

# New York Coalition for Adult Literacy

*For Immediate Release: Wednesday, April 29, 2009*

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*Press Release*

## **COUNCILWOMAN SARA M. GONZÁLEZ AND ADULT EDUCATION STUDENTS RALLY TOGETHER TO SUPPORT LITERACY PROGRAMS AND IMMIGRANT SERVICES**

*Pledge Unified Efforts to Urge for the Restoration of Funding for ESOL and Adult Education Classes, and Immigrant Services in Upcoming FY 2010 City Budget*

Sunset Park, Brooklyn, NY – In a rally jointly organized and sponsored by Councilwoman Sara M. González, and the New York Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCAL), hundreds of adult education students, community organizations, and adult literacy and immigrant advocates urged Mayor Bloomberg to work with the City Council to restore funding to the Adult Literacy Services Initiative and the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI).<sup>1</sup> Both programs support organizations that help immigrant and non-immigrant New Yorkers improve their English, basic skills, and literacy. Through IOI, citizenship and legal services for immigrants are also offered. In this difficult economy, literacy and ESOL programs across the City have seen an increased demand for these services. New Yorkers are looking to build their skills to keep their employment and remain competitive in this tight labor market.

The Adult Literacy Services Initiative and IOI are funded in the current FY 2009 City budget – adult literacy services at \$1.5 million and IOI at \$5 million – but have not been included in the Mayor’s FY 2010 Preliminary Budget. In order to meet the tremendous demand for these services, Councilwoman González and the rally goers urged that funding is fully restored to FY 2008 levels in the upcoming FY 2010 City budget.<sup>2</sup> In addition, federal economic recovery funding provides another opportunity for the City to expand ESOL and adult literacy services to promote civic engagement and strengthen our workforce.

“Government funded ESOL and adult literacy programs account for less than 60,000 seats in a City with 1.6 million residents older than 16 who have dropped out of high school. I believe the emergency I declared when I obtained the original Council funding for Adult Literacy is compounded now by the downturn in the economy. At a time when gainful employment is increasingly difficult to find, it is vital that we better prepare our hard-working residents to succeed. Doing so will lay the foundation for any successful economic stimulus plan,” declared Councilwoman Sara M. González.

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<sup>1</sup> The specific NYCAL member groups that organized this rally with Councilmember Gonzalez include Center for Family Life, Fifth Avenue Committee, Lutheran Family Health Centers, Make the Road New York, New York Immigration Coalition, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, The Sunset Park Alliance for Youth, Shorefront YM-YWHA, Turning Point, and United Neighborhood Houses.

<sup>2</sup> In FY 2008, IOI was funded at \$11.25 million, and the adult literacy services initiative was funded at \$1.5 million.

More than 20 percent of New York State's population is foreign-born (twice the national average) and more than one million New Yorkers do not speak English well. Despite the vast need for adult education and training opportunities for immigrants and low-skilled workers during these difficult times, over 97 percent of the need for adult education classes are unmet.

"Councilmember González and the City Council's support of adult literacy is so important to New York City. Along with Mayor Bloomberg, we are grateful that our City leaders understand that adult literacy services are essential investments that help New Yorkers maintain and improve their employment prospects, increase their civic participation, and keep our workforce robust," said Bruce Carmel, Deputy Executive Director of Educational Services at Turning Point.

"English classes have been critical for our adult students seeking to support themselves economically, to foster their children's educational success and to engage more fully in their communities. Now more than ever we need to invest in adult students," says Julie Quinton, Director of Adult Education, Make the Road New York.

"At this time of economic crisis, we must support New Yorkers who want to improve their English and literacy skills, and use their talent to help this City recover economically. Councilmember González is a strong champion for adult literacy and ESOL programs. We know that she will fight hard and work diligently with her City Council colleagues and the Mayor to restore the funding needed to keep these programs going," said Anthony Ng, Deputy Director of Policy and Advocacy at United Neighborhood Houses.

"Part of rebuilding our economy means investing in programs that will help immigrant New Yorkers improve their lives and their ability to contribute to the economy," said Deycy Avitia, coordinator of Education Advocacy at the New York Immigration Coalition. "The Governor and State Legislature showed great leadership by protecting immigrant programs in the state budget, and we urge the Mayor and the City Council to work together to restore funding for critical English classes and legal services in New York City."

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This rally was jointly organized and sponsored by: Councilmember Sara M. González, New York Coalition for Adult Literacy, Center for Family Life, Fifth Avenue Committee, Lutheran Family Health Centers, Make the Road New York, New York Immigration Coalition, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, The Sunset Park Alliance for Youth, Shorefront YM-YWHA, Turning Point, and United Neighborhood Houses.