

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE, JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES  
AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE, JOINTLY WITH THE  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND  
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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Wednesday, May 21, 2025  
Start: 10:06 a.m.  
Recess: 3:42 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Justin L. Brannan, Chair  
Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

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**A P P E A R A N C E S**

Linda Johnson,  
President & CEO of Brooklyn Public Library

Anthony Marx,  
President & CEO of The New York Public Library

Dennis Walcott,  
President & CEO of Queens Public Library

Laurie Cumbo,  
Commissioner, New York City Department of  
Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

Lance Polivy,  
General Counsel, New York City Department of  
Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

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

George Sarah Olken,  
President, Brooklyn Library Guild Local 1482, DC  
37 (Brooklyn Public Library Workers Union)

Katherine Kusiak Carey,  
Education Division at the Brooklyn Museum and  
Member of Local 1502, DC 37

Dr. Abby Emerson,  
NYC PLAN (The Public Library Action Network)

Melody Emerson-Simpson,  
Second Grade Student, Library Patron, and  
Advocate

Felix Emerson-Simpson,  
Library Patron and Advocate (age 6)

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

Stephanie Hill-Wilchfort,  
Ronay Menschel, President and Director of the  
Museum of The City of New York and Executive Vice  
Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group

Angel Hernandez,  
Director of Government Relations for the New York  
Botanical Garden (NYBG)

Norah Yahya,  
Senior Government Affairs Officer at the  
Metropolitan Museum of Art and Manhattan Vice  
Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group

David Freudenthal,  
Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall

Gonzalo Casals,  
Co-Director of the Culture and Arts Policy  
Institute and Interim Chief Operating Officer of  
El Museo del Barrio

Juanita James,  
Brooklyn Public Library – Branch Manager,  
Washington Irving Library

Melissa Peralta,  
Brooklyn Public Library

Elizabeth Bevington,  
Board Member of The New York Public Library Guild  
Local 1930; Chatham Square Branch of the New York  
Public Library

Carol Benovic-Bradley,  
Vice President of the Friends of Ridgewood  
Library

Constance Lesold,  
Supporter and Patron of Public Libraries and the  
Cultural Sector

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

Marren Berthelsen,  
Deputy Director of Development at Symphony Space

Ariel Savransky,  
Director of Government and Community Relations at  
92nd Street Y

Kristen Barrett,  
Vice President of Development at New 42  
New 42nd Street

Francine Garber-Cohen,  
President and Producer of Regina Opera Company,  
Inc.

Miranda Massie,  
Founder and Director of the Climate Museum

Maisie Caroll,  
BookMatch Teen at Brooklyn Public Library

Johny Garcia Alexander,  
Teen Techie Intern, Brooklyn Public Library

Sauda Tasnim,  
Librarians of Tomorrow Intern at the Saratoga  
Branch of Brooklyn Public Library

Christina Li,  
Library Patron and Advocate

Clementine McLeod,  
BookMatch Teen Intern at Brooklyn Public Library

Lucy Sexton,  
Executive Director of New Yorkers for Culture;  
Cultural Coalition New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Candice Michelle Franklin,  
Advocate for The National Endowment for the Arts  
(NEA)

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

Sara Roer,  
Interim Executive Director at Dance/NYC

Akia Squitieri,  
Executive Director of Bronx River Art Center

Kate Madigan,  
Government Affairs Coordinator at The Public  
Theater

DJ McDonald,  
Dance Parade

Sami Abu Shumays,  
Deputy Director of Flushing Town Hall

Beth Allen,  
Executive Director of Downtown Brooklyn Arts  
Alliance

Adeeba Afshan Rana,  
Branch Manager of the Bedford Public Library

Risa Shoup,  
Co-Executive Director, The Alliance of Resident  
Theatres/New York (A.R.T./New York)

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

Noel Allain,  
Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the Bushwick  
Starr Theatre

Jimena Martinez,  
Executive Director at the Cumbe Center for  
African and Diaspora Dance

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

Seth Rosen,  
Chief of Development at American LGBTQ+ Museum

Hew Rose Evans,  
Senior Development Associate of the American  
LGBTQ Museum

Nicole Touzien,  
Executive Director of Dancewave

Potri Ranka Manis,  
Artistic Director and Founder of Kinding Sindaw  
Heritage Foundation

Christopher Leon Johnson,  
Self

Sheila Lewandowski,  
Co-Founder and Executive Director of The  
Chocolate Factory Theater

2 SERGEANT KING: This is a microphone check for  
3 the Committee on Finance, jointly with the Committee  
4 on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International  
5 Intergroup Relations. Today's date is May 21, 2025,  
6 recorded by Tavell King in the Chambers.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to  
8 the New York City Council Executive Budget Hearing  
9 for the Committee on Finance, jointly with the  
10 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
11 International Intergroup Relations. Please silence  
12 all cell phones and electronic devices. And please do  
13 not approach the dais unless your name has been  
14 called.

15 Chair, we are ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [GAVEL] Thank you,  
17 Sergeant. Okay, good morning, and welcome to the  
18 eighth day of FY26 Executive Budget Hearings. I'm  
19 Council Member Justin Brannan, and I chair the  
20 Committee on Finance.

21 Today's hearings will begin with the City's  
22 Library Systems, followed by the New York City  
23 Department of Cultural Affairs. I'm pleased to be  
24 joined by my colleague, Council Member Carlina  
25

1  
2 Rivera, who chairs the Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
3 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations.

4 We've been joined so far this morning by  
5 Council Member Louis.

6 Welcome to Linda Johnson, President and CEO of  
7 the Brooklyn Public Library; Tony Marx, President and  
8 CEO of the New York Public Library; and Dennis  
9 Walcott, President and CEO of the Queens Public  
10 Library. Thank you all for joining us today to answer  
11 our questions.

12 To set the stage, on May 1, 2025, the  
13 Administration released the Executive Financial Plan  
14 for FY26-29, with a proposed FY26 budget of \$115.1  
15 billion. The Library's proposed FY26 budget of \$496.  
16 8 million, across all three systems, represents less  
17 than 1% of the Administration's FY26 Executive Plan.  
18 This is an increase of \$16.4 million or 3.3% from the  
19 \$480 million originally budgeted in the Preliminary  
20 Plan back in January.

21 The increase is mostly the result of added  
22 funds for collective bargaining. As of March 2025,  
23 the Libraries collectively had 429 vacancies relative  
24 to their FY25 budgeted headcount.

3 In our Preliminary Budget response, the Council  
4 called on the Mayor to add \$62.5 million to reverse a  
5 series of funding cuts made to the Libraries, to  
6 expand their current hours, increase programming, and  
7 reinstate Sunday library service.

8 Despite the Mayor's recent restorations in the  
9 Executive Budget, they represent only a fraction of  
10 the cuts he has made to key programs, such as this  
11 one, which the Council has found were never necessary  
12 in the first place. In a city with a budget as big as  
13 ours, keeping the libraries open seven days a week  
14 should not be some big victory.

15 As budget negotiations continue, it's critical  
16 that we work from the same framework in prioritizing  
17 the restoration of our City's most vital services and  
18 programs that our communities can truly afford.

19 My questions today will largely go further into  
20 the Council's preliminary response, along with  
21 examining the Library's capital gap.

22 I now want to turn to my co-chair for this  
23 hearing, Council Member Rivera, for her opening  
24 statement.

25 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much. Thank  
you, Chair Brannan, I appreciate you very much.

1  
2 Good morning, welcome to the hearing for the  
3 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
4 International Intergroup Relations. I'm Council  
5 Member Carlina Rivera, and I'm Chair of the  
6 Committee.

7 Today, we will begin with a hearing on the  
8 City's three library systems, followed by a hearing  
9 on Cultural Affairs. And finally, the Committee will  
10 hear public testimony related to these two hearings.

11 With that, I would like to welcome you to our  
12 Libraries' hearing. I know many of you have been here  
13 before.

14 This morning, we'll be discussing the Fiscal  
15 2026 Executive Expense and Capital Budget for the  
16 Systems. For Fiscal Year 2026, the Administration is  
17 proposing \$496.8 million subsidy for the Systems. The  
18 Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Capital Commitment Plan,  
19 which covers fiscal years 2025 to 2029, includes \$1.1  
20 billion for the Library Systems.

21 In its Budget Response, the Council called on  
22 the Administration to allocate and baseline an  
23 additional \$62.5 million for the City's three library  
24 systems, starting in Fiscal 2026.

1  
2 The funding would provide \$44.8 million for the  
3 Library Systems' unmet expense needs for Fiscal 2026,  
4 baseline the \$15.7 million, which the Council has  
5 provided annually for the systems, and provide \$2  
6 million to expand seven-day library service to 10  
7 additional branches citywide.

8 I am disappointed to see that the  
9 Administration only included a small portion of this  
10 in the Executive Plan. The Systems still have a  
11 combined unmet expense need of \$44.80 million in  
12 Fiscal 2026 for increased costs related to uncovered  
13 wage growth and health insurance, liability  
14 insurance, rents, additional staffing needs, capital  
15 ineligible IT, and deferred maintenance expenses, new  
16 and expanded locations and programs, building  
17 maintenance contracts, and supplies, among other  
18 expenses I'm sure.

19 Additional funds are needed to help maintain  
20 our city's libraries, and it is also our obligation.  
21 The Systems also have an unmet capital need estimated  
22 to be \$345 million in Fiscal 2026 alone for  
23 comprehensive renovation of branches, critical  
24 maintenance, technology upgrades, resiliency,  
25 accessibility, and project shortfalls. This

1 investment in physical infrastructure is crucial to  
2 bridge the funding gap for the System's ongoing  
3 infrastructure needs. And while this funding would  
4 meet the Library Systems' current capital needs, it  
5 does not account for the many millions of dollars of  
6 future capital needs.  
7

8 In order to provide for these needs, the  
9 Council called for a meaningful inclusion of Library  
10 capital needs in the 10-year plan, with the addition  
11 of \$1.2 billion over the next 10 years. While this  
12 plan does not include this additional funding, we  
13 hope to work with the Administration to find a way to  
14 meet the capital needs of the Systems.

15 The Council will continue to champion Libraries  
16 as a funding priority. Libraries have an essential  
17 presence in every neighborhood of New York, providing  
18 indispensable services in a safe and reliable space  
19 for youth, older adults, immigrants, and all other  
20 New Yorkers, whether it's a baby at story time or a  
21 student logging on to finish homework, a new New  
22 Yorker learning English, or a senior finding  
23 connection in a book club, the impact of the public  
24 library system reaches far beyond their walls,  
25 providing vital programs that strengthen our city's

1  
2 future. It is essential that the budget we adopt this  
3 year be transparent, accountable, and reflective of  
4 the priorities and interests of the Council and all  
5 the people we represent.

6 I look forward to an active engagement with the  
7 Administration over the next few weeks to ensure the  
8 Fiscal 2026 Adopted Budget meets the goals the  
9 Council has set out. Thank you all again for being  
10 here.

11 I would also like to recognize the staff,  
12 including Financial Analyst Sandra Gray, Committee  
13 Counsel Christina Yellamaty, Legislative Policy  
14 Analyst Regina Paul, and, of course, my own staff.  
15 Thank you very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair.

17 Before we get started, I'd like to take a  
18 minute to thank the entire Council Finance Division.  
19 I think today we are at the halfway mark. We've got  
20 another week and a half of hearings to go. There's a  
21 whole crew of people across the street at mission  
22 control who help make these hearings possible,  
23 especially the people today who are here with us,  
24 Aliya Ali, Sandra Gray, and my Committee Counsel,  
25 Brian Sarfo.

1  
2 As a reminder, for this year's Executive Budget  
3 joint hearings, we are going to take public testimony  
4 later today on both the Libraries and the Cultural  
5 Affairs Department. So if you are here to testify,  
6 just make sure you fill out one of those witness  
7 forms in the back. And after all of the agencies  
8 testify, we will take public testimony.

9 I am not going to turn it over to Brian Sarfo,  
10 the Committee Counsel, to swear you guys in, then we  
11 can get started.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, do you affirm  
13 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but  
14 the truth before this committee, and to respond  
15 honestly to council member questions, President  
16 Johnson?

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: President Marx?

19 PRESIDENT MARX: (UN-MIC'D) Yes.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: President Walcott?

21 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yes.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning, I'm Linda  
24 Johnson; I'm President and CEO of Brooklyn Public  
25 Library. Thank you, Speaker Adams, Finance Chair

1  
2 Brannan, Chair Rivera, members of the Finance and  
3 Libraries and Cultural Affairs Committee, our  
4 Brooklyn Delegation, in particular Councilperson  
5 Farah Louis, and the entire City Council, for your  
6 continued leadership and steadfast support of  
7 libraries.

8         It's a privilege to speak before a body that  
9 has not only championed Libraries but consistently  
10 acted to ensure that we can continue serving every  
11 neighborhood in our city. Your support has always  
12 been strong and, most importantly, effective. Thank  
13 you.

14         The Council's response to the Fiscal Year 2026  
15 Preliminary Budget once again demonstrated your  
16 commitment to New Yorkers and to our public services.  
17 Your call for a \$62.5 million investment in Libraries  
18 is not only reasonable, it's essential.

19         After years of fending off cuts, library  
20 operating funding has remained flat, even as costs  
21 and demand continue to rise. Our patrons and staff,  
22 including our DC 37 partners, who will testify today,  
23 deserve better than another year of doing more with  
24 less. We are encouraged that the Fiscal Year 2026  
25 Executive Budget added \$15.7 million in operating

1 support for Libraries. That investment is welcome,  
2  
3 though, unfortunately, not baselined.

4 I am optimistic that with your help, the full  
5 funding of our Library Systems required to sustain  
6 and strengthen our services will be secured. That  
7 means allocating another \$44.8 million for our unmet  
8 needs, and an additional \$2 million for the Speaker's  
9 proposal to expand seven-day service. We were also  
10 pleased to see \$50 million in capital funds for the  
11 Brooklyn Public Library included in the Executive  
12 Budget. This is a meaningful start for which we are  
13 grateful.

14 Libraries and the values we represent are under  
15 attack nationally, from the recent firing of the  
16 Librarian of Congress, to threats against the  
17 Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the  
18 freedom to read. Here in New York, the Brooklyn  
19 Public Library, with our over 1,100 dedicated  
20 employees, is rising to meet the moment – serving  
21 more patrons, offering vital programming, protecting  
22 intellectual freedom, and helping more New Yorkers  
23 thrive.

24 Librarians are serving homebound patrons with  
25 books by mail, and our outreach program connects

1  
2 family members in our branches with their  
3 incarcerated loved ones via free video conference.

4 Brooklyn Public Library's digital literacy  
5 programs have recently extended into housing  
6 developments and community centers in partnership  
7 with the city through the newly launched Neighborhood  
8 Tech Help program. And our new Digital Discovery Days  
9 are giving Brooklynites of all ages hands-on  
10 experience with cutting-edge technology.

11 We're supporting job seekers and entrepreneurs  
12 through LevelUP, which has now helped over 500  
13 patrons gain the tools and mentorship needed to  
14 advance in competitive industries. One hundred women  
15 have graduated from the program, and two of them are  
16 submitting testimony today. And our workforce and  
17 volunteer programs are growing with a 30% increase in  
18 community volunteers, helping to lead English as a  
19 second language groups, citizenship coaching, and  
20 homework help.

21 We're also helping our newest neighbors,  
22 offering over 75 ESOL classes every week, from drop-  
23 in conversation groups to business English courses  
24 and job certification classes. These programs are at  
25 capacity, always with waitlists.

1  
2 And the need is only growing. In 2024, Brooklyn  
3 Public Library recorded nearly 6 million visits, a  
4 19% increase in program sessions, and our books and  
5 digital materials circulated 9.4 million times.

6 But we cannot keep doing more with less.  
7 Brooklyn Public Library faces a \$12.4 million in  
8 unmet needs. These are not wish list items – they are  
9 unavoidable costs of providing reliable service in  
10 every community.

11 The cost of purchasing books and digital  
12 materials is rising. We've seen a 5% increase in  
13 material costs over the past five years, and our  
14 digital collection alone now requires an additional  
15 \$400,000 annually just to keep pace with usage.

16 Our buying power has diminished, and without  
17 the ability to increase our book budget, Brooklyn  
18 Public Library lags behind the national and state  
19 averages in our per capita spending on collections.

20 Healthcare premiums have also climbed, and we  
21 face uncovered costs from negotiated wage increases  
22 and minimum wage changes. These are essential  
23 investments in our staff and the very people who keep  
24 our doors open and our communities supported.

1  
2 And now we operate two new locations, as well  
3 as several recently expanded branches, all of which  
4 offer in-demand programs that require more staffing  
5 and resources. These new sites expand our reach, but  
6 without additional funding, they stretch our capacity  
7 even thinner. Patrons continue to feel these effects  
8 even with a reversal of last year's cuts. Longer wait  
9 times for books, lost hours, and, unfortunately, more  
10 service disruptions.

11 In Fiscal Year 2024, Brooklyn Public Library  
12 experienced 102 instances of unplanned delays and  
13 closures due to staffing shortages. And this problem  
14 persists today. This is not sustainable, and it is  
15 not acceptable, *and I feel like a broken record*. I've  
16 been making this case for many years, and really, we  
17 need to do something to change the situation. The  
18 public relies on us to be open when we say we will be  
19 open. It is a core library tenant. We deeply  
20 appreciate the \$4.4 million included in the Executive  
21 Budget for the Brooklyn Public Library. This yearly  
22 library subsidy is crucial, but if the City does not  
23 cover and baseline our existing \$12.4 million in  
24 unmet needs, we cannot stabilize staffing, invest in  
25

1  
2 our collections, or ensure consistent service across  
3 our branches.

4 But what truly keeps me up at night is the  
5 staggering capital funding we need to bring our  
6 buildings into a state of good repair. Brooklyn  
7 Public Library's unfunded capital needs now exceed  
8 \$400 million, one-third of which are urgent projects  
9 like roofs, HVAC systems, fire safety, and  
10 accessibility upgrades.

11 Of our aging libraries, 19 are over a century  
12 old, and last year, due to failed HVAC, elevators,  
13 and other basic infrastructure malfunctions, we lost  
14 more than 670 hours of service borough-wide.

15 The \$50 million allocated in the Executive  
16 Budget for the Brooklyn Public Library is a strong  
17 start, and we're grateful to the Administration for  
18 providing this funding. However, this amount covers  
19 only a fraction of our \$307.7 million request in the  
20 10-year Capital Plan. We also require adequate  
21 funding to initiate comprehensive and cost-effective  
22 branch overhauls, instead of moving from crisis to  
23 crisis. New Yorkers deserve public spaces that match  
24 the creativity, drive, and resilience of our  
25 communities.

1  
2 Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chairs Brannan and  
3 Rivera, and our Brooklyn Delegation, for supporting  
4 library capital projects in your districts and  
5 helping create spaces that inspire our patrons.

6 Over the years, the Council's lump sum capital  
7 funding has been a lifeline, allowing us to address  
8 urgent repairs and fill shortfalls in stalled  
9 projects. Your capital funding has been instrumental,  
10 and we would appreciate receiving these vital,  
11 unrestricted capital funds from you once again this  
12 year.

13 Libraries are our nation's most democratic  
14 spaces. Every day, we welcome neighbors from all  
15 walks of life into our trusted buildings. That  
16 opportunity for community connection is needed now  
17 more than ever.

18 Last year, thousands of New Yorkers wrote and  
19 asked you to support our libraries, and you listened.  
20 Their support has not waned. In my hand, I hold a  
21 stack of more than 225 people's personal stories.  
22 These are people who have written their testimony  
23 that they will be submitting for the record today.  
24 They, too, are optimistic that our committed city  
25

1  
2 leaders will contribute a much-needed boost to  
3 Libraries.

4 I will end my testimony by sharing how  
5 personally grateful I am for the strong relationship  
6 libraries have with you and all of our City leaders.  
7 Unlike many of my counterparts nationwide, who face  
8 service cuts and book bans, we are fortunate to have  
9 your unwavering support. It's an honor to serve New  
10 Yorkers with you, and I look forward to continuing  
11 the conversation with the Council and Administration  
12 to increase the City's investment in Libraries.  
13 Together, we can ensure every person has free and  
14 open access to the resources they deserve. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

16 PRESIDENT MARX: Good morning, I'm Tony Marx  
17 from the New York Public Library. It's an honor to be  
18 here with Linda and Dennis. And, of course, a huge  
19 thanks to the City Council, and Speaker Adams, who  
20 has spoken eloquently, as has the whole Council,  
21 about their support and her support for Libraries;  
22 Chair Brannan and Chair Rivera, essential partners,  
23 and to all the members of the City Council, who've  
24 done so much, and continue to do so much for all New  
25 Yorkers, and for all New York's libraries.

1  
2 I will be brief and summarize my submitted  
3 testimony.

4 At our last hearing, we were already saying  
5 thank you, and we do again, to the Mayor for the \$15.  
6 7 million for the three Systems. We appreciate that.  
7 We also noticed, of course, as we've all said, that  
8 that was not baseline funding. So it's not an  
9 addition, it gets us back where we were, which is  
10 sort of what the budget dance consistently does, but  
11 that doesn't meet our additional needs - as we'll  
12 discuss - nor in this case, unusually, is it  
13 baselined. So we need to address those. We need your  
14 partnership to work with the Mayor to get us that  
15 result - to work with the Administration to baseline  
16 the \$15.7 million of one-time funding, and to secure  
17 as much as possible, together with the Mayor, \$44.8  
18 million for the three Library Systems as requested.

19 You all know, as you all have spoken eloquently  
20 many times, of the essential role of libraries in New  
21 York City's civic life, and that is crucial at this  
22 point. I will come back to that.

23 After years of fighting cuts, we are now doing  
24 more, so much more, for all New Yorkers with less,  
25 especially if you consider the affects of inflation.

1  
2 So we are struggling here to do the work that  
3 we want to and aspire to do, that my amazing  
4 colleagues, our amazing colleagues, our DC 37  
5 members, make possible every day, but we need the  
6 funding to ensure those results.

7 We see that costs, as I've said, have gone up –  
8 security personnel, as just one example, in the last  
9 five years, the costs have nearly doubled. We need to  
10 make sure that our staff and patrons are safe. The  
11 cost of software licensing has doubled. Our  
12 collections budget has not been able to keep pace  
13 with inflation, let alone get us to the increases  
14 that, as Linda said, we need in order to get to  
15 something comparable to what our peers elsewhere in  
16 the country are.

17 This is New York. We should not be lagging. We  
18 should continue to lead. So, if we do not get that  
19 kind of funding, then the results are very direct,  
20 and we've seen this too many times. Our patrons will  
21 have longer waits for books. We'll have unexpected  
22 branch closures, as Linda has already referred to,  
23 due to staffing shortages, as well as emergency  
24 repairs. We'll have fewer programs, because the  
25 branches in all three systems have now become the

1  
2 essential free education centers, in addition to all  
3 the classical work that Libraries have always done.

4 You all know that.

5 The Speaker has already spoken in her State of  
6 the City Address eloquently on this, and proposed an  
7 additional \$2 million to bring Sunday library  
8 services to more branches across the city, a topic  
9 that I know Councilwoman Brewer has been passionately  
10 pushing for.

11 We welcome that partnership. We are delighted  
12 to work with you all to get those kinds of results.  
13 And that's only one example of the partnerships that  
14 we're in with the City.

15 Recently, HPD announced a neighborhood tech  
16 help program with us to give direct outreach, one-on-  
17 one, to Section 8 tenants. We're working with HPD as  
18 well, who've given us a landmark \$3.5 million for a  
19 pilot program to bring free internet access to up to  
20 2,000 Section 8 tenants. Given what Brooklyn and  
21 Queens are already doing on that front, the fact that  
22 the digital divide remains such a problem in this  
23 city, the center of the world, is outrageous. So  
24 we're delighted to continue, all of us, to continue  
25 to partner to address that.

1  
2 We work with the Office of Immigrant Affairs to  
3 provide a huge number, the greatest number in the  
4 City, outside the Schools and University, of 20  
5 English language and support centers – everything we  
6 do for free, everything respects everyone who comes  
7 in the door.

8 I'll also, as Linda did, turn to our capital  
9 program. We submitted a \$1.2 billion request for  
10 unmet capital needs, \$485 million for NYPL alone. The  
11 Mayor, and we are grateful for this, has provided  
12 \$75.3 million, but let's just note that is less than  
13 one-sixth of what our total capital needs are.

14 We're delighted to move ahead with the Seward  
15 Park renovation, an amazing library in an amazing  
16 neighborhood, which deserves the full attention that  
17 we want to give it. But there's so much more that we  
18 need to do.

19 We want to do more comprehensive library  
20 renovations, as we have done, and just completed this  
21 year, with five Carnegies. We would love to do the  
22 same at a minimum at Francis Martin and Soundview in  
23 the Bronx, as well as at Great Kills in Staten  
24 Island.

1  
2 We need to ensure that our maintenance needs  
3 are met and that our critical technology upgrades are  
4 available.

5 We continue to work with DDC (Department of  
6 Design and Construction). We appreciate the hard work  
7 of all of our colleagues there. We know they share  
8 our frustration with the constraints and rules that  
9 result in too much time being spent and too much  
10 money being spent. So we continue to look for  
11 alternatives.

12 We partnered with the EDC (New York City  
13 Economic Development Corporation) on our five  
14 historic Carnegie branches, which we completed this  
15 year, with magnificent, comprehensive renovations. A  
16 huge shoutout to Iris and my team for achieving that  
17 result.

18 We need all these efforts on capital to be  
19 included in the 10-Year Capital Plan. Only then can  
20 we plan and produce the results, which we are able to  
21 do when we manage, with EDC, or for ourselves, at  
22 half the money and half the time. Those are great  
23 results for all New Yorkers.

24 We welcome continued conversations with the  
25 Administration, now and in the future, to ensure that

1  
2 we can find a better path and alternative ways of  
3 addressing this issue. We appreciate that, now with  
4 DDC Design Build, we can undertake the Westchester  
5 Square Library project for what is now budgeted at  
6 \$32 million, as opposed to the previously budgeted  
7 \$44 million.

8 We are eager to continue to build colocation,  
9 lots of new libraries with affordable housing on top,  
10 as we did in Inwood. Now they're beautiful, open, and  
11 affordable, with 174 housing units on top, as well as  
12 a universal PreK and a community center.

13 We currently have a similar project in the  
14 pipeline, at Grand Concourse in the Bronx and the  
15 Bloomingdale Library in Upper Manhattan, which will  
16 feature 800 new housing units on top.

17 We want to do what we can to address the real  
18 housing needs of New Yorkers. Let's continue to do  
19 this. Let's make it part of the 10-Year Capital Plan.

20 We've also requested, as Linda mentioned, \$30  
21 million in lump sum allocation of capital funding  
22 from you, the Council, our essential partner – \$10  
23 billion for each borough that we serve. We're  
24 grateful to the Council for that kind of support and  
25 hope it will continue at that level, if not higher.

1 This is not the moment when we should be  
2 content to just stay the course. The values that make  
3 up the foundation of what public libraries are being  
4 purposefully challenged at the highest level of this  
5 country at this point. We have seen the gutting of  
6 the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the  
7 National Endowment for the Humanities, and the  
8 National Endowment for the Arts. We have lost our  
9 grants from those agencies, and we have reviewed and  
10 decided not to pursue or accept additional federal  
11 funds, because of the strings that are attached that  
12 we simply cannot live with. We've seen the Librarian  
13 of Congress, our amazing colleague, Carla Hayden,  
14 fired. We've seen books banned around the country.  
15 The message from the federal and other local  
16 governments is clear – these are attacks on the  
17 values of democracy and the principles of access to  
18 knowledge and free expression that are absolutely  
19 singular to what it means to be in and of America.

