



THURSDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2026

**TESTIMONY OF CATHOLIC MIGRATION SERVICES
PRESENTED TO THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE AND
THE ASSEMBLY WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON PUBLIC PROTECTION**

My name is Magdalena Barbosa, and I am the Director of Legal Services at Catholic Migration Services. Catholic Migration Services (“CMS”) is a not-for-profit legal services provider that provides free legal services and community legal education to low-income individuals in New York City. CMS’ mission is to empower underserved low-income immigrant communities in NYC primarily in Brooklyn and Queens by providing immigration, housing, and employment legal services, tenant organizing, and community legal education.

I am testifying today to express our deep concern that the Governor’s Executive Budget did not provide full appropriation authority for the Interest on Lawyer Account (IOLA) Fund. The Executive Budget allocated \$77.5 million—significantly below the \$102.5 million requested by IOLA and approved by its Board of Trustees. The \$77.5 million included in the Executive Budget falls well short of the \$102.5 million requested by IOLA and approved by its Board of Trustees, jeopardizing critical civil legal services funding for legal services organizations across New York State who provide critical services to low-income families, including Catholic Migration Services.

IOLA represents a vital, non-taxpayer funding source for civil legal services serving low-income New Yorkers. This is not taxpayer money. The funds are generated from interest on attorneys’ escrow accounts and are statutorily dedicated exclusively to civil legal services across the state. Importantly, the full amount requested is already available in IOLA’s accounts.

IOLA is entering the second year of a five-year, competitively awarded contract process intentionally structured to ensure stability and predictability for civil legal services providers. This multi-year commitment allows nonprofit organizations to plan strategically, retain critical staff, and address surging demand during a period of unprecedented need. The approach is already enhancing coordination and improving the effectiveness of service delivery across New York.

Over the past year, legal services providers, including Catholic Migration Services, have also worked with IOLA to plan and implement critical infrastructure investments through the Justice Infrastructure Project. These efforts are intended to create long-term efficiencies and improve service quality, including the recently announced statewide civil legal services training center

and a planned online intake portal that will expand access and streamline assistance for New Yorkers seeking free legal services.

Without the additional \$25 million necessary to fully fund IOLA's request, we understand that significant reductions in IOLA grants to legal services providers across New York State could begin as early as April 1, 2026. These cuts would have a serious impact on organizations statewide, including Catholic Migration Services, and would inevitably result in reduced access to legal assistance for vulnerable communities.

We remain hopeful that the Executive will recognize this shortfall and correct it in the 30-day amendments. However, if that does not occur, we respectfully urge the Legislature to include \$102.5 million in appropriation authority for IOLA in their one-house budget bills to ensure continuity of services and preserve access to justice for low-income New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

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