



**Department of
Probation**

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**Statement to the New York City Council Committees on Criminal Justice &
Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**

By Ana Bermúdez

December 18, 2018 – 1pm

INTRODUCTION

Good morning Chair Powers, Chair Van Bramer, and members of the Criminal Justice and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Committees. I am Ana Bermúdez, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation (DOP), and sitting with me is Catrina Prioleau, Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) Director. In addition to the incredible Probation staff here with me today, I am joined by Carnegie Hall – our phenomenal partner in this work – who will also be speaking about this unique partnership. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the important work of the Department of Probation’s art programs, namely the signature NeON Arts.

How it all Began - NeONs

One cannot truly explain the genesis of NeON Arts and this shift in community corrections work without focusing on the Neighborhood Opportunity Network, or NeON, model. NeONs are neighborhood probation offices co-located with community-based organizations and service providers, which create a one-stop-shop of wrap around services for people on probation, their families, and their communities. To do this effectively, we had to embed probation, and the resources we bring, in the seven NYC neighborhoods that most people on probation call home: the South Bronx, Harlem, Jamaica, Bed-Stuy, Brownsville, East New York, and northern Staten Island. Neighborhoods that too often were defined in some settings by their worst statistics. Through the NeON model in general and NeON Arts specifically, we create an opportunity for residents of the NeON neighborhoods to redefine themselves publicly by their talents, potential, skills, and creativity.

For those of you that haven't yet visited a NeON – this excerpt from a book called *Justice Reinvestment: Winding Back Imprisonment*, by lead author David Browns, paints a pretty vivid picture of our now internationally recognized probation model, and what the authors describe as “an inspiring example of how a traditional government criminal justice agency might be transformed to a vibrant local community center exuding a sense of activity and hope.” Quote:

“...A visit to the South Bronx NeON ‘will really give you a very different feel for what a local justice investment initiative might look like.’ In the colorful and radically redesigned office, it is not immediately apparent exactly who were staff, probationers, local citizens, community and health workers, friends, family, and others. The process of people reading examples of their poetry included all these and indeed the Commissioner of Probation, reading a poem by her [then] 11-year-old child. People were being assisted with healthcare registrations, employment applications, and educational programs. The taxi driver who dropped us off at the NeON office told us it was an excellent place, doing great work.”

The essence of the NeON model moved Probation away from doing things *to* people and towards collaborating *with* them. To walk that walk, we had to provide an opportunity for those communities to sit at the table with us and have a voice in how we did this work. So we reached out to the community to establish a NeON stakeholder group (NSG) for each NeON comprised of individuals from local businesses, community and faith-based organizations, residents, probation staff, clients, and community leaders – like yourselves. In fact, each Council Member with a NeON in their district is an “ex-officio” member of their local NeON Stakeholder Group.

NeON Stakeholders generously give their time and energy to ensure that each NeON has what it needs to best serve all its residents, including those on probation, as they inherently know what their community needs most. Part of what makes the NeON Arts model so innovative is the role that the NeON stakeholder groups play as the trustees of the collective decision-making power to determine which arts and cultural experiences their communities need, and which artists and organizations are



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best suited to provide them. You will have the opportunity to hear from some of these amazing folks later today, as many of them are with us and will be testifying during the public portion of this hearing.

NeON Arts – Then and Now

NeON Arts began in 2013 as a small pilot project after the Department repurposed some funding from the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI). Five years later, our public-private partnership with the uniquely qualified Carnegie Hall Weill Music Institute (WMI) has invested **\$1.9 million** of direct arts and cultural programming in underserved neighborhoods across the city. Thank you Council Members Ampry-Samuel and Gibson for your support of NeON Arts, which allowed for increased arts opportunities in Brownsville and the South Bronx respectively. In the 14 rounds of arts programming to date, NeON Arts has awarded **130** grants, and 35% of the local art organizations and artists awarded funding had annual operating budgets of less than \$250,000. Chair Powers, you saw some of the many different arts and cultural opportunities provided through NeON Arts at the culmination event this past September at Carnegie Hall.

Though the Arts and Criminal Justice may seem as unlikely of a pairing as the Department of Probation and Carnegie Hall -- helping to build and expand NeON Arts for the past 5 years has taught us that they are natural and necessary compliments to one another. The arts are about creativity and positive self-expression, opportunities that many in the criminal justice system, their families, and their communities do not have access to. But NeON Arts is changing that – since the program’s inception, NeON Arts has reached over **10,000** people citywide. Through participating in, planning, and being connected to this initiative, we started to notice a change not only in the participants, whether on probation or not, but in our staff and the broader community as well. We knew we were on to something big, as did some of the funders who commissioned an evaluation of the program.

Evaluations – Building on the Body of Research

The NeON Arts evaluation builds on the 2017 Social Impact of the Arts study by the University of Pennsylvania, which examined the impacts that access to arts and cultural institutions and opportunities had on “underserved neighborhoods of NYC,” which were – you guessed it – the NeON neighborhoods. The Penn study found that increased access to arts and culture in these communities



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using a network approach (these are their words, not mine!) had many positive outcomes, such as a 5% reduction in obesity, 14% reduction in child abuse and neglect cases, and an 18% increase in kids' educational attainment.

Most striking of all was the finding that communities with access to arts and cultural opportunities had an **18% decrease in the serious crime rate** compared to communities that did not. While not a direct causal relationship, this showed that the connection between arts and criminal justice was there – and that a holistic view of community corrections work must include increased access to the arts. In order to move the needle in our field, as host of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) Summer Training Institute in New York City last year, we took the opportunity to showcase the NeON Arts initiative as our host event at Carnegie Hall. Community corrections professionals from around the country were amazed at the talent of the artists and the diversity of art forms, but especially that this initiative was a part of our probation continuum. That led to the Department receiving the American Probation and Parole Association **2017 Excellence in Community Crime Prevention Award** for the cutting-edge use of arts in community corrections.

