

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2022

Start: 12:43 P. M.

Recess: 4:37 P. M.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: CHI A. OSSÉ, CHAIR

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

ERIC DINOWITZ
AMANDA FARÍAS
SHAHANA K. HANIF
CRYSTAL HUDSON
RITA C. JOSEPH
FARAH N. LOUIS
FRANCISCO P. MOYA
SANDRA UNG

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

GALE BREWER
INNA VERNOKOV
BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT, ANTONIO REYNOSO

THE COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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

Tony Marx,
President of The New York Public Library

Linda Johnson,
President and CEO of The Brooklyn Public Library

Nick Buron,
Chief Librarian & SVP, Queens Public Library

Sheelah Feinberg,
Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Cultural
Affairs General

Pranita Raghavan,
General Counsel at the Department of Cultural
Affairs

Shirley Levy,
Chief of Staff at the Department of Cultural Affairs

Phillippa Shao,
Director of Finance at the Department of Cultural
Affairs.

Coco Killingsworth,
Co-Interim President, Brooklyn Academy of Music
Executive Vice Chair, Cultural Institutions Group
(CIG)

Laura Washington,
Chief Communications Officer and Vice President for
Strategic Partnerships at the New York Historical
Society

THE COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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

Sade Lythcott,
CEO at National Black Theatre; Chair of Coalition of
Theaters of Color; Co-leader of Culture@3

Lisa Gold,
Executive Director of the Asian American Arts
Alliance (A4)

Melody Capote,
Executive Director of the Caribbean Cultural Center
African Diaspora Institute

Rosalind Barbour,
Administrative Chief of Staff at The Public Theater

Elizabeth Cashour,
Vice President - The New 42nd Street, Inc.

John Hyslop,
President of Local 1321 DC 37

Lauren Bradley,
Board Member of Urban Librarians Unite

Tracey Greenidge,
The Director of Development at Cool Culture

Lucy Sexton,
Executive Director New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Alejandra Duque Cifuentes,
Executive Director at Dance/NYC

THE COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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

Ya-Yun Teng,
Program Officer at Immigrant Artist Resource Center
(NYC) at the New York Foundation for the Arts

Risa Shoup,
Director at The Alliance of Resident Theatres/New
York

Francine Garber-Cohen
President at The Regina Opera Company, Inc.

Aya Ester Hayishi,
Development Director at People's Theater Project

Olympia Kazi,
Founding Member of the New York City Actor's
Coalition; Music Workers Alliance; Vice Chair of the
Nightlife Advisory Board

Adina Applebaum,
Development Manager at The Center for Fiction

Devin Mathis,
Executive Director of UrbanGlass; New Coalition of
Culturals in City Owned Buildings

Mark Ribot,
Music Workers Alliance

Sami Abu Shumays,
Deputy Director, Flushing Town Hall

THE COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Rocky Bucano,
President and Executive Director of the Universal
Hip Hop Museum

David Freudenthal,
Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall

Cheryl Warfield,
Founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera, Opera Singer,
Educator, Producer, and Arts Administrator

Alton Aimable,
President and Founder of Tropicalfete

Lisa Alpert
Vice President, Development & Programming at Green-
Wood Cemetery

1 SERGEANT LUGO: Pc recording good.

2 SERGEANT HOPE: Cloud recording good.

3 SERGEANT LUGO: Thank you.

4 Good afternoon, everyone, welcome to today's
5 remote New York City Council Fiscal 2023 Preliminary
6 Budget Oversight hearing the Committee on Committee
7 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
8 Intergroup Relations.
9

10 At this time would all panelists please turn on
11 your videos? To minimize disruptions, please place
12 all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. If
13 you wish to submit testimony, you may do so via email
14 to testimony@council.nyc.gov again, that is
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov .

16 Thank you for your cooperation, Chair, we are
17 ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Good afternoon, and welcome to
19 the hearing for the Committee Cultural Affairs,
20 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. I
21 am Council Member Chi Ossé, Chair of this committee,
22 and today we will begin with a hearing on the City's
23 three library systems, followed by a hearing on
24 Cultural Affairs.
25

1
2 The committee will also be hearing two pieces of
3 legislation today, first a Preconsidered Resolution
4 sponsored by Council Member Hudson in relation
5 Condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calling
6 upon Congress and President Joseph R. Biden to
7 increase and expand the severity of sanctions imposed
8 on Russia.

9 And, second, a Preconsidered Resolution sponsored
10 by Council Member Vernikov in relation to expressing
11 support for Ukraine.

12 And, finally, the committee will hear public
13 testimony related to these two hearings as well as
14 the legislation

15 Uh, I do want to acknowledge Council Member
16 Vernikov, and give her the floor to speak on her
17 resolution.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Can everyone hear me?

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay, thank you so much,
21 uh, thank you, Chair Ossé, and thank you Council
22 Members, uhm, and others on this call.

23 Uhm, everyone knows the horrific situation going
24 on in Ukraine, and New York City really has the
25 largest population of Ukrainians living here in the

1 country. And, I am in touch with people on the
2 ground right now, uh, we are really working very hard
3 to make sure that the refugees and others get the aid
4 that they need. Uh, it has been really, really
5 difficult, and I want to thank all of you for the
6 incredible support -- to the bipartisan support -- I
7 received in the council for this issue. Uh, New York
8 City is really the center of the world, and it is
9 extremely important that we show our support and
10 stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and
11 also the Ukrainians living here in our city. And, I
12 really want to thank Council Member Dinowitz, uh, The
13 Chair of the Jewish Caucus, and the Caucus as well as
14 the all of the council members, and Council Member
15 Hudson for also putting a strong resolution in
16 support of Ukraine, and thank you all for the
17 opportunity to speak on this.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And, with that, I
20 would like to welcome you to our Libraries hearing.
21 This afternoon we will be discussing the Fiscal 2023
22 Preliminary Expense and Capital Budget for the
23 systems.

24 For Fiscal 2023, the administration is proposing
25 a \$418.1 million subsidy for the systems. The Fiscal

2023 Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan, which covers Fiscal 2022 through Fiscal 2026, includes \$1 billion dollars for the Library systems.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the three library systems quickly pivoted their work to providing online and virtual services and programs when neighborhood branches were closed.

The three systems also worked closely with the administration to officer vital services to City residents. Hence, I am very disappointed to see reduction to operation subsidy to the systems. Reductions totaled \$12.9 million in Fiscal 2022.

I want to ensure that the Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Plan adequately funds the City's library systems as they recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure that the City is well-equipped to manage the recovery from this pandemic, The Council calls on the administration to support the library systems by increasing their expense and capital budgets to meet all short falls the systems have.

It is essential that the budget that we adopt this year is transparent, accountable, and reflective

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2 of the priorities and interests of The Council and
3 the people we represent.

4 I look forward to an active engagement with the
5 administration over the next few months to ensure
6 that the Fiscal 2023 adopted budget meets the goals
7 The Council has set out.

8 I would also like to acknowledge, uh, and
9 recognize members of the committee including, Council
10 Member Moya, Council Member Dinowitz, and Council
11 Member Louis. I would also like to thank my staff for
12 organizing today's hearing including committee's
13 counsel Brenda McKinney, Legislative Policy Analyst
14 Christy Dwyer, and Principal Financial Analyst Aliya
15 Ali as well as my Budget and Legislative Director May
16 Vutrapongvatana. Thank you

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you, Chair. Uh,
18 my name is Brenda McKinney, and I am counsel to the
19 New York City Council's Committee on Committee
20 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
21 Intergroup Relations.

22 Before we begin today, I want to remind you that
23 you will be on mute until you are recognized to
24 speak, at which time you will be unmuted by the Zoom
25 host. If you mute yourself after you have been

1 unmuted, you will be unmuted again by the host.

2 Please be aware that there could be a delay in muting
3 and unmuting, so please be patient.

4
5 During the hearing today, if council members
6 would like to ask questions, please use the Zoom
7 Raise Hand Function, and you will be called upon to
8 speak. We will be limited council member questions
9 to five minutes -- including responses.

10 As noted by the Chair today, we will begin with
11 Libraries, followed by Cultural Affairs.

12 We do not need to administer the oath or the
13 affirmation to the Library witnesses, but we will ask
14 that you testify in the following order: First Mr.
15 Tony Marx, President of The New York Public Library,
16 followed by Miss Linda Johnson, President and CEO of
17 The Brooklyn Public Library, and finally Mr. Nick
18 Buron, Chief Librarian of The Queens Public Library.

19 Thank you, and with that, Mr. Marx, you may
20 begin.

21 PRESIDENT MARX: Well, thank you, thank you,
22 Brenda, thank you to the staff, uh, particularly
23 thank you, to Speaker Adams, uhm, and to Chair Ossé.
24 You can just feel the new energy of the council, of
25 the team, of the administration as everyone sort of

1 rolls up their sleeves, and, uh, you know, as we
2 emerge from two even more impossibly years than we
3 could have imagined. So, it's an honor to be here,
4 and to be together, and to be working all together.
5 And, you have my testimony, uh, written testimony, so
6 I will not read it to you. I will be very brief, uh,
7 so that we can have as much conversation as you would
8 like.
9

10 Uh, I will just start by saying what we already
11 know. The public libraries are the most visited
12 civic institutions in this town; they are the most
13 trusted; they have two particular elements that I
14 think are particularly relevant, that are noteworthy
15 these days, which is we are the institution that is
16 focused on learning and opportunity for everyone.
17 Full stop. At a moment when those are crucial and
18 crucially missing, uh, in too many peoples' lives.
19 And, we have a capacity to innovate and to address
20 those needs to focus in on digital, to focus in on
21 the neighborhoods of needs, to focus on people who
22 need workforce development, all of it. That makes us
23 a great partner as we have always been for the City
24 Council, for the administration, for the citizens of
25 New York.

1 Just to drill down in one particular programmatic
2
3 area, we have continued to build up and continue to
4 focus on our youth education programs. We have seen
5 the existing gaps of access to information, to
6 quality instruction, to afterschool, all of that, and
7 we have seen how those gaps have exploded during the
8 pandemic, uh, particularly in those neighborhoods
9 most hard hit by the pandemic, who are already
10 suffering from the economic equality issues that we
11 all live through.

12 Uh, so we have doubled down on our afterschool
13 model, drop in- you know, you that you can come to
14 our libraries and get help from tutors who are
15 reliability there in whatever subject you're working
16 on, so that we can help to, uh, fix the gaps that
17 have been produced during difficult two years. We
18 are creating team centers in our neighborhoods, so
19 that we can help students in the digital age prepare
20 for that age -- for work -- finding work in those
21 areas. We have a flagship of that at our new Stavros
22 Niarchos Foundation Library where we have a recording
23 studio, it's chock-a-block every day, and we want
24 that to be in our system, throughout our system,
25 especially in the poorest neighborhoods.

1 We have launched a new center for educators to
2 get the research material out in to classrooms, uhm,
3 as teacher aides, as curriculum, workshops, also
4 bringing students in to our new Treasures exhibit,
5 which is an amazing introduction to every possible
6 world through our collections.
7

8 And, we continue to innovate on policy, most
9 notably eliminating late fines, which instantly
10 unblocked over 113,000, uh, just in our system, card
11 that were blocked. New Yorkers who could not use our
12 resources, because we had told them they didn't have
13 enough money, in effect, to do so. And, we are free;
14 we are respectful; we are about access. We got rid of
15 the fines -- that's a statement -- a clear statement
16 of our values.

17 I will just turn very briefly to the capital
18 agenda, because we know how important it is to have
19 facilities that, uh, just not leaking, but are
20 respectful and inspiring in every neighborhood. It's
21 why we renovated the Niarchos Foundation; it's why we
22 are doing so much work in our neighborhoods. So, for
23 instance, uh, whether it's the Woodstock Branch or
24 the Washington Heights Branch for instance, in 2014
25 when we did a renovation in Washington Heights, we

1 saw a 47% increase in visits; a 45% increase in
2 circulation, and a 105% increase in exactly those
3 education programs that the folks in that
4 neighborhood, the neighborhood I grew up in, need.
5 And, you know, the great... One of the powers of the
6 library, we cannot require you to come, there's no
7 curriculum, we only offer what people need, and we
8 have facilities enable us to do that, we can offer
9 the programs and New Yorkers come.
10

11 We have identified just this year about \$277
12 million in new system wide capital needs. We are
13 looking to get in to the ten year capital plan again.
14 That is essential for us to be able to be efficient.
15 We are looking at alternative models including what
16 we call the Inwood model, which is a new library
17 needed in an neighborhood, again, a neighborhood in
18 this case I grew up in, but we are using the air
19 above that we have never used before for 175 units of
20 100% affordable housing.

21 We know that there continue to be options in
22 public and private financing for our capital needs.
23 We are talking to the administration about how to
24 finally fix, if that's the right word, the DDC
25 problem that are all painfully aware of.

1 We are grateful to The Mayor for not including a
2 cut to libraries. We take that as a sign, uh, early
3 on of his and his administration's acknowledgment of,
4 but we also ask that The City Council restore and
5 baseline last year's funds and meet our expense
6 requests including the library materials that people
7 rely on, uh, the non-capital eligible infrastructure
8 costs, and support, for instance, for the Treasures
9 exhibit that we want every high school student, uh,
10 every middle school student in New York to visit.

11 Let me just say in conclusion, again, this has
12 been a whirlwind of two years, it is going to take
13 everyone a little bit of time to just relax and get
14 over the trauma as much as possible that everyone is
15 suffered particularly our frontline folks, but the
16 library has been here. We have been and will remain
17 open the whole time. We have retained and enhanced,
18 built, our commitment and our offerings to ensure
19 equal access to books, to knowledge, to education for
20 all regardless of the crises twists and turns
21 throughout, and we look forward to not only
22 continuing to do that, but to build upon it. Because
23 that is what we need at this point; it's what New
24 Yorkers need.
25

1
2 Thank you, Mr. Chair, it's an honor to serve with
3 you here and to be here, and, uh, I am happy to
4 answer any questions, of course, I am eager to hear
5 from my colleagues.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, President Marx. And
7 before I pass it... let Brenda continue, I do want
8 to acknowledge my colleagues Council Member Brewer
9 Council Member Fariás, Council Member Hudson, and
10 Council Member Ung, thank you for joining us.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair.

12 And, next we will hear from President Johnson
13 from the Brooklyn Public Library.

14 We are unmuting you now and when you are ready,
15 President Johnson.

16 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and City Council, I am
18 Linda Johnson, President and CEO of Brooklyn Public
19 Library. Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chairs Ossé and
20 Brannan, and the committee members for the
21 opportunity to testify on the preliminary budget, and
22 to our Brooklyn delegation and the entire City
23 Council for supporting New York City's libraries.

24 Before I proceed with my testimony, I would just
25 like to also thank Council People Vernikov and Hudson

1
2 for their work on the Ukraine crisis. I could go on
3 at length about how the situation amplifies the
4 fragility of democracy and the roles the library
5 plays in keeping citizens civically engaged, but I
6 won't.

7 On a small note, I just want to include an
8 anecdote, and tell you all that within 24 hours of
9 the first strike, Brooklyn Public Library had
10 published book lists to help our patrons, both the
11 large Ukrainian population that lives in Brooklyn,
12 and New York City Brooklynites in general, to help
13 them understand the crisis and to get accurate and
14 good information. We are here and tailoring our
15 services to our patrons day in and day out, uh,
16 whether it is about health and COVID or about
17 international crises.

18 But, today, we are here to talk about money,
19 which is of course key to our future and our
20 operations, and we ask that you continue that support
21 and restore – essential operational funding which was
22 not carried through in the Fiscal Year 2023
23 preliminary budget. We also ask the City for a sorely
24 needed capital allocation of \$85 million.

1
2 In the wake of the pandemic, libraries are poised
3 to help rebuild a more equitable New York, but we
4 need functional buildings and adequate staffing in
5 order to remain open to the public six or seven days
6 a week.

7 With 217 branches across all three boroughs,
8 including 61 in Brooklyn, libraries provide a safe,
9 dignified, and absolutely free public space to every
10 New Yorker in every neighborhood. Our librarians,
11 technology resource specialists, and other staff
12 members build longstanding relationships with the
13 communities they serve, giving them the ability to
14 assess the needs of those communities and meet them,
15 whether with ESOL and High School Equivalency
16 classes, homework help, or Storytime in Spanish,
17 Kreyol, Urdu or eight other languages.

18 This is what makes the Library the most deeply
19 trusted, democratic, and far-reaching institution in
20 our city.

21 Prior to the pandemic, Brooklyn Public Library
22 welcomed over 9 million visits in a single year, with
23 more than 15 million books checked out and 1 million
24 program attendees. In March 2020, forced to shut our
25 doors for the first time in our 125-year history, we

1 adapted many of those programs to digital platforms
2 with huge success, producing over 7,000 virtual
3 programs in the first year for 1 million attendees,
4 from personalized job assistance to grief support
5 groups.
6

7 We began reopening in the summer of 2020 with
8 grab-and-go lobby service and by the summer of 2021,
9 had welcomed patrons back into all available branches
10 to browse the collection and use computers, printers
11 and other critical technology.

12 Brooklynites continue to return to their local
13 libraries and venture in for the first time. So far,
14 in fiscal year 2023, more than 35,000 people have
15 signed up for new library cards at their local
16 library. We've seen over 600,000 WIFI sessions, and
17 physical checkouts are climbing toward pre-pandemic
18 levels. As Omicron is receding, we have been able to
19 resume indoor in-person programming once again,
20 including a concert last week with the Harlem Chamber
21 Players that was at capacity.

22 At the same time, the demand for virtual programs
23 and services continues to be robust. Last week, more
24 than 600 people tuned into a panel about Lenape
25 history via Zoom; we have seen more than 40,000 new

1 e-card holders; and e-book checkouts have soared,
2 with a record-breaking 350,000 checkouts in January
3 alone.
4

5 As ever, online or in person, libraries are
6 centers of literacy. We equip New Yorkers with the
7 reading skills they need to learn about the world,
8 succeed in their lives and participate fully in our
9 society.

10 We also believe everyone in our city should be
11 digitally literate. In the world of libraries, we've
12 long known how many New Yorkers live on the wrong
13 side of the digital divide: 800,000 in Brooklyn
14 alone. The pandemic further widened that divide and
15 made it visible to all. New Yorkers need broadband
16 and digital skills in order to access city benefits,
17 search and apply for jobs, connect with healthcare
18 providers, complete homework and much more.

19 That's why, when we were forced to close our
20 doors, we installed antennas on the roofs of 50
21 branches to amplify WIFI beyond our walls and worked
22 with the Department of Transportation to create
23 outdoor library spaces. We published a guide to
24 accessing the FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit—a
25 monthly subsidy for home broadband—and trained

1 librarians to help patrons complete the application
2 which is, ironically, online. We loaned hotspots to
3 Adult Learning students and our Older Adult Literacy
4 Navigator helped our patrons interact via Zoom. We
5 recently outfitted a new Techmobile with WIFI,
6 laptops, and more, to take tech workshops on the road
7 to high schools and senior centers. In addition to
8 being the largest provider of free WIFI and tech
9 access in New York, libraries are the largest hub for
10 career services and aspiring entrepreneurs. We're the
11 sole public hub for jobseekers in 64% of the city's
12 neighborhoods and the only local, public resources
13 for small business owners in 67% -including many
14 places where minority and immigrant owned businesses
15 are still reeling from the pandemic.

17 Our Business and Career services include
18 personalized resume and career coaching, as well as
19 financial literacy workshops. Our annual PowerUp!
20 competition provides intensive mentorship classes and
21 seed funding for aspiring entrepreneurs. This year,
22 70% of participants had never before owned a
23 business; 68% were women; and 56 percent were Black.
24 All of them are now better equipped to achieve their
25 goals and enrich their communities.

1 Civic literacy is also of utmost importance to
2 libraries. At the Civic Commons at Central Library,
3 Brooklynites can apply for a passport or IDNYC card.
4 They can also meet with immigration attorneys for
5 free, join study groups for the citizenship exam, or
6 get help preparing their taxes.
7

8 Health literacy is paramount to libraries, too.
9 We continue to partner with the City's Test and Trace
10 Corps, distributing free at-home COVID test kits at
11 23 branches. We recently offered walk-in vaccines at
12 five branches so children could get their shots in a
13 familiar, friendly environment and leave with a
14 reward: their own copy of *Where the Wild Things Are*.
15 Beyond COVID, we offer nutrition education, support
16 navigating Medicare and other health coverage,
17 meditation classes and more.

18 To ensure everyone in Brooklyn has access to
19 these and other resources, we also deliver library
20 services beyond our own walls. In lockdown, our Older
21 Adult Services team regularly called to check in on
22 dozens of homebound patrons in our Books by Mail
23 program. Throughout the crises at Rikers, Brooklyn
24 Public Library lent books to incarcerated patrons
25 virtually and via mail, and we're working to resume

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2 in-person service there. Each week, our redesigned
3 bookmobiles visit shelters for families experiencing
4 homelessness, and we hope to soon reconnect with
5 schools and senior centers.

6 At this moment, our city faces widespread
7 learning loss, disproportionate unemployment among
8 communities of color, and the effects of extreme
9 social isolation and fragmentation. Thankfully,
10 libraries have the experience and expertise to
11 address these challenges. With our partners at Queens
12 and New York Public Libraries and within the Adams
13 administration, we are working to design new
14 programs—and also adapt and scale ones that have
15 succeeded before.

16 But again, we can only do this work with
17 functional buildings and adequate staffing, which is
18 why our fiscal year 2023 preliminary budget request
19 prioritizes restoration of the Council's Libraries
20 Initiative: \$14 million across the three systems,
21 including \$3.9 million for Brooklyn. This funding
22 allowed us to continue providing service throughout
23 the pandemic and without its restoration, we risk
24 having to cut our already insufficient branch repair

1 budget, cut our collections budget, and eliminate
2 staff positions.
3

4 Like other agencies, Brooklyn Public Library was
5 asked to absorb a PEG in the current fiscal year,
6 which we can withstand if we forego hiring for
7 existing vacancies. But operating without full
8 staffing is challenging. With the Omicron surge, we
9 endured numerous closures throughout the system and
10 therefore had to reduce hours. Resuming in-person
11 programs, in addition to Sunday service, is pushing
12 us to the limit of our capacity to operate.

13 Apart from staffing, the other cause of library
14 closures is failing infrastructure: long outdated
15 HVAC systems, leaking roofs, and broken boilers. In
16 Brooklyn alone, we have over 1.1 million square feet
17 of city-owned buildings to maintain, with \$250
18 million in deferred maintenance, and no recurring
19 unallocated capital funds to depend on. It means that
20 year after year we're forced to respond to
21 emergencies rather than perform preventative
22 maintenance; to choose which projects make piecemeal
23 progress while others stall; and all too often, to
24 dip into our operating budget.

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2 Ultimately, this problem, as my colleague, Dr.
3 Marx said, needs long term attention, and we will
4 look for your assistance in advocating for libraries
5 in next year's ten-year capital plan. For now, we ask
6 that you do all that you can to support increased
7 capital funds for libraries in this year's budget.

8 We have proven that with adequate funding, we are
9 capable of creating inspiring public spaces. In
10 October, we opened Adams Street Library, the first
11 new Brooklyn Public Library branch in four decades,
12 to serve the communities of DUMBO, Farragut, and
13 Vinegar Hill. The building is a model for 21st
14 century library design and it shows: it's bustling
15 with activity every day.

16 This year, we look forward to opening new
17 libraries in Crown Heights, Brooklyn Heights, and
18 East Flatbush--not to mention the new Center for
19 Brooklyn History, the largest archive of Brooklyn
20 history in the world, now housed at the former
21 Brooklyn Historical Society building on Pierrepont
22 Street.

23 Every community deserves an inspiring library
24 with services tailored to its needs -- and there are
25 profound needs across the city in this moment. In

1
2 order for New York to recover from the pandemic—all
3 the suffering it has wrought and the inequities it's
4 laid bare—our city must invest in public space and
5 public services for all New Yorkers. Located in every
6 neighborhood and trusted by every generation,
7 libraries are uniquely positioned to help New Yorkers
8 rebuild a more democratic, more cohesive city.

9 I urge you to invest in your communities by
10 investing in public libraries.

11 Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Uh, we
13 will now move to Mr. Buron, if you are ready, for The
14 Queens Public Library.

15 CHIEF BURON: Good morning, thank you, Good
16 afternoon. I am Nick Buron, Chief Librarian and
17 Senior Vice President at Queens Public Library. On
18 behalf of the Library and our President and CEO
19 Dennis Walcott, it is a pleasure to be here.

20 Thank you, Chair Ossé, Speaker Adams, and the
21 members of this esteemed committee for the
22 opportunity to speak with you today about our budget
23 priorities for the next fiscal year.

