

HFNY Immigration Listening Forum (February 18, 2025)

Purpose: Engage in conversation and sharing of information. OCFS aims to gather information to convey to state agency leadership with the intent of providing guidance where possible.

Conversation Prompts

- How are you all doing? What's it like to be a PM or Supervisor right now?
- What are you experiencing in your programs/communities?
- What have you been hearing from staff and/or from participants?
- What host agency guidance have you received?
- What has been helpful in your programs you want to share with others?
- What guidance are you hoping to receive from HFNY CA? (Please be as specific as you can be)

Concerns Shared

- **Connecting with families virtually** – Agency does not feel What's App safeguards information. Some families do not have access to technology.
- **Getting caught up in ICE raid** – Home visitors fear being caught up in a raid. Unsure what to do in those circumstances and fear for the impact it will have on their own family members.
“I should be able to support families not hiding with them.”
- **Families are going underground and refusing all services**– They are not going to work and have stopped sending children to school. Families are afraid to follow up with services such as WIC and doctors' visits, and are afraid to visit food pantries. Families are afraid to engage with mobile crisis teams, further exacerbating mental health needs.
“We are shifting from a program of support to one of fear.”
- **Families are going hungry and physical and mental health is in decline**
- **Home visitors' exposure to direct and indirect trauma** – Many home visitors share families' backgrounds and experiences. Many are also witnessing raids and feeling helpless.
“We are the families that we visit.”
- **Home visitors' moral dilemma** – Staff still have the responsibility of being mandated reporters but are grappling with the potential consequences of calling CPS. There is no clarity in understanding what CPS and police involvement may mean for families who are undocumented. Home visitors are also being asked to become legal guardians of children should parents face deportation.
- **Families in shelters are at highest risk given ICE has targeted those settings**- Home visitors are having a hard time connecting with families with the highest needs because of the ongoing presence of ICE in their cities and towns.
- **Contradictory guidance** – Home visitors are receiving guidance from their organizations that vacillates from one day to the other, “one day told ok to visit to do assessment (at shelter) and some days told it is not safe.” Staff and families are receiving contradictory guidance on preparedness, such as what documentation to carry, what information to share with ICE, what documentation is needed for children and future legal guardians should parents get deported.
- **Impact on meeting HFNY BPS and OCFS contractual standards**- Home visitors are concerned they will not be able to meet capacity as new families are hesitant to enroll and they also fear not meeting their home visitation rate as existing families are hesitant to engage in home visits OR live within households where others are hesitant to have outsiders within the home. Programs are also seeing decline in medical visits and timely immunizations.
- **Families relocating out of New York** – Some families are leaving the country, and others are leaving to go to other states in order to not have their service record (i.e., health, social

services, etc.) follow them. Families recognize that the states they are moving to may not offer better services or have less ICE activity but they do not want any services having information about them that links back to their immigration status.

- **Inability to obtain US passports** – Families are afraid to apply for passports or do not have the funds available to them to start the application process.
- **Legal resources are overwhelmed** – Organizations providing legal services are overwhelmed with the amount of requests coming in and many families are now on waiting lists.
- **Relinquishing parental rights** – Some families are so fearful and desperate they are reconsidering their pregnancy or engaging home visitors in conversations about the steps needed to establish a temporary guardian or in extreme circumstances, relinquish their parental rights.
- **Families facing deportation do not have enough time to prepare** – Parents are not given enough time to designate a legal guardian for their children who are US citizens. Particular circumstance is not clear but parent was told children who are citizens had to be left behind and could not return with the parent to the parent's country of origin.