Before getting into some of the findings of the NeON Arts Evaluation – I want to again thank you, Chair Powers, Chair Van Bramer, as well as Council Member Vanessa Gibson, for joining us at the Evaluation announcement last week. I can honestly say that was the most fun and joyful press conference I have ever been to – and the young talent in the Renaissance Youth Choir always blows me away!

Conducting an evaluation of an initiative like NeON Arts - essentially trying to quantify human interaction - is not typical. In fact, one of the unique facets of the evaluation was the way in which the young people were engaged to play such a crucial part in the evaluation process by helping to shape the survey questions and serving as a bridge to the focus groups. Even the evaluators reported self-transformation from conducting this evaluation! Though it was not our intention to have such a strong impact on the people conducting the evaluation, I think it is worth noting in regards to not only the power of this program, but the unique model as well.



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A few statistics from the evaluation that really resonated with what we are trying to do in providing these opportunities for people on probation and their communities are:

- **Trying something new** – 80% of participants looked forward “a lot” to taking part in the daily NeON Arts event and, 91% of the time, it was an event they had *never before experienced*.
- **Know about a caring adult** – participating in NeON Arts resulted in all of the young people feeling that they know more adults who care about them.
- **New skills** – all participants learned a new skill.
- **Feeling about my future** – Most participants felt “**More hopeful**” about their future from being a part of NeON Arts.
- **Getting along with others** – participating in NeON Arts resulted in the young people getting along better with others.

Other DOP Arts Experiences

The great success of NeON Arts has created additional opportunities for us to expand and grow a number of other arts experiences, which greatly benefit people on probation and communities throughout our City. This afternoon, I will briefly walk you through those other opportunities: Free Verse, our Public Artist in Residence, the Made in NY Animation Project, NeON Photography, and NeON Inspires.

Free Verse

Free Verse is a poetry workshop offered in the NeON waiting rooms that turn wait time into creative time. Born and bred in the South Bronx NeON waiting room five years ago, Free Verse invites community members, professional writers, and probation staff to read, write, sing, and perform during a weekly open mic. Free Verse also produces an annual magazine, provides jobs for writing apprentices, and publishes books – the latest of which we have provided for each of you today. One of our greatest champions of Free Verse, Tahara, was on probation and struggling to pass her HSE exam. It was through participating in Free Verse that she built the confidence to persevere and pass the HSE on her fifth try. Tahara has since gone on to college and published her own book of poetry!



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Public Artist in Residence

Part of the Department of Cultural Affairs' (DCLA) municipal residency program, the Public Artists in Residence (PAIR) is based on the premise that artists are creative problem solvers, and therefore embeds socially engaged artists in New York City municipal agencies in order to use creative, collaborative art practice to propose and implement creative solutions to pressing civic challenges. The Department is thrilled to have Rachel Barnard, Executive Director and Founder of Young New Yorkers, which provides arts-based diversion programs to court-involved young people, as our Public Artist in Residence. Rachel's work has helped over 600 young people sentenced to make art with Young New Yorkers, instead of jail or other adult sanctions.

The Department first got to work with Young New Yorkers in a formal capacity as part of NeON Arts, where she was instrumental in our "Love Letters to Brownsville" event a couple of years ago, when NYC First Lady Chirlane McCray visited the Brownsville NeON. This evolution from NeON Arts grantee to Public Artist in Residence is emblematic of how this model and initiative allows government to collaborate with local organizations on the ground to be effective in this work.

Made in NY Animation Project

Another great arts experience that incubated through NeON Arts is the Made in NY Animation Project. A partnership between the NYC Mayor's Office of Media & Entertainment (MOME), NeON, and The Animation Project, the Made in NY Animation Project provides youth across New York City the opportunity to engage in storytelling, gain technical 3D computer animation skills, and qualify for paid internships in this evolving field. In its first year, the program created and screened 72 animated films across the 15 sites – either a local NeON or school - and connected over 1,800 youth ages 12-24 to this important skill. As workforce development is a major component of this opportunity, in the first year Made in NY Animation Project was able to promote 99 interns to paid teaching assistants, working alongside professional animators.

NeON Photography

Our latest expanded arts experience is NeON Photography, which provides professional photography training in the history of photography, technical skills, and the art of visual storytelling. This paid



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opportunity launched in Brooklyn in March, and will expand to all seven NeONs across the five boroughs next cycle. Four mentors from our Arches Transformative Mentoring program, who graduated from the initial workshop, now have paid positions teaching the Bed-Stuy workshops – an incredible synergy between two successful programs.

You may have already seen the work of NeON Photographers, as they have done commercial photo shoots for Park Avenue Pianos, photography for the John McEnroe Foundation’s Annual Fundraising Gala in the Hamptons, and even provided the Mayor’s Office, DOP, Carnegie Hall, NeON Sports, NeON Arts, and the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade with event photography. And yes, Council Members – they are available to take pictures for your events. Fourteen of these amazingly talented photographers are here with us today, some you may recognize from last week at the NeON Arts Evaluation press conference, and are looking forward to testifying about the impact that this opportunity has had on their lives.

One of the most powerful outcomes of the NeON Photography program has been the intergenerational connections in the community. Two of the workshop participants are father and son, and their relationship and significantly grown and been strengthened through participating in this opportunity. In our Bed-Stuy workshop, most of the participants are between the ages of 18-24, but there is a community participant in his early 80s, who joined the class as an opportunity to “grow and evolve” because he believes that “everyone should continue to reinvent themselves throughout their lives.” By creating an environment for clients and the community to come together around the arts, it organically created a new mentor for these young people and a new purpose for a community elder.

NeON Inspires

Finally, NeON Inspires aims to bring about interactive, youth-lead conversations with cultural icons that inspire ideas, foster learning, and provoke change. Hosted at Carnegie Hall, these opportunities provide young people with the chance to interview and engage with some of the top talent in their field. We would like to invite you to our next NeON Inspires on Monday January 7th featuring Michael K. Williams, from HBO’s *The Wire* and *Boardwalk Empire*, in a discussion and screening of



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Raised in the System, a documentary about youth in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. It is sure to be a truly powerful conversation – one you won't want to miss.