24 QPL is excited to begin its partnership with our
25 new chair, new Speaker, a new class of Council

1
2 Members and a new Mayor. We are filled with
3 tremendous optimism regarding the future of this
4 great city and are eager to work together as we do
5 our part to ensure a full recovery for New York City.

6 The City Council provides significant support to
7 New York City's public libraries. It would be
8 impossible for us to meet the needs of our customers
9 without it. Therefore, on behalf of every person who
10 works at and is served by Queens Public Library,
11 thank you.

12 March 16th will mark two years since the
13 unprecedented closure of all of our physical
14 locations to the public. QPL has been robustly
15 reemerging and safely reintroducing in-person
16 activities and playing an integral role in New York's
17 recovery.

18 We have continued our virtual programming, which
19 has been an outstanding. We have conducted over
20 29,100 virtual and in-person programs, grab and go
21 activities, and outreach activities from March 2020
22 through the end of January 2022. In that same period,
23 we circulated over 4 million e-books and other e-
24 materials, and added over 123,000 items to our
25 digital collections. Our live and archived programs,

1
2 such as Hip-Hop DJ sessions with Ralph McDaniels and
3 our 24-hour Black Health and Healing Virtual Summit,
4 were viewed nearly 1.1 million times.

5 The Library provides a vast array of services to
6 the communities we serve, and I would like to
7 highlight just a few things:

8 We operate seven Adult Learner Centers with full-
9 time professional staff and volunteers who tutor
10 literacy groups and facilitate ESOL conversation
11 groups.

12 Our Job & Business Academy provides specialized
13 training and learning opportunities, with an emphasis
14 on technology training, to job seekers, aspiring
15 entrepreneurs, and business owners. We also work
16 very closely Correctional Outreach to provide those
17 same services, too.

18 Our Mail-A-Book services offers homebound
19 customers the convenience of having library materials
20 and virtual programming delivered to their homes free
21 of charge.

22 Our Toddler Learning Centers a special program
23 where parents learn about nutrition, speech
24 development, early literacy, and parenting skills,
25

1 while toddlers become familiar with social
2 environments at a young age.

3
4 To prepare children to read, our Kickoff to
5 Kindergarten (K2K) develops knowledge of early
6 literacy skills with guided activities and story
7 times for families.

8 Children's Library Discovery Center, located at
9 our Central Library, has hands-on interactive
10 exhibits and learning labs led by a dedicated
11 Discovery Teams.

12 We have developed the STACKS program, which is a
13 free enrichment program for children in grades K-5.

14 And we operate two dedicated Teen Centers that
15 serve as safe spaces for middle school and high
16 school students to complete homework assignments, do
17 research, participate in programs and leadership
18 initiatives, and explore their creativity.

19 Nearly 15,000 young people participated in over
20 2,200 program sessions this past summer.

21 We have worked closely with the City in the
22 effort to combat COVID-19 and to engage our
23 communities during these challenging times. Whether
24 it was providing host sites for H+H COVID-19 Test &
25 Trace, vaccination sites, or NYC Department of

1
2 Education Learning Labs, polling locations for early
3 voting, Primary Day and Election Day for the Board of
4 Elections, or conducting 2020 Census outreach to
5 ensure an accurate count, Queens Public Library has
6 been there serving the people of the borough.

7 Three of our locations served as COVID-19
8 vaccination sites for children aged 5-11. Eighteen
9 of our locations began distributing COVID-19 test
10 kits to the public, and to date we have distributed
11 more than 23,000 coronavirus test kits to the public.

12 Mayor Adams' Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget
13 instituted a 3 percent cut to our operating budget
14 this fiscal year, but rescinded a proposed Fiscal
15 Year 2023 funding cut of 3 percent. Fortunately, we
16 have found ways to absorb the reductions for this
17 year without affecting hiring or service levels.
18 However, if things change in the Mayor's Executive
19 Budget and cuts are re-proposed for Fiscal Year 2023,
20 staffing levels, public service hours and our
21 collections would likely be impacted.

22 With 66 locations in every neighborhood, Queens
23 Public Library has a large capital program with a
24 variety of needs. In our Ten-Year Capital Plan
25 submitted to the City, we have identified a need of

1 \$270 million over the next 10 years. Of this, we need
2
3 \$98.6 million in Fiscal Year 2023 to address
4 projected funding deficits, as well as to begin the
5 process of initiating tier one priority capital
6 projects in need of immediate attention. An
7 additional amount of \$13.3 million is needed to
8 launch those same tier one projects.

9 When the Library is forced to make emergency
10 critical infrastructure repairs, operating funds must
11 be used for capital repairs. Therefore, it is
12 important that the City Council continue to advocate
13 for New York's library systems to receive dedicated
14 funding in the Mayor's Ten- Year Capital Plan. Being
15 able to have a dedicated capital budget will allow
16 the Library to effectively plan and maintain its
17 capital portfolio.

18 Equally important, we respectfully request that
19 the City Council, at minimum, reauthorize its \$14
20 million Library Initiative, of which QPL receives
21 \$3.9 million. This funding is vital as it allows us
22 to address non-capitally eligible and critical
23 maintenance projects, as well as support staffing
24 levels, programs and materials.

1
2 Libraries have been at the forefront of bridging
3 the digital divide, and we have secured 2,200 hot
4 spots to lend our customers, but we know more are
5 needed. We have communicated to the Administration a
6 need of \$7.9 million in new operating funds in Fiscal
7 Year 2023 in order to meet this anticipated demand.

8 As the center of community life, we build strong
9 neighborhoods through the multitude of free programs
10 and services we provide. For the Library to meet the
11 needs of our customers, especially our most
12 vulnerable populations, we respectfully ask for your
13 continued financial support and ask that you
14 prioritize QPL and New York City's libraries in the
15 Adopted Fiscal Year 2023 Budget.

16 Chair Ossé, and members of the committee, thank
17 you for the opportunity to testify today.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
19 testimony.

20 We will now move to The Chair for, uhm,
21 questions, but before we begin, just a quick reminder
22 that we will do Chair questions and then Council
23 Member questions. So, if any council members have
24 question, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function;
25 you will have five minutes, and we will be calling on

1
2 you in the order that you have raised your hand in
3 Zoom after the Chair question portion.

4 Thank you very much, uh, and Chair, to you.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Brenda, and thank
6 you to all of our esteemed testifiers this afternoon.
7 I really do appreciate all of the work that you do
8 and the passion that you have for that work.

9 I also do want to acknowledge more of my
10 colleagues that have entered this hearing, Council
11 Member Hanif, as well as Council Member Joseph, thank
12 you so much for joining us.

13 Now I do have some questions in regards to the
14 budget obviously, and I am looking forward to getting
15 in to them for myself as well as everyone that is on
16 this call.

17 I do want to start by asking for Fiscal Year
18 2023, uh, as, you know, the administration is
19 proposing a \$418.1 million subsidy for Library
20 systems, which is a decrease of \$13.8 million from
21 last fiscal year. More than half of the Library
22 systems budgets are City funding, uh, New York Public
23 Libraries' budget is approximately 59% funded with
24 City funding. Queens Public Library budget is
25 approximately 91% funding with City funding, and BPL,

1
2 their budge is approximately 85% funding, uh, with
3 City funding.

4 How will the cuts impacts the systems, and what
5 measures with this cut require the systems to take?

6 PRESIDENT MARX: Coming, one sec.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Do we want to start with you,
8 uh, President Marx?

9 PRESIDENT MARX: One second. So, it... (CROSS-
10 TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay... (CROSS-TALK)

12 PRESIDENT MARX: You know, so we are, you know,
13 obviously, what is at most predominantly at risk here
14 is our library materials...

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mmm-hmm

16 PRESIDENT MARX: Uhm, which we would have to
17 reduce. And, you know, this is in neighborhoods
18 including neighborhoods where people don't even have
19 books at home. Uhm, it is reducing our facilities,
20 maintenance, and cleaning facilitates as well as, you
21 know, we are vulnerable in terms of the rent for
22 instance for our Inwood temporary sight.

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I will go next, uhm, I think
24 all of us have budgets that are, uhm, have similar
25 components. We spend a lot of money on salaries and

1 wages and material. And, so, cuts require us to be
2 staffed too leanly -- if that's a word. And,
3 staffing levels translate specially to hours that we
4 are able to operate. So, if we are in a situation
5 where we cannot hire the staff that we need, we will
6 not be able to consistently be in the neighborhoods
7 where we need to be, and that is sort of the first
8 tenant of librarianship; it is important to be
9 consistent, and it's important to be there for the
10 community when we say we will be there. We have
11 worked hard to get to the point where we can say
12 honestly that we are within, uh, a mile of every New
13 York resident, and that we are opened in many places
14 seven days a week. And it would be devastating to
15 have to cut back on that level of service. And then
16 of course the other, uh, area of our expenditures
17 that are in jeopardy would be maintaining the
18 materials budget, keeping our collections current,
19 having as robust a digital collection as we need
20 these days and continuing to maintain the hardcopy
21 material.
22

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And, Mr. Buron?

24 CHIEF BURON: Thank you very much. I just want to
25 echo what has been said, but I want to emphasize that

1 our largest part of our budget is people. And
2 "people" is what keeps our libraries open, and
3 "people" is actually the connections that, you know,
4 our public has with the library. A library is not a
5 library without the positive interactive people that
6 actually, you know, that are actually in there to
7 help make those connections. And, so the largest,
8 our most important resource, is the people that work
9 in them, and that would be the one that would suffer
10 the most if we didn't have the funding that we
11 needed. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, you three. Uhm, so,
14 another question that I do have is, you know, during
15 the pandemic all three library systems received
16 federal and state funding to help sustain the systems
17 and their programing. What is the state and federal
18 funding each system expects to receive this fiscal
19 year, and how have the libraries used the federal and
20 state funding?

21 CHIEF BURON: I can start off, uhm, so, yes, we
22 did receive uh, federal funding, uhm, from IMLS that
23 was the CARES grant that we used, and that was...
24 Uh, really provided, uh, a number of things. So, one
25 of the things the CARES ACT did for us was really

1 help with the reentry program for incarcerating
2 adults so that we can equip them with smart phones,
3 online resources... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

5 CHIEF BURON: Job training in a virtual
6 environment, so that we did not have to completely
7 eliminate that really important program. The rescue
8 package provided hotspots lending, and we also
9 received an NEH grant as part of the rescue package
10 that really helped with fund podcasts for stopping
11 Asian hate as well. So, that is what we were able to
12 do with the funding from last year.

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I would just say that our
14 state and federal funding is, you know, just a small,
15 small portion of our overall budget. And, on the
16 federal side in particular we do get some money for
17 laptops and E-Rate. But, on the state side, you
18 know, we used the money that we get from the state
19 for capital projects. It does not fit in to our
20 operating budget the way City money does.

21 PRESIDENT MARX: I am not being... Oh, there we
22 go, sorry. So, similarly, uh, for federal funding we
23 get about a million dollars... Oops am I...

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I can hear you.
25

1 PRESIDENT MARX: Sorry. We get about a million
2 dollars, uh, from federal funding. And ,you know,
3 similarly IMLS, uh, NEH grants, uh, Workforce
4 Innovation Opportunity Act from the state mostly by
5 formula we are getting close to \$20 million dollars,
6 and plus \$4.2 from state library construction aid.
7 All of these are essential, but they are completely
8 ,you know, they are statistically very small
9 compared to our reliance and our partnership of
10 course with the City, and with The City Council.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm, thank you, you three,
13 and President Marx with start with you on this one:
14 How do you think the pandemic effected the different
15 sources of funding?

16 PRESIDENT MARX: Well, look, we... We continue to
17 be grateful, of course, to the City Council in
18 particular that have been a crucial partner through
19 ups and downs, uh, the administration, I think
20 understands, appreciates the power of what we do.
21 You know, we have gotten one-time federal support,
22 uh, as everyone has, uh, as part of the pandemic. We
23 have also seen here at the New York Public where we
24 are more reliant on private support, particularly the
25 support of the Research's Library Essential

1 Administration that has seen significant increases of
2 public support including, uh, I think we... All
3 systems do this in terms of sort of broad New York
4 City support. But, the truth is, uh, Mr. Chairman,
5 we are also in effect trying to run a library, ,you
6 know, we have an existing budget that we have been
7 able to steadily maintain and grow with the various
8 challenges, but we are not... After the pandemic,
9 we see we have to return to physical especially in
10 the poorest neighborhoods where people are so needing
11 for our services, our programs. But, we are now
12 running also a digital library, uhm, which the
13 pandemic proved the import of and we cannot withdraw
14 from. And we are trying to not diminish our
15 investments in all neighborhoods, but increase our
16 investment in the neighborhoods of greatest need that
17 have suffered so much before the pandemic and during
18 the pandemic. That means we are trying to do sort of
19 two and a half things at least on a single budget
20 even with the great support and the stepping up by
21 the city, by the state, by the feds, by private.
22 What we are trying to do, what we need to do, ,you
23 know, is so pressing that ,you know, we are still,
24 uh, ,you know, sort of close... too close to the
25

1 edge of being able to do what we need to do, and that
2 should not be the case at this point.
3

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That is well said, and uhm,
5 exactly what we are experiencing. While there has
6 been a real strong outpouring in the private
7 philanthropy of libraries, which has been heartening
8 and affirming of the work that we do, sort of an
9 indicator that people understand the services that
10 libraries provide are really fundamentally essential
11 services. But, you know, as we have all said now,
12 the great bulk of our budget comes from the City. We
13 have sustained a PEG in the current fiscal year. We
14 are thinly staffed as a result. The way that we have
15 managed the budget cut is not to fill vacancies, and
16 you can do that for just so long, uh, before it
17 starts to impact the hours that we are able to stay
18 open and the collections that we are able to provide.
19 And think that the really critical thing is this
20 notion that we are, as we emerge, not only running
21 the institutions that we were running back in March
22 of 2020, when we shut down, but also extensive
23 digital enterprises that we built during the
24 pandemic, and that our customers, our patrons, are
25 dependent upon and demanding for good reason, and

1
2 that we will not cease to operate. So, the trick is
3 continuing to run our bricks and mortar operation,
4 because that business is so important to the
5 communities that they serve, but at the same time
6 that we maintain and actually expand our digital
7 enterprise.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

9 So, selfishly, uhm, I love that there was an end
10 to late fees. However, I know that the decision,
11 uhm, is to ensure that our City's library systems are
12 equitable and inclusive. And, it is a practice that
13 had to end. However, late fees are part of a
14 library's revenue. How will this impact they
15 systems' revenue, and are there any financial
16 deficits due to the ending of late fees?

17 Uh, Mr. Buron? Am I pronouncing your name
18 correctly? Buron? Burin?

19 CHIEF BURON: Thank you very much, uh, Chair, it
20 is... It is Buron. It's like the great lake, only
21 with a "B".

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Got you.

23 CHIEF BURON: So, uhm, we have been steadily
24 taking in less for fines and fees over the course of
25 a few years. And certainly during the pandemic, you

1 know, we had waived fines and fees to begin with.
2
3 So, we really started to, uhm, weening ourselves off
4 from that. But, lost about \$900,000 in fines and
5 fees revenue. And, where we really... Where, you
6 know, what it ended up being is that in Fiscal Year
7 2020... In fiscal, I'm sorry in Fiscal Year 2021, we
8 took in a lot less as well. And, so we were able to
9 ween ourselves off of it a lot. But, really, more
10 importantly is was important for us to reprioritize
11 what we were doing, because as you said, Chair, it
12 was a... It was something that needed to end. And,
13 other libraries in the country have done this, but it
14 was more a matter of economic equity to do this.
15 What we realized, that this was an investment. And,
16 so we knew that while we were losing revenue and
17 decreasing revenue due to more people using e-
18 materials, uhm, actually it was an investment. More
19 people started to use the library. We knew people
20 weren't using the library because they were scared of
21 fines and fees or they owed too much. And, so this
22 was a long-term investment for us that was well worth
23 it, and that we have worked our budget to be able to
24 use this as the right time to be able to mitigate
25 that impact.

1 Thank you, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah, I was scared of using the
3 library because of my fines and fees, too, so...

4 CHIEF BURON: (LAUGHING)

5 PRESIDENT MARX: Can I just jump in, Mr. Chair?

6 Can you all hear me? I don't can't... (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah, absolutely.

8 PRESIDENT MARX: So, again, for us similarly, \$1.4
9 million... Let me... But, that's... it's not...
10 That's not what to focus on. What ,you know, as you
11 said, Mr. Chair, we had in this city 1.1 million
12 people blocked from being able to use the library
13 basically as an economic penalty against those who
14 could not afford to buy their way out of it. That is
15 not just crazy, but is counter to everything we
16 value. We have talked about this; we have done...
17 For years we have done... We come to the City
18 Council, amnesties, but we never quite got to it.
19 And, the simple truth is, during the pandemic, it was
20 unthinkable to charge fines. It was impossible to
21 charge fines. We didn't charge fines, and we were
22 able to absorb it in our budget. I just want to be
23 clear, what that meant was we got to the place where
24 we said, "What is at stake in terms of our values and
25

1 what is important, let's not fuss about this
2 anymore." We didn't sit around and say, "We'll wait
3 until somebody funds it for us." We said, "This is
4 what is important right now. This is what we need to
5 do, and this speaks to our values, and it speaks to
6 our... to the citizenry." It wasn't because we had
7 money sloshing around -- you've already heard that --
8 it was because it was so pressing, and I think it is
9 a statement of the values of these institutions, that
10 we stepped up to that without any guarantees of help.
11 Look, the truth is, it adds to the strain on our
12 budget of trying to do everything else, but it also
13 says, we will accept that when we need to, and we
14 will make those hard decisions and find a way to
15 cover them looking to you for support, if you agree
16 with us, on the values that we have been pursuing.

18 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And, I just would put all of
19 this in a bit of context, because this is a committee
20 filled with so many new members: The... In the
21 budget cycle, if it had been ordinary -- it would
22 have been exactly two years ago -- we had a plan
23 which was to come to City Council, and to ask for
24 support to eliminate fines so that we could be true
25 to our values and also ,you know, sort of catch up to

1 other library systems around the country. And the
2 pandemic sort of threw a rather large monkey wrench
3 in to all of that. And, then as we started to think
4 about... And, as everybody has explained, we
5 obviously could not collect fines during the
6 pandemic, because there was no place to bring your
7 books back. So, uhm, as we started to think about
8 what we needed to do as we began to reopen and to
9 encourage people to bring back the collections that
10 were ,you know, spread all over the city, it was
11 clear that if we wanted to get people back in the
12 habit of using their libraries, if we wanted to
13 people to get back in the routine that so many ,you
14 know, young parents have with their children, that we
15 needed to make sure eliminated any barriers out
16 there, and fines were the most obvious and also the
17 most stringent, uh, that we imposed.

19 So, I think we are all proud of where we are now,
20 but it is a strain, and it is an economic hardship.
21 And, you know, as we sort of plow forward, we will
22 figure out sort of how to live with it. But,
23 sustaining additional cuts from the City budget while
24 we are trying to do that as well... And, there are
25 other revenue strains that were affected the

1 libraries. In Brooklyn's case, uh, earned a revenue
2 for PASSPort services which dried up overnight. So,
3 all of these cuts, small or large, add up and it is
4 really important that we can this \$14 million
5 restored.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: The pandemic greatly impacted
8 the Library systems' programming and services,
9 forcing the libraries to quickly shift their
10 resources and operations to accommodate a world
11 during COVID. Despite this shift, libraries have
12 proven to be invaluable resources in aiding
13 communities and providing critical resources during
14 the pandemic. As COVID rates are decreasing and the
15 pandemic situation is more stabilized than in 2020 --
16 thankfully -- have the Library systems reopened at
17 full capacity? And if so, what programming and
18 services are back in operation?

19 And, President Johnson, we will start with you.

20 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Uh, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 You know, we are open now in every library that
22 is not being renovated at the moment. And, that is a
23 big step. And we are resuming in library programming
24 as well as continuing the virtual programming. We
25 are starting to host larger cultural events, which is

1
2 welcome, so welcomed. And, uhm, and also I think
3 that as we move forward, we will... in fact the
4 Brooklyn Public Library is going through a strategic
5 planning process right now, which is an exercise in
6 looking back, figuring out what we have learned
7 during the pandemic, and making decisions about what
8 we would like to carry forward. And, one of the, uh,
9 the lessons that we have learned, and that we will in
10 fact continue to do, is to do outdoor programming,
11 which has been hugely successful, uh, and provides a
12 great model. There were some things that we were
13 doing before the pandemic and we just build upon the
14 experience that we had in many, many neighborhoods in
15 Brooklyn.

16 So, we are thrilled to be back as strong as we
17 are, and, you know, as hopefully things continue to
18 progress the way they have over the past few weeks,
19 and with every step, we will be closer and closer to
20 the robust services that we are well known for.

21 PRESIDENT MARX: I will just reiterate that, you
22 know, we are fully open. Our in person programs are
23 fully back. They stopped again during Omicron; we
24 are back. You know, there is both pent up need and
25 demand and we see that across the board. We also see

1 that everyone is sort of coming back based on their
2 own individual level of comfort and that varies. You
3 know, and there is the sort of transition process, we
4 are still here on Zoom, Mr. Chairman, so, you know,
5 we are all still sort of figuring out how to get out
6 of this more fully. We are also, I think we all
7 agree, that, you know, there are neighborhoods that,
8 you know, we need to pay more attention to, put more
9 resources in, more programs. We have revised our,
10 uhm, we used the opportunity to tweak our afterschool
11 programs so that they are more broadly available,
12 they more readily available in the branches; STEM
13 programs; all of the adult education, we know how
14 much New Yorkers rely on it. We see this in terms of
15 the demand. We also know that we need to be here,
16 and we also need to help New Yorkers feel comfortable
17 again coming back. And, that is going to take....
18 that is still taking a bit of time just for people to
19 get to that personal comfort level.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

22 CHIEF BURON: Here in Queens, all of our available
23 locations are open, uh, which is 59 at the moment.
24 Uh, the ones that are not open are renovations,
25 infrastructure issues, or serving other purposes. We

1
2 have 34 libraries that are offering six day service
3 and 24 that are offering five day service. We have
4 recently opened the Far Rockaway teen library. We
5 have recently reopened the Queensbridge Tech Lab as
6 well.

7 But, in order to expand from five day service at
8 those locations to six day service throughout the
9 borough, we need to fill vacant positions, which has
10 been exacerbated by the pandemic and higher
11 retirement numbers. Uh, in 2021 alone, we had nearly
12 100 staff members leave the organization, of which 44
13 of those were retirements. Uh, when we can fill
14 those position with the adequate funding from the
15 administration and the City council, we will be able
16 bring ourselves back to pre-pandemic levels.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm. And, Mr. Buron, just
18 to... a follow up, were there any employees that
19 have been laid off during the pandemic, and if so,
20 how will the layoffs, in addition to the headcount
21 loss due to the PEGS, impact the Library system's
22 ability to continue providing resources to our
23 communities?

1
2 CHIEF BURON: Thank you, uhm, with the number of
3 staff that are voluntarily leaving and retirements,
4 we have had no layoffs at The Queens Public Library.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Wow.

6 And, President Johnson?

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, the same for us. We at
8 no time during the pandemic did we furlough or lay
9 off any fulltime employees.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: President Marx?

11 PRESIDENT MARX: Exactly the same.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Well, that is amazing. Kudos
13 to [INAUDIBLE 01:01:37]... (CROSS-TALK)

14 PRESIDENT MARX: I think it's a value... We all
15 said, this is of value... (CROSS-TALK)

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah... (CROSS-TALK)

17 PRESIDENT MARX: and, this is not a moment where
18 you throw people by the wayside. To the contrary,
19 the whole approach in union was crucial in this, is
20 like, let's get together and let's get through this
21 together, and figure out how we can do that. And, I
22 think, you know, there have been hard moments for
23 everybody, but I think that has been the real thrust
24 here.

1 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And by the way, that was only
2 possible because of steadfast City support.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So, we are very grateful that
6 we were able to carry that through.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Wonderful. Well, let's move on
8 to some more fun, even though I am having so much fun
9 thus far.

10 Capital projects, libraries' [INAUDIBLE 01:02:22]

11 UNKNOWN: [INAUDIBLE 01:02:23]

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: (LAUGHING) Libraries can serve
13 as crucial community open spaces and provide
14 technology resources such as free WIFI and computers
15 to community members that do not have access.

16 To me, I do believe that libraries are some of
17 the only public spaces in New York City period,
18 especially year round. Yet most libraries have
19 outdated infrastructure and technology.

