

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

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March 18, 2026

Start: 9:40 a.m.

Recess: 4:04 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Nantasha M. Williams,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Gale A. Brewer
Crystal Hudson
Linda Lee
Farah N. Louis
Virginia Maloney
Chi A. Ossé
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Tony Marx
President of the New York Public Library

Cynthia Carrion
El Museo del Barrio

Jirina Ribbens
Ice Theatre of New York, Inc.

Sheila Lewandowski
The Chocolate Factory Theater

Jessica Jackson

Vipassana Vijayarangan

Kate Madigan

DJ McDonald

Angel Hernandez
The New York Botanical Garden

Nicole Touzien
Dancewave

Lisa Gold
Asian American Arts Alliance

Francine Garber-Cohen
The Regina Opera Company, Inc.

Allie Brashears

Sarah Cecilia Bukowski American Guild of Musical
Artists

Martha Bowers

David Freudenthal
Carnegie Hall
Leonard Paul

President, Local 374, DC 37 (NY Public Library
workers &
Brooklyn Botanic Gardens workers)

Deborah Allman
President, Local 1930, DC 37 (NY Library workers)

George Olken
President, Local 1482, DC 37 (Brooklyn Library
Workers)

John Hyslop President, Local 1321, DC 37 (Queens
Library Guild Workers)

Lauren Comito
Urban Librarians Unite

Juliana Cope
Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center

Lisa Gold
Asian American Arts Alliance

Tony Mazzocchi
Kaufman Music Center

Dr. Lauren Britt-Elmore
The Flea Theater

Abigail Emerson

Melody Emerson-Simpson

Aya Esther Hayashi, PhD
The People's Theatre

Sarah Calderon

Melissa Riker

Margo Isabel Cohen
Ristorucci Executive Board member, Local 1502, DC
37 (Brooklyn Museum workers)

Maribel Cosme-Vitagliani
Executive Board member, Local 1502, DC 37
(Brooklyn Museum workers))

June Lei
Secretary, Local 1502, DC 37 (Brooklyn Museum
workers)

Dylan Flesch
NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN)

Javon Walker-Peters REEL WORKS

Jenny Dembrow

Nicole Gardner
Building for the Arts NY, Inc

Román Baca
Exit12 Dance Company

Melinda Wang Dance/NYC

Dohini Sompura
American Museum of Natural History

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Testing one, two, one two.
3 Today's March 18, 2026. Today's Committee hearing is
4 on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
5 Intergroup Relations being recorded in HR 1 by Keith
6 Polite.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to
8 the New York City Council Committee on Cultural
9 Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup.
10 Please do not approach the dais at any time during
11 this hearing. Please place your phone on silent
12 mode. Chair, thank you for your cooperation. We are
13 ready to begin.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you Sergeants.
15 [GAVEL] Good morning and thank you to everyone
16 joining us today for the Committee on Cultural
17 Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations
18 Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing.

19 I would like to welcome the representatives from
20 the three public library systems, members of the
21 public and my colleagues and the Council. Our public
libraries are among the most trusted and widely used
institutions in our city. As I convene my first
budget hearing as Chair of this Committee, I must
emphasize the critical role libraries play for New

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2 Yorkers. Far beyond housing books, libraries are
3 vital community hubs providing job training, tech
4 access and educational support. Serving as a true
lifeline for residents citywide.

5 However, year after year, the Council finds
6 itself returning to the same conversation during the
7 budget process. At the preliminary budget stage, the
8 full level of funding libraries require is often
9 absent. Creating uncertainty for the systems and the
10 communities that rely on them. I was very
11 disappointed to see that the preliminary plan did not
include the one time funding of \$30.7 million added
at adoption of the Fiscal 2026 budget.

12 I would have liked to see this funding baselined.
13 This recurring pattern forces the Council to step in
14 each year to restore or add funding simply to
15 maintain existing services. Rather than allowing the
16 library systems to plan with stability and focus on
expanding programs and resources for New Yorkers.

17 This cycle makes it extremely difficult for
18 library systems to plan ahead. Without stable
19 funding at the start of the Fiscal Year, libraries
20 face uncertainty in staffing, programming, and long
term service planning. Our library system should not
21

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1 have to operate with this level of uncertainty when
2 they are providing essential services to millions of
3 New Yorkers.

4 Today, we will also be discussing the significant
5 challenges libraries face in completing capital
6 projects in a timely manner. Across the city, many
7 library branches require renovations, accessibility
8 upgrades and critical infrastructure improvements.
9 Yet, these projects often take many years to move
10 from planning to completion. Lengthy timelines,
11 complex approval and procurement processes and rising
12 construction costs can delay projects well beyond
13 their original schedules, leaving communities waiting
14 far too long for modernized and fully accessible
15 library spaces.

16 If we want libraries to continue serving as the
17 cornerstone institutions they are, we must ensure
18 they have both the operating support and capital
19 resources necessary to maintain and modernize their
20 facilities.

21 I look forward to hearing from the leadership of
our three library systems today about how the
preliminary budget impacts their ability to serve New

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1
2 Yorkers and how we can work together to provide the
3 stability and investments they need.

4 Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge my
5 colleagues who are present. We have Finance Chair
6 Lee, Council Member Maloney, Council Member Louis and
7 Council Member Hudson. I would also like to thank
8 the Finance Staff, Carolina and Aliya for their work
9 on this hearing. As well as Committee Staff
10 Alejandro and Regina for their support. Finally, I
11 would also like to thank my staff Priyanka(SP?) and
12 Shakee (SP?).

13 I would also like to remind everyone from the
14 public who wishes to testify in person today that
15 you must fill out an appearance card, which is
16 located on the desks of the Sergeant at Arms at the
17 back of the room. Please fill out the slip even if
18 you have already registered to testify in advance.
19 When you are called, please limit your testimony to
20 two minutes, whether you are testifying in person or
21 in Zoom. I am also going to ask my colleagues to
limit their questions and commits to five minutes.

Okay, so I will now invite the libraries to
testify.

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2 TONY MARX: Good morning. Can you hear me? Good
3 morning, I'm Tony Marx and I'm the President of the
4 New York Public Library and it's an honor and
5 pleasure to be with you here this morning. I want to
6 thank - start by thanking City Council Speaker Menin
7 as well as Deputy Speaker and Committee Chair Dr.
8 Nantasha Williams. Congratulations on your new post
9 and thank you for those comments. I couldn't have
10 said it better myself. And also, thanks to the whole
11 Committee and its staff for the opportunity to
12 testify today on the Mayor's Fiscal 2027 Preliminary
13 Budget.

14 Over the last several years, the library has
15 repeatedly faced significant cuts to its operating
16 budget. Each year starts with a setback that we
17 spend the subsequent months spending resources to
18 reverse. Last year, uncharacteristically started off
19 better. We were held harmless, even allocated an
20 additional \$2 million to expand Sunday services by
21 the City Council. But we still had to campaign to be
baselined and we weren't, even though our peer
institutions in the city were. This is still the
budget dance, as the Chair has referred to it. It is
laborious, it is costly, and it diverts valuable

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1 staff and other resources from our vital offerings in
2 the fight to keep even.

3 This near annual exercise has left us with mostly
4 flat budgets for several years amid rising costs.
5 Naturally, we were thrilled to learn of the then
6 mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani's promise to
7 literally end the budget dance with consistent
8 baselined funding of 0.5 percent of the city's
9 budget. His mayoralty represents, in his own words,
10 a new era for both the city at large and for
11 libraries in particular. We can together turn the
12 page on the past with an administration that
13 understands that libraries are an integral part to a
14 more affordable New York.

15 We've already had some great interactions with
16 the Administration. We lent the Mayor the Quran that
17 he was sworn in on. We hosted him for the city's
18 annual interfaith breakfast. We've discussed future
19 partnership and shared priorities on digital equity
20 and literacy, as well as on collocations on
21 affordable housing above new libraries.

This positive relationship has extended to
encouraging discussions about the city budget. We
are grateful for his baselining of the City Council's

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1 \$2 million in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget to
2 maintain the added Sunday service locations from last
3 year. The Administration has also been receptive to
4 the impacts of the proposed savings targets for the
5 current and forthcoming year as well as reductions in
6 the FY27 Preliminary Budget on our offerings. We are
7 aware of the \$5 billion deficit that the city faces
8 and its ongoing conversations with the state but we
9 are heartened by the Administration's acknowledgement
10 of the outsized returns on investments that libraries
11 provide to all, to all New Yorkers.

12 It is still early in the process and we are
13 confident that the Mayor's intent on delivering on
14 both of his campaign promises. Baseline funding at
15 0.5 percent stands to transform library services into
16 a resource with a credible presence that New Yorkers
17 never have to question or wonder about.

18 We can fortify our services, which means more
19 hours and days of operations with more of our great
20 staff. And more hours and days of operations in
21 staff, means that the branches can provide college
and career advice for graduating high school seniors.
Our teen centers can do their work for young adults
to socialize with their peers. We could provide an

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1 open place for kids to drop in for afterschool
2 tutoring. A trusted place for New Yorkers and we are
3 the most trusted place for all New Yorkers in every
4 neighborhood for all income levels, for instance to
5 help filing their taxes.

6 The demand for these and other services is very
7 real. Last year, our afterschool attendance was over
8 68,000 students. We'll surpass that this year as a
9 quarter over quarter growth already shows a 25
10 percent increase. A recent career resources fair for
11 teens hosted 1,600 attendees with over 40 businesses
12 and other organizations. The FY26 PMMR shows a
13 steady increase of program attendance, library card
14 holders, computer and wireless sessions from FY23
15 through FY25.

16 And in January, the New York Times survey of
17 35,000 New Yorkers showed more funding for libraries
18 to be their very top choice. We can also address our
19 unmet needs of \$24 million, a product of operating on
20 this flat budget along with the rising costs of
21 collections, staff wages and IT.

We hope this commitment to libraries will also
include as the Chair mentioned, our capital agenda.
Our services are of little value, if they do not

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1 happen in places that feel safe, welcoming and
2 respectful of New Yorkers rights to knowledge and
3 opportunity, let alone if those spaces are not open.

4 The libraries currently have \$1.2 billion in
5 unmet capital needs, \$485 million of that is just at
6 the New York Public Library. This is because most of
7 our buildings are aging. They're small structures,
8 beloved but small and aging.

9 The city's capital process also often results in
10 costly budget shortfalls and significant delays, also
11 as the Chair has mentioned. Mayor Mamdani's
12 commitment to excellence in government makes us
13 hopeful that we can finally address these systemic
14 issues with reform in the near future. We look
15 forward to partnership in the meantime or short term
16 fixes.

17 One example would be a transformative investment
18 in the ten year capital plan. Much has happened in
19 2016 with \$100 million that allowed us to fully
20 renovate five century old Carnegie libraries in high
21 needs neighborhoods in the Bronx, Manhattan and
Staten Island. Another, as I mentioned, is the
collocation projects, which allow us to take
advantage of the air above old libraries, build new

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1 libraries with affordable housing above, as we did in
2 the first instance in Inwood.

3 And we can experiment with other ways to
4 streamline our design construction and to be - that
5 are already being employed at the new library at West
6 Chester Square. The Council has always been and
7 continues to be a most reliable ally. Every time the
8 library has faced significant cuts in the past, it
9 was the library council who took up our cause and
10 joined in the fight for restoration, including the
11 additional funding in FY26. Speaker Menin, a long
12 time friend of the library, has confirmed that this
13 continues to be the case. Recently, when she stated
14 that libraries are New Yorkers' most trusted
15 institutions. As in deed they are.

16 We know and recognize, this is a challenging time
17 for this city financially. We understand that these
18 challenges were inherited, as well as the
19 intergovernmental dynamics at play.

20 We also know that it is still early. The City
21 Council is as always with us and we have a new Mayor
who appreciates the libraries as an unparalleled
crucial public good within the lives of New Yorkers.

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1 We are living with a different Mayor and a
2 different City Council in a different day. Everyone
3 is paying attention. Everyone is committed to
4 investing in the libraries, so that we can continue
5 to invest in all New Yorkers. I look forward to
6 retiring my dancing shoes.

7 Thank you Madam Chair and all colleagues.

8 LINDA JOHNSON: Who knew Tony had dancing shoes?
9 Good morning, sorry, excuse me. I am Linda Johnson,
10 President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library. Thank
11 you to Speaker Menin and to our new Chair, Deputy
12 Speaker Dr. Williams, as well as Finance Chair Lee,
13 the Members of the Committee and the entire City
14 Council for your steadfast support of New York City's
15 libraries. Your commitment to libraries makes it
16 possible for us to deliver the programs, services and
17 resources New Yorkers count on every day.

18 I would also like to recognize and thank the
19 library workers who make this work possible,
20 including our partners at DC37 and Brooklyn Public
21 Libraries local 1482. Library staff are the
frontline of service for millions of New Yorkers and
their dedication is the reason libraries are among

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1 the most beloved and trusted institutions in our
2 cities.

3 Forgive me, some of my testimony is going to
4 repeat what my colleague from the New York Public
5 Library has just stated but I think it bears
6 repeating. Uhm, for years, libraries have endured an
7 annual ritual no city organization should face, with
8 or without dancing shoes. Funded, allocated as a
9 temporary measure, only to vanish from the
10 Preliminary Budget requiring us to return here to
11 make the case all over again.

12 That pattern has had real consequences for staff
13 morale, for our ability to plan, and for the New
14 Yorkers who depend upon us. The Mayor's Preliminary
15 Budget takes a step toward ending the budget dance
16 both baselining the \$2 million of the \$32.7 million
17 increase, the Council secured in Fiscal 2026 and
18 pledging to work with us to maintain service labels.
19 We have had many productive conversations with the
20 Administration and they have been transparent about
21 the city's budget pressures. They also understand
what the Council has long championed, that libraries
are central to the city's affordability agenda and

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1 must be a priority. We are hopeful and we will
2 continue that conversation.

3 I often say that libraries are the modern day
4 town square. A trusted space to access information,
5 to connect with neighbors and discuss critical
6 questions of their time. We welcome New Yorkers from
7 every neighborhood and every walk of life and we ask
8 for nothing in return. Your investment last year
9 marked an important step forward for libraries. At
10 Brooklyn Public Library, your support enabled us to
11 open Bay Ridge and Bedford Libraries on Sundays, hire
12 additional staff, expand our collections, and address
13 emergency building maintenance. New Yorkers noticed
14 this investment. Brooklyn Public Library 62
15 locations received over 6 million visits last year.
16 Patrons checked out nearly 10 million items,
17 including books and digital materials, as well as
18 items from our library of things, borrowing board
19 games, musical instruments, power tools for home
20 projects, telescopes, vinyl records, museum passes,
21 and even art work. Overall, our circulation is 7
percent higher year to date over the past fiscal
year. Our Culture Pass program is set to have its
strongest year since launching in 2018 with over

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75,000 passes checked out between July 2025 and
February 2026.

Library workers hosted more than 80,000 free
programs in Brooklyn alone, including our Text Help
programs, which helped over 1,500 Brooklyn residents
collectively save more than \$2 million on their taxes
last year.

Attendance at our First Five Years program is up
13 percent, putting us on pace for our busiest year
of Early Childhood programming since the pandemic.
Driven in large part by programs funded through the
City Council's First Readers Initiative. The
Preliminary Budget moves libraries in the right
direction and I'm optimistic that the adopted budget
on the Council's fiscal will build on the Council's
Fiscal 2026 investment and put us on a path toward
greater stability.

The challenges are real. The federal prohibition
on passport services at nonprofit library alone,
costs Brooklyn Public Library nearly \$1 million
annually. Our participation in the city's cost
savings exercise and personnel materials and
maintenance costs continue to climb. These are real
pressures but they also underscore the importance of

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1 investing in what libraries can deliver for New
2 Yorkers. We welcome the conversation about what one
3 half of one percent of the city budget would unlock
4 for New York City's libraries.

5 In Brooklyn, this means hiring specialists
6 dedicated to every age group across our branches.
7 So, children, teens, adults and older adults all have
8 access to the programs and resources they need no
9 matter where they live. It means expanding service
10 hours so working families can visit after work and
11 students have more time to study.

12 It means responding quickly to urgent building
13 needs rather than waiting years for a capital project
14 to wind through the pipeline, keeping our doors open
15 and our libraries safe. It is the level of service
16 New Yorkers deserve and as a January New York Times
17 poll showed, proudly demand.

18 You have Brooklyn Public Library's capital needs
19 spelled out in front of you. In the interest of
20 time, I won't read all of this but I do want to note
21 the need facing Brooklyn's Library is significant, as
is the progress we've made together.

Council Member support for our projects, as well
as the Council's extraordinary capital allocation

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1 last year, have been essential. To this end, I am
2 requesting the City Council alongside the Brooklyn
3 delegation once again, allocate \$10 million in
4 discretionary capital funding for systemwide repairs,
5 project shortfalls and essential upgrades at
6 Brooklyn's branches. We are also submitting a
7 capital request to the Administration for a
8 transformational investment, \$150 million for each
9 library system to comprehensively upgrade more than a
10 dozen libraries across the city. It's time to move
11 beyond using expense money for bandages and invest in
12 top to bottom renovations that save time and money,
13 reduce interruptions and create inspiring state of
14 the art libraries built to last.

13 Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the
14 preliminary budget. The Council has been a
15 longstanding champion of libraries and we are all
16 grateful for your leadership.

16 I'd like to end by sharing a very brief poem by
17 Live Lusk, a patron of our Marcy Library. It's
18 titled, 'My Library is Loud.' With children giggling
19 over picture books with faces that look like theirs.
20 With hushed conversations a man is rehearsing for his
21 job interview on Friday. The first one since he was

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1 incarcerated. With keyboards clacking, a young man
2 is watching a video on how to create the best transit
3 city in Minecraft. With printers spitting fresh
4 copies of a missing cat poster, a father and daughter
5 will spend the afternoon placing them around the
6 neighborhood only for mittens to appear at 6 p.m.
sharp for dinner.

7 A woman is soothing herself with rhythmic chance
8 because the library is the only place she feels safe
9 to do so. My library is loud and I feel joy.

10 Your continued support ensures our libraries
11 remain vibrant and loud with activity and future
generations who will know this joy. Thank you.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: Good morning. Good morning.
13 There we go. To Chair, Deputy Speaker, Dr. Nantasha
14 Williams, congratulations. It's a pleasure to greet
15 you. To Finance Chair Linda Lee, it's a pleasure to
16 see you as well. To our Queens representative as
17 well, Council Member Sandra Ung, a pleasure. To the
18 members of this esteemed Committee and to our ongoing
19 supporter Speaker Julie Menin, thank you for all of
your support.

20 I am Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of the
Queens Public Library. It is a pleasure to be here

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1 with you today. To our great team members who are
2 here from the Queens Public Library, to our union
3 President John Hislop(SP?) who is sitting somewhere
4 in the audience as well. Thank you for your
5 partnership and ongoing support.

6 We are here to talk about our great libraries.
7 It is 10:03 and I know at Queens, people are
8 streaming through the doors coming to receive our
9 services and they're entering looking for hope,
10 opportunity, information, services and just to become
11 better people and we are very, very thankful for all
12 the great staff who are working, providing the
13 services there.

14 I have submitted written testimony; however, I
15 will forgo reading it to emphasize a few key points.
16 It's a brand new chapter as Linda and Tony have
17 indicated for the City of New York concerning our
18 libraries. We have a new Mayor. We have a new
19 Speaker. We have a new Chair. We have a new Chair
20 of Finance and all of you are great partners and
21 supporters of our libraries. As a result of that,
we've had ongoing relationships with all of you
before. We've had ongoing conversations since the
start of this Administration, as far as with the

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1 Mayor's team, obviously with the Speaker, with the
2 Chair and other members of the City Council about the
3 importance of the libraries.

4 The City Council has always championed public
5 libraries for which we are deeply grateful and
6 because of your efforts, we were able to secure
7 increases in our Fiscal Year '26 budget that led to
8 the expansion of 7 day service.

9 At QPL, Queens Public Library, the expanded seven
10 day locations have seen over 32,500 visits with these
11 expanded services or on that extra day. Given even
12 more New Yorkers access to free high quality
13 collections, programs, resources, in welcoming
14 environments.

15 Chair Williams, Council Member Lee, Council
16 Member Ung, you are frequent visitors to our
17 libraries. You are there all the time. We've had
18 joint programs and services as a result of your
19 leadership, your financial support, and just your
20 ongoing support and we thank you for that.

21 And other members of the Queens delegation have
22 been there on a regular basis, supporting our
23 libraries but also, you know the other side of the
24 library where the needs are and you provided money

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1 for those needs but as you know, there's still many
2 needs as Tony and Linda indicated. And now we have a
3 new Administration that also recognizes the value of
4 a meaningful investment in our city's public library
5 system.

6 The Mayor has been very vocal about the power of
7 libraries to transform people's lives and to create a
8 more equitable and affordable New York City.

9 Before he even declared running for Mayor, the
10 Mayor visited our Broadway Library and I just
11 happened to see the Mayor recently in passing and he
12 remembered the visit and talked about the aspects of
13 the Broadway Children's Library children's room and
14 what it meant to him. So, we are there for our
15 relationship as far as that commitment.

16 He has spoken about committing 0.5 percent of the
17 city budget to libraries. As you know this funding
18 would be monumental. In past years at our budget
19 hearings, I've talked about what the city libraries
20 could be if we had increased and sustained funding.

21 We would even be more accessible to New Yorkers
across the city. We could extend our hours. Hire
our much needed important staff, expand our programs

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1 to meet demand and make available more books,
2 computers and other essential library resources.

3 And we would finally be able to plan effectively
4 for the outyears, rather than waiting and worrying,
5 stressing and not being able to plan properly. This
6 to me is so important. As the budget conversations
7 continue with leadership on both sides of City Hall,
8 I remain optimistic about what is possible for
9 libraries. There is great potential for our capital
10 needs too. Queens Public Libraries capital portfolio
11 has recently celebrated several milestones, such as
12 groundbreakings for our Regal Park Library, our
13 Baisley Park Library and the oldest library in our
14 system, the Astoria Library.

15 This year, DDC expects that the Administrative
16 construction to start at Laurelton Library renovation
17 and the physical construction of a brand new
18 Douglaston Library, moving that library from what was
19 called a Lindsey Box of 7,500 square feet to a new
20 16,000 square foot library and we're looking forward
21 to that as well.

And with Regal Park, that will also move from a
7,500 square foot Lindsey Box to an 18,000 square
foot library. Again, another exciting project. We

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1 currently have 41 active projects, a majority managed
2 by the New York City Department of Design and
3 Construction DDC. We are incredibly thankful to the
4 Council for its traditional allocation of the lump
5 sum funding for QPL, which is crucial in allowing us
6 to fill project shortfalls as Linda indicated as soon
7 as we are notified by DDC, as well as filling those
8 gaps.

9 For Fiscal Year '27, QPL and the two other
10 systems are requesting, again, the continued support
11 for this essential capital allocation in the amount
12 of \$10 million per system. As Linda indicated, this
13 allows us to plug holes, to respond to needs but also
14 not to tap in to our expense money. Queens total
15 capital need in Fiscal Year '27 is nearly \$271
16 million and it's comprised of critical
17 infrastructure, resiliency, and accessibility,
18 renovation projects.

19 Our buildings function as social infrastructure,
20 one of the few locations where the public can go to
21 connect with others without barriers to entry. Maybe
we can get a window cleaner as well at our libraries
to help us. I heard the side noise. I said,
hopefully that's a window cleaner and not a bird or

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1 something happening there. Our buildings function as
2 social infrastructure and your support is so
3 critical.

4 Library users and staff deserve state of the art,
5 safe and welcoming libraries that they can count on
6 to be open. With this in mind, the three library
7 systems are requesting, as Tony indicated, a
8 transformation of \$450 million investment from the
9 Administration and our capital portfolios, \$150
10 million for each system. This investment will allow
11 us to complete comprehensive renovations and to
12 address the most urgent projects across the city. It
13 will allow us to plan.

14 I think we all understand that a vision for a
15 stronger and more equitable New York city must
16 include public libraries. Our communities are facing
17 many challenges today but at libraries, they have
18 unlimited access to resources and supports without
19 needing to worry about affording them. We are there
20 for the public. All welcome to get the help they
21 need to explore diverse ideas and perspectives and
discover their own voices and passions. An
investment in the Queens Public Library, the Brooklyn
and New York Public Libraries is an investment in the

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1 future for all New Yorkers. Thank you for the
2 opportunity to testify and we look forward to our
3 continued work together and welcome your questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I also just
5 want to note that we were joined by Council Member
6 Ung. Thank you so much for your testimony. The
7 first question I have is, the library's Fiscal 2027
8 Prelim Budget totals \$491.4 million representing a
9 reduction of \$31.7 million compared to Fiscal 2026
10 adopted budget. What are the anticipated impacts to
11 programs and services as a result of this reduction?

12 TONY MARX: Thank you Dr. Chair. The Preliminary
13 - the Mayor's Preliminary Budget does not restore or
14 baseline the \$30.7 million of one time funding in
15 FY26. \$15.7 million provided by the Mayor and \$15
16 million provided by the Mayor in partnership with the
17 City Council.

18 Uh, in addition, the citywide savings targets
19 impact \$7.99 million during the current fiscal year
20 and \$12.3 in the next fiscal year. We are grateful
21 for the \$2 million of expanded Sunday service that
the City Council made possible and that the Mayor has
now baselined and then we hope that the
Administration and Council will fulfill the 0.5

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1 percent promise of the adopted budgets. The uhm - we
2 are still working to finalize how to uh achieve the
3 targets that have been set forward. Uhm, we do
4 recognize that without restoration, it will simply be
5 impossible to maintain Sunday service across our
6 systems, even with the \$2 million in the preliminary
7 budget. Beyond the loss of Sundays, we are and we
8 hope not to - this is all things we all agree we
9 would like not to see. I know the Mayor would like
10 to not see reduced days and hours of operation,
11 tightly controlling or freezing our hiring,
12 significantly reducing budgets for collections, for
13 cyber security, for facility security, for
14 maintenance repairs, IT needs, pages and overtime.
All of that is what we hope to avoid and what I know
the Mayor hopes to avoid.

15 LINDA JOHNSON: Yes, thank you for the question.
16 We also are hopeful that the money will in fact be
17 baselined but our uhm, the amount at risk for
18 Brooklyn Public Library is nearly \$9 million. Uhm,
19 and we've had many conversations about this issue in
20 particular and we're aligned with the understanding
21 that libraries play a key role in the Mayor's
affordability agenda.

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1
2 We are also fearful of the uhm exercises or the
3 outcome of those exercises to hit the target savings
4 that have been issued to city agencies. Uhm, in our
5 operating budget of 2027, a cut of 43.4 million,
6 which is the 2.5 percent cut, means our current
7 operations will continue to face challenges that we
8 will have to evaluate service reductions. We are
9 already a lean organization and we have unmet needs
10 before we begin to even think about trimming further.

11 We will have people, places and materials that
12 will not be able to be hired, purchased. And so,
13 there's not much room for further cuts. We are too
14 thinly staffed. We suffer shortages in branch
15 coverage and we may see wait times for our books
16 increase if we cannot invest in the collections or
17 keep up with the increasing costs of purchasing new
18 material. We will see more frequent disruptions,
19 which is a really critical uhm, circumstance that we
20 want to do everything to avoid. People count on
21 their libraries and the consistency and the delivery
of the times that we are open is important to
everyone's planning in terms of their use of the
libraries and the way that it works into their weekly
schedules.

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1 But disruptions like HVAC problems have a
2 terrible impact and cause situations where we have
3 what we call emergency closings, which is sort of the
4 most critical thing we're looking to avoid.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: I just want to pick up on
6 Linda's point as far as the emergency closings and I
7 think the dynamic that will take place with the uh
8 not restoration of the money as well as the
9 baselining and the money of it all, so as Linda and
10 Tony indicated for this particular fiscal year, the
11 1.5 percent, exercise that we're going through as
12 well as a 2.5 percent exercise that we're going
13 through for next fiscal year. It will definitely
14 have an impact on services, without question and
15 cutting back on services, cutting back on hours,
16 dealing with Sunday service and not having Sunday
17 service as indicated by the money that the City
18 Council put in last year.

19 But also I think the correlation between what we
20 may have to do with deferred maintenance as well and
21 the balancing act and that we have old buildings,
like we've talked about and you have boilers that
break down or in the summer time, you have the air
conditioners that don't work and as a result of that,

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1 we have to plug those holes with the expense dollars
2 and not having that money available we'll make sure
3 that we don't plug them in a way, in a timely way,
4 that allow the libraries to stay open, which has a
5 direct correlation impacting the people who come
6 through our doors looking for those services.

7 So, on one hand, you have fewer services but
8 also, you may not have buildings available to provide
9 the fewer services that would be available as a
10 result of either the exercise or the not baselining
11 or having the money available.

12 So, all those things will impact on the future of
13 our ability to serve the public and that to me is the
14 most tragic thing. So, we have to be very conscious
15 of that.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Uhm, random question
17 listening to what you all just said. How often on
18 average, like on a yearly average do you have to do
19 emergency closings?

20 DENNIS WALCOTT: I'm sorry, I didn't need to do -
21 emergency-

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I was just wondering
23 how often, like what is the cadence of emergency

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1 closings within a year or however, within a month? I
2 don't know how you can estimate.

3 LINDA JOHNSON: In the case of Brooklyn Public
4 Library, uhm, we can have as many as 1,000 hours,
5 which is really significant.

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: Basically the same for us. I
7 mean it impacts in a way where we have to shut down
8 and not have the library open and emergency closings
9 really impact us in a way where the public is not
gaining that information.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And the 1,000 hours in a
11 year you're saying average?

12 LINDA JOHNSON: Last year.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, okay, I have some
14 other questions about overall budget reduction but
15 you all mentioned the cost savings, so I'll skip to
16 that and ask uhm, so as we all know OMB has asked
17 agencies to identify savings for Fiscal 2027. What
18 specific savings targets were requested of each of
19 your systems and what proposal have you submitted? I
20 think it's due in two days. Uhm, yeah and another
21 add on to that is, did OMB provide any guidance on
which areas should be prioritized for savings or were

1 the library systems left to determine where
2 reductions would occur?

3 DENNIS WALCOTT: We have, I think until tomorrow
4 or the next day to submit to OMB what the exercise
5 will result in and we didn't really to my knowledge
6 get any particular guidance that we have to get back
7 to OMB. But again, it impacts on the potential of
8 hours. It impacts on the issue of hiring and we will
9 have to slow down on hiring.

10 So, there are many variations on how we're
11 looking at that particular exercise, especially for
12 this year and I want to just reinforce an important
13 point, that for this particular year, we're dealing
14 with 1.5 percent for a three month period of time.
15 It's not on an annualized basis and as a result of
16 that- that squeezing in any type of reaction in a way
17 that's just not good for planning. So, that's for
18 this particular year alone.

19 TONY MARX: So, I'll just reiterate what Dennis
20 said, you know when we see those kinds of you know we
21 have till another day or two I think to give that
final proposal. We'd like to, I think we'd all,
including the Mayor, like to avoid this actually
happening. But it means less money for staff, which

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1 means less hours. It means less money for expense
2 money to do the bandaids, which we prefer to do with
3 capital funding, which we also need. It means less
4 technology. It means uhm, you know it means less
5 library, less library services, less reliable library
6 services and you know, I think the City Council has
7 made it clear, the Mayor has made it clear, that's
8 the exact opposite of what we hoped to provide. And
9 Madam Chair, with apologies, I should have jumped in.
10 The New York Public Library in FY25 lost nearly 1,500
11 hours for emergency planning, building and repair
12 services and maintenance.

13 Again with constant funding, with the ability to
14 plan as Dennis and Linda have made mention of, we can
15 avoid those kinds of unexpected closings, which are
16 frustrating for the staff and frustrating for the
17 public who show up at libraries and find closed doors
18 when they should be open and welcoming to everyone.

19 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't have much to add.
20 I touched on this in my last answer but I would just
21 reiterate what's been said. What a cut of this
magnitude would mean is cutting - the purchase of
materials, a hiring freeze and a reduction of hours,
all things that we strive hard to avoid.

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1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, I'm going to ask one
3 more question uhm, I'm going to skip around a bit to
4 capital needs and infrastructure. If the city
5 granted permanent self management authority today,
6 would the library system be able to manage your
entire capital plan?

7 LINDA JOHNSON: No.

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: I don't even have to turn around
and look at our team to get the answer to that.

9 LINDA JOHNSON: That's a no.

10 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's a no.

11 LINDA JOHNSON: We're not real estate developers
12 and we have an extraordinary number of projects that
13 are underway across the system. In some cases, we
14 have more individual projects than we actually have
15 libraries because we're working on several projects
within a single branch at the same time, or not at
the same time depending on how things unfold.

16 But - and we really don't want to be fixing our
17 own boilers and roofs. We want to be building new
18 buildings and taking a hold of the projects that have
19 a strong esthetic component.

20 TONY MARX: Again, we are not currently have the
21 capacity to handle half a billion dollars in capital

1 improvements. When we do our own capital
2 improvements, we do know that those go at twice the
3 speed and cost half as much, which is a great benefit
4 to all New Yorkers and to the budget of the City of
5 New York.

6 But that requires putting money up front that we
7 don't have necessarily. We have open conversations
8 with the Mayor. Happy to have those conversations
9 with the City Council, as we have in the past about
10 whether there's a different way to do business that
11 provides consistent funding for capital needs, so
12 that we can do planning, which means we can deliver
13 effectively. Working with DDC or a reformed DDC or
14 other bodies as we have. We're partnered with EDC
15 and others to get better results, to see whether we
16 can provide to New Yorkers the kinds of capital
17 improvements on budget that everyone wants to see
18 including the Mayor is eager to see.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: So I just want to add one other
17 point and I always use this example to a question
18 like this, in that no, I agree with Linda and Tony as
19 far as we don't have our internal capacity. Yet, at
20 the same time when we do manage those few projects,
21

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1 we do it a lot better. And I always use the example
2 - and a lot cheaper.

3 One of our libraries that had the boiler
4 breakdown and it was in the dead of winter and if we
5 had to go through DDC, God knows how long it would
6 have taken, how much it would have cost. We had to
7 put our expense money to actually do the job. We did
8 the job in a short period of time and for half the
9 cost. I mean, those are the types of things we do.
10 We're in a position every now and then of getting
11 private money or state money where we can do a
12 project on our own and we do it well. But again, the
13 sheer size I talked about in my testimony, the number
14 of projects we have going on right now with DDC and
15 we could not do that but at the same time, we know
16 there has to be a better system to do it, so that way
17 it's not done in an eight year period of time.

18 It is so frustrating when we announce a project
19 and people are looking at us, as far as why is this
20 project taking so long and some of my Queens Council
21 Members here know about projects within their
respective libraries that are not being done in a
timely manner, that can be done a lot more
efficiently. And as a result of that, we're looking

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1 for that nirvana as far as how we can put a system in
2 place that allows the projects to be done
3 efficiently, effectively and cost effectively and to
4 get turned around in a faster period of time.

5 LINDA JOHNSON: I also suspect that the half -
6 half the time and half of the money is not really the
7 full story. That it's more dramatic than that.

8 TONY MARX: I think you can tell from our answers
9 Madam Chair that we are eager to have this
10 conversation. We've been eager to have this
11 conversation with past administrations. We now are
12 hearing from this Administration in an openness to
13 get serious about finding a better way to do
14 business.