20 The Libraries continue, here and elsewhere in  
21 this country, to be the singular, essential, truly  
22 democratic institutions. And this is the moment when  
23 we need to bring the full power and resources of all  
24 public libraries to bear for all people.  
25

1  
2 Let me be as clear as I can. We live in very  
3 complicated times, very challenging times. We've seen  
4 books banned. We resist.

5 We've been seeing misinformation everywhere and  
6 distrust everywhere. We resist.

7 We are seeing a decline in thoughtfulness in  
8 terms of, you know, compared to what social media and  
9 the distractions are providing. We know that the  
10 market cannot and is not providing the kinds of  
11 results that all of us, especially our children,  
12 deserve. So we resist.

13 We are seeing economic inequality at staggering  
14 levels that mean that people are not getting the  
15 opportunities to advance their lives, which is what  
16 we are in the business of providing in the libraries,  
17 so we resist.

18 This is the moment to invest in the most used,  
19 most trusted civic institution in this town, so that  
20 we can continue to do the job that you aspire for us  
21 to do. It could not be more important than it is now.  
22 It could not be more pressing.

23 We are so grateful to be at this place, not  
24 facing cuts, but we need your support for baseline  
25 additional funding, just to make it possible to

1  
2 continue to do what we're doing, and to do *more* that  
3 all New Yorkers and this Council look to us to do.  
4 Thank you so much for your support and for this  
5 opportunity to testify.

6 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And my name is Dennis  
7 Wolcott; it's a pleasure to be here. I have the honor  
8 of being the President and CEO of the Queens Public  
9 Library. I want to thank Tony, Linda, and all of our  
10 teams for their respective partnership.

11 I want to give a special thanks to you, Chair  
12 Brannan, and to Chair Rivera, and to the Council  
13 Members, for all of your support over the years.

14 I see Dr. Nantasha Williams here from our  
15 Queens Delegation. I want to thank our fantastic  
16 Queens Delegation. When I talk about a relationship  
17 and a partnership, we at the Queens Public Library  
18 have a tremendous relationship and partnership with  
19 our Queens Delegation. And it's really a pleasure to  
20 work on their behalf and the people that they serve  
21 as well.

22 You have our formal testimony, so I will not  
23 repeat it at all. And I will not even repeat what I  
24 have in front of me, which is our abbreviated  
25 testimony, because I heard the opening from the Chair

1  
2 of the Finance Committee on how many meetings you've  
3 actually had. So, I will be brief.

4 Everything that Tony and Linda said, I will say  
5 ditto to do.

6 In addition to that, you have specific  
7 testimony from the Queens Public Library, as far as  
8 our respective costs, both on the expense side and  
9 the capital side. I want to thank the Speaker for her  
10 leadership, and I want to thank the Mayor for putting  
11 the money in the budget. But as indicated, that does  
12 not meet our need.

13 And how I will be brief is that, when I see our  
14 customers come through our door, it just reinforces  
15 the value of who we are and how we are trusted. When  
16 you see the Cheese Buses pulling up in the morning,  
17 with children who are in kindergarten to whatever  
18 grade they may be, it makes my day. When I see people  
19 who are challenged come to our libraries to sit down  
20 and to read and get information and services, it  
21 makes our day. When I see our ESOL folks come in and  
22 customers getting services, it makes our day. When I  
23 see people who are coming to our programs more and  
24 more and more, it makes our day.

3 We are there to serve the public, plain and  
4 simple. Tony and Linda talked about it. We're trusted  
5 with a truly open, democratic institution. We are  
6 there to serve the public.

7 Right now in Queens, we're gearing up for the  
8 Pride Parade that'll be taking place in June. We will  
9 have some fantastic people marching on behalf of a  
10 community that we believe in. We participated in the  
11 Lunar New Year parade and had an extremely strong  
12 contingent showing support. We have materials and  
13 respect for the various communities in the various  
14 months of service that we give them.

15 We are there for the public. And, I just can't  
16 say enough about what we do as libraries, but more  
17 importantly, what the people who are sitting behind  
18 us do as our team members serving the public day in  
19 and day out. Those are what we're about. That's who  
20 we are.

21 I was watching one of the council members when  
22 we had our press conference outside, and the smile on  
23 his face when he was talking about his children, and  
24 talking about growing up with libraries, and the  
25 value that they brought into his life. Each of us has  
a similar story. We all have our story. We all have,

1  
2 I know mine is the Saint Albans Library, where I grew  
3 up, and I remember getting my first library card. And  
4 we talk about it - my children and grandchildren -  
5 and participating in various ways.

6 Like Tony and Linda, their teams, and our team  
7 at the Queens Public Library, our folks are always  
8 thinking out of the box about how to serve the public  
9 better. How do we increase our services? What does it  
10 actually mean to be open as much as we are open, but  
11 ideally to be open even more to serve the public?

12 That's why we're coming to you today to talk  
13 about adding the additional money. And it's not just  
14 to say *add additional* money, because the money that  
15 we have does not meet our need on the expense side,  
16 does not meet our need on the capital side.

17 As Linda indicated very clearly, and she's done  
18 it year after year after year, our doors are not  
19 always open because of the aging infrastructure. Our  
20 staff are not always able to be there, because we're  
21 spread so thin. That's unacceptable in a city like  
22 New York. It is unacceptable anywhere, but especially  
23 who we are as residents of New York City and public  
24 servants of New York City. It should not be that way.  
25 And as a result of that, we are here to say, we need

1  
2 your support to one, have our money baselined, and  
3 two, also to meet both our expense needs and our  
4 capital needs.

5         So I just want to give you one bit of  
6 information, and I'm going to jump down into the  
7 weeds, and then I'll close. Since my folks are able  
8 to do a great job pulling this together, I need to  
9 read it.

10         Assuming the cost of a physical book is roughly  
11 \$20.00, in 2021 with \$1 million, we would have been  
12 able to purchase approximately 50,000 books – 2021,  
13 50,000 books. In 2025, with that same \$1 million, it  
14 would only get us approximately 40,000 books. And  
15 think about that. Fewer books for the same money,  
16 because the budget is not meeting our needs.

17         Talk about an E-book, for example. Again,  
18 assume it's costing us \$100.00. In 2021, with \$1  
19 million, we would have purchased 10,000 E-books. In  
20 2025, that \$1 million would get us approximately  
21 8,000 E-books.

22         The erosion of the opportunity of having books  
23 for the public is right in front of our faces.

24         You want to go even further into the weeds, and  
25 this is even beyond my scope of understanding, RFID

1 tags. (BACKGROUND NOISE) Yes, you can laugh at RFID  
2 tags. (LAUGHTER) We all know what we're talking  
3 about.  
4

5 RFID tags come in a roll of 2,000. In 2025, a  
6 cost per roll is \$314.76. A cost per tag is 0.157. In  
7 2021, the cost per roll was \$249.52. That tells you  
8 again the erosion of the RFID tag, really, what it  
9 means. And that deals with the books that we have to  
10 put the insertion of the tags into to track the tags.  
11 Did I say it correctly, my colleagues here?

12 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)

13 PRESIDENT MARX: Book ops.

14 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Book ops. I know, that, too.  
15 And as a result of that, we need your support.

16 And we can go on and on and on, talking about  
17 the erosion of the dollars, and the flat budget that  
18 has allowed us to provide fewer services to the  
19 public. Yet at the same time, our dedicated staff say  
20 we want to provide more. We want to do more creative  
21 things. We want our hours to be longer and make sure  
22 we're there to serve the public. That's why we're  
23 here today – to talk about the importance of both the  
24 expense side of our budget and the capital side of  
25

1  
2 our budget, but more importantly, the baselining of  
3 our budget.

4       Once again, thank you very much for all of your  
5 support. Thank you for your perseverance. Thank you  
6 for your patience. And thank you for the ability to  
7 talk to you year after year, because you have been a  
8 receptive audience and ear. And we thank you for  
9 everything that you do on behalf of Libraries.

10       CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

11       Okay, before we get into questions, I just want  
12 to note that we have been joined by Council Member  
13 Ayala, Council Member Williams, Council Member Moya,  
14 Council Member Brewer, Council Member Carr, Council  
15 Member Hanif, and Council Member Salaam.

16       I want to jump right in here.

17       So in the budget, in the Council Budget  
18 Response, we called for a meaningful inclusion of  
19 library capital needs in the 10-Year Plan, including  
20 \$1.4 billion over the next 10 years.

21       Would that be sufficient funding to cover all  
22 the system's infrastructure needs?

23       PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know, 10 years is a long  
24 time. And it seems today like that's the magic  
25 number. Who knows?

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, could you give us an  
3 idea of how much above and beyond the \$1.4 million,  
4 how much additional capital would be needed?

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, I can't. I mean, we  
6 submitted the number that I -- and I didn't mean to  
7 be cheeky. It's just hard to predict what the value  
8 of a dollar will be in 10 years. What we thought, you  
9 know, what we anticipated an overhaul of a library  
10 would be four years ago, doesn't come close to  
11 covering what it actually costs today. That's my only  
12 point.

13 The numbers that we've given you are, in fact,  
14 the numbers that we've projected that would cover the  
15 cost of our needs.

16 PRESIDENT MARX: Just to reiterate, when the  
17 Administration provided us with a \$100 million  
18 infusion through the 10-Year Capital Plan, that was a  
19 historic move, because it had never happened before.  
20 We thought we could do five Carnegies for that, but  
21 we ended up having to add another \$76 million to that  
22 just because the cost went up.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Mm-hmm.

24 PRESIDENT MARX: Now, as we have funding for  
25 Seward Park, which we're grateful for, the costs,

1  
2 again, continue to go up, so we're gonna need to  
3 find, and work with you all, and with the  
4 Administration to find additional resources. And  
5 there are many more Carnegies and other branches that  
6 we want to do. Those that are landmarked, we need to  
7 respect that - ones where we can replace the  
8 libraries with affordable housing on top - the costs  
9 keep going up, but I do want to reiterate, Chairman  
10 Brannan, being in the, you know, being at the \$1.4  
11 billion mark would be extraordinary or anything close  
12 to that.

13           What we need is a commitment in the 10-Year  
14 Capital Plan that is a significant one. Because  
15 without that, we cannot plan, we cannot execute, we  
16 cannot find partners where it's possible to not  
17 necessarily work with DDC, where we can provide, uh,  
18 we can get things done in half the time for half the  
19 money. That means we have more money left to do more  
20 projects, even as costs continue to escalate.

21           It's all about what any individual would  
22 understand. We need to know what we have to work with  
23 - and to have enough to work with - to be able to get  
24 the results that you want, that the Mayor wants, that  
25

1  
2 we all want to see in our libraries in every one of  
3 our neighborhoods.

4           PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, just to add one more  
5 piece, the longer we wait for the investment, the  
6 more it will cost. So, having that investment as  
7 quickly as possible allows us to get the projects off  
8 the ground based on today's cost.

9           But who would have known last year the type of  
10 challenges from the capital side and expense side we  
11 would be facing with trade wars and everything else  
12 going on, and the impact? So the erosion of the  
13 dollar, over a period of time, becomes even steeper.  
14 So I think the investment that we talk about meets  
15 our needs at this current point in time, but the  
16 longer we wait, the investment will go up.

17           PRESIDENT MARX: Can I just add one point to  
18 Dennis' comment?

19           When we don't have the commitment to do  
20 projects in a planned and effective way, we end up  
21 having to do emergency repairs that we have to pull  
22 money from our expense budget, and we end up with  
23 closed libraries unexpectedly. And then we do band-  
24 aid solutions, because that's the best we can do -  
25 which are a waste of the public's money - because

1 that's not the way to keep our buildings operating –  
2  
3 so that we can ensure that they're operating, so that  
4 people will come to our doors and know that they are  
5 open when we say that they'll be open.

6 We'd like them to be open more on Sundays, et  
7 cetera. But, you know, it all comes back to having  
8 the kinds of resources that make it possible for us  
9 to do in a rational, planned way what you want us to  
10 do, what the Mayor wants us to do.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We agree. The cost of  
12 doing nothing is very expensive, and waiting is  
13 equally expensive.

14 Could each of the systems give us your current  
15 capital needs for FY26?

16 (PAUSE)

17 PRESIDENT MARX: Our 10-year ask to OMB (Office  
18 of Management and Budget) is for \$485 million for the  
19 10-year ask. That's \$160 million for branch  
20 renovations, \$200 million for project shortfalls, as  
21 well as \$22.3 million for shortfalls with the DDC/EDC  
22 portfolio, and \$125 million for technology and  
23 security systems upgrades.

24 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Queens general need is  
25 \$369.58 million.

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn, we have \$7.25 million in DDC shortfalls. We have a McKinley Park branch overhaul that will cost, we think, \$25 million, tech upgrades and network upgrades of \$3 million, and system-wide, critical infrastructure for \$5 million, for a total of \$40.25 million.

We have 39 active DDC capital projects and are facing \$8.4 million in current shortfalls. So we can actually submit all of this, if we haven't already, so that you have it in spreadsheet form.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Also, Chair, just to remind you, last year the three systems were hit with a capital PEG that was never restored either. So we started with a hole, based on the capital PEG, that was not part of the restoration. And for Queens, that was roughly \$32.2 million of the capital PEG in Fiscal Year 2024.

PRESIDENT MARX: Mr. Chair, can I just -- I gave you a 10-year number. The Fiscal Year 2026 ask for New York Public Library, based on the numbers I gave you, is \$262.5 million.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. What's the total  
3 number of active employees at each of the systems  
4 including full time and part time?

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn we have  
6 currently, full time 1,008, part time 229 employees  
7 of which 81% are union employees. But the budgeted  
8 projected headcount that we should be at is 1,167  
9 employees and 300 part-time employees for a total of  
10 1,466.

11 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Total we have in Queens  
12 1,438: union - 85; non-union - 125, and 456 hourly  
13 rates.

14 And again, I think for the three of us, we're  
15 reversing the trend, even though we have not met our  
16 desired max need of prior budget cuts as well, but  
17 we're at 1,438.

18 PRESIDENT MARX: At the New York Public Library,  
19 as of March 31, 2025: Full time salary was 2,161;  
20 part time was 43, part time hourly - 744 of our  
21 salaried staff, 68%, proudly union members.

22 I do want to note, these are all amazing  
23 colleagues, but just to put it in context, in FY24,  
24 we lost 326 hours of public service due to existing  
25

1  
2 staff shortages, let alone what we need going  
3 forward.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What are some of the most  
5 critical vacant positions for these three systems?

6 (PAUSE)

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Children's Librarians.  
8 Without question. And...

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Are there obstacles to  
10 filling vacancies like that? And what are they?

11 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: No. It's just that we're  
12 starting in the hole. And so basically -- then, in  
13 fairness to my colleagues, we're all competing for  
14 the same pool of people as well. And then also  
15 competing with folks, for me especially, at Nassau  
16 and Suffolk. So it's a constant making sure we're  
17 able to get people in. But that's part of the  
18 challenge.

19 In addition to that, we have, at Queens, in  
20 particular, a number of our people who have been  
21 there 30+ years, so we're seeing a number of  
22 retirements as well.

23 So you're balancing out with new hires coming  
24 in, some of the specific specialty areas, and those  
25 who are retiring. And for this past year so far, we

1  
2 have had a net number of people coming in versus  
3 number of people leaving.

4           PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know, in Brooklyn, we  
5 are always looking for librarians. Right now, we also  
6 have a need for public safety officers. But the issue  
7 really is one of planning, and it gets to this  
8 problem of not being able to count on the budget year  
9 after year. So you can't be expected to stop hiring  
10 because of a budget cut, for example, and then when  
11 the budget cut is restored, just flip a switch and be  
12 able to fill the vacancies. It takes time to fill  
13 that pipeline.

14           One of the things we're doing in Brooklyn is  
15 supporting employees who have undergraduate degrees  
16 and are interested in pursuing a master's in Library  
17 Science. This allows them to have upward mobility  
18 within the system and also fill vacancies in the  
19 library. And, now, even going beyond that, and  
20 looking at people who are close to getting an  
21 undergraduate degree, so enabling them to complete  
22 their undergraduate work, so that they then can apply  
23 for the master's programs.

24           PRESIDENT MARX: My colleagues have answered  
25 eloquently. I'll just add, you know, last year, for

1 instance, when we saw the proposed budget cuts, it  
2 means we couldn't hire because we couldn't plan. And  
3 just as one example, tragically, in, you know, the  
4 amazing neighborhoods of the Bronx, we were seeing  
5 that we didn't have the librarians, and then we had a  
6 lag time in order to hire these great colleagues to,  
7 you know, to join our other great colleagues in in  
8 the Bronx and elsewhere in our system. You know, that  
9 that's it's just another example. It's not just  
10 funding. It's the assurance going forward so that we  
11 can plan and continue to recruit. We're competing  
12 with Westchester, with Long Island, with New Jersey.

13 We're happy to compete for the best folks, and  
14 we do have the best folks, but we need to know that -  
15 - we need the resources, and we need to know that we  
16 have those resources, so that we can keep hiring and  
17 not keep people waiting.

18 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And just to add one word,  
19 *stability*. Stability allows us to plan. Linda's  
20 talked about it. Tony's talked about it. Stability is  
21 such a critical thing in planning your budget and not  
22 have to look over your shoulder to worry about a PEG,  
23 and then react to that, which then demoralizes our  
24 folks as well. And we have to be very conscious of  
25

1 that. And in addition to the Children's Librarian, at  
2 least I'll speak for Queens, we have a custodial need  
3 as well. And hiring custodians is something that  
4 we're very conscious of to make sure folks are  
5 available to keep our libraries both clean and always  
6 being responsive in who they are. They're fantastic  
7 folks, but there's always a need for more.

9 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay. Last question for me,  
10 then I want to turn it over to Chair Rivera.

11 I just want to talk about state funding. So  
12 each of the City's three library system receives  
13 funding from the state, under formula aid, provided  
14 to every public library system that meets minimum  
15 standards set by the NYSED. What state aid level, uh,  
16 what does the state aid level depend on? What are  
17 those requirements or those minimum standards?

18 (PAUSE)

19 PRESIDENT MARX: As I understand it, Mr. Chair,  
20 we -- there is a formula. For instance in FY25, we  
21 got \$21.9 million. Formula aid is \$9.7 million, but  
22 there's also designated aid of \$10.6 million in other  
23 state aid, as well as \$5.5 million from statewide  
24 Library Construction Aid Program.

1  
2 We also work with the Governor, and we're  
3 grateful for our partnership with her, on particular  
4 projects, and we're always looking for more of those  
5 on top of what the formula and other sources provide  
6 from the state.

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: In addition to that, we rely  
8 on some capital monies from them as well. And that  
9 for us, especially gives us the flexibility to do  
10 more creative type of funding with the expense money,  
11 capital money that comes down from the state. And  
12 they are very targeted initiatives that come from the  
13 state - specific to each library - and a particular  
14 legislative district as well.

15 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Brooklyn Public Library's  
16 state funding is at \$8.7 million. And I just echo  
17 what my colleagues have talked about in terms of  
18 process.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you all very  
20 much. I will turn it over to Chair Rivera. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much for your  
22 testimony. It's always thoughtful and thorough, and  
23 always with anecdotes that we truly appreciate.

24 In the Council's Budget Response, we did call  
25 on the Administration to add \$44.8 million for the

1  
2 library system's unmet expense need for Fiscal Year  
3 2026. Clearly, we'd love for them to execute  
4 unprecedented baselining for you all. I think it's  
5 deserving. That funding is not reflected in the  
6 Executive Plan.

7 Did OMB have any conversation with you all  
8 regarding the Council's Budget Response and what we  
9 were hoping would be included?

10 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I know our teams have been  
11 in conversation with OMB, but I'm not sure of the  
12 specifics, so I'll get information as we go along.

13 But I know there have been back and forth  
14 communication between our finance team, our  
15 operational team, and OMB as well. But I'll give you  
16 more details.

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: That's okay. I mean, if  
18 they haven't, I'm disappointed, clearly, but I feel  
19 like that partnership there and the conversations  
20 should be had with you all.

21 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, exactly.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. Well, I think we've  
23 mentioned an additional \$15.7 million for the  
24 Systems. I know, you can elaborate on this if you'd  
25 like, but for that to sufficiently meet the expense

1 needs of the Systems is a nice idea, but it doesn't  
2 realistically cover everything that you're  
3 predicting, especially with the federal grants, and  
4 really, the entire sort of environment around Library  
5 needs. You mentioned that for capital, a commitment  
6 that should be significant, and a number that could  
7 help. I mean, your capital PEGS were not restored  
8 from last year.  
9

10 How many projects will be delayed or postponed  
11 due to this funding not being included in the plan?

12 We called on the Administration to provide an  
13 additional \$345 million in FY 2026 for the System's  
14 capital needs. The Executive Plan does not include  
15 capital funding for the System. Do you know how many  
16 projects will be delayed or postponed due to this  
17 funding not being included in the plan, or postponed  
18 included in the plan?

19 PRESIDENT MARX: Let me put in context - the  
20 \$15.7 million, which has been restored, if you will,  
21 gives us funding for facilities maintenance and  
22 cleaning, library materials, which, you know, as  
23 you've heard, the prices have gone up, as everything  
24 has gone up, as well as a \$1 million towards library  
25 pages who we love and are crucial.

1  
2 The missing additional expense ask would cover  
3 the unreimbursed wage growth, a greater increase in  
4 library materials to fill the gap that Dennis was  
5 discussing, IT, cybersecurity, OTPS, all of which  
6 have been the result of inflation.

7 The ready example, in terms of capital, Madam  
8 Chair, is that we put in a request for another five  
9 Carnegies, or five full renovations, and in effect,  
10 we were funded for one. We're grateful to be able to  
11 move on Seward Park, but those other neighborhoods  
12 are also deserving of capital. And that's just one  
13 subset of what we are eager to do.

14 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'll limit my response just  
15 to the question about capital. And, you know, we've  
16 put in our request for the 10-Year Plan, a number of  
17 projects that we'd like to start, and we won't be  
18 able to do that if we're not included in the 10-Year  
19 Plan.

20 However, I also want to highlight the fact that  
21 each time we undertake a major overhaul of the  
22 library, we make a significant reduction in the  
23 deferred maintenance number. So we try to target  
24 libraries that are in bad need of renovations. We do  
25 a major overhaul. We eliminate all of the systems

1  
2 that are close to being incapacitated because, you  
3 know, they've been in existence beyond their useful  
4 life. These overhauls not only put great libraries  
5 into neighborhoods that truly deserve them, but they  
6 also reduce the ongoing maintenance costs of that  
7 particular branch. So it has a ripple effect  
8 throughout our entire capital and expense budget.

9       PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And what I will do is try to  
10 answer it a little differently as well. If there's a  
11 shortfall on a particular project, then that project  
12 stops if you're working with DDC. And that's  
13 unacceptable. Therefore, when we prioritize our  
14 needs, as Linda and Tony indicated, our experts, who  
15 work with our respective systems, are familiar with  
16 those aging infrastructures. And they put that in the  
17 capital plan process so that we can allocate the  
18 appropriate amount of money. And when that shortfall  
19 occurs, or there's a capital PEG that's never  
20 restored, then we have to pull that project back.  
21 Then it goes back to something that Tony talked about  
22 earlier, as far as them -- we have to shift into  
23 doing patchwork. And to do the patchwork, we're using  
24 expense dollars. And when you use the expense  
25 dollars, that comes out of a particular staff

1  
2 member's budget; therefore, it contributes to a  
3 staffing shortfall.

4         So, it's a domino effect, as Linda has talked  
5 about earlier, where the dominoes continue to fall as  
6 a result of both capital shortfalls and expense  
7 shortfalls.

8         And I know, thanks to you, and thanks to the  
9 Chair Brannan, and to the Council Members, people  
10 really don't have a clear insight into the  
11 intricacies and the complexities of the capital plan.  
12 It's not just that simple. In working with DDC, and  
13 we have a good partnership with DDC, I will not dog  
14 DDC, but they're a bureaucracy as well. And things  
15 get lost in the sauce. And, as a result of things  
16 getting lost in the sauce, then it provides really  
17 the slowness of a project, which then eats into our  
18 expense money, because we have to do a repair of a  
19 boiler - And, I've always said this, and I'll say it  
20 again at this hearing, so it's officially in the  
21 Minutes, I always cite the example of when we had a  
22 broken boiler one time. If we had to go through DDC,  
23 and the amount that it cost us to do that boiler  
24 project, and as a result of that length of time,  
25 people have frozen their butts off over the winter,

1  
2 or we would have to close the library down to that  
3 particular community.

4         Instead of doing that, we shifted our expense  
5 dollars to do it quicker and cheaper, so that way we  
6 can get that project done and keep the library open  
7 to the public. And that's the complexity and the  
8 domino effect that we continue to talk about.

9         CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I...

10         PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Dennis has used a couple of  
11 terms of our, you know, lost in the sauce, freezing  
12 our butts off. (INAUDIBLE)

13         (LAUGHTER)

14         PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Obviously, I haven't used  
15 our library services for articulating my...

16         PRESIDENT JOHNSON: All of which are great  
17 points. There is, I think, some form of legislation  
18 that's being proposed that would allow the Libraries  
19 to continue to sort of expand the work that we're  
20 doing on the construction and maintenance side. We're  
21 not interested in becoming developers for sure, but  
22 since we can do the projects at about a quarter of  
23 the cost and a third of the time, it does make sense  
24 for that kind of capability to be transferred to our  
25 staff.

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PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So well put.

CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I appreciate that.  
That's -- my questions with expense and capital.  
Sometimes we make it seem like they're entirely  
separate, and they don't actually overlap, but you  
need the budget to make sense, especially in in terms  
of emergencies. I mean, how many of the System's  
capital projects are delayed due to issues with DDC'S  
project management? Do you have any solutions to  
offer to reduce the delays with DDC-managed capital  
projects?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So I'll respond this way,  
and I'll try to keep my language in a way that  
represents the head of a library system and not  
someone else. (LAUGHTER)

We have a great project going on with DDC right  
now that we'll be able to achieve the timeline that's  
been projected. And the other piece I want to add to  
that is that it's not just DDC, when we talk about  
the bureaucracy and trying to make it lean, it also  
involves OMB, it involves bonding, it involves a  
whole host of different issues that impact the either  
repair of a library or the building of a new library

1  
2 or the expansion of a library. And so DDC gets a lot  
3 of the heat, but it's deeper than a DDC issue.

4 I think it's a variety of components that would  
5 make us more efficient in our ability to have both a  
6 cheaper project and a more timely project.

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'll just pile on here,  
8 because why not? You know, my team that works on  
9 capital projects and maintenance knows that the thing  
10 that really sticks in my craw is that even when we  
11 are doing projects ourselves, it takes so much time  
12 for the City to reimburse us that we actually have a  
13 line of credit. We pay interest so that we can pay  
14 our vendors to keep projects moving forward. So, the  
15 money we're getting is actually not covering the  
16 entire cost of the capital work being done. We're  
17 also having to pay a finance charge because doing  
18 business with the City is that arduous.

19 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And as you know, DDC just  
20 got an alternative delivery approval from the state.  
21 So we look forward to working with DDC around this  
22 alternative delivery method of building, because we  
23 want DDC to be the most efficient, cost-effective  
24 organization there is. I mean, we look forward to  
25 that, and we've had projects that have been done on

1  
2 time. We've had projects that have been delayed, but  
3 the reality is that as projects get more delayed,  
4 they become more expensive. Therefore, the shortfalls  
5 increase, and then we have to stop the projects, and  
6 that's unacceptable.