Solutions Shared

- **Offer virtual visits** – Due to increased ICE presence staff were informed by their organization not to put families at risk by visiting in-person therefore the option of virtual visits was reinstated.
- **Flexibility in communication** – offering visits in Zoom and lots of phone and text communication.
- **Become familiar with resources shared in HFNY emails and on the password-protected side of the HFNY website.**
- **Agencies sharing information on what documentation to carry and who to contact** – Twofold impact as the conversation can increase or decrease stress among staff but overall, useful for agency to provide the information on what documentation home visitors should carry with them while in the field and what numbers to call should they need assistance.
- **Ongoing communication with families** – Home visitors serving families in high-risk areas, such as shelters, have found that ongoing communication with families has helped especially checking in with them right before a visit to learn about any ICE presence.
- **Remaining vigilant to surroundings** – Home visitors have learned to watch their surroundings and pivot should they come across a person that may raise suspicion. For example, if approached by non-shelter staff about the purpose for their visit, staff refrain from answering and remove themselves from the environment. They follow-up with families immediately to inform them they were unable to attend the visit due to possible ICE presence.
- **Generating guidance on how to interact with ICE** – Program Managers shared they are working with their own organization's leadership to author guidelines on what staff should do if they end up having to interact with ICE during a home visit. Also shared that they are informing staff to continue follow their own safety guidelines.
- **Transparency on what data HFNY collects** – Sending out letter to families informing them that their immigration status is not being documented or saved is calming some fears among participating families.
- **Working with community partners to connect families to resources** – Program leadership and staff are partnering with community organizations to identify alternatives to providing services, for example, some food pantries are allowing home visitors to collect food for the families on their caseload. Regular communication is also providing an opportunity for HFNY program staff to identify newer resources, such as legal services that specifically address immigration needs.

- **Creativity with funding sources** – Programs are applying for additional funds or reaching out to funders to inquire about flexibility of using funds to pay for families’ needs, such as passport application fees, transportation to medical providers (families fear taking public transportation or their own vehicles), and other concrete resources (i.e., food, diapers, toiletries, etc.). Some folks shared they are using ALICE funds via United Way to supplement costs.
- **Revisiting boundary conversation** – Given that many home visitors share many of the same experiences as families, supervisors are revisiting the importance of boundaries and expectations about home visitor role, reminding staff to be mindful about advice shared given their own legal experiences.
- **Interacting with CPS staff** – Recognizing their duties to function as mandated reporters, HFNY staff discuss with CPS staff the importance of engaging families without police presence, when possible.
- **Ongoing focus on self-care in all domains** – Aim to have ongoing conversations about what trauma is and its impact as well as a focus on grounding. Recognizing the intentional overwhelm being fostered and focusing on what we have control over.
“We have to plant the seeds of hope! Our focus IS our RESISTANCE!”

Requests and Questions

- **Guidance on interacting with ICE** – Programs requested other programs share their own procedures once these are finalized.
- **Revisit existing HFNY enrollment paperwork** – The following wording exists in the Service Agreement form for all families, “Healthy Families program staff members, quality assurance staff, program funders (e.g., the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the NYS Department of Health, and the federal government), and national model developers (i.e., Healthy Families America), with a direct need to know may have access to your information individually or group form/combined with other families.” Programs request HFNY CA revisit wording as families have declined to participate because they fear their information will be shared with the federal government.
- **Guidance from OCFS on contract spending** – Programs want more information on built-in flexibility within their contracts that allow for spending to address families’ needs (i.e., passport application fees, transportation, material needs, etc.)
- **Guidance from HFNY CA around meeting contractual standards** – Programs want to know what flexibility is being granted when PIs and PTs are not met given so much is beyond their control at the present moment.
- **Guidance from OCFS on working with undocumented families that have US born children** – Some agencies are specifically waiting for OCFS, as the funding source to provide guidance on what recourse is available to families in obtaining visas when they have US born children.

PLEASE KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR HFNY CA RESPONSES TO ABOVE IN THE NEAR FUTURE

Resources Shared or Discussed

- [We Have Rights](#) – An empowerment campaign to prepare for and safely defend rights during encounters with ICE (available in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Mandarin, Haitian Creole, Russian, and Urdu). Written and video resources are available.
- [EMERGENCY PLAN – We Have Rights](#)- Instruction on creating an emergency plan.
- [Know Your Rights, Know Your Resources | Department of State](#) – New York State Department of State, Office of New Americans listing of resources available to all residents of New York, including immigrants.

