

## OPENING REMARKS

Thank you, Chairman Griffith, ranking member Castor, and distinguished members of the subcommittee for inviting me to testify here today.

For the record, I am Councilwoman Inna Vernikov, a member of the New York City council, as well as its minority whip.

As we sit here this morning to explore the impacts of President Biden's border policies, I appear before you, not just an elected official, but also as a Ukrainian-born American Jew, whose family immigrated to the United States as Jewish refugees 28 years ago.

Before I entered public office, I was a proud owner of a matrimonial and immigration law practice, in which thousands of immigration clients walked through my doors.

Those immigrants came to the United States using different channels, some entered through legal means, and some did not. Regardless of their status, I zealously represented each and every one of them.

America was built by freedom loving immigrants from all corners of the world, who escaped genocide, dictatorships, political and religious persecutions, in search of a brighter future, and who endlessly worked to achieve their American dream.

I do not take for granted that I am only privileged to sit here before you today, because this great country gave me and families like mine opportunities, we would not have had anywhere else on earth.

But it is because of my love for my city and this country that I have never been more concerned for her future, like I am today.

What once was a point of bipartisan agreement has become a political battlefield of contention. We once believed that the privilege of being an American citizen should be achieved by lawful means. But that is not the case today.

Because of the massive influx of migrants from the Southern border, New York City is at a breaking point. In fact, our Mayor, Eric Adams, said: “this issue will destroy New York City.”

The current migrant crisis has already placed a significant strain on every area of life for New Yorkers, including our schools, the economy, our healthcare system, and public safety.

### Schools:

The influx of migrants into New York City has added nearly 34,000 new students to our public school system over the past two years. Though we are the largest school district in the country, that figure represents roughly 4% of the entire student population.

Districts across the city have been scrambling to meet the learning, health, and emotional needs of these students, most of whom require specialized instruction. This is happening as our students are still trying to recover from the significant learning losses caused by pandemic school closures.

To add to this strain on our system, school facilities have also been utilized for housing as the city scrambles to accommodate the massive numbers of new arrivals. Last week, we witnessed a perfect example of how President Biden’s border policies are impacting our communities, when a local high school of close to 4,000 children became an overnight migrant shelter.

## Crime

A Siena poll found that 70% of New York city residents are concerned about becoming a victim of a serious crime. Those entering our country through the border are not properly vetted, as their criminal records from their home countries are mostly unknown.

Since Hamas has launched a brutal massacre on innocent civilians in Israel on October 7, the world has been paying more attention to terrorist organizations and their activity.

This past October, a Department of Homeland Security memo was circulated to staff, warning that individuals inspired by terror groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah may be attempting to travel through the Southern border to the United States.

169 individuals on the FBI watchlist were encountered at the Southern border in the year 2023 alone. That is more than the last six fiscal years combined!

As someone who represents one of the largest constituencies of Jewish New Yorkers, this is particularly frightening, especially amidst the despicable rise in Antisemitism in our city and country. However, make no mistake: Hamas sympathizers are a threat to every New Yorker and every American.

Local communities surrounding migrant shelters are also justifiably concerned by an uptick in crime. Just last week, several men were charged with stabbing another man to death in Randall's Island, one of several tent cities constructed to house migrants across the city. The violent incidents prompted the city to impose a curfew and consider adding metal detectors at these shelters.

## Health

The migrant crisis has also placed an enormous strain on the city's public hospital system, with New York city hospitals receiving over 30,000 undocumented migrant visits in the past year alone.

As of April of last year, 50% of migrants coming into New York city were not vaccinated against the contagious Polio virus, a virus that we have more or less eradicated in the united states. According to New York City health commissioner Vasan, the migrants come in from, and pass-through countries with high rates of infectious tuberculosis.

## Economy

With no end in sight, our city is projected to spend \$12 billion of local taxpayer money on the migrant crisis through fiscal year 2025, and we face projected 5% budget cuts across all city agencies.

More than 168,000 undocumented aliens have come through the city's intake system since Spring of 2023, with nearly 70,000 of them currently in our care, according to the latest data provided by the administration.

You may recall that, during a similar hearing before Congress four months ago, Democrats were touting a surefire solution to New York City's problems – giving migrants work authorizations so they could get out of shelters and benefit our economy. Well, so far, according to the city's data, only 11,000 migrants have even applied for federal work authorization and only 8,000 have applied for Temporary Protective Status – that is less than 12% of all of the migrants who have entered NYC's shelter system.

Our mayor called this an “unprecedented humanitarian crisis.” It’s far more than that.  
It’s a national crisis.

The current situation is unsustainable, unmanageable, and unaffordable. We cannot allow this administration to pursue its path of inaction and destructive policies, as they continue prioritizing undocumented foreigners, who circumvent our legal system, over law-abiding citizens.