7           PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I wanna reiterate that  
8 point. It would be great if DDC could efficiently  
9 handle all of our systems and roofs and all of the  
10 things, all of the small projects. I think I  
11 mentioned in my testimony that we have 39 open DDC  
12 projects right now. We don't want to be responsible  
13 for building new roofs or installing new systems in  
14 our buildings. It's not our business to do that, and  
15 so we'd very much like to have a construction  
16 authority that could do that efficiently.

17           PRESIDENT MARX: Madam Chair, I would like to  
18 reiterate. Look, we know that the folks, the good  
19 folks at DDC, are working hard, but they're also  
20 working hard within a structure that doesn't make a  
21 whole lot of sense as far as we can tell. We've  
22 talked about this over the years. That's something  
23 for the City Council and the Mayor to fix.

24           And we know there have been attempts at reform,  
25 but they haven't gotten us where we need to get.

1  
2 Things are better with Design-Build, for instance,  
3 but I'll just reiterate the simple fact that without  
4 sufficient funding, without plannable funding, we end  
5 up seeing delays of, you know, twice the time, you  
6 know, costing twice as much.

7 Westchester Square, that's an ongoing effort  
8 here that's been going on for way too long. That  
9 neighborhood deserves a great library. Woodlawn,  
10 since 2013, we've been trying to get that project off  
11 the ground and done. We are so eager to get these  
12 done. If we get 10-year capital funding, then we can  
13 work better with DDC. We can find alternative  
14 partners as we have with EDC for our five Carnegies.  
15 We can find, in some instances, partners with private  
16 development for the apartments above using the air to  
17 provide New Yorkers with housing, or self funded  
18 projects, self managed projects. But we need to know  
19 that we have the resources so we can make plans,  
20 deliver projects at least half the cost, half the  
21 time as otherwise.

22 When the City doesn't provide us with those  
23 kinds of commitments, in my view, it's being penny-  
24 wise and pound-foolish. And everyone suffers, because  
25

1  
2 then we cannot deliver what the City expects and  
3 needs us to deliver in terms of our capital projects.

4 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: One more thing for me, in  
5 that we're building out two new libraries, but we're  
6 using expense money, because we need to get those  
7 libraries open as quickly as possible. Someone once  
8 said to us during this planning process, "Well, how  
9 come you're not using the capital money you have?"  
10 And we said, "We want this library open sooner than  
11 eight years from now."

12 And the reality is we'll have this library open  
13 in two years. We're in design for these two new  
14 libraries. And, as a result of that, we have our  
15 folks working with the landlords of these particular  
16 buildings to make sure that we're able to serve the  
17 public a lot sooner than eight years from now.

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I appreciate that, whether  
19 it's Jackson Heights or Eastern Parkway, Westchester  
20 Square, these are all important projects.

21 My last question, because I know my colleagues  
22 have some, you know, all of this affects the  
23 programming you provide, and that's what's right, the  
24 jewel in addition to the books. How do libraries  
25 gather feedback from communities to decide which

1  
2 programs and activities to prioritize? And are any of  
3 those programs in jeopardy seriously? That'll be my  
4 last question, Mr. Chair.

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know, it's a balancing  
6 act. At least in Brooklyn, we look at attendance and  
7 where the demand is the greatest. We also have a  
8 sense of a pedagogy that we can be proud of. So, it's  
9 not just about demand; it's also about aspirations  
10 and what we want our community to learn. You know,  
11 we're very heavily invested in services to newest New  
12 Yorkers, civic engagement, voter registration, all  
13 the things that come with being a responsible citizen  
14 in the city of New York, in the state of New York, in  
15 the country.

16 And there are always great and innovative ideas  
17 that are coming from staff, so we have a Strategy  
18 Department that specifically looks at what kind of  
19 programs in the branches are likely to be successful,  
20 and we incubate them and work on a small scale, and  
21 if they're successful, then spread them more broadly  
22 across the borough.

23 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: In Queens, we just approved,  
24 I guess last year, our five-year strategic plan. So  
25 that serves as a foundation as far as working with

1 the community and implementing new initiatives and  
2 strengthening existing programs and service. And part  
3 of that plan was engaging the community as far as  
4 their feedback. We rely on our managers, who are on  
5 the ground, who know more than I know, as far as the  
6 need to the respective communities, and really  
7 feeding that into both the strategic plan and the  
8 overall discussion process itself, and then taking a  
9 look at funding. I mean, we have a very great  
10 relationship with the City, as all of us do, as far  
11 as the needs of the City and how we play that role.  
12 Whether we can allocate our existing dollars from  
13 you, the City Council, and the City overall, or raise  
14 money to meet those needs, it's all part of that  
15 process of really blending the initiatives to meet  
16 the increased demands of services.

17  
18 And then again, I think strategic planning  
19 really provides that foundation. Linda talked about  
20 the aspirational. It's keeping that aspirational  
21 vision of what we want to do, but also unlocking the  
22 creativity of our team members to provide those  
23 services.

24 PRESIDENT MARX: Madam Chair, thank you for that  
25 question.

1  
2 To reiterate, we've also just completed a five-  
3 year strategic plan, which has allowed us to review  
4 this question in detail.

5 We've seen, over the last five or ten years, a  
6 massive increase in our investment, thanks to your  
7 and the Mayor's partnership, in everything from  
8 after-school programs, teen programming, teen  
9 centers, teen ambassadors, and banned book clubs. We  
10 see English language instruction for the immigrant  
11 community that's being pressed on so many fronts at  
12 this point in terms of what the feds et cetera are  
13 doing. Computer skills are essential for making it in  
14 this world. AI is now a new area we're going into in  
15 terms of helping New Yorkers understand it.

16 We respond to what we hear in surveys, what our  
17 staff tells us is working or not working. Obviously,  
18 it varies from neighborhood to neighborhood, so we do  
19 some programs more, some less, depending on what the  
20 real needs are there.

21 One of our strategic initiatives is to increase  
22 our data capacity, our capacity for gathering data,  
23 to be responsive. And at the same time, we have to  
24 figure out, and we work at this, how to balance  
25 having the information to make the right decisions,

1 based on the resources that you and the Mayor provide  
2 to us, but also protecting people's privacy as we do  
3 it. And that's a little tricky. We may be the last  
4 institutions left that care about and respect  
5 privacy, but we have to keep that balance, and that's  
6 what we're doing.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, now we have  
9 questions from Council Member Louis, followed by  
10 Council Member Brewer.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs, and  
12 good morning. I have three quick questions.

13 Despite City Council's push to restore \$6.2  
14 million in funding for libraries across the city, and  
15 with the Administration only committing \$15.7  
16 million, this particular restoration has possible  
17 threats in equitable distribution in hours and  
18 programming and staffing – especially in historically  
19 underserved communities like Southeast Queens, East  
20 New York, East Flatbush, Brownsville.

21 So I wanted to know with only \$15.7 million of  
22 the \$62.5 million Library funding restored, how is,  
23 particularly, all your systems planning to equitably  
24 prioritize branch hours and services, particularly in  
25 these neighborhoods that I just mentioned? And will

1  
2 your systems be using a particular formula to  
3 determine which branches will receive restored hours  
4 and staffing? How will council members and local  
5 communities be included in those decisions?

6 And the last question is kind of like the  
7 second one, but what are the actual metrics that are  
8 being used in determining the cost at each branch for  
9 expanding to seven day service for FY26?

10 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Uh...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Sorry, I know it's  
12 technical.

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, no, it's not that...

14 PRESIDENT MARX: No, no, no...

15 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's just that there are a  
16 lot of questions in there. And I would say that the  
17 underlying theme of those questions is, how do we  
18 make sure that patrons living in some of our most  
19 challenged neighborhoods are being appropriately  
20 served, especially in the face of inadequate funding?

21 And I would say that we keep a close eye on  
22 programming in the neighborhoods that you're  
23 referring to. Many of those neighborhoods that you  
24 read are Brooklyn neighborhoods. And, you know, we  
25 are very sensitive to not only the programming and

1  
2 content that are being offered in those  
3 neighborhoods, but also making sure that as we're  
4 looking at libraries, the physical libraries that  
5 need renovations and overhauls, that we're making  
6 sure that the branches in those neighborhoods are  
7 also particularly well cared for and prioritized in  
8 terms of what we need.

9       Of course, and I'm sorry because I, again,  
10 sound like a broken record, but there's a balance  
11 between dealing with emergencies that are  
12 unanticipated, and making sure that we can actually  
13 do the kind of planning that we want to do to make  
14 sure that the patrons in those neighborhoods have  
15 branches that are in good and working order.

16       One emergency can come along and wipe out the  
17 capital budget for a particular year, and that's  
18 partly (TIMER) because we're not able to provide the  
19 kind of preventative work in those branches that  
20 would avoid those kinds of crises.

21       COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And the last part is  
22 system-wide with all systems, is there a formula or a  
23 metric you all are using for a seven-day service for  
24 all branches?

1  
2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I know what the number is in  
3 Brooklyn to have seven-day service across all of our  
4 branches. And I know that because my good friend,  
5 Councilperson Brewer, asks me every year.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (LAUGHS) And for Brooklyn,  
8 it's \$7.4 million.

9 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So with Queens, we have  
10 uniform hours and days of the week that we're open.  
11 So we make sure that the services being provided in  
12 the respective areas of Southeast Queens and other  
13 parts of Queens that deserve the service are fairly  
14 equitable. But we also rely on the managers to be  
15 creative.

16 And then what we've done is try to allocate  
17 separate funding to the various branches as well. So  
18 it's not a lot of funding, but individual funding, so  
19 they can tailor it to their particular community's  
20 needs as well. And we found that to be extremely  
21 helpful.

22 As far as the ability to manage the programs  
23 based on the budget, we go through a very rigorous  
24 internal budget process where we take a look at the  
25 equity as far as the allocation of the dollars to

1  
2 make sure that all the libraries are receiving  
3 equitable dollars and we're not shortchanging any one  
4 community at all.

5 But, also, when you asked about metrics, I  
6 imagine like all of us, we keep very detailed metrics  
7 of the services and the types of programs and the  
8 increases or decreases in a particular metric area  
9 and then make adjustments based on those metrics.

10 Those adjustments could be either increasing  
11 funds to try to make sure we increase the level of  
12 services in those metric areas, or we reduce it,  
13 because, for whatever particular reason, that program  
14 is not meeting the needs of the community any longer.

15 So we try to be collaborative in that process,  
16 but we keep very detailed internal metrics. And,  
17 also, as indicated earlier, then that feeds into our  
18 five-year strategic plan, and looking at those eight  
19 priority areas for us in our five-year strategic plan  
20 and how that unfolds over the next period of five  
21 years.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you for that.

23 PRESIDENT MARX: I'll just reiterate. We must  
24 provide equitable services across all our  
25 neighborhoods. But we also recognize that the

1  
2 neighborhoods vary. So we look at an array of  
3 factors. We make decisions about investing in  
4 libraries or programs, or thinking about Sunday  
5 services, that include what the access to public  
6 transit and parking are, for instance, but more  
7 particularly, number of visits, number of potential  
8 visits, demand, proximity to schools, even  
9 neighborhood income levels.

10 So one example of that is when we did get the  
11 10-year capital investment to do five Carnegie  
12 renovations, we focused those on neighborhoods of  
13 need, where income levels are lower and folks don't  
14 have alternative resources, programs, or even just  
15 physical space to go to. And so that's what we  
16 decided to invest in, because that's where we felt  
17 the need was most pressing.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you all. Thank you,  
19 Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We have been joined by  
21 Council Members Ung, Hudson, and Powers.

22 And now we have questions from Council Member  
23 Brewer, followed by Council Member Salaam.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. And  
25 thank you for your great testimony with data and

1  
2 answers. It's shocking compared to what we usually  
3 get. And, also, thank you to my twin; there's a twin  
4 up there just in case you all don't know that.

5 PRESIDENT MARX: Duly noted.

6 (LAUGHTER)

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Our birthdays align, so...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Same day, second, hour,  
9 and year. Just so you know. He looks better than I  
10 do. I'm trying.

11 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: No, I don't.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, you do.

13 So, E-Rate, do you -- is that still something  
14 that you get? And how much? And how does it operate,  
15 and et cetera?

16 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We get it. We'll get you the  
17 exact number in a sec...

18 PRESIDENT MARX: So, E-Rate is federal funding  
19 for internet connectivity, which is so essential  
20 given the continued digital divide. In FY25, NYPL can  
21 receive a maximum of \$2.2 million in E-Rate funding  
22 for eligible costs.

23 At this point, we see no threats to that, but  
24 you never know what's gonna come out of Washington  
25 next.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Queens is \$700,000.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And Brooklyn is \$2 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So that's good  
that it hasn't been cut yet.

So maybe you said this earlier and I didn't,  
but in terms of the issue of federal funding, are  
there other that could be at jeopardy, or does the  
federal funding so far seem okay?

PRESIDENT MARX: No.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So there's a -- there's a  
number of issues.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Mm-hmm.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: There's the Institute of  
Museum and Library Science...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Major cuts, yeah.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Those cuts have sort of come  
to a halt. They're episodic. It's not like it's a  
continued stream from IMLS that funds Libraries. It's  
by application.

But I think the bigger concern is, what happens  
to the state's budget if...

PRESIDENT MARX: Mm-hmm.

1  
2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And, you know, as you know  
3 all too well, what happens in the state flows down to  
4 the city, and what happens in the city flows down to  
5 the library.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, okay. All right,  
7 that makes sense.

8 In terms of the digital divide, obviously part  
9 of your capital is getting more funding. So my  
10 question is, I know almost every five years, you need  
11 to have an overhaul of your technology, because you  
12 have so many users. Is that still true? And is that  
13 the kind of funding that you're looking for? Because  
14 to me, when I go to the library branches, every  
15 computer is at use.

16 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'll just start, and I'll  
17 let everybody pile on, because this is an important  
18 issue.

19 Yes, I mean, the technology infrastructure  
20 needs to be continually replenished. Yes, we're the  
21 largest provider of free Wi-Fi in the boroughs, and  
22 we are in enormous demand. It became (TIMER)  
23 apparent during COVID to the rest of the world,  
24 something that we already knew, which is just how  
25 much our patrons depend upon the libraries to stay

1  
2 connected – to the point where we were leaving all  
3 the Wi-Fi signals on, so that people could sit  
4 outside of our libraries when they were closed and  
5 take advantage of the signal that...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's The E-Rate. Yep.

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes. But in addition to  
8 that, there's always emerging technology that becomes  
9 important. And Tony mentioned (TIMER) his testimony,  
10 uh, the importance of making sure our patrons are  
11 versed in artificial intelligence. That world is  
12 changing so quickly that it's mind-boggling for the  
13 most proficient. So I know when I'm getting requests  
14 from the branches all over the borough about help in  
15 artificial intelligence, that that's gonna be an area  
16 of expense moving forward.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

18 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So in response to your  
19 question, and picking up on Council Member Louis'  
20 question around metrics – just to give you a metric  
21 sense – in Fiscal Year 2023, we had Wi-Fi sessions  
22 583,803. In Fiscal Year 2024, that jumped to  
23 1,755,367. So that's a 200.68% increase. And that's  
24 as a result of what Linda talked about. And all of us  
25 are dealing with both having the Wi-Fi capacity on,

1 on a regular basis, as well as what we did in Queens.  
2  
3 And I imagine our colleagues in Brooklyn and New York  
4 as well, the expansion of the range of the system as  
5 well. So we've done special projects where, in  
6 neighborhoods that our branches serve, people are  
7 able to sit 150 yards away outside and get the  
8 services as well.

9 We have put aside money from prior budgets in  
10 upgrading the computers in our computer center.  
11 That's available for people on a regular basis. But  
12 our infrastructure needs around computers continues  
13 to increase. And we have a basically unmet need of  
14 \$30 million in capital dollars to deal with the  
15 upgrading of our computers for the public, but also  
16 our internal needs. Because our systems, at least  
17 I'll speak for Queens, are extremely old. So that's  
18 part of our strategic plan as well - the internal  
19 infrastructure improvement that we need to focus on  
20 and that requires additional money.

21 PRESIDENT MARX: Councilwoman Brewer, thank you  
22 again for your question.

23 We also have seen significant increases just,  
24 for instance, in wireless sessions, 80% increase in  
25 the last fiscal year, in just that fiscal year alone.

1  
2 You know, we have a huge number, over 5,000  
3 desktop computers, over 4,000 laptop computers. But  
4 as you say, the issue is the digital divide. And it  
5 is, you're right, on a five year cycle in terms of  
6 replacement. And we've spent, I think, about \$30  
7 million just on that in the last five years.

8 But the digital divide, as I've already  
9 signaled, I think maybe before you came in, is an  
10 issue...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I heard you. I was  
12 listening.

13 PRESIDENT MARX: Okay, across the city, thanks,  
14 Gale. That's why we're so proud to be partnering with  
15 HPD, both in two different projects, with Section 8  
16 housing, one, one on one, and then the other is,  
17 2,000 people, in the kind of project that Dennis was  
18 describing, and that my colleagues have also been  
19 doing.

20 Look, let me just be clear. It is outrageous  
21 that in New York City, at this point in history,  
22 that, you know, a million, possibly twice that  
23 number, of our neighbors and fellow citizens don't  
24 have access to trustable broadband at home. You know,  
25 we focused on this during the pandemic, when it was

1  
2 additionally incredible that you couldn't do  
3 schoolwork, you couldn't do your job, you couldn't  
4 look for a job, you couldn't do research, you  
5 couldn't keep up with your friends and neighbors or  
6 with, you know, city officials in terms of the  
7 information that you needed. I will never forget  
8 talking to the CEO of one of the largest, if not the  
9 largest provider in the city, who explained to me  
10 that, no, they didn't see a problem, even though one  
11 or two million New Yorkers are in the digital dark.  
12 Their prices simply make digital access unavoidable.

13         That's why all three of us, across the five  
14 boroughs, have been experimenting towards what I hope  
15 will be a much better result, which is where every  
16 New Yorker has a basic broadband, you know, offering  
17 for free as sort of a basic requirement of life at  
18 this point. The market is not providing that. It  
19 won't provide that. It's just another example of  
20 where the libraries have to step in to solve the  
21 social problems and needs that the markets by  
22 themselves can't and won't meet.

23         COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. I mean, the NYCHA  
24 folks get a little bit through Spectrum and the

25

1  
2 City's program, but you have to be a NYCHA resident,  
3 and you have to have Spectrum. Did you want...

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, I just want to build  
5 on what Tony is talking about.

6 First, just locally, in our 10-year Capital  
7 Plan ask, there's \$12.2 million for technology. And  
8 without getting into the complexities of what  
9 qualifies for capital and what doesn't...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm well aware.

11 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: But, I want to I want to  
12 reiterate the issue of inadequate broadband across  
13 the city. The libraries are in fact, you know, there  
14 to sort of help those that are on the wrong side of  
15 the digital divide in a way that is really hard to  
16 fathom in 2025. And the issue is growing every year,  
17 because the more sophisticated we get, in terms of  
18 investing in digital material, the further behind  
19 people living on the wrong side of the digital divide  
20 become. And that is really perhaps one of the biggest  
21 conundrums that we're dealing with right now. Because  
22 to meet the demand of many New Yorkers, in terms of  
23 digital material, requires us to make investments  
24 that are in some cases, it's like we're running two  
25 enterprises. We're running the bricks and mortar, and

1  
2 we're running this digital enterprise that we've all  
3 built out over the last five-seven years.

4 And we're still operating with the same amount  
5 of funding. And that is part of what is making the  
6 situation untenable.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, thank you.

8 Just quickly, two quick things. I won't bring  
9 up DDC, because I always do. Because when I do, then  
10 they call me and complain that I complain about them.  
11 But I am complaining about them.

12 For the New York, what's your seven day number?  
13 I know I didn't get it, I got Brooklyn's. What's your  
14 seven day, if you were to do seven day, what's your  
15 number that you would need?

16 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE),  
17 Tony.

18 PRESIDENT MARX: We, again, with the with the  
19 metrics, and trying to figure out where to do this  
20 and spread it across, we think it's roughly a \$10  
21 million number.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and then when  
23 will...

24 PRESIDENT MARX: And, Gale, can I just add, we  
25 used to be at a five-year replacement cycle for

1  
2 technology infrastructure. With your help, we were  
3 able to switch to a three year, which is...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

5 PRESIDENT MARX: much more in keeping with the  
6 reality of what we need.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

8 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And for Queens, it's \$7  
9 million, which is specific for overtime.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.

11 And, then finally, Bloomingdale. What's the  
12 timing of Bloomingdale being renovated and housing  
13 and so on?

14 PRESIDENT MARX: So we're working on that, Gale.  
15 We'll get you the numbers. It's in partnership with  
16 EDC. We're grateful that, you know, now that we've  
17 gotten agreement with the Health Department, because  
18 they are also located there. As in Inwood, we will  
19 provide a great new, hopefully larger, better  
20 library, brand new.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yep.

22 PRESIDENT MARX: And in the case of  
23 Bloomingdale, a block that I have walked by many,  
24 many times, you know, because of the size of the  
25

1 site, we think we can get up to 800 apartments above  
2 what is the current location.  
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Terrific, all right,  
5 thank you. Thank you very much. I won't bring up all  
6 my other topics right now, because you all know  
7 them. Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, questions from  
9 Council Member Salaam, followed by Council Member  
10 Williams.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, and good  
12 morning.

13 PRESIDENT MARX: Good morning.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Great testimony so far.  
15 This has been really informative.

16 I have a few questions as it relates to Harlem.  
17 The Executive Capital Commitment Plan includes major  
18 upgrades for branches like Brownsville and Jackson  
19 Heights. What specific capital commitments, if any,  
20 are being made to address urgent infrastructure  
21 issues in Harlem branches, such as HVAC failures, ADA  
22 accessibility, or roof repairs?

23 And has any of the \$345 million in unmet  
24 capital needs identified by the Council been  
25 allocated for Harlem-based library facilities? And

1  
2 will the Administration commit to including Harlem  
3 Library projects in the \$1.2 billion 10-Year Capital  
4 Plan?

5 PRESIDENT MARX: Council Member, thank you for  
6 your question.

7 Let me just say that, you know, we consider our  
8 branches and our research library in Harlem to be  
9 essential, crown jewels, if you will, in a  
10 neighborhood that is so powerful and needs, you know,  
11 more than it has gotten.

12 We recently completed an exterior rehab of  
13 Countee Cullen. Took way too long, over \$7.5 million.  
14 I remember that scaffolding was there and causing  
15 problems on that block. I'm delighted that's done.

16 Harry Belafonte, so proud to have that name on  
17 our 115th Street branch. We completed a cellar and  
18 floor renovation, a boiler replacement. I know that  
19 doesn't sound like charismatic items, but they're  
20 expensive — that was \$266 million. 1:34:16

21 We have proudly finished a facade and window  
22 replacement -- sorry, we are in construction of the  
23 Schomburg's facade and window replacement — \$8  
24 million of special funding from Governor Hochul, so  
25 we're grateful to the Governor for that.

1  
2 And I just want to point out that we are  
3 currently celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the  
4 Schomburg, which is the premier research center in  
5 the world for African American and diaspora studies.  
6 We've got so many programs and so much that we're  
7 aspiring to do there and fundraising, privately, as  
8 well as publicly, for the Schomburg.

9 If we can get a serious 10-year capital  
10 commitment, then we can do more in Harlem, whether  
11 it's at the Harlem Library – we did, as you know,  
12 finally replace Macomb's Bridge, which was painfully  
13 small for decades. I think we doubled or tripled the  
14 size of that branch, and it's bursting with life and  
15 programs. That's the model we want to do throughout  
16 the System, and certainly, and particularly in  
17 Harlem.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: And just some follow-ups  
19 with regards to youth and workforce programming in  
20 Harlem Libraries.

21 With the vacancy rate for Library staff at 9.4%  
22 as of March 2025, how is the City ensuring that  
23 Harlem Libraries maintain robust (TIMER) youth  
24 programming, adult education, and workforce  
25

1  
2 development services, especially when staffing  
3 shortages persist?

4           PRESIDENT MARX: So again, our strategic plan  
5 has recommitted us with public funds, and where  
6 necessary, with private funds, to ensure that our  
7 education programs, especially in neighborhoods of  
8 greater need, which is what we're talking about here,  
9 deserve that kind of level of funding. We have  
10 massively increased our education programs at New  
11 York Public and the other systems as well. Now we  
12 need to ensure that going forward, build on that  
13 going forward. And if that means we need to do more  
14 private fundraising, we will do that as well. Because  
15 the people of New York, even the folks with  
16 resources, understand just how crucial this is. And  
17 we know that you and the City Council and the City as  
18 a whole understand that.

19           COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Absolutely.

20           Chairs, if I can just -- a short follow-up to  
21 that.

22           How are the libraries partnering with local  
23 schools and community-based organizations in Harlem  
24 to expand the digital literacy and after-school  
25 initiatives? And will additional operating support in

1  
2 the Executive Budget be directed in part towards  
3 restoring youth and educational programs that were  
4 scaled back in recent years?

5 PRESIDENT MARX: Well, we have been building  
6 back, whether it's page or teen ambassador programs.  
7 We've been expanding our after-school activities - in  
8 Harlem and elsewhere. We want to ensure that we have  
9 the resources to continue that and to expand that  
10 where possible. But we've done so much in terms of  
11 expansion, that now we need to make sure that we can  
12 continue those commitments, as well as look to other  
13 places to do more.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Questions from Council  
16 Member Williams?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.

18 I just had a question about the Capital Budget.  
19 I know you mentioned a lot of the issues that you  
20 have with these projects. I think almost every year I  
21 put money in, and, as you know, it comes back around  
22 that there's a budget shortfall, and then we have to  
23 try to find additional funds.

24 If you could just explain again that process,  
25 and how we could try to avoid that? Because it is a

1  
2 little frustrating to make a priority to put in funds  
3 one year, and then find out that the project is  
4 suddenly not fully funded. It's just a frustrating  
5 dynamic for us with such limited capital funds to  
6 spread around.

7           And if we say we're going commit to this one  
8 year, and, then, next year we make other commitments,  
9 and then have to move lines around, because we get a  
10 notification from the System that a particular  
11 project is underfunded. And I think this has happened  
12 to me probably almost every budget cycle, where a  
13 project that I thought was fully funded is suddenly  
14 not funded.

15           PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So I'll take that first if I  
16 may.

17           One, it may happen to you again this year, so  
18 just to give you a heads up. I know, but I'm giving  
19 you a heads up.

20           But that's where the City Council's  
21 unrestricted money has been extremely helpful to all  
22 of us as far as plugging those holes as well. So you  
23 have not really heard the same amount of coming back  
24 to you for additional funds – at least on the Queen's  
25 side – because of the use of prioritizing and really

1  
2 taking a look at where shortfalls may take place and  
3 the excellent unrestricted money that the City  
4 Council has provided that allows us to plug that.

5 And your district in particular, Council  
6 Member, as I look at the list of libraries that you  
7 cover, every library in your district has a capital  
8 initiative taking place: Cambria Heights with roof  
9 resiliency; South Jamaica with total overhaul; South  
10 Hollis as well; and Central, thanks to you, and the  
11 Speaker, and other council members, the renovation of  
12 the auditorium at Central; and St. Albans has a  
13 project.

14 So we're very conscious of that, and we've  
15 tried to minimize coming back to you for additional  
16 money because of shortfalls.

17 But it goes back to what we talked about  
18 earlier, as far as the complexity of, if we don't  
19 have the money, as Tony and Linda have indicated, as  
20 far as the total Capital Plan - especially a 10-Year  
21 Capital Plan - then we meet those shortfalls by  
22 either coming back to you or using the unrestricted  
23 money that you have set aside from the Council itself  
24 in the overall budget.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we have also been  
3 joined by Council Member Brooks-Powers on Zoom.

4 Okay, thank you all, very, very much for your  
5 testimony.

6 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Thank you for the  
7 opportunity, and thank you for your leadership as  
8 well.