20 How are the systems addressing last year's
21 ongoing capital projects and balancing them with this
22 year's projects? And, if projects have stopped
23 because of the pandemic, have they restarted?

24 PRESIDENT MARX: All of our projects have started.
25 We have \$342 million of active projects, 47 projects,

1 I can go through them in particular. You know, we
2 really... We did not sort of hit pause on this at
3 all. I mean, only very briefly, and in fact I think
4 working with The City administration to find more
5 solutions, whether it is affordable housing on top
6 libraries. Whether it is, you know, getting us in
7 the ten year capital plan at the level that we need.
8 Whether it is thinking about DDC and revisions of all
9 that, I think the capital work is, you know, again,
10 we have systematic problems that we are talking,
11 finally, with the administering about, and finally
12 that with.... wonderfully, uh, to figure out how we
13 can solve the systemic problems that can plague us
14 and make it so hard. But, the actual progress has
15 been happening in terms of construction. Again, in a
16 sense that is, if you will, easier just to get to be
17 able to do that. Then the hiring which, you know, as
18 my colleagues have said,, you know, yes we need the
19 buildings, but the we also crucially need the folks,
20 the amazing librarians and clerical staff and all of
21 the staff, that is our bread and butter and, you
22 know, that is where, even with the funding, we are
23 all suffering through the problem of having a hard
24 time recruiting and hiring as we lose people to
25

1 retirements. And, you know, we know we cannot lose
2 that battle, because that is the essential one
3 together with [INAUDIBLE 01:04:38].

4
5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And, I don't know if there is
6 a lot more to add, I would say that, uhm, it sort
7 of... There's two sides to this story, uhm, during
8 the pandemic, we were able to get dispensation to
9 continue with certain projects which was terrific.
10 And, so in some cases, we ended up ahead of schedule.
11 And, so, the projects moved forward with the large
12 capital projects ,you know -- complete gut,
13 renovations, new projects -- and those projects are,
14 in many cases, uhm, yeah, they exist because at one
15 time we were included in the City's 10 year plan, and
16 so there had been money that was allocated to do that
17 work. And, so, those are the projects that moved
18 forward. And, that's why it is so critical that we
19 get back in the 10 year plan when we are able to do
20 that.

21 On the other side of the coin ,you know, are the,
22 uhm, the capital, the deferred maintenance, the
23 smaller projects, the HVAC systems, the roofs, all of
24 those things that create uncertainty in the buildings
25 and create problems for the people who work and want

1 to be there. And, those are what is kind of...

2 Those are the things that keep me up at night.

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: and they are things that we
5 have, you know, we kind of just keep kicking the can
6 down the road until it becomes untenable, that we
7 have an emergency, so we are spending money, uh, at
8 rates that are much greater than we should, because
9 we are not doing the preventive work that we could
10 be doing to sort of address the problems when the
11 initially arise.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And that is really where we
14 need to kind of shake things up and make a
15 difference.

16 PRESIDENT MARX: And, Mr. Chairman, can I just
17 reiterate that, you know, the DDC issue, because it
18 costs twice as much, takes twice as long, we end up
19 with shortfalls as the projects take longer, even in
20 the big projects... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

22 PRESIDENT MARX: A third of our capital budget
23 right now is allocated to cover the shortfalls...

24 (CROSS-TALK)
25

1

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

3

PRESIDENT MARX: rather than to actually move our
4 capital agenda in the way that...

5

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

6

PRESIDENT MARX: That is another indication...

7

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah.

8

PRESIDENT MARX: And the City administration
9 understands this... (CROSS-TALK)

10

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah.

11

PRESIDENT MARX: we have to solve this system
12 problem... (CROSS-TALK)

13

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, and there is one thing
14 that is even worse, uh, and then we should, you know,
15 we are beating a dead horse, but the problem is that
16 when we hit a shortfall on a project, sometimes in
17 order to continue moving it forward, because time is
18 not a friend to these projects, we, you know, what's
19 the expression? We rob Peter to pay Paul, and we
20 take money from the operating budget, where we really
21 don't have any money to give, so that we can keep the
22 project moving ahead. And, that is really awful.

23

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

24

CHIEF BURON: Yeah, like my colleagues are pre-
25 pandemic problems as well. So, these are the

1
2 problems that were before the pandemic, during the
3 pandemic, and, you know, unless they are addressed,
4 then post-pandemic. And, to address the specific
5 question, we have had no remarkable issues
6 encountered in terms of restarting projects, and
7 according to DDC's February 2022 Public Buildings
8 Report, there are approximately 37 active projects,
9 uh, for Queens Public Library, and none of them are
10 on pause.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm, I just want to ask one
12 more question before, you know, I move on to my
13 amazing colleagues, but how are the systems assuring
14 equity in determining capital priorities? Is that
15 something that exists, or is it, uhm, you know,
16 solely based off of how big the projects are?

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Alright, you know, I wish that
18 we could say that it was all about equity. Some of
19 it is about sort of the emergency nature of a
20 project... (CROSS-TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

22 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: as opposed to where the
23 project might be located. Uhm, as we do work that we
24 have, uh, that we manage ourselves, uhm, what we call
25 past through projects, and we have control over who

1 we hire to do the work, we are making sure that we
2 are hiring vendors that are women and minority owned
3 businesses, so there is some, to the next extent we
4 have control, there is some equity that is going on
5 there. But, if we could plan better, uh, we
6 certainly would be in a situation where we could be
7 doing a better job of considering the location of a
8 library, not just the condition of the library.
9

10 PRESIDENT MARX: Totally agree. Yeah, look, we,
11 uhm, when we are just dealing with putting out fires,
12 then you have to put out a fire wherever it is. So,
13 when the [INAUDIBLE 01:09:17] ... (CROSS-TALK)

14 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes.

15 PRESIDENT MARX: goes or the roof goes, you know,
16 it is hard to be equitable in that boat. Probably
17 that happens more in the low income neighborhoods,
18 because those... It is where we haven't been keeping
19 up with capital, you know, needs consistently. This
20 is all craziness. When we get, as Linda said, and as
21 Nick will say, you know, when we get the investment
22 that enables us to plan and to be efficient, which is
23 sort of basic -- right? -- amazing that we should
24 have to fight for that. We can and do allocate those
25 resources in, you know, the less well-off

1 neighborhoods, because we know that that's where the
2 gap is both in terms of past capital investments, and
3 in terms of current capital and program needs. So,
4 when we got in to the 10 year capital plan, we picked
5 five Carnegies' in the, you know, poorest less, well
6 developed neighborhoods of New York, and said let's
7 totally redo those. Something we couldn't have done
8 before.

9
10 When we talk to private donors about partnerships
11 that can lead to new libraries together with
12 affordable housing, of course that is all looking at
13 where are the neighborhoods in need? So that we can
14 prioritize those. But, if we do not have a system
15 that works, and if we do not have capital in that
16 system to make it work, we cannot, it is impossible
17 to make those kinds of priority decisions, because
18 then we are just reacting to the crisis of the day.
19 Right?

20 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I would just add one thing,
21 and that is, as we think about these large renovation
22 projects that we are doing, uhm, we are making sure
23 that we spread them out across the borough, that we
24 are doing them in every corner of the borough, that
25 we are, you know, that we are not doing it all in one

1 district or all in another, there is a lot that goes
2 in to that planning that is much more strategic. It
3 is really about the emergencies that are just being
4 addressed on a case by case basis.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great, well those are all of
7 the questions that I have for the three of you. It
8 is always a pleasure speaking and seeing both of you
9 President Marx and President Johnson, and it was nice
10 to meet you, uh, this afternoon Chief Buron.

11 I know that Brenda maybe got kicked off of this
12 Zoom, so I will... (CROSS-TALK)

13 NOAH BRICK: I can assist you, Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

15 NOAH BRICK: So, I am going to ask if any council
16 members have questions to please use the Zoom Raise
17 Hand Function, uh, and you will be called upon to ask
18 your questions.

19 Presently... Oh, we have one hand from Council
20 Member Hanif, uh, please wait for the sergeant to
21 start you five-minute clock. And, as you're
22 speaking, I will work on getting Brenda back into
23 this hearing.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. Hi, all, I am of
3 course super, super grateful to our libraries and
4 recognize that they must continue to be effective
5 community hubs during our COVID recovery, and we have
6 got to expand on all of the creative opportunities
7 that lie ahead, and continue to do the good work that
8 you have been during COVID across all of the changes
9 and the new programming that have been incorporated,
10 uhm, to continue serving all New Yorkers.

11 So, I have a couple of questions, and I want to
12 start revisiting what came up in the questioning,
13 uhm, with Chair Ossé. I am concerned about the
14 reports of increased staff resignations. Can you
15 identify why this is occurring and what steps are
16 needed to reverse this trend?

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I will start. I wish we had a
18 better understanding of it. I think it is not just
19 in our sector, it is across the city. You know,
20 there is this great resignation and we are not immune
21 from it. And, you know, we typically have
22 experienced really long serving staff. You know, we
23 have a guy who unfortunately passed away recently,
24 but he was still working for us when he was 85 years
25 old. So, this is not the norm for us, and I think

1 people are just making decisions about their lives
2 that are based upon different things than they once
3 did. Uhm, and in terms of dealing with it, you know,
4 right now we are staying lean, because we are
5 absorbing a PEG. But as soon as we have some
6 funding, you know, we will be doing some heavy
7 recruitment. It has already begun. We have already
8 started to attend some library conferences where we
9 think there might be sort of fertile ground. But we
10 are gearing up for that.

12 PRESIDENT MARX: I will only add that we are eager
13 for the City administration to negotiate successfully
14 a new contract with DC 37 that will include a
15 significant increase so that we can be more
16 competitive as we try to hire -- and because our
17 amazing staff deserve that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Nick, did you want to
19 share something?

20 CHIEF BURON: Only to say that I wanted to concur
21 with my colleagues, is that we are not immune from
22 the realities the workforce throughout the country.
23 And, I especially wanted to reiterate what Tony said,
24 is that we must be competitive. We are... Our three
25 systems are great places to work, they are mission

1 driven organizations, but that does not mean that the
2 people that work for us, uhm, have less competitive
3 salaries than the private sector, and we have to...
4 we have to be able to address that in order to be
5 competitive and to hire the staff that we need to
6 have much service as possible for our communities....

7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 UNKNOWN: I agree, yeah...

9 PRESIDENT MARX: [INAUDIBLE 01:15:23] the hard
10 jobs, Councilman, I mean these are... You know, we
11 are asking people to do essential work, public
12 service, helping people with the diversity of New
13 York, which is a strength also, and it means we have
14 to be ready to handle that diversity and diverse
15 needs in the library.

16 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And for the bulk of our staff,
17 we have been asking them to be on the frontlines when
18 many people were working remotely. They have the
19 kinds of jobs that require them to be in public
20 facing situations throughout the pandemic. So...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Right, no I am happy that
22 you raised, uh, that library workers are essential
23 workers, and we have got to make sure that they are
24

1 earning a living and competitive pay. And I will be
2 an advocate, you know, with this committee of course.

3 And, I want to move in to the next question that
4 I have that speaks to the issue of workers, uh,
5 because, again, essential workers, LED programming,
6 and some of the nontraditional partnerships that you
7 all cultivated including with Test and Trace, what
8 other nontraditional partnerships would additional
9 funding allow libraries to pursue?

10 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Wow, well that question limits
11 us only to the extent that our imaginations are
12 limited. So, I think, uhm,, you know, one of the
13 things that we have learned in the pandemic is the
14 importance of staying close to the community, and if
15 we had some more money to hire, I think we are eager
16 to get more navigators in our branches, people who
17 are going out in to the community to strengthen those
18 ties and to hear firsthand what kind of services they
19 need. You know, uh, throughout the pandemic a lot of
20 it had to do with public health issues and internet
21 access issues and, you know, in my testimony I spoke
22 on [INAUDIBLE 01:17:20]

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: those things.
25

1 PRESIDENT MARX: You know, I will just reiterate,
2
3 I mean, I think we know that we need more focused and
4 effective afterschool and other supplementaries,
5 especially in ,you know, in particular neighborhoods
6 to help the kids make up for ,you know, what has been
7 lost in these last two years. That accords with, of
8 course, with The Mayor's focus on kids and teens and,
9 you know, really sort of doubling down there. We know
10 that, you know, we... That adult education is even
11 more important going forward, because of, you know,
12 the... all of the economic changes, the need to
13 skill up, the need for technology, and we are the
14 best and biggest of that.

15 As Linda said, we can play a significant role in
16 solving the digital divide. We all trying to be
17 creative in that. You know, if it was outrageous,
18 you know, two years before that two million New
19 Yorkers don't have broadband at home, it is now, you
20 know, it just should be impossible that that is the
21 case, and yet it still is the case. I mean, there is
22 all of that still to do. T

23 The Mayor has talked to us, to the City as a
24 whole about, how do we bring communities together?
25 How do we give folks a sense of agency so that they

1
2 can come together to solve problems, to work with
3 you, their elected officials, to work with the
4 bureaucracy. Because we are in every neighborhood,
5 because we are trusted, because everyone uses us, can
6 we play a role in helping that sort of repairing the
7 damage that has been inflicted on the sort of civic
8 body if you will?

9 You know, there is so much that we are doing and
10 that we can do and that we are excited to do, because
11 we can do it.

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And one thing that sort of is
13 woven throughout what both Tony and I are talking
14 about is making sure that ,you know, that our patrons
15 have the skills that they need to be, uhm, ,you know,
16 adequately and, uhm, and in a fulfilling way,
17 employed. You know, tech skills are so important
18 these days both for kids and for adults.

19 But, I think that teen tech work really will be a
20 focus for us.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I think I saw Nick's hand,
22 but I see that I am out of time, and I Chair Ossé, I
23 do have two more questions, are going to do a second
24 round of questing, or would you like me to proceed?

25 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: You could proceed.

1 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, thank you.

2 PRESIDENT MARX: Nick, you want...

3 CHIEF BURON: Yes, Council Member, thank you,
4 Council Member.

5 I just want to say it's the big communities that
6 we are looking to serve whether it is temp... those
7 in temporary housing, whether it is incarcerated
8 adults, whether it is immigrants, whether, uhm, ,you
9 know, it is those that need basic education, uh,
10 whether it's afterschool... Those are the big parts.
11 And, we are best served by working with community
12 organizations to leverage -- have them leverage us --
13 have us leverage them -- to be able to [LOST
14 CONNECTION] [INAUDIBLE 01:20:26]. There is a lot of
15 work done in our city, and we are not going to do it
16 alone, but we are excellent at being that hub on the
17 wheel to be able to bring organizations together and
18 bring communities together to be able to magnify, you
19 know, we more than the sum of our parts. And, so we
20 would like to have more parts to be more of the sum.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much.

22 Uhm, Tony went in to this a little bit, uh,
23 around just expanding adult literacy programming and,
24 uh, expanding the budget for adult literacy courses
25

1 and curriculum is going to be a big priority for the
2 committee I chair, Immigration. How would additional
3 funding for adult literacy allow your programs to be
4 better serve students?
5

6 PRESIDENT MARX: Go ahead, Nick, you want to go
7 first?

8 CHIEF BURON: [NO AUDIO]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I feel like Nick [INAUDIBLE
10 01:21:26]... (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHIEF BURON: I have to keep coming off of mute, I
12 keep muting myself, so please excuse me.

13 Uhm, as you very well know, we are a city of
14 immigrants, and here in Queens about 50% of the
15 borough was born outside The United States. We are a
16 vital institution when it comes to new immigrants.
17 We turn away people who want to come to our free
18 adult education and our English - ESL programs,
19 because we just do not have the staffing, and we just
20 do not have the facilities to be able to do it. And,
21 so in order to use our current facilities and keep
22 them open longer, we need the staffing members to be
23 able to do that. We don't want to turn anyone away
24 and yet, you know, we provide some of the best
25 opportunities for people not only come here for the

1 classes themselves, but then be able to take
2 advantage of all other opportunities that we have at
3 the libraries. It's a one stop shop for people who
4 are new to the community and need to be able to
5 improve not only their language skills, but also
6 their business skills, their job employment skills,
7 and we can do that through contextualized adult
8 learning. Uh, more money, that's what I heard you
9 say, more money means more teachers. Because, again
10 it goes back to where we talked about before, is that
11 the resources that we get in the form of a budget
12 pays for the most important thing that we have and
13 that is our staff. Staffing leads to the programs
14 that we can do, uhm, when it comes to, uhm, you know,
15 immigrant learning, it's those people that make those
16 interpersonal connections that really help our
17 community.

18
19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, and then,
20 finally... Oh, Tony, did you want to add on?

21 PRESIDENT MARX: No, keep going.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I know these are exciting
23 questions, uhm mentioned excited listening to your
24 responses, really. I believe in just the vastness of
25

1 what libraries can accomplice for our communities,
2 and particularly for our immigrant communities.

3 What tactics, just going in to a little bit of
4 ,like, outreach and community engagement, I know,
5 Linda, you mentioned that, like, having more funding
6 would allow you to have a dedicated navigator or
7 navigators to pursue more intentional outreach.

8 In the meantime, what tactics are you using to
9 inform constituents about newer programs like the e-
10 books and audio book availability and other
11 programing?

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Actually, thank you, you kind
13 of gave me a great question that I can brag about.

14 You know, we have a new campaign that we are
15 about to launch just making sure that it puts the
16 libraries back in people's mind as a place to go for
17 resources. And that will be starting in the next
18 month, uh, as we get into spring. We are taking full
19 advantage of every avenue. So, we are doing a lot on
20 social media -- of course that does not hit
21 everybody. And then ,you know, just making sure that
22 in every library there is a lot of information both
23 coming from the staff but also just from material
24 around the library about what programs are available
25

1 and when they are being held. But, yeah, we, uhm, we
2 have strong group that is working hard to bring
3 everyone back and to inform everybody fully about the
4 great resources that we have to offer.
5

6 PRESIDENT MARX: So, just ditto, uh, we ,you know,
7 marketing, going out ,you know, to NYCHA, to homeless
8 areas, bringing our programs there, using book
9 giveaways to bring people back in, the welcome week
10 activities , I mean all of it. We are pulling out the
11 stops on this, and I agree with Linda, and is I am
12 sure Nick will say the same, we are doing a lot, and
13 we need to do more. And, let me just say this, which
14 may surprise you, if we... I don't think we know
15 fully how to do this. I think we are doing
16 everything with this. Let's just be honest, before
17 the pandemic, ,you know, in the ,you know, in The
18 South Bronx, the Upper Westside, the kids on the
19 Upper Westside on average were borrowing three times
20 as many books as in The South Bronx. And, the
21 probably have more books at home already. So, that
22 was the start before the pandemic. Right? The
23 neighborhoods in The South Bronx, neighborhoods like
24 that have less digital access, so even though we were
25 doing 10 million e-books lends, it was less going in

1
2 to those neighborhoods. The simple fact is, we are
3 doing everything we can, and I will... I think we
4 just need to be honest and say, we need to get
5 creative as a society, as a city, to say, how do we
6 get the folks who should be using us more who are
7 actually using us less, for that to change
8 fundamentally? And, I think we see that, and I am
9 not suggesting we're not doing and trying everything,
10 I'm am suggesting... I need to confess, this is
11 hard. This is hard... (CROSS-TALK)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Who makes those decisions
13 though, Tony, uhm, in terms of how to cultivate the
14 outreach... (CROSS-TALK)

15 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I would like to take a
16 slightly different, uh, bent on this, I think...
17 And, I want to give a big shout out to our Government
18 Affairs team and our Community Relations guys who are
19 going to community boards and reporting there.
20 Anybody who invites them anywhere, and by the way,
21 please feel free... (CROSS-TALK)

22 PRESIDENT MARX: I was [INAUDIBLE 01:27:08]

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Please feel free to do that.
24 I mean, we are sending book mobiles and tech mobiles
25 in to every neighborhood. I mean, we are, uh, you

1 know, when I was business school and we talked about
2 guerrilla marketing, that might date me, but, uhm,
3 but we are guerrillas out there. We are, like,
4 seriously trying to make sure that we are engaging
5 anyone and everyone who will listen to us.
6

7 PRESIDENT MARX: I totally [NO AUDIO] [INAUDIBLE
8 01:27:30] sociological problem. Right? That is
9 huge. That we just have to be honest about. Right

10 CHIEF BURON: It's a multipronged approach for
11 many of us, and that's of course... it's a
12 centralized marketing, whether that be social media,
13 or through our website, or... But, it's also at the
14 individual locations for them to go out to their
15 neighborhood and really sell the services that we are
16 providing to people who don't use us. But, also we
17 are relying, as Linda said, on community boards to
18 get our word out. That's why we'll go out there to
19 them, really profess ourselves to them, so that they
20 could talk to their constituents. It's the local
21 newspapers that we'd invite as much as possible to
22 see the great things that we're doing, to push that
23 out to their constituents. So, it is a multipronged
24 approach in order to... And, it's continuous. Doing
25

1 last month does not mean... Get us off the hook for
2 next month.
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much. I have
5 learned a lot. That's all for me.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much.

7 We will now go to Council Member Brewer followed
8 by Council Member Fariás.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. It
10 is great to part of this discussion.

11 My first question is just the hours, uhm, my
12 friend Harvey, who was head of operations under
13 Dinkins, so of you remember, he has a saying, which
14 is, the reason our city doesn't do, uhm, ,you know,
15 what Council Member Hanif and others were stating,
16 which is, "Why don't people go to the libraries all
17 the time? Why don't we have more people?" It's
18 because nobody knows when they're open. You have to
19 have a library just like supposedly the subway or the
20 bus. It just has to be there -- all the time. You
21 shouldn't have to look up the hours. You shouldn't
22 have to wonder if it's open. That would make a big
23 difference. Harvey always... he you know, he met
24 me... other day, and he says, "Gale, the
25 libraries..." What is the number that we need to hit

1
2 for a really seven... A real seven-day a week, not,
3 okay, I think it's 1:00 to 6:00 on Saturday. Maybe
4 it is 1:00 to 6:00 on Sunday. Is there a number for
5 that that we should be striving for? You know, I'm
6 talking about 8:00 to 8:00 or, uh, you know,
7 [INAUDIBLE 01:29:42]

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know I... I would... I
9 would love to be open all night long in some
10 locations.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I would agree with that.
12 And, I am tired us, okay, we can only do this - we
13 can only do that. The library, it's business it's
14 literacy, it's afterschool. It is the only place
15 that is free for all of these services. We should
16 stop messing around with shortchanging the libraries.

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I think... First all, welcome
18 back. It is wonderful to have you back. Uhm, and,
19 uh... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 01:30:12]
21 freaking institution, but I appreciate that, Linda.
22 I'm just... I've heard this before a 100 times...
23 (CROSS-TALK)

24 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You have. [INAUDIBLE
25 01:03:17]... (CROSS-TALK)

1 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 01:30:18]...

2 (CROSS-TALK)

3 PRESIDENT MARX: She wasn't gone, she was just in
4 Manhattan, Linda.

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes... (CROSS-TALK)

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I've heard this since 1978
7 [INAUDIBLE 01:30:24]... (CROSS-TALK)

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, you could be giving our
9 testimony I suspect... (CROSS-TALK)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 01:30:26] ...
11 (CROSS-TALK)

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: But, uh, but, we, uh, I will
13 say... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 01:30:28] we
15 want at least a number to know what a real seven day
16 a week -- we don't have to check to know what time
17 the library's open, it's open!

18 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know, I have a, you know,
19 there's a conflicting thing here, uhm, I, on one hand
20 would like to be open all the time, and on the other
21 hand, uh, I want to be responsible about how...

22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

24
25

1 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: we do it, and make sure that
2 the hours we're open are hours that people actually
3 want us to be there for them... (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No I agree. [INAUDIBLE
5 01:30:53]

6 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And, so it doesn't... There's
7 not a... necessarily a cookie cutter approach, uhm,
8 I think that the original Carnegie compact ,you know,
9 had us open 12 hours a day. That's... (CROSS-TALK)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Mm-hmm

11 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: a lot of hours. And, I'm not
12 sure that that necessarily makes sense given the
13 short of complexity of people's lives today. But, I
14 would really love to be able to say that in those
15 neighborhoods, where it makes sense, we will be
16 opened all night if that's in fact going to improve
17 the quality of the service and the number people who
18 will take advantage of what we offer. Uhm, and, uh,
19 you know, I would like to go neighborhood by
20 neighborhood, we are trying to do that now. In some
21 neighborhoods it makes more sense to have longer
22 hours on Sunday than it does on Saturday. In other
23 neighborhoods it's exactly the opposite. And, the
24 key is to... listening hard and getting it right and
25

1
2 having the budget in order to execute on it.