Conclusion

I sometimes say that if I could rename the Department of Probation, I would change it to the Department of Humanity. Because as you have heard from my testimony, the arts provides a necessary vehicle for individuals and communities to tap into and express their humanity. Chair Van Bramer – you put it perfectly at the evaluation announcement last week when you said:

“Every human being, regardless of where they’re born, what income level their family has, or whether or not they’ve been involved in the criminal justice system, every human being has beauty and power inside of them. What we do as a society is we push people down and we prevent that power and that beauty from coming out of their mouths, out of their hands, and out of their minds. [The NeON Arts] program is all about making sure that everyone’s beauty and power has the ability to express and manifest itself, as that makes all of us better people.”

Thank you again Chair Powers, Chair Van Bramer, and the members of these two committees for the opportunity to testify about the important and innovative art programs and partnerships at the Department of Probation. We are happy to answer any questions that you may have after hearing from our great partner in this work, Carnegie Hall.

CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2019
December 18, 2018
Hearing: Oversight - Department of Probation Arts Programming

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Powers, Chairman Van Bramer, and Members of the Council Committees on Criminal Justice, and Cultural Affairs, Libraries and Intergroup Relations.

My name is David Freudenthal, and I am Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall. I will shortly turn this over to James C. Horton, Director of Social Impact Programs at Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, but first wanted to express how grateful we are to the City Council for considering this important issue, and for the chance to speak today about Carnegie Hall's partnership with the Department of Probation around the NeON Arts program.

Commissioner Bermúdez and her fantastic team at the Department of Probation deserve the highest praise for including arts in their portfolio of solutions to forge pathways for clients and help them succeed. In our work together, we have shown the power of arts and culture to engage young people, strengthen our communities, and collaborate with local artists and organizations to make our city a better place.

We are grateful for the Council's growing interest in this work—shout out to CM Gibson and Ampry-Samuel for their support! We hope that the Council will enhance support for NeON Arts in the coming year.

Carnegie Hall and NeON Arts

At last week's NeON Arts evaluation press conference, Chairman Van Bramer spoke powerfully to the fact that access to the arts is a fundamental right, and we could not agree more. At the core of Carnegie Hall's mission is the belief that all New Yorkers should have the right to high-quality artistic experiences, and NeON Arts is an essential component of that vision. The issue of arts access is especially critical in the juvenile justice space, an area in which Carnegie Hall has expanded its presence over the past decade. We applaud Chairman Powers for identifying the value of the arts and creative experiences as key to the City's holistic efforts in the justice system. For Carnegie Hall, it's our belief is that all young people, regardless of their circumstances, need to have the opportunity to be creative, explore their talents, and develop skill sets that can help them grow and overcome challenging periods of their lives.



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Since 2013, the Hall has worked with Probation to deliver NeON Arts programming. Our work has brought together young people, community leaders, local artists and arts organizations, and others to help seven of the highest-need neighborhoods. We are proud of the many success stories that come out of NeON Arts over the years. They illustrate the transformative power of the arts and the creative potential that exists in every young person if given the opportunity to be involved with the arts. For example, Kyle, a participant in the spring 2018 Staten Island Projectivity workshop, is now employed as a Program Assistant for the Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall. We are always thinking about building employment pathways from participants' experiences in the program. To date, Carnegie Hall and NeON Arts partner organizations and agencies have employed 37 NeON Arts participants as interns and apprentices.

Carnegie Hall also provides NeON Arts participants with the chance to enhance their artistry and gain exposure to cultural experiences. These opportunities have included attendance at Carnegie Hall performances, NeON Arts showcases in the Hall's Resnick Education Wing, and group field trips to other cultural organizations. One recent example of this happened earlier this spring, when NeON Arts participants from NeON Arts grantee, Free Verse, participated in the concert, *A Time Like This: Music for Change*, as part of Carnegie Hall's 60s festival. Poets from the program performed on the main stage at Carnegie Hall in Stern Auditorium, reciting an original poem with the show's host, Lemon Andersen.

Everyone involved in the project has changed, Carnegie Hall included. The deep dive into this space over the last decade has educated this organization—board and staff—on the justice system, the ways it is tied inexorably to race and poverty, the many committed actors working to affect change, and the humanity of the individuals in the system.

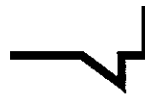
NeON Arts has also helped to forge a unique relationship between a law enforcement agency and a cultural institution. It is one of the great joys of our work to be able to collaborate with Commissioner Bermúdez and her team. The Hall's staff enjoy such a collegial and constructive relationship with Probation. The Probation team is invested in this work and this is evident in the strong relationships we have built in each NeON.

The program is a prime example of a robust, public-private endeavor that is taking a new approach to addressing some of our city's most pressing issues. We are grateful for the Administration's support of the partnership through the Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impact, an initiative of the Department of Cultural Affairs that supports partnerships between New York City's municipal agencies and cultural organizations to use arts and culture to reach underserved and vulnerable New Yorkers. Based on the success we have seen here in New York City, it is our hope that NeON Arts can serve as a model for other law enforcement agencies across the country.

We thank the Committees for their interest in this program, and we encourage the Council to support NeON Arts and other programs by our cultural colleagues across the city. We urge your continued investment in programs that:

- **Build on strengths:** We must work together to identify young people's strengths, interests, and talents in order to find the right opportunities that engage them toward success. The arts help to do this in spades.
- **Build on technology and transparency:** Many adults are working together in this effort. We need to continue to look for ways that technology and transparent communication help networks of adults coordinate on behalf of young people.
- **Invest in youth development:** Give young people a voice and continue to invest in youth development strategies in the justice system. It is important that we provide young people with information about employment opportunities and job access through authentic collaboration with companies, organizations and individuals who resonate with youth participants. One such example is the NeON Inspires series, which allows young people to interact with individuals—podcast-style—from diverse career fields, to discuss overcoming adversity, justice reform, and general life advice.

Thank you, and thanks to Probation, grantee arts organizations, stakeholders, and the talented young people of NeON Arts for being a part of these transformational changes.