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much. We  
10 really appreciate you and your testimonies.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we will take a  
12 little break, and then we are going to hear from DCLA  
13 at 12:00 p.m., noon.

14 (PAUSE)

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [GAVEL] Okay, good  
16 afternoon, and welcome to day eight, part two, of day  
17 eight of the Executive Budget hearings.

18 This will be the final Executive Hearing of the  
19 day. We'll be focusing on the Department of Cultural  
20 Affairs. I'm joined by my colleague, Council Member  
21 Rivera, Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
22 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations.

23 Welcome to a familiar face and friend,  
24 Commissioner Laurie Cumbo. Good to see you guys, and  
25

1  
2 Lance, of course. Thank you for joining us today to  
3 answer our questions.

4 On May 1, 2025, the Administration released the  
5 Executive Financial Plan for FY26-29, with a proposed  
6 FY26 budget of \$115.1 billion.

7 DCLA's proposed FY26 budget of \$215.1 million  
8 represents less than 1% of Administration's proposed  
9 FY twenty five budget. This is an increase of \$50.7  
10 million from the \$164.4 million originally budgeted  
11 in the Preliminary Plan back in January. This  
12 increase is the result of several actions, mostly a  
13 partial restoration of PEGS to the CDF, the Cultural  
14 Development Fund, and the CIG, the Cultural  
15 Institution Group operating subsidy – this partially  
16 offset by an adjustment in utility spending costs. As  
17 of March 2025, DCLA had nine vacancies relative to  
18 their budgeted headcount.

19 In the Council's Preliminary Budget Response,  
20 we called on City Hall to add \$75 million to DCLA's  
21 budget to fully restore and baseline cuts imposed to  
22 the Cultural Institutions Funding.

23 As I mentioned this morning, we do not arrive  
24 at these numbers lightly. The Council has identified  
25 sufficient resources to restore this and other

1 unnecessary cuts in full for our cultural  
2 institutions. Investing in our arts and cultural  
3 institutions isn't a nice luxury, but one of those  
4 rare moments where it works for both a moral and a  
5 financial position.  
6

7 If a budget is a moral document, then the arts  
8 are what inspire generations today and tomorrow to  
9 create, think, and explore the world beyond. I've got  
10 the passport stamps to prove it.

11 Financially, our cultural institutions are also  
12 those key investments we need to support – a  
13 heartbeat pulling millions of people into the city  
14 from around the world, generating money for our  
15 economy and our workforce, and supporting jobs all  
16 the while.

17 The Council is obligated to deliver a final  
18 budget that supports New Yorkers' success, fiscal and  
19 otherwise, and will continue that work in the  
20 negotiations ahead.

21 My questions today will largely focus on the  
22 Council's Budget Response, along with one-time  
23 funding and DCLA's Capital Program. But I now want to  
24 turn back to my co-chair, Council Member Rivera, for  
25 her opening statement.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much, Chair  
3 Brannan. Passport stamps are such a flex.

4 And I want to just thank everyone here,  
5 especially my colleagues, for fighting so diligently  
6 for their communities to ensure that their  
7 neighborhoods, their neighbors, their constituents  
8 have opportunity.

9 Good afternoon, and welcome to the hearing for  
10 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
11 International Intergroup Relations. I'm Council  
12 Member Carlina Rivera, Chair of this committee.

13 This afternoon we will be discussing the Fiscal  
14 2026 Executive Expense Budget for DCLA, which stands  
15 at \$215.1 million, and the Fiscal 2026 Executive  
16 Capital Commitment Plan which includes \$1.2 billion  
17 in Fiscal 2025-2029 for the Department.

18 I'm happy to see that at the urging of the  
19 Council, the Administration added baseline funding of  
20 \$45 million in the Executive Plan, which includes  
21 \$23.5 million for Cultural Development Fund  
22 recipients and \$21.5 million for the 34 Cultural  
23 Institution Group member organizations.

24 However, I am disappointed that the  
25 Administration did not allocate and baseline the full

1  
2 \$75 million for the City's cultural institutions as  
3 the Council called for in its Budget Response.

4       The City's cultural institutions are renowned  
5 worldwide for providing enrichment to all audiences,  
6 while contributing to the growth of our neighborhoods  
7 and the City's economy. The additional \$30 million of  
8 baseline funding would assist the CIG institutions in  
9 paying staff salaries, providing accessible public  
10 programs, and for security and maintenance of City-  
11 owned buildings.

12       The funding would also help thousands of  
13 creative nonprofits that rely on CDF funding to keep  
14 their doors open and provide services across the  
15 city. Our cultural organizations provide welcoming  
16 spaces for our community creating positive social  
17 impact.

18       In a moment when the federal government is  
19 closing its doors on immigrants, on international  
20 allies, and on public funding for the arts, we in New  
21 York City remain committed to what makes us great.  
22 Our doors are open, and we will always be the same  
23 welcoming New York City that people have been drawn  
24 to for centuries. We're a global city for culture, a  
25 sanctuary for creativity, and a place that believes

1 in community power and support. Cultural  
2 organizations and arts workers are not just major  
3 economic drivers, they are the heart and soul of our  
4 communities enriching our lives and showcasing our  
5 values.  
6

7 In the face of ongoing challenges from the slow  
8 recovery of tourism to shifting federal policies –  
9 really the cuts and threats to federal funding – we  
10 must ensure that the arts and culture sector is fully  
11 supported. And as the Chair of the Committee on  
12 Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International  
13 Intergroup Relations, I will continue to push for  
14 accountability and accuracy and ensure that the  
15 budget reflects the needs and interests of the City.  
16 It is essential that the budget that we adopt this  
17 year is transparent, accountable, and reflective of  
18 the priorities and interests of the Council and the  
19 people that we represent.

20 This hearing is a vital part of this process,  
21 and I expect that DCLA will be responsive to the  
22 questions and concerns of council members. And I look  
23 forward active engagement with the Administration  
24 over the next few weeks to ensure the Fiscal 2026  
25 Adopted Budget meets the goals the Council has set

1  
2 out. As we know, historic times call for historic  
3 investments. Thank you very much.

4 I wanna just recognize the members.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I got it.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: All right.

7 Let me just thank my staff for organizing  
8 today's hearing, including Financial Analyst, Sandra  
9 Gray; Committee Counsel, Christina Yellamaty;  
10 Legislative Policy Analyst, Regina Paul; and, of  
11 course, my Chief of Staff, Katie Loeb; and  
12 Legislative Director, Eddie Amador. Thank you so  
13 much.

14 Mr. Chair, back to you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair.

16 We have been joined by Council Members Hudson,  
17 Louis, Williams, Salaam, and Brooks-Powers.

18 Just a reminder for folks that are here...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: (INAUDIBLE)

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We said you already,  
21 you've been here the whole time. Gale, we always  
22 count on you to be here. (LAUGHS) Council Member  
23 Brewer is still here.

24 For those of you who want to testify, after we  
25 take testimony and we question DCLA, we will do

1  
2 testimony from the public on Libraries and the  
3 Cultural Affairs Committee. So just make sure you  
4 fill out one of those little slips in the back, so we  
5 can call on you.

6 I will now turn it over to Brian Sarfo, our  
7 Committee Counsel, to swear you in.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. Do you  
9 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
10 nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to  
11 respond honestly to council member questions?

12 Commissioner Cumbo?

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: General Council Polivy?

15 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. Good afternoon,  
18 Chair Rivera, Chair Brannan, and members of the  
19 committees. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the  
20 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. I am  
21 here today to testify in regards to the best budget  
22 ever, also known as the Mayor's FY26 Executive Budget  
23 proposal. Come on, this is the best budget ever.

24 I am joined today by a number of my colleagues  
25 from the agency. I will begin today with a quick look

at the amazing numbers in the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget for DCLA. It includes:

- \$52 million for the Cultural Development Fund;
- \$101 million for operating support for cultural institutions on City-owned property;
- \$52.3 million for energy subsidies to groups on City-owned property;
- \$8.2 million for agency staff and operations;
- \$1.7 million for CreateNYC and other agency initiatives.

If you don't have your calculator handy, that amounts to a grand total of \$214.7 million for DCLA in the Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget. And this biggest news of all, it includes \$45 million in baseline funding for DCLA: \$21.5 million for the Cultural Institution Groups and \$23.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund.

This is the first time that the Agency's baseline has been significantly increased in more than a decade. This reflects a major long term commitment to support our city's cultural community,

1  
2 and a recognition of culture's essential role in  
3 making our city thrive, particularly at a time when  
4 our cultural community is facing so many urgent  
5 challenges. I'm proud to be serving as Commissioner  
6 during the administration that has prioritized this  
7 historic commitment to our arts and culture  
8 community.

9       At nearly \$215 million, this is the largest  
10 amount included for DCLA in an Executive Budget  
11 proposal in HERstory. By comparison, the Executive  
12 Budget at the same point in last year's budget  
13 process was a \$151 million – meaning this year's  
14 Executive Budget is a 42% increase over last year's.  
15 And as always, this figure does not include any  
16 funding that is typically added at adoption, such as  
17 City Council initiatives or member items. Starting  
18 from such a strong position, we look forward to  
19 working toward an Adopted Budget that continues to  
20 invest in and support our vibrant cultural sector at  
21 record levels. We are certainly looking forward to  
22 the City Council outdoing us this year.

23       While initially added in the Fiscal Year 2026  
24 Preliminary Budget, another item included is the in  
25 the best budget ever is \$3 million for the creation

1 of up to five new members of the City's Cultural  
2 Institutions Group. We are continuing to work closely  
3 with the organizations under consideration to see if  
4 the designation is the right fit to ensure their long  
5 term stability and service to New Yorkers. While the  
6 CIG as a whole is the cornerstone of our city's  
7 cultural community, these new CIG members give us an  
8 once-in-a-generation opportunity to foster greater  
9 equity in this important source of city support. We  
10 look forward to making announcements as we finalize  
11 the new groups in the near future.  
12

13 Now, I'd like to provide a few updates on the  
14 great work we're able to do with these historic  
15 investments in our cultural community.

16 The process of distributing the FY26 Cultural  
17 Development Fund is already well underway. We  
18 released the applications for the next cycle the last  
19 week in March, well ahead of last year's schedule and  
20 they were due May 8th.

21 We appreciate the many council members who  
22 helped us spread the word about this year's  
23 opportunity, which, each year, supports nearly 1,100  
24 organizations citywide.  
25

1  
2 For the upcoming award cycle, we estimate that  
3 we'll convene more than CDF panels to review  
4 approximately 800 applications for support. We are  
5 actively recruiting panelists to support this  
6 process. It's a great paid opportunity to learn about  
7 the public funding process in-depth, network with  
8 your peers, and give back to our city's cultural  
9 community.

10 Please visit [nyc.gov/CDFapply](https://nyc.gov/CDFapply) to learn more.  
11 Again, that's [nyc.gov/CDFapply](https://nyc.gov/CDFapply) to learn more.

12 And as you know, last year we brought back city  
13 council representatives to participate in the CDF  
14 panel review process. No one knows your districts  
15 better than you, and we value you and your staff's  
16 insight and contributions to the process.

17 Earlier this month, DCLA's Programs Unit  
18 collaborated with the Council to host a webinar on  
19 the ins and outs of Council participation on CDF  
20 panels. We appreciate your ongoing partnership and  
21 collaboration on this important program. And that  
22 came about as a result of our strong testimony here  
23 at City Hall, and we heard from you, our Council  
24 colleagues.

1  
2 Just last week, New York Foundation for the  
3 Arts announced the recipients of the latest round of  
4 the Queens Art Fund, and the Brooklyn Arts Council  
5 announced grantees for the latest round of DCLA-  
6 funded regrants to artists and small arts groups.  
7 Together, these grant programs distributed more than  
8 \$1 million to hundreds of artists and small arts  
9 groups across Brooklyn and Queens. These funding  
10 amounts include the 15% increase we added for the  
11 borough arts councils in our FY25 budget, an  
12 investment in the artists who live and work in our  
13 city.

14 Our Public Art Unit is also hard at work  
15 bringing remarkable works of art to civic spaces  
16 across the five boroughs. Together with EDC, we  
17 recently launched an open call for artists to serve  
18 as the design partner for the Chinatown Welcome  
19 Gateway, part of the Chinatown Connections Project.  
20 Manhattan's Chinatown is one of the city's most  
21 distinctive enclaves, where generations of immigrants  
22 have come to make their homes and, in the process,  
23 contribute to our city's vibrant mix of communities  
24 and cultures. With the creation of the new Chinatown  
25 Welcome Gateway, this iconic New York City

1 neighborhood will have the powerful symbol it  
2 deserves. Applications to the open call are due June  
3 15th. Visit [nyculture.submittable.com](https://nyculture.submittable.com) for details if  
4 you are watching from home.  
5

6 We've also got an active open call for artists  
7 to serve as our city's next public Artist in  
8 Residence. PAIR is DCLA's pioneering Artist Residency  
9 program, which places artists-in-residence with the  
10 New York City municipal agencies to address pressing  
11 civic and social challenges through creative  
12 practice. Artists and artist collectives are  
13 encouraged to apply to work with one of the three  
14 agencies participating in the 2025-2026 PAIR program:  
15 The Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations,  
16 The Mayor's Public Engagement Unit, and The New York  
17 City Department of Small Business Services.

18 PAIR taps into artists' unique superpower,  
19 bringing creatives and public servants together to  
20 find new ways of approaching long-standing issues.  
21 Applications are due June 30th, and the selected  
22 PAIRs will be announced later this year. The open  
23 calls are also available on and submittable at  
24 [nyc.submittable.com](https://nyc.submittable.com).

1  
2 While FY26 six capital adds will not be  
3 included in the budget until adoption, that's not  
4 stopping us from moving forward on major capital and  
5 equipment projects across the city. Earlier in May,  
6 we celebrated the grand reopening of the New York  
7 Botanical Garden's Everett Children's Adventure  
8 Garden. The \$8.5 million renovation project, which  
9 included \$4 million in city support, is the first  
10 update to the beloved 12-acre space since it was  
11 created in 1998. Council Members Rivera and Hudson,  
12 you're all going to love this. The project ensures  
13 that the Children's Garden can continue to  
14 accommodate large audiences – over 175,000 children  
15 and adults – who visit each year, including 18,000  
16 students from PreK through fifth grade.

17 I was also delighted to join Council Member  
18 Rivera, Powers, and Brewer in April to cut the ribbon  
19 on the multi-year \$220 million renovation of The  
20 Frick Collection, marking the most comprehensive  
21 upgrade to The Frick since its opening in 1935. The  
22 project has restored the museum's historic first-  
23 floor galleries and created a new suite of galleries  
24 on the second floor of the original mansion,  
25

1  
2 welcoming the public to experience these spaces for  
3 the very first time.

4         Also in April, I joined the New York Historical  
5 Society – again with Council Member Brewer. We've  
6 been hanging out a lot together. For the topping out  
7 ceremony of the Tang Wing for American Democracy, the  
8 future home of the American LGBTQ+ Museum. The City  
9 is honored to be a key partner in bringing this  
10 vision to life, having committed nearly \$60 million  
11 to support this important project, which I've been a  
12 part of since I was on *that* side of the table.

13         And we're proud to be stewarding the next  
14 generation of capital projects through our Capital  
15 Feasibility Planning, CFP pilot program. CFP is an  
16 opportunity for small and mid-sized organizations  
17 that are considering construction, renovation  
18 equipment, or other capital projects to take a deep  
19 dive into this major decision before they make it. In  
20 the two previous cycles of CFP, we've worked closely  
21 with organizations to strategize, plan, and think  
22 deeply about their needs and how a capital project  
23 could fit into their long-term goals. Some groups are  
24 able to hit the ground running on their expansion,  
25 renovation, or other big projects after coming out of

1  
2 CFP. Others decide that such a major undertaking  
3 doesn't actually align with their strategic goals, or  
4 the timing isn't right. Regardless, CFP can help set  
5 up small and mid-sized cultural organizations for  
6 long-term sustainable success. The application for  
7 the next round of CFP is currently open. All eligible  
8 groups should have received an email from our capital  
9 unit. We'll be sending a reminder this week so groups  
10 who are interested can keep an eye out for that.

11         As always, our team at Materials for the Arts  
12 is doing the most to foster a cleaner, greener, more  
13 creative NYC. At the beginning of the month, MFTA  
14 welcomed five new emerging designers for MFTA's Young  
15 Designers Program. Each designer started the program  
16 by creating an original look using materials sourced  
17 from MFTA that are now on display in the warehouse.  
18 Throughout the residency, the young designers will  
19 return regularly to gather materials, participate in  
20 educational excursions, focus on sustainability and  
21 fashion, and receive mentorship from MFTA's Designer-  
22 in-Residence and the BK Style Foundation team. Their  
23 final collections will debut at a runway show this  
24 September, presented in partnership with BK Style

1 Foundation. We hope you all will be participating in  
2 it this year.

3  
4 This year, MFTA has continued its MFTA After  
5 Hours: Late Night Teacher Shopping program. Launched  
6 in 2023, the Late Night Shopping program extends  
7 MFTA's hours until 7:00 p.m. on a monthly basis to  
8 accommodate the schedules of educators during the  
9 school year. Thursday, June 5th will be the last day  
10 of Late Night Teacher Shopping for the school year.  
11 So, Educators, make sure to book your appointments at  
12 [nyc.gov/mfta](https://nyc.gov/mfta). We've had over 200 appointments from  
13 schools during MFTA After Hours this year, so the  
14 response to this initiative has been spectacular.

15 MFTA is such a special place, providing free  
16 materials that make affordable, accessible arts  
17 programming happen in schools, not-for-profits, and  
18 other spaces across the city. I want to give a big  
19 shout-out to the team that makes it all happen.

20 Before closing, I want to recognize that our  
21 city's cultural sector is facing challenges on so  
22 many fronts – from uncertainty with federal and  
23 private funding, to changing audience habits, to  
24 rising costs, and so much more. We're proud of our  
25 historic investments, which will help our sector

1  
2 persist, thrive, and continue to bring amazing arts  
3 programming to New Yorkers. We couldn't do this  
4 without the partnership of so many, especially the  
5 City Council. I thank you for the opportunity to  
6 testify today, and I'm happy to answer any questions  
7 that you have at this time on the best budget ever.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I didn't hear my name  
9 mentioned in the testimony. That's okay.

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You've got to invite me  
11 out.

12 (LAUGHTER)

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, let's jump right in.  
14 Sorry, we have also been joined by Council Member  
15 Sanchez.

16 Okay, so let's talk -- All these hearings have  
17 been somewhat overshadowed by cuts from the Trump  
18 administration. So does DCLA know how any of the  
19 City's cultural organizations have been impacted by  
20 funding policies of the Trump administration? Are you  
21 hearing concerns from folks? Are they reaching out to  
22 you, asking for contingency plans? What are you what  
23 are you hearing on the ground?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: According to an analysis by  
25 the City's Independent Budget Office, 268 nonprofits

1 in New York City received grants from the NEA,  
2 totaling more than \$7.5 million in the current fiscal  
3 year. Another 27 groups \$6.7 million from IMLS.  
4 Thirty-five groups got \$8.9 million from the NEH.  
5 That's more than \$23 million for hundreds of groups  
6 across the city. Coming at such a precarious time,  
7 while we do not have an analysis of how many of these  
8 might be affected by the NEA's latest actions, we  
9 recognize that our cultural community is facing  
10 unprecedented challenges on a number of fronts. While  
11 the City can't address the sector's needs alone, we  
12 are proud of the \$45 million in baseline funding  
13 we've provided in the Executive Budget, a major long-  
14 term investment in the sector. We've also put out a  
15 collection of resources for groups that receive  
16 notices of NEA Grant terminations, so they have the  
17 info they need to submit appeals, find legal support  
18 if needed, and advocate for the value of culture here  
19 in New York City and across the country.  
20

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Are you aware of any  
22 cultural organizations that are in danger of closing  
23 because of the elimination or reduction of federal  
24 funding?  
25

1  
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Many organizations come to  
3 us through a program called Create in Place. This  
4 initiative was established to help sustain and  
5 support organizations during this time. So what I  
6 would say to that question is, we are consistently  
7 working, if you can also say triaging, with dozens of  
8 organizations, to make sure that we help them and  
9 connect them to resources on the state level with  
10 other foundations, other support partners that can  
11 help them navigate these very challenging times. But  
12 anyone can see when they're reading the papers that  
13 many organizations are facing layoffs, furloughs,  
14 terminations of positions, and it is inevitably a  
15 difficult and challenging time. Tourism levels that  
16 were rebounding are also starting to take a hit, as  
17 many of our partners and other cities and countries  
18 are not coming to the US at the same frequency. So  
19 there is a lot to manage at this time, but I believe  
20 that the City's strong commitment through this  
21 Executive Budget signals to the community that we are  
22 here for them. We recognize that art and culture are  
23 the lifeline of the city of New York, and we're going  
24 to continue to support them.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

1  
2 How is DCLA addressing labor issues within the  
3 cultural sector, specifically, issues of fair pay and  
4 job security for artists and cultural workers?

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We've had conversations  
6 with DC 37. We've had conversations to navigate some  
7 really challenging circumstances and situations that  
8 have arisen, particularly within our Cultural  
9 Institutions Group. We've met with Deputy Mayor  
10 Adolfo Carrión. We've also brought up these  
11 challenges that the cultural community is facing as a  
12 result of labor negotiations and contracts. So it's  
13 something that we are actively working on in terms of  
14 making sure that we are providing long-term solutions  
15 to really make sure that we don't find ourselves in  
16 the same positions that we found ourselves in this  
17 year, particularly when labor negotiation contracts  
18 are negotiated. We want to make sure that we are  
19 working more in tandem to make sure that there is a  
20 support mechanism when those increases happen.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I'll talk about headcount.  
22 So DCLA's FY26 budget provides for 58 full-time  
23 positions across all divisions. But that's actually  
24 two fewer positions from the headcount in FY25. Could  
25 you tell us what positions were eliminated and why?

1  
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, last year, DCLA  
3 committed to hiring more staff, but the agency is  
4 still below its budgeted headcount.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What is your budgeted  
6 headcount right now?

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Our budgeted headcount at  
8 this time is...

9 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Council Member Brannan,  
10 for FY25, our budgeted headcount is still 60 full  
11 time positions and 10 full-time vacancies. For FY26  
12 and the out years, the headcount is 58, and that's  
13 because of two federal FEMA positions. (INAUDIBLE)...  
14 (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. So the two that were  
16 eliminated were federally funded?

17 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Exactly.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Now, did you eliminate  
19 those sort of preemptively, or are they no longer  
20 funded, or what's the story there?

21 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: No, one of them is an  
22 active opening that's posted on the...

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Oh, okay.

24 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: City Jobs website...

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

1  
2 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: that we're actively  
3 trying to... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And what positions are  
5 those that are funded by FEMA?

6 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: We have -- we had one  
7 FEMA expert who sat within the agency to help arts  
8 and culture organizations that were making FEMA  
9 claims as a result of Sandy and (INAUDIBLE)...

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Oh, okay, got it.

11 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: and storms to help them  
12 get FEMA claims.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: That's great. Okay.

14 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, what are your current  
16 vacancies there right now?

17 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Our current vacancies  
18 that we're hiring for are our chief of staff position  
19 and the FEMA position.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So it's just two?

21 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Just those two spots,  
23 okay. Are you having any challenges filling those?  
24 How long have you been looking?

1  
2 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: No, we're not having  
3 challenges. We have strong applicants for both  
4 positions. We've been actively interviewing for both  
5 positions and hope to make an announcement about  
6 hiring for both as quickly as possible.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

8 All right, I just want to ask about the capital  
9 commitment plan. DCLA's five-year Capital Commitment  
10 Plan for FY25-29 is \$1.2 billion. It's almost a 6.5%  
11 decrease when compared to the preliminary plan. Could  
12 you tell us what projects have been delayed and  
13 pushed out to the out years? And I assume there's not  
14 one general reason for the project delays. Could you  
15 talk maybe about some of the common reasons why these  
16 projects get pushed out?

17 (PAUSE)

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: If you can start that, I'm  
19 not aware of delays that you're referring to in the  
20 way that you're referring to delays. Our projects are  
21 on track. Some projects take longer than others to  
22 either put a shovel in the ground or to complete.  
23 Lance can probably give you a bit more detail on  
24 those projects that you may potentially been  
25 referring to.

1  
2 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: I would say there are  
3 no particular delays that we want to highlight today  
4 in general. The City capital process is one that  
5 takes a lot of time...

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure.

7 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: and that has a lot of  
8 safeguards. And in large part, that's because it's  
9 funded by municipal bonds, and we take that  
10 responsibility very seriously, as do our two  
11 construction agency partners, the Department of  
12 Design and Construction and the Economic Development  
13 Corporation.

14 So we don't manage any active capital  
15 construction. We're a funding agency that then  
16 partners with one of those two agencies to execute  
17 the projects. We're proud of the work we do with  
18 those agencies. We know that these projects can take  
19 time, but we also know that these City investments  
20 can make an enormous difference for a cultural  
21 organization that would otherwise be unable to  
22 fundraise.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I guess we're just trying  
24 to understand why there's a \$1.2 billion decrease  
25 from January's Preliminary Plan.

1  
2 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: We'll take a look and  
3 get back to you, Council Member.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, Chair Rivera?  
7 Thanks.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you. Thank you both  
9 for being here.

10 As you know, the Council called on the  
11 Administration in its budget response to include \$45  
12 million baseline starting in Fiscal Year 2026. But  
13 the budget does not include the additional \$30  
14 million that we also asked for. Has DCLA had  
15 discussions with OMB regarding the additional \$30  
16 million for the CIGs and CDFs?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We have not had additional  
18 conversations following the announcement of the  
19 additional \$45 million that came in for art and  
20 culture. Usually, as part of the negotiation process,  
21 we partner with the City Council, and there's an  
22 anticipation that the Administration will provide a  
23 level of support, and that the Council would match  
24 that level of support in some way, either through  
25 council funding, initiatives, or member items. So we

1  
2 are actively looking for that partnership to continue  
3 and remain because it's really, really critical for  
4 organizations to feel that baseline increase through  
5 the partnership with the City Council.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: It's -- so you're saying  
7 that \$30 million will not be included in the final  
8 budget? Are you still considering it? Why wasn't it  
9 included in the Executive Plan?

10 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: We are so proud of the  
11 fact that the FY26 Executive Budget included a \$45  
12 million baseline increase for New York City Arts and  
13 Culture. And that was something that only happened  
14 because of the groundswell of support from the more  
15 than 1,000 organizations that receive CDF funding  
16 every year, our 34 CIGs that spoke with one voice so  
17 clearly that the number one priority this year was a  
18 meaningful and significant baseline increase. And we  
19 are so proud that that was included in the Executive  
20 Budget.

21 The budget dance is not done. It continues  
22 through the end of June, and we look forward to  
23 ongoing engagement with our arts and culture partners  
24 and conversations with Council and the Administration  
25

1  
2 to arrive at the final budget, which we know will be  
3 the best budget ever.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And we certainly didn't  
5 want the City Council to feel left out of such a  
6 historic investment in art and culture. So we have  
7 left a place for you in order to contribute to the  
8 best budget ever, and wanted you to...

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Wow, thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: certainly feel included.

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Wow, thank you so much.

12 You know, when you dance, you should stretch  
13 just in case your partner gives you the runaround.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: But you've got to have a  
15 partner.

16 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Right. So, how is DCLA --  
17 actually, how will the additional \$45 million be  
18 split between the CDF groups and the CIGs?