3 [BACKGROUND NOISE] [INAUDIBLE 01:43:45]

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well, what I am seeing is,
5 whatever your... Okay, I agree with you, I mean,
6 even depending on the Saturday or Sunday, I know that
7 only too well. But, the issue is... The public
8 should not have to have, like, keep... As Harvey
9 keeps reminding, me, "wonder if the library is open".

10 [INAUDIBLE 01:32:02]... (CROSS-TALK)

11 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, the key to that is to be
12 consistent. So, if you say you're going to be open
13 for this block of time, that in fact you always are.
14 So, it's... (CROSS-TALK)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I agree, but it should be
16 across... a little bit across the board. So, if
17 [INAUDIBLE 01:32:12] places.... (CROSS-TALK)

18 PRESIDENT MARX: Council Member, you are
19 [INAUDIBLE 01:32:14]... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You know, that's...
21 (CROSS-TALK)

22 CHIEF BURON: You are absolutely correct. Uhm,
23 and, uhm, ,you know, it's funny that you mentioned
24 ,you know, Mayor Dinkins, because it's because of
25 Mayor Dinkins, that I was hired... (CROSS-TALK)

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's because of Harvey!
3 Not... I worked with Mayor Dinkins, it's because of
4 Harvey, I'm just saying.

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I understand, but I [INAUDIBLE
6 01:32:31] ... (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I loved Mayor Dinkins, may
8 he rest in peace, but it's because of Harvey. Go
9 ahead... And, [BACKGROUND NOISE] [INAUDIBLE
10 01:32:35]... (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHIEF BURON: [BACKGROUND NOISE] [INAUDIBLE
12 01:32:36] And, it's thanks to the administration...
13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

15 CHIEF BURON: Thank you to the administration that
16 I was hired over 28 years ago, because they wanted to
17 bring back six day service, and so... (CROSS-TALK)

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's Harvey.

19 CHIEF BURON: what... What this does... (CROSS-
20 TALK)

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 01:32:48]

22 CHIEF BURON: Is that we have to build up to this.
23 And, so, right now, we would not even have enough...
24 If... We would not even have enough staff right now
25 to be able to have seven day service. But, I do

1
2 remember, as a librarian, that we had seven day
3 service at every council district. And, that's a...

4 (CROSS-TALK)

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

6 CHIEF BURON: Yeah, and so we have to build up to
7 that, and quite honestly, because of ,you know, the
8 funding that we need, we need funding just to get up
9 to six day service. [INAUDIBLE 01:33:14]

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [INAUDIBLE 01:33:15] the
11 problem, Nick, we.... What I want from you is the
12 number that would require whatever you, Linda, Tony
13 agree for your library services, seven day a week,
14 obviously with some caveat, this one wants this,
15 that, or... and, this one wants Sunday. Although,
16 even when you've got an orthodox community, you've
17 still got people in there who, you know, they'd like
18 to go the different days, excreta.

19 CHIEF BURON: Well, and as you likely know, Sunday
20 service for us is time and a half. So, we need
21 enough staff in our six day service... (CROSS-TALK)

22 UNKNOWN: [INAUDIBLE 01:33:45]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I agree... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHIEF BURON: and keep them [INAUDIBLE 01:33:47]
25 in cash. So, your question is excellent, and we

1 would like to get back to you with an actual
2 number... (CROSS-TALK)

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHIEF BURON: of what that looks like to have
5 seven day service. And, then, understand that we
6 have to build up to that with a staffing level...
7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [BACKGROUND NOISE] It's
9 Harvey Robins, R O B I N S. Go ahead... (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHIEF BURON: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Go ahead, Tony, did you
12 want to say something?

13 PRESIDENT MARX: I just reiterate that, you know,
14 it's about the staffing. It's about having
15 [INAUDIBLE 01:34:11]... (CROSS-TALK)

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, but then put the
17 money in for the staffing. Everything goes in that
18 number.

19 PRESIDENT MARX: No, and the overtime adds to that
20 in that case. But, you know... (CROSS-TALK)

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's okay.... (CROSS-
22 TALK)

23 PRESIDENT MARX: [INAUDIBLE 01:34:17]... (CROSS-
24 TALK)

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Put it in.

UNKNOWN: [INAUDIBLE 01:34:19] Got that?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Number two, maybe you discussed this already, if I'm... I'm sorry, I'm also on the NYCHA hearing, Chair, I apologize. I think you are, too. You're being slick too. You're going on both.

So, the issue is the tech. Uhm, it's the five year constant change because of the fact that technology doesn't last very long. So, I guess my question is, how do we look at technology for the libraries? Is it just capital, is there other ways in which we should be looking at the technology for the libraries? Mostly I am thinking about for the patrons. I don't know I'm just asking kind of a general question, because it is what the... I wish they all went for books... (CROSS-TALK)

UNKNOWN: [INAUDIBLE 01:34:56] right? (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But, I just wanted to just think a little bit about the technology, what that looks like in terms of capital for the future?

PRESIDENT MARX: Well, I think it's... It is a constant need, uh, Gale as you know. And, we had

1
2 some change in rules at The Comptroller level that
3 made it more flexible, that was essential, and
4 [INAUDIBLE 01:35:18]... (CROSS-TALK)

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, that's helpful.

6 PRESIDENT MARX: important. But, I, you know, I
7 do think it never stops. Right? And, we need to
8 keep going, uh, and replenishing and upgrading. And,
9 as others have said, we need to connect that to, uh,
10 it's not just devices, it's the skills to use the
11 device, which is why the public libraries are the
12 largest free computer skill training, especially for
13 adults in the city, and it's about connectivity and
14 broadband connectivity. Which, you know, it's just,
15 uhm, it's beyond a scandal that we are even talking
16 about the fact that a million or two million New
17 Yorkers don't have connectivity. They can't use the
18 library online if they can't get online, they can't
19 even to their jobs or... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I...

21 PRESIDENT MARX: go to school... (CROSS-TALK)

22 UNKNOWN: [INAUDIBLE 01:36:05]

23 CHIEF BURON: And, that is another example of
24 where we need to solve this problem, and the library
25 should be partner or is a partner.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. [INAUDIBLE
3 01:36:13]... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHIEF BURON: You know, and... You know, and the
5 three systems really understand that technology is
6 not the end point. The technology is the tool to get
7 to better jobs, to get to better education, to get
8 to, you know, lifting up our communities. So, the
9 tool has to keep changing. Tony said it very well,
10 it's like it's building the skills so that you could
11 use any tool to continue to build, and that skills
12 come from ,you know, adequate... adequate staffing
13 which came back to what you had said earlier.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you still get, uh, E-
15 Rate money? And, then, are you not allowed to be a
16 hub for the neighborhood, right? Because, then you'd
17 lose your E-Rate, is that still the situation?

18 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: [INAUDIBLE 01:36:53] E-Rate,
19 and we are using our libraries to extend, uh, WIFI
20 signals. We're all the largest providers of WIFI in
21 our boroughs, uhm, free WIFI. Uhm, and we're...
22 We're all working at extending those signals out in
23 to the neighborhoods.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, so you haven't
25 been... Have you... You have to get permission from

1 the FAA or FTC or whatever... FAA... right you have
2 to get.... (CROSS-TALK)

3
4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What's that... That
5 expression? You ask for forgiveness, not for... Not
6 for... (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Not for permission.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But, you have... Do you
10 have... You haven't gotten it from the federal
11 government yet to be able to extend out in the
12 community? Is that... Because, when I have
13 testified, they've always said no. But, maybe
14 they're changing their minds.

15 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I don't know that it's an
16 issue... (CROSS-TALK)

17 PRESIDENT MARX: I think this is an ongoing
18 negotiation. Let us come back to you on that.
19 And... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, [INAUDIBLE
21 01:37:34] and, then, just, finally maybe you talked
22 about DEC, they charged you too much? Are they still
23 [INAUDIBLE 01:37:38]... (CROSS-TALK)

24 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, no, no, we just...
25 We... We did talk about this... (CROSS-TALK)

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: and, we've been working
[INAUDIBLE 01:37:40]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay... Okay, because
they say they... they don't, and I say they do. So,
uh, it's just an ongoing dispute... (CROSS-TALK)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No one's going to disagree
with you on that Council Member... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: They do... They do, Gale. I
think we're all [INAUDIBLE 01:37:49]... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, we'll talk about it
later.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: on that... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, thank you very
much, Mr. Chair.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, and then we will finally
got to... This is the last council member. If any
other council members have questions, please raise
your hand in Zoom.

We will go to Council Member Fariás, thank you so
much... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Hi, good afternoon, that
was a very animated discussion, uhm, I have to check

1 and make sure... some of my questions were answered.

2 I did have a public WIFI question, so thank you for
3 saying you will get back us on, like, expansion and
4 community use.
5

6 I am really interested in discussing around The
7 Council Initiative, and I did pop out a couple of
8 times, so please let me know if you have already
9 answered some of these.

10 So, in Fiscal Year 2022, The City Council
11 allocated one time funding of \$14 million split
12 between the three systems. Uh, can you just
13 elaborate a little bit more on how some of that was
14 used?

15 And, then, I think, I'd like to learn about, uhm,
16 The Council's role, and the libraries, are planning
17 on implementing the City's first reader initiatives
18 or any of the initiatives if you want to, like, dive
19 a little deeper in to them?

20 CHIEF BURON: Uhm, I will just start. Uhm, of the
21 \$14 million that three Library systems got, The
22 Queens Public Library got \$3.9 million. We used ours
23 for vital non-capitally eligible maintenance and
24 critical maintenance that can only be, uhm, be used
25 through operational money and not capital money. Uh,

1 we did it to support staffing levels as well to help
2 with programming, and to buy increased materials, uh,
3 this would be a great opportunity to say that e-
4 materials cost about five times more than a hard...
5 than a printed book. And, so, but any time that...

6 (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Sure.

8 CHIEF BURON: we are buying e-material, it's much
9 more expensive, and so extra funding where we have to
10 maintain print collections as well as, uh, vital e-
11 collections, is something that will cost us money in
12 the long term. But, that's how we used our money at
13 Queens Public Library. Thank you

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: And just a quick followup
15 before anyone else jumps in, is that because of,
16 like, propriety in its use? Or, why is it five times
17 more expensive?

18 Sure you can go ahead... Oh, he needs to be
19 unmuted, Sergeant.

20 CHIEF BURON: Sorry, I keep muting myself. I you
21 know I... (CROSS-TALK)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: It's okay. It's habit.
23
24
25

1
2 CHIEF BURON: Because, I've been used to it after
3 a couple of years, because that's what you do, but,
4 you know, there's process here.

5 Uhm, you have asked an excellent question, and I
6 am so glad that you have asked that question, because
7 why is it five times more when we're renting with
8 these e-books. We don't own hardly any of these e-
9 materials. We are renting them for either 26
10 circulations or two years... (CROSS-TALK)

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Mm-hmm.

12 CHIEF BURON: And we don't own it. And, so this
13 is a much bigger question that you have asked about
14 how do we make e-material more affordable for public
15 libraries so that we can buy more for our public?
16 Uhm, but they are proprietary, uh, whereas when we
17 buy a book we get to keep it. And, when it has had
18 its life use, we could sell it, as we do, for an
19 online vender to get money to buy more books. But,
20 it comes to e-material we don't own it. And, so the
21 price, uh, you have jumped in to a very interesting
22 topic that, uh, I wish as I... As President Marx
23 said, I wish I could give you a really good answer to
24 that one, uhm, but it's elusive because it is the
25 publishers and the online venders that are charging

1
2 us what they are charging us, and they have a
3 monopoly on this content.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Got it. Maybe Chair Ossé
5 and I can talk offline with you all about this to see
6 if this is a state or federal thing we can push.

7 And, so, sorry, just, uh, Linda or Tony, would
8 you like to jump in on the previous question or this
9 one?

10 Linda you're not muted.

11 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, sorry, about that. Uhm,
12 it happens once a day.... (CROSS-TALK)

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: That's okay.

14 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Uh, on, uh, like Queens,
15 Brooklyn Public Library's \$3.9 million.
16 Unfortunately, it doesn't take long to spend that.
17 But, it is basically staffing, programing, materials,
18 branch [INAUDIBLE 01:42:17] we do participate in,
19 uhm, "Ferst Readers" program. We have virtual story
20 times in 11 languages, uh, "Ready Set Go
21 Kindergarten!" in Spanish and English, uh, Book
22 Refresh in collections. So, you know, nothing
23 particularly out of the ordinary that we use that
24 funding for, but all, you know, profoundly
25 fundamental and important.

1 PRESIDENT MARX: And, really quickly, uh, our \$6.1
2 million, uh, from The City Council, we spent \$3.4 on
3 library materials, \$2.5 on facilities, maintenance,
4 and cleaning, and \$170,000 as agreed with The Council
5 on the temporary space for the Inwood Branch while we
6 are building the new branch and the affordable
7 housing on top.

8 The e-books issue is a huge issue. I'd be
9 delighted to dive in with you. Uh, New York Public
10 Library is I think fair to say the biggest sort of
11 actor sort of, you know, nationally on this. We have
12 our own... (CROSS-TALK)

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Right.

14 PRESIDENT MARX: Uh, SimplyE app, which is
15 important, because we think the libraries need to
16 control this ecosystem, control... ensure privacy
17 and be able to negotiate with authors and publishers
18 so that we get the rights without being gouged and
19 still protect the interest of authors and publishers
20 to make a fair return, so that we continue to have
21 creativity. But, you know, we're... We're at... We
22 lent 10 or 11 million e-books during the pandemic.
23 Uhm, we have negotiated with Google to get 4 million
24 books available to, you know, potentially anyone in
25

1 the world. I mean, this is, uh, a huge issue, and...

2 (CROSS-TALK)

3 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Mm-hmm

4 PRESIDENT MARX: it's also an issue that involves
5 not only how to you ensure that you can offer it, but
6 how do you make sure that people are taking you up on
7 it? Uhm, and that's the marketing side and the
8 outreach side. So, this is... This is a whole
9 ecosystem that's emerging and developing and, you
10 know, all three systems are deeply in this.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Yeah, that's... It's
12 super interesting, I mean, I definitely wasn't
13 something I thought we would... that would come up
14 today, but, you know, it's... If we're kind of like,
15 renting the books from you to read, and you're
16 renting the books on a use basis or a time basis,
17 it's kind of counterproductive to making sure folks
18 have access to it and cost is definitely inhibiting
19 ,you know, better uses of dollars.

20 Chair Ossé, can I ask a capital question really
21 quickly?

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Sure.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Thank you so much.
24
25

1 Uhm, I just wanted to ask some, uhm, around some
2 of the capital projects. I am really excited to see
3 that the Castle Hill Branch in my district, uhm, has
4 an allocation, an ongoing project for renovation to
5 the branch of \$8.3 million. But, I really wanted to
6 know ,you know, how are the systems adjusting last
7 year's ongoing capital projects and balancing them
8 with this year's projects? And, have all of the
9 capital projects that were halted, uhm, due to the
10 pandemic, have they restarted?
11

12 PRESIDENT MARX: So, I could start, uh, everything
13 has not just restarted but has been restarted and
14 gaining steam. We have 47 projects at the moment in
15 The Bronx alone. We have 18 projects for \$137
16 million. We have completed a whole set of projects
17 including in The Bronx and Morrisania. We are, uh,
18 we are doing our five Carnegies, and those include
19 Hunts Point, uh, Melrose, uh, we are doing
20 construction on the new Westchester Square. I mean,
21 so, you know, really this is moving, but as we have
22 said, there are systemic problems that we need to
23 solve so that we can maintain and build this momentum
24 and not keep running into the same structural issues
25 that we have. And, I think the administration is

1 ready to have that conversation in a way that we're
2 actually... in a way we've never been ready before,
3 and so that would be amazing.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Okay, thank you.

5 Anyone else, or you're okay?

6 CHIEF BURON: I would just, uh, reiterate what I
7 said before, that we have, uh, 37 active projects
8 right now with DDC as of today. Uh, none of them are
9 on pause, they are moving ahead, uhm, at their own
10 pace.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Beautiful. Great, well,
12 thank you all for testifying today. I really
13 appreciate it.

14 PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And, at this point, Chair, uh,
16 no other council members have raised their hands to
17 ask questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Brenda, I do have one more
19 question if that's okay. [BACKGROUND NOISE] And,
20 this is for President Marx. Is your background a
21 green screen or a real background?

22 PRESIDENT MARX: [NO AUDIO]

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Oh, wow, that's pretty cool.

1 PRESIDENT MARX: [INAUDIBLE 01:47:33] office was
2
3 built, you know, for this a hundred and some odd
4 years ago. But, actually the thing to really come
5 out to this building for is the Treasures exhibit,
6 because after 125 years all of these amazing things
7 that basically we have kept in a safe are now
8 available for the public. We've got... I was with a
9 school group this morning. We want every school to
10 come and visit. You know, never mind the office,
11 come and see the Treasures it's amazing.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Amazing, thank you.

13 Back to you, Brenda.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, thank you, Chair.

15 So, we do not have any other raised hands for council
16 member questions for the Library section.

17 So, uh, Chair, this would conclude the Library's
18 testimony portion of the hearing, and we've moved
19 Cultural Affairs if you're ready?

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay.

22 PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you all.

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you all.

24 CHIEF BURON: Thank you very much.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great, thank you.

1
2 And, then, Chair, so we will go to you and begin
3 the, uh, Cultural Affairs portion of the hearing.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Amazing, thank you so much,
5 Brenda.

6 Good afternoon, everyone, good afternoon again to
7 those of you that were on, uh, the previous part of
8 our hearing.

9 And, welcome to this hearing for the Committee
10 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
11 Intergroup Relations. Again, I am Council Member Chi
12 Ossé, Chair of this committee.

13 This afternoon, we will be discussing the Fiscal
14 2023 Preliminary Expense Budget for DCLA which stands
15 at \$145.5 million and the Fiscal 2023 Preliminary
16 Commitment Plan includes \$1.3 billion in Fiscal 2022-
17 2026 for the department.

18 At the urging of The Council, the administration
19 added approximately \$30 million at adoption of the
20 Fiscal 2022 plan. The funding included \$11 million
21 for the Cultural Institution Group (CIG); 17 million
22 was for Cultural Development Fund (CDF); and \$2
23 million for agency initiatives.

24 The Council is disappointed that the funding is
25 not included in the Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Plan.

1 The Preliminary Budget includes cuts that total
2
3 \$3.4 million in Fiscal 2022 and \$4.5 million in out
4 years achieved through cuts and CreateNYC funding,
5 CDF funding, CIG Supplemental funds, and other
6 programmatic initiatives.

7 Disappointed to see cuts at a time... I am very
8 disappointed to see cuts at a time when cultural
9 organizations are struggling and need funding the
10 most.

11 In the Fiscal 2022 adopted plan, there was \$12.6
12 million in federal funding for the City Artist Corps
13 in the agency's budget. This program supported NYC-
14 based working artists who were disproportionately
15 impacted by COVID-19. The total funding for the
16 program was \$25 million of which \$12.4 million was
17 managed by other agencies. This funding is not
18 reflected in the Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Plan.

19 How does the agency plan to ensure that our
20 artist are provided continued support in Fiscal 2023?
21 It is The Council's responsibility to ensure that the
22 City's budget is fair, transparent, and accountable
23 to New Yorkers. Hence, as The Chair of the Committee
24 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
25 Intergroup Relations, I will continue to push for

1
2 accountability and accuracy, and ensure that the
3 budget reflects the needs and interests of the City.
4 It is essential that the budget that we adopt this
5 year again is transparent, accountable, and
6 reflective of the priorities and interests of The
7 Council and the people we represent.

8 This hearing is a vital part of the process, and
9 I expect that DCLA will be responsive to the
10 questions and concerns of council members. I look
11 forward to an active engagement with the
12 administration over the next few months to ensure
13 that the Fiscal 2023 adopted budget meets the goals
14 of The Council as set out.

15 And, I do want to go off script for a second,
16 because, you know, we are in a time where we are
17 almost about to hit... we are in our third March
18 since the pandemic hit, and as we realized or found
19 out last week, uh, with many of the lifts from that
20 mask mandates and some of these vaccine mandates, uh,
21 that this new administration, uhm, is trying to bring
22 New York back. And, I do want to acknowledge that if
23 we are going to bring this city back, uh, we cannot
24 do it without our cultural institutions.

1 Uh, just a rough statistic, but about 25% of the
2 tourist that come to this city, uh, come because of
3 our culture, our cultural institutions, our cultural
4 organizations. And, if we are going to fiscally
5 rebuild this city and bring it back, uh, to the way
6 that it was before the pandemic, uh, then we will
7 need our cultural institutions to at the forefront of
8 that conversation. Uhm, and as Chair of this
9 committee, it is just disheartening, uh, to see that
10 there is a proposed cut, uh, to our cultural
11 institutions, and I will do everything that I can as
12 a council member and as Chair of this committee to
13 push back as much as I can to make sure that those
14 cuts don't even happen. And, not only cuts, but we
15 replenish the budget to what it was before the
16 pandemic, and maybe even go further and fund it more
17 than it was during the pandemic.

18 Uh, I would also like to recognize the members of
19 this committee who are present, uh, just for this
20 section of the hearing, so Council Member Brewer is
21 with us, Council Member Farías, Council Member
22 Joseph, Council Member Louis, Council Member Hanif,
23 and Council Members, uh, thank you so much for being
24 here.
25

1
2 And, again, I would also like to thank my staff
3 for organizing today's hearing including Committee
4 Counsel Brenda McKinney, Legislative Policy Analyst
5 Cristy Dwyer, and Principal Finance Analyst Aliya
6 Ali. And, I also do want to thank acknowledge my
7 staff my Budget and Legislative Director May
8 Vutrapongvatana.

9 Brenda, I will turn it back to you, thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair.

11 Uh, so, hello, everyone, and for the benefit of
12 those who were not here for the Library's portion, my
13 name is Brenda McKinney, and I am the counsel to the
14 New York City Council's Committee Cultural Affairs,
15 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations.

16 Before we begin today, I would like to remind
17 everyone, you will be on mute until are recognized to
18 speak, just some housekeeping items, at which time
19 you will be unmuted by the Zoom host. If you mute
20 yourself after you have been unmuted, you need to be
21 unmuted again by the host. Uhm , please be aware
22 that there will be a delay in muting and unmuting, so
23 please be patient and also be aware that a little box
24 pops up for you to click.

1 During the hearing, if council members would like
2
3 to ask questions, please use the Zoom Raise Hand
4 Function, and you will be called on to speak.

5 We will be limiting council member questions to
6 five minutes -- including responses.

7 We will be calling on council members in the
8 order that they raise their hands in Zoom.

9 We are going to hear now from Cultural Affairs,
10 The Department of Cultural Affairs. So, I will now
11 administer the oath of the affirmation to all of the
12 DCLA (Department of Cultural Affairs) witnesses, uhm,
13 including those that are here available for question
14 and answer.

15 Uh, if all of you... I know several people are
16 in the same room, if you could just come on camera so
17 we can see you, and we will just unmute. I will just
18 call your names, uh, and then we will just unmute you
19 now. Thank you so much.

20 Uh, so first is Sheelah Feinberg, DCLA Deputy
21 Commissioner?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next is Pranita Raghavan, DCLA
24 General Counsel.

25 PRANITA RAGHAVAN: [NO AUDIO]

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next is Shirley Levy. DCLA
3 Chief of Staff.

4 CHIEF LEVY: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And, Finally, Phillippa Shao
6 of Finance.

7 DIRECTOR SHAO: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

9 Deputy Commissioner Feinberg, uhm, you may begin
10 your testimony when ready.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Thank you.

12 Good afternoon, Chair Ossé and members of the
13 committee. I am Sheelah Feinberg,

14 Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Cultural
15 Affairs. I am here to testify in regard to the
16 Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2023 preliminary budget.

17 I am joined by several of my colleagues from the
18 agency including Chief of Staff Shirley Levy, General
19 Counsel Pranita Raghavan, and Finance Director
20 Phillippa Shao.

21 To begin, let me say I'm thrilled to see so many
22 new faces on the Council's Cultural Affairs
23 committee. Our cultural community deserves dedicated,
24 energetic advocates in City government. I am looking
25 forward to working with you to do everything we can

1
2 to support this essential aspect of what makes our
3 city great.

4 With this in mind, I'd like to start with a quick
5 overview of the Department of Cultural Affairs' work
6 and mission. We are the largest municipal supporter
7 of culture in the United States, providing funding
8 and technical assistance to over 1,000 cultural
9 nonprofits each year. We distribute annual grants to
10 support cultural programming through the Cultural
11 Development Fund. We provide operating and energy
12 subsidies to organizations on DCLA-owned property,
13 including the 34 members of the Cultural Institutions
14 Group. We provide capital funding to support
15 equipment and construction projects at hundreds of
16 organizations. Our public art unit is dedicated to
17 both permanent and temporary installations on City
18 property. And our Materials for the Arts program,
19 based in Long Island City, provides free supplies to
20 cultural organizations, artists, City agencies with
21 arts programming, and public schools.

