



THE COUNCIL *of* THE CITY OF NEW YORK

May 6, 2024

The Honorable Eric L. Adams
Mayor of the City of New York
New York City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Adams,

March 2022 was a moment of reckoning for our city. Witnessing an immense surge in asylum-seeking people from around the globe arriving in the five boroughs, *The New York Times* dubbed Midtown’s Roosevelt Hotel the “New Ellis Island.” Today, just over two years later, almost 200,000 people — primarily from Central and South America and Western Africa — have made their way to our city in search of a more prosperous and dignified future. Yet, upon arriving, asylum seekers are forced to face an increasingly complicated and hostile procedural system—one that is failing both our new neighbors and our established communities alike.

Asylum seekers are told to go to the Roosevelt Hotel for intake and to receive assistance navigating available government services. There, they are promised a bed at either the hotel or a shelter somewhere in the city. However, reporting indicates many people were forced to spend hours waiting before being assigned a room. And in many reported instances, people were forced to sleep on the city’s sidewalks without receiving any form of municipal assistance. Be sure, the implications of this nascent issue reverberate well beyond midtown.

In the district I represent, roughly 4,000 people have been sent to a NYC Health + Hospitals operated Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Center (HERRC) on Hall Street. Since the opening of this HERRC and other respite centers, New Yorkers across the city have worked diligently to accommodate the needs of their new neighbors.

In my district alone, community partners like BKLYN Combine, Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), and One Love Community Fridge have coalesced to collect donations ranging from clothes and canned food to toiletry items and backpacks full of care packages to provide for the single men at the HERRC on Hall Street and later for the families at the shelter on Park Avenue. Local businesses and nonprofits, through their many partnerships with restaurants and distributors, have also opened their doors and asked how they can be of assistance to new arrivals and the community writ-large, with some donating food and providing material support to those in need. Local residents have also organized to hand out free meals and provide sorely needed translation services.

My office has joined these efforts, working tirelessly with extremely limited resources to provide support for both our new neighbors and the communities in which they now reside.

To date, my team and I have:



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- Held a months-long clothing and supplies drive in fall and winter 2022, in collaboration with the Brooklyn Academy of Music, to support newly arrived migrants across District 35 and personally delivered those donations to families in need;
- Promoted a mutual aid asylum seeker support drive that called for new toiletry items and bedding in collaboration with Gowanus Mutual Aid and Clinton Hill-Fort Greene Mutual Aid in summer 2023;
- Signed an August 2023 letter from Governor Hochul to President Biden calling on the federal government to expedite work authorizations for all asylum seekers and provide the state and city with funding to guarantee our ability to continue providing housing assistance, healthcare and human services, and educational support among myriad other services that ensure a person's right to a dignified existence;
- Rallied with the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) and advocates to demand federal support and immigration relief for long-term and new New Yorkers;
- Organized a Resource Fair at the Brooklyn Navy Yard's Building 77 in November 2023 to provide a number of services, including immigration support, housing/tenant aid, legal support, IDNYC Mobile Van, older adult services, and free clothing giveaways, to more than 500 new arrivals;
- Facilitated the removal of abandoned vehicles along Hall Street and near the HERRC that became hazardous hangout spots in coordination with the Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, and the NYPD after receiving multiple complaints;
- Arranged two walk-throughs of the HERRC in the second half of 2023 with Hall Street residents, city agency representatives, Brooklyn Community Board 2 representatives, and RXR staff to allow residents to communicate concerns and speak directly to those empowered to address them;
- Allocated nearly \$200,000 in limited discretionary expense funds in FY24 (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024) toward supplemental sanitation services, including clean ups near the HERRC;
- Conducted monthly street sweeping clean-up events under the BQE near the HERRC in coordination with the Department of Sanitation and ACE Programs for the Homeless; and
- Coordinated with NYC Health + Hospitals, which oversees the Hall Street HERRC, to address the community on a quarterly basis, and establish a dedicated email address to facilitate community suggestions and concerns (HallStreetHERRCFeedback@nychhc.org).