19 How will the CIG portion be split between the  
20 34 CIGs?

21 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: The CIG portion is  
22 \$21.5 million, and that baseline increase is gonna go  
23 to all 34 of the CIGs. It's going to be split the way  
24 that their funding is typically split. What it really  
25 does is it gives those 34 institutions the ability to

1  
2 plan long term for that increase instead of having to  
3 rely on one-time amounts at adoption each and every  
4 year, and that's why it was so important.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. I know you had  
6 somewhat of a breakdown in your testimony, which I  
7 appreciated the detail that you gave, Commissioner.

8 In in terms of capital equity, how is DCLA  
9 prioritizing capital project spending to address the  
10 projects that have been identified as urgent matters  
11 and may require more capital funding?

12 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Can you repeat the  
13 question, Council Member?

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Yes, of course, of course.

15 How is DCLA prioritizing capital project  
16 spending to address the projects that have been  
17 identified as urgent matters and may require more  
18 capital funding?

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So in our capital process,  
20 particularly during this really challenging economic  
21 time, we look at projects that are already in the  
22 pipeline. Projects that have gone through our process  
23 and they are near completion, but have been  
24 undergoing a process where each year they call what's  
25 known as banking, where they have the ability to roll

1  
2 over funding year after fiscal year in order to  
3 achieve their capital funding goals.

4         So we start there, and then we go into the list  
5 in terms of recognizing that there are organizations  
6 that are already in process, and we want to make sure  
7 that we continue to support them. We also want to  
8 make sure that we help organizations complete the  
9 process. So we want to make sure that we put funding  
10 there.

11         And then there are also capital requests that  
12 are very instrumental to the daily operations of the  
13 organizations, such as boilers, roof repair,  
14 elevators, lighting systems, situations, or  
15 circumstances that are critical to the viability of  
16 the organization. Projects that will make the  
17 institution more accessible are certainly critical.

18         And then after that process, we do look at new  
19 building, new construction, new ideas that are being  
20 put forth to see how we can prioritize those  
21 organizations. And so we do our comprehensive review  
22 of organizations that are banking, organizations that  
23 are near completion, organizations that have critical  
24 needs, and then we culminate with organizations that  
25 have new ideas and new projects that they want to

1 bring to the fold. And we have to do an assessment as  
2 we do with every project to make sure that new  
3 organizations or organizations that are looking to do  
4 a very large capital project have the ability to  
5 complete said project, particularly during this time.

6  
7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Understood. And I know that  
8 you all have a great relationship with many of these  
9 organizations, and they let you know what's coming or  
10 what's been delayed.

11 You know, in terms of the CDF fund, that's  
12 something that I know you all take a lot of pride in.  
13 The deadline was May 8th. I think you mentioned there  
14 were 800 applicants.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Approximately.

16 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Great. What is the goal for  
17 the number of organizations to receive grants, and  
18 how is DCLA ensuring transparency and fairness in the  
19 panel review process?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, I thank you so much  
21 for that question, because the CDF process is  
22 certainly the cornerstone of our agency. So, I want  
23 to begin really by saying that one of the things that  
24 we have done to make this program more accessible is  
25 the partnership with the City Council, for both

1  
2 getting the word out about the fact that -- To  
3 getting the word out, the fact that the application  
4 is coming up, doing webinars within the agency to  
5 help organizations prepare for it, but you all  
6 sending it out in your newsletters, at your community  
7 board meetings, informing people of two things: One,  
8 that this application due date is approaching, which  
9 is now passed, but also the ability to promote for  
10 panelists. And getting into your districts is so  
11 important for ensuring that we have diversity in our  
12 panels, but also diversity in the organizations that  
13 are applying to this process. So having 51 members as  
14 champions and ambassadors, and also bringing those  
15 said council members and their staff into the  
16 reviewing panel process, has created a level of  
17 equity that has been really extraordinary for the  
18 Agency in terms of having that level of diversity. So  
19 we certainly thank all of you for your support in  
20 that. Lance, did you want to add to that as well?

21 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Council Member Rivera,  
22 do you have more that you were hoping to hear about  
23 the CDF process?

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I know you're always  
25 looking to include more people on ,like, in terms of

1  
2 the diversity on the panels. It's really the process  
3 of ensuring transparency and fairness. I know we're  
4 working on improving the process, the timeline, so I  
5 really appreciate the Commissioner's response.

6 I guess my follow-up question to that, in terms  
7 of our communities and historically underserved  
8 populations and areas, does DCLA allocate additional  
9 funding to organizations that are led by or serve  
10 BIPOC communities, low-income communities, LGBTQIA  
11 communities, and other historically marginalized  
12 communities? And if so, can you produce a breakdown  
13 of which groups received additional funding and the  
14 difference in award amount for these groups, or is  
15 this something that you're planning?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We did not quantify the  
17 organizations in that way by the criteria that you  
18 just discussed. We created something called the CDF  
19 Equity Fund, and through this fund 264 organizations  
20 operating in areas of New York City with the lowest  
21 median incomes and highest poverty rates received a  
22 total of \$2 million in additional funding on top of  
23 their CDF awards. So we actually looked at this and  
24 said, how can we get funding into the lowest median  
25 incomes and highest poverty rates? And that was the

1  
2 criteria that we looked at in terms of bringing  
3 support that has been not as deeply invested in those  
4 communities systemically for generations. So we  
5 wanted to change that.

6 Eligibility for the CDF includes whether  
7 additional funds would provide critical support for  
8 arts or cultural organizations serving vulnerable  
9 populations of the city with fewer community  
10 resources.

11 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: I'd also note that we  
12 brought back the Language Access Fund this year and  
13 the Disability Forward Fund this year, both of which  
14 in FY25 helped support organizations that we're  
15 targeting, uh, the types of programs that I think  
16 you're really driving at.

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I know you're always  
18 looking to grow. I mean, ideally, that's what we  
19 would want, expansion. I know we're expanding the  
20 number of cultural institution groups there are. The  
21 preliminary plan included \$3 million in baseline  
22 funding for new CIGs. You mentioned in your testimony  
23 that you really have to see if the designation is the  
24 right fit. Have the new CIGs been determined, and if  
25

1  
2 so, which institutions are they in, and in which  
3 boroughs?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm excited about that  
5 question.

6 I wish I could give you the announcement that  
7 we're all waiting on with pins and needles to  
8 announce who those organizations are, but at this  
9 time...

10 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Are you close? You're  
11 close.

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We're close.

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We're really close. We're  
15 so close, but it's going to be potentially five  
16 organizations, one from each borough. We wanted to  
17 make sure that we prioritized organizations that are  
18 on City-owned property, which is a criteria to making  
19 sure that we can support these organizations, but  
20 also we wanted to bring it to all five boroughs and  
21 communities that have typically been underserved and  
22 under resourced, similar to the Equity Fund, but in a  
23 different way.

24 So we wanted to make sure that the  
25 organizations were on City-owned property, that it

1 was a good fit for the organization, understanding  
2 the financial viability of the organization. So it's  
3 a really intensive process in terms of determining  
4 whether CIG status is a right fit for the City and  
5 the organization. There are many factors that could  
6 come into play in terms of ownership of the property.  
7 Do organizations want to work with the City in that  
8 way? Many organizations have really expansive  
9 portfolios where they own properties all across the  
10 city. Some are leased, some are owned, some are  
11 rented. So there are a lot of complexities that go  
12 into determining if an organization is a right fit  
13 for the Cultural Institution Group.

14  
15 And so we are continuing to undergo that  
16 vetting process. We're really excited about it. There  
17 hasn't been an increase of the Cultural Institution  
18 Group of this magnitude in over 30 years. So we're  
19 really excited to, again, to continue to make  
20 HERstory along with the expansion of the baseline  
21 budget, the expansion of the Cultural Institution  
22 Groups, as well as an increase to our local arts  
23 councils by 15%.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you for that, and I  
25 appreciate you always recognizing when people are

1  
2 kind of first to do something. And you've mentioned  
3 my own position, so I always appreciate you.

4           And there's just one last question, because I  
5 know my colleagues have them. There's no doubt New  
6 York's the cultural capital of the world. You are an  
7 incredible cheerleader and champion of that. Yet,  
8 according to the cultural community, many artists and  
9 cultural workers are leaving New York due to a lack  
10 of work or affordable housing. I know Chair Brannan  
11 mentioned labor shortages and the challenges in the  
12 creative economy. With artists leaving, we are  
13 risking not only a loss of culture but also a loss of  
14 economic opportunity. And I know you and I have  
15 talked about housing specifically and how desperately  
16 we need that here.

17           How can DCLA support artists and cultural  
18 workers to ensure that they do not have to leave New  
19 York City? And is housing for those artists in  
20 practice, because I know there are some legal  
21 questions there, something your agency can support?

22           COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'll start with this. I  
23 know you have a lot to add on this as well, Lance.

24           What I'm really excited about is that, for the  
25 first time, we've delivered a 15% increase to all

1  
2 five local arts councils in New York City. And that  
3 is substantial. It's going to allow for many of the  
4 artists of New York City to receive grants, but also  
5 the support that comes with a grant that's being  
6 received by an artist who's a part of our local arts  
7 councils.

8 But something that I'm also really excited  
9 about is the Mayor's announcement about After-School  
10 for All. This is a \$330 million investment in After-  
11 School for All, and arts and culture are going to be  
12 a huge part of that initiative. We're meeting with  
13 Commissioner Howard in the days to come, and we are  
14 gonna discuss how we are going to prioritize our  
15 teaching artists and our arts organizations to be a  
16 part of this because this type of initiative would  
17 give what many artists need, which is sustainable  
18 income, where they're able to demonstrate that they  
19 have a work history that is very important for when  
20 you're applying to affordable housing lotteries and  
21 otherwise.

22 So we want to make sure that we are providing  
23 real employment that has a continuous ability to have  
24 pay stubs, and all of those types of dynamics that  
25

1  
2 are on a regular basis, that are gonna help the arts  
3 community on so many levels.

4       There are also projects that we've been  
5 piloting, like the National Black Theatre, which is  
6 an arts and housing project that is going to show how  
7 artist housing can coexist with cultural spaces.  
8 We're looking to do that, as well as the Bedford  
9 Union Armory project, now the Major Owens Health and  
10 Wellness Center, is another project where you have  
11 cultural space, as well as deeply affordable housing  
12 for the individuals of New York City.

13       But I tell you it's something that I want to  
14 continue to crack the code on in terms of how we  
15 really create deeply affordable artist housing and  
16 workspace in New York City. But these are some of the  
17 measures through the increase of the Arts Councils,  
18 we want to see more of that, and we can do that in  
19 partnership with the City Council, as well as with  
20 private partnerships. But I also want to make sure  
21 that we ensure that the arts community is at the  
22 forefront of the After-School for All Initiative.

23       CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, now we have  
24 questions from Council Member Brewer, followed by  
25 Council Member Salaam.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.  
3 Just in terms of that \$30 million that we still want,  
4 I mean, if you have \$23 million cut to the groups,  
5 and they've all been calling me and calling you.

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You know, 65, 10 there,  
8 65 -- it's a lot for these small groups. Plus,  
9 tourism is way down from being responsible for both.

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, I mean, how can you  
12 not say that we don't need -- I know there's a budget  
13 dance. I've seen it before. But I do think you should  
14 be advocating even though \$45 million based is  
15 terrific. They're really hurting. They're really  
16 hurting.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Plus, I know we're all  
19 working with MOCS to improve the City flow of  
20 dollars, but that's slow, because of all the MOCS  
21 blah, blah, blah issues.

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think your groups are  
24 in trouble. Real trouble. And so I'm just wondering  
25 what else, besides the \$45 million, and I understand

1  
2 the after-school programs, but that \$30 million is  
3 really needed now. Can you respond to that?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say, again, the  
5 continuous partnership with the City Council has  
6 always been the way that we have achieved  
7 sustainability for the arts and cultural community.  
8 Without that partnership, we're not able to provide  
9 the level of support that is so critical and is so  
10 needed. So as we've always done, we're certainly  
11 going to need the Council's support to match this  
12 historic victory for the arts and cultural community.  
13 So we're going to be, again, looking at art and  
14 culture support from the City Council.

15 But also, we're really excited about the arts  
16 and education funding that the Mayor placed in the  
17 budget as well. And that is going to be critical in  
18 terms of also providing artist support, teaching  
19 artist support within the budget.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I understand, I  
21 understand. Just so you know, we are really concerned  
22 about the groups. And \$30 million, I'll just say it  
23 again, is desperately needed.

24 Number two, we wrote you a letter about CASA.  
25 We love SU-CASA. We appreciate your support. But we

1 need to have earlier SU-CASA decision-making. Because  
2 what happens is it's so late - I mean, the City  
3 Council, too, needs to improve its decision-making  
4 about SU-CASA. But I wanted to know that you would be  
5 part of an earlier process. It's hard on Lower  
6 Manhattan CC, and it's hard on the groups, because  
7 they don't get their funding until it's too late,  
8 and then they don't have much time to do their  
9 process.  
10

11 So, can you comment on how we can improve the  
12 SU-CASA process?

13 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: Thanks so much, Council  
14 Member Brewer. I wanted to let you know that the  
15 Department of Cultural Affairs and Council Finance  
16 have already been in touch about how to improve all  
17 of the Council initiatives and to make sure that our  
18 partnership is as successful as possible. And it does  
19 really, in fact, take a partnership, both with our  
20 agency stepping up to the plate and the Council  
21 making the designations as early in the cycle as  
22 possible. I think with this open line of  
23 communication between Cultural Affairs and Council  
24 Finance, that we're gonna be able to get things in a  
25 really good place going forward.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. So SU-CASA  
3 can be announced, like, (TIMER) in the summer and not  
4 until the fall? Is that what you're trying to tell me  
5 - in English?

6 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: I'm not committing to a  
7 particular schedule, but I'm saying that ongoing  
8 communication, dialogue, and partnership...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, but we need  
10 to make it sooner. I'm not good at hyperbole, so...

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Let me just say this,  
12 Council Member Brewer, on that. My dream of all  
13 dreams, and it was the dream when I was in the City  
14 Council, is the close of the budget, latest June  
15 30th...

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: If all the City Council  
18 members would make their...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm ready!

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Would make their SU-CASA,  
21 CASA, Art As A Catalyst for Change, Theaters of  
22 Color, Art Immigration - if you did it all at one  
23 time, you can't imagine how powerfully we would be  
24 able to get that money processed and out the door.  
25 But when on the Council side, the allocations or the

1 designations come in October, or they come in  
2 December and make...

3  
4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I will -- I will work to  
5 make sure... (CROSS-TALK)

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: (INAUDIBLE)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Mine is ready. But, I'll  
8 try to (INAUDIBLE)...

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I know yours is ready.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Mine is ready, but I'll  
11 try to make sure that my colleagues...

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: If anybody could do it,  
13 it's you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I will try.

15 Next is CIGs. Are there new CIGs? Are they  
16 announced? What's going on?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The new CIGs have not been  
18 announced, because we want to continue with the  
19 vetting process to make sure that this is the right  
20 fit and the right designation for each of the  
21 organizations. We would be irresponsible to announce  
22 who they are while they're going through the vetting,  
23 and let's say, for whatever reason, the vetting  
24 process determines that they are not eligible.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

1  
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It would be a big  
3 disappointment to their community, their supporters,  
4 and their organizations.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How many CIGs -- I  
6 understand, this is a good thing that you're doing,  
7 but there are still CIGs, or I should say potential  
8 CIGs...

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: on City property who are  
11 not on the list, because there's not enough money. Do  
12 you know how many? I mean, I love my South Street  
13 Seaport, as an example, Museum. Not on the list,  
14 probably -- it is on City land, however. So, do you  
15 know how many are on City land that, for whatever  
16 funding reasons, can't be considered?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It's less than a dozen.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Less than a dozen? Okay.  
19 So we still need money for them?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I appreciate  
22 there's more money for the... I call LMCC in  
23 Manhattan, but for the others -- But I don't think  
24 it's enough. They really need more money to manage  
25 all of these agencies that they're trying to manage.

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COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What have they asked for? I know you just said 3%, but what have they asked for? What do you think they really need to do the managing? Because they do feel that they can't manage with what they are being allocated.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That increase -- that increase was actually 15% not 3%.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So I want to just...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, that's (INAUDIBLE)...

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: pat myself on the back about that. And I just want to say clearly that we are very focused on our local arts councils. We are meeting with them. We just had a convening at Governor's Island, with all five of the local arts councils, to discuss how we can strengthen and pool our resources to better serve the field. There were foundations that were there. There were public and private partnerships and individuals who recognize the power of the Arts Council's unifying, and we are going to continue to support them. And I'm confident that this partnership of the local arts councils is

1  
2 going to render very strong and powerful results for  
3 the City of New York culturally.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, I appreciate  
5 that.

6 We all love, New Heritage Theater. You know how  
7 much I love them.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I know you do.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, I do.

10 So they need \$5 million to purchase a building.  
11 Can they get \$5 million from DCLA to purchase a  
12 building? That's a pretty good price in Harlem.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It is an excellent price.  
14 However, we are working with both organizations. The  
15 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs does not  
16 administer capital dollars for the purposes of  
17 acquisition. We've also looked at the partnerships  
18 with the New York State Council on the Arts, as well  
19 as DASNY (Dormitory Authority of the State of New  
20 York), and it looks as if acquisition can't be  
21 utilized for -- acquisition capital dollars cannot be  
22 used for acquisition on the state level either. So  
23 we're trying to figure out other resources to help  
24 them, potentially private resources, where once they  
25 receive those private dollars, we're then able to

1  
2 match that with the build out and the fit out, the  
3 FF&E for their particular spaces. So our job is  
4 typically not in the business of acquisition of  
5 spaces.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. We need them. We  
7 need \$5 million... (CROSS-TALK)

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We certainly need  
9 (INAUDIBLE)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I don't care how we get  
11 it.

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Finally, on the schools,  
14 the Blueprint. You know, I always talk about the fact  
15 that even though we hope that there is Cultural in  
16 the schools, and I appreciate the after school  
17 efforts. Is there any sort of tallying by Cultural  
18 Affairs as to what does go on in the schools? Because  
19 I do feel that there's not enough Cultural in the  
20 schools. I think you agree. But how we keep tabs on  
21 what they are or not doing?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that the best  
23 way to get that answer would be for the Blueprint  
24 that the art study that comes out every year with  
25 Paul Thompson in the Department of Education Arts and

1  
2 Ed Office. They do an annual event each year where  
3 they publish a report discussing the very question  
4 that you're asking, in terms of how do we keep a  
5 tally of where artists are in the schools, where  
6 organizations are in the schools, who has after  
7 school, who doesn't have after school, where there  
8 are cultural deserts. And that is a really powerful  
9 tool for us to understand where we need to focus our  
10 dollars.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, but do you  
12 look at it to say that they should be doing more?  
13 Because they should be doing more.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We can always do more with  
15 more.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you, Council Member  
18 Brewer. I feel like I have arrived - I've been  
19 grilled by Council Member Brewer, all right!

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we have questions  
21 from Council Member Salaam, followed by Council  
22 Member Louis.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Good afternoon, and  
24 thank you for your testimony.

25

1  
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much. It was  
3 very good seeing you at the Westchester (INAUDIBLE)  
4 Luncheon Awards Ceremony.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: You as well, always  
6 great to see you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: I am actually just  
8 writing down the last thing that you just said, "We  
9 can always do more with more."

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: That should be put on a  
12 shirt.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: I want to talk about,  
15 real quick, the support for the Studio Museum of  
16 Harlem. The Studio Museum of Harlem sees projected --  
17 sees a projected budget decrease of nearly \$70,000  
18 from FY25 to FY26. And I wanted to know, what  
19 explains this reduction? And what steps are being  
20 taken to ensure the stability of one of Harlem's  
21 flagship cultural institutions?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I will have to look further  
23 into your question, because the Studio Museum in  
24 Harlem is part of the Cultural Institutions Group,  
25 and they receive a baseline award that is continuous

1  
2 year after year without reduction. So perhaps General  
3 Counsel Polivy can expand on that.

4 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: I think the issue is  
5 that we're comparing the FY25 actuals to the FY26  
6 Executive Budget, which doesn't yet include member  
7 items, one time adds at adoption, they should not be  
8 receiving a \$60,000 reduction in expense funding.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Gotcha. We'll definitely  
10 follow-up.

11 And, lastly, vacancy rates and staffing  
12 capacity – The department has a vacancy rate of 17.6%  
13 as of March 2025. Does this staffing shortage impact  
14 the Agency's ability to work closely with Harlem-  
15 based institutions and applicants, particularly when  
16 navigating application and compliance processes for  
17 CDF funding?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We have two vacancies, so  
19 we are actively interviewing for those two vacancies  
20 within our office. They say you should take a long  
21 time to hire. So I'm in the very long time to hire,  
22 because we want to check references, we want to make  
23 sure that this is a good fit. So I want to make sure  
24 that we do our due diligence and make the right  
25 hires. We are thrilled with our recent hire for the

1  
2 CDF process. Audrey St. Clair (phonetic) has recently  
3 come on to make sure that we have a robust CDF  
4 process, and we're really happy with that experience  
5 of working with her.

6 But I would say in terms of our ability to work  
7 with Harlem organizations, we are actively in  
8 communication and helping to deliver really great  
9 projects in Harlem, such as the National Black  
10 Theatre, which has been a grant recipient both on the  
11 CDF as well as the capital side. We have just  
12 continued to provide support for the Studio Museum in  
13 Harlem and also to help them to assist with the  
14 opening of their building.

15 We are also working with the Apollo and making  
16 sure that we complete the renovation project that's  
17 really exciting that's happening. (TIMER)

18 My goal is to complete, for the first time, the  
19 Africa Center project. That has been delayed on 5th  
20 Avenue for quite some time. So we've invested an  
21 extraordinary amount of capital dollars to complete  
22 that project.

23 I just met with, as you know, Mama Foundation  
24 [for the Arts]. I did a walking tour with Vy  
25 Higginsen just last week touring the five-story

1 building and seeing all of the great work that  
2 they're doing.

3  
4 So we are active on the ground in Harlem making  
5 sure that the organizations that call Harlem Home are  
6 well supported, well funded, and I'm excited when all  
7 of these organizations within the next year are going  
8 to begin to open their doors.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you for that.

10 Just one last question on anti-gun violence  
11 initiatives and cultural, immigrant initiatives. How  
12 many Harlem organizations are receiving funding  
13 through these initiatives? And how is DCLA tracking  
14 its impact in neighborhoods disproportionately  
15 affected by gun violence and immigration challenges?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's an excellent  
17 question. To get those exact numbers, I would have to  
18 get back to you to understand how those initiatives  
19 are impacting your district. But I will say, as I  
20 have to pat myself on the back one more time, when I  
21 was in the City Council, I created the Art as a  
22 Catalyst for Change Initiative. And that initiative  
23 was designed to place an artist residency program in  
24 areas most impacted by gun violence. And the goal of  
25 that initiative was to partner with the Mayor's

1  
2 Office to End Gun Violence, which is also legislation  
3 that I passed when I was in the Council, to make sure  
4 that those two dynamics work in tandem, so that we  
5 have an artistic and cultural component to solving  
6 the issues of gun violence in our communities.

7         But I will say, while those initiatives are  
8 really powerful and important in navigating issues of  
9 gun violence in our communities, we can't  
10 underestimate the power of Summer Youth Employment  
11 opportunities, which this Council, in partnership  
12 with the Mayor, has expanded. When I was sitting on  
13 that side of the table, there were only 25,000 young  
14 people receiving a Summer Youth Employment  
15 opportunity. That number, with your partnership, is  
16 now up to 100,000. So that's really powerful, and we  
17 can't underestimate that.

18         And just want to add that this after-school  
19 program, After-School for All, is going to really  
20 impact the safety of our communities on so many  
21 levels, when we're able to really provide full  
22 academic, cultural, and athletic opportunities for  
23 every young child in our school system. Our young  
24 people shouldn't have to choose which school they're  
25 going to go to based on who has aftercare and who

1  
2 doesn't have aftercare. Those are really hard  
3 decisions for a parent to make.

4           So I want to make sure that, you know, we don't  
5 underestimate those initiatives, but they are  
6 critical in solving these really, really important  
7 issues in our community.

8           COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, I appreciate  
9 it.

10           COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you.

11           COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, Chairs.

12           CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Council Member Louis?

13           COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair, and  
14 good to see you, Commissioner, and Lance.

15           COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Good to see you. And I want  
16 to thank you again for the opportunity to serve in  
17 your Women's HERstory Month event.

18           COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Oh, yes.

19           COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Always a big success at the  
20 Brooklyn Children's Museum.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: We enjoyed you and your  
22 outfit.

23           COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. (LAUGHS)

24           COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: So, thank you for coming  
25 by.

1  
2 Two quick questions – One of them, Chair Rivera  
3 shared, so I'll rearrange it. But, will DCLA allocate  
4 a portion of FY26 funds specifically towards  
5 technical assistance, multilingual outreach, and  
6 application support for emerging and grassroots  
7 cultural groups, and in the FY26 budget?

8 And the second one is – and Chair Rivera  
9 mentioned that the City Council is supporting DCLA  
10 with sharing information with our constituents and  
11 cultural groups – but given ongoing feedback about  
12 inadequate awareness of deadlines and eligibility  
13 requirements, have you all thought about with the  
14 FY26 funds that you'll receive, will DCLA establish a  
15 year round community based engagement plan to  
16 democratize access to funding?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Spoken like the Council  
18 Member who created the Office of Not for Profit  
19 Services (\*Mayor's Office of Nonprofit Services).

20 That is an excellent question. We do extensive  
21 webinars to make sure that our applicants are ready,  
22 on board, and prepared to apply. We also have an  
23 entire process – once the application is launched,  
24 during the application process, and afterwards,  
25 making sure that organizations understand exactly how

1  
2 to apply to CDF, what to do while they're applying,  
3 and whether they did or did not get the grant. We  
4 actually do really intensive interviews with  
5 applicants so that they can understand where they  
6 might not have met the benchmark in order to apply  
7 for the following year. So that's one.

8 Our technical service is not built out the way  
9 that you're saying it or asking. It's more just a  
10 part of the entire process. We make sure that that  
11 happens. We do extensive outreach. Our new programs  
12 Assistant Commissioner, Audrey St. Clair, has been  
13 out in the field, which is a really big and new  
14 dynamic, where she's going in person to meet with  
15 arts organizations and to meet with groups that work  
16 collaboratively together and form alliances. So we're  
17 really very proud of that.

18 Lance, did you want to add something to that?

19 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: The last thing I'd say  
20 is that this year we worked very closely with the  
21 Council to put together a toolkit of resources for  
22 groups that may want to apply to CDF. So our office  
23 put that together, we shared it with the Council, and  
24 the Council then shared it with all members, so that  
25 members could get those materials into the hands of

1  
2 the groups in your districts, and that you could  
3 include it in your newsletters, and all of the other  
4 ways that you communicate directly with your  
5 constituents. (TIMER)

6 So we think that this is really important, and  
7 I want to just highlight what the Commissioner said,  
8 that our assistant commissioner is getting her team  
9 out into communities this year to speak directly with  
10 organizations to do exactly what you're proposing.

11 So we are very much on the same page and want  
12 to collaborate on doing that effectively. And this  
13 toolkit that we've put together and shared with the  
14 Council is another good way to do that, because we  
15 can't get into all 51 council districts, but we know  
16 that you guys have all the right contacts, and the  
17 right people to be communicating with, so that you  
18 can take that toolkit of information and share it  
19 with all of them.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: The toolkit was  
21 definitely helpful, so I look forward to doing that  
22 again.

23 So, Ms. St. Clair would be the point person...

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes.  
25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: to work with? Okay, thank  
3 you.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And just want to add, we  
5 have met with the Office of Non-Profit Services and  
6 are looking forward to doing some collaborations  
7 there as well. So, thank you so much for authoring  
8 that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That office is really  
11 critical to City services and making sure that we are  
12 getting funding out the door in a timely fashion.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. Thank you,  
14 Chairs.