22 We do all of this with a small but passionate
23 team of nearly 50 public servants dedicated to
24 working with our constituents in all five boroughs.
25 In recent years, our staff has found far-reaching

1 ways to build greater equity into our programs and
2 services. Not only have we sought to encourage and
3 foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive
4 cultural workforce, but we've also worked to ensure
5 the agency's funding and services are reaching
6 historically underserved communities around the city.
7 As we've witnessed the damage the pandemic has caused
8 to our most vulnerable neighbors - particularly in
9 communities of color - we've strived to take this
10 work even further. We believe that art and culture
11 have the power to connect with and uplift every New
12 Yorker, and we're committed to working with partners
13 across the cultural community - including you - to
14 continue building on the progress we've made.

16 With that brief context for our work, I'll now
17 provide an overview of Mayor Adams' FY23 preliminary
18 budget for DCLA. The total expense funding allocated
19 to the agency is \$145.2 million, which includes:

- 20 • \$28.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund
- 21 • \$107.1 million for the Cultural Institutions
22 Group
- 23 • \$1.25 million for energy subsidies to groups on
24 DCLA property
- 25 • \$6.2 million for agency operations

- A little over \$2 million for additional agency programs and initiatives.

Please note that at this stage in the process, these figures don't include any one-time allocations typically added at budget adoption.

In the Mayor's preliminary budget proposal, the Department of Cultural Affairs continues to invest in our city's cultural community while finding savings and efficiencies along with our colleagues across City government. There is no recovery, I will echo what Chair Ossé said, there is no recovery for New York City without culture, and we look forward to working with partners on the collaborative budget process in the months ahead.

Now, I'd like to provide a few recent and upcoming highlights from the agency:

Our amazing team at Materials for the Arts recently launched The Great Dance Shoe Giveaway, offering 11,000 pairs of free dance shoes to schools, dancers, and dance groups. Since we cut the "golden shoe string" just two weeks ago, so far roughly 9,000 shoes have gone to 250 schools and arts organizations across the five boroughs. This has brought a welcome boost to performing artists around the city as stages

1 and studios continue to return to life. If you know
2 of anyone who could use the shoes, visit nyc.gov/mfta
3 to schedule an appointment to get some.
4

5 As part of the agency's FY22 Cultural Development
6 Fund, we partnered for the second year with the NYC
7 Arts in Education Roundtable to offer \$1,000
8 unrestricted relief grants to arts educators around
9 the city. Our COVID-19 impact surveys of the cultural
10 field found that arts educators - who are an
11 essential link between our city's cultural riches and
12 our young people - were particularly hard hit by
13 pandemic layoffs and furloughs. The application
14 period for the third round of the relief fund opened
15 yesterday and closes on March 21st. So please help us
16 spread the word to anyone who could benefit.

17 The CUNY Cultural Corps, a program we helped
18 create several years ago to open up a stronger jobs
19 pipeline into the cultural community from CUNY's
20 diverse pool of talent. The Cultural Corps is now
21 accepting applications from students for the next
22 term. These are paid opportunities for eligible CUNY
23 students to gain hands-on experience at some of our
24 city's amazing cultural groups. Places like the
25 Laundromat Project in Brooklyn, Alice Austen House in

1 Staten Island, the Bronx Council on the Arts, New
2 York City Ballet in Manhattan, the Queens County Farm
3 Museum, and dozens more host Cultural Corps members
4 each year. Students should apply by March 31. The
5 program is always looking for new cultural partners,
6 too. So anyone who wants to host one of the amazing
7 students that come through this program should visit
8 CUNY's website to learn more.
9

10 Finally, our CDF team has moved mountains these
11 last two years - via Zoom, of course - to keep City
12 funds flowing to cultural groups as they faced some
13 of the most difficult times we hope we'll ever see.
14 While struggling through the same professional and
15 personal upheavals we've all faced, our Programs unit
16 quickly implemented reforms to make accessing funds
17 easier and more equitable for all grantees. These
18 changes included streamlining applications and
19 expanding eligibility for multiyear awards to all
20 groups.

21 Now, we're preparing to embark on the next phase
22 of these efforts for the FY23 Cultural Development
23 Fund, bringing every eligible group back for a
24 competitive panel review for the first time in three
25 years. As part of this, we are also making reforms to

1 the panel review process itself - notably, expanding
2 the number of panelists, increasing stipends, and
3 making a dedicated effort to have panels of cultural
4 community members who reflect our city's breadth and
5 diversity. In short, we want to make sure the people
6 reviewing applications and making funding
7 recommendations bring a wide range of views,
8 perspectives, and experiences to the table. We plan
9 to open panel nomination process in the coming weeks.
10 We need your support to recruit people with deep
11 roots in your districts to serve on panels and help
12 us steward these public funds.

14 Again, we believe that there is no recovery for
15 New York City without culture. From bringing tourist
16 dollars back to our city, to the social and
17 educational value the arts bring to every New Yorker
18 - the power of the arts to heal and inspire is
19 unrivalled. As I said earlier in testimony, the new
20 energy and enthusiasm on the City Council is
21 incredibly exciting as we continue the difficult work
22 of supporting our cultural recovery while making sure
23 City funds reach those who need it most. We look
24 forward to working toward a City budget with you

1 while investing in these priorities and also finding
2 ways to work smarter and more efficiently.
3

4 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
5 I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And, Chair, we will go to you
7 next. Uh, just a reminder, uhm, after Chair
8 questions, we will go to council member questions.
9 Uhm, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and we
10 will call on council members in the order that they
11 have raised their hands. Thank you.

12 Chair?

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner
14 Feinberg, it's nice to see you again.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: It's good to see
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Uh, first question I have is,
18 in the Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget for DCLA,
19 it stands at \$145.5 million, and this an \$8.6 million
20 decrease from Fiscal Year 2022. And, 99.8% of
21 funding for the DCLA is City funded. How will this
22 decrease impact the agency, and what programs and
23 operations are being affected by this decrease?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: So, right... Thank
25 you for the question, Chair.

1 So, where we are right now in the budget process
2 is pretty much where we have been in the past year.
3 Uh, this year, Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget
4 was \$143.6 million, and now we are looking at \$145.2
5 million, again for the Preliminary Budget.
6

7 A lot of budget does come in adoption, and so
8 that's... You know, that's, we are talking about the
9 decrease, but I think that is really relative to what
10 happened at budget adoption.

11 So, I don't anticipate any additional programs
12 being cut... (CROSS-TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Uhm, until we know
15 more through this budget process, uh, the full
16 picture of our numbers.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay, thank you.

18 And at the urging of The Council, uh, the
19 administration added approximately \$30 million at
20 adoption of the Fiscal 2022 plan. What was this
21 funding used for in Fiscal Year 2022?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Yeah, we used that
23 money, as we all have been living through COVID, you
24 know, and, uh, in 2020 we used it more for, uh, COVID
25 relief. And, then last year, because, COVID did not

1 go away as fast as any of us hoped it would, we used
2 it more for recovery.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: So, we used that
6 additional \$30 million to supplement the funding that
7 was already in place to both the CIG and to CDF to
8 ensure that they could continue to provide vital
9 programming, uh, to their communities.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, just as a followup, how
11 many more cultural organizations compared to Fiscal
12 Year 2021 were funded through the CDF because of this
13 one time funding?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Uh, I will have to
15 get back to you with that exact number...

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: But, again, the way
18 that we were able to do it, and what we tried to do
19 before was to make it easier so that they could have
20 just a renewal process versus a new applicant
21 process, because we expected and understood that a
22 lot of the groups, uh, in some cases had furloughs,
23 had... were under staffed, so they didn't have the
24 time to put together a new proposal. So, instead we

1
2 said, let's just try to renew them so that they can
3 ensure continuity of funding.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah, thank you, and no worries
5 if you don't have this off the top of your head, but
6 how has this one time funding been helpful to DCLA
7 and its operations programming and initiatives such
8 as supporting CIGS and bringing in more funds for the
9 CDFs?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: You know, uh, we
11 always... We appreciate the additional funding that
12 we are able to provide the field, uhm, and, you know,
13 it one time this year... I mean, to back up for a
14 minute, last year was a historically high budget for
15 DCLA, this past it was \$230 million, so historically
16 high budget. And, it was done in partnership with
17 the council. Part of that budget increase also, I
18 would be remiss if I didn't include that that also
19 includes some federal stimulus funding.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: So, that's why we
22 were able to bump it up so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right, and why is the \$30
24 million that were added at adoption of the Fiscal
25

1
2 2022 plan by the administration not included in the
3 Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Budget?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Uh, you know, I
5 think it's an ongoing conversation. This is the
6 early part of that budget process. And, we are
7 having ongoing conversations with OMB and with City
8 Hall. So, that's where we are right now in this
9 process.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you Deputy Commissioner.

11 And, I want to move on to headcount of DCLA. Uh,
12 the Fiscal 2023 preliminary plan includes a reduction
13 of, uh, \$57,000 in Fiscal 2022 to 2026 through
14 elimination of vacancies in the agency. Does the
15 agency believe it has an adequate number of staff to
16 efficiently run all of the programs and initiatives?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: No, we can always
18 do more with more.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: But, uh, we feel
21 that we have a structure in place and staffing in
22 place to continue to provide the services that we do
23 as an agency.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, due to COVID, as you know,
25 more cultural organizations need support, and most

1 organizations rely on DCLA grants for their
2 programming and operations. Over the years, there
3 has been a rise of CDF applications, and with COVID
4 recovery, it is expected that more organizations will
5 seek out this funding. Does DCLA have enough staff
6 to handle the budget allocations especially as we
7 enter in a new budget cycle?
8

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: So, again, I am
10 going to thank you for the question, and it's right
11 on, you know, we do expect a lot of submissions this
12 year as we do come back to panel for the first time
13 in three years. We are working diligently to...
14 with OMB and with City Hall, uhm, and other... And
15 DCAST to full the current vacancies that we have so
16 that we can be fully staffed up to run a robust panel
17 review process this year.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

19 And just a final question when it comes to
20 headcount of the agency, how will DCLA ensure that
21 with their current staffing situation that the CDF
22 application review process will be done in an
23 equitable way?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: We will just ,you
25 know, again, we will work with the current staff that

1 we have and any staff that come on board, we will be
2 sure to inform them the way that we as an agency are
3 committed to equitable funding and so that they are
4 aware of that.
5

6 And, again, I would go back to the panel review
7 process, and I also would go back to... in my
8 testimony recall to you and your colleagues to help
9 us get more panelist to come from all different
10 neighborhoods throughout New York City. Yeah, I
11 don't think we could do this blind. We're not, you
12 know, we know who we know. You know more people. You
13 know, we are reaching out to you in good faith to ask
14 for your help.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Deputy Commissioner.
16 And, I just want to cover a final base before moving
17 on to some of my colleagues who may have questions.

18 I wanted to ask, how many capital projects does
19 the agency currently have? And, how many cultural
20 organizations are these at?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: There are a total
22 of 425 capital projects right now, uhm, which
23 includes a total of 213 organizations.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.
25

1
2 And, what is the breakdown of DCLA's capital
3 projects by borough? Uh, does DCLA track its
4 projects this way? How can we ensure more capital
5 work is done in the outer boroughs?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: We do keep track of
7 our capital projects by borough, and I can follow up
8 with you later if you want more information, but I
9 can tell you that in The Bronx there are 31 projects,
10 in Brooklyn there are 94...

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: And in Manhattan
13 there are 219, in Queens there are 48, in Staten
14 Island there are 26, and then there are seven that
15 are citywide.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm. And I do have to ask
17 as, you know, a followup of course... (CROSS-TALK)

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Yes, of course.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Does DCLA work to ensure its
20 capital spending is spread across the city in an
21 equitable way?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Yes, absolutely we
23 do. And, I want to go back to the capital process
24 that we use, which is that it's a request driven
25 process... (CROSS-TALK)

1 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

2
3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Cultural
4 organizations come to us. At the same time, we do
5 webinars and technical assistance for groups that are
6 interested in becoming an applicant for a capital
7 project. So, we work with them, uh, and we also work
8 with you on The Council.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: And we also work
11 with borough presidents as well to ensure that there
12 is a greater equity among the groups that are
13 applying and also making sure that they are able to
14 complete their application in a timely fashion so
15 that they too can receive the capital funding.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Alright.

17 Well, I have one more question for you before I
18 kick it back to Brenda.

19 How much community perspective factors in to
20 capital planning and decision making?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I'm sorry, Chair,
22 could you repeat that question?

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: How much community perspective
24 goes in to and factors in to capital planning and
25 decision making?

1
2
3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: No, I think I would
4 say that really, uh, that's really at the behest of
5 the cultural organization that's applying to the
6 extent that they are hearing from their community
7 that they need for example, uh, new lighting, or they
8 want to build out a new theater within their space.
9 You know, that is something that I think they are
10 speaking to as part of their applications process.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm. Well, those are all
12 the questions that I have for you Deputy
13 Commissioner.

14 I'll pass it on to you again, Brenda. Thank you.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Thank you, Chair
16 Ossé.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair.

18 Uh, so, at this point, we will move to council
19 member questions. If any council members have
20 questions for the administration and DCLA, please use
21 the Zoom Raise Hand Function and you will be added to
22 the queue. Uhm, as a reminder, please keep your
23 questions to five minutes including answers, and wait
24 for the Sergeant At Arms to tell you when your time
25 begins. The sergeant will then let you know when

1 your time is up. And, our muter/unmuter will unmute
2 you.
3

4 At this point, Chair, we do not have any council
5 member questions. So, we will just wait one moment.
6 If any council members have questions, please use the
7 Zoom Raise Hand Function.

8 Okay, and Council Member Hanif has a question.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [NO AUDIO]

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: One sec.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Hi, Sheelah, good to see
13 you again.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Good to see you as
15 well, Council Member... (CROSS-TALK)

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. Thank you so
17 much.

18 I like to get into the questions, because I have
19 several, uh, so, I fully support boosting the tourism
20 sector, but I want to make sure that concurrently our
21 efforts are on Cultural Affairs are focused on
22 providing services and programming and services for
23 local residents, especially those with lower incomes.
24 Could you describe the department's efforts on this
25 on this [NO AUDIO] [INAUDIBLE 02:15:15]

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: So, I just want to
3 make sure I heard your question, and thank you for
4 it, but I want to make sure I heard it accurately.

5 Uhm, yes, we are committed to tourism. And, one
6 of the things that I think goes back to tourism is
7 that actually at the height of the pandemic, we
8 partnered with NYC & Company and [INAUDIBLE
9 02:15:35], some of our interagency partners, to do a
10 local campaign to make sure that people in the local
11 neighborhoods and all of the neighborhoods in New
12 York City were able to access cultural intuitions in
13 their neighborhoods. So, it was like hyper local.
14 So, that was part of our tourism 101 from I think it
15 was fall of 2020.

16 You know, again, we are committed, as are you, to
17 providing cultural programming and services to
18 organizations, uhm, that do that. We feel that
19 culture, as I said in our testimony, is vital to the
20 recovery of New York City. But, I also think it's
21 vital if you will indulge me for a minute, I think it
22 is really vital to the spirit of the individual that
23 lives here. And, it shouldn't be a one off that you
24 have an opportunity to go experience something on a
25 Sunday or on a weekend. It should be that's embedded

1 throughout your experience living in New York City.

2 So, we are committed to that as well.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you.

4 Could you describe the delays in distribution of
5 The Cultural Development Fund money to nonprofits and
6 what the current status of disrupting is?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Yes, sure, I think
8 during the... Thank you for that question, Council
9 Member, yeah, during the pandemic, uh, you know, as
10 everyone else, we had to shift to remote work and
11 that did create a little bit of an issue, uh, or
12 excuse me, a little bit of a delay uh, in getting
13 payments out. We are back on track with getting
14 payments out as fast as we can right now.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's really good to know.

16 And, then what is the department doing to ensure
17 that cultural organizations are paying wages that
18 allow workers to live above the poverty line? Are
19 there guidelines for organizational budgets in this
20 regard, and if so, how are they enforced?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: You know, that's an
22 issue that has come to our attention, you know, that
23 the cultural workforce is not paid as well as other
24 sectors in the City. Uh, in terms of the actual ,you
25

1 know, part of the actual process that we do for
2 funding, uh, we do look for organizational budgets,
3 but we don't ,you know, I want to be clear, like, we
4 don't necessarily have a stance on that. But, we are
5 aware of that as an issue, and we do work with our
6 partners in the Cultural sector to make sure that
7 that message gets amplified -- that people do need to
8 make a decent living wage. I will also just add
9 that, again, because we are aware of it, it is part
10 of why we partner with CUNY and other places to
11 ensure that people that start getting into the
12 pipeline of a job in the Cultural sector, are able to
13 secure a living wage.

14
15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Do you think there might be
16 an opportunity for the agency to have a stance?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Uh, you know,
18 perhaps down the road it's something that we can
19 explore.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Uhm, and then finally, I
21 have heard a lot about the City's big campaign to
22 bring back Broadway. Can you describe what targeted
23 efforts are underway for local artists that are
24 focused on smaller scale performances, and that have
25 been particularly hit by the pandemic?

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: You know, again,
3 uh, well, one, I think I put it in the testimony ,you
4 know, arts and ,you know, we have some of these
5 different opportunities, Arts and Educators, we are
6 working with the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable,
7 there are some \$1,000 grants that are going out
8 there. We, uhm, are working with organizations with
9 local arts councils in particular to help with local
10 artists, and, uh, get funding as well. And we
11 support the local artists, uh, local arts councils.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. That's all for
13 me

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Thank you, Council
15 Member.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, thank you so much,
17 Council Member.

18 Uh, so at this point, we will go to Council
19 Member Farías, uhm, and you are the last council
20 member at this point, thank you.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Just like last time. Uhm
23 thank you so much for everyone being here, and for my
24 colleague's previous questioning. Uhm, really glad
25 Council Member Hanif started off with tourism. As

1 Char of Economic Development, I am constantly looking
2 at it and trying to get some answers as we move
3 through recovery here in the city.
4

5 So, just to touch base a little bit, and I just
6 want it for the record, uhm, visitors to cultural
7 institution groups fell in the last fiscal year when
8 compared to prior years, as we know. Do we happen to
9 know the estimate for FY22?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Uhm, thank you for
11 that question, Council Member, I do not have a record
12 of visitors for Fiscal Year 2022.

13 But, can I just go back for one second? I just,
14 you know...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Sure.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I would be remiss
17 if I did not do a broad based shout out to all of the
18 cultural organizations in New York City, who really,
19 to your point, are the backbone to the recovery of
20 the City. They have pivoted in ways that I don't
21 think any of us could foresee or plan for, but they
22 did it. They became vaccination sites. They became
23 polling sites. They became food pantries. They
24 became cultural connections when we needed them the
25 most. And, so I just wanted to give that shout out,

1
2 uh, to all of the cultural organizations in New York
3 City.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Yeah, absolutely, I
5 appreciate that shout out. I am going to reiterate
6 that with you. We saw them being critical to really
7 our recovery and our response during the pandemic.
8 So, you know, kudos to everyone out there. We
9 appreciated that response during a really hard time
10 our city was having.

11 Uhm, so, don't worry about that number. I am
12 sure we can touch base another time.

13 And, then the other... The other ask I had was,
14 if we happen to know the portion of reduction in
15 visitors that were local versus just tourists. Do we
16 happen to have that data?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I don't have that
18 data. But, I am happy to look it in and follow up
19 with your office.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Great, thank you. Uhm,
21 and then just to switch gears with the Citywide
22 Cultural Plan, uhm, can you please provide us any
23 additional updates on the agency that is implementing
24 the Cultural Citywide Plan?

1
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: Uh, I am going to
3 defer to our Chief of Staff, Shirley Levy for that
4 one.

5 CHIEF LEVY: Hi, Council Member, thank you very
6 much for that question.

7 Uh, the Cultural Plan was created in 2017. It's
8 a 10 year plan that actually recruits the
9 participation of not just DCLA but a lot of our
10 sister agencies. So, as we, uh, go through another
11 year and we look ahead, we really are looking to
12 engage our partners in different city agencies and
13 figure out together how we can support arts and
14 culture, not just through our own budget and
15 activities , but collectively as a city with
16 everyone's help. So, it's an ongoing, uh,
17 multipronged process.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: Great, thank you for that.

19 And, my colleagues asked additional questions
20 that I already had, so thank you so much for your
21 testimony today.

22 CHIEF LEVY: Thank you, Council Member.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, and, Chair, with that,
24 uh, no other council members have raised their hands
25

1 at this time. So, we are ready to move to the public
2 if you have no other questions, uhm... (CROSS-TALK)

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great, I do want to, uh, ,you
4 know, acknowledge before we move on, uhm, and thank
5 Cultural Affairs obviously, but before we hear from
6 the public, I do want to share that this committee is
7 also hearing two council resolutions pertaining to
8 the conflict in Ukraine. And do any member of the
9 committee have any questions about either resolution?
10 If not, we can move on to the public.

11 Amazing, back to you, Brenda. I feel like a news
12 anchor.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair.

14 Uhm, and those... Thank you very much. The
15 Committee Report for those resolutions are also on
16 Legistar.

17 Okay, so, at this point we are finished with the
18 Cultural Affairs administration testimony portion of
19 the hearing, and we will move to public testimony.

20 Uh, so I will, uh, Chair, go to you to
21 acknowledge there are no council members that have
22 joined.

23 Uhm, I will move to that portion, uhm, and we
24 will just do some housekeeping matters to start.
25

1
2 So, all panelists will have two minutes to
3 deliver your testimony, and we request that out of
4 respect of other people who are waiting to speak, you
5 please stay within your allotted time. If there is
6 anyone who would like to submit written for the
7 record, you may do so by emailing testimony up to 72
8 hours after the hearing to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

9 I will also now turn it over, uhm, to go
10 through... Actually, I will continue to go through
11 some other, uhm, procedural items, thank you.

12 Uhm, for those that were not here for the first
13 portions, uhm, of today of today's hearing, my name
14 is Brenda McKinney, I am counsel to the Committee
15 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
16 Intergroup Relations. As a panelists, as a reminder,
17 you will be on mute until you are called on to
18 testify, at which time your name will be called and
19 you will be unmuted by the Zoom host. If you mute
20 yourself after you have been unmuted, you will need
21 to be unmuted again by the hosts, so please wait for
22 the Sergeant At Arms to tell you when your time
23 begins once you unmuted; the sergeant will then let
24 you know when your time is up. As a reminder, you
25

1 have two minutes, and you actually have to accept the
2 unmute button when you are unmuted.
3

4 So, we will now here from panel number one. I
5 will name the first members of this panel based on
6 who is present. One moment, please... So, first we
7 will hear from Coco Killingsworth from Brooklyn
8 Academy of Music testifying on behalf of Cultural
9 Institutions Group or the CIG, followed by Laura
10 Washington from New York Historical Society, and
11 followed by Sade Lythcott from National Black
12 Theatre. This is panel one.

13 Uhm, so if you are ready, Miss Killingsworth, you
14 may begin your testimony.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 COCO KILLINGSWORTH: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé,
17 and members of the Committee. I am Coco
18 Killingsworth, Co-Interim President at the Brooklyn
19 Academy of Music or BAM, and Vice Chair of the
20 Cultural Institutions Group. I am here today to
21 provide testimony on behalf of the CIGs - a diverse
22 coalition of 34 cultural organizations who share a
23 public-private partnership with the City of New York
24 and are located in all five boroughs, including zoos,
25 gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

1 We are grateful for the Council's vital support
2 for culture and the arts in New York City and are
3 especially grateful to have this conversation in a
4 moment where the City is looking beyond recovery. We
5 know that our sector of culture and arts is critical
6 to signaling to the world that the city's vibrancy is
7 restored and fundamental for supporting communities
8 as they heal and build a more equitable city.

9 The CIGs have a distinct relationship with the
10 City, based in partnership, and we welcome the
11 opportunity to work with the Council to address New
12 York's most pressing needs. Through this closeness
13 with city government - in the last two years alone,
14 CIGs have continued to deliver world-class cultural
15 programming, provided virtual and in person
16 experiences, embraced 'open culture,' held
17 vaccination and COVID test distribution sites, hosted
18 food pantries and so much more. CIGs annually employ
19 over 12,000 people with over 8,265 additional
20 volunteers across the city.

