

Remarks for Integrating Cities II Conference, Milan, Italy

November 5, 2007

“Territory, enterprise, job, community: the answers to integration needs” (1 hour)

I: Opening and Overall introduction to New York City

(Introduction)

On behalf of New York City’s Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, thank you for the invitation to participate in this important panel discussion.

The United States was shaped by immigrants, and New York City is no different.

Our communities are vibrant because they are diverse –

- you can walk down a single block and hear myriad languages,
- smell the aromas of wontons, falafel, and pizza, and
- witness the energetic collision of cultures from across the globe.

(Statistical Profile of NYC)

New York City is home to a racially and ethnically diverse population of 8 million people,

- 20% of whom live in poverty, and
- 25% of who are under 18 years of age.

Almost half of New Yorkers speaks a language other than English at home.

Our school system is the largest in the United States,

- with over 1 million children in public school, and
- 300,000 attending private schools.

(Statistical Profile of Immigrant New Yorkers)

Today, New York City's 2.87 million immigrants comprise 36% of the population.

They arrive with a wide range of language and labor market skills and are a vital component of our economic, social, and cultural life.

Immigration is a topic close to my heart, as my own family came to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic.

II: DYCD General Introduction

I am the Commissioner of the Department of Youth and Community Development, or DYCD.

DYCD is responsible for all youth services,

- provided outside of the regular school day and
- for improving family life by investing in strong, healthy communities.

We achieve these goals by administering public funding to an array of innovative programs in the areas of:

- afterschool,
- youth workforce development and job readiness,
- literacy, and
- homeless youth.

The agency operates with:

- a budget of \$400 million (approximately 284 million Euros),
- through over 3,500 contracts,
- with approximately 1,600 community-based, or non-governmental, organizations.

While all of our programming considers the City's demographics in design decisions, many of our services focus directly on the specific needs of immigrant youth.

III. Issues Facing NYC's Immigrants

There are four particular challenges that New York City's immigrants face, and

- that I expect have an impact on your communities as well.

We offer programs that address each of these issues,

- enabling immigrants to be self-sufficient,
- to improve their living conditions, and
- to strengthen their neighborhoods.

LEGAL

The **first** issue many immigrants face is an array of complicated laws and regulations,

- ranging from citizenship,
- to asylum,
- to the right to employment and
- fair working conditions.

Our Immigrant Legal Assistance Program invests nearly \$1.4 million (around 1 million Euros),

- in helping foreign-born New Yorkers obtain permanent residency or citizenship, and
- helps those who entered the country illegally to adjust their status.

Immigrants are able to consult with attorneys who assess their legal needs for no fee.

We also know that immigrant workers are often subject to exploitation, as employers know that they may fear deportation if they report abuses.

We fund programs for immigrant workers that counsel them to address wage disputes and educate them about their rights.

LANGUAGE

A **second** issue arises when immigrants arrive with limited or no English-language skills,

- skills that are inextricably linked to employment opportunities and educational and social success.

For non-English speaking immigrants, or those who lack literacy skills, our Literacy Programs provide:

- language classes that emphasize the skills needed for interacting with their children's teachers,
- speaking with doctors, and
- gaining employment.

In the Family Literacy program, parents and their young children build English language skills together in a safe and nurturing environment.

300 families are enrolled in this \$2.4 million (1.7 million Euro) program, which consists of structured activities to help immigrants achieve competency in English.

And through collaboration with the New York Times Company Foundation and other private partners, nearly \$250,000 in private funds supplements the City's investment.

We recently increased our commitment to the literacy needs of adolescents by:

- funding an additional 11 programs to serve 300 middle school children.
- Many have limited English language skills.

SOCIAL

Third, many foreign-born New Yorkers face a variety of social issues.

- They are afraid to call the police during a domestic violence crime.
- They are unaware of, or unable to access health coverage and other government benefits.

We invest nearly \$700,000 (486,000 Euros) in our Domestic Violence programs to help victims-

- get the counseling,
- legal and
- social services they need.

We also help immigrants enroll in free or low-cost health insurance through health fairs and other outreach events.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF YOUTH

Finally, it is critically important, when we talk about immigration, that we focus on young people.

There are 300,000 immigrants under the age of 18 in NYC.

And they face a unique set of challenges as they try to strike a balance between assimilation and maintaining their families' traditions.

Immigrant youth often assume the role of “family translator.”

- For example, when a parent needs to visit a doctor or open a bank account.

There are also young people who enter the country unaccompanied by a parent or guardian – sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

We allocate \$360,000 (250,000 Euros) to programs that assess the legal needs of youth and help them to obtain US citizenship.

And we provide services to help parents navigate the school system so that they can advocate for their kids.

Our Out-of-School Time Program (OST) is also designed to take the special needs of immigrant youth into consideration.

OST provides an assortment of academic, recreational, and cultural activities for young people after school, on holidays, and during the summer.

As of January 2008, the system will consist of approximately 660 programs serving 80,000 youth, at no cost to parents.

Partnerships have been instrumental in ensuring high-quality OST programs.

DYCD has collaborated with the foster care and health departments to ensure that all programs meet safety standards.

OST programs are located in:

- public schools,
- housing facilities, and
- parks and recreation centers.

We collaborated with the Department of Cultural Affairs for an initiative that provides a variety of arts programs to young people.

Our target locations for OST programs include many areas with high concentrations of English Language Learners.

We distribute a parent guide in seven languages.

We enlist community organizations to operate OST programs that specialize in the unique needs of immigrant youth.

IV. Conclusion

All of these programs help our newest New Yorkers successfully

- integrate into the fabric of the City and
- partake of the opportunities afforded all Americans,
- while respecting the unique cultures they bring to our country.

And our programs are constantly evolving.

For example, we hold focus groups and conduct surveys to sharpen our understanding of the people we serve and ways our program can improve.

Thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of my agency and my city.

Most of all, I am eager to engage in a dialogue to discuss:

- our commonalities,
- our differences, and
- how to improve our services and
- begin to develop partnerships with our counterparts outside of the United States.