

New York City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing
Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair, Committee on Immigration

Presented by Marlyn Suarez, Public Service Scholar at Hunter College;
ESOL Tutor at LaGuardia Community College, The English Language Center

Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 26th, 2018

Good afternoon Chair Menchaca, and members of the Committee on Immigration.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you all today about the issues that currently face our immigrant communities. Mi nombre es Marlyn Suarez, primogenita de Maria Rita Suarez y Wellington Salvador Suarez, dos inmigrantes de la Republica Dominicana (My name is Marlyn Suarez, daughter of Maria Rita Suarez and Wellington Salvador Suarez, the first born of two immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic). I grew up in a predominately Spanish-speaking household for most of my childhood and saw how the lack of English proficiency severely impacted my family member's ability to engage with their community. As a child, I had to watch my grandmother, a certified elementary school teacher in the Dominican Republic, succumb to using the all too familiar pleasant smiles, nods, and gestures to navigate her neighborhood. Susceptible to financial scams and other pitfalls because of her old age, the noticeable linguistic challenges created yet another barrier she had to overcome to fully integrate into her community. It is because of these experiences that I decided to become an ESOL tutor.

For the last two years, I've been tutoring ESOL students at La Guardia Community College, which provides affordable and intensive English courses to immigrants at all walks of life. They serve over 4,000 students on a yearly basis, the majority of which are in intermediate leveled courses. This means that they have just enough English to get by (i.e. ask for directions, introduce themselves, or speak in simple past tense), but are not fluent enough to obtain a mid-level job. As a tutor, one of my goals is to foster natural conversational skills and to get students

comfortable with the English language. Over the course of 8 weeks, we work on pronouncing difficult syllables, identifying common idioms, and becoming self-aware as they adapt to the large cultural differences in New York. One of the most common culture shocks new immigrants receive is when they hear a New Yorker speak; they're amazed at how many words a New Yorker can fit into a single sentence without running out of breath. We work on listening skills in tutoring as well.

In order to achieve that, I constantly ask students open-ended questions. In one session, I propose the following question: "What animal best represents you?" Tentatively, one student named Ken raised his hand. Now, Ken was a brilliant man- he has a PhD back in Thailand, has presented in numerous international conferences, and was a professor at a prestigious university as well. In response to the question I asked, Ken said "At home, I feel like a tiger, but here I feel like a bug". So I'm asking you, Council Members, to not only restore, but baseline \$12m in funding for adult literacy. In New York City alone, over 2.2 million adults are not English proficient or don't have a high school diploma.¹ Please increase funding to adult literacy, so that more people like Ken can feel like Tigers in New York City. Thank you.