News



J. Antonio Fernández, CEO of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese New York, and Faiza Ali, commissioner at the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs York, visit booths where volunteers held an immigration information phone bank to offer guidance and respond to local immigrants' concerns April 21. (Courtesy of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York)



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Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York recently convened a multi-agency immigration information phone bank, responding to a surge in anxiety among immigrant communities, particularly parents concerned about family separation.

"Over 1.5 million children in New York have an immigrant father or mother, children who are living in fear because they don't know if the family is going to be broken by the system," said J. Antonio Fernández, CEO of Catholic Charities New York.

"At Catholic Charities we provide legal support, counseling, case management, workforce development, to ensure that people can stay here in New York and have a normal life," he said.

The program, held at the Catholic Charities Community Services headquarters in Lower Manhattan, involved 56 volunteers from Catholic Charities and partner organizations, who staffed phones from 5-7 p.m. April 21. The effort, organized in collaboration with the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the New York State Office of New Americans, the Mexican Consulate and the New York Legal Assistance Group, sought to provide accurate information and guidance to immigrants navigating enforcement concerns.

Over the past year, Catholic Charities and its partners have fielded more than 42,000 calls through hotline services, reflecting what local advocates describe as a sustained need for accessible legal information and social support.

Fernández said that such work depends on collaboration. Commissioner Faiza Ali of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs described the work as part of an effort to

ensure access to reliable information.

> 'People are just not sure what to expect. They're not sure they're going to have their day in court. They're not sure that even if they have permission to be here, that that's not going to be taken away.'
> —Liz Markuci
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Ali, who was recently appointed to lead the office by Mayor Zohran Mamdani, said that outreach efforts have included "launching a Know Your Rights video about interactions with ICE and highlighting our immigration legal hotline and also distributing over 30,000 Know Your Rights booklets."

Ali said the current political climate has shaped demand for such services. "Across the city, many immigrant families are living with uncertainty and with fear, fear of enforcement, fear of family separation, or fear of even asking for help," she said. "And too often, that fear, we know, is combined with widespread misinformation, and it keeps people from accessing the very services and protections that are in fact available to them."

Hotline organizers said deportations and legal representation concerns have become increasingly common. Liz Markuci, director of hotline services at Catholic Charities, described a noticeable shift in the tone of calls over the past year. "We hear the calls when people feel alone. We hear the calls when people feel desperate and anxious," she said.

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Markuci told the National Catholic Reporter that Catholic Charities tailors its outreach efforts based on patterns in incoming calls. "This time, we're hearing more from families that are worried about their kids, and that's why this focus was about families who are not sure what they're going to do if a parent is taken away," she said.

She added that uncertainty about legal status and due process is a recurring theme. "I think people are just not sure what to expect. They're not sure they're going to

have their day in court. They're not sure that even if they have permission to be here, that that's not going to be taken away," she said.

"The bottom line is, am I going to be safe and able to live here with permission?"

Organizers said they expect to continue holding similar events in response to emerging needs.



A volunteer works at a phone bank coordinated by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York to offer guidance and respond to local immigrants' concerns April 21. (Courtesy of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York)

State officials echoed similar concerns about access to accurate information. Cindy Treminio, deputy director of operations at New York's Office for New Americans, said her office expanded access for immigrants asking for help. She told NCR that the issue of legal representation for immigrants is a central issue emerging from calls. The phone bank also marked the first participation of the Mexican Consulate in New York.

"It is with a heavy heart that I share with you an issue that has become a source of deep concern to Mexico's president, President Claudia Sheinabum, and that is the death of 15 Mexican nationals under ICE custody since January 2025," Diego Sandoval, Mexican consul for the Civil Protection Unit said at the event.

Alejandro Cabrera Clemente was the last of 15 Mexican immigrants who died while in custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on April 11, and the 47th person to die in ICE custody under the Trump administration. The case comes amid an increase in detention, with the number of people held reaching approximately 70,000, the highest in the agency's history.

An ABC News analysis of ICE data found that the first 14 months of Donald Trump's second term "have been the deadliest period at federal detention centers since the COVID-19 pandemic," with a death rate of 11 per 100,000 admissions, compared to 7 per 100,000 last year and 1 per 100,000 in 2022.

Sandoval said those deaths call for accountability and transparency. "We believe, and we share this belief with all our allies, with Catholic Charities, that each life, each human life, is of the utmost value, and any loss demands attention, transparency and accountability," he said.

"In response to these terrible deaths, the government of Mexico has acted through formal diplomatic channels requesting thorough and transparent investigations as well as timely access to information," he said.

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