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## **Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means**

*Dockets #0524-0531 FY22 Budget*

*Office of Food Access*

*Office of Language Access*

*Office of Immigrant Advancement*

*Human Rights Commission*

*Age Strong Commission*

***Working Session: Thursday, May 6, 2021, 10:00 a.m.***

***Hearing: Monday, May 17, 2021, 10:00 a.m.***

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The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the various departments' budgets at the Working Session on Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. Recording here: <https://youtu.be/X0dZRkQrPHM>

The Administration is requested to respond to all questions in one of three ways:

1. Verbally at the hearing on Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, at 10AM.
2. For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to May 17<sup>th</sup>, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
3. By deferring to a specific scheduled departmental budget hearing.

Please annotate and return this information request before May 17<sup>th</sup>, indicating how each question will be answered.

### **Office of Food Access Budget Questions**

#### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- What was OFA's budget in FY21? What is it this year? Please provide a breakdown by personnel and non-personnel. Please provide additional detail regarding how your budget was spent last year, what new funding will be used for this year, and changes in FTE.
  - What costs are under the \$765,150 in non-personnel funding?
  - What will the impact of the \$330,000 in increased funding be?
  - How many FTE does Food Access have?
- Does Food Access have contracted services? What is the nature of these services and how many contractors are local, minority, and/or women owned businesses?
- What does the current demand for Food Access look like? How do we expect that to shift in FY22, as we transition to a post-pandemic period and residents go back to school and work?
- Under external funds, Double Up Food Bucks went from \$160,000 in FY21 to \$0 in FY22. Why is this and what does it mean for the program?



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- Children's Hospital - Boston EATS went from \$80,000 in FY21 to \$0 in FY22. Why is this and what does it mean for the program?
- Does Food Access do any intentional outreach to Native and Indigenous individuals, or partner with NAICOB? I am concerned that Boston is a hub for the indigenous community to gather and receive services, but not necessarily where they're domiciled, and so this community is easily overlooked.
- What sorts of food access work are we looking to expand or continue with one-time ARP funding, and how are we thinking about avoiding the cliff effect after the ARP funding and other federal grants cease?

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- The Office of Food Access is one of the most important departments in the City. I would like to see the budget increased substantially.
- How does OFA reach out to residents who may face hunger-related issues? In particular, what outreach is done toward seniors, residents with disabilities, those who speak a language other than English, and those who live in public housing?
- Having access to healthy food is critical, especially for children. Please talk about your partnerships with other city departments, including Age Strong, BPS, and BCYF. What are some programs that would enable families to buy healthy foods like fresh fruit and vegetables?

### **Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:**

- How many FTEs do you have? Are you looking to expand this number?

### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- Can OFA talk a bit about the decreases in external funds, including the Children's Hospital - Boston EATS grant, the Double Up Food Bucks grant, and the Strategic Planning grant? What did these grants fund and how will those operations be funded with these new decreases?
- What specifically will the new investments in OFA fund?



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- What specifically did OFA do with its increased investment last year from the BPD OT budget reallocation?
- What will staffing (FTEs) look like for OFA in FY22? What did it look like in FY21?

### **Office of Language and Communications Access Budget Questions**

#### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- What was LCA's budget in FY21, under Neighborhood Services? What is it this year? Please provide a breakdown by personnel and non-personnel. Please provide additional detail regarding how your budget was spent last year, what new funding will be used for this year, and changes in FTE.
- Does LCA assist departments with ASL translation?
- Are there City guidelines for putting out accessible information on social media?
  - For example, do departments provide "alt text" for graphics/digital posters, to aid third-party translation and text readers?
- Under the Administration's updated language access policy, what are your new commitments, how are you implementing changes, how is it impacting your metrics and goals? Are your resources sufficient given these new responsibilities?
- Under the Language Access ordinance being discussed by the Council, what would the new commitments be, how are you thinking about implementing the changes, and how would it impact metrics and goals? Would your resources be sufficient under these new responsibilities?
- Please provide detail on the new Research Analyst role.
- Is 5 FTE sufficient for carrying out your work? Has there been any discussion of requiring departments to designate some internal FTE time to language access, not just establish a point person?