15 Let me just give an example. When the city gave
16 us a significant additional investment into the ten
17 year capital plan, which was back in 2016 and was for
18 the first time in living memory when that happened.
19 It enabled us to plan. It enabled us to deliver on
20 budget, five amazing Carnegie branches, redone top to
21 bottom in neighborhoods of need and that has produced
incredible results for those neighborhoods. When we
find a different way to do business that enables us
to plan, that enables us not to go through the sort

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1 of the sequential processes of DVC so that we could
2 do things all together, so that we can get to a
3 result that doesn't take twice as long. We can
4 deliver amazing results for New York and everyone
5 benefits from that.

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: Can I just put into the record
7 as well Chair and I think it's so important since
8 we're on this topic, we should not forget that
9 several years ago, we had to absorb a capital PEG
10 that was never restored at all. And as a result of
11 that, we then were starting even further in the hole
12 with the capital money that was allocated for our
13 libraries and so, that then took us a step back and
14 even though they talked about with that capital PEG
15 it's in outyear projects. The outyear projects
16 always get closer and as a result of that, they were
17 left to fend as far as how we plug some of those
18 holes.

19 So, all of these things intersect as far as both
20 the efficiency but also the ability to plan, to
21 really provide our public with the type of libraries
they deserve.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I will follow
up with a few more questions but I wanted to turn it

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1 over to my colleagues who may have questions. Uhm,
2 Chair Lee, do you have any questions?

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yes, really quick ones.

4 Actually it's about the capital needs and
5 infrastructure and uhm, Deputy Speaker knows that I
6 have this love, hate relationship with our
7 procurement system in the city and I feel like this
8 is something we could talk about all day when it
9 comes to capital needs and how long the process
10 takes. When I was at my former nonprofit, I think we
11 got awarded funding in 2018 and they still have not
12 started or I think they were just about to start.
13 So, and what ends up happening is as the costs
14 increase, the amount of the dollar stays the same and
15 so, what ends up happening is you just have to reduce
16 the scope, which doesn't help anyone and in fact, it
17 negatively impacts the public the most and the people
18 who use the services.

16 So, I totally hear you on that. Uhm, and
17 actually one of my former board members brought up
18 this idea about building housing, you know affordable
19 housing above the libraries as a potential way to
20 build more housing and this was a long - many, many
21 years ago actually. Uhm, so just on that subject,

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1 uh, when affordable housing is built above a library,
2 how are the capital costs typically allocated between
3 the housing developer and the library system and what
4 portion of the library construction costs can be
5 offset through those partnerships?

6 LINDA JOHNSON: Uhm, we've done a few of these in
7 Brooklyn and every one sort of has its own flavor and
8 or at least five or six sources of funds in each of
9 these projects. So, it's hard to uhm, state with any
10 kind of specificity exactly what the allocation
11 happens to be. And I'll give you just an example of
12 Sunset Park, which was a Lindsey box that was
13 bursting at the seams and it had probably close to
14 \$20 million in deferred maintenance.

15 So, that library was knocked down. We provided
16 temporary service nearby. The developer of that
17 project was a nonprofit developer. We contributed
18 the land. We, being the library, in the city and the
19 building yielded- we got a library that was twice the
20 size of the original ones. We were quite happy with
21 that. We were responsible for fitting out the
library and there were 49 units above the library
that were added to the Sunset Park Housing stock.
The first time, there had been truly affordable

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1 housing offered in that community for I think 40
2 years and the demand and when I say these numbers, I
3 always think I must be making a mistake because it's
4 so outsized but for those 49 units, I think there
5 were like 40,000 applications, yeah.

6 TONY MARX: If I could - if I could also jump in
7 here. Look, the air has always existed above the
8 libraries but we hadn't focused on how to use those
9 to benefit libraries and to benefit all New Yorkers
10 who are clearly in need of affordable housing.

11 So, we got creative because the libraries can
12 innovate. We can be creative. We started with
13 Inwood, the neighborhood that I grew up in. Uhm, a
14 much beloved library there that was way past its date
15 for needing to be replaced. We partnered with EDC
16 instead of DDC with all the benefits that we've
17 already talked about. We partnered with Robinhood
18 and an individual donor to supplement the funding and
19 we partnered with a developer who built - so we got
20 as a result, a 20,000 square foot brand new amazing
21 library, as well as a pre-K center, an ACTS center
and job training and 174 units of 100 percent
affordable housing with the kind of demand for it
that Linda has already said.

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1 That was a learning process. It took us some
2 time to get to it but the results are truly
3 phenomenal and I love that library. I love all our
4 libraries but that one is really spectacular and has
5 encouraged us, so we are now in planning for doing
6 the same in Grand Concourse where we envisioned 114
7 units of affordable housing. Bloomingdale is in
8 planning on 100 Street on the west side that could
9 yield up to 850 units of housing and uh well, it's a
10 site of major development and we have identified park
11 jester with the Speaker and the Mayor as possibly the
12 next round.

13 We are looking at all the libraries that need to
14 be renovated that are not the landmarked carnegies.
15 Obviously we can't do that. We can't do this there
16 but we're looking at every opportunity that is
17 possible to do this kind of colocation because we get
18 great new libraries, we get it at you know at
19 reasonable rates if you will and could get this done
20 with EDC or other partners and the city gets more of
21 the affordable housing that everyone so desperately
needs.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hmm, mmm, it's a great model
and I hate to say it, it's a little facetious but it

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1
2 probably takes the same amount of time if we were to
3 just give you regular capital dollars to finish the
4 libraries to build a whole new building.

5 Uhm, quick question because I remember when I was
6 at one of the DDC hearings, I was talking to the then
7 Commissioner about their new design build program and
8 one of the questions I had asked was which agencies
9 they could potentially partner with to pilot this
10 more because they're very interested in expanding it.
11 It's a lot faster in terms of the timeline because
12 you're not doing things sequentially, the front
13 loading part of the design in the building and all of
14 that is happening in the beginning with the
15 architects and the contracts, all at the same time.
16 So, there's you know I was actually really impressed
17 by it. And so, just wondering if you had
18 conversations at all with maybe using some of the
19 models that you've mentioned as a pilot or part of
20 that process.

21 TONY MARX: Again, we have had a great uh track
record working with EDC. Uhm, and we continue to
talk with them about possibilities. I think this is
an example of where we all need to be open minded.
We know that you know DDC was created for particular

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1 reasons at a particular moment in history. We're all
2 grateful to our colleagues at DDC but we all also
3 recognize the limits and the ways in which you know
4 adding twice as much time, twice as much cost, does
5 no one any good and that we need to be creative
6 together and to work together with the City Council
7 and with the Mayor to find systems that will work
8 better, which I think are imminent possible.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah.

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, we have two projects in
10 Queens with DDC and Design Build. So, we're
11 exploring to see how we may look at others as well
12 and I think there are still questions even with what
13 you said Chair Lee as far as front end and the
14 potential efficiency. What the extra cost may be to
15 us and what they may charge us for those type of
16 projects and whether the cost is worth the return on
17 the efficiency of delivery. And so, we're exploring
18 that as well.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, perfect.

18 LINDA JOHNSON: Brooklyn as well. We have a
19 project at Spring Creek and uh DDC is pitching a
20 second one but we're all - we're going to wait and
21 see.

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1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and just lastly, uhm,
3 can you just outline which library branches are
4 currently in the capital plan for full reconstruction
5 or demolition and replacement and whether any of
6 those projects could accommodate mixed use
developments such as affordable housing?

7 LINDA JOHNSON: Uhm -

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, I'll jump in because- go
ahead Linda.

9 LINDA JOHNSON: I mean uhm, we're in the process
10 of uhm, putting a list together and the one that's
11 out front is the new Utrecht Library but there's
others that uhm, that could follow.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, Linda and Tony, New York
13 and Brooklyn are ahead of us as far as all the
14 various colocation projects. So, we're exploring
15 internally, as far as those libraries that may
16 qualify and then we'll be working with both the
17 Mayor's Office and the City Council and the Speaker,
18 as far as those projects that we're proposing. But
we've done some internal analysis and so, we're still
refining that.

19 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, there's also a
20 communications issue here. When these projects go
21

1 into production, we're closing libraries down for a
2 significant period of time and so, there's a sort of
3 delicate process of community engagement that we like
4 to go in before we start announcing you know where
5 there are.

6 TONY MARX: I've already mentioned the colocation
7 ones that we're looking at. Those conversations
8 continue to see what else we could do. They are, as
9 Linda's just mentioned, require intense conversations
10 with the communities as they should. So for
11 instance, at Bloomingdale, the question of sort of
12 what percentage are affordable or other mixed use
13 apartments is an ongoing conversation. I'll just say
14 very quickly, recently completed capital projects at
15 New York Public Library, Fort Washington, County
16 Cullin, Huntspoint, Port Richmond, Richmond Town,
17 Eight Track Replacement and Muhlenberg. Uhm and in
18 progress, Hamilton Fish Park, Huguenot Park, West
19 Chester Square; long time in the works. Woodlawn
20 Heights, Castle Hill, Edenwald, Seward Park, Tompkins
21 Square and West New Brighton. And there is more that
we need to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Right, no thank you so much.

LINDA JOHNSON: It's like a never ending.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah.

LINDA JOHNSON: get through it. We each have,
well- Tony has 90 some branches. We each have 62.

DENNIS WALCOTT: I have 66.

LINDA JOHNSON: There's never an end to the work
that needs to be done.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah, definitely. Thank you
so much. Thank you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Council Member
Hudson.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much Chair
and good morning.

DENNIS WALCOTT: Good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: You all mentioned the
libraries being the most trusted institutions and
also we know that they are the most democratic
institutions and at a time when our democracy is
under threat, uhm, I think the impact on these most
democratic institutions cannot be overstated.

And so, each of your library systems provide
direct services, community stability and innovative
programming. Can you share how potential service
reduction would disproportionately impact
neighborhoods that rely most heavily on libraries for

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internet access, study space and educational
programming?

LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you for that question. Of
course, we agree with all of your sentiments and
we'll do the very best we can to make sure that cuts
would not disproportionately affect neighborhoods in
greatest need. To the contrary, we're sensitive to
where the demand uhm, has the deepest impact on a
community but also aware that because our operations
are complex, it's difficult to tailor specific uhm,
reductions in service to particular neighborhoods.
So, there's also at the same time, a competing effort
to be somewhat even handed about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Well, I think that's a good
and important point to note is that any reduction
would make it extremely difficult and could
unintentionally have a disproportionate impact on
some of the communities with the greatest needs.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, no question. I think one
of the beauties about our libraries is the deep
relationships that our librarians have with you know
individual members in their communities.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

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LINDA JOHNSON: And trying to uhm, be sensitive when cuts they know will affect somebody in particular.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

TONY MARX: Can I just add, we absolutely share your sentiments. We live in challenging days, challenging to the fundamentals of our democracy. We respond to book bannings by unbanning books for here in obviously - for folks nationally. We're mindful of the possibility of ICE putting a chill on particularly the immigrants who come to our branches. We are providing the largest free English language instruction outside of the schools and CUNY and we don't want to see that diminish. We want those communities to feel welcomed and respected and not to be fearful.

We provide wireless access. There are a million and a half New Yorkers still without broadband at home and we are working to solve that problem, not just in the branches but finding ways to project wireless beyond the branches and we would like to see a utility level of free broadband, so that people can do the work of democracy and communicate with each other.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

TONY MARX: And then lastly, I'll say the libraries in our time have transformed themselves from passive spaces, much essential and beloved. Places to come read, to have HVAC, to have computer access and collections and access to our amazing librarians but they are all now, also now education sectors. Millions of visits to education programs, which simply didn't exist before from early literacy to afterschool to tutoring, to computer skills, to English Language essential for the immigrant community, who we all need to be protecting and serving.

Anytime there's reduction in funding, anytime there's a reduction in hours, anytime a branch needs to close for lack of capital investment, all of those offerings are diminished. We live in a moment, I know you feel this way. I know the Mayor feels this way, which we need to be doing more, not less given the challenges that we are all facing.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely.

DENNIS WALCOTT: So, just to pick up on a point that Linda made in her testimony and I know all of us are experiencing this, our metrics are up right now.

1 I mean we're seeing people coming back from COVID and
2 our metrics are up and I use the figure of with our
3 Wi-Fi usage, we've seen a 51 percent increase in the
4 people utilizing our Wi-Fi. That's based on the
5 extended service that we give for people to be able
6 to take advantage of that but we see our program
7 services numbers going up.

8 Any type of cut or even a threat of a cut,
9 impacts that as well because then people wonder
10 what's going on.

11 Or our waiting lists get longer and longer, which
12 is on one hand good because people are coming to us
13 but then meeting that demand is not good because the
14 money is not there or the threat of the money is not
15 there and it doesn't allow us to plan and our goal is
16 to make sure we empower our team members to plan
17 appropriately knowing their particular neighborhoods.

18 So, all of those things have an impact as far as
19 services are concerned and the impact of any type of
20 cut on the services that we've been providing.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Uhm, if I may Chair?
Thank you. I just have one other question, which
uhm, you sort of already answered, so it's a great
segway but according to the PMMR, participation in

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1 programs has increased. If you can each maybe just
2 talk about which types of programs are experiencing
3 the most growth and how libraries are prioritizing
4 programming to meet community needs. And then I
5 think what you've answered and I'm sure that the
6 other two folks will agree with your sentiment that
7 uh, does the current preliminary budget allow you to
8 sustain your current level of programming or will
9 communities see fewer events and educational
10 opportunities. Though you've already alluded to a
11 cut that would uh, threaten those programs. Thank
12 you.

13 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, certainly any cuts of this
14 magnitude would definitely have an impact on the
15 quantity of programming that we would offer. It's
16 just sure logic. You're not open as many hours. You
17 don't have as much staff. You can't offer the same
18 level of service sadly but our business is very labor
19 intensive and uhm, and being thinly staffed, just
20 doesn't - isn't sustainable is really the problem.

21 In terms of which programs are seeing a surge, I
think our focus has certainly been in outreach
services. Services to the immigrant communities.
Services to you know zero to five is sort of our

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1 bread and butter. The other focus that we've really
2 uhm, been uhm, very disciplined about maintaining is
3 on teens. We believe that the programming if we get
4 it right in the libraries that we offer to teens is a
5 lot healthier than what they might be attracted to
6 elsewhere and there was a natural rhythm to library
7 use where you would come with your parents or your
8 caregivers when you were small, that as things became
9 more interesting elsewhere, you sort of drifted away
10 from the library and ended up coming back when you
11 had your own children. And we're trying to reduce
12 the amount of time that we lose people in their sort
13 of lifelong learning cycle.

14 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, the Queens gate count is up
15 by four percent. Circulation is up by 25 percent,
16 e-circulation is up as well. Attendance is roughly
17 flat for us. Wi-Fi sessions as indicated before is
18 up by 51 percent. Computer sessions are up by 17
19 percent. So, again, it's just the trend numbers are
20 just up and up and up. We're seeing an increase.
21 You know we have a mailer book program, the
circulation is up for that as well. And our visits
are up. So, I mean, we just see the numbers in
program services and with ESOL services that we're

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1 providing, that's up as a result of both private
2 funding and city funding as well.

3 As a result of Sunday service, our visits are
4 increasing, so any way you look at it, slice it, the
5 services are up. The people are saying, we want you.
6 We are glad you are there. The demand is there and
7 we want to have the continuity of being able not just
8 to be able to respond to the demand but to increase
9 the programmatic services we provide to meet the
needs of the public at large.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: The logical conclusion I
11 draw is that funding should also be up but go ahead
Tony.

12 TONY MARX: We are - we're in heated agreement.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay.

14 TONY MARX: Can I just add uhm, so again, it's
15 worth noting what a lib- because a library has become
16 now a proactive space, it also means, people are
17 coming and staying longer. They're not just coming
18 in grabbing a book. They are still doing that but
19 they are also staying for these programs. And these
20 programs have become really mainstays. We see for
21 instance in our school aged children and afterschool,
a 25 percent increase in attendance and 6 percent

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1 more sessions from 25 to 26. College and career
2 pathways. Teen programs, as Linda mentioned, other
3 programs for school aged kids. Our language access.
4 Uhm, ESOL, we have 15- over 15,000 ESOL class seats
5 filled and we have still 1,500 to 2,000 names on the
6 waitlist. We don't want waitlists. We want everyone
7 to get the services that they are eager to get from
8 us. We live in a moment when the immigrant community
9 in particular is feeling threatened.

10 That's when and I know you agree. I know the
11 Mayor agrees absolutely that that means we need to
12 step up. Not step back. So, with the funding so
13 that we can provide those services and be clear to
14 the immigrant community that they are welcomed and
15 essential members of this city and of our community.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: I just want to add something,
17 which you probably already understand but there's a
18 common thread and that is, that we are the largest
19 providers of free Wi-Fi in our boroughs. And that
20 being on the wrong side of the digital divide is not
21 where you want to be right now. And it's only
getting worse because with the advent of artificial
intelligence, the divide will only widen. And so,
when we're not open and people cannot bring their own

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1 devices or take advantage of our public access
2 computers, it's very limiting and makes living in
3 this complicated city of ours much more difficult.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely. Thank you
5 all. Thank you Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Council Member
7 Maloney.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you so much Chair
9 and thank you for all being here today, for the work
10 that you do and your testimony. A shoutout to the
11 New York Public Library whose main branch is in my
12 district, District 4. So, thank you for being here.
13 I had a similar line of questioning to Council Member
14 Hudsons. So, just want to reiterate the importance
15 of libraries and closing the digital divide which
16 plays a key role in economic development too, right?
17 These are people using internet for economic mobility
18 for learning. Uhm, and I also want to echo the
19 unseen costs of unpredictable funding cycles, where
20 there's human capital costs that come with that with
21 uncertainty. The starting and stopping of projects
at a time when uh, you know the end result is costing
taxpayers more to deliver less. So, it's time to
hang up the dancing shoes. On the seven day service,

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1 can you clarify how many branches currently operate
2 with seven days, seven day service or Sunday service?
3 And if there's room to grow in expanding that
4 program?

5 LINDA JOHNSON: In Brooklyn, it's 12 branches and
6 we can't even think about expanding that while we're
7 under threat of curtailing services during the week.
8 Everybody is whispering the numbers.

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: No, go ahead Tony.

10 TONY MARX: Uh, sorry. So, uhm, we added five
11 additional branches for Sunday services. Three in
12 the Bronx, one in Manhattan and one in Staten Island
13 with thanks to the City Council and uhm we uh that's
14 in addition to Jefferson Market, the Sportsman
15 building, the New Yorkers Foundation, Washington
16 Heights, Park Chester, Bronx Library Center, Grand
17 Concourse in the Bronx and Todd Hill in Staten
18 Island. We select these sites based on locations of
19 services, access to public transit, number of visits,
20 school proximity, all of that. We are eager to do
21 more but we have to have the funding to do more. It
costs us time and a half; those are because of
agreements with our great partners at DC37, so we
need to be respectful of that but also mindful of the

1 cost involved and I just want to go back if I may
2 Council Member to what your comment about uh, and
3 Linda's comment about the digital divide. It's just
4 - it's just crazy to think about a million plus New
5 Yorkers still being in the digital dark. I mean,
6 imagine in the pandemic, if you didn't have access to
7 schools, you didn't have access to jobs. You didn't
8 have access to the internet at home. Now, you know
9 here we are, you know five years or so later, there's
10 still those folks who are without.

11 We saw an increase of wireless sessions in the
12 libraries jump from \$1.3 million in FY23 to more than
13 double that, \$2.7 million in FY25. The demand is
14 real. We are meeting those in the libraries, but we
15 are all increasingly looking at them. My colleagues
16 are working at and we're partnering with HPD and
17 others to find ways to use the library's capacity to
18 provide broadband, free broadband at a basic level to
19 all New Yorkers. That's what I know the Mayor is
20 aspiring to and it's what we are all working towards.
21 The days of digital dark should be long behind us.

DENNIS WALCOTT: In response to the question, we
have eight in Queens, so we added five in addition to

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our three and then we also had added a Saturday hour
in Q Gardens Hills, making that seven days a week.

So, we've seen the numbers as I indicated in my
testimony with 32,000 people coming through our doors
for seven day services and we love it but at the same
time I think as Linda and others have indicated, Tony
and I have indicated, that it's all connected also to
the \$30.7 money being baselined because you just
can't do seven day service and have that extra
Sunday.

COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: I did want to ask one
more question on my last 50 seconds here but -

LINDA JOHNSON: I just wanted to explain because
maybe it's not evident but the reason that Sunday's
are such a sticking point, uhm, is that it's more
expensive to deliver service on Sunday and that we
staff buildings on a volunteer basis on Sunday so
it's more difficult to get people to uhm, sign up for
those hours.

COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Makes sense. Uhm, thank
you Chair. On the point of savings, I wanted to ask
about the Energy Efficiency Initiatives that were in
the Preliminary Budget. Solar panel installations
and lighting audits, if there is any expected cost

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1 savings you see from those investments or if you've
2 realized any savings from those investments in the
3 past.

4 TONY MARX: We are always looking for being more
5 energy efficient. We live in a time when that is
6 essential for society for the globe. It is worth
7 noting that the city pays our electric bills. So,
8 when there are savings, those go to the city, which
9 is great but they don't come - they don't affect our
budget per se.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: That's helpful.

11 DENNIS WALCOTT: And at Queens, we have a project
12 where we have installed, yet not seen the results yet
13 at Peninsula Library but also, just real quickly,
14 imagine like Tony and Linda, we're going through our
15 strategic planning process and so, energy savings,
16 resiliency is a key part of that as well. And so,
17 we've been working with DCAS around special funding
and also taking a look internally as far as how we
become more efficient to savings.

18 TONY MARX: I should have added, we're particular
19 proud of our solar panels at Charleston Library, so.

20 LINDA JOHNSON: Us as well, Coney Island.
21

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you very much and
thank you Chair.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: No problem. Uhm, okay, I
4 have a few more questions on staffing and workforce
5 challenges. Does the Fiscal 2027 Prelim Budget
6 affect hiring, retention and staffing levels across
7 the three systems? And if you could just share your
current vacancy rate for each of your systems.

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, we are continuing to hire,
9 of taking a very detailed look at the hiring that
10 we're doing. So, we have an internal hiring panel
11 that looks at where our vacancies are and making sure
we continue to staff. But again, as indicated
12 before, the 1.5 percent savings exercise that we're
13 going through may have an impact significantly on
14 that and definitely to 2.5 percent. As far as the
vacancy rate, uhm, 83 right now.

15 TONY MARX: Our current vacancy at both research
16 and branches is 105. Uhm, and you know we are eager
17 to continue to fill those vacancies. Obviously if we
18 have uh, if we face the kinds of cuts that have been
proposed and that we know everyone is hoping to
19 avoid, uhm then we won't be able to fill those
20 vacancies. Instead we'll be freezing.
21

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LINDA JOHNSON: And Brooklyn Public Library is at about 100 vacancies.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I have a question about state funding. So, each of New York City's library systems receives funding from state under Formula A, provided to every public library system that meets minimum standards set by NYSED. How is the level of state aid level determined? Does it include census data as well as local needs?

DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, it's by formula.

TONY MARX: With the exception of occasional particular investments by the governor or by members of the legislature. It's basically by formula and it has seen an increase in the last year. Let me get that number for you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you know the methodology of the formula? Like do you know-

LINDA JOHNSON: It's based upon population.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you. Is the current level of state aid adequate to meet the needs across the five boroughs?

DENNIS WALCOTT: That's an easy one, no. I mean

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LINDA JOHNSON: You know there's libraries in every municipality in New York State, so.

DENNIS WALCOTT: So, our folks collectively have been up advocating as far as more money as well and we see it from the legislature more side than the governors office but then it evens itself out but the answer is no.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: In Fiscal 2026 Enacted State Budget, how much did libraries receive statewide? What did each of the systems receive? So, how much got deposited for all libraries across the state and then how much did New York City libraries receive?

TONY MARX: I don't know the statewide number. We'll get that for you Madam Chair. I know that the New York Public Library received \$21.9 million in FY25. The largest part of that or single largest part of that was through the Formula A but there was also designated A to another state A involved.

DENNIS WALCOTT: We can get you that information.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I think the total is about \$103 million for libraries across the state and Brooklyn Public Library received just over \$8 million.

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1 TONY MARX: And again, it's based on
2 demographics. It's based on population.

3 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, and we're around the same
4 as Brooklyn.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How much did you say
6 Brooklyn got? Sorry.

7 LINDA JOHNSON: 8.7 precisely.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, okay. I was going to
9 say how did you get more but I realize New York has
10 multiple boroughs. Like 20 million in the city but
11 you're not just New York - I know, I know, I know.
12 That's why I didn't say anything. I know, that's why
13 I was like 8.7 from Brooklyn, that's like not right.
14 They're the largest borough but you have three
15 boroughs.

16 TONY MARX: And we love Brooklyn and Queens. Let
17 me just be very clear.

18 LINDA JOHNSON: He has 90 libraries to our 62.

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: 66.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, no listen, I got it.
21 I didn't even ask. I made it a correction myself.

Okay, do you know how much funding the governor
is proposing in this current budget for the library

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1 systems and do you have any sense of what you all are
2 expecting to receive?

3 TONY MARX: So, we know that the state budget as
4 you know has not yet been enacted and I know the
5 Mayor is very conscious of that and that's part of
6 the discussions that are - that we look forward to
7 positive results on. The Governor's proposed budget
8 at the moment calls for a very small increase in
9 expense funding for the three library systems, about
10 200,000 of which would go to the New York Public
Library.

11 DENNIS WALCOTT: I will have to get you that.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: No problem. Okay, I'm
13 going to turn back to capital needs and
14 infrastructure and I feel like you all alluded to
15 this but if you could get any more specific, that
16 would be helpful around obviously some of the regular
17 maintenance, the aging and significant repairs that
18 you have to do yearly. How does the current capital
funding pipeline address deferred maintenance and
modernization across the systems?

19 LINDA JOHNSON: I'll start and everyone can feel
20 free to chime in. The issue for all of our systems
21 is that they are in some cases, we're dealing with

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1 Carnegie Libraries that are you know, date from the
2 early 1900's and are more expensive to repair. To
3 what Dennis was referring to as Lindsey boxes, which
4 were libraries built during the Lindsey
5 Administration, which put service in every corner of
6 our borough but they were all built at the same time
7 and frankly inexpensively built and all sort of
8 limited in terms of size and because they were all
9 coming online at about the same time, they're all
10 degrading at about the same time. The deferred
11 maintenance numbers are staggering and when I first
12 came to this job, kept me up at night but nobody else
13 seemed to be losing sleep over it because they become
14 inured to it.

15 So, in Brooklyn, it's over \$350 million in
16 deferred maintenance and the risk that that puts on
17 us is these unplanned closings. Uhm, we have over
18 1.1 million square feet of real estate and the city
19 is - we're asking the city for \$10 to 15 million a
20 year to take care of that footprint, which is not
21 nearly enough to make any kind of uhm uh you know
improvement in that number, in the deferred
maintenance number. And just one of the reasons that
these projects, these overhauls make so much sense is

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1 that if you take a library with a significant amount
2 of deferred maintenance and you decide to do a
3 complete overhaul, you completely wipe out that
4 deferred maintenance and you deliver to that
5 community a library that is in good working condition
6 that is warm in the winter and cool in the summer and
7 perhaps most importantly, you have the opportunity to
8 build an inspiring space where people feel proud and
9 can do their best work and presumably uh, will be in
good shape for years to come.

10 TONY MARX: So, I'll just add to that, uhm, it's
11 simply, the fact is the current pipeline doesn't
12 address these priorities, which is why we're here
13 discussing it. It's also why it's so important for
14 us to have a significant investment in the ten year
15 capital plan. So, that we can plan to avoid these
16 closings. There will still be an occasional
17 emergencies that we'll need enough additional expense
18 funding to cover the bandaid approach that Linda
described. We'd like to minimize those because they
are so dislocating.

19 The simple fact is we have century old libraries
20 uhm that require significant investment to keep them
21 open. It's why we have asked the City Council to

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1 consider a 410 million lump sum request of capital to
2 each of the systems to get out of this problem. Uhm,
3 and again, all these issues connect. If we have a
4 branch that has to close, we cannot provide the
5 services that New Yorkers look to us to provide. We
6 need both the expense funding to pay for those
7 services and the capital funding to make sure that we
8 have the buildings in shape and open in which we can
9 provide those services in every neighborhood.

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, just excuse me, to pick up a
10 point that Tony made earlier about the Carnegie's and
11 Linda made as well, so we have Astoria Library that's
12 closed now because we are putting major improvement
13 there and also making it ADA accessible as well, and
14 Astoria was built probably around 1902, 1905 and part
15 of our challenge is that with deferred maintenance,
16 it really is deferred. We have a ranking list at
17 Queens as far as those in most need, those in some
18 need and those in very serious need and all of those
19 have me and all of those will be impacted. All of
20 those will have - especially the Lindsey boxes close
21 down at some point and time. Without the significant
investment that all of us have talked about, then
we're just putting little bandaids on and those

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bandaids will eventually come off and we can't afford
to have that happen.

So, all of that is to say is that the
comprehensive money that we will ask for and we
continue to ask for is important because it
eliminates those deferred needs in putting major
projects in place that, as Linda indicated, will then
give the community a library it deserves.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and again, you
did allude to this when I asked my original question
around your working relationship with DDC to ensure
library capital projects are completed on time and
within budget, which we know there's a big lean out
on time and often times, you have to come back to us
because they're also not within budget. So, I don't
know if you had anything else to add and I know this
is an ongoing conversation that requires certainly
more time than we have at a hearing but anything else
that you might want to add in terms of what you've
described as a different way to do business? I know
that we're also in the Council equally interested in
working with you and the Mayor's Office to figure out
how we could address this issue.

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2 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, I'll respond a little
3 differently than normal in that I think one, as
4 indicated in our testimony, this is the perfect
5 opportunity to finally address this problem, both
6 with new leadership on the exec side and new
7 leadership and continued leadership on the City
8 Council side. And really doing a detailed analysis
9 of the why's it's taking so long. It takes so long
10 to do.

11 I mean, I don't know if I've actually seen. We
12 know the impact of what happens to us but a real big
13 breakdown of each city agency that has a hand in
14 delaying this capital work.

15 And then, what can be done from a management
16 point of view or even a legislative point of view to
17 minimize the problem if not eliminate the problem
18 that takes place in taking so long and once that's up
19 there, it brings it in the public. It opens it up
20 for review and analysis and response as far as how it
21 improves the system for specifically for us as
libraries because you know when I was Chancellor, I
always use this example. We have one of the most
complex projects ever in building three schools up in
the South Bronx that was on a railyard that was

1 contaminated and building an athletic field. We had
2 to remediate that and through the SCA, we were able
3 to build three schools, an athletic field, remediate
4 the ground in a three year period of time. That's
5 what it should be. Not an eight to ten year period
6 of time for libraries.

7 So, that's one of the ways of suggesting that we
8 open it up, find out what's happening and then Linda
9 knows and she's been really focused on this, as far
10 as how we then change it around to benefit the
11 libraries.

12 LINDA JOHNSON: Uhm, you know we sort of beat
13 this to a bloody pulp but I would just add two things
14 that we haven't said about this problem. Uhm, one is
15 that the city's reimbursement structure is very slow.
16 And so when we are funding our own projects, uhm, we
17 end up in Brooklyn having to borrow money to pay our
18 vendors because otherwise we fear that they won't be
19 able to continue the work. So, we're actually paying
20 interest on money that we need because the city's
21 reimbursement structure creates a lot of lag time
between the beginning of the project and when the
money starts to flow and that would be really helpful
to fix.

1 The other thing that I want to add that hasn't
2 been discussed is the impact on morale. Uhm, to the
3 people who work in branches that are in bad
4 condition. Who are sort of forced to do their work
5 day in and day out with one hand tied behind their
6 back because there are chillers in the middle of the
7 floor to you know provide cooling during the summer
8 or because there are leaks in a building that's
9 filled with paper and books. So it makes it - you
10 know we want our librarians to love their work and
11 they do. They love their patrons but we're making it
12 tough in some cases.

11 TONY MARX: Madam Chair, you clearly hit a nerve
12 again, so again, with all due respect and gratitude
13 to the work of our colleagues at DDC. DDC was
14 created in the Giuliani Administration for particular
15 reasons at a particular moment in history. It has
16 become large and bureaucratic. Uhm, it cannot be
17 responsive and nibble in the way that we are
18 describing and I think the track record makes that
19 clear.

19 We have talked-I in my position, I have talked to
20 three previous mayors about this. Everyone rings
21 their hands. Everyone understands that the rules and

1 requirements for self-managed projects are too
2 onerous. Uhm, everyone has said we need to revisit
3 this. We've talked about passthroughs but again, the
4 process by which we get reimbursed is not staffed
5 sufficiently, so we had the you know with a lot of
6 paperwork and not getting reimbursed in a timely way,
7 creating financial constraints upon us. We need to
8 restructure the design contract as a whole. We've
9 worked with EDC and other organizations that have
proven there is a better way to do this.

10 We are eager to work with the new administration,
11 who I know are eager to exactly to solve this kind of
12 problem that has been handcuffing us for way too
13 long. There are solutions to this. We would love to
14 roll up our sleeves and find those solutions together
with the Mayor and with the City Council.

15 LINDA JOHNSON: I mean I think truthfully and
16 Dennis mentioned this, you know someone needs to take
17 a deep dive and look at what's going on. I suspect
18 it's no one thing. We can't really know what's
19 happening inside DDC. It's not our you know
20 organization to run but my guess is that there are a
21 host of problems there, all working at odds uhm and

1 it's deeply affecting our - it's deeply affecting our
2 ability to do our jobs.

3 DENNIS WALCOTT: And just to add one more thing
4 to what Linda just said in that, it's not just DDC.
5 That's why I say we really need to take a look at all
6 the city agencies that have the connection to this.
7 OMB as well. That's issues of bonding, what it
8 actually means. I mean there are a host of
9 intersections of agencies that are involved in this
10 issue and a challenge for this issue and it's a great
11 management project to really tackle to claim. I
12 solved the delays of DDC for the people of New York
13 City. It's a great project for someone to tackle to
14 say, these are the ways we need to analyze these
15 issues. These are the intersections of these various
16 city agencies and how it flows downstream to impact
17 the people of New York City.

18 It's a great time to do it and this is the
19 perfect group of individuals on both sides of the
20 aisle to do it.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, do any of my
colleagues have any more questions for the libraries?
You can ask a question, we have some time. We have a
whole 15 minutes before DCLA is supposed to be here.

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2 Okay, well, we've been joined by Chair, Council
3 Member Stevens. Alright, well, thank you so much. I
4 do look forward to working with you all. I do like
5 these project management projects personally, so
6 hopefully we can try to do what we can for the next
7 four years to chip away at this issue. So, I do look
8 forward to working with you and thank you so much for
9 joining us this morning and thank you so much for all
10 you do for New Yorkers who rely on the library
11 systems. Thank you so much.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: Thank you for your leadership.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thanks. I guess now we'll
14 take a little minute break before DCLA at 11:30. And
15 just FYI, public testimony will be after DCLA's
16 testimony.

17 Alright, good morning again and thank you
18 everyone for joining us today for the Committee on
19 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
20 Relations Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget
21 Hearing. I would like to welcome the representatives
from the Department of Cultural Affairs, members of
the public and my colleagues in the Council. As this
is my first budget hearing as Chair of the Committee,

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I want to begin by acknowledging the vital role that arts and culture play in shaping New York City.