And we're not done yet. In the coming months, my team and I will:

- Organize a second Resource Fair with dozens of community-based organizations and a vaccine bus;
- Renew funding for supplemental sanitation services in District 35 for FY25, targeting the area around the Hall Street HERRC;
- Introduce legislation to increase community notification requirements for the siting of all migrant-related facilities — including those operated by NYC Health + Hospitals, the Office of Emergency Management, and the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations — so communities are made aware of changes in real-time;



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- Host monthly meetings with local residents to understand ongoing quality of life issues and establish a plan to address them;
- Write a letter to the New York Congressional Delegation urging them to work with President Biden to enhance financial support for New York City and expedite work authorization approval for all asylum seekers, including those from West African nations, the Caribbean and beyond;
- Urge your administration to establish a long-term plan for the care and support of asylum seekers in our city, including steps to address persistent quality of life issues in and around HERRCs and expand co-located support services for asylum seekers, prior to any discussion of a contract renewal for a HERRC.

Despite our shared efforts, the reality is that an influx in the population requires an increase in the resources our communities need. More people means more trash, greater use of public facilities like parks, and more neighborly disputes around issues like noise or loitering. My office and my neighbors have been asking for your assistance for the better part of a year to no avail. I have a team of six. You have a team of nearly 1,300 (not to mention the 350,000 employees working under you across all agencies). I have an annual office budget of \$521,000 and a discretionary expense budget of a little more than \$2 million that I can use to support nonprofits and city agencies. You have an office budget of \$177 million.

Why is it, then, that since placing a HERRC at Hall Street, my community — including our new arrivals — has seen no material support from City Hall? My team and I have tried to schedule a Town Hall meeting with you and your senior leadership, including by filling out your recently mandated elected official engagement form, to discuss how best to address emerging challenges and support asylees in my district, but have been met with no tangible follow-up or firm commitment to even hosting a meeting.

Your administration's persistent passing of the buck to federal and state officials has meant my office and constituents have had to step up, using our limited resources to address an issue of city-wide and national importance. But we simply do not have access to some vital services, namely translation services for languages predominantly spoken by Black migrants (e.g. Wolof, Fula, Malinké, Pulaar, Mandinka, and Bambara) and wraparound support services for those in dire financial straits who are resorting to panhandling. In FY24, your administration refused to re-fund the Language Access Initiative: Interpreter Bank and Worker Cooperatives that would have provided the city critically needed language access support. And despite the respite center opening in July 2023, my office has been the sole point of culturally competent contact for community members until two months ago.

We know the services and programs my office and our community have provided are nowhere near sufficient. We are fighting symptoms, not root causes, because we have neither the jurisdictional authority nor the financial resources to do so.

Yes, we need significantly more funding from the state and federal governments to meet the growing need. Yes, we need Congress to reform our immigration system, and, more urgently, they need to expand work authorization to more countries so more migrants can work and move



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out of shelters. And yes, we need a national settlement strategy for asylum seekers coming to our country. And I have made all of this clear in the aforementioned letter to President Biden that I signed onto with the Governor's leadership.

But our city has resources. You have added an additional \$2.2 billion to your FY25 Executive Budget, but there is still, conservatively, at least \$1 billion remaining in unallocated revenue that you can utilize to support vital city services—like our libraries, cultural organizations, CUNY, and older adult centers—as well as new arrivals and local communities. We can use the unallocated \$1 billion the Council identified, as well as the recently earmarked \$3 billion in the New York State FY25 budget, to (1) pay for more routine services in and around HERRCs including sanitation, legal services, mental health support, and workforce development, (2) restore cuts to and enhance the Parks Department's Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) program to maintain and enforce rules in local parks, or (3) to expand service and program offerings to our neighbors in need. These are initiatives that can help integrate new arrivals into their communities if done right.

As the one responsible for addressing the influx of our asylum seeking neighbors, you have the unique authority and ability to ensure the seamless integration of new arrivals into our communities. While some measures may be out of your control and in the hands of our partners in Washington, D.C. and Albany, you can and must do better by my constituents — new and long-time residents alike. And I am a willing partner. I am asking you, on behalf of my community, to **commit to co-hosting a Town Hall within 30 days of the date of this letter** with all relevant agencies and contractors in charge of the management and operation of the Hall Street HERRC and recently opened shelter on Ryerson Street, as well as the Department of Sanitation, the Department of Parks & Recreation, and other city agencies who can help to the address quality of life issues my constituents are facing.

We need sustained leadership now more than ever. Let's work together and use the innovation and ingenuity of our city's municipal workforce to make New York City the home we know it can be to current New Yorkers and those seeking refuge and asylum alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Hudson".

Crystal Hudson
New York City Council Member, District 35