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- What does the department training on protocols for language access for the coordinators include?
- LCA has \$897,585 in contracted services, but later in the RFI it says LCA has no existing contracts. Please clarify and explain what the budgeted amount is planned to be used for.

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

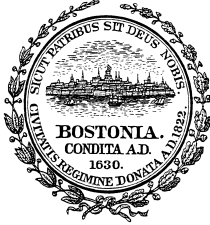
- Language Access is another critical department in the City that should see increased funding. Can you talk about how the office is expanding its role and function as an independent office?
- Can you talk about how you recruit people who speak various languages?
- Please talk about how you can support BPS, as they need more outreach for language access.
- What is the process for a city department that needs forms translated?
- What is the protocol for helping a constituent that comes into City Hall and needs an interpreter?

### **Councilor Julia Mejia asked:**

- We've been working with you on a new language access ordinance that would likely require changes in funding. Can you speak to how your funding needs would change should the ordinance pass, and how your new funding may be anticipating these changes?
- New federal regulations came in from HUD. How does the new funding address the implementation of these new standards?

### **Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:**

- There has been some back and forth over whether literacy belongs under the purview of Language Access or Workforce Development or somewhere else. Can you clarify which department should oversee literacy efforts?



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### **Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:**

- LCA does enormous work for all City departments. Is LCA currently right-sized to meet all these needs?

### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- What did LCA's budget and staffing look like under ONS? Or what portion of ONS's budget and staffing in FY21 was dedicated to language and communications access functions?
- Can LCA talk about its anticipated \$900,000 in contracts? What will these contracts be for? What efforts will the office make to procure diverse vendors?
- What specifically did LCA do with its increased investment last year from the BPD OT budget?
- In the Request for Information, LCA provided a breakdown of employees that are moving out of ONS: Why does the table only show 2 employees? Is LCA still planning on moving 3 positions out of ONS to LCA?
- When does LCA anticipate the office being fully staffed with its 5 FTEs?

## **Office of Immigrant Advancement Budget Questions**

### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Office of Immigrant Advancement External Fund
  - Where is funding received from? What is it used for?
  - What are the contracted services paid for with these funds? (Contractual services in external funds are doubling from FY21) Is this the mini-grants to immigrant-led non-profit organizations, or something else?
- What are the outcomes of the mini-grants? Can you please provide examples of some of the projects carried out under the mini grants? Is there a way to help organizations scale up initiatives that were really successful?



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- Is it a goal of the Foreign-Trained Immigrant Professionals Pilot Program for the internship host to hire folks at the end of their internship? Will job-search support be given? What if any collaboration has there been with OWD on this?
- What are the most common programs, services, and critical information that the Office for Immigrant Advancement refers to or gives?
- What types of resources does the office help immigrant-serving organizations acquire?
- What have been the conclusions from data from any of the recent surveys to identify concerns and problems that immigrants face in Boston?
  - How is the office addressing these concerns and problems?
  - What are the most persistent concerns and problems?
- Under goals, it's listed that 500 immigrant-serving organizations are connected to resources to better serve their constituents. I assume that this is the number of unique times that an organization is connected to resources, rather than the number of unique organizations. Is there data on how many organizations the office connects with resources? Do we know if there's any area of the city or any organizations or communities that we are not consistently connecting with?
- What are the equity-oriented recommendations made to the city and its agencies? Please provide some examples.
- Why is Suitcase Stories being discontinued?
- Do Know Your Rights (KYRs) presentations include tenants and housing rights or are they solely focused on immigration rights?
- Following the successful pilot of the Immigrants Lead Boston Program, what were the learnings and what are the next steps? I see it is being continued, but please provide some more information and detail.
- Please provide a breakdown of how your budget was spent last year, what new funding will be used for this year, and changes in FTE. MOIA has grown substantially over the past few years, so please speak to multi-year goals and the general path for where the department is heading.



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### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- What are some of the programs and assistance available to workers and families who might be struggling to recover from pandemic?
- Many residents still have questions about immigration status and cases. MOIA used to host immigration clinics; have they still been happening through the pandemic?