21 Uh, my time is going, so I am going to move
22 quickly.

23 We are in partnership with you all, and BAM has
24 been key in continuing to do work with our school
25

1 children and seniors through the pandemic both as a
2 lifeline.
3

4 One of the innovations and silver linings of the
5 pandemic was how the Cultural Community came
6 together, seen through ongoing Culture@3 calls
7 happening right now.

8 Last year we had the most unified, inclusive, and
9 equity-driven ask that the NYC cultural community has
10 ever had and hope to build on that this year. We
11 would like to see the FY22 PEG Cut... (CROSS-TALK)

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 COCO KILLINGSWORTH: We would like to see the
14 FY22 PEG Cut t to the Cultural Development Fund
15 restored. As the Council determines its budget
16 priorities for FY23, we are here to ask for a
17 restoration of all Council Initiatives, and a
18 restoration of \$35 million of FY22 Funding. We also
19 request an additional \$50 million for the cultural
20 community. We look forward to being in dialogue with
21 the Council and the Administration about that request
22 in detail in the coming weeks.

23 As a collective, the CIGs ask that the Council
24 commit to a comeback and beyond. New York will be an
25

1
2 example to the world of a new type of city, one that
3 values every citizen and invests in every community.

4 Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, thank you so much for
6 your testimony.

7 Next we will hear from Miss Laura Washington.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 LAURA WASHINGTON: Good afternoon, Chairman Ossé
10 and all members of the committee. My name is Laura
11 Washington, I am Chief Communications Officer and
12 Vice President for Strategic Partnerships at the New
13 York Historical Society, and on behalf of the
14 institution, I want to thank you for your continued
15 support of Education And The Arts in New York City --
16 particularly during these challenging times. And, I
17 want to thank you for the opportunity to testify.

18 Now, for over 200 years, New-York Historical has
19 told the story of our nation's founding. And, since
20 2005, The Historical Society has really been a
21 galvanizer in the museum world by boldly undertaking
22 a series of landmark exhibitions that reexamine US
23 History m the perspectives of the historically
24 disenfranchised. These include exhibitions like
25 *Slavery in New York, Chinese American:*

1
2 *Exclusion/Inclusion, Black Citizenship in the Age of*
3 *Jim Crow, and most recently, Dreaming Together.*

4 Now, in Fiscal Year 2020, New-York Historical
5 partnered with The American LGBTQ+ Museum to bring
6 forth plans to construct a major museum dedicated to
7 LGBTQ+ history and culture. This new Museum will be
8 housed on the top floor of New-York Historical
9 Society's planned expansion. This project will
10 provide critical workforce development and job
11 creation opportunities, allowing New-York Historical
12 to help advance New York City's economic recovery in
13 the wake of the coronavirus pandemic while bolstering
14 the arts and culture sector.

15 The American LGBTQ+ Museum will us to develop
16 programming that brings the voices, perspectives,
17 actions, and achievements of this population to the
18 foreground. The whole institution will be a place
19 where thousands of annual visitors including
20 tourists, school groups, and others can see
21 themselves as part of the full American story. The
22 building will hold additional classrooms and gallery
23 spaces, which will allow us to expand the number of
24 K-12 and higher education... (CROSS-TALK)

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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LAURA WASHINGTON: students it serves.

We currently serves roughly 200,000 K-12 students and teachers, and the expansion is going to add new class space and access to our LGBTQ and Academy for American Democracy, which is a civics learning residency for all New York City's sixth graders. And, I mean, we know that sixth graders and everyone else during this time of political discord need to be informed.

We also have Masters of Arts in Museum Studies program we do in partnership with CUNY.

And, I want to thank you. We remain grateful for the programmatic and capital funds that New York City has allowed us. And, I appreciate your time today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

Uhm, and finally the last person on this panel, we will hear from Sade Lythcott.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

SADE LYTHCOTT: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé, and esteemed committee members and colleagues.

My name is Sade Lythcott, I am the CEO of the National Black Theatre, Chair of Coalition of Theaters of Color; a coalition that represents the

1 largest body of culturally specific theatres in all
2 five boroughs and the co-leader of Culture@3.

4 I have had the great privilege to be born and
5 raised in this incredible city I love so much.
6 Growing up in Harlem in the 80'S wasn't easy. It was
7 plagued by both a crack and AIDS epidermis, the
8 proliferation of gun violence, failing education
9 system, and chronic economic disinvestment.

10 In essence, growing up, it could have felt like
11 we were left for dead, but in Harlem, we knew a
12 secret that the world forgot. We had soul.

13 As a daughter of both artists and entrepreneurs,
14 I watched the intersection of the two help
15 resuscitate my community bringing catalytic economic
16 revitalization and community resources to Harlem's
17 youth, senior, deaf, disabled, and homeless
18 populations with programs and productions whose
19 outcomes helped to decrease youth involvement in the
20 criminal justice system and improve mental health and
21 wellbeing in our neighborhood. And, the truth is,
22 arts and culture does that wherever it is. We are
23 and have always been the heartbeat and the soul of
24 New York City. It is because of arts and culture
25 that New York City is Singular in the pantheon of

1
2 great global cities and the cultural capital of the
3 world.

4 But we do our city and our organizations a grave
5 disservice when we myopically view our sector solely
6 through the nonprofit lens as arts and culture is a
7 generative sector -- we are a proven economic engine
8 from small outer borough neighborhoods to the overall
9 City GDP. We are job multipliers and workforce
10 development pipelines. We are not "nice to have" we
11 are crucial and essential to New York City's success,
12 vibrancy, and recovery.

13 The creative economy contributes more than 13% of
14 New York City's GDP, and yet we receive... (CROSS-
15 TALK)

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 SADE LYTHCOTT: less than a quarter of 1% -- less
18 than a quarter of 1% in funding.

19 So, here is my ask, I will wrap it up, because of
20 time, as the cultural capital of the world, we'd like
21 to discuss a roadmap to get culture funded at 1% of
22 the City's budget. Here is where we start, first we
23 ask for full restoration of the PEG that was
24 unnecessary and a harsh cut to FY22 budget to the
25 CDF's grantees, the smallest cultural organizations

1 throughout the City; for FY23 budget, we are here to
2 ask for the restoration of all cultural initiatives,
3 we are asking that our baseline funding be held
4 harmless; we are asking for the restoration of FY22's
5 PEG of \$5 million to our baseline; and as Coco has
6 said, we are asking that the Council and the City's
7 administration work together to pass a sector wide
8 ask for a visionary investment in building back New
9 York's economy of \$85 million.
10

11 I will submit the breakdown of that in my written
12 testimony.

13 I want to thank you all for this time. We are
14 asking not for handouts; we are asking your friends
15 in government to break arts and culture out of siloed
16 conversations that rob both us and this great city of
17 the solutions we all deserve. We are asking you, our
18 council members, who have been our partners and our
19 friends in government to try your hand at being
20 creative when it comes to investing in a safe,
21 vibrant, and thriving city. We are asking you to see
22 us for our contribution and not just our designation.

23 Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

25 This is the end of our first panel.

1 Uh, just a reminder as well, that we will
2 submit... Or you may submit, we will accept, written
3 testimony up to 72 hours after the hearing. So,
4 while there is a two-minute clock, you can submit as
5 much written testimony as you'd like, and you can
6 submit additional written testimony to
7 testimony@council.nyc.gov .
8

9 So, I will go to... (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: [INAUDIBLE 02:36:09]

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: you, Chair... (CROSS-TALK)

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: for a second?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Of course.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Uhm, just to respond to Miss
15 Lythcott's, uh, testimony.

16 These PEGS and just to hear the need to... We
17 need to reiterate this throughout the entirety of
18 this hearing. These PEGS to culturals are... It's
19 BS. Uh, you know, when you just heard, uh, your
20 testimony, especially coming from Harlem in the 80'S
21 and how cultural was such an impactful element to
22 aiding the youth in Harlem when there were so many
23 other things that were going on, especially
24 pertaining to public safety. And, maybe some of you
25 have heard me say this on, you know, Culture@3 or

1 even at the New York Historical Society, but, you
2 know, the two words that we are hearing in this
3 administration, uh, often are public safety, public
4 safety, public safety, and, yes, while Culturals are
5 going to help us rebuild our economy, uhm, culturals
6 are also going to be how we heal our communities,
7 especially after these rough couple of years.

9 So, these PEGS, again, are BS. We are all on the
10 same page here. But, I just wanted to throw that in
11 to the conversation, uh, once again.

12 Back to you Brenda.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much,
14 Chair.

15 If any council members or if, Chair, if you have
16 any questions for this panel, uhm, we can move on to
17 the next panel otherwise.

18 Okay, thank you so much.

19 Uh, so, I am going to call the next panel of
20 witnesses, and thank you so much, uhm, for your
21 testimony.

22 Uh, the next panel will be Lisa Gold from the
23 Asian American Arts Alliance, Melody Capote from
24 CCCADI, and Rosalind Barbour from The Public Theater.

25 Thank you so much.

1 Uh, if you are ready, Miss Gold, you may begin
2 when the sergeant calls the clock.
3

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 LISA GOLD: Thank you.

6 Good afternoon Committee Members and Chair Ossé.
7 Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony
8 today.

9 My name is Lisa Gold, and I'm the Executive
10 Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance, a 39-
11 year-old, Brooklyn-based service organization that
12 works to ensure greater equity, representation, and
13 opportunities for Asian American and Pacific Islander
14 artists and arts organizations. We work with artists
15 and arts administrators throughout the five boroughs
16 and across artistic disciplines.

17 So, today, I would like to ask each of you to
18 name your favorite AAPI musician, author, dancer,
19 actor, or visual artist. And if you can't, I'd like
20 you to consider why not. And, I would venture to say
21 it is partly because our community's cultural
22 contributions have not been sufficiently valued, and
23 that AAPI artists and arts organizations have been
24 grossly underfunded for decades, resulting in a lack
25 of visibility and opportunities for our artists.

1
2 AAPI-led and-serving organizations receive less
3 than 4% of The Department of Cultural Affairs'
4 discretionary budget and there are ZERO AAPI-led
5 CIGs. So, despite comprising almost 18% of the New
6 York City population and a growing force in the
7 electorate, we receive a significantly
8 disproportionate amount of cultural funding—closer to
9 2%, and that gap is not closed by the philanthropic
10 or the private sector. A recent report by AAPIP
11 showed that for every \$100 awarded by foundations,
12 only 20 cents was designated for Asian American and
13 Pacific Islander communities.

14 So, we all know that the arts are critical to the
15 city's economic recovery and our community's health
16 and well-being. Art heals, it provides respite, it
17 spreads ideas and concepts that are emotionally,
18 intellectually, and ideologically complex, and it
19 helps people work through trauma and build
20 resilience.

21 And right now, after multiple attacks on the AAPI
22 community, our constituents are feeling fearful and
23 isolated. A recent report released last week by
24 NAPAWF noted... (CROSS-TALK)

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

LISA GOLD: that 75... 75% of AAPI women reported experiencing racism or discrimination over the past twelve months.

So, the AAPI community and our cultural organizations need increased support. We and other POC organizations have been under-resourced and underfunded for too long. We need to have our voices heard and our stories told.

So in that, we support the findings of the HueArts NYC Brown Paper, call for a \$100 million fund for POC arts and cultural entities, and ask that the City Council and Department of Cultural Affairs ensure that our City's cultural funding is distributed truly equitably.

Thank you all for your leadership and support of culture and arts during what has been -- and continues to be -- a very challenging time for our City.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

Our next panelist will be Melody Capote from the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Miss Capote, you may... Oh,
3 fabulous...

4 MELODY CAPOTE: Mr. Chairman, and members of City
5 Council, my name is Melody Capote, Executive Director
6 of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora
7 Institute, a 45-year-old arts and cultural
8 organization that uses artistic expressions to
9 promote racial and social justice and uplift the
10 contributions of the African Diaspora. I am also a
11 founding member of the original culture equity group
12 and a steering committee member of the Latinx
13 Consortium of New York.

14 I want you to imagine a sunflower, it is a
15 particular favorite of Oshun (sp?) one of the deities
16 of the Orisha sacred traditions the Yoruba people.
17 This sunflower, the goddess Oshun, and even the
18 consecrated beads worn around my neck are all part of
19 culture in the same way that music, dance, poetry,
20 and spirituality are. Consider that the culture is
21 the brown core of the flower and each petal is one of
22 the elements of the culture which I have just named.
23 Council Member, these are the things that were stolen
24 from indigenous people and descendants of the African
25 Diaspora.

1
2 My colleagues testifying today will tell you what
3 culture means to the economy of New York, and they
4 will propose a \$10 million cultural equity fund for
5 addressing the needs of organizations of color who
6 are so underserved in the inequitable distribution of
7 cultural related funds by this city.

8 I support this request a 100% whether as a
9 program of DCA or an Executive Budget line.

10 Therefore, I am not going to spend a lot of time
11 examining the "what" of the racism that has taken
12 culture away from our community. Rather, I am here
13 to tell you why you must do something extraordinary
14 to make to up for the cultural losses suffered by
15 communities of color. These losses are real and they
16 are also personal.

17 Imagine me as young woman applying to be a part
18 of a dance program at a local university and being
19 told that I didn't fit the image. And what was that
20 image? It was that of a Eurocentric blonde who
21 didn't have my curly hair, my full lips, nor my even
22 fuller hips. Imagine being made to feel that these
23 traits are bad with phrases like, [INAUDIBLE
24 02:43:29]... (CROSS-TALK)

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 MELODY CAPOTE: which when translated means "bad
3 hair" being referenced to my natural curls.

4 I come here to tell you that there are hundreds
5 of thousands of girls and boys who have suffered
6 these and even uglier cultural losses caused by
7 people basking in white privilege.

8 Now listen closely to why you must do the right
9 thing and support the Cultural Equity Fund in the
10 amount of \$100 million. You have all heard of
11 restorative justice. It refers to a process where
12 guilty parties attempt to make amends for the damage
13 caused by their behavior. I am urging you to adopt a
14 new phrase called reparative justice and provide
15 funding that will allow organizations of color to
16 build institutional capacity so that we can
17 effectively compete with those who are privileged
18 heirs of millennium of enslavement, colonization, and
19 other forms of oppression.

20 Please give us back the culture that was stolen
21 from us, not through tokenism and street naming
22 changes; we need real dollars put in to a fund that
23 solidifies the work of organizations of color that
24 will ultimately help young people learn where they
25

1
2 came from and thereby to become even better citizens
3 of this country.

4 Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
6 We will have one more panelist on this panel,
7 Rosalind Barbour from The Public Theater.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 ROSALIND BARBOUR: Hi, my name is Rosalind
10 Barbour, Administrative Chief of Staff at The Public
11 Theater. Thank you to Chair Ossé and the members of
12 the committee for calling today's hearing.

13 The Public is a proud member of The Cultural
14 Institutions Group, a diverse coalition of 34
15 cultural organizations across the five boroughs, with
16 the distinct public/private partnership with the City
17 of New York.

18 Over the past two years, the work of the public
19 has been transformed by the COVID pandemic a force
20 that remains a profound threat to the very core of
21 our field. From our assumptions around how we create
22 and disseminate to the financial toll facing
23 individuals in institutions around the world. And,
24 yet, despite these changelings, the public has
25 continued to make its work available to the people of

1
2 the City of New York through and low-cost
3 programming.

4 In crafting 2021-2022 season, The Public was
5 faced with a new challenge: How do we grapple with
6 returning to the stage in the wake of an
7 international pandemic? In response we have crafted
8 a slate of programming, which honors the stories we
9 had planned to tell in 2019 and dreams forward to new
10 partnerships that reflect the tectonic shifts our
11 society has experienced between 2019 and 2021. This
12 included our fall productions of Cullud Wattah and
13 our upcoming production of SUFFS a new musical which
14 brings to life a complicated chapter in the ongoing
15 battle for the right to vote; The American Women's
16 Suffrage Movement.

17 This year, the public is also investing in new
18 partnerships to provide resources and physical space
19 to exceptional BIPOC led organizations heavily
20 affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

21 In individual collaborations with NAATCO and the
22 Ma-Yi Theater Company, The Public is committed to
23 taking on the cost of producing the NAATCO production
24 of Out of Time and Loyd Suh's The Chinese Lady at our
25 downtown home.

1
2 We are also continuing our decades long
3 relationship with The National Black Theatre -- and
4 hi to Sade, and thank you for your testimony earlier
5 -- in a production of the New York premier of James
6 Ijames's Fat Ham.

7 The Public is delighted to be opening our doors
8 to such exceptional organizations making their
9 visionary works available to our audiences.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 ROSALIND BARBOUR: In creating a long term model
12 of the BIPOC led resident theater companies, we hope
13 to continue leveraging our resources and influence
14 for the benefit organizations who speak to
15 marginalized communities.

16 Uhm, and I just wanted to echo Melody and Shade
17 and everyone else's call for the restoration of the
18 funds from FY22 and the elimination of the PEG cut to
19 ensure that we have equitable funding for CBF and CIG
20 organizations that has been so tremendously affected
21 by the pandemic.

22 Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, uh, Chair, this is
24 the final member of this panel.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Well, good, I don't think I
3 have any questions to... Oh, seems as though Council
4 Member Hanif does.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much...

7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, uh, for your
10 testimony to all of the panelists.

11 Uhm, Lisa, thank you especially for your
12 incredibly powerful testimony and being a force in
13 this work and in this moment in the wake of violent
14 anti-Asian violence. Uhm, I guess I just want to use
15 my time, uh, for you to... For us to hear from...
16 more from you, uh, so that my colleagues and I better
17 understand what AAPI cultural workers and artists are
18 experiencing at this time. Please expand on the
19 challenges, the joys, and how we can make sure AAPI
20 artists are not invisible?

21 LISA GOLD: Okay, thank you. Uh, thank you so
22 much, uhm, Council Member Hanif. I will tell you, it
23 is, uhm, it is a very difficult and challenging time.
24 I have heard from my constituents, uh, a dancer who
25 runs her own dance company, who was followed on her

1 bicycle and screamed at on the street. I have had
2 artists that were dancers that were attacked on their
3 way to performances. We have heard of people that
4 are just afraid, frankly, to leave their house. Not
5 even to mention ,you know, the toll that it has taken
6 on organizations that have lost revenue do to ,you
7 know, no income from performances or paid revenue
8 opportunities. So, you know, it what we have been
9 calling the dual pandemic of anti-Asian racism, plus
10 the losses due to the pandemic. So, right now, one
11 of the most important things that we can do is
12 provide opportunities, visibility, support, and
13 funding to the Asian-American communities. We are
14 working on a partnership right now with NAATCO to
15 build bridges in solidarity across our communities.
16 So, I think funding more work like that to help build
17 a culture of understanding and communication is
18 really critical. Obviously mental healthcare and
19 safety -- we are also working on a number of programs
20 that promote the mental health and safety of our
21 constituents. So, again, uhm, looking at all of
22 these issues as not isolation, like culture doesn't
23 exists in a vacuum. Mental health does not exist in
24 a vacuum. These are all interrelated. So, we need
25

1 to think of these holistically. So, I just, uhm, I
2 want to thank you for your concern, uhm, and hope
3 that, uh, the rest of the council, again, considers,
4 uhm, the value and the input of Asian-Americans not
5 just during APA Heritage Month, and not just during
6 the Lunar New Year, but every single day of the year.
7

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Council
9 Member did you have any other questions or does
10 anybody have questions for the panel?

11 Okay, great. Uhm, with that, Chair, we will move
12 to the next panel. I will call out the three
13 panelists on this panel, and then we will take
14 questions afterwards.

15 So, the next panel will be, and thank you to our
16 panelist... The next questions... The next
17 panelists, excuse me, will be an apologies for any
18 pronunciation in advance, Elizabeth Cashour from The
19 New 42nd Street Theater, John Hyslop from Local 1321
20 DC 37 or Queens Public Library workers, and Lauren
21 Bradley from Urban Librarians Unite.

22 So, uh, the next witness will be Elizabeth
23 Cashour, you may begin when the sergeant calls the
24 clock. Thank you

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

1 ELIZABETH CASHOUR: Hello, uh, The New 42nd Street
2 appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony
3 in support of funding from the Committee for Culture
4 Affairs for the performing arts and arts education.
5

6 The New Victory Theater is the premier nonprofit
7 New York City Theater for kids and families located
8 in the heart of Times Square with annual audience of
9 approximately 100,000 people. It is one New York
10 City's largest providers of live performing arts and
11 classroom arts education programming reaching 40,000
12 students in all grades annually.

13 Through our own research on the intrinsic impacts
14 of the performing arts on children, New 42 knows
15 young people who have access to the arts receive
16 myriad of benefits that help them become more
17 collaborative with their peers as well as emphatic
18 and understanding of the lives of others. Crucially
19 important in the city where thousands of children
20 live in underserved neighborhoods, the arts also
21 inspire children to imagine a more optimistic future
22 for themselves.

23 New 42 believes access to the performing arts is
24 an essential right for all. In immediate response to
25 the closure of The New Victory Theater in March 2020,

1 the organization launched a weekly digital program,
2 New Victory Arts Break, in order to continue bringing
3 the performing arts in to the homes and lives of
4 children. The interactive program takes kids on
5 guided video explorations of an art form such as
6 puppetry, percussion, and songwriting and gives kids
7 the tools they need to create and flex their own
8 creative muscles.
9

10 Arts Break has been a huge success garnering
11 nearly one million video views, and it is an
12 important program we'll be sharing with classroom
13 teachers as we move forward.

14 Liz Walter, at teacher at Lexington School for
15 the Deaf, told us, "Every Monday, we are in a race to
16 share the new Arts Break materials with the school. I
17 have definitely enjoyed every one that's caught my
18 eye, and they are so inspiring." The response has
19 been strong, so we will continue to build as we move
20 forward.

21 In November 2021, The New Victory reopened as did
22 so many other theaters and other cultural
23 organizations across the city. This year we'll
24 offer... (CROSS-TALK)

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 ELIZABETH CASHOUR: This year we will offer six
3 presentations on our stage, and next year we will be
4 up to 10.

5 So, again, like so many others, we have come back
6 strong. Recently a parent at a performance at The
7 New Victory shared that his two children... He
8 attended with his two children, and wrote a beautiful
9 thank you note. "This was the first public artistic
10 piece in nearly two years, and, my God, what a
11 glorious, glorious piece it is. What a show, what a
12 show, what a show." We're so happy to be back live
13 for New Yorkers of all ages who need [INAUDIBLE
14 02:54:17] spirit of the theater.

15 We fervently believe that New 42 is an important
16 part of city's pandemic recovery, and that it is
17 expanding access to all children and will help us
18 move forward to a more equitable and just society.
19 With the City Council's help and continued funding
20 for arts initiatives, we will bring the performing
21 arts in to an ever expanding number of homes,
22 classrooms, and schools across the City, and we will
23 bring New Yorkers, even the youngest among us all, in
24 to The New Victory Theater for live performances that
25

1
2 inspire, challenge, and bring hope and joy to all New
3 Yorkers.

4 Thank you for inviting us to testify.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
6 testimony.

7 The next witness will be John, uh, excuse me, Mr.
8 Hyslop from DC 37.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 JOHN HYSLOP: Chairman Chi Ossé and fellow
11 committee members, thank you for giving my fellow
12 presidents Leonard Paul of Local 374, Reynaldo
13 Barbour (sp?) of Local 1482, Debra Allman (sp?) of
14 Local 1930, and I an opportunity to testify.

15 These past two years have been very dramatic,
16 chaotic, and tragic. Fortunately for our city, we had
17 a beacon of stability and security - our City's
18 public libraries. Throughout the five boroughs and in
19 each and every neighborhood, library staff, both
20 frontline and back office provided library services
21 in buildings that were safe, comfortable, and clean.

22 Our dynamic staff provided enhanced, innovative,
23 and novel library services that included grab and go
24 library materials. We provided telephone and in-
25 person reference, along with remote printing. We

1 provide virtual programming that included book clubs,
2 art workshops, trivia, cultural dance presentations,
3 and much more. Additionally, we held creative tabling
4 and outreach events as a point of contact with our
5 customers. Buildings were converted to testing and
6 vaccine sites. These vital and free services provided
7 everyone a sense of community, especially important
8 for those who suffered most during the pandemic.

9
10 Mayor Adams' Preliminary Budget indicates a
11 funding level that will barely allow library staff to
12 maintain our current service level, and that will
13 strain us next year. As this pandemic recedes,
14 hopefully to a less severe, less tragic, and endemic
15 disease, library users will flock back to their
16 branches demanding more of everything we offer and we
17 barely have enough staff now.

18 This is where the City Council can help. We need
19 your financial support so that we can meet this pent
20 up and expected demand.