Our cultural sector is not simply an amenity. It is one of the defining forces that makes New York the global capital of creativity. Cultural organizations, artists and institutions are also powerful economic engines for our city. They are driven, they drive tourism, activate commercial corridors, create jobs and generate billions of dollars in economic activity each year. From our world renowned institutions to the small community based organizations that anchor neighborhoods across the five boroughs, the cultural sector supports thousands of workers and contributes to the vitality of our local economies.

At the same time, we must recognize that the spaces where culture happens are theaters, museums, rehearsal studios and community art centers are a central infrastructure. These are the places where creativity is nurtured, where communities gather and where the next generation of artists is developed.

If we want a thriving, cultural ecosystem, we must treat cultural spaces as the infrastructure they are and ensure they receive the sustained investment

1 necessary to survive and grow. Yet many artists and
2 cultural workers are struggling to remain in the very
3 city they helped define. The affordability crisis
4 facing New York City is deeply felt within the
5 cultural community. Rising rents, shrinking
6 rehearsal and studio space and the high cost of
7 living are pushing artists out of the city and
8 threatening the diversity and dynamism that make our
9 cultural sector so extraordinary.

10 Today's hearing is an opportunity to closely
11 examine whether the Preliminary Budget meets the
12 needs of DCLA and the broader cultural community.
13 While New York City's arts and cultural sector play a
14 vital role in our economy and in the life of our
15 neighborhoods, the level and consistency of
16 investment from the city has not always reflected
17 that reality.

18 I was very disappointed to see that the Prelim
19 Plan did not include the \$30 million one time funding
20 added at the adoption of the Fiscal 2026 Budget. I
21 would like to see that funding baselined to
appropriately account for the needs of the city's
cultural institutions and artists.

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2 Today, we will be looking carefully at how the
3 Prelim Budget supports cultural organizations,
4 whether it provides meaningful support for artists
5 and whether the city is doing enough to preserve and
6 invest in the creative spaces that are essential to
7 our city's identity and economic vitality. It is
8 essential that the budget that we adopt this year is
9 transparent, accountable and reflective of the
10 priorities and the interest of the Council and the
11 people we represent. This hearing is a vital part of
12 this process and I expect that DCLA will be
13 responsive to the questions and concerns of Council
14 Members.

15 I look forward to an active engagement with the
16 Administration over the next few months to ensure the
17 Fiscal 2027 Adopted Budget meets the goals the
18 Council has set out uhm and before we begin, I will
19 acknowledge my colleagues again. Council Member Ung,
20 Hudson and Stevens and again, I want to thank amazing
21 staff, Carolina, Aliya for their work on this
hearing, Committee Staff Alejandro and Regina for
their support, my staff Bianca and Shaki(SP?) and I
just want to remind everyone from the public who
wishes to testify in person today that you must fill

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1 out an appearance card, which is located on the desk
2 of the Sergeant at Arms at the back of the room.
3 Please fill out the slip even if you have already
4 registered to testify in advance. When you are
5 called, please limit your testimony to two minutes
6 whether you are testifying in person or on Zoom. I'm
7 also going to ask my colleagues to limit their
8 questions and comments to five minutes.

9 And I also just want to thank the Sergeant at
10 Arms and I will now turn it over to the Committee
11 Counsel to administer the oath to members of the
12 Administration.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, could you
14 please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell
15 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
16 in your testimony before these Committees and to
17 respond honestly to Council Members' questions?
18 Thank you.

19 As a reminder to all of our witnesses, please
20 state your name prior to your testimony for the
21 record. Thank you and you may begin.

ALTON MURRAY: Good morning Deputy Speaker and
members of the Committee. I am Deputy Commissioner
Alton Murray from the New York City Department of

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1 Cultural Affairs, here today to testify in regards to
2 the agency proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary
3 Budget. I am joined today by our General Counsel
4 Lance Polivy and other colleagues from the agency.

5 I will begin today with a review of the numbers
6 from Mayor Mamdani's Fiscal '27 Budget for DCLA. In
7 FY27, the budget allocates a total of \$215.6 million
8 in city funds to DCLA. This includes: \$52 million
9 for the Cultural Development Fund, also known as CDF,
10 \$52.9 million to cover energy costs for groups on
11 city property, \$100.6 million for operating subsidies
12 to Cultural Institutions Groups, also known as CIG,
13 \$8.2 million for agency staffing operations and \$2
14 million for CreateNYC and other initiatives.

15 Please note these figures do not include any one
16 time funding allocation, such as the City Council
17 initiatives, that are typically added at budget
18 adoption each year. By comparison, at this point in
19 the process last year, the Preliminary Budget for FY
20 26 allocated \$164 million to DCLA, \$52 million in the
21 process last year, \$52 million less than we currently
have allocated for FY27. We look forward to working
in the months ahead towards adopting a budget for

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FY27 that builds on the strong support for arts and culture that our agency has historically provided.

Our FY26 Expense Budget remains at a record-setting \$300 million for our agency. This robust funding has allowed us to support affordable, accessible diverse cultural programs across the city. Recently, we publicly announced the FY27 CDF awards, awards notification went out in December. This cycle we saw more than \$74 million in grants for public programming to over 1,171 cultural organizations. More than 84 percent of these applicants receive awards and 96 percent of the funded organizations offer free subsidized programming. Over half of these grantees are receiving multiyear awards following the recent reforms that expand eligibility for a multiyear support providing greater financial stability to organizations across the sector.

The FY27 CDF budget maintains a 15 percent increase for the city borough art councils. Funding also delivered \$2.1 million in increased funding to 283 organizations in lower income neighborhoods. Together with continued Safety Net funding for long-time grantees, these initiatives reflect the

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city's ongoing commitment to strengthening a diverse, equitable and community-rooted cultural sector.

I am delighted to report that the application period is now open for the next cycle of CDF. The agency has worked hard to launch the process as early as possible in the Fiscal Year so that our awards notification can go out sooner. We understand that this is a priority for the field and for our New York Commissioner and we want to shout out our hardworking team at DCLA Programs Unit for moving this process forward.

FY27 CDF applications are due April 2nd and webinars are also posted up on March 25th. For anyone who hasn't been able to join our webinar, we've also posted a recording on our website. It's the most informative 90 minutes of information available on our website at citygov- at nyc.gov/culture.

DCLA Capital unit has also been hard at work on advancing our capital construction and equipment projects for cultural groups across the city. Requests for funding for projects including funding from the Borough President's Office were due February 19th. All other capital requests are due tomorrow.

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1 Eligible organizations are invited - were invited to
2 two capital funding seminars earlier this year, both
3 of which were at capacity.

4 We are also excited to continue the capital
5 feasibility planning program into its fourth year.
6 The program matches consultants with small
7 organizations to help them define, plan, strategize,
8 and strategize successful capital projects.
9 Applications to take part in this program will open
in April.

10 The New York City Create in Place Program, which
11 is an interagency collaboration based at DCLA,
12 continues to open up new pathways of support for
13 smaller organizations beyond direct funding. As part
14 of this work, the Create in Place team has organized
a series of webinars, which starts tomorrow.

15 The webinar series will bring together experts in
16 finance, legal services, government and nonprofit
17 consulting to provide practical guidance for creative
18 small businesses and non profit arts organizations.
19 Participants will learn about strengthening
20 organization capacity, accessing capital through
21 grants and financing tools and connecting with pro
bono legal services tailored to the creative sector.

If you're interested in joining an upcoming webinar, visit nyc.gov/CreateInPlace.

DCLA's public art team is continuing to bring extraordinary community-centered installations to neighborhoods around the city. Last month, they joined partners at the Parks Department and DDC to unveil the new Shirley Chisholm Rec Center in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. This new facility is the first ever rec center in Central Brooklyn, and features a remarkable permanent installation by artist Vanessa German, commissioned by our Percent for Art program. German's artwork, The East Flatbush People's Museum of Love and Wonder; great name, is a component of - is a component are installed throughout the center, celebrating the people, places and connection that illuminates the community with love and wonder.

Through our Public Artists in Residence, or PAIR program, artists are working with a variety of agencies to bring their creative practice to bear on a range of civil challenges. Our PAIR with the Commission on Human Rights, Caitlyn McCain, has been working at the intersection of theater and housing policy. She has been leading a series of Fair Chances Performance in areas of Brooklyn where

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1 residents are at higher risk of housing displacement.
2 Caitlyn is working with both professional actors and
3 New Yorkers directly impacted by the criminal legal
4 system to collaboratively develop this performance.
5 This work dramatized the barriers former incarcerated
6 individuals face when seeking housing, and rehearses
7 strategies to dismantle them. In partnership with
8 both CCHR and MOME, we are also releasing a series
9 of videos acting out McCain's Fair Chance
10 Performances. These are integrated into the city's
11 resources to aid tenants. As you might know,
12 Commissioner Vij co-funded and led PAIR when it was
13 established at our agency over ten years ago. And
14 the Mayor had expressed admiration for the program,
15 so we look forward to building on the success of PAIR
16 in the new administration and continue to work with
17 artists explore possibilities of creative practices
18 in public service.

16 DCLA's amazing Materials for the Arts program
17 also continues to foster a greener and more
18 affordable arts landscape for our city. Last Fiscal
19 Year, MFTA provided 4.1 million pounds of materials
20 valued at nearly 417 million to 2,500 members
21 organizations, school and agency across the city.

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1 That's an average of roughly \$6,800 worth of supplies
2 provided to each member completely free of charge.

3 Recent donations facilitated by MFTA include 50 high
4 end office chairs donated by Morgan Stanley, which
5 went to the Martha Graham Dance Company just this
6 week. A premium velvet curtain donated by the Met
7 Cloisters went to Teatro LATEA, where it will now be
8 draped over the theater's incredible production.

9 Thanks to MFTA and their generous partners, these
10 high quality, donated items avoid a fate in the
11 landfill, and instead help arts groups and educators
12 stretch every dollar. Tomorrow, March 19, they will
13 also open All Night I Hear the Noise of Water
14 Sobbing, a solo exhibition featuring recent work by
15 artist Mary Mattingly, as MFTA's Artist in Residence,
16 Mattingly has unlimited access to MFTA's warehouse of
17 donated supplies, where she has collected, found
18 objects to create the installations featured in her
19 solo exhibition. We hope you can join us for the
20 opening tomorrow or see the exhibition at some point
21 before it closes this summer.

We've been delighted to work with the Mayor's
Office and the new Administration to both highlight
existing and create new opportunities for all New

1
2 Yorkers to experience the joy and connection that
3 comes from the engagement with the arts. In January,
4 Mayor Mamdani partnered with the Under the Radar
5 Festival to offer free tickets to the festival
6 performances, ensuring all residents can afford to
7 enjoy the unmatched experience of live theater. He
8 broke ground on the Timbale Terrace, an existing new
9 housing development in East Harlem that will also
10 provide a permanent home for Belongo, the Afro Latin
11 Jazz Alliance funded by DCLA. For Black History
12 Month, he worked with the Louis Armstrong House to
13 offer free tours and joined the Brooklyn Museum for
14 their free First Saturday program.

15 We were also honored to join the mayor to cut the
16 ribbon on the restoration project of Weeksville
17 Heritage Center's historic Hunterfly Houses, which
18 once anchored the free Black community of Weeksville.

19 Together, these show a clear direction that we're
20 excited to explore further with our new Commissioner.
21 We want to foster a city where cultural organizations
can thrive, where our legacies and heritage are an
honor and where every New Yorker has the opportunity
to feel a sense of belonging, purpose, and
inspiration that only culture can provide.

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1 Thank you for giving this opportunity to testify
2 today and we're happy to take any questions you have.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. Uhm,
4 DCLA's Fiscal 2027 Prelim Budget totals \$215.9
5 million, representing a reduction of \$83.7 million
6 compared to Fiscal 2026 Adopted Budget. Beyond
7 initiatives previously supported by the Council that
8 are not included in the Prelim Budget. Are there any
9 anticipated impacts to the Departments programs,
10 services or cultural organizations as a result of
11 this reduction?

12 LANCE POLIVY: Thank you very much for that
13 question Deputy Speaker Williams. It's great to be
14 here today and to get to have this important hearing
15 about the FY27 Preliminary Budget. We want to
16 highlight something in response to that question
17 noted in our testimony. Just that we are really
18 proud that our FY27 Preliminary Budget actually
19 includes more than \$50 million more than our FY26
20 Preliminary Budget.

21 This reflects the hard work that everybody in
this room did including the Council, all of the
organizations and advocates sitting behind us and the
Department of Cultural Affairs working in partnership

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1 with OMB and City Hall to deliver a \$45 million
2 baseline increase for arts and culture in FY26. We
3 are confident that the money that you have noted that
4 is not reflected in our budget including the \$30
5 million added at adoption is going to be part of
6 ongoing budget negotiations over the course of the
7 next few weeks. We look forward to our partnership
8 with the Council and coming forward and out of this
9 process in FY27 with an adopted budget that delivers
for this sector.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I think I was
11 confused about something that you said. So, you said
12 that there was an increase. Didn't we see a
13 decrease? You were talked about from last Fiscal
14 Year. You said you were proud of the budget, can you
explain that again?

15 LANCE POLIVY: Of course. When we were at the
16 Preliminary Budget last year for FY26, we had over
\$50 million less-

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, you're saying that
18 you're starting with more than you did last year?

19 LANCE POLIVY: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: But it's still a
21 reduction.

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1 LANCE POLIVY: Well, it's not -

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: From?

3 LANCE POLIVY: FY26 adopted.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes.

5 LANCE POLIVY: But that's because there will one
6 time adds at adoption.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, okay. It was like
8 funny, funny uh, mass messaging you did. Okay, which
9 programs or initiatives will experience the most
10 significant funding changes as a result of this
11 decrease?

12 LANCE POLIVY: As noted, there is no decrease,
13 it's just the stage that we're at in the budget
14 negotiation process. We look forward to our ongoing
15 negotiations with the Council. Uhm, and to arrive at
16 a budget that delivers for - uhm, for -

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, so I'll reframe the
18 question. What programs or initiatives did you
19 impact last Fiscal Year that you may not be able to
20 think about right now because that additional money
21 wasn't included as it was last year?

LANCE POLIVY: I understand the question. You're
saying if we were not to get \$30 million added at
adoption like we did in FY26.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, like I get it. I
3 know it's semantics. We like to say that the money
4 is not there but it's not that the money is not
5 there, it's that we put it in one time, it wasn't
6 baselined, so I get the semantics but like, the one
7 time money, you did something with it, I hope. And
8 so if you don't get the one time money this year,
9 what are the things that you used the one time money
10 for last year, that if you don't have it this year
11 will be impacted?

12 LANCE POLIVY: It was about an even split, \$15
13 million for the CIG's and \$14.8 million for CDF.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, DCLA has a budgeted
15 headcount of 58 in Fiscal Year 2027 Prelim Plan.
16 What is the agency's vacancy rate?

17 LANCE POLIVY: Our agency has budgeted headcount
18 for 58 and we currently have 49 people working at
19 DCLA. So, we have 9 vacancies.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Does the agency believe it
21 has sufficient headcount to meet the needs of the
cultural community?

LANCE POLIVY: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You guys just be lying
under oath but uhm, anyway slide but okay.

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2 LANCE POLIVY: Deputy Speaker Williams, we have
the hardest working team in city government.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: No, and I do believe that
4 all city workers are hard working but we also know
5 that city workers typically tend to be the most
6 worked workforce as well and they wouldn't be as
7 worked if there were more people to share in the
load. So, I get that.

8 LANCE POLIVY: Our agency could always do more
9 with more but we are confident that we -

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Of course, that is like
the agency talking point across all agencies. I get
11 it.

12 LANCE POLIVY: To work hard to deliver.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, I'll pause to go to
14 Council Member questions. Council Member Ung.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you Deputy Speaker.
Assistant Commissioner, we have heard from Botanical
16 Gardens that receive City Council funded community
17 composting support through their obligation plans now
18 that DCLA is pushing to restrict, the world defines
as educational expenses only. And this has resulted
19 in the denial or delay of funding for essential
20 operation costs for composting, like tools insurance,
21

1 fuel for utility vehicles and payroll costs. Given
2 that the compost processing is fundamental to any
3 meaningful compost education program, can you explain
4 why DCLA is drawing this distinction?

5 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, I think that's a great
6 question Council Member Ung and thank you for
7 flagging that issue. We've been working very closely
8 with the gardens that receive this initiative funding
9 for compost outreach and education over the last many
10 years but especially its been a focus over the last
11 two fiscal years. And we've been working in
12 partnership with Council Finance to really define
13 what the boundaries are for these funds and we're
14 happy to continue working with you in your office to
15 see if there are additional expenses that should
16 qualify. But at the end of the day, Council Finance
17 has worked with our office to define what the
18 parameters are for your initiative and we are
19 executing based on the partnership that we formed
20 with Council Finance.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: So, just to follow up on
that, this is you - this is not a final
determination? This is something you're working with
Council Finance about? Because composting is very

1 important in the communities, especially of course in
2 the Botanical Gardens. So, it's very hard for the
3 Botanical Gardens to carry on these programs if
4 they're not going to be reimbursed for what is
5 educational purposes.

6 LANCE POLIVY: We completely agree and so, it's
7 all a matter of defining the exact scope. I think we
8 can all agree that car insurance probably isn't
9 fundamental to composting, outreach and education.
10 Maybe there are certain handheld tools you're
11 describing that maybe come closer to the border.
12 We're delighted to meet with your office and talk
13 about any examples that you think are closer to the
14 border of education and outreach that are currently
15 not being funded and to see if there's something that
16 we can do about it.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you. We will be doing
18 that. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Council Member Maloney
20 followed by uhm, Council Member Stevens.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you so much Chair.
I wanted to look at payments. So, the Preliminary
Mayor's Management Report indicates that only 70
percent of operating support payments are made on

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1 time below the 90 percent target. What challenges do
2 these delays cause and how do they affect the
3 financial stability of the cultural organizations
4 that you fund and support?

5 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, thanks a lot Council Member.
6 My understanding is that- that particular statistic
7 primarily is about payments made to our CIG
8 institutions and we have looked into this ahead of
9 today's hearing. Much of it is just about the
10 process through which the obligation plans are
11 submitted by CIG's. Our team then reviews the
12 obligation plans that we receive from each
13 institution.

14 Sometimes there are mistakes or as I was speaking
15 about with Council Member Ung, maybe something is an
16 incremental expense that's listed on an obligation
17 plan. So, there's some ongoing engagement and back
18 and forth between our CIG unit, which works
19 incredibly hard to review all 39 of these each month
20 and the institutions. Once they finally have one
21 that can be approved, we process the payment and get
them out promptly but that back and forth can
sometimes take a little bit of time.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: And what are some of the
3 issues that the organizations face as they're kind of
4 dealing with that back and forth?

5 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, it's very difficult for the
6 organizations. They are trying to make payroll,
7 they're trying to pay for their programs uhm and
8 their ongoing operations. So, we are dedicated to
9 working with our CIG institutions to try and speed
10 this process up as best we can. Uhm, and it really
11 is all about this continued engagement, dialogue
12 between our agency and the groups to get the
13 paperwork correct, and as soon as it is, then we can
14 process payments.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you for that. I
16 also wanted to dig into visitor attendance. The
17 report shows that attendance is declining at cultural
18 institutions in the most reporting period. How is
19 DCLA taking this trend into account in the funding
20 decisions and what challenges does this create as we
21 manage reduced city support and also declining
attendance at these cultural institutions?

LANCE POLIVY: Well, I would say that if you look
at our last several adopted budgets, our city support
has been increasing but there's no doubt that this is

1 a time of crisis for the field. We're looking at a
2 moment in which as the Independent Budget Office has
3 noted, over \$30 million in federal funding has been
4 taken away from cultural institutions in New York
5 City. We have declining foundation support, private
6 philanthropy and extremely high escalating costs.
7 And that's what really makes this an emergency
8 situation that we at the Department of Cultural
9 Affairs want to ring the bell on and it's part of why
10 we've been so proud of our partnership with the
11 Council to really deliver for arts and culture in our
12 last few budgets and we're hoping that that ongoing
13 engagement, dialogue is going to result in a budget
14 that all of us can be really proud of for arts and
15 culture.

16 And I think that if we can, we can start to think
17 about and partner with these institutions to ask
18 about what's going on with attendance numbers and to
19 try and make sure that all New Yorkers, visitors,
20 tourists, have an opportunity to enjoy, engage with
21 and benefit from the wide diversity of arts and
culture institutions in New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Are there any efforts on
reversing that trend? And sorry, go ahead.

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2 ALTON MURRAY: We're also doing our part to
3 highlight opportunities for free and affordable
4 opportunities for New Yorkers to visit institutions.
5 We recently set up a program with the American Museum
6 of Natural History, so that New Yorkers who have
7 certain benefits cards can also attend the museum and
8 see special exhibitions for free. So, we're out
9 there trying to promote. These opportunities and
10 these institutions that they are not only - are not
11 always priced prohibitive, they are also free to New
12 Yorkers.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you. That's
14 something I think would be worth investing in. One
15 last question is on the Metropolitan Museum of Art,
16 which borders my district and as the Chair mentioned,
17 city support in the FY27 Preliminary Plan is reduced.
18 Uhm, if you can speak to how this reduction will
19 affect the institution's operations and the impact it
20 will have on public programming etc. And also, how
21 we think about the smaller and more resource
constrained organizations that might be
disproportionately impacted by the funding
reductions.

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2 LANCE POLIVY: With respect to the MET, the MET
3 is a wonderful institution and a jewel of public
4 Museums throughout the world. A place that is
5 visited and enjoyed by New York City Public School
6 students, members of the broader New York City
7 community and a place that people visit from all
8 around the world. We're really proud of our
9 partnership with the MET and their role as a leader
10 within CIG's. Uhm, we have been working with the MET
11 on a number of capital projects and we're really
12 proud of the work that they've been doing on the
13 Michael C. Rockefeller wing.

14 Their chiller plans are projects that we've been
15 supporting with City Capital dollars and have been
16 successful projects that we partnered on together.
17 They have all sorts of uh landmark preservation
18 requests that our office partners on and their
19 ongoing CIG subsidy payments.

20 So, the Madison Institution that we are in touch
21 with all the time, they have a terrific senior
leadership team in place at the MET today and I have
no doubt that we can continue our partnership to make
sure that they continue to be successful long into
the future. With respect to what would change if

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1 they didn't receive this \$30 million at adoption, uh
2 they would be subject to I don't have the exact
3 figure but uh an equal percentage of that \$15 million
4 spread across all of the CIG's. So, that's something
5 that I think we'll continue to partner on and as we
6 work towards the FY27 adopted budget.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you. Thank you
8 Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'll ask a few
10 more questions and then uhm, come back to Council
11 Member Stevens. I will talk about the cultural
12 institution. Five new CIGs were added in Fiscal 2026
13 to bring it to a total of 39 CIGs in Fiscal 2026.
14 What was the process to determine the operational
15 subsidy for each of the new CIGs?

16 LANCE POLIVY: We are so proud of the five new
17 CIGs that joined the cohort in late September of
18 2025. It was an enormous achievement for our agency.
19 Uh that it only let in one new CIG in 2019 and very
20 few before then. It was the largest expansion of the
21 CIGs since the 1970s and so, just what an achievement
for our agency and for the city to be able to provide
steady reliable funding and operating support to
these five new institutions, one from each borough.

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1
2 In terms of their operating subsidy, each one was
3 based on their overall operating budget. Their
4 current set of needs, comparing the type of
5 organization to other CIGs and making sure that
6 equitable funding went to each of the five boroughs.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How is DCLA working with
8 all of the CIGs to ensure financial stability and
9 workforce retention?

10 LANCE POLIVY: I mean I think that we are working
11 with each of our CIGs and keeping a close watch on
12 their financial stability, most importantly by
13 serving as an exhibiso member of each one of the 39
14 boards of directors. That's a really good way to get
15 a sense of the financial health of each of the
16 organizations. We make sure that someone from our
17 agency, sometimes the Commissioner, sometimes a
18 member of our CIG unit attends each and everyone of
19 the board meetings for all 39 of those groups.
20 That's where big fiscal challenges come up. But of
21 course that's not the only way. We're also in
regular dialogue with each of the CIGs that come to
us for administrative support, to serve as a thought
partner and we are really glad to play that role.
These are critical groups. They're a diverse set of

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1 groups and they really help for our overall cultural
2 ecosystem in the city to thrive.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Given that the number grew
4 and the current request from the mayor for each
5 agency to find cost savings, do you have any thoughts
6 on how that would impact funding for the CIGs, given
7 that the number grew specifically in FY26? And then
8 now you're being asked to reduce it in this new
fiscal year?

9 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, it's a good question. I'm
10 not worried about the growth of the CIG cohort having
11 an impact on our FY27 budget. The \$3 million
12 allocated in FY26 for the CIG expansion has been
13 baselined, and so, that \$3 million will be there
14 going forward. So, I don't worry about being able to
15 support the needs of the new CIGs. As for the
16 remainder of the CIGs, we're very proud of the
17 increase that they got through the \$45 million
18 baselined increase. They got \$21.5 million baselined
19 in the FY26 budget and so, we know that will - we are
20 of course knowing that that will be part of their
21 baseline going forward. And we will fight together
with the Council to try and make sure that uh that

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1 there is a strong add at adoption that adequately
2 funds and supports the sector.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Uhm, what is - I'm turning
4 to the Cultural Development Fund now. What is the
5 proposed funding level for the CDF in FY27 compared
6 to FY26?

7 LANCE POLIVY: I don't have that exact figure in
8 front of me. What I can tell you is that just over
9 \$74 million was allocated in the FY26 awards in the
10 FY27 Preliminary Plan, \$51.96 million has been
11 allocated to CDF. So, \$22 million less.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, we passed that
13 budget though, so I do look forward to hearing about
14 what the proposed plan is for this year.

15 Uhm, okay, just a few questions on capital budget
16 and cultural infrastructure and just want to
17 acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member
18 Brewer. Uhm, so how many cultural capital projects
19 are currently delayed and what are the major barriers
20 slowing projects?

21 LANCE POLIVY: I couldn't give you an exact
figure on the number of capital projects that are
delayed. You know we work hard on all of the capital
projects that are in front of our agency and at the

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1 moment, I'm going to see if I can get you the total
2 number of projects that we're currently working on.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I think uhm, this is asked
4 in my next question, which is the coordination
5 between your agency and DDC, since you don't have any
6 information on the current delay. So, if you could
7 share like what is the nature of the relationship and
8 how do you coordinate with DDC around capital
projects for the cultural institutions.

9 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, I'd be happy to talk a
10 little bit about that. We are really thrilled about
11 the close partnership that our agency has with both
12 of the city's capital construction agencies. DDC and
13 EDC, both of them are really wonderful partners on
these capital projects.

14 In terms of what our partnership looks like, uhm,
15 we work with organizations to come up with the scope
16 of a potential capital project that they'd like
17 funding for. They apply to - they can apply to the
18 Admin to the Council and to the Borough President's
Office for funding for that potential project.

19 In each adopted capital budget, they are
20 allocated a certain amount of funding towards those
21 projects. Once a project is fully funded, that's

1 when the process can really start between our agency
2 and DDC, and we can do a managing agency switch to
3 move the project from our agency where it was getting
4 fully funded over to DDC to start with the design and
5 construction process.

6 There are a number of steps once DDC has the
7 project. First they want to really flush out the
8 scope through their front end planning unit and all
9 the steps that they take to figure out what a cost
10 estimate is going to be, how much time the project is
11 going to take to do and they get their engineers and
uhm experts.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Is the DCLA staffer though
like with DDC along that process?

13 LANCE POLIVY: Yes, every step of the way.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

15 LANCE POLIVY: When that frontend planning report
16 is done, it goes to the DCLA capital project manager
17 who's helping to oversee the project. So, we make
18 sure that we are overseeing everything that is
19 happening. Then they're going to pick a design
20 company, a design firm that's going to generate the
21 design for the capital project. We are heavily
involved in those regular design meetings with the

1 institution that receives capital funding. That can
2 go on for uhm, for quite a while as they go through
3 the design process. Once they have a complete
4 design, then they're going to bid the project out and
5 pick a contractor to build and deliver on the
6 project. With the contractor, the same thing, there
7 are going to be regular construction meetings, our
8 capital project manager is going to be at each of
9 those meetings as is the institution, as is DDC.

10 So, that's how we do our DDC managed projects.
11 There's a slight -

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: DCLA has someone on staff
13 whose title is Capital Projects Manager?

14 LANCE POLIVY: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, okay, so you were
16 going to give me the information on the number of
17 active capital projects you have and it would be
18 helpful if you also share the number of delayed
19 projects. I mean, given that you all based off of
20 what you just said, seem to be working hand and hand
21 with DDC. I think that your agency should also have
the number of delayed projects as well.

LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, I think the question would
be what the definition of a delayed project is but

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1 what I can tell you is we have 390 active capital
2 projects with 212 organizations.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You know I have like a few
4 projects. One is being managed by DDC. It's not a
5 cultural institution but from what I know from the
6 Parks Department and DDC, it's like they typically
7 will say this should be done by fall of 2026. And
8 so, for me so we're clear on definition. If the
9 project is still in design, after fall, if they say
10 design should be completed, they at least give those
11 timelines as I have seen. I don't know if DCLA runs
12 the timeline process different with their cultural
13 institutions but from what I have seen from the
14 projects in my district, they typically will say,
15 give a timeline, rough estimate. They don't give an
16 exact date but they'll say by Fall 2026, design 2026
17 should be completed. So, to me, so we're on the same
18 page about like what I would define as a delayed
19 project, if they are still in design after fall of
20 2026, then that to me becomes a delayed project. If
21 they are still in design, after fall of 2026, then
that to me becomes a delayed project.

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1 So, if you could get information based off of my
2 definition on delayed projects, I think that would be
3 helpful out of the 390.

4 LANCE POLIVY: Thank you Council Member, we will.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, I'll turn it over to
6 Council Member Brewer for questions and then Council
7 Member Stevens.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Thank you for
9 all that you do. Uhm, just I know that uhm there are
10 other organizations that are CIGs but we just don't
11 have the funding to bring them into the family. Is
12 that - do you know how many other organizations would
13 be part of CIGs if in fact the funding was there and
14 I just wanted to know how much it would cost to bring
15 you know South Street Seaport, uh Chinatowns Museum,
16 etc.? They're all on city land. So, what would be
17 the general number and what would be the cost?
18 Because obviously I would love to see them be part of
19 the CIG family.

20 LANCE POLIVY: Completely. So, we were thrilled
21 to grow the CIG cohort by these five new members last
year.

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1 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know it only too well.
2 It wasn't the real but the Bronx group that's really
3 from Manhattan, keep going.

4 LANCE POLIVY: Hold on, hold on.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm telling you like it
6 is.

7 LANCE POLIVY: The Bronx children's museum is
8 very much a Bronx group.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I'm talking about the
10 Manhattan group, it's really in the Bronx. Go ahead.

11 LANCE POLIVY: There's a theater in Manhattan.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, I know but they do a
13 lot of work. Keep going, I want the whole list.

14 LANCE POLIVY: Okay, I don't have -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know my list.

16 LANCE POLIVY: I know.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know the list, I want
18 to know what you have. Go ahead.

19 LANCE POLIVY: We call that set of groups the
20 Energy Coalition. Groups that are on city owned
21 property but are not members of the CIG.

Uhm, so that set of groups is where we pulled
from to identify these new CIGs and as you were

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1 saying, the key is funding and whether the group is
2 an appropriate new add to the CIG cohort.

3 Uhm, and it also is a substantial amount of work
4 within our agency to attend all the board meetings
5 for five new groups and if we were to add all of the
6 additional groups on uhm, on city owned property as
7 CIGs, it would add additional uhm workload and we may
8 need additional capacity to do that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

9 LANCE POLIVY: So, I think you're right, the
10 total set of groups, it's under ten.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, ten to be added if
12 there was the funding and the capacity and so on is
13 what you're saying?

13 LANCE POLIVY: I'm saying yeah.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay but there are some
15 sets of how much that might cost just generally?
16 Obviously it's power light and staffing, I assume.

16 LANCE POLIVY: Hmm, hmm. So, while the heat,
17 light and power, we're already paying for because
18 they're members of the Energy Coalition.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But not the operating and
20 some of the other costs.
21

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2 LANCE POLIVY: Exactly. So, to give you a rough
estimate, we brought on five new members.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

4 LANCE POLIVY: And we got \$3 million added to our
5 baseline to support those five new groups. So, that
6 gives you a rough estimate.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Around \$6 million, \$6
8 million. That's not very much money to put in groups
9 that could desperately need it and would benefit
10 economically to the city and to the cultural
11 community. \$6 million, okay, we need \$6 million for
12 that. The other question I have just in terms of we
13 love the groups of course that end up in CDF in terms
14 of their amazing capacities and interests and how
15 many - do you have a sense of how many get left on
16 the table, don't get funding, should get - it's all a
funding issue. I don't think anybody can say that
these groups that apply aren't fabulous from my
experience anyway.

17 Uhm, do you have some - I just wish we had more
18 money for culture. I think we all need more money
19 for everything but culture in particular in my
20 opinion. So, what would be, you know how many get
left behind? I've sat on those panels, so I know

21

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1 them well. You have some sense of how much is left
2 on the table, I guess budgetwise, more than numbers.
3 In so many cases, I know Manhattan has the most uh in
4 terms of the panels, etc., etc.. Brooklyn thinks
5 they're big but Manhattan has more groups. I just
6 want you to know that and more than every other
7 borough but I want to note - so that's the idea. How
8 much more money would we need to do a better job of
9 serving more of these fabulous cultural groups.
That's my question.

10 ALTON MURRAY: We funded 84 percent of the
11 applicants this year. And it's not just the money
12 factor, it's also the quality -

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct, I agree.

14 ALTON MURRAY: So- more, we can do more if we had
15 more money but this year we had an increase in the
16 budget, so we had brought in more gross but it's
based on the percentile, their score and the number
of applicants.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay but what I'm - I
18 know some of them don't fit the bill. I've seen the
19 applications. My staff sits on the panel and does a
20 review very religiously but do you have some sense of
21 what you know it's hard to say- not every group is up

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1 to par. But for those that are because there are
2 some left behind that are fabulous and you'd feel
3 terrible about telling them there's no support for
4 them.

5 Do you have some sense if you had x dollars, what
6 would be helpful for some of these groups? I know
7 that's a broad question but we're all trying to come
8 up with some budget and darn it, culture needs, you
9 know they really do need more. Go ahead.

10 LANCE POLIVY: Council Member Brewer, you are not
11 going to get any fight from us about -

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but I'm trying to
13 get some numbers. I got one. I got a \$6 million
14 number for CIGs but I have some sense for the groups,
15 for the CDF.

16 LANCE POLIVY: We did not say \$6 million. We
17 gave you a-

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I got \$6 million out of
19 it. I can do 3 plus 3. I know how to do that. It
20 equals 6.

21 LANCE POLIVY: We need to look at the operating
budget.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but it's a
ballpark. It's a ballpark.

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1 LANCE POLIVY: To get a sense.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, how about for the
3 groups?

4 LANCE POLIVY: The CDF, again I want to emphasize
5 what our Deputy Commissioner just said. We have a
6 competitive grant making process.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

8 LANCE POLIVY: And part of how we're able to use
9 a grant mechanism instead of a procurement mechanism
10 is because of that competitive process. We
11 prioritized funding as many groups as possible in
12 FY26, which is part of how we got to funding 84
13 percent of them. That's a really high percentage.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No but some of them
15 didn't get as much as they got the year before
16 because funding concerns are there.