### **Councilor Julia Mejia asked:**

- Can you talk about your goals, specifically around increasing media and social media coverage? What is the reason behind this goal? What are your plans to also include local, ethnic media, and off-the-beaten-track spaces and resources that many residents use?
- Please provide additional detail on your 2 new positions. I'm particularly interested in learning about the Economic Integration Specialist.

### **Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:**

- What happened with the adoption of a Municipal ID? Several years ago I know there was an RFP put out, but it doesn't seem that anything progressed. What is the status of this program now?

### **Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:**

- Over the past few years the department has increased significantly with increased operating budget and FTEs. Do the current resources feel sufficient to meet your commitments?

### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- What specifically did MOIA do with its increased investment last year from the BPD OT budget reallocation?
- In the budget book, one of the performance measures is the number of equity-oriented recommendations made to city, state, and federal agencies, NPO,



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and for-profit organizations: Can MOIA talk about some of the recommendations that were made (15 projected in FY21)?

### **Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

- Can more money be appropriated for very basic level ESOL classes for immigrants that have little or no English proficiency? Workforce Development funds are focused on higher level skills so there are few resources to help “beginners”.

## **Human Rights Commission Budget Questions**

### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Is the \$273,014 “Other” charge under Department Personnel the commission members’ stipends, or for additional employees, or something else?
- In FY21 there were 6 interactions with City departments on compliance with the HRC ordinance. How are these initiated? Does the HRC audit specific departments, or are these due to complaints?
  - If the latter, how can we be more proactive?
- What will the increase to 6 FTEs enable the HRC to accomplish? How will it enable the HRC to be more proactive?
- What does the \$100,000 increase in contracted services represent?
- It says in your metrics that 100% of complaints received resulted in inquiries or referrals. What is the breakdown of inquiries vs referrals? Where are complainants referred to and what constitutes an inquiry?
- How many hearings has the HRC held based on a complaint?
- How can we be more proactive in protecting folks against racially-motivated violence or harassment, especially given the rise in anti-AAPI sentiment?





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- How can we be more proactive in protecting the rights and safety of our LGBTQ community, particularly trans and nonbinary individuals? How can we address violence and discrimination, including in the workplace and in the housing market? I know when we had the authors of the Suffolk study at our Fair Housing hearing, they mentioned that trans individuals were more discriminated against than any other sub-group.
- The RFI outlined the great work the HRC is doing in several areas. But, what are the short term goals or outputs for each of these areas? Some were outlined but some were not. For example, “Securing Immigrants’ Rights” outlined a specific workflow, while others did not.
- What has the HRC’s work been on workplace discrimination?
- How frequently does the HRC interface with the Boston Police Reform Task Force? Has the HRC made any information requests yet to the BPD or Boston Police Reform Task Force?
- Please describe the nature of your partnership with the BPD Civil Rights Unit.
- Please provide additional detail regarding how your budget was spent last year, what new funding will be used for this year, and changes in FTE.

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- With the rise of anti-Asian racism and other forms of discrimination and bullying in recent years, the Human Rights Commission can play a significant role in investigation. I would like to see a special director of investigation to ensure that the City has the ability to fight hate crimes.
- I understand that the Director may be leaving. What does that mean for the status of the Commission? Are there plans for a temporary director?
- In order for the Commission to be effective it needs to be properly staffed and resourced. What are the short- and long-term planning goals for the Commission in terms of personnel, outreach, and overall goals.

### **Councilor Julia Mejia asked:**



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- Can you speak on efforts being made to address the digital divide beyond the publication of your upcoming study? What action items do you plan to take to make an impact on municipal broadband in our city?

### **Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:**

- I'm concerned that the HRC's jurisdiction hasn't been updated to include pregnancy or domestic workers (protections for whom have been increased by newer laws). There are also some inconsistencies with the MCAD statute of limitations. Are there plans to update policies?
- The Commission currently has no website or online forms, and no public-facing clarifications on how to file complaints, and how the Commission's process differs from the State's. When will there be a website with forms and directions?
- Please provide some information on the Director position, as the current Director has announced a run for office. Will he stay in that position? If not, when will he be replaced?

### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- What will the \$100,000 increase for anti-discrimination supports in HRC's budget fund specifically (located under the line item of contracted services)?
- HRC is expecting an increase of 4 FTEs: when does HRC anticipate that it will fill these positions?
- How many complaints did HRC receive in the past year?
- What specifically did HRC do with its increased investment last year from reallocated BPD OT?
- As the overseer for citizens to ensure that recommendations from the Boston Police Reform Task Force are implemented: Can the HRC give an update on progress made by the City to implement the recommendations? Has the HRC received an update on progress made?
- When does HRC anticipate that the "Health Inequities Now" plan will be released?



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### **Age Strong Commission Budget Questions**

#### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- What is the plan for using ARP funding to support and expand AgeStrong efforts, and what is the plan for avoiding the cliff effect after the ARP funding and other federal grants cease?
- What is the current status of the taxi coupon program while a study is conducted? I know several of the residents at Amy Lowell have asked about the disappearance of the program.
- Please explain the 13.7% reduction in the programs and partnerships budget.
- Does AgeStrong do any intentional outreach to Native and Indigenous individuals, or partner with NAICOB? I am concerned that Boston is a hub for the indigenous community to gather and receive services, but not necessarily where they're domiciled, and so this community is easily overlooked.
- Please elaborate on the Events budget increase and FY22 investments under contracted services.
- The phone banking outreach to older adults at the height of COVID seemed like an excellent approach to contact those who may not know about AgeStrong's resources. Has the outreach continued to older adults who may be isolated? (In other words, elders who are not a part of a housing community or community center community, folks that may not call, etc.) Have we checked in on the folks we called initially?
  - What have we learned from phone banking and what are the plans to continue to reach out to older adults who may be isolated?
- How many calls do you get that are housing-related? What would you say are the most frequent calls you get? Does the city have the housing or other resources to meet the needs of folks calling? Are there specific elder-focused housing resources you connect people with or do you send them to OHS? Can you provide detail on the call volume and a breakdown of the types of call?



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- Does Age Strong do wellness/health checks on older residents/reach out to residents that neighbors are concerned about? If so, are there ways Age Strong could be better supported in this?
- Please provide additional information on the new supports to help elders with hoarding challenges.
- Please provide additional detail regarding how your budget increase was spent last year, what new funding will be used for this year, and changes in FTE.

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- Age Strong has been great about providing connection for seniors, both prior to and throughout the pandemic. Can you speak to outreach programs to check in on seniors regularly and connect them to resources as we recover from pandemic?
- In coordination with LCA, what outreach is done to reach seniors who speak languages other than English?

### **Councilor Julia Mejia asked:**

- Can you speak to how outreach has been conducted/adjusted for harder to reach senior populations in the era of COVID, especially as more and more services have been moving online?
- How are you working with organizations like LGBTQ Senior Housing to ensure LGBTQ seniors have access to affordable housing, and services?

### **Councilor Lydia Edwards asked:**

- The biggest issue I hear in my district is about cab coupons having been eliminated. Why did this happen? It would seem that this popular program would be a good place to spend some of the increase in funding.
- I'd like to request a shuttle for seniors in the North End and Charlestown to help them get to grocery stores.



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- Please provide an update on the East Boston senior center. Please speak to the choice of vendor and concerns that were raised about the vendor's wage theft violations.
- How much is spent on contracting altogether? Can you address concerns about the procurement process following an issue with a contract for home delivery of meals where a non-MWBE vendor came in above cost but won the contract?

### **Councilor Michael Flaherty asked:**

- Older adults are among our fastest growing population. What investments are we making in terms of digital literacy for older adults? What programs are being promoted? Any partnerships? Will any of the federal relief funding be spent on this issue?

### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- Can Age Strong talk about the decrease in some of its external funds, including the Mobility Assistance Program, MCOA Respite, and the Elderly Universal Fund? What did these grants fund and how will the department make up for these decreases?
- Why is Age Strong's Programs & Partnerships and Transportation line items being reduced in FY22?
- What specifically did Age Strong do with its increased investment last year from reallocated BPD OT?

### **Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

- We have one senior center in District 9 – Veronica Smith Senior Center run by a volunteer board and staffed by Age Strong. Can we get them:
  - Technical assistance for grant writing
  - Financial support for technology programming and equipment. Computer classes and tablets.
  - Property Management – the center needs a security system/camera so that visitors can be buzzed in.