HUMANITIES NEW YORK

December 17, 2018

RE: Criminal Justice Committee Hearing on Oversight – Department of Probation Arts Programming

Committee on Criminal Justice

Hon. Keith Powers (Chair)

Hon. Carlina Rivera

Hon. Rory I. Lancman

Hon. Alicka Ampy-Samuel

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Hon. Jimmy Van Bramer (Chair)

Hon. Francisco Moya

Hon. Karen Koslowitz

Hon. Laurie A. Cumbo

Hon. Joseph C. Borelli

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the Committee on Criminal Justice and the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations for inviting my testimony today.

My name is Sara Ogger, and I am the Executive Director of Humanities New York (HNY), an independent 501(c)3 and the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities that receives Federal, State, and NYC funding as well as private donations and grants. HNY is based in Manhattan but we operate throughout New York state, with about 50% of our grantmaking and direct services going upstate. The mission of Humanities New York is to strengthen civil society and the bonds of community, using the humanities to foster engaged inquiry and dialogue around social and cultural concerns. We have recently begun researching ways in which we can help with the bramble of issues that constitute the ecosystem of incarceration in New York.

Participation in a democracy requires placing, sometimes quite literally, your life in the hands of your fellow citizens. This requires robust civic trust, and it's hard to trust someone whose life and experience you do not know. Building on this insight, HNY uses the tools the humanities to foster engaged inquiry and dialogue around social and cultural concerns. The most basic of these tools should be ubiquitous but remain difficult to encourage: open, frank, and substantive dialogue about the hopes, anxieties, and obstacles that unite or divide us. These practices support our best institutions of "informal democracy" whose norms and practices need constant attention and renewal if our democracy is to counter the many threats that face it. Opportunities for conversation – structured and informed, yet supple and nimble enough to respond to the opinions and experiences of participants – are a strength of the public humanities. And they are urgent and necessary for society to thrive. We need to convert distrust into trust, otherwise democracy will not flourish.

This is nowhere more true than in people's interactions with the justice system, and especially in probation and re-entry. We think that arts and the humanities - with the difference between arts and humanities being, roughly, that between creative engagement like painting or writing and interpretive work like dialogue and analysis - can have an impact on people who are going through the re-entry and probation process. The social stigmatization of incarceration extends beyond time served, and goes beyond the imprisoned individual. The experience behind bars influences the rest of an incarcerated person's life and also deeply transforms the experiences of families and communities, both within affected families and communities and in their relationship to outsiders. James Baldwin once wrote something simple yet profound: "No one, after all, can be liked whose human weight and complexity cannot be, or has not been, admitted to." So we need to find ways to convey the complexity of the individuals and families and not assume that a person's or family's sole attribute is the crime they committed or the fact they served time.

Our most direct engagement with these issues began last March, when we hosted a public conversation at Federal Hall, a few blocks from here. This event, "After Attica: Criminal Justice and Mass Incarceration," took historian Heather Ann Thompson's Pulitzer Prize-winning book about the Attica uprising, *Blood In The Water*, as a starting point for a discussion about the social and historical forces at work in the American penal system. In addition to

Thompson, participants included Michael Winerip, a former investigative reporter for *The New York Times* and 2007 Pulitzer finalist for his reporting in New York State prisons, and Toussaint Losier, a scholar of the American criminal justice system based at Harvard University. (This panel was recorded and can be accessed on the Humanities New York YouTube channel).

Based on the success of this event, we incorporated work on NYS prisons into our recently adopted strategic plan, as a key area of focus. HNY is adopting a multi-pronged approach, using a mix of grants, direct service programs, and public events. We are still in the planning stages, but it looks like we will be exploring both sides of the prison pipeline -- the communities where the incarcerated and their families live and the communities that house prisons. We have impaneled a committee to help guide this work, led by our board member Deva Woody, Associate Professor of Politics at The New School University. Other committee members include Phil Lewis, formerly of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Cornell University; Joan Shelley Rubin, Professor of History and Director of the Humanities Center at the University of Rochester; Jean Ashton, formerly a curator at the New-York Historical Society; and other academics and practitioners.

Our grant-making, in the meantime, is informing our in-house work during this research and planning period. In our last grant round alone, we funded three diverse, engaging projects that offer a bounty of experience to the formerly incarcerated.

We provided funding to The Incurables, a Brooklyn-based theater project, for "Bearing Witness to the Incarcerated Girls of New York," a town hall at the Brooklyn Courthouse where experts -- formerly incarcerated women, professors, judges & advocates -- discuss the harm girls often endure during incarceration, and what the future of justice for girls looks like.

We also funded Manhattan's Stella Adler Studio for Acting's project "Ritual4Return," a 12-week arts and education program that directly addresses the stigma or sense of abandonment that attaches to re-entry. In this program, formerly incarcerated individuals develop a rite of passage intended to provoke individual and community healing, and publicly mark their transitions from incarceration to freedom.

Finally, we funded Columbia University's Heyman Center for the Humanities project "Outside In: Art Museums at Rikers Island." The project will bring together incarcerated youth, museum educators, and the general public to create art in a healing environment, culminating in celebration of an art exhibit, and a panel discussion on how mass incarceration impacts communities.

We intend to further our exploration of these issues over the next several years, and not only through out grantmaking. Humanities New York is currently planning a reading and discussion program that will be made available to formerly incarcerated people, their families, and the public at large. During these programs, which take place over the course of a few weeks to months, participants move through a series of readings that highlight the diverse experiences of people who have been incarcerated.

A few years ago HNY launched a different reading and discussion program called James Baldwin's America, which used the great writer's work as a lens through which to view our audiences complex often baffling relationship towards race in America. A group organized by the Harriet Tubman Boosters in Auburn, NY, a community that in many ways relies on a prison as an economic engine, was impressed at how reading Baldwin enabled people to discuss their own experiences: "They laid out some stuff about their own personal histories that you ordinarily wouldn't discuss, especially in a group of strangers. That really set the tone that this group is going to be for real and honest here, and let it all hang out." Another group at the Brooklyn Community Pride Center had a similar experience. One participant said that "I have never before had the privilege to be part of such a diverse group of people speaking so openly and honestly about their life experiences and beliefs," with another noting that "The group itself was diverse in multiple ways, helping to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue."