17 LANCE POLIVY: Well, the funding grew by we had
18 an extra \$14 million in the FY26 budget for CDF that
19 we didn't have in uhm, in FY25. So, the pot was
20 significantly bigger. That's how we were able to
21 spend \$74 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

LANCE POLIVY: Instead, what changes in part of
those fluctuations are based on the score that each

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1 group receives through that competitive panel process
2 and so, sometimes even a group that does phenomenal
3 programming, just has a year where the application is
4 not as strong as it was the year before or two years
5 before that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

7 LANCE POLIVY: And that's part of why we have our
8 program officers going out into the field, doing site
9 visits, meeting with the groups, answering questions
10 that they have about how to strengthen their
11 application from the prior year. That's how groups
12 can get more.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What's the total, maybe
14 it's here. What's the total for CDF? What is that
15 panel total that they can spend for the panelists?

16 LANCE POLIVY: The panelists don't get to pick
17 the amount of money.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, no I know that but
19 I'm saying what is the amount that you allocate for
20 CDF? What is the amount that you allocate for all of
21 that?

LANCE POLIVY: \$74 Million.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: \$74 million, okay.

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2 LANCE POLIVY: That's what we were able to do in
3 FY26.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you Madam
5 Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Council Member Stevens.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Oh, thank you. I guess
8 you guys remembered I was here. I have some
9 questions. Uhm, you know just to kind of piggyback
10 off of what Council Member Brewer was saying,
11 although she did take some shots at the Bronx. I'll
12 let it slide though.

13 LANCE POLIVY: You don't have to let that slide.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'll let it - she knows
15 how I feel about Manhattan.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: But I think you know and
17 I've said this to a lot of the CIGs and things like
18 that. Uhm, they are gener- a city revenue generator
19 and they don't act as if they are. People typically
20 come to New York City to go to cultural institutions
21 and so, you know they are necessary for the city to
thrive and sometimes - and I'm saying this to the
organizations. You guys don't act in your power
because I have said this multiple times, if you guys
all say hey, then we won't open for the Christmas

1 break. We won't open spring break. That is millions
2 of people who won't have places to go and so, and so,
3 you guys start acting your power. We can't either
4 because it is true everything Council Member Brewer
5 is saying, you guys are the heartbeat of New York
6 City and so I think it's important that you know
7 we're funding these institutions in that way so that
8 more people can come and just see the beauty of it.
9 But I'll jump into some other questions. I'm going
10 to talk a little bit about workforce development.
11 Uhm, and I believe I asked this question before and I
12 guess the answer wasn't necessarily adequate but New
13 York City is the artistic and creative center for the
14 country and in the world and in 2022, the creative
15 economy employed an estimated 274,000 people in New
16 York City, yet the city approached the workforce
17 development and career training programs leaves the
18 culture sector out. How did DCLA plan to support
19 greater workforce development initiatives and help
20 launch careers in the arts?

18 ALTON MURRAY: So, Council Member, we have this
19 fantastic program called the Community College Corp
20 and it's a program that allows New York City college
21 students to get real life work experience. We

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1 support this program because we believe it is a vital
2 path to careers for folks from underserved
3 communities. We continue to highlight and support
4 other nonprofits that have workforce development,
5 such as theater, roundabout theater who do careers in
6 nontraditional arts uhm, jobs. So, we are out there
7 promoting our program and supporting and funding
8 other organizations who are running these job
9 programs.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, and I think I said
10 this before where we really need to get into a habit
11 of like exposing young people to all forms of not
12 just the art but behind the scenes work as well
13 because so often young people don't know what they
14 don't - they can't see.

14 So if they don't know about jobs are being
15 created and things like that, they don't know and so,
16 we really need to get into a place of like having
17 young people exposed to those things and I think that
18 those two things you mentioned sound great but how is
19 that enough? How does a young person in the Bronx
20 know about those programs? How do they understand of
21 getting into them? And so, for me, it's thinking
about how do we continue to broaden that conversation

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1 around making sure people are exposed to different
2 forms? And another critique that I typically have is
3 even when I'm looking at a lot of the culture
4 institutions, there's a lot of people of color
5 working in nonmanagement positions. How are we
6 having pathways to people and young people to get
7 into these leadership roles and a lot of these
8 cultural institutions and I would love to see more
being done in that realm.

9 ALTON MURRAY: Yeah, there are other cultural
10 institutions that are doing the work like WCS program
11 in the Bronx. So, they have a workforce development
program and the SYEP program.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So, don't get me started
13 with the SYEP program. You know nobody knows that
14 better than me and that is not necessarily a gateway
15 because yes, we have places like the Bronx who takes
16 in more kids than most places, right? I think, what
17 are you guys up to? 1,900 students that they're
18 taking in but those are typically folks coming in
19 doing some of the lower level things and so, that's a
20 great way to work at our institution but like those
21 numbers don't reflect what I'm talking about actually
creating a pathway into the workforce.

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2 ALTON MURRAY: I completely understand and we
3 need to do a better job of recruiting organizations
4 that can fund workforce development programs. The
5 current administration will also be looking at
6 opportunities and ways to engage high school students
7 and cultural activities. So, that should open the
8 path for more career and enlightenment to what's out
9 there.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And I'm happy to work
11 with you on that as you're rolling those things out
12 to be a thought partner because I do think that it's
13 really important that we're exposing these young
14 people to the different opportunities and not just
15 the traditional roles that we see.

16 I'm going to move on to the next question. In
17 New York City Arts education paying for
18 professionalism, reports in New York City teaching
19 artists compensation and employment in roundtables
20 found that teaching artists in New York City face
21 significant financial challenges with many earning
incomes that are alarmingly low relative to the
city's cost of living. The report emphasized that
the need for sustaining multiyear funding and
difficulties for reimbursement based on contracting

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1 and rigorous procurement policies that prevent
2 substantial pay rates, uhm, and inconsistent year to
3 year funding. How does DCLA support more substantial
4 salaries for teaching artists? And what is DCLA
5 doing to ensure that CDF and City Council
6 discretionary funding is distributed faster and in
7 more consistent, in a more consistent manner?

8 ALTON MURRAY: So, there are two questions there.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Hmm, mmm yes two
10 questions.

11 ALTON MURRAY: So, we'll answer the second one,
12 what are we doing? Uhm, this year, we announced and
13 released the application a month and a half earlier
14 than we did previous year. So, we're trying to work
15 towards getting back on a more normal cycle where we
16 do the announcements in early fall. We continue to
17 work with our team to figure out ways to streamline
18 other opportunities, creating more multiyear grants,
19 so we don't have as many obligations and grantees to
20 review.

21 So, we are continuing to figure out ways to
continue - bring the timeline back to the way it was
in the past. It's a cycle. So, something must end
for something to start. So, we are figuring out ways

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1 to get it quicker and sooner and faster. So, in a
2 few years, we'll be back on a more normal cycle.
3 Uhm, the second question about - repeat the question.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Uhm, well, you were
5 talking about the discretionary funding. So, it was
6 the first question that you probably want me to
7 repeat. How does DCLA support more substantial
8 salaries for teaching artists?

9 ALTON MURRAY: We are very much aware that
10 outside of teaching artists, all artists are really,
11 really, really challenged to live in this city
12 because of the affordability crisis. We try to fund
13 the work with high performing organizations who hire
14 teaching artists. We do not have control over the
15 salaries of teaching artists. The organizations are
16 an independent entity like for the grants, but we
17 raise awareness that the affordability crisis. We
18 try to encourage opportunities and provide more
19 opportunities for artists to earn a living in New
20 York City.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And even to go back to
the procurement funding that you were talking about.
You know I think it's really important for us to make
sure that we're uplifting that. We really need to

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1 make sure we're investing in MOCs, right? And that's
2 an organization that I think we are always so
3 passionate about, talking about getting the money but
4 getting the access to the money has been a real
5 hindrance and so, you know I think we have to
6 continue to highlight and I DCLA folks actually
7 appreciate you guys a lot more than other agencies
8 throughout New York City because you get money out
9 the door a lot faster, but I think even saying
10 getting out faster doesn't necessarily mean timely,
11 right? And so, it is still - it's a major concern of
12 mine. It's something that I've been really
13 passionate about, thinking about how do we actually
14 hunker down and really kind of like remove some of
15 this red tape that we have.

14 And just in the last question, uhm, as far as
15 accessing critical benefits and medical insurance and
16 retirement plans are lacking across the field. While
17 88 percent of the teaching artists reported having
18 health insurance, only 6 percent received it through
19 employers. Will DCLA consider supporting a benefit
20 pilot for a freelance and self-employed artists as
21 described in the Center for Urban Futures Creative
New York City's report?

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2 ALTON MURRAY: Our new Commissioner highlighted
3 that's one of our important initiatives to explore.
4 It's a conversation, we do understand housing and
5 health are such vital to artists staying in New York
6 City.

7 So, in the few coming months, we'll be having
8 those discussions and conversations. One of the
9 first things our Commissioner mentioned that she's
10 interested in exploring that as an option. As
11 someone who has been on the ground working with
12 artists, she's keenly and highly aware that this is
13 necessary.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, I look forward to
15 hearing more details about that as that is being
16 rolled out. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Council Member Louis.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you Chair. Good to
19 see you Deputy Commissioner Murray and Lance. I have
20 two questions. Given the significant drop in
21 cultural programs funding from \$106.8 million in FY26
and \$53.9 million in FY27, how is DCLA planning to
mitigate the compounded impact on nonprofits that may
simultaneously face federal funding cuts and is there
a contingency strategy or reserved funding to prevent

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1 service reductions, layoffs, or closures amongst
2 smaller community based nonprofits?

3 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, I think it's a great
4 question and one we think about a lot. We are hoping
5 to work together with the Council to build an
6 equitable budget that delivers for arts and culture
7 in New York City and if we do that we're hoping to
8 make sure that there is sufficient funding for the
9 field so that no one is feeling cuts in FY27. It's
10 obviously a very difficult fiscal environment right
11 now and I think that's going to be part of the
12 ongoing dialogue through the budget process is how we
13 can work together to ensure the best possible budget
14 for DCLA in FY27.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: We'll look forward to you
16 guys working with the Chair on that. Uhm, my last
17 question, we have consistently heard from nonprofit
18 providers. They're probably here in the room that
19 the Cultural Development Fund application and
20 reimbursement process has become increasingly
21 burdensome, particularly for smaller organizations
without dedicated administrative staff.

What specific changes is DCLA making in the
budget to streamline the application contracting and

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1 payment processes and how are you ensuring that
2 smaller community based organizations can equitably
3 access funding without being disadvantaged by
4 administrative barriers and in your response if you
5 could just include the timeline for the upcoming
6 panel and the awards component. Thank you,

7 LANCE POLIVY: Okay, I think I've got it. That
8 was like a four or five partner. At the beginning,
9 it's about are we willing to make any changes to the
10 application, not for the FY27 process because that
11 application has already but for FY28 to take a look
12 at whether there's a way to curtail some of the
13 questions to make it a shorter application so that it
14 would be more accessible to smaller arts
15 organizations that maybe don't have a grant writer on
16 staff.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Right.

18 LANCE POLIVY: And can deal with that burden. I
19 think it's a terrific question and one that our
20 agency really needs to think about and look into much
21 more closely.

So, I think that process would have to start
almost immediately because it takes a very long time
to change the application the way that it's loaded

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1 into our electronic platform. And so, I can commit
2 to you, I can commit to you that we will be having
3 those conversations and look into that issue
4 promptly.

5 In terms of the contracting issue, and getting
6 the money out the door. That's one where as Council
7 Member Stevens was just highlighting, DCLA operates
8 on a grant model as opposed to a procurement model,
9 which actually gets 80 percent of our funding out the
10 door immediately, uhm as opposed to waiting for
11 completion of services and then applying to MOCs to
12 get that money back as a reimbursement from the city.

13 So, that's a tool that we're using to try and get
14 our money out very quickly. In exchange for that,
15 there is a certain amount of paperwork that we need
16 including and execute a grant agreement. There are
17 conflicts of interest forms that need to be filled
18 out and a number of other forms. We need those so
19 that we can make sure that we are adequately
20 protecting the city funding and making sure uhm, that
21 we are doing all of the appropriate things we need to
as an agency to make sure we never put our ability as
an agency to use grant making in jeopardy.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Right, you never want to
3 compromise that but it would be good and I think
4 we've had these conversations in the past to maybe
5 have like a dedicated staff or a rep that could walk
6 nonprofits through the process and although you may -
7 you made mention that FY28 may be the time to start
8 the process. I think in FY27, you could start
9 thinking about some ways in the meantime and if you
10 could just share a little bit about the panel
11 component, like when is that starting?

12 ALTON MURRAY: It should start early June, early
13 summer. To go back to another point, so we have also
14 moved a lot more organizations to multiyear grants.
15 So it reduces the burden of the process on our
16 nonprofits as well as for our employees.

17 Uhm, our program officers also are a great
18 resource for underserved communities to make sure
19 that they're part of the process. Last year they
20 went out to community board meetings to talk about
21 the process and they're very helpful in helping
shepherd organizations. If they do not receive
funding there, they reach out to them to give them
counseling on how to make their application more
viable for future funding. So, we're doing our part

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1 just to be on the ground to talk to small
2 organizations, going out to communities to give them
3 insight into how they can be more competitive.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Just another
6 question on the capital stuff. Okay, capital
7 construction process has been plagued with
8 inefficiencies. And in recent years, slow to a
9 crawl, with many projects taking two years to simply
10 get underway and an average of eight to ten years to
11 complete. How is DCLA working to improve the capital
12 process for cultural organizations? What is the
13 average timeline for a capital process? We're saying
14 eight to ten but wanted to know if you have more
15 accurate information on the average timeline for a
16 capital process?

17 LANCE POLIVY: I don't think we have the stat in
18 front of us to tell you the current average length of
19 a DDC capital project start to finish but what I can
20 say is that these projects do take a long time. Part
21 of why they take a long time is that the city dollars
that are put into them come with a lot of other
burdens and requirements and that's to protect the
bonds that back city capital investments.

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1 So, we understand that part of that is always
2 going to be the city's capital process. Other parts
3 of it are things that we are continually in dialogue
4 with other city partners about trying to identify
5 ways to improve timeline delivery and satisfaction of
6 the cultural partners who are the recipients and the
7 ultimate client for any of these projects. I think
8 we have a lot more work to do. I think that it is
9 really exciting to be partnering with leadership in
10 this new administration as we think about where there
11 are some key tools in areas in the process that may
12 be able to speed things up.

13 I'll highlight just one for you that may be uhm,
14 a note of optimism, which is that DDC was able to get
15 legislation passed in the state budget last year.
16 And that new state law gives them additional tools
17 that they are now deploying, including something
18 called CM Build. And uhm, we've already started
19 deploying this with at least one cultural group and
20 we hope to bring it to more soon, which does speed up
21 timelines, decrease cost, and increase the strength
of the project delivery. This is a tool that DDC was
fighting for for many years and took a big, big push
to get it passed by the state. And I think that as

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1 DDC keeps looking for these additional resources,
2 that other construction projects not part of the city
3 have at their fingertips, they're going to see even
4 more ways that they increase those timelines and
5 improve project delivery for organizations.

6 So, I again, want to thank all the dedicated
7 public servants at DDC who work with us so closely
8 every day and tell you that in light of that
9 gratitude, we still are talking to them, thinking
10 with them and trying to identify capital process
changes that can increase the speed.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Just pivoting
12 to the Chief Savings Officers. So, was your Chief
13 Savings Officer given any targets by OMB and I know
14 you have like a few days to submit it but if you
15 could share with us uhm any savings that this officer
has found and any potential impacts to the agencies
performance?

16 ALTON MURRAY: We do have a target of 1.5 percent
17 for this year and 2.5 for next year. We were in
18 discussion with OMB on where we land and we've
19 identified things but there's a continuing
20 conversation. We expect to have our submission on
21 February - March 20th which is when it's due.

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1 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, so you're not able
2 to share with us.

3 ALTON MURRAY: Not able to share.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, uhm, does DCLA have
5 a long actually, let me ask this other question.
6 It's in relation to this. Has DCLA plan to implement
7 well- I kind of asked this.

8 Who - can you just share actually who is the cost
9 savings officer in the agency?

10 ALTON MURRAY: I currently hold that role and
11 network with our finance team.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, you're the CSO on the
13 record.

14 ALTON MURRAY: I'm the - yes, yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, okay.

16 ALTON MURRAY: But there's a team that is
17 actually analyzing uhm, the cost savings.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay and have you asked
19 DCLA about the \$30 million that wasn't baselined from
20 last year? Have you made any requests on your end to
21 OMB?

ALTON MURRAY: We always advocate for more,
particularly the \$30 million, we haven't had that
conversation yet.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay and do you have a
3 long term strategic plan for cultural investment in
4 New York City? Because I know sometimes it feels
5 year to year for us but we know agencies do plan, so
6 is there a plan?

7 ALTON MURRAY: We've worked on a racial equity
8 funding plan, so we have that but the budget is, you
9 know every year it's negotiated so we can't really
10 plan without further than that.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay uhm, I think a few
12 Council Members or Council Member Brewer, you have
13 another question?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Quickly and thank you
15 very much. We know that some CIGs participate in the
16 City Health Plan. It's a huge benefit to those that
17 do and it doesn't cost the city more as I understand
18 it. Are you scheduling a meeting with the Office of
19 Labor to open this opportunity to all CIGs including
20 the new ones. Those are the ones that have been
21 asking.

ALTON MURRAY: Repeat the question.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Sure. The City Health
Plan, which is a major benefit to the CIGs that are
in it. Apparently it doesn't cost more for New York

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1 but apparently the newer ones, the newer CIGs do not
2 have the opportunity to be in that plan according to
3 my information. And I just didn't know if you're
4 going to be meeting with the Office of Labor, City
5 Labor to make them - give them that opportunity.

6 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, it's a great question,
7 Council Member. We have been in touch with OLR to
8 talk to them about this issue. Actually, not just
9 for the five new CIGs but there are a lot of other
10 members of the cohort that are interested in
11 receiving additional information, learning about what
12 the cost would be, the potential savings to the
13 organization and to their employees. So, we have
14 been in dialogue with OLR and uhm, and will continue
15 to be in touch with them to try and get more
16 information and figure out how these groups can do
17 the analysis and then make the determination whether
18 they would like to apply and join.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, would it be a cost
17 issue for the city? For the group? Would it be
18 shared? How does that work? Just curious.

19 LANCE POLIVY: The group needs to provide a great
20 level of detail about the potential employees.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What they need, right.

21

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2 LANCE POLIVY: Right. What their salaries are
3 and the benefits that they choose and then OLR is
4 able to give them an estimate of okay, this is what
5 it might cost your organization to join. So, it's
6 not about the cost to the city as you said. It's
7 much more about working collaboratively with the
8 groups to get the information. Getting OLR to tell
9 the groups exactly what they need to provide.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's probably less
11 expensive than trying to go out in the open market,
12 which is what we're talking about. Okay, thank you
13 very, very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I'll turn it over to
15 Council Member Maloney for questions.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Alright. I wanted to
17 ask a question about annual adjustments. So costs
18 overall for our cultural institutions continue to
19 increase, such as increases negotiated through
20 collective bargaining agreements and inflation.
21 Would DCLA consider annual cost adjustments year over
year to support staff wages and increase costs
connected with inflation for arts and cultural
organizations, similar to the overall increases that
happen year over year for other city agencies?

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2 LANCE POLIVY: It's a great idea and we really
3 thank you for the question. We would have to be in
4 touch with our colleagues at the Office of Management
5 and Budget about any type of mechanism like that that
6 would impact the city's budget but it's a great idea
7 to make sure that arts and cultural organizations can
8 rely on stable, reliable increases in their funding.

9 Uhm, again, just a matter of the mechanism and
10 whether the city has the resources to support it.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you for that
12 consideration. I also wanted to touch on arts
13 education. So, a report showed that 900 plus
14 cultural organizations partnered with schools in the
15 2024 to 2025 school year, which is a big increase and
16 23 percent of schools reported use of funding from
17 arts organizations for arts education. How does DCLA
18 plan to continue to foster arts partnerships with our
19 city's public schools?

20 ALTON MURRAY: We continue to fund organizations
21 that are working in schools and we try to be robust
with that funding and if they write a great
application, they get increased funding. We also
have our materials for the arts program that supports
arts organizations and school classrooms that allow

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1 students to go to materials for the arts and have
2 uhm, onsite education programming. But what's really
3 great about materials for the arts, it offset costs
4 by providing materials that teachers can use in
5 classrooms. So, it's a prong of being very favorable
6 to arts education programming for organizations that
7 submit for funding and encouraging classroom teachers
8 and arts organizations to come to materials for the
9 arts to get materials so that they can offset cost.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Council Member Stevens.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I just had a question
11 because myself and Deputy Speaker had a convening a
12 couple weeks ago with some young people and they
13 explained how they often are not feeling welcomed in
14 places and spaces throughout New York City and as a
15 result, we've seen things like these teen takeovers
16 that's been going on throughout the city and having
17 large groups.

18 Uhm, one, I guess my first question is how are
19 you guys working with organizations to make young
20 people feel more welcome? Because apparently this is
21 something they are saying and so, we need to be
responsive. And so, is that something that you guys
have been thinking about and what does that outreach

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1 look like? I know some places have like teen nights
2 and things like that but honestly, it was really
3 heartbreaking to hear these young people talk about
4 not being able to have access into places and a lot
5 of spaces saying that you have to be 18 years and
6 older and they can't come.

7 So, this generation of teens are really feeling
8 disconnected. So how are you working with like these
9 organizations to kind of make this a more welcoming
space for young people, especially teens?

10 ALTON MURRAY: We continue to work with our
11 partners such American Museum of Natural History to
12 create opportunities for organizations to individuals
13 to have access families or high school students with
ID's to have access to these programs.

14 We also fund programs such as school culture that
15 works with families to get them into institutions.
16 We understand how important it is. I personally
17 remember the first time I went into a cultural
18 institution and trying to own that space. So, it's
19 an issue that we are aware of. We feel that pain but
20 we need to continue to fund organizations. That
21 brings grassroots organizations in marginalized
communities into the spaces and figure out

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1 opportunities where we can highlight opportunities
2 for them like Teen Stake, the MET, that they can go
3 and own these spaces.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, I really would
5 love for us to start working with organizations to
6 think about a plan because again, like I said, it was
7 heartbreaking to hear from these young people feeling
8 not welcomed and places just across the city, and
9 that's a problem for me. And obviously, the -
10 working with the MET, that's one institution but I
11 think how are we making sure especially institutions
12 that we're giving public money to, are being a
13 service to the public and you know, I've been yelling
14 about this, teens need to be a part of this
15 affordability conversation and that's not being clear
16 to me in any city plan right. We're really
17 forgetting about the young people and so, I just
18 wanted to think about that as we are thinking about
19 this budget and how are we looking at it from a lens
20 of adding young people into those conversations and
21 making sure that organizations or institutions that
we're giving money to are also thinking about how are
we going to include them in these spaces and not just
families. I'm talking about teenagers because even

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1 looking at the unemployment rate for teenagers
2 between the ages of 16 and 21, we're at 21 percent
3 and Black teenagers in specifically were already at
4 23 percent of young people between the ages of 16 and
5 23.

6 So, we're clearly missing the margin on this and
7 when we're talking about this in budget, I just want
8 us to make sure that we're thinking about that and
9 being intentional about including them in our
10 planning process. Because honestly, it does not feel
11 that way throughout anything in the city and I feel
12 like I'm always having to be the voice of reason.
13 So, I'm bringing this up so that we can think about
14 how to move forward and again, see me as a thought
15 partner and would love to work with you on thinking
16 about how to move forward with that.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you Chair Stevens.
18 Just a few more questions before I conclude this
19 question of the hearing. So, in Fiscal 2025 and
20 Fiscal 2026, the data showed that zero organizations
21 received cultural development fund payments at the
start of the fiscal year. Why are CDF payments
consistently delayed at the beginning of the fiscal
year and what steps is DCLA taking to ensure

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1 organizations receive their funding in the timelier
2 manner?

3 LANCE POLIVY: Thank you very much Deputy Speaker
4 Williams. In terms of why no organizations received
5 their funding on July first, we can't allocate the
6 funding until we know how much money we can devote to
7 CDF. So, we wait until we have budget adoption. We
8 then know what the total pool of funding is and then
we can distribute it.

9 As Deputy Commissioner Murray has noted today, we
10 have made great strides to increase the timeline
11 including that this years FY27 application has
12 already launched a month and a half earlier than it
13 did in FY26 and we are making every effort we can as
14 an agency to improve the timeline and make sure that
15 it's even earlier in FY28. So, you have our
16 commitment to be a partner and a collaborator in this
effort to make things start earlier but we will never
be ready on July 1st.

17 The best that we've ever done is sort of as
18 Deputy Commissioner Murray said, in the early fall
19 and that's our target to hit that.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, uhm, I have follow
21 ups but in the interest of time, I won't follow up.

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1 Uhm, so the PMMR tracks overall funding and
2 participation and does not clearly show how cultural
3 investments are distributed across neighborhoods or
4 community districts. Does DCLA track cultural
5 participation and funding geographically and will the
6 department support adding a borough or neighborhood
7 level metric to better evaluate equity and access to
8 cultural resources?

8 ALTON MURRAY: So, over the years, we've had this
9 conversation and what we've done, we've looked at the
10 data and what it shows is that funding is done
11 proportionately to the borough's application. So, we
12 try to encourage organizations and Council Members,
13 you should do this to get as many nonprofits to
14 submit an application. That's how you increase the
15 participation. We also are out there trying to
16 encourage and educate our nonprofits so that they can
17 be more viable and when they submit an application
18 prices are competitive.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And is your comment just
18 now that it's proportional anecdotal or do you
19 actually have the data to back up-

19 ALTON MURRAY: We've looked at the data. We've
20 had this conversation for the last three years.
21

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Are you able to share with
the Council?

3 ALTON MURRAY: Not currently but we can get that
4 to you.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, okay, thank you.
6 Uhm, the Prelim Fiscal 2026 Mayor's Management Report
7 identifies that 39 percent of CIG visitors use the
8 free admissions policy to visit the institutions.
9 Can you disaggregate these admissions by each
10 individual CIG? Can you explain the message for how
11 this metric is collected and last but not least, does
this include all ticket sales or just in person at
the counter?

12 LANCE POLIVY: We'll look into that Deputy
13 Speaker and get back to you.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. I like to ask data
15 questions, so like you should let the Commissioner
16 know because I don't like when you guys come to
17 hearings and not have the data and then we have to
18 follow up because it's not transparent to the public
19 because we're asking these questions on the record
for the public so they can get the information. So,
20 I do hope and this is like my first hearing, so you
know I plan to be - trying to be nice but just in
21

1
2 general, I really hate when agencies don't have the
3 information and if I wasn't also pressed for time, I
4 would legitimately sit here and wait until you guys
5 can present the information but I won't do that
6 today. But it is within me to do that in future
7 hearings. If I ask a question and you guys don't
8 have the information, that you get the information to
9 us as soon as possible.

10 Can you disaggregate this metric uhm, by having
11 New York City residents pay the suggested donation
12 and how many New York City residents pay what you
13 wish and how many New York City residents receive
14 truly free entry? Are you able to disaggregate that?
15 No, you have to get back to me.

16 Has DCLA ever received complaints from New
17 Yorkers that they were a non entry because it refuses
18 to pay to adjusted donation amounts? And what has
19 happened with these complaints?

20 ALTON MURRAY: So, we probably cannot advocate
21 the wish because we don't - I don't think the museums
do track it that way. Uhm, so there is no system to
aggregate that.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think that's why
we're asking the question because based off what

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1 we're told, they don't. Maybe some do but we heard
2 that it's not all and maybe it's something that DCLA
3 should require from these institutions. If some are
4 doing it but some are not doing it.

5 Some of the 39 CIG members don't pay rent to the
6 City of New York despite being on public park land
7 correct? Yes. Can you quantify the value in unpaid
8 rent by these CIGs and share that with the Committee?

9 LANCE POLIVY: Our objective is to help support
10 all arts and culture institutions that apply for DCLA
11 funding. We're not looking to charge rent and add a
12 rent burden to institutions that are already
13 struggling so much. So, we can absolutely get that
14 number to you but we would not want to add an
15 additional burden to institutions that already are
16 doing so much to support our communities and having
17 so much difficulty doing it because of the very
18 difficult financial climate that they're working in.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I don't think
20 anybody on this Committee disagrees with you. I
21 think we agree with you but I do think it's important
to have information and I believe as it stands
internally in the Council, we don't know that
information. So, if you all have quantified that

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1 number, it would be helpful to just share with us and
2 the public should know as well but I don't think
3 anyone here on the Committee wants to uhm, incur any
4 additional costs to the institutions who we are now
5 also asking, where is the additional \$30 million that
6 has not been accounted for and as you testified to,
7 primarily vocal to the CIGs of the CDF fund, which we
8 want to see restored.

9 So, I don't think that we would be counter
10 productive to ourselves and make any suggestions that
11 these institutions should incur any additional costs.
12 Just want the information.

13 Okay, anybody else have any other questions?
14 Okay, thank you so very much. I look forward to
15 formally meeting the new Commissioner. Uhm,
16 congratulations to her and look forward to being uhm
17 partnering with you all to advance and address many
18 issues that have come up at this hearing and our
19 previous hearing and I hope you have a great day.

20 Okay, I now open - I'm going to open it a little
21 early but I now open the hearing for public
testimony. I remind members of the public that this
is a formal government proceeding and that decorum
shall be observed at all times.

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1 As such, members of the public shall remain
2 silent at all times. The witness table is reserved
3 for people who wish to testify. No video recording
4 or photography is allowed from the witness table.
5 Further, members of the public may not present audio
6 or video recordings as testimony but may submit
7 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at
8 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

9 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
10 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at
11 Arms, if you have not already done so and wait to be
12 recognized. When recognized, you will have two
13 minutes to speak on today's hearing topic, the Fiscal
14 2027 Prelim Budget.

15 If you have a written statement or additional
16 written testimony you wish to submit for the record,
17 please provide a copy of that testimony to the
18 Sergeant at Arms. I will now call the first panel.
19 Deborah, Phillip - maybe I should say first and last
20 names. Deborah Allman, Phillip Macalouso(SP?)George
21 Olken, John Hyslop - are they in the building? Oh
okay, so then we have to go to another panel.

Uhm, Amonie Wilford(AP?), Inrika Mandia(SP?),
Lillian Young, David Patterson, Emilie Jabinski(SP?).

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1 Correct me when you come speak. I want to make sure
2 I'm saying this right. Hou Shreeve, Lauren Comito,
3 Amonie Wilford. But right now this is Lauren Comito,
4 David Patterson, Emily Drabinski, Hal Schrieve.

5 Yeah, you going to start? Sure, just say your
6 name for the record before you start. Thank you.

7 LAUREN COMITO: There we go, sorry. Lauren
8 Comito, I'm the Executive Director of Urban
9 Librarians Unite and I'm also a public librarian here
10 in New York City. Urban Librarians Unite is a 501 C3
11 organization that's based in Brooklyn and focuses on
12 supporting library workers in cities across the
13 country and a little internationally doing trauma
14 support advocacy and professional development. In my
15 work as a librarian, I see first hand every day how
16 essential libraries are and I feel a little bit like
17 I've given this testimony 15 times because I have
18 since 2011, so I rewrote it a little bit because you
19 know. One of the things that I really love about
20 this city and have loved living here for so long is
21 that New Yorkers adore and use their libraries. They
speak up for us every year. They come out and talk
to you all about why it's important they come to
rallies and that's really because I think New Yorkers

1 see libraries as part of both the practical support
2 of their daily life and sort of joy in their lives as
3 well - okay we could do that. Where they can both
4 learn things and take practical steps to make their
5 lives better but also find the joy of finding a book
6 with their child or going to story time or
7 discovering a movie and I think that right now that's
8 something that we all really need. We're sort of
9 facing an epidemic of both isolation and mental
10 health issues. And also, you know AI generated
11 hallucinating professional journal articles that
12 don't exist.

13 A government registering the domain name
14 [Aliens.gov](https://aliens.gov). Apparently I'm autistic because my mom
15 took tylenol. Uhm, what are you going to do? So,
16 libraries are really a place where we can focus on
17 actual facts and actual information and that's
18 something that I think the government should be
19 investing in to build out these spaces of core
20 infrastructure so that we can have like materially
21 better lives in our communities and also the joy that
makes it worth existing.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

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1
2 EMILY DRABINSKI: Hi, I'm Emily Drabinski and you
3 pronounced it just right. Good afternoon Dr.
4 Williams and members of the Committee. Before we
5 begin, I'm here representing Library Pack and before
6 we begin, Library Pack would like to formally
7 recognize and thank you Dr. Williams, Chair for your
8 steadfast commitment to our public libraries.

9 Your tireless advocacy for the branches within
10 your district and your leadership on library issues
11 citywide have been vital to the communities we serve.
12 We are grateful to have such a dedicated champion
13 heading this Committee. It's not often I speak to a
14 government official I know agrees with me, so I'm
15 grateful.

16 My name is Emily Drabinski, I am a Librarian. I
17 am a former president of the American Library
18 Association and I am an Associate Professor and Chair
19 of the School of Information Studies at Queens
20 College CUNY. One of the main pipelines for the
21 library workforce here in the city.

Today, I speak in my role as leader of Library
Pack. We are an independent political action
committee dedicated to supporting and advocating for
New York City's public libraries. Our mission is to

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1 endorse and financially support candidates for local
2 and state office who recognize the intrinsic value of
3 libraries and improving the lives of all New Yorkers.

4 We advocate for a future where our libraries are
5 robustly and equitably funded, ensuring safe staffing
6 levels and consistent operating hours that meet the
7 public's needs across all five boroughs.

8 I'm grateful to be here today to address the
9 significant gap between the Mayor's campaign promises
10 and the reality of the current budget proposal.

11 During his campaign, Mayor Mamdani made a clear,
12 historic commitment to public libraries. He pushed
13 to end the budget dance, to ensure baselined funding,
14 and to commit 0.5 percent of the city's expense
15 budget to public libraries.

16 Despite these promises, the February financial
17 plan proposes only \$492 million for public libraries,
18 a \$36 million reduction from 2026 levels. By
19 presenting a Preliminary Budget that includes a
20 reduction, the Administration has kicked off the very
21 budget dance it once called damaging. This pennywise
pound foolish process must change. We look forward
to working with you to ensure our libraries can

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1 fulfill their potential to be a cornerstone of a more
2 equitable, affordable city for us all. Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

4 HAL SCHRIEVE: Hi, my name is Hal Schrieve, I'm a
5 member of the public and uhm I have eight years of
6 experience working as a librarian in public libraries
7 as well. I'm presenting just as myself today because
8 I also want to talk about the campaign work I did on
9 the Mamdani campaign last year. I was one of
10 thousands of New Yorkers that got really excited
11 about that campaign, partly because of the promises
12 around consistent funding to libraries.