- [New York State Family Resource and Opportunity Centers](#) – List of centers across the state that provide families with access to programs and resources they need to build protective factors and help children thrive.
- [HFNY Transfer of Learning Self Care Materials](#)
- [NYS Trauma-Informed Network and Resource Center Breath Body and Mind Practice Sessions](#) – Gentle stress relief sessions that meet for 30-45 minutes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Sessions are free of charge and also available in Spanish.
- [HFNY Affirmation Cards](#) – these cards were shared with sites as they went through the accreditation process and are available via the HFNY SharePoint.
- [Children Thrive Action Network Toolkit: Protecting Immigrant Families Facing Deportation](#) – Live toolkit with a number of resources that are updated on a regular basis.
- [HV Safety Procedures.pdf](#) – Program specific safety protocol and procedures. These are not HFNY related but rather generated by programs for their staff at their discretion.

Additional Legal Resources

Below is from Hiscock Legal Aid Immigration Program

Thanks to the support of the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA), our expanded staff, along with legal counsel from our partner, the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York, we are able to provide immigration legal services to four regions, covering a total of 18 counties, of New York State.

We wanted to update and remind our community partners of the services our agency provides and the regions we cover through the ONA Legal Counsel program:

Central New York (Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego Counties)

ONA Legal Counsels

- James P. Tracy, Jr., jtracy@hlalaw.org
- Fahimeh Zaheri, fzaheri@vlpcny.org
- John Jeha, jjeha@hlalaw.org
- Awad Osman, aosman@hlalaw.org
- Emily Davies, edavies@hlalaw.org
- Silvana Vergara, svergara@vlpcny.org
- Anna Petrie, apetrie@hlalaw.org
- Zahra Vakil, zvakil@hlalaw.org
- Anas Saleh, asaleh@hlalaw.org

Mohawk Valley North (Herkimer and Oneida Counties)

ONA Legal Counsels

- Chris Jones, cjones@hlalaw.org
- Sharmila Roy Lovely, sroylovely@hlalaw.org
- Sarah Murphy, smurphy@hlalaw.org
- Christiana Okezie, cokezie@hlalaw.org
- Anas Saleh, asaleh@hlalaw.org

Mohawk Valley South (Fulton, Montgomery, Schoharie, and Otsego Counties)

ONA Legal Counsels

- Yvonne McKinnon, ymckinnon@hlalaw.org
- Tamara Carson, tcarson@hlalaw.org
- Emily Davies, edavies@hlalaw.org

- Cooper Townsend, ctownsend@hlalaw.org
- Christiana Okezie, cokezie@hlalaw.org
- Anas Saleh, asaleh@hlalaw.org

North Country (Clinton, Essex, Hamilton, Franklin, St. Lawrence, Jefferson, and Lewis Counties)

ONA Legal Counsels

- Naomi Godbey, ngodbey@vlpcny.org
- Grace Sullivan, gsullivan@vlpcny.org
- Alexandra Lechman, alechman@hlalaw.org
- Juan Ariza Fabregas, jarizafabregas@hlalaw.org
- Elyse Maugeri, emaugeri@hlalaw.org
- Patrick El Saddik, pelsaddik@hlalaw.org
- Anas Saleh, asaleh@hlalaw.org

Supervising Attorney for Hiscock Legal Aid Immigration

- Karen Southwick, ksouthwick@hlalaw.org

Under these programs, we continue to provide general immigration legal services, including assistance with naturalization, adjustment of status, family reunification, asylum, employment authorization, travel documents, temporary protected status, deportation and removal defense, and more. We are also available to provide off-site Consultation Days, Community Presentations, and to answer immigration queries from community members and partners like you.

In addition to the legal counsel contact information by region provided above, those with questions or seeking any of the above services should also feel free to call us for an intake at 315-218-0152 or email us at immigration-intake@hlalaw.org, and we will be happy to assist you.

Si necesita ayuda en español haga el favor de contactar a 315-218-0152 o por correo electrónico al immigration-intake@hlalaw.org.

للغة العربية، يرجى التواصل على هاتف رقم
315.218.0152
او على البريد الالكتروني
immigration-intake@hlalaw.org