Thank you. I hope HNY can continue to be a resource for the City Council and the people of New York City in this work.

Sara Ogger, Ph.D.
Executive Director

YOUNG NEW YORKERS

TESTIMONY OF:

Rachel G. Barnard—Founder and Executive Director

Delivered by Mansura Khanam, Program Teacher

YOUNG NEW YORKERS

Presented before

The New York City Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Jointly with the Committee on Criminal Justice

Oversight Hearing:

Department of Probation Arts Programming

December 18, 2018

My name is Mansura Khanam and I am a Program Teacher with Young New Yorkers' (YNY). I am here to speak on behalf of Young New Yorkers' Founder and Executive Director, Rachel G. Barnard, who is also the current Public Artist In Residence at the Department of Probation (DOP). This is her testimony.

YNY uses art to bring positive systemic change to the ways that teens and young adults are prosecuted in New York's criminal legal system. We do this by providing restorative arts diversion programming as a sentencing option for young people facing charges in adult criminal court. To date, over 900 young people have been sentenced to make art at YNY instead of jail or other adult sanctions.

YNY is thrilled by the NeON Arts Evaluation Report that provides strong evidence of the positive, meaningful, and sustained impact of art programming on young people and the larger communities the Department of Probation serves. As clearly shown in the report, community arts programming contributes to meaningful gains in social and emotional learning and sets up an environment in which communities can be safe and thriving.

Young New Yorkers and NeON

Young New Yorkers has partnered with the Department of Probation on NeON programming since its inception in 2013.

1. NeON Brownsville: YNY ran restorative arts programming around gun violence in Brownsville. At the completion of this program, the young people who participated, over half of whom were on probation, realized a public art installation called *Love Letters to Brownsville* in the front garden of 444 Thomas S Boyland Street, facing the local 72nd police precinct. In *Love Letters to Brownsville*, 400 white roses were weaved to form a sculpture that read the word "TRUST". Guests were invited to write a love letter to Brownsville on bright pink tags. Guests then met with the young artists attending the rose sculpture and exchanged their love letter to Brownsville for a white rose, a gift from the young people to their community. Slowly the "TRUST" sculpture transformed from white roses to pink love letters swaying in the wind.
2. NeON East New York: YNY ran a photography program in East New York that centered the voices of our young participants around the local impacts of mass incarceration. Participants entitled their photo project *Everyday Heroes* and invited their mentors and violence interrupters—people who are faced with the task of building relationships with the community and mediating disputes—to come in and sit for a portrait as a way of acknowledging the daily work they do to empower local young people and keep them out of the criminal legal system. The event culminated in a public exhibition that displayed a photo series and biographical descriptions of all of the nominated heroes. The exhibition became a public event that brought together the young people of East New York, their highlighted heroes, and the broader East New York and Brooklyn community. The artwork and photos displayed provided a platform and living dialogue for the young artists to honor their community and discuss ways to continue the fight against mass incarceration in their neighborhood.
3. Carnegie Hall's Create Justice: This year, YNY realized an exhibition at Carnegie Hall's Create Justice Conference as part of a NeON Arts Project. The exhibition and art game re-imagined becoming justice-involved as a glitter pink-spangled labyrinth. Guests moved through a series of steps to complete the game mandate, which mirrored the experiences of young people sentenced to YNY's Restorative Arts Diversion Programs.

In all of these projects, youth used art to lead the conversation around criminal legal issues that impacted them and sought to create change by creating positive new connections between themselves and those with discretionary power within the criminal legal system.

PAIR

In addition to founding YNY, I am also currently the Department of Probation's Public Artist in Residence (PAIR).

My experience working as an artist within the DOP leadership has continued to impress me with their commitment to create safe and thriving communities, not only through supervision practices but by creating supportive structures that allow individuals to move beyond difficult immediate circumstances and to become contributions to their communities. For the PAIR, the Department of Probation leadership has explicitly asked me to improve client-officer relationships and develop a series of concrete interventions in collaboration with the DOP community, to be staged across all five boroughs. Interventions will restructure moments of human connection and promote a shared sense of belonging between the groups. The DOP leadership's commitment to engage meaningfully with their staff and clients was demonstrated by setting up meet and greets for me at all of their locations across the city. The project to be realized this February, and will use art to center the existing wisdom of staff and clients and to create new modes of connection to lead to better staff and client relationships and in turn better case outcomes for clients, keeping more people in their community.

In my experience, the DOP has shown their commitment to keeping people within their communities and the NeON arts program shows their courage and willingness to meet this commitment through innovative means, such as the arts.

Future Opportunities of the Arts at the DOP

With the implementation of Raise The Age, the DOP is providing adjustments to Adolescent Offenders (AOs). Currently this group includes 16-year-olds, and, starting next October, it will also include 17-year-olds. YNY, with our 7 years of experience with providing arts programs as a sentencing option to over 900 young people ages 16 to 25, encourages the DOP to provide arts programming as an adjustment option. YNY welcomes the opportunity to partner with the DOP on such a project.

Conclusion

This hearing demonstrates the Department of Probation and the Council's commitment to exploring innovative arts-based alternatives in NYC's criminal legal system. YNY looks forward to continuing to work with the Department of Probation to provide statistically-verified arts-based alternative sentencing programming. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Rachel G. Barnard, YNY Founder and Executive Director, with any questions about this testimony at (347)720-0776 or at rachel@youngnewyorkers.org. Please carbon copy Kelsey Weber, YNY Administrative and Program Associate, at kelsey@youngnewyorkers.org.



New York Shakespeare Festival dba The Public Theater
City Council Testimony
Committee on Cultural Affairs & Committee on Criminal Justice
12/18/2018

I'm Tiffany Bryant, Government Affairs Coordinator at The Public Theater. Thank you for holding today's hearing regarding the intersection of cultural nonprofits and the New York City criminal justice system.