13 Uhm, I knocked at least 1,200 doors and got
14 people who were really deactivated, excited about the
15 election by talking about library funding. The cuts
16 made under the Adams Administration that the City
17 Council reversed and we you know clawed back. Those
18 cuts were really unpopular with many ordinary people
19 who use libraries, parents and children uh noticed a
20 reduction in new books on the shelves and uhm, the
21 end of Sunday service for those months where we were
trying to fight for that funding back, really got a
lot of people excited about libraries and interested
in making sure those libraries are consistently

1 funded. The Mayor ran on an explicit promise
2 particularly articulated in February of the campaign
3 year, that he was going to commit 0.5 percent of the
4 city budget to public libraries. And like Emily
5 Drabinski, I am disappointed that that didn't make it
6 into the preliminary budget and that we have to
7 negotiate again for that number. I just want to
8 express that that number is still a really small
9 fraction of the overall city budget but as you've
10 heard from the presidents of the libraries, it would
11 make a huge difference both in capital planning and
12 consistent programming. And ensuring that New
13 Yorkers have space to go and do the things that they
14 cannot do at their places, whether that's print or
15 stay warm or use the bathroom, or read or work on
16 homework with the assistance of afterschool tutors,
17 libraries really are uhm, a cornerstone of our public
18 life and we need to be able to plan year to year.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Perfect timing. Thank you
17 all so much for your testimony and yes, like you, I
18 do hope that the Mayor fulfills at least a few of his
19 campaign promises as it pertains to the libraries. I
20 am optimistic that he will uhm, but yeah, this is
21 just the complexity of campaigning versus governance.

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1 It's not always as easy as we'd like it to be, so
2 thank you so much.

3 Next up, uhm, Gonzalo Casals oh Casals, oh Former
4 Commissioner, oh important. Let me get that right.
5 Hello. Ryan Gilliam, Lucy Sexton. Oh, I see what
6 type of panel this is and Kimberly Olsen.

7 Yeah, we also are very ghetto in the Council, we
8 only have one mic, sorry. Oh okay, okay, we have a
9 jenky mic. It works sometimes it doesn't, so you
know use as you wish.

10 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Well thank you Deputy Speaker
11 Williams and the City Council for hosting today's
12 hearing and also, Happy Arts in our Schools Month.
13 My name is Kim Olsen and I'm proud to represent the
New York City Arts and Education Roundtable.

14 I'm here testifying today as part of the It
15 Starts with the Arts Coalition, calling on our city
16 to prioritize funding and policy change that not only
17 improves arts education in New York City but supports
18 our vibrant robust workforce. The arts are the
19 heartbeat of our great city. Dance Theater, music,
20 visual arts, media, literary arts are a vital engine
21 for our city's economy, cultural identity and a
critical component of culturally responsive pedagogy,

1 yet bureaucratic hurdles in contracting, the
2 skyrocketing cost of living and chronic inequities
3 across our city are stifling our city's most valuable
4 resource, leaving our students and our workforce
5 behind.

6 In New York City, arts education is across agency
7 effort, employing a workforce of 11,000 teaching
8 artists and approximately 2,887 in school arts
9 teachers. But our city doesn't make that easy.
10 Contract delays, namely CASA and New York City Public
11 Schools MTAC contracts, mean late or unrealized start
12 dates, lost employment for artists, and lost
13 educational opportunities.

14 Inconsistent funding year over year across
15 agencies makes it difficult to build sustainable long
16 term partnerships between schools and cultural orgs
17 and stable employment for artists.

18 This in turn has a trickle down impact on the
19 workforce, where teaching artists only earn a median
20 individual gross income of between \$35,000 to \$50,000
21 a year with virtually no access to health insurance
through an employer.

As a result and through our report, we found that
79 percent of teaching artists do not feel their work

1 sufficiently supports living in or near New York
2 City. Beyond the grave implications for our
3 workforce, this continues to threaten arts education
4 access and participation rates, still rebounding from
5 the pandemic. 31 percent of middle schoolers meeting
6 state learning requirements in the arts simply isn't
7 acceptable.

8 Unless our city takes action, we are at risk of
9 losing our most diverse and impactful parts of the
10 cultural workforce. With that, we urge our city to
11 take action to protect our workforce and invest in
12 our students, that includes reforms to contracting,
13 wanting insurance pilots to support teaching artist
14 affordability and restoring and baseline funding for
15 the Department of Cultural Affairs in the amount of
16 \$30 million. Thank you.

17 LUCY SEXTON: Hi, my name is Lucy Sexton, I lead
18 New Yorkers for Culture and Arts, a coalition of more
19 than 400 artists and cultural groups. We realize
20 that the city is facing a tough budget year and will
21 be rightly focused on protecting jobs, healthcare,
housing and so many essential services for our city.

I'm here today to say that culture and arts are
essential services. It is data proven that robust

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1 cultural assets in neighborhoods provide measurable
2 improvements in everything from mental and physical
3 health, small business vibrancy, public safety and
4 social cohesion and more. And of course, if you're
5 looking at the economy, the last thing you want to
6 cut back on is the engine for economic activity that
7 culture provides. This year, many cultural anchors
8 receive unexpected cuts in funding from both DCLA and
9 the New York State Council on the Arts. We need to
10 act now to stabilize cultural groups, especially
those in historically disinvested communities.

11 So, this year's request addresses these by asking
12 the city to restore and baseline the \$30 million
13 added in the FY26 budget. This is most necessary if
14 we are to stem the city's loss of cultural jobs,
15 baseline funds that organizations predict their
16 funding and hire and retain staff.

17 And to further stabilize the sector, we ask that
18 the culture budget be indexed to increase yearly as
19 costs increase. Further, we request reforming and
20 streamlining the cultural capital process. We need
21 more data transparency, as was evident in today's
hearing. We need to build a plan for projects in

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1 advance so that each project doesn't suffer these
2 long delays.

3 Finally, we ask that you increase the coalition
4 of Theaters of Color Council initiative to \$8
5 million. The last increase CTC received was in 2021,
6 when it was serving just over 50 groups. It now
7 serves 63 groups and desperately needs an increase.

8 The city needs what culture provides, a city
9 where people feel safe and connected filled with
10 vibrancy, community, and joy. Invest in this vision
11 for our city, consider it an investment in New
12 Yorkers lives and the city's economy. Thanks for
13 hearing my testimony.

14 RYAN GILLIAM: Hi, I'm Ryan Gilliam. I'm the
15 Executive Director of Fourth Arts Block, also known
16 as FABnyc. We're a team of artists and organizers
17 working to preserve, strengthen and grow the cultural
18 vibrancy of the lower east side.

19 For 25 years, we have partnered with our
20 community bringing artists and art strategies to help
21 address displacement, affordable housing, equitable
economic development, public space stewardship,
public safety, racial equity, and cultural

1 preservation. We're an embedded part of the civic
2 infrastructure of our neighborhood.

3 I'm here to support investment in DCLA. It's
4 absolutely critical but also to make the case that
5 the cultural sector be seen as a professional
6 services partner who can be contracted to assist the
7 city in delivering on its goals for equity, community
8 engagement and responsive government.

9 Although NYC currently contracts for the arts and
10 culture sectors through a few agencies, there are
11 obstacles in the procurement system that make it
12 challenging for agencies to seek out arts and culture
13 partners or for artists in small cultural
14 organizations to participate. DCLL's PAIR Artists
15 and Residency program provides one model and I
16 support its expansion. But PAIR residencies can take
17 six months to scope and are among the most complex
18 ways artists could engage with government.

19 A program that is insuited to shorter and more
20 immediate projects. One thing we can learn from PAIR
21 projects is how many agencies use that residency to
develop new and creative ways to engage communities,
particularly those historically underserved. That is
core infrastructure work and it is exactly what

1 organizations like mine do at a neighborhood level.
2 Often using community art making, story telling and
3 engagement and local cultural traditions to advance
4 that work.

5 I believe it could open up new opportunities to
6 employ artists and advance city agendas by building
7 on partnership models between agencies, intermediary
8 cultural organizations like FAB and artists. To that
9 end, I recommend the Council convene a roundtable
10 with DCLA and community focused organizations like
11 mine. This working group would name the barriers,
12 artists and cultural organizations face in securing
13 city contracts. Define the role intermediary
14 organizations could play in mitigating those
15 barriers, identify agencies interested and ready to
16 contract for creative services and establish a clear
17 pathway for agencies to move forward with procuring
18 services from the arts and culture sector.

16 GONZALO CASALS: I'm Gonzalo Casals at Culture
17 and Arts policy Institute. Thank you Madam Chair
18 Williams and members of the Committee for the
19 opportunity to testify. Uhm, while the institute
20 supports the sector, would ask for increased funding
21 and for the Department of Cultural Affairs. Funding

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1 along these asks and I almost feel like I'm preaching
2 to the choir today because I'm going to talk about
3 data. Uh, you cannot hear me? Great.

4 Too many decisions in this sector are still
5 driven by intuition, drive and evidence. The city
6 administration's lack of transparency limits
7 oversight, distorts decision making and weakens
8 advocacy. This increased funding with real
9 transparency and meaningful access to data.

10 The Council philanthropy and cultural
11 organizations need this information to make informed
12 decisions. This is not only about the work that DCLA
13 does. This is about the work that we all do in this
14 sector.

15 A few examples: Last year, DCLA awarded almost
16 \$75 million to almost 1,200 organizations through
17 CDF. uhm, to answer your question Council Member
18 Brewer, you would need basically \$20 million more to
19 fund everybody that applies to CDF. The largest
20 location on record but without knowing the total
21 amount requested, this number means nothing, that it
makes contacts. Historically, CDF had about 60
percent of the total ask 60 percent of the total ask.
We still don't know what the total ask is every year

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1 and that would give us context to know how much \$75
2 million is or is not. We also know in about one in
3 six has improved rates on the numbers we just heard-

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, we still need a mic
5 still. This is so very crazy. Uhm, can you just
6 come here?

7 GONZALO CASALS: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, it works.

9 GONZALO CASALS: Thank you. Uhm, okay and again
10 context matters. Would the simple data points that
11 I'm going to share with all of you matter more if I
12 told you that more than 40 percent of applicants that
13 have budgets and there are \$250,000. Of the total
14 applicants of CDF, 40 percent, more than 40 percent
15 only have a budget of \$250,000. Little of us use our
16 salaries and how much it costs to live in New York to
17 contextualize how small those budgets are and how
18 precarious those organizations are.

19 If you look at organizations under a half a
20 million dollar budget, it makes 60 percent of
21 applicants, right. These organizations rely heavily
and sometimes almost exclusively impact public
funding. Again, a lack of the total information.

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1 For them inefficiencies to the lack of evidence based
2 policy is not abstract, it's existential.

3 The funding distribution based on data from prior
4 years, also reveals a structuring balance. The small
5 organizations that make up for 40 percent of rentees
6 receive only 26 percent of the funds right. And I
7 just want to make sure, this is not to shame anyone.
8 Data helps us all be better, right?

9 Organizations with budgets between \$1 million and
10 \$5 million represent 21 percent but receive 32
11 percent of the funding, right? So, we're seeing an
12 imbalance between sizes of organizations. Without
13 better data, we cannot assist these locations. We
14 are entering hopefully a new era for New York City as
15 this Administration likes to say and I hope there's a
16 new attitude towards data.

17 In addition to the Open Data Law that was passed
18 over a decade ago, thank you Council Member Brewer
19 for the efforts. Council Member Ossé passed a law,
20 Local Law 15, to improve transparency of DCLA. The
21 first and latest report was over a year late and it
omits three requirements that are extremely important
to access equity within the distribution of funds.
Demographic data and communities served, information

1 and organizational leadership and the breakdown of
2 funding by source, right. We still, when we get the
3 final disclosure of CDF, we cannot tell what's
4 Council initiatives and what is CDF money directly.

5 This is particularly concerning because the City
6 of Application already collects much of this
7 information that is needed for the report.
8 Applicants are defied you know who they serve, and
9 then defied their leadership and responsible
10 questions about the diversity of their staff.

11 This is not a data collection issue, the city
12 already gathers much of this information and is
13 simply not included. Our request is very straight
14 forward, yes increase the funding for arts and
15 culture but also require transparency and access to
16 the data the city already holds. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and thank you so
18 much to this very esteemed panel. I appreciate your
19 testimony and I will call the next panel. Oh, yes,
20 Council Member Brewer has a question.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I do have one question.
Just the issue of the housing, which is a big one.
What is a group or speaking for a group, the issue of

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1 artist housing. Is that something that you're
2 focused on? Obviously it doesn't come under the 30 -

3 EMILY DRABINSKI: Thank you for the question
4 Council Member Brewer. What I can say is that we are
5 very excited that Council Member Louis has
6 reintroduced the artist housing bill, which will
7 remove the barrier to having artist preference
8 housing. That is the first step in making sure that
9 we have housing for the actual workforce. The other
10 thing I will say is that there is a precedent for the
11 city and housing its workforce right? The Grand
12 Street projects and even on 23rd Street, the Lincoln
13 Towers were built as union housing, right? It was
14 built for the people who work here. We are one of
15 the industries that powers New York City and we need
16 to have our workforce able to live here.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.

16 GONZALO CASALS: That is the first priority to
17 artist housing. It is the way we pay artists. They
18 are independent contractors.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I know I'm aware. It
20 doesn't fit into Housing Connect at all. I'm aware,
21 thank you.

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1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Okay, bringing
3 back our friends at the library, Deborah, John,
4 Philip and George.

5 GEORGE OLKEN: Hi all. I'm George Olken, the
6 President of Local 1482, the Brooklyn Public Library
7 Workers Union. Good afternoon Chair Dr. Williams and
8 fellow Committee Members. Thank you for the
9 opportunity to speak on behalf of our members at
10 Brooklyn, Queens and New York Public Libraries. The
11 four unions representing New York City's Public
12 Library Workers are disappointed in the Mayor's
13 Preliminary Budget and has demanded that our three
14 systems cut their budgets by -(MIC NOT WORKING)

15 Okay, cut our budgets by \$1.5 - (MIC NOT WORKING)
16 appreciate you for being flexible, thank you.

17 Uhm, for the past many years, the Preliminary
18 Budget has threatened cuts to library funding, only
19 for those cuts to be restored before the final budget
20 is approved in June. The libraries are left with
21 stymied budgets and uncertainty, which prevents
necessary hiring. The local unions have participated
in this decades long dance by joining the library
administrations basically to beg for crumbs but in
good budget years and in bad, the libraries have not

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1 increased hiring. Public libraries are vital hubs of
2 democratic participation and the Mayor understands
3 this because during his campaign, he repeatedly
4 affirmed 20 commitments to stabilize and fund
5 libraries and to finally end the budget dance.
6 Unfortunately, the city's unsustainable budget
7 shortfall has forced the mayor to reassess this
8 commitment.

8 Right now, libraries are drastically
9 understaffed. Branches do not have enough children
10 librarians to provide programs, custodians to
11 maintain and clean branches, IT workers to provide
12 our growing IT infrastructure or clerical workers to
13 ensure branches operate. Without more workers, we
14 cannot keep up. If these library budget cuts are
15 enacted, if library budget cuts are not stabilized
16 and increased, this will result in reduced public
17 service hours and that will protect our physical and
18 mental health of our members who are stretched thin,
19 burnt out and struggling. Library union members
20 strongly support the mayor's commitment to universal
21 childcare, rent regulations that improve public
transportation along with our DC 37 members. We
support his call to tax millionaires and billionaires

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1 in order to pay for these important programs. We are
2 the very New Yorkers being crushed by the city's
3 affordability crisis. We need an affordable city.
4 We urge you to find a way, not for a one shot budget
5 bandaid, rather for a new path towards a lasting,
6 thriving, sustainable city. New York City needs more
7 libraries, not fewer but there can be more libraries
8 without library workers. Thank you.

9 PHILIP MACALUSO: Hello, my name is Philip
10 Macaluso, Vice President of Local 374. We represent
11 the custodians that work at the New York Public
12 Library. I just wanted to add just some real world
13 consequences of when we have deferred maintenance.

14 My custodians, our custodians bring to us
15 problems like they mop floors. There literally just
16 mopping a floor and tiles flip up and create uh, you
17 know unsafe conditions. It used to be that uh
18 custodians were only assigned one building but now
19 there's one custodian for two buildings, which means
20 they're traveling across the city. So, if there is
21 an unfortunate circumstance with humans in a restroom
perhaps. That those rooms are closed until we can
bring a custodian across the city to clean up things,

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1 which creates unsanitary, unsafe conditions and it
2 bank rolls from there.

3 So, I just wanted to add that uhm, you know it's
4 all the little things that just steamroll into big
5 unsanitary conditions that cause buildings to be
6 partially closed and all sorts of problems. So, I
7 just want to illustrate with those two little things
8 about what it means to defer maintenance.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much and I
10 appreciate all you do within the library systems and
11 look forward to continuing to work with you all to
12 improve conditions for workers.

13 PANEL: Thank you Dr. Williams.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Okay, now
15 we'll go to Imani Wiliford, Inricka Mendia(SP?), and
16 Lillian Young. Are they back? Okay.

17 LILLIAN YOUNG: Yeah, okay, good afternoon. My
18 name is Lillian Young. I am an artist, a part of the
19 DC 37 Union, the Family Programs Coordinator for the
20 Brooklyn Museum, a Board Member of the New York City
21 Museum Educators Roundtable.

I am here today to talk about the importance of
funding the arts and cultural institutions,
especially during these times when freedom of

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1 expression is being censored and attacked at federal
2 levels. During the last four years that I have been
3 at the Brooklyn Museum, and in my over ten years of
4 experience being an art educator, I have seen first
5 hand how big of an impact the arts have for children
6 and their families.

7 The family programs at the Brooklyn Museum are
8 made for intergenerational audiences with a focus of
9 families with children ages through 6. One of our
10 most popular programs is our Sunday art classes
11 families create that helps kids ages 4 to 6 consider
12 the intentions and agency in their own art. In the
13 past, this program consisted of 24 classes that were
14 offered throughout the year but due to the financial
15 hardships that we are currently facing, I had to cut
16 the program down to 9 classes for the year, so we are
17 only serving 42 of the original 280 families that we
18 used to serve.

19 Uh, I love this position. It helps - I love it.
20 I get to help people find their artistic voice, see
21 themselves in the museum and our collections and
connect in a way that they didn't realize was
possible. But in recent years with financial
instability at the museum, we have been given very

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1 contradictory directives to do more with less
2 resources. Working with financial instability is not
3 sustainable for artists like myself who run these
4 programs, nor is it sustainable for the Brooklyn
5 families we serve who deserve to have consistent
6 access to art education.

7 New York is a cultural hub of the world and every
8 time I have to tell a family that a program like our
9 stroller tours is cancelled. Because of budget cuts,
10 I feel that pain in the contradiction. Uh, our
11 museum gives so many people the chance to create and
12 engage with works of art from around the world and I
13 implore the City Council to fully fund and increase
14 the budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs.
15 Thank you.

16 IMANI WILLIFORD: Okay, hello. My name is Imani
17 Williford and I am a proud 4th generation New Yorker
18 who works at the Brooklyn Museum as the curatorial
19 assistant for photography, fashion, and material
20 culture. Growing up in Brooklyn and going to
21 publicly funded cultural institutions such as the
Brooklyn Museum significantly influenced my decision
to become a curator. As a part of my job at the
Brooklyn Museum, I help assist in developing

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1 collections and exhibitions that engage, educate and
2 address the distinct and diverse audiences of
3 Brooklyn in the city at large. I also help document
4 current trends in art, as well as underrepresented
5 areas of art, such as uhm, global Africa and its
6 diaspora and Brooklyn born or based photographers. I
7 act as a conduit between the public and art objects
8 through extensive research, writing, public programs,
9 tours, and the specialized areas of fashion,
10 photography. I also support scholars and other
11 museum professionals from around the world by
12 providing them information about the collection and
13 the museum's history.

14 I am so proud that my work ensures that Brooklyn,
15 my home town, has a world class art institution but
16 with the rising cost of living and student debt
17 impacting myself and my colleagues it is getting
18 harder to meet the demands of our profession. My
19 mother worked for the New York City Law Department
20 for more than 30 years. Due to the cost of living
21 crisis, she no longer lives in the city. I view my
work at the Brooklyn Museum and more importantly as a
DC 37 Member as an opportunity to give back to my
city by continuing the decades of civil servant work

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1 that put a roof over my head and clothes on my back.

2 Increasing funding for the Department of Cultural

3 Affairs is an essential commitment the city must make

4 to working New Yorkers like myself who have dedicated

5 our education and expertise to enriching our city's

6 cultural sector. Thank you so much.

7 ANTHONY GAMENDIA: Hello to the Cultural Affairs

8 Committee. Thank you for this time. My name is

9 Anthony Gamendia(SP?), I'm an Educator and Cultural

10 Programmer at the Brooklyn Museum, a proud member of

11 DC 37, Local 1502 for almost five years and I'm also

12 an artist. I work at the Brooklyn Museum because I

13 believe in the work we do and the possibility of

14 museum spaces, especially when they're brought to

15 life with people, with New Yorkers. And the Brooklyn

16 Museum could be many things. It's for Saturday, it

17 brings tens of thousands of New Yorkers free cultural

18 programming a year at a time when nightlife can be

19 prohibitively expensive and all people want to do is

20 be together.

21 Or it's the work that I and the rest of our

school programs teaching artists do to teach

thousands of students a year and from every borough

in our galleries and art studios. The Brooklyn is

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1 everyone that visits it and it's also all of us that
2 sustain it. Watch its galleries, keep it clean, put
3 in our exhibitions and bring the sense of commitment
4 that is needed to care for this 200 year old building
5 and run its programs, but more and more my union
6 colleagues and I are being asked to do more with
7 fewer resources and little recognition of this
8 reality. Reduced staff capacity due to attempted
9 layoffs has been felt across the Brooklyn Museum and
10 disproportionately by certain departments. Our
11 education and public program staff lost four union
12 educator positions due to attrition with no sign of
13 any of those positions being filled. Despite the
14 City Council providing additional funding to keep
15 staffing levels the same last year.

16 Since last spring, the museum has since hired
17 three executives but not a single full time educator,
18 yet me and my colleagues make up the work, teach
19 every class that comes to visit, and stretch every
20 resource we have to fulfill the very deep need for
21 art education in our community.

22 All this is to say that my teaching artists are
23 tired. My colleagues are tired, and the burnout is
24 here. And so, while we champion the education and

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1 public programs that make the Brooklyn Museum what it
2 is, it is vital to articulate that these are the very
3 programs that are consistently at risk whenever the
4 Brooklyn Museum and the Department of Cultural
5 Affairs has its budget reduced. It is us workers
6 that steward these programs who fill it the most.
7 Just as New Yorkers should be able to count on our
8 art classes and free programs, art workers and
9 artists should be able to count on this city and its
art institutions.

10 Too often, talented artists leave New York
11 because the money just no longer makes sense. It's
12 not sustainable and that's our loss. We all want to
13 be in a city where art thrives and so it is a matter
14 of prioritizing the artist and art workers that make
that possible with increased funding. Thank you for
this time.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and thank you so
16 much for all you do to support the cultural ecosystem
17 in New York City. Thank you.

18 PANEL: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, next up we have
20 Judith, Lisa Gold, and Erica or Eva Davis, Latinx
21 Arts Consortium.

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1 Hi, you can start.

2
3 EVA MAYHABAL DAVIS: Great, good afternoon. Uhm,
4 thank you Madam Chair Williams and members of the
5 Committee for this opportunity to testify. My name
6 is Eva Mayhabal Davis, I'm the Project Manager for
7 Latinx Arts Consortium. We are an intersectional
8 network of 54 Latinx serving organizations. Our
9 members include community groups, as well as CDF's
10 and CIG's, including programs that are one person run
11 festivals, all the way to historical spaces like
12 Flushingtown Hall. We envision a New York City where
13 Latinx arts and culture are fully funded. They're
14 deeply valued and celebrated as an integral part of
15 New York City's diverse and vibrant cultural fabric.
16 We host gatherings that foster knowledge exchange,
17 resource sharing and collective action towards
18 systemic change.

19 Along with the rest of the members on this panel,
20 our organizations are rooted, led by an accountable
21 to BIPOC and queer communities whose mission
programming and public role centered the historic
cultural expression and lived experiences of members
of these communities. We are also members of the
Cultural Equity Coalition led with my colleagues at

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1 the American Arts, Asian American Arts Alliance, the
2 Alliance of Resident Theaters New York, Dance NYC,
3 Indie Space- and Indie Space.

4 We are an organization and entities across
5 multiple artistic disciplines and racial communities.
6 Collectively, our members reach more than 1 million
7 New Yorkers a year.

8 Our organizations are grounded in the legacy and
9 mission of cultural equity groups dating back to the
10 early 1990s. That is 30 years in the making and
11 going on more. We strive to support the leadership,
12 prepare emerging leadership and amplify the stories
13 of our communities. Most recently Latina culture has
14 been in the spotlight if you recall that bunny at the
15 superbowl but with that, it was very quickly reduced
16 and attacked further proliferating permission for
17 hatred and intolerance. We are witnessing the
18 violent surveillance and stigmatization of entire
19 communities, simply for being. Simply for speaking
20 another language, simply for expressing who we are
21 and our cultural expression being policed and that is
not okay.

As the largest immigrant group in New York City
and the United States, Latinx communities experience

1 pressures shaped directly by immigration. Many
2 artists and cultural workers are immigrants or first
3 generation. New Yorkers navigate the workforce
4 precarity often facing discrimination, limited access
5 to benefits and barriers to public assistance.

6 Cultural organizations often become informal
7 support systems, workforce incubators and trusted
8 spaces within our communities where we can navigate
9 language, where we can bring up concerns and also
share our economic instability.

10 This labor is essential to the function of
11 cultural ecosystems. Yet it remains largely
12 unrecognized and of course unfunded. I am here to
13 join my colleagues in this sector wide ask to
14 baseline \$30 million additional dollars because this
15 is an investment in New Yorkers. An investment in
16 New Yorkers, an investment in immigrant New Yorkers
and an investment for all. Thank you.

16 Good afternoon Madam Chair and Members of the
17 Council. Thanks so much for the opportunity to
18 testify today. My name is Lisa Gold and I am the
19 Executive Director of the Asian American Arts
20 Alliance or A4 and a member of the Cultural Equity
Coalition. We are a 40 year old - for 40- for over

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1 40 years, A4 has worked to ensure greater
2 representation, equity and opportunity for our Asian
3 American artists and cultural organizations of all
4 disciplines. The only organization in the country
5 that does this. But I want to start with a question
6 for you. Can you name a famous Asian American?

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Lucy Liu.

8 EVA MAYHABAL DAVIS: Excellent. So, you are
9 actually uhm better than 42 percent of Americans who
couldn't even name one.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Uhm, oh my gosh, who's the
11 artist that did the Lewy stuff? Isn't that an Asian
artist, Murakami?

12 EVA MAYHABAL DAVIS: Oh, Takashi Murakami?

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, isn't that Japanese?

14 EVA MAYHABAL DAVIS: Japanese American, yes. Now
15 you get two but you know most people said? Most
16 people, they say Jackie Chan, who is not even
17 American and Bruce Lee, who is dead. Okay, so this
18 isn't just about celebrity though, it's about
19 visibility. It's about belonging and ultimately it's
20 about safety because when communities are unseen,
21 they are often unheard and underserved. So, that's
where culturally specific organizations come in.

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1 So, organizations like A4 create spaces where
2 artists and cultural workers of color are not only
3 supported but deeply understood. We build community,
4 provide resources, and create pathways to
5 opportunities so that the stories shaping our culture
6 actually and accurately reflect the people who live
7 here and yet, at a time when the federal government
8 is actively rolling back equity efforts and private
9 funding is shrinking, our city has to step up, not
10 step back. Instead, we're facing a lack of
11 transparency and persistent inequity. So, based on
12 DCLA funding information that I found and I dug up,
13 AAPI organizations receive roughly 5 percent of CDF
14 grants already below the share of the population that
15 receives grants but even more concerning, those
16 grants are on average 23 percent less than than the
17 normal grant.

18 And with no dedicated AAPI led or serving CIG,
19 less than 2 percent of cultural funding is allocated
20 to our community despite representing 18 percent of
21 the city population. So that gap is not just a
number. It's a lost opportunity and its silenced
voices. So, culturally specific organizations like
A4, LXNY, and the LGBTQ museum are essential

1 infrastructure. We ensure that artists can thrive,
2 that our communities feel seen and that New York
3 City's cultural landscape reflects its true
4 diversity.

5 So, I join my colleagues in supporting the sector
6 wide ask to baseline and incrementally increase the
7 \$30 million in arts funding and to take meaningful
8 steps towards equitable distribution across our
9 sector. Because when you invest in culturally
10 specific organizations, you're investing in a city
11 where everyone belongs, so thank you.

12 JUDITH INSELL: Okay good afternoon Chair
13 Williams and the City Council Committee Members that
14 are here today. My name is Judith Insell and I am
15 the Executive Director of the Bronx Institution that
16 has been around for 54 years and we annually provide
17 over 20,000 residents of the Bronx with free of
18 charge live performances, presented by professional,
19 local 802 Musicians. That's right, they're
20 professional, local 802 Union Musicians in multiple
21 genres that aim to provide culturally relevant live
events to the neighborhoods we serve.

So, we serve the entire borough of the Bronx. We
are creative placemakers. We do not have our own

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1 venue. We have venue partners. So, we serve every
2 single community in the Bronx. I join my colleagues
3 in the New York City arts and culture sector in
4 asking that the City Council restore and baseline
5 last year's \$30 million to the cultural budget and
6 that the baseline be indexed to automatically
7 increase with inflation annually. This is a really
8 important thing. We are not receiving increases to
9 meet the cost of actually running our institutions
each year.

10 These are - these asks are crucial to continuing
11 the work of the Bronx ensemble and thousands of the
12 other city cultural institutions committed to serving
13 New Yorkers. Each year thousands of Bronx residents
14 experience the Bronx arts ensemble's live
15 performances in their neighborhoods and they tell us
16 how much our performances have a positive impact on
17 their lives. Through our audience surveys, we
18 actually take audience surveys at every single
19 performance. Bronx citizens express gratitude to our
20 organization for providing them with a community
21 building experience that is healing, restorative
emotional effects are in their mind, body and spirit.
We are also aware that our concerts provide an

1 economic boost to local businesses in the
2 neighborhoods where we perform. Whether it's
3 audience members purchasing a snack at a bodega
4 before they go to one of our outdoor concerts in Van
5 Cortlandt Park or dining in an Italian restaurant on
6 Arthur Avenue before one of our concerts at
7 [INAUDIBLE 242:00] George. Our concerts are helping
8 keep Bronx neighborhoods. So, we are not only
9 supplying the neighborhoods and supporting the arts
10 and culture that's there, we're actually economically
11 supporting the local business.

12 Bronx Arts Ensemble is struggling with the
13 challenges of rising operating costs while striving
14 to remain on mission to provide free live music
15 performances. That is no cost to anybody who enters
16 or comes to any of our performances. No ticket cost
17 to them. A borough at the center of an affordability
18 crisis and we understand that. Without funding from
19 the Department of Cultural Affairs, Cultural
20 Development Fund, my institute cannot continue to
21 serve the Bronx with free services at all.

19 Bronx Arts Ensemble is just one example of
20 thousands of nonprofit arts and culture institutions
21 in New York City that need the City Council to

1 restore and baseline last year's \$30 million to the
2 culture budget while adopting a mandate. A mandate
3 that the baseline be indexed to automatically
4 increase with the inflation that we are facing every
5 single year.

6 I hope the City Council will receive my message
7 positively and respond to the sector's request for
8 the support we so desperately need to continue
9 meaningfully serving the citizens of New York City.
10 I'm sorry I took a little longer but -

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You did.

12 JUDITH INSELL: It's an important fact to
13 understand.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I know.

15 JUDITH INSELL: That the Bronx communities need
16 every single dollar of support that you put towards
17 it. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and thank you so
19 much for your testimony and I remind folks to stick
20 to the two minutes only because it's such a busy day
21 today. And I really do not like cutting you all off
as a person, it is very difficult for me. So, as I
extend you all grace, I ask that you extend grace
back by trying to the best of your ability to stick

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1 to two minutes because I personally do not like
2 cutting people off. So, if you can govern
3 yourselves, I would so appreciate it. Okay, next
4 panel. Thank you so much. Coco Killingsworth,
5 Stephanie Wiltchfort, Stephanie, did I say your last
6 name right? Wiltchfort. Okay, I'm going to get that
7 right. Norah Yahya, Nora's smart, she said, don't
8 mess up my last name. I'm going to give you the
9 phonetic spelling and David Freudenthal. I'm going
to get it together.

10 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Freudenthal.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Freud- oh like Sigmen and
12 Freud. Freudenthal, okay. Hi.

13 STEPHANIE WILTCHFORT: Hi good afternoon Chair
Williams. -

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I don't think it's on.

15 STEPHANIE WILTCHFORT: Good afternoon Chair
16 Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural
17 Affairs, Libraries, and Intergroup Relations. Thank
18 you so much for this opportunity to testify. My name
19 is Stephanie Hill Wiltchfort, I'm the Ronay Menschel
20 Director of the City of New York and I'm also Chair
21 of the Cultural Institutions Group.

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1
2 A coalition of 39 cultural institutions located
3 in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens,
4 museums and performing arts organizations and I'm
5 delighted to be offering testimony on behalf of the
6 coalition.

7 I would first just like to thank the Council for
8 prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing
9 a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million
10 baseline increase for arts and culture in Fiscal
11 2026. Your leadership and advocacy for our Culture
12 for All campaign in partnership with New Yorkers for
13 Culture and Arts was critical in supporting the vital
14 role of arts and culture in our communities, in
15 making our community safe, accessible and educational
16 for New Yorkers, as well as making the city more
17 affordable and improving quality of life for artists,
18 cultural workers and families.

19 CIG members have a deep commitment to ensuring
20 that access to culture is affordable for all New
21 Yorkers. Many of our organizations, including the
Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of
Natural History, Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of
the City of New York are free to New York City
residents. Our institutions are open and accessible

1 to everyone, welcoming over 4 million free visits
2 each year and providing safe, public spaces for
3 people of all ages and walks of life.

4 Each of our institutions expands its reach
5 through partnerships with city agencies and community
6 based organizations to provide a host of services
7 that compliment our core missions, including field
8 trips and teacher professional development for
9 hundreds of thousands of public school students and
educators annually.

10 Other partnerships have included providing COVID
11 testing and vaccination sites, facilitating food
12 distribution, implementing IDNYC and serving as
13 polling sites among many others. I'm just going to
14 say that we are asking for three things this year.
15 One is restoration and baselining of the \$30 million
16 in support that we received last year that was added
17 in the FY26 budget. If there is one number I want
18 you all to remember today, it is \$30 million.
19 Restore and baseline that \$30 million. It is
20 essential to keeping the sector strong and it is -
21 when we lose that funding, it is most damaging to
small community based organizations in our
coalitions.

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1 We're also going to ask for annual increases year
2 over year for the sector and we're also going to be
3 talking with all of you about capital projects
4 reform, a topic I know we all love very much.

5 So, with that, I'm going to turn it over to my
6 colleagues.

7 COCO KILLINGSWORTH: Greeting Chair Williams and
8 Members of the Committee. My name is Coco
9 Killingsworth and I am the Chief Experienced Impact
10 Officer at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, BAM. I'm
11 here to urge the New York City Council Committee on
12 Cultural Affairs and Libraries to increase funding
13 for the arts and cultures in the city's budget and to
14 baseline the \$30 million added at adoption last year,
15 so it becomes part of the permanent foundation, not
16 one time restoration.