15 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: One more question about the  
16 recent Arts and Education Oversight. The Agency  
17 stated that more than 420 CDF grantees proposed arts  
18 education projects throughout the five boroughs. Do  
19 you foresee any shortfalls in the CDF's continuous  
20 participation in arts education?

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Our agency operates on a  
22 panel review process, and so we're not able to, in  
23 many ways, make designations based on key priorities.  
24 It would have to be that organizations come to us,  
25 and they propose a project or a specific interest

1  
2 that they have in fulfilling said project, and we  
3 fund based on that. But we don't have a criteria to  
4 say that we're going to fund x amount of arts and  
5 education grants or x amount of community based  
6 grants or x amount in that way.

7 It's more so something that comes about as  
8 organizations come forward and say this is something  
9 that they're interested in that they want to support,  
10 and the panel would read that application and make a  
11 designation in that way.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, thank you, thank you  
13 for that answer. Thank you to both of you.

14 I am just going to ask one more question, okay?

15 Despite the end of COVID, the City's cultural  
16 institutions are still feeling the impacts of the  
17 pandemic, you know, with attendance. It just hasn't  
18 rebounded to the pre-pandemic levels.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And many organizations are  
21 seeing a slowing in their fundraising efforts, you  
22 know, phrases that are being used as "philanthropic  
23 retreat".

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: It's quite scary. Even some  
3 larger cultural organizations are feeling this  
4 pressure. Many cultural institutions are facing a  
5 dire financial situation, with some organizations  
6 being forced to lay off staff and cut down on  
7 programming or operating hours.

8 With the Council's expected assistance, as you  
9 laid out, will an additional \$45 million be enough to  
10 sustain the cultural community and to help them  
11 recover from the impacts of COVID or is more needed?

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: \$45 million is only enough  
13 with the support and partnership of the City Council.  
14 So if we have the level of support that the Council  
15 has previously provided – and then some – then we can  
16 work collaboratively and collectively to make sure  
17 that we provide the level of support to sustain our  
18 organizations during this really challenging time.

19 Your partnership, again, will be critical to  
20 ensuring that we can provide the cultural and  
21 financial health for our sector.

22 GENERAL COUNCIL POLIVY: And that partnership  
23 goes beyond just funding. We spoke about this topic  
24 at one of our prior hearings. And I think that the  
25 hearing really brought out just how dire this

1  
2 financial time is for organizations in the arts and  
3 culture.

4           So since that hearing, what the Commissioner  
5 has done is, you participated in a convening that the  
6 Commissioner put together of all of the leaders in  
7 government arts and culture across the state and the  
8 city, to make sure that everyone is on the same page,  
9 knows just how difficult this time is, and is trying  
10 to start rowing in the same direction to work  
11 collaboratively to help solve this problem.

12           Another thing that the Commissioner has done,  
13 as we promised at that hearing, is that she has  
14 started speaking to foundation leaders to try to  
15 better understand what is going on with funders and  
16 what you called the philanthropic retreat from arts  
17 and culture. And we're starting to get some answers  
18 about why that might be happening and where those  
19 dollars may be going instead. But we are committed to  
20 helping the arts and culture sector to understand  
21 this problem, to get our arms around it, to get that  
22 information out to the groups, and to be working as  
23 closely as possible with all of our government  
24 partners, because only working together as a team can  
25 we solve this problem.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I'm glad you brought up the  
3 call. You know, I realized that we need the state as  
4 well. So at that point, they had not passed the  
5 budget. We're really looking to figure out how to  
6 address the gaps and shortfalls. I appreciate your  
7 partnership and the questions you've raised. I know  
8 there's going to be testimony from our partners and  
9 allies. And looking forward to the next few weeks

10 Chair Brannan? Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Commissioner.  
12 We care very much about arts and culture in this  
13 council, and we will do everything we can to deliver  
14 the "best budget ever" on our side.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I feel very confident with  
16 that closing statement. I think I can rest well  
17 tonight knowing that I've heard it from you and our  
18 Chair. I am so happy that you were able to  
19 participate in the meeting with our city and state  
20 cultural leaders, at the state level, as well as with  
21 the Assembly and Senate, alongside NYSCA and our  
22 team. And those sorts of collaborations are what's  
23 going to keep us whole during this really trying  
24 time.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

1  
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we are going to take  
4 a half-hour break. Public testimony is not supposed  
5 to start until two o'clock. We really can't start it  
6 early. We will reconvene in about half an hour.

7 (PAUSE)

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. [GAVEL] We are now  
9 going to open up this hearing for public testimony.

10 I just need to remind members of the public  
11 that this is a formal government proceeding and that  
12 decorum shall be observed at all times. As such,  
13 members of the public shall remain silent, unless, of  
14 course, you are testifying.

15 The witness table is reserved for people who  
16 wish to testify. No video recording or photography is  
17 allowed from the witness table.

18 Members of the public may not present audio or  
19 video recordings as testimony, but you can submit  
20 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at  
21 Arms for inclusion in the final, official hearing  
22 record.

23 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, make  
24 sure you fill out one of these little appearance  
25 slips; they're at the back table with the Sergeant at

1  
2 Arms, and then just wait for us to call you. Once  
3 you're recognized, you will have two minutes to speak  
4 on today's hearing topic, either the Libraries'  
5 budget or the DCLA's budget.

6 If you have a written statement or additional  
7 testimony you wish to submit for the record, just  
8 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at  
9 Arms, and they will bring it up to us.

10 I will now call the first panel. We have  
11 Katherine Carey, John Hyslop, and George Olken.

12 (PAUSE)

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, no worries, do you  
14 want to start, John?

15 JOHN HYSLOP: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

17 JOHN HYSLOP: All right, thank you.

18 Good Afternoon, Chairs Brennan and Rivera, and  
19 Committee Members.

20 Thank you for giving us this opportunity to  
21 testify on behalf of the nearly 4,000 public library  
22 workers we represent. We cannot thank the City  
23 Council enough for their unwavering support for  
24 libraries. Under the leadership of Speaker Adrienne  
25

1  
2 Adams, our union members know that New York City's  
3 public libraries will receive Council funding.

4 We must also thank Mayor Adams for adding money  
5 to the Libraries' budgets. Without that financial  
6 commitment, our financial situation would have been  
7 even more dire. And yet, this is our problem: Our  
8 financial situation remains dire. The Mayor's  
9 proposed Executive Budget for FY 2026 remains the  
10 same as FY 2025 and is only for one year.

11 In our testimony in March, we explained the  
12 invaluable services we provide and how libraries'  
13 inconsistent funding has impacted those services.  
14 Right now, we do not have enough funding to  
15 adequately staff for six-day service. Right now,  
16 children's programs do not happen because we do not  
17 have enough staff. Right now, branches do not have  
18 enough custodians to adequately clean them. This  
19 understaffing is a result of every Mayor's  
20 inconsistent and inadequate funding of libraries.

21 Compounding this understaffing is New York  
22 City's high cost of living that crushes our members,  
23 forcing library workers to work multiple jobs and  
24 overtime and never feel financial security. Many  
25

1  
2 leave the library and the profession because they  
3 cannot afford to work on such low salaries.

4         This is devastating to many of us because our  
5 library work is so rewarding. Our members are  
6 rewarded with engagements we have with our patrons  
7 and colleagues. A Children's Librarian sees the joy  
8 on the faces of children at Toddler Time. An Adult  
9 Reference Librarian engages with an avid reader on  
10 their favorite authors. Our branch's neighbors help  
11 the custodian clean up the sidewalk. A Clerical  
12 Supervisor is thrilled to see their former page and  
13 mentee after they graduate from college. Those  
14 rewards only happen at our library branches. When a  
15 mayor inconsistently underfunds our libraries, our  
16 members suffer and our patrons – your constituents –  
17 lose.

18         The Mayor's proposed Executive Budget keeps our  
19 budget flat while costs are going up, and is not  
20 baselined. Our members will continue to suffer under  
21 New York City's unaffordability crisis and libraries'  
22 understaffing, and this does not need to happen. Our  
23 elected officials have the ability to consistently  
24 and adequately fund our libraries for us to plan our  
25 future and pay our members a living wage. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

GEORGE OLKEN: Good afternoon, Chairs Rivera and Brannan. Thank you to the Committee Members.

I'm George Olken, the President of Local 1482, the Brooklyn Public Library Workers Union. And I'm going to speak to a particular situation in Brooklyn.

As John mentioned, public libraries are understaffed, and library workers are underpaid. Based on economic contracts negotiated by DC 37 and the City, OLR issues pay orders that lay out minimum salaries for each City title. I'm a bookmobile driver. My City title is Office Associate Level 2. And so the current minimum incumbent rate for my title is \$49,014.00, and that's exactly what BPL pays me. After years of members raising concerns about irregularities, our Local found that nearly 200 union workers at BPL have been systematically underpaid, paid below the contractual minimums, *for decades*. We filed a grievance in 2023 and a second grievance in 2024 on behalf of workers in affected clerical and custodial titles.

The Library argued that the current method is how salaries have always been calculated. It's still

1 incorrect. And they've been working with us to fix  
2 it.  
3

4 Unintentional as it may be, underpayment has  
5 dire consequences; it changes the course of lives. I  
6 spoke to one member who was denied a home loan  
7 because their income was just below the eligibility  
8 threshold. That member is underpaid by \$3,000.

9 As you can imagine, members are frustrated at  
10 the slow pace of negotiations. Altogether, we're  
11 talking about more than \$250,000 in total  
12 underpayment across these workers. We're confident  
13 that salaries will be corrected before the end of the  
14 fiscal year. However, incorrectly paid workers also  
15 deserve back pay. We urge the Library to prove they  
16 value workers as much as they say they do and to make  
17 good on their commitment to workers.

18 We're supporting the Library's ask for  
19 increased funding to hire more workers, to buy books  
20 and computers, to repair old buildings, and in part  
21 to help us clear this final hurdle – to pay library  
22 workers what they've earned and (TIMER) to end this  
23 unhappy chapter in Brooklyn Public Library's history.

24 Our message is simple: pay us what we're owed.

25 Thank you for your leadership and your support.

1  
2 KATHERINE KUSIAK CAREY: Good afternoon. My name  
3 is Katherine Kusiak Carey, and I work in the  
4 Education Division at the Brooklyn Museum. I have  
5 worked at the Brooklyn Museum for eight years and am  
6 a proud member of District Council 37, Local 1502.

7 I first want to thank the Chairs of this  
8 committee for your ongoing support for our union and  
9 your support for cultural institutions and working-  
10 class New Yorkers. When Brooklyn Museum leadership  
11 attempted to lay off our union members this fiscal  
12 year, members of the City Council supported us in  
13 avoiding these layoffs. They showed their commitment  
14 to protecting Union jobs as well as supporting the  
15 arts and culture. We hope to continue collaborating,  
16 as workers and local government, to protect the  
17 artists and cultural workers who make our arts and  
18 educational institutions places where all New Yorkers  
19 can express creativity, learn, and benefit from  
20 resources and programming that enrich their lives.

21 Today, I'm asking the Council to increase  
22 funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs for  
23 the FY26 budget. I'm also here today to discuss, as  
24 an educator, how this budget affects my work and how  
25

1  
2 the museum's financial situation impacts the  
3 communities we serve.

4         In my role at the Education Division, I support  
5 the work of educators who serve over 50,000 people,  
6 including public school students, DOE educators,  
7 teens from all five boroughs, families, access  
8 audiences, as well as older adults and emerging  
9 professionals. Over the past few months, our  
10 Education team has been directed to drastically  
11 reduce programming due to decreased funding. And it's  
12 been deeply concerning to watch thriving programs  
13 that have served diverse audiences come to a halt.  
14 For example, our division has a very highly respected  
15 paid internship and fellowship program. (TIMER) We  
16 conduct targeted outreach to first-generation college  
17 students, as well as students from CUNY and SUNY,  
18 which creates a pathway for jobs in the cultural  
19 sector. For the first time in 30 years, we will not  
20 be running a fellowship program. In addition, just  
21 last June, we received an email that a federal IMLS  
22 grant was abruptly cancelled. The impact of cutting  
23 this program comes at a high cost to the museum and  
24 would reduce our internship program.

1  
2 Other education programs that have been cut  
3 include outreach for adult literacy, art-making  
4 programs, programs for adult Spanish speakers, and a  
5 reduction in the number of educators teaching K-12  
6 guided gallery visits to school groups.

7 At a time when federal cuts are forcing museums  
8 to halt programs, and educators are strained for  
9 resources, I urge the Committee to prioritize funding  
10 for cultural institutions as an investment in our  
11 city's future and ensure that our city continues to  
12 provide opportunities for arts and education  
13 programming for all New Yorkers. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank you very  
15 much, I appreciate you guys.

16 Next, we have Abby Emerson, Melody Emerson-  
17 Simpson, and Felix Emerson-Simpson.

18 (PAUSE)

19 DR. ABBY EMERSON: Hello, good afternoon, Chair  
20 Rivera and Chair Brannan. Good to see you both.

21 My name is Dr. Abby Emerson. I'm a New York  
22 City Educator, and I'm here today as a member of NYC  
23 Plan, the Public Library Action Network —a group of  
24 patrons and library workers organizing together to  
25 amplify, strengthen, and advance the futures of NYC's

1  
2 three public library systems. San Francisco's Library  
3 budget is 1.36% of its overall city budget. Chicago's  
4 Library budget is approximately 0.7% of its overall  
5 city budget. But if we take a look closer to home, at  
6 the moment our NYC Library budget is just 0.43% of  
7 the overall City budget, and that is unacceptable.

8         What I would like to ask is that as a city, we  
9 fund libraries at 0.5%, and not just this year, but  
10 every year. At NYC Plan, we feel this is a realistic  
11 number and would address the major strains the  
12 libraries are currently under. From our research and  
13 conversations with library workers, patrons, and  
14 union reps, we found some key areas of concern that a  
15 measly 0.43% can't currently address. We also just  
16 heard from them in the last panel.

17         So, committing to 0.5%, which for this coming  
18 year would translate to \$575.3 million, would be used  
19 to address these three critical areas:

20         One, the very real building upgrades that are  
21 needed, HVAC, accessibility, restrooms, et cetera.

22         Two, back pay and fair pay for library  
23 workers. The existence of out-of-date contracts and  
24 thousands of dollars in workers ' wages is frankly  
25 quite embarrassing.

1  
2 Three, additional programming for multiple  
3 populations that rely on the library to meet their  
4 very real needs - immigrants, youth, elders, unhoused  
5 folks, working adults, et cetera. My local branch is  
6 bustling and rowdy with youth after school, such as  
7 these, which is great, yet there's currently zero  
8 programming for them at this time.

9 Funding libraries at 0.5% is frankly a small  
10 ask. New Yorkers want more from their libraries,  
11 (TIMER) which are some of the only public-shared,  
12 completely free, democratic spaces we have left in  
13 the city. It would be very "punk rock", frankly, to  
14 fund them appropriately. Thank you for your time and  
15 consideration.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Any punk rock mentions  
17 will get you a long way here.

18 MELODY EMERSON-SIMPSON: Good afternoon, my name  
19 is Melody Emerson-Simpson, and I live in Brooklyn. I  
20 go to Brooklyn Brownstone School, and I'm in the  
21 Second Grade Rainbows. I am here today to talk about  
22 how library workers need to be paid more fairly, and  
23 how the elevator in my library is always closing down  
24 for repairs.

1  
2 I think the workers should be paid more so that  
3 they get enough money for how much work they do. Some  
4 workers aren't paid enough. That is unfair.

5 At the end of first grade, the library near my  
6 house was closed down for three weeks. Also, the  
7 elevator is always breaking. We need money for  
8 repairs.

9 In addition, I think we should have more Movie  
10 Days. The library needs more money for that to  
11 happen. I think libraries should have better  
12 elevators, and workers should have more money. Thank  
13 you.

14 (APPLAUSE)

15 FELIX EMERSON-SIMPSON: Hi, my name is Felix. We  
16 need more money to fix the library's elevator. We  
17 need more money for the workers. Thank you for  
18 listening.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much for  
20 your testimony.

21 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you!

22 (APPLAUSE)

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Good job, guys, thank you.  
24  
25

1  
2 Okay, now we have Stephanie Hill- Wilchfort,  
3 Gonzalo Casals, Angel Hernandez, David Freudenthal,  
4 Norah Yahya.

5 STEPHANIE HILL-WILCHFORT: Good afternoon, Chair  
6 Rivera, Chair Brannan, and Members of the Committees  
7 on Culture and Finance. Thank you so much for this  
8 opportunity to testify.

9 My name is Stephanie Hill-Wilchfort; I am the  
10 Ronay Menschel President and Director of the Museum  
11 of the City of New York. I'm also Executive Vice  
12 Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group. I'm here  
13 today to provide testimony on behalf of the CIGs, a  
14 coalition of 34 cultural institutions, located in all  
15 five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and  
16 performing arts organizations. We are testifying  
17 today to support culture for all and request a \$30  
18 million baseline increase to the DCLA adopted budget  
19 in FY26.

20 I want to start by thanking the Council for  
21 prioritizing culture, and for your strong advocacy in  
22 securing a full restoration for our institutions in  
23 FY25, and for the historic \$45 million that was  
24 baselined in the FY26 Executive Budget. While the \$45  
25 million baseline allocation stabilizes current

1  
2 funding, it does not increase the overall budget for  
3 culture. A \$30 million baseline increase would be  
4 transformative for CIGs, for DCLA, and for programs  
5 across New York City. This \$30 million would not only  
6 ensure our institutions have the resources needed to  
7 fully serve New Yorkers and attract tourists, but it  
8 would also build the City's resilience as federal  
9 policies and funding cuts threaten the viability of  
10 New York City's institutions, programs, and the  
11 livelihoods of our artists.

12 Arts and culture generate \$110 billion in  
13 economic activity annually and are vital to the  
14 city's economy. Our cultural sector is also central  
15 to the success of our city's tourism industry and  
16 workforce. The Cultural Institutions Group alone  
17 employs 15,700 full and part-time staff, of whom  
18 5,800 are union members. Furthermore, CIGs offer  
19 career pathways and training opportunities (TIMER) to  
20 more than 6,000 New Yorkers each year.

21 This is a particularly important moment for the  
22 City to support our cultural institutions. Investing  
23 in culture is investing in the heart and soul of New  
24 York. We ask the Council to baseline \$30 million for  
25

1 Culture to ensure our sector can survive and thrive.

2 Thank you so much.

3  
4 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon, my name is  
5 Angel Hernandez, and I'm Director of Government  
6 Relations for the New York Botanical Garden, a  
7 "Fungi". The recent announcement of -- oh, you got it  
8 now, thank you...

9 The recent announcement of a \$45 million  
10 baseline in the Cultural Budget marks a historic  
11 moment for DCLA. On behalf of New York Botanical  
12 Garden, I want to thank Speaker Adams, Chair Rivera,  
13 and Chair Brennan for your unwavering support and  
14 efforts in this achievement. The increase allows the  
15 Agency to make pivotal investments in our city's  
16 cultural institutions, an accomplishment that will  
17 empower these local economic engines to preserve jobs  
18 and create more opportunities for the communities  
19 they serve. After many years of advocating for a  
20 baseline, cultural institutions now focus on  
21 withstanding federal cuts as they currently grow,  
22 while inflation has rapidly swelled since the last  
23 cultural budget baseline 15 years ago. This is why I  
24 stand with my colleagues in the cultural community  
25 today and ask for your support in baselining \$30

1 million in the Cultural Budget in the upcoming fiscal  
2 year adoption.

3  
4 A baseline would make an economic impact that  
5 can bring our city's cultural institutions to a  
6 steadfast position. At NYBG, for instance, our school  
7 partnership programs at the Edible Academy and  
8 Children's Adventure Garden would see an increase in  
9 staff and resource capacity to serve more Bronx  
10 Public School Students.

11 We also advocate with our side network  
12 coalition colleagues to increase the initiative's  
13 funding with a \$30 million baseline, so that paid  
14 internships for city high school students can  
15 increase threefold from previous fiscal years. Yet a  
16 full baseline not only helps extend and expand  
17 current initiatives at NYBG, but it can also help  
18 create new ones as well. The yet to be instituted  
19 Rooted In Accessibility Initiative, which funds the  
20 enhancement and expansion of accessibility (TIMER)  
21 programming at NYBG, along with three other CIG  
22 botanical gardens, can become a reality.

23 I want to conclude this testimony by extending  
24 an invitation to you all to visit our latest summer  
25 installment, Van Gogh's Flowers, which opens this

1 week. With only a baseline of \$30 million in FY26,  
2 New York Botanical Garden is allowed to continue its  
3 mission of public engagement on this level, despite  
4 the obstacles that lie ahead. Thank you very much.

5  
6 NORAH YAHYA: Good afternoon, I'm Norah Yahya,  
7 the Senior Government Affairs Officer at The Met  
8 Museum and the Manhattan Vice Chair of the Cultural  
9 Institutions Group. Thank you, Chair Brannan, Chair  
10 Rivera, and Council Member Gale Brewer, for the  
11 opportunity to testify today.

12 I'm going to skip some of the history here, and  
13 first just say, thank you, for this historic  
14 recognition, and the value that you recognize that  
15 culture was bringing to our city by baselining the  
16 \$45 million in the Executive Budget. As a former  
17 Finance Analyst, I remember seeing the budget  
18 decimated, so this is truly historic and a profound  
19 moment for us, and I'm glad I'm here to see this  
20 symbolic investment. In addition to that, I just want  
21 to continue to advocate for the additional \$30  
22 million that we are looking for in the budget  
23 adoption. We are grateful for the \$45 million, but it  
24 does not account for inflation and the things that we  
25 need in order to be sustainable and provide all the

1  
2 services that our cultural institutions provide  
3 across the city.

4 Like many of our peer institutions, the Met  
5 continues to face lasting challenges brought on by  
6 the pandemic and subsequent global and economic  
7 disruptions. While we are heartened by the resurgence  
8 of tourism, the landscape has shifted. For example,  
9 the Met had 5.6 million visitors last year, with 2.5  
10 million of them being New Yorkers.

11 We are a pay-as-you-wish institution. You can  
12 come in, you can pay a penny, or you can pay \$5, up  
13 to your choice. Our New Yorkers are not our visitors  
14 that generate revenue for us – it's our international  
15 visitors, and not only has that number not rebounded  
16 from the pandemic, but it has also shifted and  
17 changed. With the war in Ukraine, it's made traveling  
18 from Asia even more difficult. We have completely  
19 lost our Asian market, and they were some of our  
20 biggest spenders, quite frankly, in the museum. In  
21 addition to that, with tensions now with Canada,  
22 Mexico, and the EU, it's already having a chilling  
23 effect on travel raising real concerns for our future  
24 audiences, so we're already starting to see a  
25 decrease in visitation from our Canadian visitors,

1  
2 which is really frightening for us in what the future  
3 looks like for our revenue.

4 I will just close by, again, (TIMER) thanking  
5 you all in this moment of both profound challenge and  
6 great potential, we ask for your continued support  
7 and understanding that the arts are not a luxury, but  
8 they are essential to this city.

9 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Chair Brannan, Chair Rivera,  
10 Council Member Brewer, thank you all for the  
11 opportunity to testify.

12 I'm David Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall. I'm  
13 here to reinforce and uplift the support of the field  
14 by asking for \$75 million to be baselined in the  
15 Cultural Affairs Budget this year. We are thrilled,  
16 we join our colleagues in our great happiness in the  
17 inclusion of the baselining of \$45 million.

18 This year's budget is a historic move, but the  
19 work is not done. And we urge the Council to partner  
20 with the Administration to get us to that last leg to  
21 get us there. So important. You all know the value of  
22 what culture does, how essential it is to our city. I  
23 don't need to repeat those words that have been said.

24 I'm glad to give some examples of some of the  
25 things that Carnegie Hall does in this space and to

1  
2 speak about some of the pressures that we have  
3 experienced here that demonstrate the challenges that  
4 the field as a whole has seen.

5 I also will take this opportunity to uplift  
6 Carnegie Hall's own request before the Council around  
7 our work with the City's human services agencies,  
8 which I think is extremely typical of the way that  
9 CIGs and the cultural community really leans in to  
10 support New Yorkers and the way that arts, in our  
11 case music, can be an essential piece of building  
12 stronger communities, better lives for New Yorkers,  
13 especially those in the most challenging  
14 circumstances.

15 I'm sure that my colleagues have spoken to the  
16 challenges that the city is facing, that we as  
17 cultural institutions are facing around these federal  
18 cuts for Carnegie Hall. There's about \$1.7 million  
19 that we've already lost (TIMER) or are significantly  
20 at risk. The challenges are real, and you have always  
21 -- you, the Council, have always been in culture's  
22 corner. It's fantastic that the Administration has  
23 done what it's done. You know, you've always been  
24 fighting for us, and we're so grateful for all you've  
25

1 done. We ask for your help to get us to this last  
2  
3 mile.

4 GONZALO CASALS: Thank you, David.

5 Dear Chair Rivera, Chair Brennan, and Members  
6 of the Committee, thank you so much for allowing me  
7 to testify today. Gonzalo Casals, I'm the Co-Director  
8 of the Culture and Arts Policy Institute, and I'm  
9 also currently the Interim Chief Operating Officer of  
10 El Museo del Barrio.

11 I want to acknowledge the Administration's  
12 listening to our calls for historic baselining. But  
13 as my colleagues have said, and you're gonna hear  
14 over and over again, that is long overdue stability,  
15 but it does not bring growth. And I'm gonna go a  
16 little off the script of the written testimony that I  
17 present. Because I think I should be speaking not  
18 only about the work of El Museo, but also about the  
19 work of the whole sector. In particular, El Museo is  
20 part of the Latinx Network, 50+ Latinx organizations  
21 in the city. Probably we're the largest one, and  
22 because we're the largest one, I feel the  
23 responsibility to advocate for all Latinx  
24 organizations and BIPOC organizations. And of the  
25 many different aspects of this perfect storm in which

1 we're suffering in the cultural sector, the loss of  
2 \$32 million in federal support has deepened  
3 longstanding inequities in the sector. Latinx and  
4 BIPOC organizations that are rooted and accountable  
5 to their communities have historically received 50%  
6 to 60% less money from individual donor contributions  
7 compared to what we call predominantly white  
8 institutions. And this apparently reflects the  
9 systemic inequities in philanthropy giving, with  
10 wealth and networks being racialized. As a result of  
11 this, many organizations depend almost entirely, if  
12 not exclusively, on government funding. So, when you  
13 remove 25% to 30% of all government funding available  
14 through the City, State, and Federal Government, that  
15 gap deepens.

17 And I want to be clear that it just depends  
18 because you only relied on one source of revenue. And  
19 I want to be clear, all cultural (TIMER)  
20 organizations in the sector are hurting -- and I'm  
21 finishing with this -- every single one. That said,  
22 as the City steps in with support, it's critical that  
23 the resource is distributed equitably. Right? Taking  
24 into account the disparate impact that the withdrawal  
25 of federal funding has across the sector.

1  
2 I support the additional \$30 million baseline  
3 requested, as the sector has. And I thank you for all  
4 your support for the cultural sector.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I just wanted to thank you  
6 all for the work that you're doing in terms of  
7 diversity, I guess, inclusivity, whether it's -- I  
8 know you're doing [Martin] Wong Graffiti, and the  
9 Children's Adventure Gardens, Superfine. Carnegie  
10 Hall had Ivy Queen, the queen of reggaeton.