Conceived nearly 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public engages one of the largest and most diverse audiences in New York City in a variety of venues including the Delacorte Theater and its landmark downtown home, which houses five theaters and Joe's Pub. Through all of its programs, the Public serves approximately 350,000 a year.

The Public Theater is proud to serve formerly and currently incarcerated populations through two programs: the Mobile Unit and Public Works.

The Mobile Unit tours Shakespearean productions for underserved audiences throughout New York City's five boroughs twice per year. In all we visit 18-20 venues per tour including: five New York City Parks venues; seven correctional facilities; two facilities that provide services for the homeless; and three community-based organizations with whom we partner through our Public Works program. We are particularly proud to bring our Mobile Unit to correctional facilities. This is a quote from a letter sent by an attendee in a correctional facility: "It is the first play I've ever seen with an adult cast, and it will not be forgotten, ever..."

Over the last seven years, the Mobile Unit has become an indispensable part of our mission. The results of our tours have been astounding: the fierce, celebratory hunger with which inmates and citizens of every walk of life responded to the work filled us with the conviction that we were doing something important.

Through our Public Works program, we engage deeply with eight community-based organizations to provide year-round classes and workshops. In 2018, the Public Works musical adaptation of *Twelfth Night* had a full five-week run at the Delacorte Theater for the first time. In fulfillment of the Public's goal of radical inclusion, over 100 members of the community ensemble were part of Shakespeare in the Park. The Fortune Society, whose mission is to support successful reentry from prison and promote alternatives to incarceration has served as a Public Works community partner since the program launched in 2013.

Fortune Society's partnership with Public Works has centered around engaging, inspiring and uplifting its members. In the first year of our partnership, teaching artists led twice weekly acting classes for Fortune Society members and staff with the goal of fostering talent and creating opportunities for creative expression, learning, and exploration.



In March of 2014, Fortune Society launched its own acting company entitled The Fortune Tellers using the skills, support and confidence gleaned from their participation in Public Works. Each spring, The Fortune Tellers collaborate to create an original 45-minute piece, which is presented at Fortune Society's now-annual Arts and Theater Festival.

David Rothenberg, founder of Fortune Society, said, "It is difficult to measure the vast impact on our men and women participating in The Public Theater programs. From personal experience, I see, up-close, people who have been marginalized and/or overlooked gaining the excitement of participating in such a creative venture."

DreamYard, an organization which nurtures the artistic talents of youth in the Bronx, has also been one of our strongest community partners. Jason Duchin, DreamYard's co-executive director, said, "DreamYard has been in partnership with The Public Theater for several years through its Public Works program which has deeply inspired and uplifted our community and benefited many Bronx residents."

At the Public Theater, we are committed to the goals and values of the NYC Cultural Plan through programs like Public Works and Mobile Unit. We are honored to have the opportunity to partner with the City in engaging with all New York communities and I thank all of you for your time.

City Council Members, the Committee on Criminal Justice and the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and Intergroup Relations, Commissioners, Ana Bermudez, DOP staff and NeON Arts staff, Carnegie Hall, invited guests, thank you all for your time and for allowing me to speak with you. It is an honor to be here. My name is Dave Johnson, I'm a poet, playwright, actor, and translator and I've been serving as Poet in Residence to the NYC Department of Probation for seven years and I'm the director of **Free Verse**.

Free Verse is a writing program & publishing house & a working artists program that promotes turning waiting time into creative-time. Born, bred and living in the heart of the waiting room of the South Bronx Department of Probation Center— where probation clients check-in with their probation officers – Free Verse solicits new writing created while people wait. The editorial staff of the Free Verse magazine of poetry, prose, and song is a mix of probation clients and community members, *employed* to serve as paid *writing apprentices* – right in the waiting room. Free Verse hosts weekly open mics and workshops and numerous public events that invite DOP clients, DOP officers, DOP staff, professional writers and artists and the community to share their work together.

Seven years ago, after the New York City Department of Design and Construction and Lonnie Tanner did an overhaul of the Probation office waiting rooms, I was called to help create a place and environment that would give clients respect and that they could find refuge while waiting. This was no easy task. After hundreds of hours of observation and conversations with probation clients, probation officers, staff, security guards, and families of clients, I met with the Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner Sharun Goodwin to discuss what we might create. I proposed Free Verse. And little by little Free Verse

blossomed and took off. DOP has been an amazing partner in all our work. They soon took a leap of faith and created this incredible program, NeON Arts, that would extend arts programming throughout DOP and throughout the city.

And the replicable model that Free Verse was able to create was then hatched with the assistance and support of NeON Arts. This has been vital to our work. NeON Arts, along with Carnegie Hall, has allowed our work to flourish and be seen. During the last seven years over thirty probation departments from around the United States, Italy, and Australia have visited the South Bronx to experience Free Verse. They all expressed the desire to bring the Free Verse program to their cities. The goal now for Free Verse is to implement this replicable model in further jurisdictions within our own city. Here. New York City.

In direct line with the Council's mission and vision of reform in social justice, Free Verse seeks to create spaces for freedom of expression and places for economic opportunity that promote democracy and human achievement through the written word.

Free Verse's strategy is not only to create an arts program, but it is a conduit for creating value for court involved clients and the community and to serve the city. We propose to build on our existing publishing house & working artists program that produces original work, generates educational material for literacy at all levels and that creates jobs for Department of Probation & court involved clients that will serve all social service agencies and nonprofits throughout the city. Free Verse has been able to extend their reach beyond DOP by employing DOP clients with other agencies and nonprofits.