17 When we talk about affordability in New York, we
18 are talking about equity, about who gets to stay and
19 who gets pushed out. Cultural institutions are part
20 of the city's civic infrastructure. We create stable
21 employment, activate commercial corridors, provide
gathering spaces and ensure that arts and culture
remain accessible to working families. When
institutions are destabilized by inconsistent

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1 funding, neighborhoods lose more than programming,
2 they lose anchors that contribute to economic
3 vitality and community cohesion.

4 BAM serves 700,000 people annually through
5 theater, dance, music, film, education, and community
6 programs. We employ workers across 8 daily working
7 unions and remain committed to affordability,
8 including offering one of the city's lowest movie
9 ticket prices.

10 Each year, more than 3,000 older adults
11 participate in our senior programs and BAM education
12 reaches up to 25,000 students, teachers and families,
13 partnering with nearly 225 schools, most in
14 underserved communities. Performing arts, venues,
15 and institutions in particular operate complex year
16 around facilities that require sustained investment.
17 Theater and performance spaces are not passive
18 venues. They are highly specialized environments
19 that depend on skilled union labor, advanced
20 technical systems, rigorous safety standards and
21 constant maintenance.

They serve as rehearsal hubs, educational sites,
community meeting spaces and economic drivers for
surrounding small businesses and unlike commercial

1 presenters, nonprofit performing arts institutions
2 balance earned revenue on public service mandate. We
3 keep ticket prices within reach, offering free
4 programming, and making space for community use.
5 Without public- reliable public funding, that balance
6 becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

7 If New York is to remain a place where culture is
8 made, not just consumed, affordability must be
9 treated as cultural policy. That means baselining
10 \$30 million added last year and increasing the
11 support to real operating costs so that performing
12 arts institutions can continue to serve as engines of
13 access, economic activity and civic identity.

14 Equity in the arts is not about access, it is
15 about sustaining the institutions that hold space for
16 community life across the generations. Without this
17 critical funding, New York will not be what it is.
18 Thank you for your leadership and this opportunity to
19 testify.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

21 NORAH YAHYA: Thank you to the Committee. Thank
you Chair for allowing me the opportunity to testify.
My name is Norah Yahya, I'm the Chief Government

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1 Affairs Officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and
2 the Manhattan Vice Chair of the CIG's.

3 As you heard today, arts and culture are not
4 optional in New York City. They are essential to its
5 identity, its economy and its daily life. They are
6 the life blood of this city, reaching into every
7 neighborhood, every borough and every community. The
8 MET holds more than 30,000 events annually and serve
9 learners of all ages and disabilities. We welcome
10 nearly 180,000 school children each year and adds to
11 the \$2.5 million annual student visits from the
12 CIG's.

13 Our work is deeply embedded across the city. We
14 partner with other 500 community based organizations
15 and collaborate with city agencies and institution.
16 We work with one-third of New York City Senior
17 Centers through our METS at box program, reaching
18 older adults across the city, many of whom are shut
19 in. We also provide nearly 100 paid internships
20 annually with 25 slots dedicated to NYCHA youth.

21 We have a teen program, obviously people have
heard of teens taking the MET but we also have drop
in Fridays and really appreciate collaboration from
our Council Members to make sure teenagers are aware

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1 of that and we can become a better third space for
2 our teens and youth.

3 The demand for what we do is clear. The MET
4 welcomed 5.7 million visitors last year and for the
5 second year in a row, local attendants exceeded
6 pre-pandemic levels, nearly half of our visitors are
7 New Yorkers. Many accessing the museum through our
8 pay as you wish model, which means you can pay as low
9 as a penny and I do believe our president just
eliminated pennies so it's free, okay.

10 In addition to that, we also do IDNYC, Blue Star
11 Families and those who qualify through SNAP benefits
12 also can enter the museum for free. We're grateful
13 for the Council's leadership in delivering a historic
14 \$75 million increase and \$45 million baseline but as
you've heard today, more is needed and necessary.

15 In order to sustain this work to continue our
16 commitment, we urge the Council to act as you've
17 heard by having the \$30 million baseline, providing
18 annual increases and also reforming the capital
19 process for once and for all. Cultural institutions
20 like the MET are not just destinations, we are your
21 partners in delivering on the city's goals from
education and workforce to public health, aging and

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1 community cohesion. We are proud to serve all New
2 Yorkers and proud to be in every corner of this city
3 and continued investments in arts and culture is an
4 investment in New York City itself.

5 Thank you all for your relentless advocacy as we
6 start this budget season. We look forward to
7 continuing this conversation.

8 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Deputy Speaker Williams,
9 Committee and Staff, thanks for the opportunity. I'm
10 David Freudenthal, uh, I am the Government Relations
11 Director at Carnegie Hall. I want to underscore the
12 requests and the call of actions by my colleagues in
13 this panel. Uhm, the \$30 million to baseline that.
14 The increasing, uhm an annual increase to keep up
15 with the cost of living and looking at the capital
16 process. You know that calls out. Those are things
17 that are doable in this year and I just want to also
18 just to say uhm you heard from us all about how
19 deeply we as CIGs believe in our compact with the
20 city, how seriously we take what it means to be
21 really in service to New Yorkers. To be meaningful
about that work and the Council has been real
partners to us in doing that. You supported us with
not just with this direct funding but also to Speaker

1 initiatives focusing on our work and wellbeing, our
2 work in the justice space, our workforce development
3 programs. Council Member Stevens spoke about the
4 need for focus on young New Yorkers and we think
5 about that work in terms of pathways to jobs. We are
6 serving three quarters of a million New Yorkers every
7 year with what we're doing. You've heard from our
8 colleagues about all that they do. Uhm, this would
9 not be possible without this partnership and we're so
10 grateful to be working with you all in it. Many
11 thanks.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: THank you and thank you so
13 much for your testimony. I look forward to
14 continuing to working with you all, specifically on
15 the capital stuff because I feel like we need to do
16 more there. So, thank you so much and have a good
17 day.

18 The next panel I'll call is Kathryn from the
19 Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, Angel from the New York
20 Botanical Gardens and Cynthia from El Museo del
21 Barrio. Museo, it's so hard. Boy, I took Spanish
for like four - no, I did Spanish all of high school,
in college, oh yes, welcome. Yes, practice makes
perfect.

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1 Hi, you can start.

2 KATHRYN GLASS: Now it is. Thank you for the
3 opportunity to testify on behalf of the importance of
4 what the city does with the cultural institutions.
5 My name is Kathryn Glass, I'm the Chief Public
6 Affairs Officer at Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which is
7 a deeply special place that's been rooted in this
8 city for about 115 years. And when you do a survey
9 of what makes Brooklyn Botanic Garden and other
10 gardens in our city different from Botanic Gardens
11 around the country and indeed the world, it is the
12 investment of the city which allowed us to begin our
13 legacy over 100 years ago with significant
14 investments in community and education. We rely on
15 that so deeply to serve our populations.

16 Today, we get about 900,000 visitors, over
17 300,000 of which come for free. We are supporting
18 over 150 community gardens as well as teen programs
19 and senior programming and programs for people with
20 disabilities.

21 I want to just echo what my colleagues have
already said in terms of the three primary requests
to baseline the \$30 million to index it against
increasing inflation and to streamline and make more

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1 efficient our capital programs ask. Thank you very
2 much.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

4 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon Chair Williams
5 and Members of the Committee. My name is Angel
6 Hernandez, Director of Government Relations for the
7 New York Botanical Garden. A proud member of the
8 Cultural Institutions Group, the CIG. I want to
9 thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak and
10 also thank you and your colleagues in the Council for
11 advocating the historic \$75 million increase and the
12 \$45 million baseline increase for the cultural sector
13 last year.

14 Our institution took root in the Bronx just as
15 the borough was entering an era of development and
16 growth. In this regard, we have always been a part
17 of the local community in efforts over time to seek a
18 better quality of life. In the case of affordability
19 in the Bronx community. In 2025, we welcomed over
20 200,000 New Yorkers for free, mostly from the Bronx
21 under our Bronx Neighbors Initiative.

Our Bronx community maintains partnerships with
hundreds of community gardens under the Bronx
Community Farmers Initiative, where fresh produce is

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grown at various sites and distributed to other sites
as food pantries.

On Webster Avenue, we've made investments in
affordable housing for seniors and families, bringing
over 650,000 units of 100 percent affordable housing.
As for career empowerment for the next generation,
our green ready - our Opportunities Workforce program
offers career readiness in training in horticulture
and landscape design for Bronx young adults. This
program will offer two certificates in each sector
and aligns with both industry and community needs
that offer career paths within the city, county, and
private organizations. The Sign Network Coalition
where NYBG along with seven other signs based CIG's,
offer valuable paid internships to 1,100 city high
schoolers every year to prepare them to meet emerging
challenges and drive innovation of the future.

All though these few examples provides insight
into NYBG's diverse efforts to make life affordable
and invest in the future of our city's youth. These
efforts cannot continue without a full restoration
and baseline of the \$30 million added in FY26 budget
to support DCLA and its entire arts and culture
sector.

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1
2 NYGB has enjoyed many years of partnership with
3 the City Council and remains grateful to your
4 collaboration and support. Thank you very much.

5 CYNTHIA CARRION: Good afternoon Chair Williams
6 and members of the Committee. My name is Cynthia
7 Carrion and I'm the Director of Government and
8 Community Affairs at El Museo del Barrio, a proud
9 member of the CIG and I'm also a proud New Yorker.
10 I'd like to thank the Council for prioritizing
11 culture and for its advocacy in securing the historic
12 \$75 million increase and the \$45 million baseline as
13 you heard from my colleagues. But most importantly,
14 it is affirming that culture is not a luxury in New
15 York City, it is essential infrastructure for our
16 communities.

17 Founded in 1969 by Puerto Rican parents,
18 educators, artists, and activists joined the civil
19 rights era and Museo del Barrio was created to demand
20 cultural representation and educational equity for
21 our communities. More than 50 years later, Museo
remains deeply rooted in East Harlem El Barrio,
serving as a cultural home for Latina New Yorkers.

While we welcome visitors from across the country
and around the world, our deepest responsibility is

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1 to the communities that surround us. Families,
2 youth, artists and elders from East Harlem and
3 throughout New York City come to Museo to participate
4 in exhibitions, public programs, cultural
5 celebrations that reflect their histories, language
6 and traditions. Programs like Uptown Bound,
7 [INAUDIBLE 262:09], our Three Kinds Day Celebrations,
8 bring thousands of New Yorkers together each year to
9 celebrate Latina art, music and cultural traditions.

10 Our community concerts and performances in our
11 570 seat theater, create space for artists and
12 neighbors to gather, perform and share culture
13 together.

14 Institutions like El Museo contribute directly to
15 the health, equity, and economic vitality to our
16 neighborhoods, supporting artists, educators,
17 creating welcoming space for immigrant and
18 multilingual communities and attracting visitors who
19 support nearby small businesses.

20 Initiatives like Gasa and Sugasa allow us and
21 other community based organizations across the city
to deepen our roots and impact in the city. So,
again, just to reiterate restore the baseline for \$30
million added for FY26, consider annual cost

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adjustments and improve the capital project process.
Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. I hope
you enjoy the rest of your day. Appreciate your
testimony and the consistency. You all are a
consistent bunch.

Sarah from Roundabout Theater, Rosalyn Barber,
Penn Genthner and Warren Elmore.

ROSALYN BARBER: Great, sure, hi, I'm Rosalyn
Barber from the New York Shakespeare Festival doing
business as the Public Theater. And I really want to
thank -

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Sorry, I just wanted to
make an announcement that the Council is crazy and we
have a lot of conflicts, and so, I actually have to
uhm, leave for a second for a meeting but my
colleague Council Member Farah Louis is going to take
over with Chairing right now.

ROSALYN BARBER: Oh sorry, okay great. Uhm, good
afternoon. Thank you so much for uh having me here.
I'm the Administrative Chief of Staff of the New York
Shakespeare Festival doing business as the Public
Theater. Uhm, as the City Council begins to access
its FY27 budget, I'm here respectfully to ask the

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1 City Council to restore and baseline the \$30 million
2 that was added in the FY26 budget and to support the
3 Department of Cultural Affairs and the entire arts
4 sector. And I'm also here to ask the Council to
5 support the public theaters request for a \$350,000
6 Speaker initiative item to help pay for the public
7 theaters free programming in all five boroughs.

8 Each year, the public theater serves over 150,000
9 New Yorkers with free programming through Shakespeare
10 in the Park at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park.
11 Our mobile unit, which has stops in all five boroughs
12 and our community pageant, our classes for seniors,
13 youth immigrants, military members, union members,
14 and more.

15 The free programming costs the public over \$10
16 million to produce in direct expenses every year, not
17 including the cost for full time staff,
18 infrastructure, salaries, benefits and the rest.

19 This year, we're requesting \$350,000 from the
20 City Council to help underwrite these programs. We
21 do that knowing that the city budget is tight but we
aren't looking for a handout. The city's creative
economy generates over \$110 billion each year, so
we're simply looking for a small reinvestment in

1 order to continue serving the people in the City of
2 New York with free, high quality, inclusive
3 programming. We, like you, believe that every New
4 Yorker deserves to be able to experience awe
5 inspiring live performing arts experiences that
6 transport them from the daily grind of living in this
7 city. We believe that these experiences shouldn't be
8 limited to folks who live in areas with proximity to
9 these productions and we don't believe they should be
10 limited to folks who can pay \$300 or more for a
11 ticket.

12 That's why we bring our programming to places
13 like Brownsville Recreation Center, Roy Wilkins Park
14 and Jay Hood Wright Park and we really hope that you
15 will consider this request so that we can continue
16 serving your communities and making these experiences
17 available.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much.

19 ROSALYN BARBER: Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: You may begin.

21 PENN GENTHNER: Thank you. My name is Penn and
I'm here with the Classical Theater of Harlem. I'd
like to thank our Chair and Committee. Your support
and the work you do to help the arts and culture

1 thrive is deeply appreciated. I'm here in New York
2 with the job I love in the theater because my
3 grandparents took me to see Broadway shows. One that
4 I saw with them Rad Time is enjoying a phenomenal
5 revival at Lincoln Center right now that I encourage
6 everyone to see.

7 As an impressionable 14 year old, that powerful
8 story of what America can be is in large part
9 responsible for how I understand and what I value
10 about citizenship and patriotism today. Individuals
11 drawn from all over to participate in New York's
12 legendary cultural sector consistently spend their
13 money locally. What we earn working at theaters, we
14 spend seeing more theater. We buy each other's books
15 and donate to each other's projects.

16 With New York's deeply interconnected cultural
17 sector, even with tiny organizations, art can be a
18 powerful economic amplifier. When CTH was able to
19 offer the city's first post pandemic theater with its
20 free outdoor performances, we sought to leverage
21 every connection we had to bring life back to our
streets and parks. Today, in partnership with uptown
Grand Central, when a coalition of hundreds of street
vendors, shots, restaurants and peer nonprofits,

1 we're able to activate our more than 30,000 visitors
2 to generate over \$600,000 in business for the
3 neighborhood in a single month. Because of the
4 lighting and sound equipment CTH brings to Marcus
5 Garvey Park each summer and shares with our peers,
6 more performances by other cultural groups are
7 possible during the month of our residency than at
8 any other time of the year.

9 With the wisdom of recent experience from the
10 pandemic, New York's cultural sector has banded
11 together for mutual support like never before and has
12 the power to overcome the challenges facing the
13 city's finances today.

14 The resources we share mean that public
15 investment resounds across the local economy, driving
16 physical industry and nightlife, making public spaces
17 safe and prosperous, increasing the value of real
18 estate and drawing tourism. Your support perpetuates
19 the legends of New York as the destination for a
20 young person who feels they have something worthwhile
21 to contribute.

Thank you again to the members of this Committee
who clearly understand the value of the arts.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you.

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PENN GENTHNER: I hope my words can be of use in
your important work.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin.

LAUREN BRITT-ELMORE: Good afternoon Members of
the Committee. I am Dr. Lauren Britt-Elmore. I am
proud to be the Executive Director of the Flea
Theater in Tribeca NYC, just four blocks north of
here. The Flea's mission, we support and invest in
experimental art by Black, Brown and queer artists.
We provide commissioned opportunities, mission
aligned residencies, subsidized rehearsal and
performance space and production support.

In the last five years, we've done so both in our
space and across the city. From the Bronx to Coney
Island, from the west side to Governors Island. In
2025 alone, the Flea directly supported 150 artists
and welcomed nearly 15,000 NYC audience members into
our space. For many of those artists, organizations
like ours are their entry point into New York's
robust and diverse cultural ecosystem, however, our
role is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.
Small theaters like the Flea are operating in a
climate where costs continue to rise, while
expectations for public outreach and artist support

1 continue to grow. We are often the most nimble and
2 responsive part of the sector, both artistically and
3 economically while we remain the most financially
4 vulnerable.

5 Public investment through the Department of
6 Cultural Affairs, allows us to continue doing this
7 work. City funding doesn't just support individual
8 programs, it stabilizes the organizations that
9 artists depend on. It ensures that New York remains
10 a place where artists can begin their careers, not
11 just sustain established ones. It's those emerging
12 artists who make New York the most interesting city
13 on earth.

14 As you consider the FY27 budget, I urge you to
15 increase funding for small and midsize theaters so
16 the New York City artists that Flea support, don't
17 just survive in New York but continue to define it.
18 Thank you. I'm excited for your leadership and
19 opportunity to testify.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. You
21 may begin.

SARAH MERCANTI: Thank you Council Member Louis
and esteemed members of this Committee for the
opportunity to testify today. My name is Sarah

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1 Mercanti and I am representing Roundabout Theater
2 Company. Founded in 1965, Roundabout celebrates the
3 power of theater by spotlighting classic works from
4 the past, cultivating new works of the present and
5 educating minds for the future. We operate and
6 steward in a grateful partnership with the City of
7 New York five historic theaters on Broadway and off
8 and in the heart of Manhattan's Theater district. We
9 employ 1,500 art theater and administrative staff
10 each year. Our productions reach approximately
11 400,000 theater goers each year. As part of New York
12 City's creative sector, we helped generate \$110
13 billion in economic activity and as part of the
14 Broadway community, we helped bring nearly 15 million
15 visitors to see a show last season.

16 We proudly foster artistic development through a
17 continuum of residencies and commissions that empower
18 theater artists at all stages of their careers and
19 Roundabout has also had a decades long commitment to
20 reducing physical, financial and cultural barriers to
21 the arts with programs like our signed interpreted
series, pay what you wish ticketing, and community
nights.

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1
2 Now in its 30th year, education at Roundabout
3 invests over \$4 million each year to serve
4 approximately 24,000 New York City Public School
5 students, teachers, aspiring theater technicians, and
6 administrators and lifelong learners. We achieve
7 this through a robust portfolio of teaching and
8 learning initiatives, community partnerships and
9 workforce development programs.

10 Roundabout relies on the city's support to serve
11 thousands of New Yorkers each year and keep the arts
12 at the heart of our civic life. We are deeply
13 thankful to DCLA, City Council, MOME, SBS, and the
14 HRA for their long time support of our Landmark
15 Theatrical Workforce Development program. Today,
16 TWDP has trained over 150 New York City residents in
17 technical theater careers backstage. 86 percent
18 continue to work in the field and 16 percent have
19 joined a theatrical union.

20 Together with our colleagues, we encourage the
21 City Council to deepen the city's FY27 investment in
arts and culture by baselining and indexing last
year's \$30 million add fully funding City Council
initiatives like CASA and streamlining the cultural
capital process.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you.

SARAH MERCANTI: Thank you so much.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Alright, this panel is now
excused. Thank you so much for being here and for
your testimony. Now, we're going to hear from one of
our youngest champions in the art world, Melody
Emerson-Simpson. Ready? Of course, come on down
Melody. Did you submit a slip? Are you Abby?
Great, alright, Melody, if you go turn on your
microphone, that little button there in the middle
and you may begin your testimony.

MELODY EMERSON-SIMPSON: Hi, my name is Melody.
I am here to testify about the libraries and how the
libraries need money.

Last year, Mayor Mamdani made a promise that he
would give the libraries 0.5 percent of the budget.
Budget is one of my spelling words in school this
week. So, now I'm like, why is Mayor Mamdani
breaking his campaign promise? New Mayor, same
problem.

I love my library and when I was younger, it
closed down for two weeks. I totally lost my head.
I think this shows that the libraries are important
to me. Libraries need money so they don't close for

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1 real and a lot of people become sad. In my library,
2 we only have one bathroom and no water fountain. The
3 money needs to help pay for improvement in the
4 libraries. It would be cool if the library had
5 enough money for more programs for younger kids and
6 not just teens.

7 In conclusion, I think that the library should
8 get more money. I hope that this Council will work
9 with Mayor Mamdani to make that happen. Bye.

10 DR. ABBY EMERSON: Let's give it up for Melody.
11 Great job. Tough act to follow. Uhm, good
12 afternoon, my name is Dr. Abby Emerson. I'm a New
13 York City educator and I'm here today as a member of
14 NYC PLAN, the Public Library Action Network, which is
15 a group of patrons and library workers organizing
16 together to amplify, strengthen, and progress the
17 futures of New York City's three public library
18 systems.

19 At the moment, the proposed libraries budget sits
20 at 0.39 percent of the overall city budget. This is
21 woefully inadequate for multiple reasons. We have
been asking for a stable 0.5 percent for multiple
years now. This is a fair and reasonable ask. For

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1 this coming cycle, that would translate to \$635
2 million that the libraries so desperately need.

3 The mayor campaigns as we heard with the platform
4 of meeting that 0.5 percent but has since stepped
5 back from that. And the current 0.39 is even less
6 than last year when we were under the Adams
7 Administration, which was at 0.42.

8 Nationally, our public goods are being stripped
9 away at every turn and we have an obligation to
10 ensure that does not happen at the local level. Too
11 often libraries are taken for granted but the complex
12 work they do both technically behind the scenes and
13 socially in their communities is essential.

14 I personally find libraries one of the most
15 emotionally moving spaces in our city, where else is
16 everyone truly welcome without payment. Despite the
17 magic they somehow pull together, as a patron, I want
18 more from my library. I often visit libraries when I
19 travel to other places and I'm struck by the
20 creativity of their offerings. I can only imagine
21 what New York City Library workers could do with a
properly funded budget.

I know I would benefit, my kids would benefit and
we all would benefit too. So, I'm asking once again

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1 just like last year, that we commit a stable and
2 baseline 0.5 percent for libraries in this budget
3 cycle and every budget cycle. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. This
5 panel is now excused. Thank you so much for being
6 here and for testifying. Thank you Melody.

7 Our next panel is Francine Garber-Cohen, Risa
8 Shoup, that's cute, I like that. Uhm, Hue Rose
9 Evans, and Jay Hawk. You may begin.

10 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: To your members of New
11 York City Council, I am Francine Garber-Cohen,
12 President and Producer of the Regina Opera Company.
13 For 56 years Regina Opera has offered year around
14 free and ticketed fully staged operas and ticketed
15 and free consults in Southwest Brooklyn.

16 Regina Opera performances are places where
17 thousands of Brooklyn residents, many of them
18 retirees, are able to meet friends, getting them out
19 of their houses, where many live alone. Regina Opera
20 provides affordable entertainment for audiences who
21 may not otherwise attend live opera performances.
Some of them are on fixed budgets and cannot afford
the tickets to the Metropolitan Opera. But in order
to provide these services, Regina Opera, like other

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1 arts organizations, means increased support from the
2 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Our
3 company participates in many free cultural activities
4 hosted by the Sunset Park, Business Improvement
5 District, the Third Avenue Merchants Association in
6 Bay Ridge and the Bay Ridge Arts and Cultural
7 Alliance among others. These events not only reach
8 low income and underserved music lovers especially
9 senior citizens who make up over 65 percent of our
10 audience but they also bring new and existing
11 customers to these neighborhoods. Additional
12 audience members increase the visibility and income
13 of the local stores and restaurants and they generate
14 tax money to New York.

13 We at Regina Opera depend on grants such as the
14 one from New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
15 to meet our budgeting needs especially for the free
16 performances. The cost of these productions keeps
17 rising, therefore we request that the New York City
18 Council add \$30 million to the budget for culture and
19 we request that the dollar amount automatically
20 increase annually with the percentage of inflation.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much.

20 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Thank you.

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COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: You may begin.

HUGH ROSE EVANS: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Hugh Rose Evans and I'm speaking today on behalf of the American LGBTQ Museum, in support of its FY27 DCLA Cultural Development Funding renewal request. The museum provides public educational programs exploring the achievements and lived experiences of LGBTQ people in all five boroughs in New York City.

Last Fiscal year support from the Development Fund allowed us to pilot a new program series. The Queer Legacies Project, which is a series of four archiving workshops with LGBT elders at Sages Edie Windsor Center in Chelsea. These workshops were an incredible success serving over 125 registrants and we're proud to say we're successfully continuing the project this fiscal year. Having launched our first session of queer legacies at Sage Center Harlem last week.

We plan to bring the project to more senior centers in the Bronx and Brooklyn in future years. This year, the museum is requesting the renewal of our FY26 funding and an increase to \$100,000. We recognize that this request is more the museum has

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1 got before but it represents the scale of our
2 expanding scope of services. Funding for FY27
3 programs will support our entire season of programs,
4 allowing us to produce recurring educational events
5 and cultural partnerships in all five boroughs and
6 this includes our monthly legendary literary society
7 bookclub, our partnership with the Leslie-Lohman
8 Museum, our Reverb Performance partnership with Long
9 Island City's cultural lab, our annual film screening
10 with New Fest LGBTQ Film Festival and our annual June
11 Pride Festival Activations including a marching
12 contingent of NYC Pride of LGBTQ workers from
13 galleries, libraries, archives and museums.

14 These New York City series are just one part of
15 the more than 50 public programs we produce annually
16 across the nation. And these services are essential
17 to building trust and public awareness with our
18 museum. We need your help to maintain the growth.
19 We are humbly asking committee members to advocate
20 for the museum to your fellow colleagues, helping us
21 to increase our cultural development funding to
\$100,000 in FY27.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you.

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HUGH ROSE EVANS: I sincerely thank you for your
time.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin.

RISA SHOUP: Good afternoon Council Member Louis
and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the
opportunity to testify today. My name is Risa Shoup
and I serve at the Chief of Operations for the
American LGBTQ+ Museum. I'm also a member of the
Steering Committee of the Cultural Equity Coalition
and a proud queer parent of a New York City Public
School student who is thriving in so many ways
because of her access to arts and culture as one of
our youngest New Yorkers. My colleague Hugh spoke to
you about the museum's programming and I'm here to
talk to you about the critical need for data
throughout the cultural sector.

New York City is home to the largest LGBTQ+
population in the country, more than 700,000 people
and that number continues to grow. Nearly one in
five young people in the State of New York now
identifies as LGBTQ+. Nationally, that number is
approaching one in ten adults. This is not a small -
we are not a small or static community. We are a
significantly expanding and future defining part of

1 our city and yet there is a persistent gap between
2 who we are and what is resourced.

3 LGBTQ+ communities, especially transgender,
4 nonbinary and those folks who are also members of
5 communities of color continue to face
6 disproportionate barriers to access and
7 disproportionately lower access to resources that
8 they so sorely need. And these inequities extend to
9 the cultural sector where funding has not yet kept
10 pace with either the scale or the diversity of our
11 communities.

12 At the American LGBTQ+ Museum, our mission is
13 grounded in a simple but powerful idea, that LGBTQ+
14 people deserve to tell our own stories in our own
15 voices and on our own terms. But we cannot do that
16 work well or sustainably and no culturally specific
17 institution can without intentionable, equitable
18 investment and transparent data because what isn't
19 counted isn't funded and what isn't funded isn't
20 seen. And at this time, it is cultural nonprofits
21 who are developing data sets but we need support from
you, the New York City Council and the Department of
Cultural Affairs to access our data. We're calling
for a cultural funding ecosystem that reflects the

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1 full breadth of New York City's communities. One
2 that prioritizes transparency and how funds are
3 allocated.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much.

5 RISA SHOUP: Thank you so much.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin.

7 JAY HAWK: Hello Council Member Louis and the
8 Committee. I'm a long time citizen, first time
9 testifier and I come to you as a government liaison
10 from Japan Society. So, I appear before you today to
11 beseech you in your capacity as the Council Committee
12 on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
Relations to hold the line for the fiscal '27 budget
at last year's level at a minimum.

13 The past year has seen a profound contraction in
14 federal funding for arts and culture nonprofits, in
15 addition to the outright loss of funds, the very
16 volatility of federal funding has wreaked havoc with
17 many New York City nonprofits, surely these two facts
are not new to you.

18 Our organization, Japan Society was able to
19 weather these storms due in part to the exceptional
20 support of the DCLA whose Cultural Development Fund
21 allocation actually increased slightly year over year

1 from '24, '25. So, we're very grateful to the
2 Council for restoring funding and also to the DCLA
3 who extended that funding to many nonprofits across
4 the city. So, now we are faced with another budget
5 crisis, which will surely challenge your Committee to
6 reduce funding to the DCLA and the CDF. Let me be
7 very clear why I think that is a mistake. Of course,
8 I may quote many statistics that support my
9 perspective, by demonstrating for example, that the
10 arts contributed over \$120 billion to the state
11 economy, support directly nearly half a million jobs
12 in the metro region but to me, these data points miss
13 a central argument and uh, evade entering the most
14 fundamental question we must ask, which is why
15 support the arts at all?

14 In 1997, I was a young film critic in Seattle
15 where I conducted an interview with a famed Russian
16 filmmaker, Alexander Sokurov. And as part of that
17 interview, I posed a bombastic question. I said, why
18 make art at all? What is the purpose of art? And
19 he, without skipping a beat, answered, isn't the
20 point of art to make people softer and gentler and
21 more human?

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1 That answer profound in disimplicity seems to me
2 well worth bearing in mind as you make the sausage of
3 the budget for Fiscal Year '27. We as a city, as a
4 nation, and as a peephole are more desperately in
5 need of softer, gentler, more human interactions and
6 art is the avatar of these aspirations.

7 There you go. Thank you very much.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. This
9 panel is now excused. Thank you for being here. The
10 next panel, Sarah Mercanti, Roselyn Barber, Penn
11 Genthner, sorry if I butchered that and Lauren
12 Elmore. I'll do it one more time. You did this
13 panel already? Oh, okay.

14 Alright, we'll pivot, Marlene Ramirez, Concio -
15 go ahead girl. Uh Raquel Du Toit, okay. I got a
16 little French. Uh, Aya Hayashi, Hayashi, beautiful
17 and Sandy Luna, Sandy Luna, she's right here, okay,
18 perfect. Okay, you may begin.

19 UNIDENTIFIED: We're getting ourselves sorted.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: I see. This is a
21 beautiful panel. Who is starting first?

SANDIE LUNA: I am.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Perfect, you may begin.

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2 SANDIE LUNA: Good afternoon. Thank you Council
3 Member Louis and Members of the Committee for the
4 opportunity to testify. My name is Sandie Luna, I am
5 an immigrant artist and the Executive Director of ID
6 Studio Theater in the South Bronx. We're a company
7 making original Spanish language and bilingual
8 theater from within our immigrant community for the
9 last 25 years.

10 We have called the South Bronx our home for more
11 than a decade and our award winning work has traveled
12 from here to [INAUDIBLE 289:18] to see that - What is
13 into the Car, to name a few.

14 Along with my fellow panel members I testify as a
15 member of the Coalition of Theaters of Color, a
16 network of organizations rooted in and accountable to
17 communities of color across New York City and the
18 Cultural Equity Coalition of New York. Together
19 representing more than 3,300 arts organizations and
20 over 100,000 artists.

21 Our CTC grant last year supported six original
22 productions and we reached 4,000 people directly. It
23 made possible [INAUDIBLE 289:51] co-produced with the
24 Clemente Center, where performers were directly hired
25 from the Randall's Island Migrant Shelter. No

1 additions, no auditions, no bureaucratic barriers.

2 We went to where our newest neighbors worked with
3 their stories, their images, their voices, creating a
4 space that welcomed them as artists and allowed the
5 rest of us to see them as something more than what
6 they had endured. This is the kind of work our
7 organizations make possible every single day.

8 Theater builds community, community builds civic
9 life. CTC funding unlocks possibilities within our
10 communities. These are funding dollars that multiply
11 in measurable and immeasurable ways.

12 The Coalition of Theaters of Color was among the
13 first cultural initiatives this Council created,
14 paving the way for many that followed. Those
15 programs have grown. CTC has not. No increase since
16 2021 despite adding 13 organizations to the
17 coalition.

18 The communities we serve are certainly resilient
19 but they are on the frontlines of this political
20 moment. We are asking you to protect them. At its
21 core, our work and yours are aligned, building a city
where everyone, every community has a stage, every
story has a home.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much.

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SANDIE LUNA: Thank you so much. This investment is long overdue, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yes, preaching to the choir. Who's next? You may begin.

AYA ESTHER HAYASHI: Dear Council Member Louis - oh, let's turn this on. Dear Council Member Louis and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Aya Esther Hayashi and I am the Development Director of the Peoples Theater. Where we create theater with and for immigrant communities to build a more just and equitable world.

Through productions, free arts education programs and advocacy, we serve over 2,500 artists and audiences annually, rooted in the belief that immigrants telling their own stories can change hearts, minds and policy.

Thanks in part to a \$25.7 million capital investment by the city, we are on the cusp of opening Central Local Drought in Grunda, a state of the art 20,000 square foot center dedicated to the immigrant experience.

Today, I testify as a member of the Coalition of the Theaters of Color and the Cultural Equity

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1 Coalition. Together we serve more than one million
2 New Yorkers each year. We see everyday how artists,
3 cultural workers, CBO's, funders, and policy makers
4 are interconnected. When one part of this ecosystem
5 is under-resourced, entire communities lose access to
6 cultural opportunity, economic activity, and creative
7 expression.

8 When equity is prioritized, neighborhoods thrive.
9 While my colleague Sandie and I represent two
10 immigrant centered organizations, the CDC initiative
11 funds 63 arts nonprofits including Legacy Black and
12 indigenous organizations. It is one of the few
13 initiatives to support these groups who are core to
14 our city's cultural history.

15 I join the sector wide ask today and urge the
16 Council to increase the CDC initiative to \$8 million
17 in the FY 2027 budget. For context, the law
18 establishing CDC allows us to use these funds for
19 general operating support but because it's
20 administered through DCLA, we are confined to using
21 the funds as program support. This modest \$2.3
million increase would put CDC organization grants by
nearly 30 percent and serve as a cost of living
increase after being stagnant for five years.

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1 We also ask the Council to restore flexibility so
2 organizations can use these funds to sustain their
3 operations, build capacity and support workforce
4 development. This allows us to serve New Yorkers
5 more richly, more abundantly.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. You
7 may begin.

8 MARLENE RAMÍREZ-CANCIO: Buenos dias Is this on?
9 It is. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My
10 name is Marlana Ramirez Cancio and I am artistic and
11 Co-Executive Director of BAX, Brooklyn Arts Exchange,
12 a multigenerational arts incubator that has supported
13 artists for 35 years through residencies, education
14 and affordable rehearsal space. I'm also a part of
15 the Cultural Equity Coalition like my colleagues.

16 How does an artist become an artist? Artists
17 don't just appear. Along with my colleague and
18 others in the room, we are art services organizations
19 that provide infrastructure that nurture artists
20 across their full life cycles. We are the connective
21 tissue of the cultural ecosystem. Our work is often
invisible, less like the skin and more like the
veins, carrying support, resources and relationships
that keep the system alive.