21 Children's programs are restarting, and there are
22 not enough children's librarians to meet the demand.
23 Senior citizens, who were cut off from their social
24 networks, are getting more comfortable being out in
25 public and need materials, a safe and clean place to

1
2 congregate, and programming, and we do not have
3 enough staff to meet their needs. Multiple branches
4 do not have custodians, so custodians are required to
5 cover multiple branches in one day. We have more
6 software and hardware offerings that are creating a
7 need for more staff with specialized skills. We have
8 more immigrant and adult learners that will require
9 teachers. Our customers will be demanding so much
10 more from us, and with your financial support we can
11 meet this demand.

12 These past two years, library staff proved that
13 we are agile and adaptable.... (CROSS-TALK)

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 JOHN HYSLOP: As we return to some form of
16 normalcy, library users will be expecting quality
17 library services. The Mayor's preliminary budget is a
18 good start but is not enough. We are overwhelmed
19 right now and will be more overwhelmed very soon.
20 With your financial support, we can fulfill all of
21 our customers and your constituents' demands for
22 library services.

23 Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
25 testimony.

1 The final panelist will be... On this panel,
2
3 uhm, Miss Lauren Bradley. You may begin when the
4 sergeant calls the clock, thank you.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 LAUREN BRADLEY: Thank you, Committee Members, and
7 thank you, Chair Ossé. My name is Lauren Bradley,
8 and I am here on behalf of the board of directors for
9 Urban Librarians Unite.

10 Our members are frontline library workers,
11 library school students, and library lovers. To
12 address Council Member Hanif's earlier question about
13 community outreach, frontline branch staff are the
14 ones who do that, and we are experts at it.

15 We support our patrons who are experiencing a
16 range of issues including houselessness, addiction,
17 opioid addiction, food insecurity, learning barriers,
18 and structural oppression. Our members are also
19 involved in community efforts like mutual aid
20 networks, food pantries, harm reduction programs, and
21 open streets.

22 One of many things our group does is organize the
23 annual Urban Librarian's Conference. Last September,
24 our theme was Liberation and Joy. We heard from
25 public library workers across New York City working

1 on amazing projects, and I would like to share just a
2 few of these.
3

4 A group of children's librarians are actively
5 dismantling racism in story time songs through peer
6 education.

7 Prison Library Support Network is a grassroots
8 collective of librarians who partner with all three
9 Library systems to provide outreach to people
10 currently incarcerated.

11 There is a staff led initiative called Transform,
12 which trains library staff to better service
13 transgender and nonconforming patrons.

14 This is just a small sample of staff driven
15 projects across our public libraries, but it's
16 illustrative of how frontline branch staff serve
17 their communities.

18 Because of this work, our branches and their
19 staffing play a key role in reimaging New York as a
20 more equitable and just city. Now is the time to
21 invest in our libraries, so our library workers can
22 expand this vital work.

23 Thank you for your time.
24
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
3 testimony. That concludes this panel. Uhm, if there
4 are any Council Member or Chair questions?

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Sure I just want to acknowledge
6 my good friend and Brooklyn Borough President Antonio
7 Reynoso who is on this hearing.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And, actually, and Chair, if,
9 uh, if we don't have any other Council Member
10 questions, our next panel, we can go to the Brooklyn
11 Borough President, the Honorable, uh, Antonio Reynoso
12 as our next panelist -- as our next witness.

13 So, The Brooklyn Borough President, if we don't
14 have any questions, I'm just watching hands and not
15 seeing any.

16 The next, uh, witness will be The Brooklyn
17 Borough President. Thank you.

18 BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT REYNOSO: Hello,
19 everyone, uh, happy to be here in my first hearing as
20 a borough president to the City Council, and of
21 course it is with, uh, our good friend and Brooklyn
22 City Council Member, Chair Chi Ossé. Thank you so
23 much, Chair, for having me.

24 I will be very quick. I know this is going to be
25 a long hearing, so I will take it away.

1 Good afternoon, and thank you to the City Council
2 and thank you again, Chair Chi Ossé, for giving me
3 the opportunity to speak today. I am Brooklyn Borough
4 President Antonio Reynoso, and I am here to ask the
5 Mayor and the Council to support the cultural
6 institutions that serve a vital role in our
7 communities and to ask that you consider equity in
8 these funding allocations.
9

10 Though all the city's cultural institutions
11 provide critical arts, cultural, and historical
12 education and programming, not all of these cultural
13 institutions are created equal. The pandemic hasn't
14 been easy on any institution. Yet the Metropolitan
15 Museum of Art in in Manhattan has a \$3.3 billion
16 endowment, and even as the pandemic raged, had \$50
17 million set aside to purchase art. Meanwhile,
18 Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, which
19 celebrates one of the largest free Black communities
20 in pre-Civil War America, is struggling just to keep
21 its doors open.

22 Now, Weeksville is part of the Cultural
23 Institutions Group (CIG), along with five other
24 amazing cultural institutions in Brooklyn: Brooklyn
25 Museum, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn Botanic

1 Garden, Brooklyn Children's Museum, and the New York
2 Aquarium. Of these, the Brooklyn Museum has the
3 largest endowment, which even before the pandemic was
4 only about 5% of the Met's. Today I ask that the
5 Council work with the Mayor to restore all proposed
6 cuts to the CIGs, and that DCLA develop a methodology
7 for allocating these funds equitably that considers
8 not only organization size, but also populations
9 served.
10

11 I also want to call your attention to a recent
12 report from HueArts NYC, which researched the impacts
13 and needs of arts organizations in New York City led
14 by people of color. In contrast to the larger CIGs,
15 these small organizations tend to have less stable
16 funding sources, and they often rely on DCLA's
17 Cultural Development Fund (CDF). HueArts NYC found
18 that these small, POC-run organizations often provide
19 much more than just arts programming in communities
20 of color, for example, many have pivoted to community
21 service during the pandemic. Additionally, these
22 organizations often lack stable space, face chronic
23 underinvestment, and are less able to call upon
24 individual donors for support due to the lack of
25 disposable income in communities of color. Meanwhile,

1
2 there is a lack of transparency in the allocation of
3 CDF funding, and no clear priority placed on
4 addressing these disparities.

5 Even with the supposed "one-time" supplemental
6 funding allocation made last fiscal year, DCLA's
7 budget still represents less than 1% of the City's
8 total budget. And yet, now cuts are being proposed,
9 cuts our communities simply cannot afford.

10 So, I am calling on the Mayor to not only restore
11 the proposed cuts and add new funding to our cultural
12 institutions, but also to implement new systems to
13 ensure that arts and cultural funding is allocated
14 equitably and with transparency. The City doesn't
15 need to give an organization with a \$3.3 billion
16 endowment and billionaires on its board more money.
17 It does need to lift up organizations that share the
18 history of communities of color, educate Black and
19 Brown youth, and serve as community anchors in
20 underinvested neighborhoods.

21 Thank you, and I look forward to working on this
22 alongside DCLA, Mayor Adams, and of course Chair
23 Ossé.

24 Thank you so much.
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, uh, to the
3 Honorable, uh, Reynoso, the Brooklyn Borough
4 President.

5 Chair, if you or the council or any other council
6 members have questions?

7 Okay, this concludes this panel, and thank you so
8 much again for your testimony. Welcome back.

9 Uhm, at this point, we will move to our next
10 panel, panel five.

11 The next four individuals will be witnesses on
12 this panel, and then we will take questions at the
13 end. As a reminder, again, you can always submit
14 testimony up to 72 hours after the hearing.

15 The next panelists will be Tracey Greenidge from
16 Cool Culture, Lucy Sexton for New Yorkers for
17 Cultural and the Arts, Alejandra Duque Cifuentes from
18 Dance/NYC, and Ya-Yun Teng from New York Foundation
19 for the Arts. Apologies again for any pronunciations.

20 Uhm, and if you are ready, Miss Greenidge, you
21 can testify. Thank you.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 TRACEY GREENIDGE: [NO AUDIO]

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uh, we can see... I'm so
25 sorry, we can't hear you. Uhm, there might be a box

1
2 that pops up to accept the unmute. Yeah, you should
3 be unmuted, thank you.

4 TRACEY GREENIDGE: Thank you, my name is Tracey
5 Greenidge, I am The Director of Development at Cool
6 Culture. And, this testimony is the behalf of my
7 organization and the thousands of New York City
8 families who receive our free programs annually.

9 Cool Culture is a social justice organization
10 that used arts and culture to strengthen family and
11 community well-being.

12 We have nearly 20 years of BIPOC leadership and
13 have been offering more than 50,000 families free
14 cultural access.

15 Our work now goes much deeper. Using targeted
16 programs that encourage families to feel comfortable
17 in cultural spaces and ensuring educator shave the
18 tools to help introduce arts into their parent and
19 caregiver engagement initiatives while allowing these
20 same families to have their voices amplified through
21 the arts.

22 I would like to thank the New York City
23 Department of Cultural Affairs for its longstanding
24 support of Cool Culture and hundreds of small BIPOC
25

1
2 organizations who have operated far too long on a
3 shoestring budget.

4 Without your support, though, so many parents
5 with young children, including myself, would be able
6 to freely access the arts in this wonderful city. I
7 applaud the new incoming members for your continued
8 commitment in this field.

9 I know that as the City fights to recover from
10 the impact of COVID, and now [INAUDIBLE 03:07:11] the
11 unfolding crises in Europe, we are aware of the
12 difficult role that lies ahead including the 3%
13 impending budget cuts across the board for all City
14 organizations.

15 I stand with other cultural institutions to say
16 that any cuts to the already *meager* CDF budget, would
17 have deep ramifications for the arts, but
18 particularly for those small organization... (CROSS-
19 TALK)

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 TRACEY GREENIDGE: where staff is the only aspect.
22 We strongly urge you to ensure that all small BIPOC
23 organizations continue to receive a level of support,
24 and in fact, we support an increase, so that we can
25 continue to develop the relationships with our

1 communities that have grown to rely on our cultural
2 resources that would be otherwise unattainable.

3 Continued support and increased level of funding, is
4 the only way forward and will enable Cool Culture and
5 other organizations to continue to offer critical
6 programs to BIPOC community members.

7 Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
9 testimony.

10 The next witness will be Lucy Sexton from New
11 Yorkers for Culture and the Arts.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you Chair Ossé and members of
14 the City Council for hearing our testimony. We are
15 here today to ask that you invest in the citizens in
16 every neighborhood of New York City. By investing in
17 culture and arts for every New Yorker, we can build a
18 vibrant, safe, healthy, and equitable city.

19 You are hearing today from many artists and
20 cultural groups detailing the extraordinary cultural
21 work they are doing across our city. You already know
22 that culture is key to citywide recovery, and to its
23 long term economic stability. Culture is key to
24 tourism. It is the number one tourist attraction.
25

1
2 It is the key to local neighborhoods, serving to
3 increase foot traffic and bring dollars to local
4 restaurants and small businesses.

5 Today, I want to talk about what culture brings
6 to every aspect of the lives of your constituents and
7 to call for an equitable investment in culture for
8 every community so that every citizen can experience
9 the benefits of a robust cultural life in their
10 neighborhood.

11 This country, has a history of neglecting and
12 disinvesting in communities of color. This city's
13 history is the same. We must consciously and
14 deliberately ensure that dollars are going to Black,
15 Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and deaf and disabled
16 communities and cultural organizations. By investing
17 in BIPOC-led and serving cultural groups, by
18 investing in culture for New Yorkers with
19 disabilities, by sending tourism dollars to those
20 local cultural centers, we will build a more
21 equitable city.

22 Every neighborhood should enjoy the data proven
23 benefits of a strong cultural ecosystem. Those
24 include improved outcomes in everything from
25

1
2 education and aging to public safety and mental
3 health.

4 I ask that you speak to your colleagues in other
5 committees - education, mental health, aging,
6 criminal justice, and finance - and explain to them
7 that culture and arts are part of the solution in
8 every one of those areas.

9 I join my colleagues in calling that the FY22 PEG
10 Cut to the Cultural Development Fund restored. Cuts
11 to DCLA staff are an equity issue. If the agency
12 can't function efficiently, funds are delayed, most
13 impacting smaller often BIPOC organizations that can
14 least afford to wait for reimbursement.

15 As the Council determines its budget priorities
16 for FY23... (CROSS-TALK)

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 LUCY SEXTON: we are here to ask for a restoration
19 of all Council Initiatives-Coalition of Theaters of
20 Color, Immigrant Arts Initiative, CASA and SuCASA and
21 more, and a restoration of \$35 million of FY22
22 Funding.

23 We will be requesting an additional \$50 million
24 for the cultural community from the Council and the
25

1 administration and are happy to follow up with more
2 details.
3

4 Thank you for allowing me to testify.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
6 testimony. Uh, just one moment. Apologies, but...
7 Okay, and the next witness will be Alejandra Duque
8 Cifuentes, uh, you may begin your testimony when the
9 sergeant calls the clock, thank you.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Good afternoon, my
12 name is Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, Executive
13 Director at Dance/NYC the service organization of
14 the Dance industry and workforce in New York City.

15 I am coming to you today advocating for dance
16 workers, organizations, and businesses that live
17 within the larger performing arts creative economy.

18 Arts workers and businesses are parents, they are
19 educators, they are small business owners, they are
20 therapist, they run large intuitions and drive
21 musicals on Broadway.

22 I want to encourage to imagine if you were to
23 remove every dancing body from a stage on Broadway.
24 What would happen to the many millions of dollar-
25 generating shows of our city?

1
2 When the pandemic hit, it was the smallest
3 organizations and the independent workers that were
4 hit the hardest and have been unable to recover the
5 most. Of those, our data found, that immigrant,
6 BIPOC, disabled workers, and *specifically* parents
7 were the hardest hit in the losses of income.

8 We are telling our community by not paying them
9 living wages, but not sustainably funding
10 organizations with general operations, and by
11 reducing the budget or arts and culture we are saying
12 that it's not possible for New Yorkers to make a
13 living in the arts, and that the arts are not as
14 viable as they actually financially are in our city.

15 Despite being one of the least funded of the
16 performing arts sector, the dance industry generates
17 over \$300 billion to the economy of the City.

18 This budget is not a financial document, it is a
19 document where you articulate the values of this
20 administration and the values of this city council.
21 And what you decide to allocate will be a reflection
22 of who are the workers of the City who we value? As
23 Shade mentioned, we generate such a high percentage
24 of the GDP of this particular city, and yet the
25 investment is not proportional. And, so I join my

1
2 colleagues in requesting an investment that is
3 proportional to the impact that we generate in the
4 City to the BIPOC workers... (CROSS-TALK)

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: and disabled, and
7 immigrant workers, and the businesses and
8 industries that are so deeply impacted, and to
9 ensure that the money that we are giving is
10 materially creating an impact for folks that have
11 systemically not had access to resources --
12 *intentionally* been removed from having access to
13 recourse. We have to make decisions now to ensure
14 that those workers and organizations can survive
15 and continue to thrive in our city.

16 Thank you so much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
18 testimony.

19 And, now we will call on the final person on
20 this panel, uhm, who is Ya-Yun Teng, thank you.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 YA-YUN TENG: Hi, everyone, thank you for having
23 me here. My name is Ya-Yun Teng, I am the Program
24 Officer, Immigrant Artist Resource Center (NYC) at
25 the New York Foundation for the Arts, also known as

1
2 NYFA - We are an arts service organization whose
3 mission is to provide financial, educational, and
4 professional services to individual artists and
5 emerging arts organizations.

6 Our work impacts real human beings and it is
7 critical work to the communities in New York City.

8 Last year, NYFA was a lead partner launching the
9 City Artist Corps Grants to support New York City-
10 based working artists who were disproportionately
11 impacted by COVID-19. NYFA distributed \$15 million to
12 3,000 working artists across the City's five
13 boroughs, helping the artists sustain their practice
14 and engage the public throughout New York City.

15 In addition to administering grants, NYFA
16 provides professional development training to
17 artists, and has been serving 10,000 immigrant
18 artists since 2007.

19 This year, we are expanding NYFA's Immigrant
20 Artist Resource Center to provide more support to
21 immigrant artists who play a crucial role in healing
22 our communities and are the backbone of New York
23 City's creative economy.

24 We know that the livelihoods of immigrant artists
25 are facing major threats, because many immigrant-led

1 and immigrant-serving arts organizations reported big
2 losses of their annual budgets.
3

4 NYFA feels that we need to make efforts to reach
5 and serve those that we are not reaching yet and
6 further uplifting their perspectives.

7 In order for us to continue our work, we need
8 funding now more than ever to support artists and to
9 sustain our own operations. This is also very
10 personal to me - as I am an immigrant from Taiwan and
11 have been working in New York City's arts sector for
12 more than 10 years.

13 We recognize that the city council is facing very
14 difficult budget decisions, but the funding we
15 receive through the New York City of Cultural
16 Affairs... (CROSS-TALK)

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 YA-YUN TENG: is critical to our survival. We ask
19 you to keep in mind that artists and cultural workers
20 are essential. They heal our communities and we know
21 that neighborhoods with cultural assets show better
22 outcomes for education, aging, crime, health, and
23 community wellbeing as many of my colleagues have
24 talked about.
25

1
2 We ask that the FY22 PEG Cut to the Cultural
3 Development Fund be restored. And for FY23, we ask
4 for a restoration of all Council Initiatives and a
5 restoration of \$35 million of FY22 Funding to DCLA.

6 Thank you very much. We know we have a difficult
7 job ahead. A special thank you to our Council Member
8 in Dumbo New York, Lincoln Restler, for supporting
9 the immigrant artist community that we serve.

10 Thank you everyone.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
12 testimony and to all the members of this panel. This
13 testimony concludes this panel.

14 Are there any Council Member questions? Or,
15 Chair, Do you have any questions?

16 Okay, uhm, I don't see any hands, so we will move
17 to the next panel. Thank you again.

18 One moment, so I will call the names of everyone
19 on the panel, and then call you individually.

20 The next panel will be Risa Shoup from The
21 Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York, Francine
22 Garber-Cohen from The Regina Opera Company, and Aya
23 Ester Hayishi from The People's Theater Project.

24

25

1
2 So, the next witness is Risa Shoup. You may
3 begin your testimony when the sergeant calls the
4 time.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 RISA SHOUP: Good afternoon and thank you, Chair
7 Ossé, esteemed committee members, and other
8 colleagues for your time.

9 The Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York is a
10 nearly 50 year old member service organization that
11 represents over 400 nonprofit theaters throughout New
12 York City. We are a grant maker providing the field
13 with \$2 million in funding every year primarily to
14 theaters with budgets under \$500,000 who consistently
15 seed the field with new talent and techniques and
16 often come from communities that are most underserved
17 by philanthropy.

18 We are offer subsidized rehearsal office and
19 theater space in three facilitates through Manhattan
20 and Brooklyn -- all of which are fully accessible to
21 folks with disabilities.

22 We offer trainings like sexual harassment
23 prevention tailored specifically for our industry,
24 and disability justice seminars.

1
2 Our member may have closed their venues during
3 the pandemic, but they never stopped working.

4 Let me tell you, you cannot stop theater makers,
5 we obsessively pursue telling our stories out of a
6 deep desire for connection and collaboration.

7 Educational programming and theatrical
8 presentations pivoted to virtual production within
9 days of the March 2020 shutdown, and with many
10 theaters now reopened, we are seeing a resurgence of
11 new and previously scheduled productions in theaters
12 around The City written and directed and performed by
13 production teams as diverse as The City's population.

14 As an industry, we exhibited exemplary compliance
15 with the Key to NYC mandate at tremendous cost to our
16 bottom lines, because we agreed it would keep our
17 artists and our audiences safe.

18 Theaters are businesses and our workers are
19 actors, and ticket sellers, parents and teachers,
20 renters and homeowners.

21 Our audiences buy a ticket, and go out to eat at
22 a restaurant, and then take the subway to see one of
23 our shows, supporting other workers across other
24 sectors.

1 We are asking to see the FY22 program to
2 eliminate the gap cut to the Cultural Development
3 Fund restored as we find a way through [INAUDIBLE
4 03:20:05] ... (CROSS-TALK)

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

6 RISA SHOUP: endemic phase of the pandemic and
7 continued constraints, unearned income, and the end
8 of relief funding.

9 Additionally, I am asking for a restoration of
10 our Council initiatives and a restoration of the \$35
11 million of FY22 funding, which for my member theaters
12 and I, will provide critical resources we need to
13 rebound endemic phase of the pandemic.

14 I am also asking for more equitable funding
15 practices and more funding overall as has been
16 eloquently demanded by my colleagues Shade Lythcott,
17 Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, and others to support
18 theaters and other cultural institutions that are led
19 by and serve communities of color. These
20 institutions are at the forefront of artistic and
21 administrative practice, but their access to funding
22 lags far behind their creativity and innovation.

23 Thank you for listening to us and for your
24 leadership and support. If any of you would like to
25

1
2 tour one facilities or tour one of our member
3 theaters located in your district, I welcome you to
4 reach out to me. We would love to see you at the
5 theater.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
7 testimony.

8 Uhm, our next panelist will be Francine Garber-
9 Cohen from The Regina Opera Company, Inc.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Hi, I am I am Fran Garber-
12 Cohen, President of Regina Opera, a small-budget
13 organization. For 52 years, Regina Opera Company,
14 based in Sunset Park, an underserved and low income
15 BIPOC community, has offered fully-staged operas with
16 full orchestra, and many free concerts in parks,
17 libraries, and festivals mostly in Sunset Park.

18 We provide affordable entertainment in accessible
19 venues for audience members who may not otherwise
20 attend live performances. The performances bring
21 happiness and empathy to our audiences, and bring
22 people together, especially Senior Citizens which
23 make up about 65% of our audience. The need for this
24 cultural enrichment is reflected in the facts that
25 over 4000 people usually attend our live performances

1
2 each season, and we have had about 40,000 views of
3 our online operatic and instrumental programming,
4 allowing people who are avoiding public contact due
5 to COVID to still enjoy music.

6 Regina Opera Company, as did most other cultural
7 organizations, has suffered greatly in the past two
8 years due to the COVID pandemic. We need to return
9 New York City to its prior strength as a Cultural
10 Capital. A slower recovery for arts and culture will
11 extend the length of recovery for the many industries
12 the creative economy affects.

13 To accomplish this, we request that the PEG cut
14 funding of 2022 be restored.

15 As the Council determines its budget priorities
16 for FY23, we are here to ask for the support of all
17 Council Initiatives and additional funding for New
18 York City Cultural Community.

19 In addition, I'd like to stress that cultural
20 equity is central to a thriving culture and city.
21 Underserved and underfunded areas in New York City
22 deserve an equitable share of the funding. This will
23 help all of us, especially us in Sunset... (CROSS-
24 TALK)

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: especially us in Sunset
3 Park to return to normal.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
5 testimony. And, just a reminder, you can submit
6 written testimony, uh, as much as you'd like, and up
7 to 72 hours after the hearing.

8 Our next panelist, we have one more on this
9 panel, is Aya Ester Hayishi from The People's Theater
10 Project, thank you.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

12 AYA ESTER HAYISHI: Good afternoon, Council Member
13 Ossé, committee members. Thank you for your advocacy
14 and leadership on behalf of the Arts and Culture
15 community and for communities of color as we approach
16 the pandemic's second anniversary.

17 My name is Aya Ester Hayishi, I am the
18 Development Director at People's Theater Project,
19 also known at PTP. We are the largest performing
20 arts organization in Manhattan north of Harlem and
21 steering committee member of LxNY.

22 At PTP, we create theater with and for immigrant
23 communities to build a more just and equitable world.

24 As an immigrant and Latino led organization, our
25 neighbors of all ages and backgrounds in Washington

1 Heights, Inwood, and The Bronx trust and rely upon
2 us.
3

4 At PTP, theater is our tool in the work of social
5 justice amplifying and humanizing the stories of New
6 York City immigrants. We do this through the work of
7 the PTP Company, our multi-generational, multilingual
8 ensemble of all immigrant artists of color.

9 Through our six year PTP Academy for Leadership
10 Theater and Activism, and our PTP partnerships at
11 schools and CBOs, we serve over a 1,000 immigrant
12 youth and children every year.

13 Free of charge to all families, our programs
14 guide these young people through a journey of self-
15 discovery and celebration of their cultures.

16 The creative economy generates a \$110 billion
17 dollars in economic activity, a number that far out
18 [INAUDIBLE 03:25:05] that the City invests in to our
19 sector. Today we join the demand for a designated
20 \$100 million fund for BIPOC arts and cultural
21 entities. And, we are 0.1% of The Mayor's proposed
22 budget.

23 We also ask that you restore funding added at an
24 option last year. Without the latter, our sector
25 will face in essence a \$20 million cut, which will

1
2 affect PTP and so many other small and midsize
3 organizations in our City.