Presently, however, we have very little funding. We are running on fumes. We were generously allotted funding to expand through DCLA, which allowed us to hire and pay an additional 8 clients in the program and employ them for 6 months. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you DCLA. But this funding ran out in June of 2018. We need funding now. Free Verse has a grand plan. Seven years ago there were very few people I proposed the idea of Free Verse to that thought it would work. But DOP gave Free Verse and me an opportunity. And we've been able to extend our work into other venues and are working with many other organizations throughout the city to further engage, educate, and employ our court involved clients, such as: Visions Senior Center for the Visually Impaired, The Brooklyn Public Library Adult Literacy Centers, St. Johns University Art & Writing Program, NYU, NYU Casa Italiana, Kairos Italy Theatre & The Italy-New York Theatre Festival, The Brooklyn Book Festival, The New School for Social Research Writing Program, Poets House, Teachers & Writers Collaborative, St. Joseph's College, The Bronx Museum, The Queens Museum of the Arts, ACS & The Children's Center, and Arches.

We've published the Free Verse magazine 6 times. This last issue had over 1000 submissions by clients, staff, and community members. We've published full-length books by DOP clients, writing workbooks, a Make Your Own Book workbook, Mad Lib Poetry-Comic Books. We've published a book of our work in a trilingual edition, *Versetto Libero* (English, Italian & Spanish) that is distributed in New York and in Rome, Italy. This past summer, with tremendous assistance of DOP, we sent a client to study theatre for three weeks in Tuscany, Italy. He has said it changed his life! He is on a ten-year probation sentence and when I met him he had lost his

job, his wife and his kids. He has worked with Free Verse for almost six years. He has now been published in every magazine. He is working on his own book. He is a paid teacher of poetry now at Visions Senior Center. He couldn't be here today because he also now has a full time job with Costco in it's security department. And this past year he has been reunited with his wife and children. Thanks to Carnegie Hall and NeON Arts, his story with Free Verse was recently published in The PlayBill Magazine that is available at every Broadway show.

Free Verse is working to make change and to make a difference. I'm here today to ask for your support. We've been functioning piece meal, month-to-month and now-week to-week. To sustain this replicable model requires sustained funding. We ask you to fund Free Verse and to fund NeON Arts on a serious ongoing basis. If there is anyone on the committee that would commit to reading and hearing a further proposal, I would be honored to send it and to meet with you. We will provide you with an even more robust program that will create economic and artistic opportunities that will ultimately save the city money, the tax payers' money and be a win-win for us all. Can I get a commitment this morning? Thank you for your time.

Dave Johnson
Free Verse Director

City Council, Art is our common humanity it is our birthright-
It is the universal language that connects us all to one another .
I am writer poet and filmmaker and became involved with Free Verse
as an intern with the Community Based Organization -
SoBRo in the Bronx

I was in the Probation Center on 161 Street helping our organization recruit youth to get their GED 's and begin their academic life. However writing was a passion of mine- I had been writing since I was a child so when I was asked would I like to participate in a writing group that meets at a probation center every Thursday. I was not only intrigued by this novel concept but I welcomed it because one thing that is true of all writers besides having a fetish for pens - we are forever in search for the one that writes the smoothest without hesitation so our thought will not be interrupted by a leaky pen — but we are also looking for a community to belong to .

And Free Verse provided that for me . And has continued to six years later- I can speak about how because of Free Verse my poetry has been published in the Bronx Times NewsPaper - I have been asked to be a guest of the Open Program a traveling theater group located in Pisa Italy this past summer - however to me the true value of Free Verse is the community that it helps to foster create and maintain through the art of poetry in the midst of a probation center.

Rare is the individual that has never made a mistake . I have yet to meet one and probation is a physical location where you get the individual support you need to amend your life and take a critical look at your choices. And that being said probation is focused on the individual- however human being we are communal by nature - we are born into families and we are apart of communities - we do live in isolation - and we thrive best when we are connected.

Free Verse greatest achievement is that it allows individuals to stay connected. To be held accountable by those who see them not only as someone who has made a mistake but also as a budding artist a poet - a writer - someone who has something to say. And whose voices will not only be heard but affirmed by a community.
The open mic acts as a space to share old hurts , new triumphs and victories of the spirit

It is a testament to free verse and the community that it has fostered that folks come back after no longer being on probation . They come back to help someone else find their voice - to encourage them to get on the microphone and to be affirmed.

In an America that has increasingly become more divided - in an America in which folks are more engaged with their smart phones than the person that they are sitting across to during dinner. Free Verse acts as a beacon in society to remind us all that the value of community is one that should be persevered. And that Art is forever reaffirming our humanity -where ever the art may be found - be it in a Broadway show - or a probation center.

-Thank you so much. Please fund us!

Yasmine Lancaster-Free Verse Poet

New York City hosts some of the most talented artists and storytellers in the world. The saying goes that if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere. Yet the chance to make it is not given equally to all New Yorkers.

I am Brian Austin, the Founder and Executive Director of The Animation Project (otherwise known as TAP). Ten years ago I created TAP: a program where young adults come together in a therapeutic setting to learn state-of-the-art computer animation software to tell their stories. The resulting animations are screened publicly and shared on social media.

Early on in our work, we partnered with the NYC Department of Probation, enabling us to serve hundreds of young adults in family court. With the establishment of the NeON sites, and specifically, NeON Arts, this partnership expanded, allowing us to reach countless underserved New Yorkers across all five boroughs.

Pointedly, this partnership now includes the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment: in 2017 establishing the Made in NY Animation Project. Together, we currently serve 2,000 young New Yorkers and host eighty paid interns in our Workforce Development Program. Our industry partners include BlueSky Studios, Avalanche Studios, Nickelodeon, T2 Interactive, The Mill, and many others.

One of the most exciting areas of our work with young probationers is to witness them come to life when asked to tell their own stories.

In many settings, young adults are not encouraged to express their full, contradictory selves. "Pull up your pants," "Take off your hat," "Don't curse," "Turn it down," "Keep it moving," are all well-meaning refrains directed (sometimes loudly) at youth. Social order is of course necessary, but with youth development as our goal, young adults need a space to develop and share their ideas.

This is why TAP's first mandate is to listen. Our therapists begin each group with: "What story do you want to tell?"