1
2 One of our artists and residents for example,
3 shared that BAX was the first place where she felt
4 believed in, not for what she had done but what she
5 might do. She developed her work at BAX, premiered
6 at a major venue and is now on tour. That kind of
7 sustained support is what allows artists, thousands
8 of them across our coalition, to stay in New York and
9 build a life here.

10 Unlike presenting organizations, service
11 organizations don't rely on ticket sales, and much of
12 our work isn't public facing. It's ongoing and
13 relational. We maintain studios, run residencies and
14 offer long-term support that is essential to the
15 artistic process but often harder to fund because
16 it's less visible. We're facing rising costs across
17 rent, staffing, healthcare and materials, while
18 philanthropic and federal funding becomes more
19 unstable and as you know, this is especially true for
20 those of us who support BIPOC, queer, migrant and
21 disabled artists.

18 As Dance NYC's data shows, arts workers are
19 already among the most economically vulnerable in the
20 city. Art service organizations make it possible for
21 artists not just to become artists, but to sustain

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1 their practice. We want a city where artists and
2 cultural workers can live, work, play, and stay.
3 Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: You may begin.

5 RAQUEL DU TOIT: Is this on? Uhm, thank you
6 Council Member Louis and the Committee for the
7 opportunity to testify today. My name is Raquel Du
8 Toit and I am the Executive Director of Dance NYC.
9 Our organization serves and represents the estimate
10 of over 6,000 dance workers and over 1,000 - I mean
11 1,700 dance entities in our city. And we do
12 advocacy, regranteeing and knowledge sharing.

13 As Marlene explained, art service organizations
14 or ASO's are vital lifelines for the 326,000 New
15 Yorkers who work in the creative sector. By building
16 deep relationships, we serve as a vital bridge
17 between complex funding ecosystems and that of the
18 working class vogue artists that create spaces of
19 queer belongings or the immigrant auntie keeping folk
20 dance traditions alive between hospital shifts.

21 And the need here is outstanding. 63 percent of
New York artists don't have cash to cover a \$400
emergency. Our spade of dance 2023 report found that
despite the inherent risks of dance work, 37 percent

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1 of dance workers don't have health insurance, 64
2 percent support their work from their own pockets and
3 the gap that service organizations are being asked to
4 fill is only growing wider. Also, the affordability
5 crisis inequities for working class and marginalized
6 artists keep growing. Yet the current funding
7 ecosystem leaves service organizations like ours
8 struggling, forced to do more than declining sources.
9 The highly responsive yet invisible nature of our
10 work means that project based funding model designed
11 for presenting organizations do not work for us. We
12 are asked to compete for the same pool of funding as
13 the people and organizations we are serving,
14 undercutting the stability of that ecosystem.

15 That is why we support the sectorwide ask to
16 baseline the \$30 million addition but beyond that, we
17 need a separate funding process for service
18 organizations with general operating support so that
19 we can serve and not compete. We need the city
20 partnerships also to serve our artist constituency.
21 Working collaboratively for portable benefits and for
art space subsidiaries. The city must view art
workers as service providers and necessary workers.
Thank you very much.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. This panel is
3 excused. Thank you so much. Now, we'll hear from
4 Trenton Price, Britney Bellinger and Nicole Tosia.
5 You may begin. Yeah, you can begin.

6 TRENTON PRICE: Can you hear me? Okay. Thank
7 you Council Member Louis and Chair Williams and
8 Members of the Committee. My name is Trenton Price,
9 I'm the Executive Director of the Salvadori Center.

10 At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services
11 that's STEM plus the A for arts and architecture to
12 schools, afterschool sites in NYCHA community centers
13 across the five boroughs. For context, last year,
14 Salvadori served over 12,000 students in 178 sites.

15 We are grateful to have the support of the
16 Council through multiple CASA digital inclusion and
17 literacy grants, as well as the afterschool
18 enrichment and speakers initiative at numerous NYCHA
19 sites across the city.

20 At Salvadori, we have seen first hand the impact
21 of investing in arts and arts education for cultural
access programming for young people. For example,
our residencies explore and have kids creating
community models that reflect their values or
monuments that are important to them and their peers.

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1
2 Amplifying student voices is one of the most
3 important things that a creative education can do.
4 Having worked in arts education now for two decades,
5 I know that it is often one of the first things to
6 get cut when funding gets tight but to the contrary,
7 schools and cities that know the true value of arts
8 and arts education know that tight times are when we
9 need to double down on the arts. A recent study with
10 NYU showed that Salvadori students showed increased
11 self efficacy up to a year after our residency.

12 What could be more important than a young
13 person's belief in their ability to succeed than
14 which impacts motivation, effort and persistence.
15 Investing in arts and arts education is an investment
16 in our future. We applaud the city for their
17 increased investment in the Cultural Development Fund
18 and ask it be baselined. We also ask that the
19 Council expand the CASA program which has been flat
20 for a number of years despite growing need from young
21 people after school.

22 I thank you for facilitating this hearing and for
23 your commitment to supporting the young people in the
24 arts and culture of our city. We at Salvadori are

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grateful to be of service to New York City's
children. We stand ready to do more. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. You
may begin.

BRITTANY BELLINGER: Good afternoon Council
Member Louis and Members of the Committee. Thank you
for all that you've done for supporting the arts and
allowing me to testify today.

My name is Brittany Bellinger. I am the Director
of Programs and Innovation Museum Hue. It's a New
York City based member driven art service
organization dedicated to advancing equity in the
cultural sector. Arts and culture as you know are
essential to New York City. They shape our
identities, preserve our histories and drive our
local economies but just as important is who is being
supported within that ecosystem.

At Museum Hue, we work with and represent arts
organizations founded and led by Black, indigenous,
Latinx, Asian and all people of color. These
institutions are deeply rooted in their communities.
They are spaces of story telling, education and
cultural preservation. But despite their impact they
continue to face systemic barriers to funding and

1 access to government resources. Many operate with
2 far fewer resources than larger institutions, even
3 while serving communities that are historically
4 under-represented. Through our Hue-wide and cultures
5 research we are documented this landscape and the
6 need is clear. These organizations are vital to a
7 more complete and accurate cultural narrative in New
8 York City but they cannot continue to operate on
inequitable footing.

9 We urge the city to increase equitable funding
10 for organizations of color, expand access to grants
11 and resources, invest in leadership development and
12 support the pathways to stable long-term space for
13 these institutions. Organizations of color have long
14 been resilient and innovative often in spite of
15 chronic underinvestment. With equitable support they
can continue to thrive and serve the communities that
make New York City what it is. Thank you so much.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin.

17 NICOLE TOUZIEN: Good afternoon Council Member
18 Louis and members of the Committee. Thank you for
19 the opportunity to testify. My name is Nicole
20 Touzien and I am the Executive Director of Dancewave.
21 Dancewave is a 30 year old dance education

1 organization with a community center in Brooklyn and
2 service spanning all five boroughs. Our programs
3 foster a safe and welcoming environment for creative
4 expression, facilitate multicultural exchange that
5 fosters deep community building, opens doors for
6 careers in the arts, and promote physical, mental and
7 social wellbeing that contributes to the improved
8 health and vibrancy of our city.

9 Thanks in part to this Committee's focus,
10 advocacy and the city's investment. Dancewave is
11 empowered to provide no and low cost programming to
12 over 6,000 individuals of all ages and backgrounds
13 each year.

14 With city funding, we are able to ensure that
15 everyone who wants to participate in our programs
16 can. Simply put, this funding transforms lives. As
17 we look ahead to the Fiscal 2027 year budget, I join
18 my colleagues in the following request. First,
19 restore and baseline last year's \$30 million addition
20 to the culture budget.

21 Second, index the baseline so that it
automatically increases with inflation, allowing us
to provide living wages for cultural workers. Third,
streamline the capital funding process for culture

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1 for greater ease and efficiency, holding a hearing so
2 that Council Members can understand the issues. And
3 fourth, increase funding for the coalition of
4 Theaters of Color initiative to \$8 million to reflect
5 the now 63 participating organizations facing rising
6 costs of operations. Baselineing \$30 million in
7 cultural funding is critical for sustaining our
8 impact, volatile funding levels impede staffing,
9 program development and direct service at small,
10 community based organizations like Dancewave where
city funding plays an outsized role.

11 Like many organizations here today, Dancewave
12 faces no shortage of challenges. The city's
13 investment in our work should not be one of them.
Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. This
15 panel is now excused. Thank you for your testimony.
16 We'll now hear from Ira Dutchman, Doria Gosma, and
17 Simon Salinas Junior and Gabrielle Gatto. Gabrielle
Gatto, Simon, Doria and Ira.

18 Okay, when you begin your testimony, if you could
19 restate your name, okay. You may begin.

20 GABRIELLE GATTO: Good afternoon members of the
21 Council. I'm Gabrielle Gatto, Manager of Public

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1 Programs at the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn but we
2 are not just a cemetery, we are a national historic
3 landmark at a mighty 478 acres, who are a cultural
4 space. We host concerts, dance performances, walking
5 and tours and even an artist and residents program.

6 Most recently, our death education offerings,
7 programs surrounding death, dying, grief and loss,
8 have become our most popular events. Our grieving
9 and leaving program combines the arts with process
and grief. We meet once a month at no cost.

10 In 2005, we saw over half a million visitors, a
11 testament to having our gates open seven days a week
12 free to the public. This spring, one month to the
13 day, we will open our new visitor center. A restored
14 19th century greenhouse and addition gallery,
classrooms and a flexible space for cultural
15 programming. We know that the Council is interested
16 in expanding access on this front, especially new and
unconventional spaces.

17 Although we are in one borough, our resources and
18 landscape are for New Yorkers and members of all
19 five. We invite you to visit us. Our gates are
open. Thank you for your time.

20

21

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COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. You
may begin.

SIMON SALINAS JUNIOR: Good afternoon members of
the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to
testify today. My name is Simon Salinas Junior and
I'm the Development Associate at the Peoples Theater,
a member of the Coalition of Theaters of Color and
Cultural Equity Coalition.

At the Peoples Theater, we create theater with
and for immigrant communities to build a more just
and equitable world and through our work, we aim to
counter the pervasive anti-immigrant narratives in
this country while cultivating socially engaged
artists and leaders.

Today, I urge the Council to increase the
Coalition of Theaters of Colors Initiative to \$8
million in the FY 2027 budget. The CTC initiative is
a critical source of support for theaters of color
like us across New York City. Many organizations
have experienced reductions or elimination in CDF
support, making CTC funding an essential source of
stability for artists, cultural workers and community
programming.

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1
2 At the Peoples Theater, CTC funding has supported
3 our professional productions that centered the
4 immigrant experience. Specifically with this
5 funding, we have served approximately 170 artists and
6 4,000 audiences across the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens
7 and Manhattan over 8 years. This modest \$2.3 million
8 increase will put CTC's organization grants by nearly
9 30 percent, which is the minimum of what is needed to
10 increase the capacity and stabilize our
11 organizations.

12 After moving to NYC from Texas, I feared I would
13 find the culture that felt hard, cold and distant.
14 Living in Washington Heights has shown me the
15 opposite. I have seen first hand how organizations
16 like the Peoples Theater make this city feel
17 welcoming, vibrant and alive. I have seen how access
18 to theater, arts education and advocacy strengthens
19 communities and reminds us that people that they
20 belong. This impact matters deeply in neighborhoods
21 like mine, where culture and community are
inseparable. We ask the Council to increase the CTC
initiatives to \$8 million in FY 2027 and restore
flexibility so organizations can use these funds as
they need to best serve our communities. Thank you

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1 so much for your time and consideration for this
2 request.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin.

4 IRA DEUTCHMAN: I'd like to thank the Council for
5 this opportunity to testify. My name is Ira
6 Deutchman, I'm representing the Uptown Film Center, a
7 new nonprofit that believes in the power of film to
8 educate and to bring people together.

9 Upper Manhattan has become what we call a cinema
10 desert which is why along with the support of the
11 stated New York and over 700 individual donors, we've
12 purchased the long shuttered Metro Theater on 99th
13 and Broadway in Manhattan and planned to build a five
14 screen independent cinema arts and education center
15 to serve a neighborhood that really needs it.

16 The five zip codes that are within 1.5 miles of
17 the theater have a population living below the
18 poverty line that ranges from 7.8 percent in 10024 to
19 30.6 percent in 10027. Approximately 35 percent of
20 that population speaks a language other than English
21 at home, including 22 percent who speak Spanish.

The area around the theater has Manhattan's
largest concentration of post COVID empty
storefronts. Nonprofit independent cinema venues,

1 such as the one we're trying to build have proven to
2 boost local economies, drive foot traffic, support
3 local businesses and create jobs.

4 While we're working to build this facility, we've
5 been offering a sample of our programming as guests
6 in whatever auditoriums we can find. We're grateful
7 to Majority Leader Abreu for the grant we received
8 for our science on screen series, which is currently
9 going on right now. Uhm, also, we've begun pilot
10 programs in neighborhood schools. The first took
11 place this fall in 5th grade classes at PS 84 and
12 we're currently applying to DCLA for a grant to
13 expand that program.

14 We appreciate your continued support for our
15 programming and our educational programs and we hope
16 the City of New York can play a large part in helping
17 us raise the \$29 million we need to build out the
18 facility. Thank you very much.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. This panel is
20 now excused. Thank you for your testimony. Next,
21 we're going to hear from Akia Squitieri. Sorry if
I'm butchering that, I can't read the name. What's
the name? Got it. Uhm, David Johnston, Miriam
Dalaei. Are you coming on her behalf? Okay. We

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1 just need a slip. Miriam, NoMad Jazz Festival.

2 Okay, we just need a slip from you. You could come
3 and then we'll get the slip. What's your name?

4 David, wait I have you David. I have you David but
5 Miriam is not here? Okay and uh Suzette Brown Simon.
6 Suzette Brown - all of that. Come on down. Thank
7 you. Thank you.

Thank you, you may begin.

8 AKIA SQUITIERI: Good afternoon Council Member
9 Louis and the Committee. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify. I thank you for your
11 advocacy this morning at the budget hearing. My name
12 is Akia Squitieri and I'm the Executive Director of
13 the Bronx River Art Center, located in the West
14 neighborhood of the Bronx. We are a tiny but mighty
15 organization, which for nearly four decades has
16 served the Bronx as a hub for arts education,
17 emerging and professional visual arts exhibitions,
18 performances, community engagement, environmental
19 stewardship along the Bronx River and professional
20 artist development.

21 Last year, we welcomed over 5,000 community
members to classes, exhibitions, performances, that
fostered mentorship, collaboration and professional

1 growth and served 1,300 youth in free arts
2 programming.

3 Our programs are primarily tuition free or low
4 cost designed for the neighborhoods that we directly
5 serve, where 27 percent of our residents live in
6 poverty and where access to high arts, high quality
7 arts education is limited. We empower Bronx youth to
8 see themselves as creative leaders and support local
9 artists and community members in sustaining their
10 artistic careers. We provide access and exposure to
11 arts in neighborhoods that are traditionally
12 underserved and overlooked.

13 But organizations like ours faced a constant
14 challenge. As already mentioned by many of my
15 colleagues in the sector, we face rising costs,
16 staffing limitations and alienating facilities
17 without predictable stable funding. This is why as a
18 sector and as an organization, we're asking the
19 Council to take four critical actions for the city's
20 cultural sector.

21 As you've heard today, restore the baseline of
the \$30 million added to last year's cultural budget.
Stable funding allows organizations to plan, retain
staff and sustain programs.

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Second, index that baseline to inflation, right materials and staffing costs continue to rise and cultural organizations need support to keep in pace.

Third, reform the capital funding process. Capital projects as already discussed can take anywhere from six to ten years. Our organization is an example of that.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much.

AKIA SQUITIERI: Increase the Coalition of Theaters Color Initiative to \$8 million. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin.

DAVID JOHNSTON: Thank you to the Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is David Johnston, I am the Development Director for the Jazz Gallery. My colleague Miriam Dalaei Fodera, a Festival Director for the NoMad Jazz Festival had to leave.

The Jazz Gallery presents over 380 concerts a year to an in person audience of over 17,000. We've been bringing top quality jazz to New York City audiences since 1995 and we just celebrated our 30th anniversary. We offer free tickets each month to students at the Institute for Collaborative Education. The South Bronx Charter School for

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International Culturals and the Arts, free concerts in Hudson Yards in the financial district.

Last year through Culture Pass, we distributed 468 free tickets to New Yorkers. We offer low cost memberships to students, professional musicians and veterans. In 2025, we partnered with the Flat Iron NoMad Partnership, the NoMad Alliance and the Madison Square Park Conservancy for the inaugural NoMad Jazz Festival. This festival, which took place in Madison Square Park in August '25 attracted 70K visitors per day.

New Yorkers enjoyed free world class jazz with Ravi Coltrane, Lizz Wright, Brandee Younger and newer emerging artists. We share the City Council's Commitment to affordability for artists and audiences alike and we're also proud to be a long time grantee of DCLA.

Dr. Williams, since you have returned to us, I found a quote of yours I liked very much. The fact that the overwhelming majority of grantees offer free or subsidized programming underscores the importance of public funding in keeping cultural access affordable and accessible for New Yorkers. We thank you for that. We are asking for the City Council and

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1 the Speakers Office to support the NoMad Jazz
2 Festival. We are also asking for a restoration of
3 \$30 million in baselined support. Thank you very
4 much.

5 SUZETTE SIMON: Hi, thank you. I'm happy to be
6 here. My name is Suzette Simon.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Your mic.

8 SUZETTE SIMON: I'm sorry, my mic is not on? Oh,
9 okay great, hey. Hey, that's important. Hi, so uhm
10 yeah, hi. Thank you. I'm happy to be here. My name
11 is Suzette Simon and I am the Founder of NY Laughs, a
12 comedy nonprofit founded in 2007. We believe
13 punchlines make a better NYC and I like to think of
14 myself as basically NYC's local LOL dealer. We
15 produce free stand up in public spaces, think
16 Shakespeare in the Park but with more Heckler than
17 fewer tights. We call it Laughter in the Park.

18 We believe a laughing New Yorker is a better New
19 Yorker and honestly, a less terrifying one but we
20 won't talk about that. You know especially on a
21 stalled F-Train but uhm we actually make the NYPD
laugh, so basically think of us as public safety in
some regards.

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1 I started NY Laughs with a mic, a sign, and a
2 healthy amount of delusion in Tompkins Square Park.
3 19 years later we've produced shows in over 20 parks
4 in green spaces and reached more than 30,000 New
5 Yorkers and visitors from every walk of life and work
6 with many New York institutions including the Irish
7 Caucus of the New York City City Council. Thank you
8 CM Powers, okay, Assemblyman Powers and yes, we're
9 funny but we're also very serious about the work.
10 We're deepening the role of stand up as a vital
11 cultural asset in the city. We receive support from
12 NYSCA, DCLA, and partnering with institutions like
13 Lincoln Center, Pier 57 and Battery Park City
14 Authority.

15 We've also received discretionary funding,
16 including from a republican, Borelli, because it
17 turns out jokes pole well everywhere. We bring
18 people together and after the successful launch of a
19 festival last year at Union Square, we received
20 Speaker funding but because everybody's last speaker
21 funding doesn't come with a group chat. So, we are
here asking for \$150,000 because we want to actually
reach 50,000 New Yorkers. We want to start a comedy
festival that is similar, a circuit like there is a

1 comedy festival in Montreal that is in July and then
2 Edenborough brings in over more people than FIFA in
3 September, in uh in August. So, we want to start
4 bolstering a comedy festival in Union Square.

5 Union Square is great because it's a great you
6 know not only do you have great audiences but uhm
7 it's a great place for New Yorkers to find an
8 emotional support pigeon.

9 Thank you so much for everything. I have - I
10 have some flyers for you and a lot of enthusiasm.
11 The same sort of enthusiasm you get after you
12 survived a [INAUDIBLE 318:52]. So, yeah, thank you
13 so much. I love you guys.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Don't you want to explain
15 your outfit?

16 SUZETTE SIMON: Oh, this is my -oh, I'm laughing
17 apple that's why. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh. Oh, New York Laughs.

19 SUZETTE SIMON: I want to turn the Big Apple into
20 the Laughing Apple.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

SUZETTE SIMON: Yeah, that's right. It gets
blown up. I didn't - I'm on Ozempic, so you know.
So, it affects costumes too.

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CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: GLP-1. Okay, thank you so much.

SUZETTE SIMON: Yeah, okay great.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Appreciate you.

SUZETTE SIMON: Do you want the flyer?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, can the Sergeants take the flyer. Thank you so much.

SUZETTE SIMON: Because I see you all are all funny inside, deep inside. Marte has performed, maybe this year?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Let me know.

SUZETTE SIMON: Yeah, okay.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Reach out to my office. Okay, next panel is Maricio Delfine, Caron Atlas, Deeksha Gaur, Edward Panlin and then please correct me. I love to be corrected so I can say people's names correctly. You may begin.

EDWARD HAMLIN: Hi, I wrote Edward Hamlin but I'm actually Ned Hamlin, President of the American Guild of Music Artists, the Union of singers, dancers and stage staff in opera, dance and concert performance. But first and foremost, I'm a working artist who actually just rushed here after a dress rehearsal of La Traviata at the MET Opera. Thank you for the

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1 opportunity to speak. Surrounded by so many who
2 share a commitment for the arts. I want to
3 specifically emphasize the critical situation faced
4 by the nonprofit performing arts. Where downward
5 trends and federal funding and private donations
6 present escalating challenges and by its artists who
7 struggle every day with increasing cost of living in
8 New York and beyond.

9 Nonetheless, organizations in this city continue
10 to thrive artistically. To name just a few, the METs
11 production of Tristan und Isolde, which I performed
12 in last night, has received critical acclaim and sold
13 out houses. Voices of a sanction continues to bring
14 world class choral music to the village and now under
15 a contract that makes their seniors key partners in
16 the company. And Dance Theater of Harlem opens its
17 57th season next month and its first in decades under
18 a union contract and DTH is one of several New York
19 organizations and artists who are forced to withdraw
20 from their engagements at the Kennedy Center.

21 Artistic excellence is vital to the city and that
opera alone generates \$1.3 billion in economic
activity and the creative industry all together
contributes as much as 13 percent to the city's total

1 economic output. But the arts that give so much to
2 this city need support, which is why we are asking
3 along with so many other folks here, uhm for a
4 baseline \$30 million increase in funding with annual
5 increases for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

6 Of course, as President of the Union and as a
7 Central Labor Council Delegate, I'm also here to
8 stress that our arts funding strategy must center
9 artists and provide good jobs, safe jobs and secure
10 jobs, which usually means union jobs that have the
11 protections of a collective bargaining agreement.
12 Union jobs close conventional wages and equities by
13 also providing artists the security to report
14 instances of discrimination and harassment and to
15 stand up for themselves on the job.

16 New York is a vibrant artistic hub. Thank you
17 for your continued advocacy in preserving that
18 funding for the arts. Thank you.

19 CARON ATLAS: Good afternoon. I'm Caren Atlas, I
20 direct Arts and Democracy and Naturally occurring
21 cultural Districts New York, which is a citywide
alliance and uhm, I'm just going to ditto the sector
requests for the \$30 million baseline increases for
inflation and a greater commitment to equity

1 including \$8 million to the Coalition of Theaters of
2 Color.

3 I also believe that funding for Arts and Culture
4 should be part, should be a greater part of other
5 city agency budgets given all that the arts
6 contribute to the city. And that includes DOT,
7 Department of Health, SBS, who have all supported us
8 and others. Uhm, I'm sharing with you, NOCDNY is
9 reimagining New York City recommendations, which are
10 grounded in equity and in this holistic approach.
That's the little booklets.

11 Two days ago, arts and democracy joined the
12 cultural partners and Council Member Shahana Hanif to
13 host our community IFTAR in Kensington Brooklyn, a
14 diverse immigrant neighborhood. In spite of the
15 rain, more than 400 people showed up. This joyful
16 event in its 10th year exemplifies why arts and
17 culture matter and why this should be well supported.

18 In a time of polarization and hate crimes, it
19 brought communities together including Muslim and
20 Jewish neighbors, in a time when they feel
21 overwhelmed and paralyzed by the news, it offered an
opportunity to connect, belong and know we could make
a difference.

1
2 It highlighted the voices and creativity of
3 Muslim women artists and nuances of their cultures.
4 Neighborhood youth who grew up with this program got
5 jobs which will continue throughout the summer as we
6 animate our local plazas.

7 And to go back to our question that came up about
8 four hours ago at the hearing, no, we haven't
9 received our funding yet for this program. We're a
10 tiny organization and fronting that money is very
11 difficult and also uhm for eight months, uhm we were
12 funded by CDF and Cultural Immigrant Initiative,
13 which is an incredible program but it is very hard
14 for small organizations to front the money for eight
15 months of their programming. Thank you so much.

16 DEEKSHA GAUR: Thank you Chair Williams and
17 Committee Members. My name is Deeksha Gaur and I am
18 the Executive Director of Theater Development Fund or
19 TDF, a nonprofit that is focused on affordability and
20 access to the performing arts for nearly years.

21 You may know us through our iconic TKTS booths in
Time Square and Lincoln Center. I am here to join my
colleagues and urging the city to restore and
baseline \$30 million to the budget of the Department
of Cultural Affairs.

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1 With support from the CDF, TDF served 1.3 million
2 New Yorkers and visitors last year from all 51
3 Council Districts, including students, veterans,
4 older adults, people with disabilities and arts,
5 healthcare, education and government workers.

6 I want you to imagine for a second 1,000 people
7 sitting in a room together, their hearts beating,
8 literally as one. That is exactly what happens when
9 people attend the arts. They relax, they engage with
10 new ideas, they experience joy and catharsis. This
11 connection to their humanity makes them more likely
12 to vote, to volunteer and to contribute to their
13 communities.

14 The arts have an outsized impact on both
15 individual wellbeing and community health. At TDF,
16 we believe our collective work is not done until
17 every New Yorker feels belonging in the performing
18 arts. And to advance this, we have requested Council
19 support including allocations from the Speakers list,
20 the Autism Awareness Initiative, and the Veterans
21 Community Development Initiative.

TDF cannot do this work alone. We welcome your
partnership in expanding access and reaching more
communities across the city, either through

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1 introductions to community partners or in support of
2 your own initiatives to make the arts more accessible
3 for our city's residents.

4 New Yorkers deserve both bread and roses, to live
5 well and to thrive as happier individuals and
6 healthier communities.

7 On behalf of TDF, I thank you for your time.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much.
9 Appreciate you all for your patience. I know it's
10 been a long day. Okay, next panel, Libertad Guerra,
11 Ana Beatriz Sepúlveda-Echegaray, Barb - Echegaray.
12 Okay and Barbara Bryan already right? Oh, you're
13 here, yay okay.

14 ANA BEATRIZ SEPÚLVEDA-ECHEGARAY: Thank you madam
15 Chair Williams and Members of the Committee for the
16 opportunity to testify. My name is Ana Beatriz
17 Sepúlveda-Echegaray and I am the Co-Director at
18 Performance Space New York, formerly PS 122 in the
19 East Village. I'm testifying today as a member of
20 the Partners and Cultural Stewardship Coalition. An
21 emerging coalition of nonprofit cultural
organizations that steward and activate public facing
cultural facilities across New York City through long
standing partnerships with public agencies. Our

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1 members for civic and historic spaces operate venues
2 that remain open and accessible to public and provide
3 programming that serves New Yorkers across boroughs,
4 generations, and communities.

5 Reunited by a shared commitment to stewardship,
6 access, equity and collaboration, as well as a clear
7 understanding that public, private partnership is one
8 way the city delivers arts and culture at a
9 meaningful scale.

10 We represent organizations that do far more than
11 present programs. We care for public spaces,
12 preserve civic assets, support artists, educators,
13 students and community partners and create places
14 where culture, learning and civic life can take root
15 across generations and publics. The testimonies you
16 are about to hear from my fellow coalition members at
17 the Clemente, Movement Research and Dance Theater of
18 Harlem, some impact metrics of this scale and public
19 value, we bring our combined 250,000 square feet of
20 city owned cultural space. Roughly 450,000 New
21 Yorkers and visitors from beyond the city are reached
annually and upwards of 500 full time and part time
workers are employed annually across member
institutions.

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Our coalition stewards theaters, galleries, dance spaces, artist studios, rehearsal spaces, and offer programs such as major performances, exhibitions, youth arts education, artist residency etc..

It is a privilege to occupy and steward the city on buildings but we need additional support to sustain them and the people that look after them. Thank you.

LIBERTAD GUERRA: Thank you Chair Williams and members of the Committee. My name is Libertad Guerra and I am the Executive Director of the Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center. The Clemente is a longstanding cultural and neighborhood anchor of the lower east side providing direct support of artists, independent producers and small arts organizations. We steward a 100,000 square foot historic building. We sustain a year around ecosystem that includes 46 subsidized studios, four theaters, two galleries and outdoor public space while advancing affordable access through artist support, community partner and all of the programs and festivals. Besides being members of this stewardship coalition, we are also part of the cultural equity coalition that testified earlier. In

1 addition to the challenges faced by all organizations
2 in the sector, these coalition members face unique
3 challenges. Our situation is not only the legacy of
4 the pandemic, it is the conversions of three ongoing
5 pressures that are destabilizing cultural stewardship
6 of city owned buildings across New York City.

7 The first one is inflation. That has raised the
8 cost of nearly everything nonprofit organizations
9 need to operate, utilities, insurance, maintenance,
10 supply, security, transportation and labor. These
11 are the same pressures affecting small businesses
12 across the country but for cultural organizations,
13 they are compounded by public service organizations,
14 aging facilities and limited flexibility to absorb
15 this rising cost. New York City's affordability
16 crisis, we all know, is affecting not only
17 individuals and families, but also the institutions
18 that hold neighborhoods together like ours.

19 Yes, this is part of the solution. We are part
20 of the solution of the affordability crisis. We
21 provide deeply subsidized multiuse space, venues to
cultural producers and community groups and artists
but sustaining those low costs has too often come at
a price. Deferred maintenance in facilities that are

1 constantly in need of repair and renovation and a
2 pressure of staffing and benefits that are forcing us
3 to absorb expected building cuts from already
4 strained operating budgets.

5 BARBARA BRYAN: Hello, hello, thank you Madam
6 Chair Williams and members of the Committee. I'm
7 Barbara Bryan, the Executive Director of Movement
8 Research, also a member of the Partners in Cultural
9 Stewardship Coalition.

10 In addition to stewarding city assets, which are
11 the engine of economic development and opportunity
12 for our neighbors and communities. We contribute
13 greatly to the social wellbeing of our fellow New
14 Yorkers. This matters because our organizations do
15 far more than operate buildings. We steward public
16 cultural spaces that function as sites of learning,
17 gathering, artistic development, memory and
18 neighborhood life.

19 Across the coalition, these spaces include
20 theaters, galleries, dance studios, classrooms,
21 rehearsal spaces, artist studios, archives and
flexible community venues.

They support a broad range of public services,
performances, exhibitions, arts education, youth

1 development, artist residencies, preservation,
2 interpretation and civic gathering. We serve
3 children, families, youth, students, neighbors,
4 seniors, residents, public school communities,
5 working artists, cultural workers, researchers, and
6 visitors from across the city and beyond. We also
7 serve communities that have too often been excluded
8 from sustained cultural investment, including Black,
9 Latino, immigrant, multilingual and low-income
10 communities, as well as artists and audiences seeking
11 affordable, welcoming places to create and to
12 participate.

13 What makes this coalition distinct is not only
14 the scale but the depth and continuity of what we
15 provide. These are standing programs and long term
16 public resources. Harlem stages Waterworks
17 Commissioning Series and Emus, now running for more
18 than 25 years, have created an enduring platform for
19 artists and audiences. Bronx River Art Center is
20 Bronx River Sounds connects performance to
21 neighborhood based cultural life in the Bronx.

At the Clemente, historians and the way the New
York chronicle citywide initiatives advance a public

humanities model rooted in Latinx history and
community knowledge.

While the International Puppet Fringe Festival
and the resident Cama Tiato Cio, one of the city's
anchor bilingual children's theaters, bring
international and bilingual programming to families
and young audiences. Dance Theater of Harlem, sorry
- thank you.

GWENDOLYN KINGSBERRY: Thank you Madam Chair
Williams and members of the Committee for this
opportunity to testify. I'm Gwendolyn Kingsberry and
I am the Director of Community Engagement and Arts
Education at Dance Theater of Harlem. A leading
dance institution that comprises of a multicultural
valet company of local acclaim and a world class
training school in arts, education, and community
outreach programs.

I want to close our combined testimony by
speaking on what a stronger partnership that the city
should now make possible. The city already invests
in many of our organizations through project based
grants. Energy reimbursement and capital allocations
but those tools were not designed to meet the full
operating realities of stewarding public cultural

1 assets. What is needed now is a more intentional
2 stewardship strategy, one that matches the public
3 function these organizations already perform on the
4 city's behalf. The strategy should include practical
5 mechanisms that the city can develop in partnership
6 with coalition members. A shared repair and step of
7 the stabilization fund for urgent building needs that
8 do not rise to the level of major capital projects
9 but cannot be absorbed by nonprofit operating
budgets.

10 Expanding access to shared services and group
11 rate systems that could lower the cost of insurance,
12 health coverage, retirement benefits and other
13 essential expenses and a more coordinated interagency
14 approach to the facilities workforce and compliance
15 challenges that come with caring for public facing
cultural buildings.

16 This is not about treating cultural organizations
17 as isolated grantees. It is about recognizing them
18 as long term stewards of civic access and building
19 the systems to support the responsibility. A
20 stronger framework will protect public facilities,
21 reduce the long term cost of deferred maintenance,
stabilize the workforce that makes these services

1 possible, and allow organizations to direct more of
2 their limited resources toward artists, audience,
3 students and neighborhoods. Our call is for the city
4 to recognize cultural stewardship as a public systems
5 issue and to develop the tools that recognition
6 requires. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you all so very
8 much, both for your patience and your testimony and
9 for all you do within your wonderful organizations.

10 Final in person panel, Jacqueline, Joyira or
11 Jovira Cabrera, how do you say it? Oh, the second
12 one I did it right Jovira. Molly from MoMA and DJ
13 McDonald. Oh wow, okay so you'll go in the next
14 panel. Yeah, sorry about that. I don't know what
15 happened. You can begin whomever.

16 Hello, can you hear me? Okay, great. Uhm, good
17 afternoon. Thank you Dr. Williams and Council. My
18 name is Jovira Cabrera and I'm a New York City
19 Educator, a doctoral candidate in research and Latino
20 family engagement and bilingual early literacy
21 programs and a parent of two young children who
regularly visit the Queens Public Library.

The Queens Public Library system is central to
both my personal and my professional life. As a

parent, I visit local branches with my children to attend cultural events and to access diverse books that reflect our communities, the languages and identities.

Participating in the Kickoff to Kindergarten series was transformative for my family. I learned a lot of greeting strategies that strengthen how I engage my own children. In their nightly reading routines and deepen my confidence as their first teacher.

As an educator and a researcher, I have also seen how the Queens Public Library serves as a trusted community hub with culturally and linguistically diverse families where they feel welcomed and empowered.

Queens Public Library does more than lend books. It builds school readiness, provides bilingual resources and ensures families have access to high quality early learning experiences regardless of income or language background. Libraries, like the Queens Public Library are public institutions that advance equity and opportunity.

