

Testimony Letter for Public Hearing on Summer Youth Programming

Submitted by: Rosalia Castelan
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Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at today's public hearing on Summer Youth Programming. My name is Rosalia Castelan, and I serve as the Community School Coordinator at Hampstead Hill Academy, where I work directly with a large population of immigrant families, many of whom face significant social, economic, and linguistic barriers.

I am here to advocate for greater accessibility, equity, and funding for free or low-cost summer programs for our city's most underserved youth. Every year, I witness the deep anxiety and frustration experienced by families who desperately want their children to have enriching, safe, and educational opportunities during the summer months, but are blocked at nearly every turn.

Many of our immigrant and underserved families are navigating life while dealing with unstable housing, food insecurity, low-wage employment, and limited access to affordable child care. For them, summer programs are not a luxury—they are a necessity. Yet, year after year, the same barriers persist:

Language Access: Most summer program materials, applications, and communications are only offered in English. Many of the parents I support speak limited English and feel intimidated or excluded by the system. Without multilingual support, they cannot navigate registration processes, leading to missed deadlines and lost opportunities.

Digital Access and Literacy: Many programs require online registration, which can be a major hurdle for families without home internet, computer access, or familiarity with digital platforms. Some parents rely on phones with limited data or shared devices, making the process overwhelming and frustrating.

Program Capacity and Availability: Even when families overcome these obstacles, there are simply not enough free summer spots in their neighborhoods. Programs fill up quickly, especially those that are well-regarded and affordable. The demand far exceeds the supply, leaving many children with no options.

Transportation and Location: Families without access to a car or reliable public transportation are limited to programs within walking distance. When the only free programs are miles away, they may as well not exist for these families.

Fear and Mistrust: For undocumented families or those with mixed-status households, there is often fear around providing personal information or engaging with unfamiliar institutions. This fear, whether justified or not, keeps children out of programs that could support their growth and well-being.

We know that high-quality summer programming prevents learning loss, supports mental health, builds social skills, and provides much-needed structure and safety. For children from immigrant and low-income households, these benefits are even more critical.