When I tell people about TAP's work, I often find myself having to emphasize, that yes, the Department of Probation is our partner. It deserves to be better known that Probation is in the business of offering opportunities for growth. This holds true not only for the individuals it serves, but is equally true for it's partners. The New York City Department of Probation has been essential in enabling TAP to bring our unique, direct-service programming to thousands of young adults, ensuring that their stories are heard, and that even the most disadvantaged in our city have access to technology, thereby placing sustainable jobs within their reach.

Brian Austin
Executive Director
The Animation Project
www.theanimationproject.org

Hello everyone, my name is George and it is an honor to be here and be able to speak concerning an issue dear to my heart. I am a Free Verse Poet who relighted my artistic spirit, through NYC DOP and the NeON program.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Commissioner Bermúdez and the entire DOP staff for their support and encouragement of Free Verse and the NeOn program.

Not only do I participate and instruct, but I am a client of DOP who found Free Verse and NeOn helped change my attitude towards my involvement with the criminal justice system.

Free Verse has given those without a Voice, the ability to speak through open mic, published magazines, and performance at Carnegie Hall. Many of those served come from neighborhoods underserved with artistic programs. Through Free Verse I have attended Events and helped with Block Parties in East NY, Brownsville, South Bronx, Flushing, Rosebank and even a Kwanza event in Stapleton in Councilwoman Rose' district/.

We have encouraged thousands of submissions to our magazine, and to watch someone react when their work is published, makes it all worthwhile. I've seen clients who dreaded coming to probation, and the wait it entails; embrace our open mic and writing sessions.

I would like to see Free Verse at all DOP locations, for it changes people and instills hope, and is an outlet for their thoughts.

What I've experienced has forever changed me for the better. What is needed is more funding for Free Verse, to provide transportation costs to clients, supplies and a small stipend as encouragement to participate. We've had members from 8 to 85 contribute. There are no boundaries', or censorship at Free Verse it's all inclusive.

In closing, I want to thank everyone for listening and hope you consider expanding our work where needed. A client told me that: "Free Verse changed his life.". I told him; "he changed mine!" Thank You!

George Warwick
Poet
Free Verse

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I represent: The International Child Program

Address: 127 W 127th Street, Ste: 126

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Name: TAMARA C. WILLIAMS

Address: 81 WHITTLESEY AVE, WEST ORANGE NJ

I represent: MUSIC BEYOND MEASURE

Address: 78 JOHN MILLER WAY, LYBURN NJ

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I represent: Noon

Address: 33 Beaver

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Name: Audre Whitehead

Address: 219 E. 121st Street NY, NY 10035

I represent: Neon Photographers

Address: 127 W. 127th St NY NY 10035

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Name: Danny Cross

Address: 359 Easton St Ronkonkoma NY 11779

I represent: Project FAME NeON Arts

Address: " "

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I represent: Public Theater

Address: _____

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I represent: Harlem NEOD

Address: 127 W 127th St.

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Name: Scholanda Miller

Address: 804 Thomas S Bayland St. Astoria

I represent: Brownsville Neod

Address: 444 Thomas Bayland St Astoria

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Name: CARL P. McINTOSH

Address: 748 CRESCENT ST Brooklyn NY

I represent: NEON PHOTOGRAPHERS

Address: 33 Beaver St NY NY

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Name: Lynda Sylvester

Address: 220-16 146 avenue

I represent: The Animation Project

Address: 219 broadway new york

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Name: Julia Defina

Address: 89-64 163rd Street, Jamaica, NY

I represent: CMS/DUP/NEON ARTS

Address: Jamaica DUP

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Name: Frank Dody

Address: 1368 Fulton Street Brooklyn NY 11216

I represent: Bed Stuy Restoration

Address: 1368 Fulton St. Brooklyn NY 11216

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Name: Michael McIntosh

Address: 604 Hasley Bklyn

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: MANSURA KHANAM

Address: 204 CORNELIA ST, BROOKLYN, NY 11221

I represent: YOUNG NEW YORKERS

Address: 33 FLATBUSH AVE, 4TH FL, BROOKLYN, NY 11217

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Name: Yasmine Lancaster ^{pronounced} (YAS-MEAN)

Address: 1294 Grant Avenue apt #31 Bklyn

I represent: Free Verse Poetry Magazine

Address: _____

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Date: 12-18-18

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Name: Shera Hoop

Address: 71 Van name ave

I represent: NYC Probation Dept

Address: 340 Bay St.

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Name: Sara Ogger

Address: 3 Hanover Sq. SA 10004

I represent: Humanities New York

Address: 150 Broadway, 1700, 10038

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Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Laura Satkowski

Address: 55 Broad St.

I represent: Mets Associates

Address: 55 Broad St.

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Name: Suzanne Harnett

Address: 47 Keeler St.

I represent: Mets Associates

Address: 55 Broad St, NY NY

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Name: Emrose Dowdy

Address: 149 Milford Street BK NY 11208

I represent: Neon Arts

Address: 1

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Name: George (PLEASE PRINT) Warwick

Address: 1 SEATON ST

I represent: DOP

Address: _____

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Name: KENNETH SWINDELL (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 219 EAST 121ST ST. NEW YORK, NY 10035

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Kalefe Williams (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 4 North 6th Place 4Q Brooklyn NY 11249

I represent: Neon Photography

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James C. Harter

Address: 881 7th Ave, NY NY 10019

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: Same as above

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Name: David Freudenthal

Address: 881 7th Ave

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: _____

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Name: Dylan Henry

Address: 552 Emerson St

I represent: Neon Photographers

Address: 510 Gates Ave

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Name: ANA BEAUGADEL

Address: 33 BEAVER STREET

I represent: DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION

Address: _____



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Name: Tayuan Spencer

Address: 215 Cozine Ave

I represent: Department of Probation

Address: _____



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Name: Brian Austin

Address: 325 north end ave

I represent: The Animation Project.

Address: 291 Broadway 700 NY NY 10007

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Name: CATILINA PATRICKA

Address: 33 BEAVER STREET

I represent: DEPARTMENT OF ADAPTATION

Address: _____

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