When we fund libraries, we invest in our children's futures. When we fund libraries, we

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1 support immigrant families. When we fund libraries,
2 we strengthen our communities. If we truly believe
3 in these priorities then our budgets must reflect
4 this commitment by fully funding our public
5 libraries.

6 JACQUELINE: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair
7 Williams, Committee Members, thank you for having me.
8 Is it still on? Can you guys hear me? Alright, my
9 name is Jacqueline and I'm a Queens Public Library
10 Patron. The library is important to me for several
11 reasons. However, before I speak of them I must
12 begin by saying that my interest peaked in the
13 services of the library. When I volunteered as an
14 adult basic education tutor at the Rush Dale Village
15 Library. I was deeply encouraged even elated when I
16 witnessed a student's progress. The moment they
17 realized they could read, their faces lit up. Their
18 country dance and persona improved and they looked
19 forward to their next class.

20 The Public Library is also important to me
21 because of the many opportunities it has afforded me
and the members of the community as well. I utilize
the computers. I also read the newspapers. In
particular the New York Times. I especially

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1 appreciate that most libraries have book clubs and
2 I'm a member of the Laurelton Literary Society.

3 In the near future, I hope to learn how to play
4 chess, which has been offered at the Cambria Heights
5 Library. I also learned to paint at the library and
6 have some of the art work is now being exhibited at
7 the Cambria Heights Library. I particularly like
8 that I was able to participate in a defensive driving
9 class and for the past two years I have my taxes done
at that library, thanks to the Alliance with AARP.

10 Additionally, I can't emphasize enough how
11 beneficial the work of the Queens Public Library
12 Civic Engagement department has been to me. I
13 thoroughly enjoy the leadership programs, which have
helped me to become a better leader and communicator.

14 The benefits that the public libraries offer are
15 enormous, however, increased funding is essential to
16 expand programming across our libraries. Greater
17 resources would allow for the development of
18 additional opportunities for teens, including
19 financial literacy workshops, mentorship initiatives,
20 and other enrichment programs designed to equip them
21 for the future.

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1 With sustained and increased support, libraries
2 can continue to grow, not only as centers of learning
3 but as pillars of guidance and community empowerment.
4 Thank you.

5 DJ MCDONALD: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker,
6 Chair Dr. Williams, and staff. My name is DJ
7 McDonald. I represent the Dance Parade for purposes
8 of this hearing, which we invite you to be part of on
9 May 16th as we do it for the 20th annual - this will
10 be the 20th annual parade and festival. It would be
11 my honor to have you as our guests, any of you, all
12 of you. As well as our friends from the libraries.
13 I'm here to support the ask that you've heard from
14 many of my colleagues that the Council baseline the
15 \$30 million that was added to the cultural budget
16 last year that that be indexed so it automatically
17 increases with inflation, that the process for
18 capital funding be streamlined and that the funding
19 for the Coalition of Theaters of Color Initiative
20 should be increased to to \$8 million to reflect the
21 greater number of organizations this year. But more
importantly I'm here to support but I think we've
begun as a partnership with the Council. That has
persisted over many years but now can take on a new

1 dimension. If we believe in investing in culture as
2 one of the things that anchors the population in the
3 City of New York, increases its tax space and brings
4 in tourists from all over the world and that
5 investment at the level of say one percent ultimately
6 is a goal that we should strive for. If we believe
7 that a dollar investment in culture generates \$99 in
8 the general economy. I think it's a good investment,
9 especially when the city and the state are under such
10 pressure from the federal government to demonstrate
11 to the rest of the country what New York has always
12 demonstrated, that these kinds of investments in our
13 cultural resources produce an economy and a society
14 we all want to live in.

15 So, thank you very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and thank you so
17 much for your testimony. Cathy.

18 CATHY: Thank you so much for your time. I'm
19 honored and proud to be the last person to testify
20 today.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Well, no we have one more
actually.

CATHY HUNG: Oh, you took my spot. Uhm, but
thank you for listening to all of us today. My name

1 is Cathy Hung and I'm the Executive Director of
2 Making Books Sing, doing business as New York City
3 Children's Theater. I often begin by inviting people
4 to think back to their first theater experience.
5 Whether you are on stage or in the audience, you
6 likely remember that excitement. The moment where
7 they feel possible to fly, to sing or dance or be the
8 funnest person in the room. Theater gives children
9 permission to imagine. To explore new possibilities
and to believe they can do anything.

10 At New York City Children's Theater, we use the
11 same power of imagination to help children learn,
12 deal and grow. I think of a little boy in one of our
13 multilingual shelter residency whose head is broken
14 for weeks. During a simple drama game, pretending to
15 be an animal, he suddenly laid out the tiniest roar.
16 The whole room froze. Then he did it again louder.
17 By the end of the session, he was leading the group.
18 That roar wasn't just play, it was agency. It was
19 confidence returning. Our programs, including main
20 stage productions, literature at play, and workshop
21 and theater for the very young touring productions
are active across 24 City Council Districts in all
five boroughs and serve more than 16,000 students

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1 annually. Our teaching artists, experts in trauma
2 informed practice, use theater, music and active play
3 to help children process big emotions, solving
4 problems and build empathy and rediscover joy.

5 So, as you make a decision for the coming year,
6 we respectfully ask for your continued and renewed
7 support for this critical funding stream. We are
8 asking for speaker initiative support of \$450,000 to
9 support our shelter program, Cultural Immigrant
10 Initiative Fund especially from District Council -
11 Council's District, you have given us funding since
12 you took office. Thank you so much. And all the
13 important culture programs CASA and SUCASA. Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and again thank
16 you all so much for testifying, especially the
17 libraries. It's always nice to meet patrons uhm and
18 you all are from Queens. It sounds like you're in
19 Southeast Queens, so always nice to see folks locally
20 here at City Hall, so thank you so much for taking
21 time out of your day to testify.

22 Okay, the last person, Margie Malovie, Malovie.
23 Oh, yup, miaswell. We don't have a slip for you, so
24 you just need to fill out the slip.

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1 Oh, okay, so we had a slip for you, okay. You
2 know it's the type of day. Thanks all for your
3 patience. Okay either one can start.

4 MOLLY KURZIUS: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker
5 Williams and members of the Committee. Thank you for
6 the opportunity to speak today. Also representing
7 Queens here from MoMA PS1 in Long Island City. I'm
8 Molly Kurzius. I'm the Chief of External Affairs at
9 MoMA PS1 where for the past 50 years we have proudly
10 served Long Island City with ambitious exhibitions,
11 deep community partnerships and free public programs.
12 At the core of our mission is accessibility, ensuring
13 that all New Yorkers can access and engage with
14 contemporary art.

15 On January first, as you know, we eliminated all
16 admission fees making PS 1 the largest free museum in
17 the city. The response has been truly extraordinary
18 and the message is clear, when financial barriers are
19 removed, New Yorkers show up. But this moment of
20 increased demand, comes as cultural organizations
21 face rising operating costs and growing demand for
free programming like ours.

At the same time, the funding landscape is
shifting in foundational ways that undercut

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1 philanthropic support. In this environment, city
2 funding is essential to the daily functioning of our
3 organizations, providing the stability our
4 institutions need, especially when other funding
5 sources are uncertain.

6 We support restoring baseline city funding,
7 annual cost adjustments and reforms to the capital
8 process that will ensure that culture is affordable
9 and accessible for all New Yorkers. Specifically
10 this year in FY27, MoMA PS 1 is seeking capital
11 funding to take the next step in our commitment to
12 access. We're pursuing a transformative renovation
13 of our entrance building, courtyard and first floor
14 to create a welcoming ADA accessible, green space and
15 flexible community hub in the heart of Long Island
16 City. While Long Island City as many of you know,
17 has grown rapidly in recent years, yet ranks 57th of
18 59 districts in open space per resident. The recent
19 one, LIC rezoning and PS1's own community engagement
20 efforts, point to the need for accessible public
21 space within our community. Since 2020, we worked
with neighbors and partners to shape a design that
meets community needs. This plan creates a flexible
entry space with seating, restrooms, and a potential

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1 café, opens the concrete wall along Jackson Avenue
2 and transforms our 25,000 square foot courtyard with
3 greenery, shade and seating. Replacing gravel with
4 secured paving and adding an integrated ADA ramp and
5 permanent canopy for year around use.

6 The courtyard will remain open to the public
7 beyond museum hours as a neighborhood gathering
8 place. The project has already secured \$12.5 million
9 in support from the City Council, the DCLA and the
10 Queens Borough President, half of our total funding.
11 We respectfully seek this additional support to
12 realize our vision and continue advancing our shared
13 goals of access, equity, and affordability.

14 UNIDENTIFIED: Hi there. Good afternoon. Push
15 the button. I'm sure you're all very tired. Thank
16 you for being here. I actually decided to come on a
17 whim based upon an email I got from a library
18 advocacy organization this morning. I'm a mom of
19 three boys in Brooklyn, I'm an attorney, a local
20 organizer, political fund raiser and I am about to
21 pursue my Masters of Library Science in hopes to work
with uh Library Sciences degree and my law degree in
the mass incarceration system. And I'm just here
because you know it's fascinating to me to see how

1 much the New York City Library Systems budget has
2 shrunk so consistently over the last several years,
3 which is something you're inheriting. Uhm, I see
4 branches closing. I see less hours. I see - one of
5 my branches closed. It was supposed to open 16
6 months later, it's now two and a half years later,
7 it's still not opening and the reason I came is
8 because the library is one of the last spaces where
9 everyone is and should be welcome. It is the
10 repository of like all of our greatest
11 accomplishments and ingenuity and at a time of
12 political crisis but also political change, when
13 you're contemplating what the libraries budget should
14 be, I don't think it should be thought of in terms of
15 a building that has a lot of books in it that puts
16 together some very sweet and wonderful programming.

17 I think it should be thought of as a space that
18 is a bridge to social mobility for so many people,
19 particularly people who are forgotten, like people in
20 prison who otherwise have no access to information
21 other than small drips that come from small
organizations that decide to put their time towards
bringing humanity to people who are locked up and
that's just one small part of for example, Brooklyn

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1 Public Libraries programming. So, all I would ask of
2 you is to reimagine really what the value of the
3 library is in this city with the oldest MOIS program
4 in this city that seems from my perspective as
5 someone who lives here to be providing less and less
6 to its people but expecting the libraries to be that
7 when we're cutting programs elsewhere, having a
8 library be a place where a houseless person goes.
9 Having the library be a place where someone who
10 doesn't have a job go. If we can provide those
11 things yet, I believe we can in the future for
12 everyone who deserves it, why not better support an
13 infrastructure that's already there, that's already
14 providing it to them? Thank you so much.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and as I said
14 from the last panel, I appreciate uhm, you coming and
15 spending time out of your day. I know I don't take
16 it lightly that people come and testify, so thank you
17 so much for your testimony as a patron and thank you
18 so much. I'm looking forward to touring. I know I
19 have to reschedule my date but I look forward to
20 coming. Uhm, to visit as Chair of the Committee
21 because I have been there a few times and I look
forward to coming as Chair of the Committee.

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1 Thank you. Okay, thank you so much. Thank you
2 everybody that testified today for sharing your
3 thoughts and experiences and thank you for your
4 patience most importantly. If there's anyone in the
5 room who wishes to speak but has not yet had the
6 opportunity to do so, please raise your hand and fill
7 out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms at
8 the back of the room.

9 Nobody, great, that concludes the in person
10 portion of our public testimony. We will now move to
11 remote testimony. We will now move to remote
12 testimony. If you are testifying remotely, please
13 listen for your name to be called. Once your name is
14 called, a member of our staff will unmute you. You
15 may then start your testimony once the Sergeant at
16 Arms sets the clock and queues you to begin. Julia
17 del Palacio. You may begin once you are unmuted and
18 the Sergeant queues you.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 JULIA DEL PALACIO: Thank you. Good afternoon
18 Chair Dr. Williams and members of the Committee.
19 I'll keep it brief because I know it's been a long
20 day for you all. My name is Julia del Palacio. I'm
21 the Executive Director of Queens Theater. A proud

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1 member of the Cultural Institutions Group. Queens
2 Theater reflects the lived experiences of Queens
3 residents while supporting local creators, first time
4 producers, schools and community organizations with
5 accessibility and representation of the core of our
6 mission.

7 Our Theater for All initiative has served over
8 250 deaf and disabled performers with alumni reaching
9 Broadway and national TV. Through developing new
10 American voices, we have nurtured over 160 plays
11 centered on immigrant and first generation stories.
12 Our Queens Theater education programs reach over
13 5,000 students and older adults annually. Many in
14 arts schools and senior centers, providing vital
15 cultural programming.

16 We also serve multiple districts across Queens
17 through CASA and SUCASA locations and have the
18 capacity to do more. To continue this work and
19 remain a stable, civic anchor, we are asking the
20 Council for support in three specific areas:
21 Baseline restoration of the \$30 million already
mentioned, inflation adjustments and capital project
reform.

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1
2 Queens Theater is a trusted partner and a
3 neighborhood anchor. Your support ensures that
4 culture remains affordable and accessible for all New
5 Yorkers. We look forward to strengthening our
6 partnership with this Committee to keep the arts
7 thriving in Queens and beyond. Thank you for your
8 time and your commitment to the arts.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for being so
10 concise. Next panelist, Doria Josma followed by
11 Jessica Baker.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Now.

13 DORIA JOSMA: Thank you. Hello everyone. Uh,
14 thank you Chair and members of the Committee. My
15 name is Doria Josma. I am the Development Manager at
16 Cool Culture and I'm here on behalf of more than
17 50,000 New York City families. Primarily families of
18 color and families experiencing poverty who access
19 the city's cultural resources through our programs.
20 For over 25 years Cool Culture has worked at the
21 intersection of arts, equity and community wellbeing.
Through our city wide program, families with young
children receive free access to more than 90 museums,
zoos and cultural institutions across all five
boroughs.

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Each year, families make over 180,000 visits, creating moments of joy, connection and learning that arts and cultural access extends far beyond the classroom. But this work is about more than access, it's about belonging. Despite of the vision of Create NYC, our city's cultural funding system continues to reflect deep inequities.

An Independent Budget Office Analysis found that a small group of large institutions receives the majority of public funding. While more than 1,000 cultural organizations, many rooted in Black, Brown and immigrant communities share only a small fraction.

Through our parent power for cultural equity work, families in Bedford Stuyvesant told us art is everywhere but access is not. They spoke about displacement shrinking space for community based creativity and their hopes for intergenerational art spaces. Healing centered cultural hubs and opportunities for their children to thrive.

So, today on behalf of Cool Culture, we urge the Council to take bold action. Reimagine our cultural funding model to address historic inequities, establish a baseline of sustained funding for BIPOC

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led cultural organizations and invest in the
grassroots -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

DORIA JOSMA: Cultural ecosystems. Thank you so
much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Jessica Baker
followed by Sophia Harrison.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

JESSICA BAKER VODOOR: Good afternoon Chair
Williams and members of the Committee. Thank you so
much for this opportunity to testify. My name is
Jessica Baker Vodoor and I am the President and CEO
of Sung Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden
and I'm also the CIG Vice Chair for Staten Island.

Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural
Institutions Group and our site is home to three
additional CIG's, the Staten Island Museum, the
Staten Island Children's Museum and the Noble
Maritime Collection, as well as 39 different resident
individual artists and CDF organizations.

Staten Island also has two more CIG's in historic
Richmond Town and the Staten Island Zoo and together,
we represent the cultural backbone of our borough.

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1
2 Now entering our 50th year, Snug Harbor is a
3 culture park on Staten Island offering arts, nature,
4 history, education and events for all. We envision a
5 more culturally connected and thriving Staten Island
6 and Snug Harbor confronts the affordability barriers
7 by providing accessible programming for our
8 under-resourced community and the general public.
9 Much of it free or pay as you wish, thanks to
10 consistent support from the City of New York.

11 We are the city's only free botanical garden,
12 open 365 days a year and we steward a historic 83
13 acre campus with 26 buildings, providing free open
14 green space adjacent to environmental justice
15 communities. Our workforce development initiatives
16 are funded with both private and city support,
17 training emerging and young adults in environmental
18 stewardship. There are many of those thanks to City
19 Council initiatives. Our artist residencies are also
20 sought after providing stipends in professional
21 development as well as space to live, work, and
create and share with the public.

This in addition to the 39 subsidized studio
tenants, artists and individual organizations that

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1 cross genres from visual to performing arts. We
2 welcomed over 500,000 visitors in Fiscal Year '25.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

4 JESSICA BAKER VODOOR: 35 were free. Just wanted
5 to uplift my colleagues' support for the baseline
6 restoration of the \$30 million, annual adjustments
7 increasing our costs uhm - to address our costs and
8 also to improve and reform the capital process.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next up Sophia
11 Harrison.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 SOPHIA HARRISON: Good day Deputy Speaker Dr.
14 Nantasha Williams and all in attendance. Hi, I'm
15 Sophia Harrison, the Executive Director, Founder of
16 Arts House Schools of Music, Dance and Fine Arts
17 located in Coney Island Brooklyn. Locally we serve
18 the 47th and 48th Districts.

19 Since 2005, Arts House Schools mission has
20 supplied culture and humanity for children in the
21 Coney Island community while providing them with the
opportunity to build self esteem, self confidence and
develop poise, grace and balance.

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1
2 Additionally, we believe it is our responsibility
3 to engage our entire community in meaningful artistic
4 activities. Activities that effectively communicate
5 beauty, foster an appreciation for diversity and
6 create a life filled with meaning and purpose. This
7 self imposed and our responsibility is echoed through
8 the 1,000 plus arts and cultural organizations and
9 countless independent artists that serve NYC
10 including the outer boroughs and especially the
11 culturally underserved neighborhoods of southern and
12 eastern Brooklyn, Far Rockaway, Staten Island, and so
13 many communities in the Bronx.

14 Today I'm requesting that the Council stabilize
15 funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs and in
16 turn, stabilize the sector. Unfortunately after more
17 than a decade of receiving funding from the Cultural
18 Development Fund to provide dance scholarships to
19 boys and girls ages five to seven. This year Arts
20 House Schools was zeroed out. The sudden loss of
21 funding not only reduces the number of students who
we are able to financially assist in the arts
education but also ripples down to the salaries of
teaching artists, program and organizational staff,

1 while placing a financial burden on the organization
2 itself.

3 For the past 19 years, Arts House Schools has
4 worked hand and hand with our local Council Members
5 to provide our community with experience and exposure
6 in the arts. It has been the support of the entire
7 Council that organizations such as Arts House Schools
8 have been able to step outside of our doors and
support the community around us.

9 Today, along with our colleagues, we are asking
10 the Council to stabilize the sector by restoring the
11 baseline of last year's \$30 million and add to the
12 cultural budget. That the baseline be indexed so
13 that automatically increases with inflation. The
14 capital funding for culture be streamlined and
revised for a greater ease and efficiency and that
the funding of the cultural -

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 SOPHIA HARRISON: Theaters of Culture be
17 increased to \$8 million to reflect the greater number
18 of organizations it serves and also that the Council
19 will consider a cultural budget of one percent of the
20 city's budget. Thank you so much.
21

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CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next, we have
Ester Welsh, Mariame Kaba and Dylan Flesch.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Esther, you can begin.
Okay, if Esther - oh the room is muted. They can't
hear us?

If anybody on the Zoom can hear us, Esther can
begin. Oh, we're muted still? Okay, I'm going to
try this again, Esther or Mariame Kaba, if you're on.
Ester first then Mariame Kaba.

ESTHER WELSH: Okay, may I begin?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yep.

ESTHER WELSH: Okay, uhm, my name is Esther
Welsh, I am a library patron and a member of New York
City PLAN. I am here today because public libraries
need at least half a percent of the city's budget.
The Preliminary Budget as it is now, allocates just
0.39 percent. New Yorkers will tell you that this
city is the best city in the world and this greatness
is due in large part to the library. Our libraries
are a place of intellectual freedom and learning.
They're a place where people can go to build skills
and community. It's an archive of our cultural
heritage and they serve as cooling centers, so they

1 can literally save lives. The library deserves to
2 have adequate and stable funding. Allocating 0.3
3 percent of the budget is a drop from the previous
4 year's budget. Uhm, this is not stable and it's not
5 adequate.

6 Let's see- so this number, this constant like
7 budget cuts and different funding, it leaves
8 libraries scrambling to maintain infrastructure,
9 maintain their collections, their programming and
10 their accessible hours. Libraries deserve better
11 than this and New Yorkers deserve better than this.
12 Uhm, New York City PLAN has asked that half a percent
13 of the budget be allocated to public libraries and
14 the Mayor has agreed to this both in his campaign and
15 has reiterated it after his election. So, this is a
16 commitment that needs to be honored. So, yes, once
17 again, we are asking for half a percent of the city's
18 budget and that this should be a benchmark for future
19 budgets because libraries deserve stable funding.

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next up
miriam.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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2 MARIAME KABA: Hello everybody. I'm sorry, it's
3 telling me about unmuting and muting, so I'm
4 struggling with it. I'm here. Thank you so much to
5 the Council for these hearings. My name is Mariame
6 Kaba and I am a New Yorker born and raised and I am a
7 member of the New York City Public Library Action
8 Network, which is a grassroots group of New York City
9 residents that are focused on a mission to make sure
10 that our three library systems are strengthened and
11 amplified and can progress.

12 Libraries like most public institutions
13 perpetually deal with budget constraints. Mayors
14 proposed or threatened to cut library budgets and
15 then after public mobilization and outcry, sometimes
16 restore funding at levels that do not keep up with
17 inflation.

18 The New York City PLAN, which I am a member, has
19 been strategizing and organizing to stop this
20 destructive budget dance. Our main demand is that
21 the city allocate 0.5 percent, half of one percent of
the expense budget to our public libraries annually.
This demand has been amplified by the New York City
Public library system as well. The Mayor included
our demand in his platform during his campaign.

1 After he won, he reiterated his support in an
2 event at Greenpoint Library in December of 2025.

3 When the budget was actually released in February, he
4 actually allocated 0.39 percent of the city budget,
5 which is much less than what was promised during the
6 campaign.

7 So, we're asking the City Council to please join
8 us in advocating and executing an increase. And most
9 importantly, stabilizing funding for our public
10 library systems, which are essential democratic
11 institutions and are being asked every single year to
12 do more with not enough funding.

13 We live in a time of pervasive disillusionment.
14 People are rightfully mistrustful of most
15 institutions. The library can serve as one way to
16 show that public goods are actually good and that
17 institutions aren't meaningless.

18 I ask the City Council to support the demand and
19 0.5 percent of the city expense budget to be
20 allocated to our public libraries. As Rita Dove
21 wrote, the library is an arena of possibility,
opening both a window into the soul and a door onto
the world. New York City-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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1
2 MARIAME KABA: New York City is a city of
3 possibility and deserves to fully funded libraries.
4 Thank you so much.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Dylan or
6 Dillon.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 DYLAN FLESCH: Hello, thank you Deputy Speaker
9 Dr. Williams and the rest of this Committee for the
10 opportunity to testify. My name is Dylan Flesch and
11 I am a patron of the Brooklyn Public Library and a
12 member of NYC PLAN, the Public Library Action
13 Network. I'm here to implore the City Council,
14 especially Council leadership and the budget
15 negotiating team, to fight with every tool at your
16 disposal to fund public libraries at half of one
17 percent, 0.5 percent of the total city expense
18 budget. This number should be baselined and should
19 be considered the minimum acceptable amount. I don't
20 want the City Council to have to keep filling the gap
21 through negotiations and discretionary funding year
after year, as I'm sure you don't either.

I'd like to compliment you Chair Williams on your
handling of these proceedings today. I especially
liked when you called out a previous speaker from

1 DCLA for acting like the one time funding that gets
2 rangled between the preliminary budget and the
3 adopted was something they could count on. Because
4 it's not and similarly for libraries, they must act
5 like the amount in the preliminary budget is the
6 amount they are going to have to operate with. They
7 can't and shouldn't count on those numbers increasing
8 between now and July and because of this, they can't
9 plan and they have to start operating under the logic
10 of cuts.

11 They stop hiring, they start planning reductions
12 to services, and generally they can't be all we need
13 them to be. This is the impact of the budget dance
14 and we need it to stop. Library management is
15 tiptoeing around this conversation because they're
16 trying to maintain positive relationships with the
17 Mayor while they're doing back room negotiations.

18 The CEOs of the libraries consistently fail to
19 recognize the need that NYC PLAN and patrons and
20 workers of libraries have been highlighting for
21 years. We have to stop accepting these crumbs in the
22 budget and fight for more.

23 My son Griffin got his library card when he was
24 two months old and we've been able to access hundreds

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1 of books that we wouldn't have otherwise. We visit
2 the Sunset Park branch at BPL frequently. It's a
3 beautiful new branch with 100 percent affordable
4 housing on top but even my branch has now had to
5 close the whole bottom floor due to a burst pipe and
6 flooding. There are ten close branches in Brooklyn
7 right now, so the 100 vacancies -

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 DYLAN FLESCH: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Did you have any 20 second
11 last final things you wanted to say? Oh okay or
12 maybe not. Oh, you're going to get unmuted now.
13 Okay, well I tried. Thank you so much for your
14 testimony.

15 DYLAN FLESCH: Okay, it's letting me now.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, okay, go ahead, 20
17 seconds.

18 DYLAN FLESCH: I want to say, I call on you to
19 hold the Mayor to his promise of ending the budget
20 dance and fight for at least half of one percent for
21 the city budget for libraries.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Okay, next
panel, Susan Hoffman, Kathleen Collins, Brittany,

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Shatsheer, and Claire Park. So, we'll start with
Susan Hoffman.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: It looks like Susan left,
so let's go to Kathleen Collins.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

KATHLEEN COLLINS: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker
Dr. Williams and Council Members. My name is
Kathleen Collins and I'm disabled from birth and I'm
a Native New Yorker. Also, I'm the Treasurer of
Disabled in Action.

Libraries are important to everyone but they are
especially provided for New Yorkers with
disabilities. We are living in a time where we are
experiencing a deluge of information and data. It is
essential that everyone, including people with
disabilities, have equal access to that knowledge.
The libraries are a lifeline for many New Yorkers who
are blind, visually impaired, have reading
disabilities or have other disabilities. It provides
access to books, technology and information that
would otherwise be out of our reach.

Personally, I have benefitted greatly from being
able to read books online from the three New York

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1 City Public Library systems. However, more needs to
2 be done. New York City must increase funding for all
3 our libraries but especially for the Andrew Heiskell,
4 Braille and Talking Book Library. Increased funding
5 will expand tiers, improve assistive technology, and
6 ensure that people with disabilities can fully
7 participate in the information age.

8 History shows that people with disabilities have
9 changed the world. Individuals such as Albert
10 Einstein, Steven Hawking, Senator Doe, Senator
11 Tepler, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the next
12 great scientist or artist or leader could be a New
13 Yorker with a disability who simply needs access to
14 knowledge.

15 If New York City truly believes in opportunity
16 for all, then we must invest in accessible libraries
17 because the cost of lost perpetuities, far greater
18 than the cost of funding them.

19 Finally, access to information is a civil right.
20 Please provide more funding for the Andrew Heiskell,
21 Braille and Talking Book Library and affirm that New
York City remains committed to equity, inclusion and
the fundamental principle that knowledge must be
accessible to everyone. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you, Brittany
followed by Claire.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

BRITTANY SHROPSHIRE: Hi, my name is Brittany
Shropshire, I am a resident of Queens and a long time
lover of the library. The library has been my second
home since I've been able to read and I have cards at
all three library systems, as well as I visit my
local branch in Briarwood weekly to check out books
and access services.

As a Social Worker, I also request professional
development books through the library frequently.
The library is truly a lifeline of the city serving
every single age gap and population and should not be
used as a bargaining tip every time budget talks come
around. Not only is that heartbreaking to me but
also exhausting and frustrating to all of us who
support the library and the staff members having to
pour countless energy into advocating when they are
already stretched thin by limited staffing. I'm
asking for the Mayor to follow through with
allocating 0.5 percent of funding in the 2027 budget
and make that the benchmark for future budgets and

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1 requesting that the City Council members also can
2 support us in that advocacy.

3 Thank you so much for all that you are doing in
4 this Committee.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Claire.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 CLAIRE PARK: Hi, my name is Claire, I'm a
8 resident of New York City. I'm also a member of the
9 New York City Public Library Action Network, like so
10 many of us today. I am here today to ask the City
11 Council to commit 0.5 percent of the total city
12 budget for public library funding in the upcoming
13 fiscal year.

14 I just want to share some like scenes from my
15 library experiences over the last couple weeks just
16 showing how much they do for me and neighbors. Uhm,
17 this - well, I guess a lot heard before but this
18 summer, I didn't have any internet access at home or
19 air conditioning and I live on the top floor of my
20 apartment. The Bay Ridge Library was the place where
21 I could get both internet and AC for free, as well as
cold filtered water. While I was hanging out there,
I met a group of adults with disabilities who came to

1 read and hang out. I saw a lot of my senior
2 neighbors reading the local newspaper.

3 Last week, I went to the Crown Heights Library
4 with their back to back children's reading hours and
5 I noticed that during the reading hours, parents and
6 also other caretakers could take a break from
7 caregiving. The library also has an amazing book
8 dropbox that staff has decorated in the form of Bluey
9 the dog and I also got to use the bathroom there for
free.

10 Yesterday, at the Brooklyn Heights Library, I
11 skimmed through some new novels and I used the
12 printer. I met a woman there who asked me for my
13 help because of her low vision in printing documents
for her church group.

14 I learned how to read and write English by going
15 to my local library as a kid and by checking out and
16 reading books. These are like basic skills that
17 allow me to make my livelihood today. The current
18 allocation of only 0.39 percent for public libraries
19 is unacceptable and I urge City Council members to
20 care for us, your constituents by committing a
21 minimum 0.5 percent of the city budget for all of the

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city's libraries this year and also going forward.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next panel is
Potri Ranka, Janet Sinsiratti, hmm. Sinsira - I want
to get everyone's names right, okay and Juliana Cope.
So, first one, Potri.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

POTRI RANKA MANIS: My name is Potri Ranka Manis.
Good afternoon Chair Dr. Williams and Council Members
in the Committee. I'm a Founder and Artistic
Director of Kinding Sindaw, a not-for-profit cultural
organization of 34 years of service in New York City.

New York City's immigrant public school library,
public libraries under serve indigenous communities.
A member of New York Culture and Arts Coalition and
also Dance NYC.

Kinding Sindaw now preserves and advances the
living tradition of the indigenous peoples and some
are southern philippines and diaspora. Through dance
and music, story telling, martial art, and community
based cultural education, we serve youth, families
and seniors across schools, libraries and public
programs, primarily in the underserved communities.
For many we serve, Kinding Sindaw is more than an art

1 organization, it is a cultural lifeline. Our
2 intergenerational programs sustain indigenous and
3 diaspora languages, tradition and invited knowledge,
4 strengthening identity, belonging and mental health.

5 Our work aligns with the city's priorities in
6 public health and culturally responsive services. We
7 support social, emotional learning, reduce isolation
8 and build resilience among immigrant communities,
9 serving as both a cultural anchor and reach across
10 cultural understanding. However, small cultural
11 organizations like ours face ongoing structural
12 underfunding. Rising costs for space transportation
13 and fair wages for teaching artists threaten the
14 sustainability of the sort.

15 We respectfully urge the Council to increase
16 baseline of \$30 million funding for Department of
17 Cultural Affairs and prioritize Coalition of -

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 POTRI RANKA MANIS: Uhm, and funding for - okay
20 thank you and \$8 million for CTC. Thank you so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. Next
up, Janet followed by Juliana.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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JANET CESAROTTI: Thank you, it's Cesarotti. So, you almost had it.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Cesaratti, thank you.

JANET CESAROTTI: Yeah, yeah, uhm, thank you Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and Council Members for this opportunity to testify. My name is Janet Cesarotti and I am a Program and Development Associate with Notes in Motion/Selwyn Dance Theater founded in 2000. We are a New York City nonprofit that prevents innovative dance performances and provides comprehensive arts education in public schools.

As a long-time department of education vendor, we serve students from 3K through 12th grade in styles ranging from modern and valet to hiphop, Latin, African, Hollywood and musical theater. Since our founding, we have directly served over 93,000 students across 190 schools and reached more than 528,000 young people in communities throughout all of New York City.

Today, we partner with 190 schools across 45 Council districts. Our programs give students confidence, discipline and joy, skills that extend far beyond dance and to school and life. Teachers

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1 and parents report that students who were previously
2 disengaged are now participating, leading and showing
3 up differently in classes. Arts education also
4 supports social, emotional growth, academic
5 engagement and community connection, particularly for
6 students in underserved neighborhoods. Yet, access
7 remains inequitable. State data shows that only
8 about one-third of 8th graders are meeting New York's
9 arts education requirements. Too many students are
10 still being denied consistent high quality arts
11 education, leaving gaps in both academic and personal
12 development.

13 As the City Council reviews the FY27 Preliminary
14 Budget, we respectfully urge you to address the cost
15 of living crisis for the arts education workforce,
16 restore and baseline \$30 million in DCLA funding to
17 stabilize arts organizations and workers citywide and
18 preserve and improve arts education in schools
19 throughout the city.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 JANET CESAROTTI: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next up
Juliana Cope.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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1 JULIANA COPE: Thank you Deputy Dr. Williams and
2 Members of the Committee. I am Juliana Cope,
3 Assistant Executive Director for Development External
4 Affairs at Mindbuilders Creative Art Center. Founded
5 in 1978, Mindbuilders began with the grassroots
6 mission to inspire the growth of local youth and
7 families in the Northeast Bronx by providing low
8 cost, high quality arts education. Thanks to your
9 support, we offer numerous free programs. All of our
10 fee for service programs are subsidized and no one is
ever turned away for inability to pay.

11 We provide music, dance, theater, folk culture
12 and production programs serving hundreds of students
13 each week and thousands of audience members each
14 year. Organizations like Mindbuilders Creative Art
Center touch every vital aspect of daily life.

15 In terms of to our purpose is the community we
16 serve and the words of one of our incredible parent
17 volunteers, AJ, in times like these, where we are so
18 divided, this is our gathering place, our place of
19 agreement, a place where our children can go, not
20 only to learn about themselves but their culture.
21 Not only to learn about their culture but themselves.

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We're not alone in serving New York City this way.

We exist as part of this great ecosystem.

As such, we stand with our colleagues calling on the city to continue your ongoing investments in the cultural sector including restoring baselining last year's \$30 million add to the culture budget and increasing funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color to \$8 million. Thank you for supporting this work that effectively transforms lives, neighborhoods and our city. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Last but certainly not least, Steven.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

STEVEN: Hi. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, we can hear you.

STEVEN: Hi, sorry, I'm currently in transit. I'm with NYC PLAN as well. Uh, you've already heard a lot from the rest of my group, so I'm just going to reiterate. Uhm, you know we were trying to get a funding increase that the Mayor had agreed to with his campaign. It looks like the Mayor has instead proposed a budget cut, so we're asking City Council to fight for that half a percent funding increase.

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1 I'm on my way to fly right now in support for
2 this cause but thank you so much for hearing our
3 demand and we hope that you'll fight for it because
4 we all know how important libraries are. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much. Well,
6 I believe that concludes our Preliminary Budget
7 hearing. I just want to make sure that I'm saying
8 all the things I need to say, and I think I am.

9 Yeah, alright, so seeing that there is no one
10 else who wishes to testify, this hearing is
11 officially adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 26, 2026