11 (LAUGHTER) Okay? And I have to say, El Museo and the  
12 Candida Alvarez Exhibit are wonderful. So I want to  
13 thank you all for what you're doing for New York  
14 City. And I will be sure to fight for you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

16 Okay, our next panel is Constance Lesold, Carol  
17 Benovic-Bradley, Elizabeth Bevington, Melissa  
18 Peralta, and Juanita James.

19 JUANITA JAMES: Good afternoon, Chairs and  
20 Council. Thank you for this opportunity to speak  
21 today.

22 My name is Juanita James, and I've proudly  
23 served the Brooklyn Public Library for the past 25  
24 years. Currently, I'm a branch manager at Washington  
25 Irving, and I speak on behalf of not my branch, but

1  
2 also dedicated staff, families, students, and seniors  
3 who rely on our services every day no matter what.

4       As a branch manager, I often step in multiple  
5 shifts, sometimes closing and opening branches with  
6 staff for days at a time. When staff take their well-  
7 earned vacations or call out sick, I scramble to keep  
8 our doors open. In some cases, I have to return to  
9 work on my own time -- I return right after my own  
10 time off to ensure weekend coverage. This is not  
11 sustainable. It's frustrating. It's stressful. And  
12 quite frankly, it's unfair to our staff and the  
13 public who expect and deserve consistent, high-  
14 quality services.

15       Stretching our workforce to the brink impacts  
16 everything from programming to safety and atmosphere  
17 in our spaces. That's why I'm urging you today to  
18 restore Brooklyn Public Library's budget -- \$44.8  
19 million in the unmet needs -- so we can continue our  
20 services to the public at the standard that they  
21 deserve. By restoring this funding, we can maintain  
22 adequate staffing levels, reduce burnout, and ensure  
23 that every branch can open and close safely and  
24 reliably. It will also allow us to keep offering  
25

1 educational and cultural programs that so many  
2 Brooklynites depend on.

3  
4 Thank you (TIMER) for your time, attention, and  
5 commitment to the public library. With your support,  
6 I know that we can continue with our communities that  
7 need it the most and do it with excellence. Thank  
8 you.

9 MELISSA PERALTA: Good afternoon, and thank you  
10 for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the  
11 Brooklyn Public Library.

12 My name is Melissa Peralta; I'm a child  
13 librarian. I've only been at the Washington Irving  
14 branch for four months, but in a short time, I've met  
15 so many families, students, and newcomers who rely on  
16 us in a deeply personal way. Access to free  
17 resources, educational support, and welcoming spaces  
18 can make a profound difference in people's lives, and  
19 I see it every single day. Our branch offers a range  
20 of well-attended programs, including tech workshops  
21 for teens, English classes for adults, and regular  
22 story times for families. Our patrons include  
23 students from nearby schools, immigrant families, and  
24 long-time residents, each with their own unique  
25 needs.

1  
2 As a child librarian, I had the privilege of  
3 connecting with many of them. One mom recently told  
4 me she brings her children every weekend, not just  
5 for books but in her words, "It's just the one place  
6 where they all feel like they belong." Unfortunately,  
7 we're not able to meet the growing demand for these  
8 programs. We've had to turn down opportunities to  
9 host additional story times and school visits, not  
10 because there's no interest in them, but because we  
11 don't have enough staffing to support them. To  
12 continue serving the community effectively, we need  
13 to increase funding for additional staff and more  
14 programs - programs that respond directly to what our  
15 patrons are requesting. With additional support, we  
16 can create opportunities to empower children, support  
17 immigrant families, and strengthen the neighborhood  
18 as a whole.

19 Thank you for your time, consideration, and  
20 commitment to supporting your local libraries. When  
21 you invest in libraries, you're investing in the  
22 children, families, and neighbors who count on us  
23 every day.

24 ELIZABETH BEVINGTON: Good afternoon, and thank  
25 you again for the privilege of speaking to you today.

1  
2 My name is Elizabeth Bevington; I am a Local 1930  
3 Library Workers Guild Board Member and a resident of  
4 Council District 2.

5 I want to speak today about the City's  
6 affordability crisis and its impact on library  
7 workers and our patrons. That's specifically to  
8 underscore why baselining our budget and increasing  
9 funding for libraries and cultural institutions is so  
10 important.

11 Earlier, one of you asked about the obstacles  
12 to recruiting and retaining staff at the libraries.  
13 Most library workers and people considering library  
14 work will tell you it is a salary. I mentioned that I  
15 am a District 2 resident, and that's possible only  
16 because I live in a three-income household. My  
17 partner has two jobs: one as adjunct faculty at New  
18 York City University and another at a different  
19 cultural institution. It is imperative that library  
20 workers have competitive salaries, so that we can  
21 live in New York City, and so that library systems  
22 can be responsive to the unique needs of our  
23 communities.

24 I work in District Council 1, at the Chatham  
25 Square branch of the New York Public Library. Located

1  
2 in Chinatown, between the Manhattan Bridge and the  
3 Bowery, the COVID-19 pandemic especially hard hit it  
4 in myriad ways, and recovery has been slow. But we  
5 are once again one of the busiest branches, with  
6 double or more the program attendance, circulation,  
7 through-the-door visits, and computer usage of, the  
8 systemwide average for the New York Public Library.

9 Our service area median income is \$39,123. Our  
10 patrons are among the most impacted by housing  
11 shortages and cuts to social services. Library  
12 services often (TIMER) fill the gap with inadequate  
13 resources. We need to be able to recruit and retain  
14 staff who are representative of our neighborhood,  
15 and, perhaps most importantly, who can speak their  
16 languages. More than half of our staff speak at least  
17 one dialect of Chinese, but we cannot be sure we  
18 could replace them without being able to pay  
19 multilingual library workers what they are due. Thank  
20 you for your time.

21 CAROL BENOVIC-BRADLEY: Good afternoon, Chairs  
22 Brannan and Rivera, and esteemed Council Members.

23 My name is Carol Benovic-Bradley, and I've been  
24 visiting libraries in New York City since I was a  
25 child. Today, I live in Ridgewood, Queens, where I

1  
2 frequent the Ridgewood branch of Queens Public  
3 Library. I also serve as Vice President of the  
4 Friends of Ridgewood Library.

5 Libraries played a foundational role in shaping  
6 my love of reading, my sense of community, and my  
7 deep appreciation for our amazing city. As a child,  
8 it began with books. I was the kind of kid who could  
9 finish a book in an afternoon, so libraries really  
10 helped keep our book spending in check. And riding  
11 the bus to Brooklyn Central Branch with my older  
12 sister always felt like an adventure, a journey  
13 across the borough to a magical world filled with  
14 books and calm.

15 As an adult, libraries have come to mean even  
16 more. I love the periodical and newspaper collection,  
17 and I frequently use the Libby app, as well as the  
18 printing services. And, yes, the library still helps  
19 me keep my book spending in check.

20 But what I've grown to appreciate most is the  
21 library as a community space. It's a place to learn  
22 about local writers, to enjoy live music and the  
23 arts, and to connect with my neighbors.

24 At the Ridgewood branch last November, we  
25 hosted a holiday Friendsgiving dinner, sharing a hot

1 meal and conversation with over 40 neighbors  
2 attending. We've given away hundreds of books,  
3 supporting literacy across all ages with comics,  
4 popular novels, and titles that've been challenged or  
5 banned. As a Friend of Ridgewood Library, I've made  
6 real friendships. I've helped care for our library's  
7 garden, creating a peaceful oasis for visitors. I've  
8 played bingo, done crafts, and attended events hosted  
9 by other local groups, all right at my branch. I was  
10 able to attend the opening of the new Far Rockaway  
11 branch and celebrate the resources, events, and sense  
12 of community it offers. I have a network of neighbors  
13 whom I can read with, trade books with, and who I  
14 call friends. I'm endlessly grateful for these  
15 experiences and relationships and for everything that  
16 (TIMER) libraries offer. It's my greatest wish that  
17 all New Yorkers and visitors to our city get to  
18 experience all that libraries have to offer. This is  
19 exactly why our libraries need more funding. It is my  
20 dream to see all branches open seven days a week,  
21 where extended hours are considered standard, where  
22 our libraries can plan for the future with confidence  
23 and invest in staff and collections, where facilities  
24 don't just keep up, but thrive, offering modern  
25

1 amenities that reflect the needs of the communities  
2 they serve.  
3

4 Investing in our libraries is investing in  
5 people, in our collective future, and in the strength  
6 of our communities. Please support QPL, BPL, and New  
7 York Public Library with increased funding so they  
8 can continue their efforts to promote not just  
9 reading, but learning, service, and community. Thank  
10 you.

11 CONSTANCE LESOLD: My name is Constance Lesold,  
12 and I thank you for all the wonderful work you're  
13 doing on behalf of the City. I thank you for finally  
14 getting the Bedford branch of the library open. I  
15 attended the opening, and it was absolutely  
16 wonderful. I look forward to using it as a space to  
17 encourage other community activities that are greatly  
18 needed.

19 I am very concerned that we don't have enough  
20 free activities for the underserved populations of  
21 the city, both those who've been here a long time and  
22 the immigrants who are here.

23 My husband's family were immigrants from  
24 Hitler's Germany, and they used, for example, the  
25 Brooklyn Botanic Gardens. In fact, my father-in-law

1  
2 said that was his "synagogue". They used it for  
3 relaxation and to keep their minds and souls together  
4 through that hard time.

5 I have sponsored the Committee of 100 to make  
6 the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens free again for several  
7 years. I'm also glad to remind you that during the  
8 pandemic, the gardens, without a director at the  
9 time, decided to offer a community pass, allowing  
10 anyone to visit for free. However, people are not  
11 aware of this yet. It is not publicized enough. I  
12 would ask all the libraries to publicize that fact,  
13 that you can go for free if you ask for a community  
14 pass. I can't say how important that is.

15 The Brooklyn Children's Museum is in need of  
16 support so (TIMER) that it can have many more free  
17 activities. We cannot ignore the fact that people  
18 just don't have any extra money now. And the City has  
19 to fill in with assistance for them to give their  
20 communities, their families, what they need to carry  
21 on and become productive citizens. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much, thank  
23 you all.

1  
2 Our next panel features Francine Garber-Cohen,  
3 Ariel Savransky, Kristin Barrett, Marren Berthelsen,  
4 and Miranda Massie.

5 MARREN BERTHELSEN: I'm Maren Berthelsen, Deputy  
6 Director of Development at Symphony Space. And on  
7 behalf of our Executive Director, Kathy Landau, I'd  
8 like to express my deepest appreciation to Chair  
9 Rivera and Chair Brannan, as well as to your support  
10 of the arts in New York City.

11 We were thrilled that the proposed Executive  
12 Budget provides \$23.5 million for cultural  
13 development funding and that the baseline funding for  
14 arts education was restored. It shows, once again,  
15 that New York leads the nation in demonstrating the  
16 importance of the arts in both strengthening  
17 communities and civil society.

18 This Council, and this Committee in particular,  
19 understand that the arts and artists matter. Every  
20 story matters, every student matters, and every  
21 dollar matters and makes a difference. Generation  
22 after generation, we see this on our stages and in  
23 our classrooms. From audience members who attend our  
24 literary, music, and film programs at 95th and  
25 Broadway, to the thousands of New York City students,

1 children, and adults who participate in our arts  
2 education and literacy programs, we witness the power  
3 of the arts to transform lives.  
4

5 After a three-night residency at Symphony  
6 Space, author and musician James McBride shared that,  
7 "The humble space at the corner of 95th and Broadway  
8 has stood as a shining lighthouse of what art means  
9 and should mean to the wider world. It shows the  
10 diversity of hope, aspiration, and opinion that we  
11 should all aspire to. It is our treasure, a New York  
12 special," and that is true of so many of our cultural  
13 partners.

14 Now more than ever, it is up to all of us to  
15 ensure that the arts continue to enlighten,  
16 illuminate, and inspire as they have throughout  
17 history, that they remain a source of celebration, of  
18 refuge, of resistance, acceptance, and evidence of  
19 our shared humanity. An increase in baseline funding  
20 would go so much farther toward furthering those  
21 goals.

22 With your committee and the City Council  
23 leading the way, we know that New York will remain  
24 the beacon for artists, audiences, and community that  
25 it's always been. Thank you for your time.

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CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

ARIEL SAVRANSKY: Thank you, Chair Rivera, Chair Brannan, and Members of the Committee, for this opportunity to share testimony. My name is Ariel Savransky, and I am the Director of Government and Community Relations at the 92nd Street Y. Since 92nd Street Y's founding, more than 150 years ago, we have offered services for people of diverse racial, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

I want to start by thanking the Council and the Administration for allocating an additional \$45 million to the baseline funding for DCLA. We are also honored that the City Council Members, again, awarded CASA and SU-CASA partnerships to us during FY25.

In FY25, we are providing eight free CASA programs in schools throughout the city, including those focused on creative movement, Cuban music, American rhythm and blues, and Afro Brazilian percussion. We hope to expand in FY26 and deepen our relationships with additional schools throughout the city.

We are also grateful for our SU-CASA funding, allowing us to provide choral arts instruction at Roosevelt Island Senior Center. We hope to continue

1  
2 this program in FY26 with the support of the New York  
3 City Council.

4 Our arts programs reach over 7,000 public  
5 school students and teachers in 58 schools across all  
6 five boroughs of New York City. Programming offers  
7 opportunities for in-depth classroom visits from top  
8 teaching artists and innovative curriculum design, as  
9 well as interaction with 92nd Street Y main stage  
10 talent from around the world. Additionally, it  
11 provides unparalleled access to professional  
12 internships and other early career opportunities. We  
13 have built strong collaborations with many schools,  
14 and we understand the unique needs of each school  
15 population.

16 Public funding is crucial for our organization,  
17 and we are committed to using this funding to help  
18 ensure students can experience high-quality arts  
19 education in their classroom and the thrill of live  
20 performances at our global community center.

21 Thank you so much for your support and for the  
22 opportunity (TIMER) to testify.

23 KRISTEN BARRETT: Good afternoon. I'm Kristen  
24 Barrett, Vice President of Development for New 42,  
25 New 42nd Street. Thank you very much for welcoming

1  
2 all of us today and for your tireless efforts to grow  
3 city funding for cultural organizations.

4 As we all know, the arts and culture sector  
5 exists at the very heart of our city, and meaningful  
6 funding is critical. The power of the arts can be  
7 transformative, expanding a child's socioemotional  
8 development and unlocking their creative potential.

9 Many young New Yorkers have had their first  
10 experience with live performance at our new Victory  
11 Theater. One of our partnering teachers recently  
12 shared, "None of my students have ever been to a  
13 theater before. Some of them had never even taken the  
14 train until today. This was so exciting for us."

15 Each year, we partner with over 130 schools  
16 throughout the five boroughs for in-classroom arts  
17 education, and we welcome 19,000 students to the  
18 theater with a highly subsidized \$2 ticket. We have  
19 also provided 3,000 free tickets to children and  
20 families in NYCHA housing.

21 These programs, among others, rely on City  
22 funding. At New 42, reductions in our Department of  
23 Cultural Affairs allocation and the loss of Speaker  
24 Initiative funding in recent years have strained our  
25 already limited resources, making it difficult to

1 think expansively and sustainably about how we invite  
2 all New Yorkers to engage with the arts. Our federal  
3 support was also cut this month when the NEA withdrew  
4 its approved funding recommendation for one of our  
5 productions.  
6

7 I urge the City Council to fight for essential  
8 cultural funding on behalf of New 42 and the many  
9 organizations that make up the cultural community  
10 here in New York City.

11 And I thank you very, very much for ensuring  
12 that New Yorkers of all ages have access to world-  
13 class performing arts. Thank you.

14 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Good afternoon, Council  
15 Members.

16 My name is Francine Garber-Cohen, President and  
17 Producer of Regina Opera Company, which has offered  
18 year-round, fully staged operas, and ticketed and  
19 free concerts in Southwest Brooklyn for 55 years,  
20 including 13 years in Sunset Park, and also  
21 performing in Bay Ridge. At these performances,  
22 thousands of Brooklyn residents, over two-thirds of  
23 whom are senior citizens, many of them retirees on  
24 fixed incomes, can meet other music lovers, getting  
25 them out of their homes where many live alone. We not

1  
2 only provide entertainment to help these people,  
3 these grandmas and grandpas feel happy listening to  
4 our music, but we also help to combat the scourge of  
5 loneliness and feelings of isolation. Music is  
6 medicine. But to provide these services, Regina  
7 Opera, like other arts organizations, needs increased  
8 support from New York City.

9 We at Regina Opera thank you for the baseline  
10 of \$45 million in the Executive Budget in Fiscal Year  
11 2026. And now, due to the extreme losses caused by  
12 the cuts to federal funding, we must request an  
13 additional \$30 million. The extra support is  
14 especially needed to increase the Department of  
15 Cultural Affairs' available funds.

16 I want to point out that these are high-  
17 velocity dollars. The money goes directly into the  
18 hands of staff members and arts workers who spend it  
19 immediately on food, rent, taxes, and other  
20 necessities, which help local businesses. (TIMER)

21 Investment in the arts is an investment in New  
22 York City. Thank you.

23 MIRANDA MASSIE: Chair Brannan, Chair Rivera, I  
24 want to join my colleagues in thanking you all for  
25 your leadership on culture and your civic leadership

1  
2 for all New Yorkers. It's very much noted and  
3 appreciated, especially now. This is a time when we  
4 need local leadership, and it is also a time when we  
5 need cultural leadership. We need leadership that is  
6 sound in culture, which has historically been and  
7 continues to be a real strength here in New York  
8 City.

9 My name is Miranda Massie, and I'm the Director  
10 of the Climate Museum, which is a pretty new, and a  
11 member of New York City's cultural community – we got  
12 started in 2018. Chair Brannen, you were one of the  
13 members who supported us early on. Thank you again  
14 for that.

15 Thanks largely to the Department of Cultural  
16 Affairs and the engagement and support of different  
17 members of the City Council, we were able to make it  
18 through the pandemic as a fledgling organization. And  
19 in the brief time that we've been doing public  
20 programming, we've presented hundreds of public  
21 events, and 17 different exhibitions, many with  
22 esteemed partners, who are represented in the  
23 testimony today, from across the city in every  
24 borough. And we've gotten to a point where we're  
25 gonna have a permanent home in 2029 as the cultural

1 anchor of a new development on the Far West Side. And  
2 most of the capital requirements associated with that  
3 permanent home will be covered by our real estate  
4 partners, Moinian, Boston Properties, and BRP. But  
5 some of them we'll need to step up on ourselves.  
6

7 So I want to elevate for your attention  
8 \$100,000 Speaker request that we've made  
9 strategically to start to establish eligibility for  
10 requesting capital funds from the City in the future  
11 down the road. Because, of course, while the property  
12 that we're gonna be located on is owned by New York  
13 State, our heart lies very much with New York City,  
14 and we want to partner with the City in creating the  
15 work that we're (TIMER) going be presenting to the  
16 community of New York City. And the fundamental  
17 impulse of that work, just to close, is to use the  
18 arts and culture to let everybody know about all the  
19 meaningful civic actions they can take in relation to  
20 climate and all the ways it's touching our lives. So  
21 we are kind of at the intersection of New York City's  
22 climate leadership and our cultural leadership.

23 And again, we want to thank you for putting us  
24 at that nexus point. Thank you all.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Kristin, can I just ask,  
3 the NEA Grant that you mentioned, how much was it  
4 worth?

5 KRISTINE BARRETT: Ours was a \$15,000 grant for  
6 a production that has already happened. So we spent,  
7 and then we were cut out, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, guys. Thank you  
9 all very much.

10 Okay, now we have Jessica Soto, Christina Li,  
11 Maisie Carroll, Sauda Tasnim, and Johny Garcia  
12 Alexander.

13 (PAUSE)

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, who wants to start?  
15 Start from my left, your right. Just turn your mic  
16 on.

17 MAISIE CAROLL: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
18 Maisie Carroll, and I'm a BookMatch Teen at the  
19 Brooklyn Public Library. We're a group of teenagers  
20 who run a program that provides book recommendations  
21 to other teenagers. I've been part of BookMatch Teen  
22 for two years, and I love it so much. Seeing this  
23 rare connection that the library creates is magical.  
24 Through this program, I have connected with so many  
25 people. I've even interviewed a five-year-old boy

1  
2 about his book interests, which turned out to be the  
3 horror series "Five Nights at Freddy's". Then my  
4 friends and I recommended a collection of creepy  
5 children's books and graphic novels to him, which he  
6 excitedly shared with his parents and little brother.

7 I want to share with you a few moments of how  
8 the library has helped me connect with other readers.  
9 So many people who write to us don't have much to say  
10 about the books they like. They give us video games,  
11 music, and movies, and then we give them books,  
12 hoping to inspire reading amongst kids who don't  
13 enjoy it as much as we book-matched teens. I mean,  
14 what's a better way to start reading again than being  
15 given a book that is perfect for you?

16 One example is a form sent by Rachel. Rachel  
17 gave us a list of video games that she liked. I  
18 recommended "Nimona" by N.D. Stevenson wrote, "This  
19 is a fun graphic novel that has the action,  
20 adventure, and fantasy of many video games like the  
21 ones you mentioned. It also has a movie adaptation as  
22 a plus. I found that's a great way to get kids  
23 interested."

24 I also messaged a girl named Cheyenne who was  
25 losing interest in fantasy books and was looking for

1  
2 something else to read. I recommended her "Where I  
3 End and You Begin" by Preston Norton. And I wrote  
4 her, "This is the interesting and fun plot of many of  
5 the books and authors you mentioned, along with the  
6 same humor and romance. You did mention that you are  
7 not as into fantasy as you used to be, but I hope  
8 that you are able to enjoy this light fantasy in this  
9 book and appreciate how it is a tool to tell a much  
10 smaller story."

11 I hope these examples can show (TIMER) how we  
12 have used the tools that the Brooklyn Public Library  
13 has given us to inspire and connect with readers.  
14 Inspiring readers and connecting with other people in  
15 our community is what the library stands for. That's  
16 why I was so eager to come here today and share with  
17 you all why the library is so important to us  
18 teenagers. It gives teens like me the opportunities,  
19 the passion we have for books and reading, and the  
20 chance to connect with other people interested in  
21 reading across the city. It has allowed us to promote  
22 reading and literacy and spread the love for books in  
23 a way that genuinely allows people to find the books  
24 that work for them. Thank you.

1  
2           JOHNY GARCIA ALEXANDER: Good afternoon,  
3 everyone. It's so good to be here with you all. My  
4 name is Johnny Alexander Garcia; I'm a Teen Techie  
5 Intern at Brooklyn Public Library.

6           I'd like first to take a moment and say thank  
7 you to the NYC City Council and the Brooklyn Public  
8 Library for the opportunity to be here today. It is  
9 an honor to be able to advocate for such an important  
10 part of so many lives.

11           The library has always been a core part of not  
12 only my life but also my family's history. It has  
13 been passed down through generations as a valuable  
14 place for recreation and education. My mother  
15 introduced me to the library when I was little, just  
16 like how my grandparents introduced her when she was  
17 little. It has provided valuable opportunities and  
18 has been an essential safe space for all of us.

19           For many communities, including homeschoolers  
20 such as myself, libraries are invaluable resources to  
21 promote and support inclusive social and mental  
22 wellness while equally helping us develop our  
23 personal, social, academic, and professional skills.

24           Libraries fill gaps in our lives in so many  
25 ways, and I speak from experience. My sister would

1  
2 walk with me to the library for art and gaming  
3 events. There, I'd be able to socialize and spend  
4 time with fellow community members my age, as  
5 together we enjoyed all the wonderful activities  
6 available in our library.

7         Additionally, my parents take me to the library  
8 frequently. As aforementioned, it's part of our  
9 family tradition. They take time out of their busy  
10 schedules for us to spend quality time together,  
11 exploring and participating in library activities,  
12 while borrowing and enriching books – books that have  
13 helped me grow as a person, and books by authors who  
14 have helped broaden my perspective, setting examples,  
15 and providing guidance for making it through life's  
16 hardships.

17         I now, like my siblings have before me,  
18 volunteer and intern at the library. It has been an  
19 amazing, fruitful experience meeting so many diverse  
20 people along the way. Part of my life is continuously  
21 navigating substantial community resources and  
22 opportunities at local libraries, opportunities that  
23 I simply may not have had the chance to experience  
24 otherwise.

1  
2 My first experience working as a volunteer was  
3 at Brooklyn Central's Business and Career Center.

4 There, I was able to help people with their resumes  
5 and job searching. It was such a fulfilling  
6 experience being able to give back. It helped me get  
7 acquainted with fellow members of our community,  
8 while developing my social skills, a skill I needed  
9 support with prior to signing up. (TIMER)

10 After being assigned to a branch, I was able to  
11 participate in FIRST LEGO League. I was part of a  
12 team full of bright, inspiring individuals. We  
13 learned important soft skills in coding and robotics.

14 I'm grateful for the library being such an  
15 important pillar in our lives and communities. This  
16 is only my story. There are countless other New  
17 Yorkers who've had wonderful, life-changing  
18 experiences with their local libraries. I humbly ask  
19 for your continuous support of these invaluable  
20 resources. In the times we live in, the library has  
21 become even more essential in creating a safe space  
22 for people who direly need it.

23 In conclusion, a budget increase would be a net  
24 positive for everyone in New York City. When making  
25 this important decision, we hope you take not only

1  
2 our stories into consideration, but also the  
3 experiences of all of our fellow New Yorkers who hold  
4 the library near and dear to their heart and lives.

5         Once again, I would like to thank the City  
6 Council and Brooklyn Public Library for letting me be  
7 here with you all and speak on a matter which I hold  
8 incredibly close to my heart.

9         Thank you all for listening. I wish you all a  
10 blessed day.

11         SAUDA TASNIM: Good afternoon, everyone, thank  
12 you so much for this opportunity, it's a pleasure to  
13 be with you all.

14         I am Sauda Tasnim. I have been an intern at the  
15 Saratoga Branch of the Brooklyn Public Library since  
16 January of this year. I'm a Librarians of Tomorrow  
17 intern, and since the beginning of the year, I've  
18 learned tremendously about various aspects of the  
19 library as an intern that the school couldn't have  
20 taught me in any other way. I have the fortune to  
21 work with an incredible mentor, amazing staff  
22 members, and peers whom I met through the library.

23         It wasn't the actual small task of an intern  
24 that made this experience so memorable for me. It was  
25 the connection, the daily conversations I would have

1  
2 with people, the guidance they provided me, and all  
3 the amazing experiences —my favorite being learning  
4 how to garden in my branch's backyard.

5       Throughout the months, I've had the opportunity  
6 to visit a lot of field trips, including the Morgan  
7 Library Museum and Book Ops, to see the logistics and  
8 behind the scenes of how books end up in libraries.  
9 Those were experiences and knowledge I couldn't have  
10 found anywhere else. I'm so grateful to the Brooklyn  
11 Public Library for having all these opportunities for  
12 us young adults.

13       And even for teenagers who are not interns, I  
14 believe libraries are still a great place and  
15 resource. It's a place surrounded by knowledge and an  
16 understanding community. And it's especially  
17 important that in this era, where everything is  
18 slowly becoming online, we keep the importance and  
19 cultures of libraries alive.

20       Libraries are not just bookkeepers, but they  
21 are filled with unique experiences and people that  
22 young people wouldn't find anywhere else. My  
23 experience there has impacted my personal goals, my  
24 career, and my college goals, and opened me up to so  
25

1 much more opportunity. It is only through the library  
2 that I was able to have all of that.  
3

4 My ask would be that you consider libraries as  
5 a more important pillar of society and invest more in  
6 them, so they can continue their programs and work  
7 that support and guide young adults just like me.  
8 Thank you so much again.