4 Art heals. Immigrant stories are New York City's
5 stories. Help us bring our city to a place of
6 flourishing in a way that only arts organization of
7 color can.

8 Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
10 testimony.

11 That concludes this panel. Uhm, so, if the Chair
12 or any council members have questions, if they don't
13 we... I do not see any hands, so we will move to the
14 next panel.

15 Thank you again.

16 The next panel will be... I will name everybody
17 on the panel, all the panelists, and then we will
18 take questions at the end from council members or
19 Chair.

20 Olympia Kazi, Adina Applebaum, Devin Mathis, and
21 apologies, Marc Ribot will be in this next panel.

22 So, with that, Miss Kazi, uh, when the sergeant
23 calls the clock, you may begin your testimony, thank
24 you.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1
2 OLYMPIA KAZI: Thank you very much for the
3 opportunities to testify today.

4 So, my name is Olympia Kazi, I am a founding
5 member of the New York City Actor's Coalition and the
6 Music Workers Alliance, and for the last four years,
7 I also served as the Vice Chair of the first ever
8 Nightlife Advisory Board.

9 You know, every time I come to these hearing, it
10 breaks my heart. So, about this year, what I wanted
11 to make sure that you don't forget, are the workers
12 that were extremely impacted and did not qualify for
13 a lot of the relief -- especially music workers that
14 had to tour after the pandemic and unemployment
15 insurance has expired, and they ended up losing more
16 money and remaining stranded in other states and in
17 other countries, and they lost more money.

18 So, I really hope that you are going to help the
19 New York City Artists Corps 2.0, and this time around
20 we are going to get it right.

21 And, so, last year, we helped some people, but we
22 did not focus on the impacted performing artists.

23 So, I want to make sure that this time around there
24 is a New York City Artist Corp 2.0, and that it does
25 prioritize impacted performing artists, uh, who were

1 learning their living as artists before the pandemic,
2 and we hope that we will be able to continue now and
3 after.
4

5 The second thing I wanted this committee to
6 consider is beyond DCLA, we should also be talking to
7 The Mayor's Office of Median and Entertainment. We
8 should be looking at programs instead of having to
9 give relief after. Let's institute a Pandemic
10 Touring Insurance Fund -- a pilot project that we
11 could start and fund already this year. This way
12 artists don't have to accrue debt and then seek
13 relief next year.

14 Last but not least, I want to make sure that we
15 are collecting some data so DCLA and [INAUDIBLE
16 03:28:12] had committed to do a music census before
17 the pandemic, but that never came through. So, if we
18 could invest also in a little bit of data about the
19 art workforce that would be fantastic.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today,
21 and, you know, welcome to the new Chair.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
23 testimony.

24 The next witness will be Adina Applebaum. You may
25 begin when the... (CROSS-TALK)

1 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: sergeant calls the clock.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

4 ADINA APPLEBAUM: Thank you, Chair Ossé, thank you
5 committee members, my name is Adina Applebaum, I am
6 the Development Manager at The Center for Fiction,
7 which is a home for storytelling that brings diverse
8 communities together as readers and writers to share
9 a passion for fiction.
10

11 We are a 200-year-old organization. We recently
12 relocated from Manhattan to Fort Greene in 2019.
13 Through our programming we spotlight local authors,
14 and we host events about cultural and social issues.

15 One recent event we held with Ian Manuel and
16 Yusef Salaam was about their experiences of
17 incarnation and the role that literature played in
18 helping them survive.

19 In addition to public events, our programming
20 includes emerging writer fellowships, which help
21 talented writers publish debut novels, and adult
22 writing workshops, and reading groups.

23 Today, I am honored to tell you more about our
24 programming for young readers KidsRead / KidsWrite.
25 Our KidsRead / KidsWrite programming annually serves

1 students from New York City Public Schools in grades
2 3 through 12. Our collaborative programming connects
3 young people with dynamic writers who share their
4 backgrounds and experiences. And, we work with
5 teachers to figure out which writers and programming
6 makes the most sense with their curriculum and will
7 connect the most with their students.
8

9 We provide students with free books, reading
10 groups, and writing workshops with the goal of
11 empowering them to tell their own stories. And a
12 huge percentage of our students live in shelters.
13 And, at one of our recent partner schools on Staten
14 Island the percentage of students living in shelters
15 was %14 and loved below the poverty line. So, for
16 them books can unfortunately an unaffordable luxury,
17 and giving them books of their own to keep and read
18 and talk about -- about characters whose lives
19 resemble them or characters from completely different
20 worlds opens new possibilities and also reminds them
21 that their stories are valued. And that is really at
22 the heart of what we do.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 ADINA APPLEBAUM: Teachers have told us that our
25 programing draws out new voices and perspectives, and

1
2 authors with whom we partner have called the
3 experience extraordinary. And, we do offer artists
4 an honorarium for partnering with us, so we are
5 supporting them financially as well.

6 We believe that creating interests in telling
7 stories for children has never been more important,
8 and as with so many of our peers, we have suffered
9 devastating losses from the COVID pandemic. So, as
10 we begin to reemerge it's only with your support that
11 we can assure a strong future for storytelling, for
12 readers, of writers of all ages, and make sure that
13 children have books and stories that both speak to an
14 expand their experience.

15 Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify
16 today.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
18 testimony.

19 The next panelist will be, uh, Devin Mathis,
20 thank you.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 DEVIN MATHIS: Hello, thank you, uh, my name is
23 Devin Mathis, I am the Executive Director of
24 UrbanGlass in Fort Greene, and I am submitting
25 testimony today on behalf of The New Coalition of

1
2 Culturals in City Buildings. Our coalition consists
3 of 13 organizations with operating budgets ranging
4 from \$500,000 to \$16 million and was born six years
5 ago under the common umbrella of Culturals operating
6 out of City owned buildings who are not CIGs.

7 But, with the help of [INAUDIBLE 03:32:14] and
8 Council Member Cumbo, we were able to successfully
9 advocate the DCLA to provide us with energy subsidies
10 that boost our operational capacity and thereby
11 safeguard a delivery of diverse cultural programs.

12 We also came together, because we all have a
13 collective obligation to our communities and the City
14 properties which we operate and steward.

15 We have made and continue make long term
16 investments in these City properties. The energy
17 subsidy has been an immense help for all of us and
18 has enabled us to continue our important work. The
19 subsidy really has been a lifeline, and with the
20 change in both The Commissioner, Associate
21 Commissioner, and Cultural Committee Chair, we wanted
22 to make sure that you knew about this important
23 funding and its history.

24 The New Coalition of Culturals in City Owned
25 Buildings cares after populations and neighborhoods

1 historically underserved by larger cultural
2 institutions. Together we engage nearly two million
3 New Yorkers, many of us who are able to distribute
4 food, water, and PPE supplies to our neighbors and
5 essential workers and others within our coalition we
6 are able to open our lobbies to provide temporary
7 cooling places and bathrooms for protestors and
8 others in need.

9
10 We are more than just art spaces. We are a
11 legacy organizations that have commitment to the
12 neighborhoods where we are located. We are anchor
13 institutions which are really important during times
14 of disruptions and challenge. Our communities need us
15 more than ever.

16 For each of us, the energy subsidy... (CROSS-
17 TALK)

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 DEVIN MATHIS: is a significant part of our
20 budget. And, I am going to skip ahead [INAUDIBLE
21 03:33:52] very quickly. Uh, for the communities we
22 serve and the artists who create within our spaces,
23 losing this funding, which would negatively impact
24 our ability to stay within and continue functioning
25 would... It's not just a problem, it's a crisis.

1 We are asking you for your continued advocacy on
2 the energy subsidies of New Coalition of Culturals in
3 City Owned Buildings. The energy subsidy was a hard
4 won victory, and if it is dropped from the budget it
5 is unlikely to return. Please keep the energy
6 subsidy for The New Coalition whole.
7

8 Thank you again for your time and all that you do
9 to advocate for the arts.

10 Thank you so much for your testimony.

11 We have one more person on this panel, uhm, Marc
12 Ribot you may begin with the sergeant calls the
13 clock.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 MARC RIBOT: Thank you very much. My name is Marc
16 Ribot, I am a musician, a touring indie musician, and
17 I am with the Music Workers Alliance, which is
18 dedicated to the empowerment of indie musicians.
19 And, I would like to underline my support for
20 everything that Olympia Kazi had said. We need -- in
21 terms of policy -- to refund New York City Artist
22 Corp, but we need to fix the problems that prevented
23 that program from benefitting working musicians last
24 time. It was open to any self-defined artist,
25 whether they had ever worked or not as an artist or

1 whether they had in fact been impacted by COVID-19 or
2 lost any work as a result of it. Thus, actual
3 working artists were marginalized in that process.
4

5 Now, I also want to give a shout out to Sade
6 Lythcott acknowledgment that a lot of our economy
7 lies outside of the public and philanthropically
8 funded sector. A lot of it is in the private sector.

9 But, I would like to expand that: A lot of our...

10 From the standpoint of working musicians, a lot of

11 our economy is in export. We work outside... You

12 know, we love to work at the publicly funded

13 institutions when we get the gig. But we earn or

14 leaving on tour, outside of New York. As touring

15 musicians, we have been triply impacted. We have

16 been impacted by the shutdowns here and abroad; we've

17 been impacted by the shutdowns of travel; and we have

18 been impacted by COVID-19 itself. I have to test

19 every day I'm on tour. Okay? To enter the venue or

20 to cross borders. If I test positive, that's

21 immediate force majeure shutdown... (CROSS-TALK)

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 MARC RIBOT: of all ensuing gigs, uhm, it also

24 means I am responsible for paying my own hotel, uhm,

25 until... I can't get on a plane and come home.

1 So, we need to... If we want the real economy of
2 New York musicians, we need to do that pilot project
3 to offer insurance and to do the research so that...
4 MOMÉ'S report was wonderful -- it omits music as an
5 export -- we can't benefit -- we can't return without
6 understanding the real economy.
7

8 Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: thank you so much for your
10 testimony.

11 That concludes this panel, and thank you to
12 everyone for our testimony.

13 I am just checking for council member hands, or
14 Chair if anybody has questions for this panel?

15 Okay, so, I am not seeing hands, so with that, we
16 will move to the next panel.

17 Uhm, so, I will name the panelists... the
18 witnesses and then call you one by one.

19 The next panelists will be Sami... and apologies
20 in advance for any pronunciation issues, Sami Abu
21 Shumays from Flushing Town Hall, Rocky Bucano from
22 Universal Hip Hop Museum, and David Freudenthal from
23 Carnegie Hall.

24 Uh, so Sami Abu Shumays, you begin your testimony
25 when the sergeant calls the clock.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: Thank you, Chair Ossé and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify. I am Sami Abu Shumays, Deputy Director of Flushing Town Hall, a member of the Cultural Institutions group and a member of the Latinx Arts Consortium of New York -- LxNY.

The preliminary budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) for FY23 represents a significant funding cut - more than 50% of our City funding.

As one of the smallest CIGs, our baselined funding is \$375,292, a figure that hasn't increased for over a decade. Instead, for the last several years we have depended on the "one time" increases added at budget adoption and a bunch of initiatives including CTC and Supplemental Support to be whole bringing our total operating support has been about \$800,000 -- a figure that is comparable to what we were getting in 2008 before the financial crash.

So, it has taken us 14 years to get back to where we were. And, at the same time, uh, during a time when we had to lay off people initially and have

1
2 gradually built back the organization. We don't have
3 a base of wealth to suffer these cuts.

4 So, I am here with three requests:

5 First that the council restore the fiscal 22 \$35
6 million -- as a bunch of people have said.

7 Second, that those increases baseline. The
8 uncertainty... So, for us more than 50% of City
9 funding is not baselined. It's crazy.

10 And, then third, Consider significant increases
11 beyond the \$35 million. DCLA support is incredibly
12 inequitable across the five boroughs, uh, with one
13 estimate being that Manhattan receives 10 times the
14 per capita funding as Queens and five times the per
15 capita funding of Brooklyn. We don't want to see any
16 organization cut to restore equity, The People's
17 Cultural Plan in 2017 said that a figure \$270 million
18 would create equity across the City, uh -- Shade
19 Lythcott -- I want shout out to what she said, \$1
20 billion dollars. One percent of the City Budget is
21 what we really need. Those are the numbers that we
22 should be talking about. That would really make
23 us... (CROSS-TALK)

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
25

1 SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: the cultural capitol that we
2 should be.
3

4 Thank you very much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
6 testimony. The next panelist will be Rocky Bucano
7 from the Universal Hip Hop Museum.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 ROCKY BUCANO: Good afternoon, Chairman Ossé and
10 esteem City Council members of the Cultural Affairs
11 Committee.

12 I am Rocky Bucano, President and Executive
13 Director of the Universal Hip Hop Museum, the
14 Bronx, and New York City's newest and most diverse
15 cultural institution.

16 The Universal Hip Hop Museum serves as the
17 cultural anchor of the Bronx Point Development,
18 which features 100% affordable housing in the Mott
19 Haven section of the Bronx.

20 The journey to establish a permanent home for
21 Hip Hop began 12 years ago. Construction of the
22 Universal Hip Hop Museum's 53,000 square feet state
23 of the art building began construction last year
24 during the height of the global COVID pandemic.
25 Despite the challenges of building a new cultural

1 institution during a global pandemic, the museum's
2 construction is on track to open in 2024.

3
4 I am here to request \$8 million in new capital
5 funding, to support design and construction related
6 to the museum's interior fit out and \$175,000 in
7 discretionary funding to support the museum's
8 cultural and educational programs. The City's
9 investment is vital to the museum's continued
10 growth, development, and ongoing construction.

11 When the Universal Hip Hop Museum opens in 2024,
12 it will become New York City's newest global
13 cultural attraction drawing hundreds of thousands
14 of visitors annually from around the world uptown
15 to the Bronx. This increased tourism will generate
16 millions of dollars in revenue and help local small
17 business owners realize new revenue. The Universal
18 Hip Hop Museum's construction has already created
19 new jobs and will create many new employment
20 opportunities in the years to come. There is no
21 doubt that the Universal Hip Hop Museum's economic
22 impact on The Bronx will be transformative.

23 Since Universal Hip Hop Museum's journey began,
24 we have produced a variety of educational,
25 cultural, and social justice programs serving

1 students and educators from the city's five
2 boroughs. This year, the Universal Hip Hop Museum's
3 is producing a Hip Hop Physics program for...

4 (CROSS-TALK)

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

6 ROCKY BUCANO: New York City middle school and
7 high school students. We are also introducing a new
8 program called Shoot Cameras, Not Guns, designed to
9 help reduce gun violence committed by both young
10 men and young women who live in under-resourced
11 communities.
12

13 I thank you for allowing me to testify today.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
15 testimony.

16 The final member of this panel will be David
17 Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall, thank you, and you
18 may begin your testimony.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Hi, everybody, I just want to
21 say how honored I am to be in a space with all of
22 these extraordinary arts professionals in City
23 government, in the sector, all playing together to
24 support this field.
25

1 Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to members
2 of the committee.
3

4 Uh, Carnegie Hall is another proud member of the
5 CIG, and we just want to lend our voice to
6 underscore Coco Killingsworth's testimony, you
7 know, and the calls from our colleagues in the arts
8 and cultural sector for increased investment in
9 2023.

10 As you have heard, I won't take you through them
11 again, but, you know, it's a massive and robust
12 need and we are grateful for your attention to it.

13 For Carnegie Hall, our public service mission is
14 central to why and how we exist. And there's a lot
15 happening on our stages. Uh, I just wanted to talk
16 quickly about, you know, some of our partnerships
17 with the City as demonstration that, you know, CIGs
18 big and small are all deeply committed, uh, to
19 serving New Yorkers and supporting our cultural
20 colleagues. Our citywide festivals, our
21 partnerships with cultural organizations around the
22 City, we are super excited about our Afrofuturism
23 Festival this year, which is happening right now,
24 as well as our Carnegie Hall Citywide, which are
25 free community concerts in partnerships all around

1
2 the City with community based organizations. And
3 also our deep partnerships in the City's schools
4 and community settings including our work in
5 justice settings, which the council has supported
6 so deeply.

7 I would call out that the council has a big role
8 in supporting culture both in the funding for the
9 agency and through their own discretionary support
10 through capital and expense lines. You are all key
11 partners and... (CROSS-TALK)

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: we look forward to the work
14 together.

15 I just want to wrap up by calling out The Chair
16 for asking the question that everybody wanted to
17 know, which was, uh, whether that green screen was
18 real or not. So, thank you for that. We all needed
19 to know.

20 Many thanks.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: thank you so much for your
22 testimony. This is the last member of the panel.

23 Uh, Chair do you have any questions? Any council
24 members? (CROSS-TALK)

25 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: No more questions for me.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much.

Uhm, so with that, we are actually moving to our final panel today. I am just watching for council member questions, and I don't see any hands. So, we will move forward.

The members of that panel will be Cheryl Warfield and Lisa Alpert.

So, Miss Warfield, I will call you and you may begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHERYL WARFIELD: Good afternoon, thank you, Speaker Adams, Chair Ossé, and committee members for hearing my testimony.

I am Cheryl Warfield, a union opera singer, independent producer of work about the Black Experience, and founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera a community based nonprofit that presents concerts and educational cultural outreach to youth and families.

I speak today to remind The Council that arts and culture have and continue to provide a guiding light towards the City's recovery, and that small BIPOC organizations like mine strive to provide services in the trenches where we are most needed.

1
2 I testify in solidarity with New Yorkers for
3 Cultural and Arts, New York's cultural institution
4 groups, The Coalition for Theaters of Color, and
5 Community based arts and culture organizations.

6 I am entreat The Council to mobilize and support
7 arts and culture with substantial investment in
8 historically under resourced neighborhoods.

9 A fund earmarked to target underserved
10 neighborhoods would bring the benefits of cultural
11 assets where they are most needed. Investing in
12 cultural centers in these neighborhoods can and will
13 improve the vitality, safety, and strength of these
14 communities and their families. Such investment will
15 strengthen New York overall.

16 To that end, we ask that the fiscal 2022 PEG cuts
17 to the Cultural Development Fund be restored.

18 Regarding Council priorities for fiscal 2023, we
19 ask for a restoration of all Council initiatives and
20 the restoration of \$35 million of fiscal 2022
21 funding, an additional \$50 million is needed for the
22 cultural community. Cultural equity is central to
23 every part of this ask, as we envision an equitable
24 and thriving culture and City that benefits all.

25 Let's continue the conversation... (CROSS-TALK)

1 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

2
3 CHERYL WARFIELD: in coming weeks regarding these
4 asks and to elaborate on the benefits for all New
5 Yorkers that equitable and adequate funding will
6 provide.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
9 testimony. And, I apologize, I left one person off
10 this panel that's my mistake. So, it will be...
11 Sorry, the last person on this panel will be Alton
12 Aimable. And apologies for any pronunciation.

13 So, with that we will call the next person on
14 this panel, apologies, one moment, uhm, Lisa,
15 apologies, I am just making sure that I'm not missing
16 anyone else very quickly and just checking. And, we
17 will check for anyone we've missed at the end.

18 Uhm, okay, so with that, we will move to Lisa
19 Alpert, and then Mr. Aimable, you will be the last
20 member of this panel. Thank you very much.

21 Miss Alpert, you may begin your testimony when
22 the sergeant calls the clock.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Apologies, we might have lost
25 the witness.

1
2 Uhm, so we will just to the next person on the
3 panel, Mr. Aimable, we will move to you next if
4 you're ready to submit your testimony. You may begin
5 when the sergeant calls the clock.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 ALTON AIMABLE: Alright, cool. Uhm, I am Alton
8 Aimable, President and Founder of Tropicalfete. We
9 are a cultural arts organization. We do programming
10 mainly in Brooklyn. But one of the things I wanted
11 focus on is the importance of culture and how it
12 could affect someone's well-being.

13 So, coming out of the pandemic, I was asking some
14 of the students what did coming back mean to them?
15 And, one of the common things I heard, uh, coming
16 back in to program -- we teach [INAUDIBLE 03:50:17]
17 we teach skills, uh, dance, both to youth and seniors
18 -- was the word depression. It just helped them
19 tremendously just to get back. I know the
20 coronavirus had us shut down for a little while, but
21 we were still able to move virtually. And, just
22 having that connection with another human being to
23 express your culture, I just want to state how
24 important those things are.

1
2 Another fact I would like to bring up is, working
3 with the libraries, we have done a lot of programs
4 with the Brooklyn Public Library, we have festival
5 coming for Caribbean Heritage Month in June, so
6 funding the libraries, funding small cultural
7 institutions like us to partner up with major
8 cultural institutions is something that, you know, I
9 would like to you guys to consider, and to just keep
10 making it happen with the funding that you guys have
11 provided us.

12 So, thanks to all of the council members who have
13 supported us, and hopefully that funding will
14 continue for us and for other cultural institutions.

15 Thanks, if you have any questions, I'll be happy
16 to answer.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
18 testimony.

19 Uhm, and also, Miss Alpert has now logged in.
20 So, we will go back to Lisa Alpert and then conclude
21 this panel.

22 Uh, so, Miss Alpert, you may begin when the
23 sergeant calls the clock.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

25

1 LISA ALPERT: Hi, Chair Ossé, hello, it's nice to
2 meet you. You must be exhausted.

3 My name is Lisa Alpert, I am representing Green -
4 Wood. Let me just start with the obvious, Green-Wood
5 is a cemetery, I know you know. We are a national
6 historic landmark and we cover a really big piece of
7 land in South Brooklyn. We have been here since
8 1838... (CROSS-TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: My grandfather is buried there.

10 LISA ALPERT: Oh yeah! You're kidding! Oh, let's
11 talk offline...

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: (LAUGHING)

13 LISA ALPERT: We have our archival records I bet
14 you would like to... (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

16 LISA ALPERT: Okay, that's great.

17 Oh, you threw me off. Okay, no wait a minute,
18 hold on.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Sorry, sorry, sorry.

20 LISA ALPERT: It's alright.

21 So, as a cultural space Green-Wood is the
22 backdrop for concerts and art instillations, walking
23 tours, trolley tours, we have an artist in residence
24 program, which is now in its second year, and this
25

1 year's artist is the amazing gender queer artist
2 Rowan Renee, school programs at [INAUDIBLE 03:52:36]
3 Black Pioneers of Green-Wood, Women pioneers of
4 Green-Wood, Immigrant Pioneers of Green-Wood, etc.,
5 Concerts In The Catacombs, Latinx programming, LGBTQ+
6 programing, Juneteenth -- I could go on and on.
7

8 We host about 320 programs and tours every year.
9 And, we are not a public part, and we are not a
10 museum, but we basically act like both of them to
11 serve the community. So, we are a tranquil and
12 healing and inspiring space for all.

13 Here's what's going to really surprise you,
14 Green-Wood sees an astoundingly high number of
15 visitors annually. In 2021 we had 450,000 visitors
16 from across Brooklyn and New York City, and that is
17 because we are open seven days a week until 7:00 p.
18 m. daily, 365 days a year at no cost to the public.

19 So, Chair Ossé, I think you are interested in
20 developing new and sort of unconventional spaces for
21 cultural programming, uh, well, I can say that Green-
22 Wood definitely checks that box for unconventional.
23 So, we would love to talk to you about our
24 experience... (CROSS-TALK)

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 LISA ALPERT: uh, for this year's budget, Green-
3 Wood has two asks in front of The City Council, a
4 discretionary ask to support our large scale, free
5 public programming, including Juneteenth and Día de
6 los Muertos, Battle of Brooklyn Day, etc. And,
7 second we are seeking capitol for our Education and
8 Welcome Center, which will allow us to serve more
9 Brooklynites, more New Yorkers year round with our
10 educational and cultural programming.

11 So, we are excited to support your vision for
12 cultural programming in New York City and we just
13 look forward to meeting with you and working with you
14 to support our shared New York community.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
16 testimony.

17 So, Chair, this concludes the end of this panel,
18 and this includes all of our public witnesses.

19 So, we will do one final check, if there is
20 anybody we missed? But, this will otherwise conclude
21 the public portion of our hearing.

22 Uh, if there is anyone we missed, if you could
23 please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function? I'm just
24 checking, and just making sure that there's nobody
25 else.

1
2 And, if there are any council members who had
3 questions for this panel, apologies.

4 I am not seeing anyone. Uh, so, Chair there are
5 no members of the public who would like to testify,
6 so this concludes public testimony.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you very much. Thank you.
8 Brenda, and thank you to everyone that testified both
9 from the libraries and from every cultural
10 institution and [INAUDIBLE 03:55:12] that also did
11 attend.

12 And, without further ado, I will close us out.

13 [GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, everyone.
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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 April 15, 2022