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COUNCILMAN DANIEL DROMM AND COMMUNITY LEADERS URGE CITY TO SAVE FREE LEGAL SERVICES AND ENGLISH CLASSES FOR NEW YORKERS

City Hall, New York, NY -- Councilmembers Daniel Dromm, Julissa Ferraras, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Margaret Chin, Jumaane Williams, and Brad Lander stood with more than one hundred New Yorkers to urge Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council to restore the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI). This initiative has provided funding for free legal services and adult English classes for low-income New Yorkers since Fiscal Year 2002.

"The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative funds services that are essential for New York City's immigrant communities. We must secure funds for English classes, legal services, and citizenship resources that IOI delivers to this vital part of New York City's population," said City Council Member and Chair of the Immigration Committee, Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights). "I call upon my fellow members to stand with me in protecting immigrant opportunities in New York City."

The City Council's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative was funded at \$5 million in FY 2010, after a more than 50% cut in FY 2009. The funding is a drop in the bucket of the overall city budget, but the impact is far-reaching in these traditionally underserved communities.

Nonprofit leaders and New Yorkers who depend on these programs spoke to their importance and the need to have these funds restored to FY 2010 levels. IOI funds programs provided by seventy-two organizations, which allow people to protect their legal rights and enables new immigrants to gain English fluency and become fully integrated.

"The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative has already seen a fifty percent cut in recent years. To top it off, the Mayor's proposed cuts to adult literacy mean that resources might be stretched even thinner," said Ms. Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition. "Unless the City Council steps in, this year's cuts will have the effect of dismantling the nonprofit infrastructure that helps immigrants learn English, access affordable legal services, and integrate into society."

Yisroel Schulman, President of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) spoke to the legal services they provide throughout New York City, "NYLAG served over 8,000 immigrants in all five boroughs as a result of receiving IOI funding from the City Council. Without those funds, the services will stop and immigrants across the City will find themselves without legal help."

"The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) is critical funding that supports our successful immigration legal services and English classes. Each year, our office assists hundreds of immigrants, and IOI funding has helped us to better serve the growing West African population in the Bronx," says Carolyn McLaughlin, Executive Director of BronxWorks.

"In this country, it's indispensable to speak English and it's the goal that I most want to reach in my life. I would feel helpless if I did not continue. I would feel like the city failed me," said Gabriela Casteneda, a Make the Road New York student from Port Richmond, Staten Island.

"It is so vital for the residents of upper Manhattan to know that they can turn to us for help on applying for citizenship. The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative is crucial, and it would be difficult for us to offer citizenship services without this funding," said Barbara Lowry, Executive Director, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation.

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