9 CHRISTINA LI: Good afternoon. My name is  
10 Christina Li; I thank you for granting me the  
11 privilege today to speak on an issue that is deeply  
12 personal, yet imperative across various boroughs –  
13 the significance of sustained funding for public  
14 libraries.

15 We often uphold public education as the  
16 foundation of literacy, creativity, and knowledgeable  
17 ideas. But as with any structure, the foundation  
18 alone is not enough. A child's intellectual and  
19 emotional development demands upskilling and  
20 enrichment. This is where public libraries step in.  
21 Where education offers a framework, the library  
22 offers freedom to explore, to question, and to grow.

23 Consider this: A child may be able to learn to  
24 read in a classroom, but it's often in the library  
25 where that reading turns into passion. Exposure to a

1 wide selection of texts cultivates transformation.

2 This leads to greater academic success, higher  
3 empathy, and strong communication skills.

4 The library is where the idea becomes  
5 accessible to all, not just to those with economic  
6 means. Let's not forget the free programs that are  
7 offered, designed to meet the developmental needs of  
8 the youth. I have had the privilege of working within  
9 such programs, and I can tell you firsthand that the  
10 programs offered extensive joy to them. They ignite  
11 an imagination, sharpen motor skills, and encourage  
12 creativity. Yet the truth is stark. Many parents are  
13 unable to supplement their children's education, not  
14 due to a lack of trying, but rather to a lack of  
15 resources. I speak with conviction because I do not  
16 approach this from a distance. I sought refuge in the  
17 books, programs, and librarians who never diminished  
18 my opinions. The library is not just a place; it is a  
19 sanctuary. We live in an economy where full-time  
20 employment no longer guarantees financial stability.  
21 For these families, the public library is not simply  
22 helpful; it is essential.

23 To underfund our public libraries is to incur a  
24 long-term social cost. It's a turn away from the very  
25

1 values we can't claim to hold dear, equal  
2 opportunity.

3  
4 In closing, I ask not simply for your support,  
5 but for your vision to see libraries not as  
6 components of the past, but as blueprints for the  
7 future.

8 Now I ask *you*, as the investors, to invest in  
9 the potential of our future generation, knowing that  
10 it would be nothing less than a flourishing of an  
11 informed, empathetic (TIMER), and resilient society.

12 Thank you.

13 CLEMENTINE MCLEOD: Good afternoon, my name is  
14 Clementine McLeod, and I am a BookMatch Teen Intern  
15 at the Brooklyn Public Library.

16 Libraries were and will always be a vital part  
17 of every community, especially for teens. They're not  
18 just a place to check out books; they're a third  
19 space separate from school and home that is free and  
20 accessible. That kind of space is increasingly rare.

21 After school, I often found myself spending  
22 time in the library studying or doing homework while  
23 waiting for my other activities to begin. I couldn't  
24 wait at school; it closed after classes ended, and  
25 home was too far away.

1  
2 The library became a haven. In Downtown  
3 Brooklyn, Atlantic Terminal Mall introduced a policy  
4 around 2024 banning teens under 18 unless accompanied  
5 by an adult. A friend of mine who went to a nearby  
6 high school could no longer go there after school.  
7 That left the library as one of the few welcoming  
8 spaces left for teens to simply exist.

9 Libraries matter because they're places where  
10 young people can connect, feel safe, and just be.  
11 That's why I'm asking you to continue funding spaces  
12 like this because we need them. Thank you for your  
13 time.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much to this  
15 panel and for your experiences, advice, and advocacy.  
16 I do think the libraries are transformative, and I  
17 truly appreciate your testimonies. Thank you.

18 The next panel is Lucy Sexton, Sara Roer,  
19 Candice Michelle Franklin-Cox, Akia Squitieri, and  
20 Justin Perez. Are we missing Justin? I am going to  
21 add someone else, uh, Kate Madigan.

22 Okay, whenever you are ready, thank you for  
23 being here.

24 LUCY SEXTON: Great, my name is Lucy Sexton. I'm  
25 with New Yorkers for Culture and Arts.

1  
2 As you have heard, we are asking for \$30  
3 million to be added to the baseline. Why? Many  
4 reasons. I'll list a few. But I want to note first  
5 that \$30 million will bring us up to 0.25% of the  
6 City budget for the first time in 10 years. We've  
7 been below that, and we've long requested 1% of the  
8 City budget.

9 1. We need the \$30 million added to the  
10 baseline to fully fund the Cultural Development Fund.  
11 Many organizations that depend on CDF are still  
12 getting zero. Losing funding for the first time or  
13 worse, like the Chocolate Factory, a beloved staple  
14 of Western Queens, which had long received support,  
15 getting zero for the second year in a row. Those that  
16 did have funding restored, such as the Bronx Arts  
17 Ensemble, received less than half of what they'd been  
18 getting two years ago. CDF simply does not have  
19 enough to fund cultural organizations across the five  
20 boroughs.

21 2. DCLA needs more staff. They currently have  
22 nine program officers for 1,100 grantees. It's an  
23 equity issue, as smaller organizations with limited  
24 capacity are more dependent on assistance from  
25 program officers.

1  
2 3. Arts and culture are under attack from the  
3 federal government. The Institute for Museum and  
4 Library Services, National Endowment for the  
5 Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts  
6 together fund New York City cultural institutions  
7 with \$32 million in 2024. That is all going away. The  
8 zoos, gardens, and science museums are losing tens of  
9 millions of more dollars in science funding. We need  
10 this \$30 million added to the baseline to protect us  
11 as we face these devastating headwinds over the next  
12 three years. You know who else needs arts and culture  
13 to be protected and stable? The economy. It will need  
14 all the help it can get in the coming years, and we  
15 are why people visit, why they live here, and why  
16 people go out to bars and restaurants. We generate  
17 13% of the City's economy. Even more important, our  
18 communities (TIMER) will need the connection and  
19 well-being that culture provides.

20 So, as you work to do all you can for these  
21 communities most impacted by cruel federal cuts,  
22 remember that this modest investment in culture is  
23 essential to keeping those communities whole,  
24 connected, educated, and healthy. Thank you very  
25 much.

1  
2 CANDICE MICHELLE FRANKLIN: This is my first  
3 time ever doing anything like this. I'm just an  
4 independent dancer. But good afternoon, Council  
5 Members.

6 My name is Candice Michelle Franklin, and I'm  
7 honored to stand before you today to advocate for  
8 restoring funding from that loss from the National  
9 Endowment of the Arts.

10 I'm a dancer, choreographer, music producer,  
11 creative director, and the artistic director of Jazz  
12 Ain't Dead. Most importantly, I'm a teaching artist  
13 working with institutions such as the Department of  
14 Education (DOE), Jazzmobile, Joffrey Ballet School,  
15 Lincoln Center, the National Jazz Museum of Harlem,  
16 YAFFA Arts, Harlem One Stop, and the Cumbe Center for  
17 African & Diaspora Dance.

18 Like the lady from the Met said earlier, the  
19 arts are not a luxury; they are essential. They  
20 uplift communities, amplify marginalized voices,  
21 further dialogue toward equality, and remind people  
22 from all walks of life that they are seen and valued.

23 Most of my work is free to the public, not  
24 because the arts are free but because arts funding  
25 makes public programming possible. With the arts we

1  
2 are not just showing dance, we are bringing joy,  
3 excellence, teaching history, creating opportunities,  
4 and sometimes on a day celebrating culture through  
5 the love of social dance, we have the beautiful  
6 extraordinary power simply through the offer of our  
7 dancers hand to show people that they are seen and  
8 that they matter.

9 For example, we work with seniors with  
10 Jazzmobile and autistic children with the DOE,  
11 teaching Lindy Hop and giving opportunities to  
12 perform, be social, be seen, and feel valued.

13 I'm going to jump over, because I want to make  
14 sure I make that 17 seconds. Probably not. (LAUGHTER)

15 But anyway, that being said, let's say this,  
16 funding doesn't just support artists, it supports the  
17 people artists uplift, restoring arts funding  
18 strengthens communities, preserves history (TIMER),  
19 and builds bridges across generations.

20 It's not just a lifeline for artists in this  
21 city but a means for them to create belonging,  
22 provide opportunities, and ensure that communities  
23 are seen and valued, ultimately enriching lives and  
24 improving the quality of life for all. So I ask you,  
25 please help restore NEA funding for theater, music,

1  
2 and dance, the visual and fine arts, because when we  
3 invest in the arts, we invest in people. Thank you.

4 (PAUSE)

5 SARA ROER: Thank you to Chair Rivera and the  
6 Committee for the opportunity to testify today. I'm  
7 Sara Roer, and I am the Interim Executive Director at  
8 Dance/NYC, an art service organization that advocates  
9 for the estimated 6,000 dance workers and 1,700 dance  
10 entities in this city.

11 Dance workers, like you, are powerful agents of  
12 change. They use the arts to build stronger  
13 communities in an increasingly hostile environment.  
14 While immigrant communities are under attack, dance  
15 workers are teaching newly arrived youth in our  
16 schools using movement to facilitate belonging beyond  
17 language. While freedom of expression and diversity  
18 are under attack, dance workers are amplifying all  
19 the stories that make up this city, creating  
20 programming in parks, small businesses, theaters, and  
21 community centers. However, this vital work is not  
22 sustainable under the current conditions.

23 When the average dance worker is doing these  
24 amazing things but still earning 15% below the living  
25 wage, we need the City to be our partner.

1  
2 Recently, Dance/NYC and Arts New York conducted  
3 a survey of 177 CDF grantees, and our data shows  
4 what's possible when the City supports culture. It  
5 meant that only 25% of organizations experienced cuts  
6 in FY25 versus 69% in FY24.

7 Despite that good news, broader instability,  
8 that's happening right now, means that 29% of  
9 organizations still reported feeling unconfident or  
10 very unconfident in their contributed revenue goals,  
11 despite that poll coming near the end of the fiscal  
12 year, when those projections are typically more  
13 solid.

14 And that's why we are joining the chorus of  
15 voices to reiterate our full ask of a \$75 million  
16 baseline increase for DCLA. The \$45 million is a  
17 major success and would be a wonderful win; the  
18 additional \$30 million is critical.

19 We also need increases for City Council  
20 initiatives, especially shouting out the Coalition of  
21 Theaters of Color, which hasn't had an increase in  
22 over five years despite a 40% increase in the  
23 organizations served.

24 Just (TIMER) right now, our communities are  
25 hurting, and attacking the Arts is part of a larger

1 effort that's rolling back our rights, and this is an  
2 opportunity to be bold, to say that our cultures are  
3 important, that all cultures are important, and to  
4 invest in those cultures as a way of deeply investing  
5 in our city, and we hope that you'll continue to do  
6 that. Thank you.

8 AKIA SQUITIERI: Hello, Council Members. Thank  
9 you for your time and for this opportunity. My name  
10 is Akia Squitieri; I am the brand-new Executive  
11 Director of the Bronx River Art Center. I am also a  
12 proud member of the Bronx and a resident of District  
13 11.

14 For 37 years, BRAC's central location has been  
15 in four neighborhoods, identified by New York City's  
16 Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity as  
17 disproportionately affected by racial, social,  
18 economic, and health factors. These have been deeply  
19 impactful to these neighborhoods, which we serve, and  
20 BRAC has been a channel for DCLA, CASA, SU-CASA, and  
21 the CIA Initiative Funding. We have brought world-  
22 class performances, contemporary art, and arts  
23 education directly to these historically underserved  
24 communities where the arts, and more, have been  
25 defunded in schools and community centers for years.-

1  
2 We strongly urge the Council to keep fighting  
3 for more funding in this budget. As I'm sure you all  
4 know, and many of us have already said, studies have  
5 proven time and time again that the arts help youth  
6 develop not only their technical skills but also  
7 their communication skills, identity, sense of  
8 empathy, and self-worth.

9 We've seen firsthand how the youth of our city  
10 develop critical life skills, thanks only to access  
11 to the arts and culture, which is supported by this  
12 Council and DCLA. Often, these students ' only arts  
13 programming is provided within their community by our  
14 organization.

15 We've also seen firsthand how New Yorkers are  
16 desperate for more of the arts. In the past year  
17 alone, while city and federal cuts have increased,  
18 our attendance and participation numbers have  
19 tripled. We are welcoming more and more people than  
20 ever, looking for a place to celebrate the vast  
21 representation of cultural identity and artistic  
22 expression, multiple perspectives, mediums, and for  
23 them to try new creative pursuits.

24 As we face a federal political climate that  
25 devalues the power of the arts and culture in our

1  
2 communities (TIMER) with cuts to NEA and beyond, I  
3 urge this Council to fight to ensure that New York  
4 City remains a sanctuary city for the arts, which is  
5 so integral to the vibrant fabric of our city's multi  
6 ethnic culture of identity. Thank you.

7 KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera,  
8 Chair Brannan, Committee Members, and staff. My name  
9 is Kate Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator for  
10 The Public Theater. I am here to advocate for The  
11 Public Theater's survival and for the Council to  
12 stabilize the entire arts and culture sector. Thank  
13 you for this opportunity to speak.

14 Art institutions are the core of what makes The  
15 Big Apple so "appealing". Thank you for that.

16 (LAUGHTER)

17 The Public Theater is grateful for the City  
18 Council's Commitment to the first substantial  
19 baseline increase for our cultural groups in over a  
20 decade. A permanent \$45 million increase for the  
21 Department of Cultural Affairs is nothing short of  
22 historic. However, more is needed to stabilize NYC's  
23 cultural organizations.

24 The CIGs and CDFs alike are facing rising costs  
25 related to inflation, funding cuts from the federal

1  
2 government, and divestment from private donors and  
3 foundations. In 2023, The Public Theater implemented  
4 painful austerity measures to protect the future of  
5 the organization, but as the goal lines continue to  
6 shift, and we experience the effects of the headwinds  
7 I just outlined, sustainability remains painfully out  
8 of reach. Sadly, many of our peer organizations are  
9 facing a similar reality.

10 In addition to our shared cultural funding  
11 request, The Public Theater has submitted various  
12 discretionary and capital asks to the Council this  
13 budget cycle to support our free programming and  
14 City-owned infrastructures.

15 Each free Shakespeare in the Park production at  
16 the Delacorte Theatre costs the public over \$3.5  
17 million to stage. With a typical summer season  
18 featuring two main stage shows, a community pageant,  
19 and a mobile unit tour to all five boroughs, we  
20 invest nearly \$10 million annually to provide free  
21 performances to the people of New York City. Our  
22 iconic free Shakespeare in the Park program serves  
23 more than 100,000 New Yorkers and visitors each  
24 summer entirely free of charge.

1  
2 And I will finish - (TIMER) Without fiscal  
3 action in permanent NYC government investment, the  
4 NYC nonprofit component will be a less equitable,  
5 diverse, and accessible field. Should we let this  
6 version of the future come to pass, ultimately, those  
7 who can only afford to pay hundreds of dollars for  
8 tickets and productions will be able to attend these  
9 cultural offerings. I'll give you one "Guesla" on who  
10 would fill that gap.

11 Thank you for your time and dedication to the  
12 people of New York City.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very much.

14 Okay, this is the last panel in person, so if  
15 we don't call you and you're here and want to  
16 testify, please make sure to fill out a slip, and  
17 we'll bring you up.

18 First is Adeeba Rana, Beth Allen, Sami Abu  
19 Shumays, and DJ McDonald.

20 And if you want to testify, and I didn't just  
21 call your name, just fill out a slip, and we will  
22 call you up.

23 (PAUSE)

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, who would like to  
25 start? (LAUGHTER)

1  
2 DJ MCDONALD: I caught that pass.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Good.

4 DJ MCDONALD: Hi, DJ McDonald, coming to you  
5 from the Dance Parade, and I've been part of every  
6 one of the 19 parades that have taken place. Last  
7 time on Saturday, we once again sent 10,000 dancers  
8 through the streets of New York from 16th Street and  
9 6th Avenue over to Tompkins Square Park.

10 I came from a lunchtime meeting with a young  
11 choreographer. Well, not so young. I mean, she's mid-  
12 career. She has a company that she supports and  
13 partially pays through your support. And I would like  
14 to thank you, Chair Brannan, Chair Rivera, and your  
15 colleagues on this Committee, for your continued  
16 support. You understand what is at stake here.

17 This morning, I thank you, Chair Rivera, for  
18 joining us out on the veranda. I appreciate your  
19 words, and you understand that the amplification of  
20 the money that you invest in culture in New York  
21 returns itself 99 times. And with that kind of  
22 investment portfolio, I'm surprised Warren Buffett  
23 hasn't taken us over.

24 But what was at issue this morning is the  
25 challenge that this choreographer is facing in

1  
2 employing her artists, and the immediate cause of my  
3 having this conversation was that I watched the faces  
4 of a bunch of children sitting in front of the stage  
5 when her company performed. I know she's discouraged,  
6 and she needed a pep talk.

7         The pep talk that you give us every year is  
8 predicated on the money that you provide for us. And  
9 I want to amplify our ask for \$30 million on top of  
10 the baseline this year, just to get us to 0.25% of  
11 the City budget. The Libraries are asking for 5%,  
12 which sounds luxurious. And I know I'm preaching to  
13 the choir here, but I want to emphasize that the  
14 baseline, the base of our pyramid, are people like  
15 this artist and her dancers that have come to New  
16 York, as they do every year around parade time,  
17 seeking their new life, and giving to the children  
18 that saw them, and whose faces lit up, so much. They  
19 didn't know what they were looking at, but they were  
20 enthralled with it. And the way that the arts and  
21 culture in this city represent to us our own  
22 experience, so that we can see and create with it, is  
23 what makes New York dynamic and unique. Thank you.

1  
2 SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: My name is Sami Abu Shumays,  
3 Deputy Director of Flushing Town Hall, one of the  
4 small CIGs.

5 Let me start by saying that we're enormously  
6 grateful to the Administration for the baseline  
7 increase, and to the Council for its steadfast  
8 advocacy for that. However, the new baseline for  
9 Flushing Town Hall only brings our budget figure up  
10 to \$516,000, which still represents a cut of \$306,000  
11 from our FY25 allocation of \$822,000. This still  
12 represents a 37% reduction to our Operating Budget  
13 from DCLA, and an 8% cut to our total Annual Budget.  
14 If this cut is sustained in the Adopted 2026 Budget,  
15 it could necessitate laying off five to six of our  
16 full-time employees, which represents just under a  
17 third of our staff. So, while you may hear folks  
18 saying that the budget dance has ended, it has not  
19 ended for us. I don't have much to add that hasn't  
20 already been said by many amazing colleagues in the  
21 cultural sector.

22 I'll say this - please look closely at the  
23 numbers and ensure that everyone is held harmless,  
24 from the CDF Organizations, which desperately need a  
25 new funding model, to the CIG Organizations. Please

1  
2 baseline the additional \$30 for FY26 and ensure that  
3 organizations like ours, which serve diverse and  
4 lower-income communities, are truly supported and  
5 made sustainable.

6 On the back of my testimony, I copied page 1780  
7 from the supporting schedules. You can see that cut.  
8 And you asked a question earlier about how the money  
9 was distributed. Of the \$21 million to 34 CIGs,  
10 Flushing Town Hall \$141,000, bringing our baseline  
11 from \$375,000 to \$516,000.

12 We are still largely suffering from baseline  
13 funding. Thank you.

14 BETH ALLEN: Hi. Thank you, Chair Rivera and  
15 Chair Brennan, for the opportunity to provide  
16 testimony today. I'm the Executive Director of the  
17 Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance, or as we fondly call  
18 it DBAA, and I am here to join with my colleagues in  
19 expressing my gratitude for the \$45 million baseline  
20 in the Executive Budget and to advocate for an  
21 increase of \$30 million to bring the full budget to  
22 \$75 million.

23 Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance is a network of  
24 60 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations in the  
25 greater Downtown Brooklyn area. Our members include

1 every presenting arts venue situated in the Brooklyn  
2 Cultural District, as well as a range of smaller  
3 venues, dance and theater companies, small galleries,  
4 and others.  
5

6 Our members collectively serve more than five  
7 million individuals annually, including over 100,000  
8 school-age children, employ around 4,000 individuals,  
9 and generate more than \$200 million in annual  
10 economic impact.

11 Our work is fostering a supportive network  
12 among arts and cultural professionals and addressing  
13 issues that affect our work at the neighborhood and  
14 borough levels. The context for our work is the  
15 growth and gentrification of Brooklyn, where we are  
16 fighting for attention and resources amid much  
17 larger-scale investments in the commercial sector and  
18 larger non-profits, including the fund they call "Eds  
19 and Meds", so universities and hospitals.

20 There's been no equivalent investment in  
21 scaling the arts. We talk about the arts surviving  
22 gentrification, but don't we ask the question of what  
23 the arts need to grow and to meet the increased  
24 demand.  
25

1  
2 That is the question that I am largely trying  
3 to put out to anyone who will listen, where we all  
4 know the basic answer is more money, and specifically  
5 (TIMER) more money available to small and mid-sized  
6 organizations to scale up, and more money available  
7 for the full range of talented artists and passionate  
8 administrators who work in the field and not just  
9 those who have proximity to wealthy donors.

10 DCLA provides crucial funding for this  
11 infrastructure, especially for its support of small  
12 and mid-sized organizations, which are the bulk of  
13 DBAA members. It's the only city agency fully devoted  
14 to supporting this infrastructure, and it's a crucial  
15 part of our community infrastructure. Arts  
16 organizations are the ones that partner with schools  
17 and community centers. Our venues drive foot traffic  
18 to local retail and restaurants. And the Cultural  
19 Development Fund is a very, very crucial source of  
20 support for these organizations, and as has been  
21 mentioned many times, they are in a severe amount of  
22 distress right now, not least because of the National  
23 Endowment for the Arts cuts and various reallocations  
24 and foundation funding. This would be a huge benefit,  
25

1  
2 allowing us all to breathe a little easier with the  
3 additional \$30 million.

4 So, thank you very much for the opportunity to  
5 testify and for your championing of our cause.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

7 ADEEBA AFSHAN RANA: Good afternoon, I love  
8 being a closer. My name is Adeeba Afshan Rana, and  
9 I'm the Branch Manager of the Bedford branch, which  
10 reopened just 28 days ago after being closed for more  
11 than four years.

12 In those years, aside from learning patience, I  
13 learned just how deeply our patrons value the  
14 library. They love coming to story time, having a  
15 place to study, getting book recommendations, and, as  
16 you heard from our teens, they love having a space of  
17 their own.

18 One patron shared that, "Although she may move  
19 from apartment to apartment, the library where she  
20 learned to love to read, where she brought her  
21 daughter every week, and now brings her grandchild,  
22 might look a little newer, but the feeling of home  
23 has always, always stayed the same."

24 We are proud to be back, and our community is  
25 so happy to have us back. That's why I'm asking you

1  
2 to meet Brooklyn Public Library's \$44.8 million in  
3 unmet expense needs. Without this investment, it  
4 would feel to many like the branch never truly  
5 reopened. Meeting these needs —staffing, programming,  
6 and utilities—allows us to sustain the vibrant,  
7 intergenerational connection we have with our  
8 community. It ensures that future generations grow up  
9 knowing that no matter how the city changes, their  
10 local library will always have a place and a program  
11 for them. Thank you for your time and consideration.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very, very  
13 much.

14 Okay, last call for on-person testimony. Is  
15 there anyone here who wants to testify and hasn't  
16 already done so? Once we go on Zoom, there's no  
17 turning back.

18 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. As soon as she  
20 comes, we'll (INAUDIBLE).

21 All right, first on Zoom is Risa Shoup.

22 (PAUSE)

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin

24 RISA SHOUP: Hello.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Hi.

1  
2 RISA SHOUP: Thank you, Council Member Brannan.  
3 Thank you, Council Member Rivera, and everyone else  
4 who is here today.

5 My name is Risa Shoup, and I am a Co-Executive  
6 Director of the Alliance of Resident Theaters New  
7 York, also known as A.R.T./New York. We represent  
8 over 400 nonprofit theater companies throughout New  
9 York City and New York State, and we work across  
10 three facilities located both in Manhattan and in  
11 Brooklyn. We are a service provider. We offer  
12 subsidized workspace, including offices, rehearsal  
13 spaces, and two theaters. We offer financial  
14 resources, including three grant programs and a cash  
15 flow loan program that we administer in partnership  
16 with SeaChange Capital, and a wide array of  
17 educational programs, which include in-person  
18 convenings in the fall and the spring, online  
19 roundtables and peer learning spaces, and expert-led  
20 trainings and workshops. And, of course, we are  
21 advocates for our constituents and the field. Thank  
22 you again for the opportunity to testify today.

23 Theater is a big piece of why people love to  
24 live, work in, and visit New York City. Theater is a  
25 place where people feel safe, where stories are told,

1  
2 where empathy is built, and where new worlds are  
3 imagined. And I can think of no greater opportunity  
4 before us right now than to imagine a more just,  
5 equitable, and inclusive world. And that's what we do  
6 in the theater every day. And we build those critical  
7 skills that everyone is going to need so much more of  
8 in the future.

9         And yet despite the importance of theater, our  
10 field has not recovered since the COVID-19 shutdowns,  
11 and you're probably tired of hearing it. And I'm  
12 certainly tired of talking about it, but I just  
13 completed a two-year research effort with A.R.T./New  
14 York that shows that ticket sales are still down 11%  
15 from 2019.

16         What we also learned that's huge, that is as  
17 encouraging as that is discouraging, is that free  
18 programming and the number of free attendees have  
19 both doubled since 2019. This shows us that people  
20 want to go to the theater. It also shows us that the  
21 cost of theater, just as the cost of everything,  
22 rent, food, and childcare, is getting in their way.

23         Public funding for the arts and culture, and  
24 theater specifically, is critical. Public funding is  
25 reliable. Public funding is available to the largest

1  
2 theaters and the smallest theater companies that are  
3 being formed right now. We need public funding to  
4 continue offering a diverse array of programs and  
5 telling a diverse array of stories that reflect who  
6 New York City is and keep people living here, working  
7 here, and visiting the city.

8 And so it is with all of that in mind that I  
9 join all of my colleagues who have testified before I  
10 did today in asking for that additional \$30 million.  
11 (TIMER) to be (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
13 Time has expired.

14 RISA SHOUP: so that we... So that we can  
15 continue to offer this instrumental and important  
16 programming, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Risa.

18 Now we have Melody Capote.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

20 MELODY CAPOTE: Buenos días, Co-Chairman Brannan  
21 and Co-Chairman Riviera, and New York City Council  
22 Members.

23 I am Melody Capote, Executive Director of the  
24 Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute  
25 in East Harlem, a cultural organization dedicated to

1  
2 using the arts and culture as a vehicle for promoting  
3 racial and social justice, uplifting the African  
4 diaspora, and preparing the next generation of  
5 artists, cultural activists, and administrators.

6 I want to begin my testimony today by thanking  
7 the New York City Council for listening to us and for  
8 securing the additional \$45 million that now lives in  
9 the Executive Budget as a baseline for the New York  
10 City Department of Cultural Affairs.

11 But I would be remiss if I did not thank my  
12 colleagues in the arts and culture field as well,  
13 because I believe that it was through our collective  
14 advocacy efforts, our rallies, meetings, testimonies,  
15 and hearings like today, and our educating of city  
16 council members and staff that we finally saw this  
17 increase to DCLA, the first in almost 16 years.

18 But how does this baseline funding actually  
19 break down? What does this mean for those small and  
20 mid-sized organizations that are eligible to receive  
21 CDF awards? And how do we define and assure equitable  
22 distribution of these funds?

23 With this "best budget ever" claim, we've  
24 learned that approximately \$21 million will be  
25 allocated to the 34 Cultural Institutions Groups and

1  
2 that \$23 million will be shared between CDF, the  
3 Cultural Development Fund, and DCLA administrative  
4 expenses.

5 Yet we have already been advised as CDF  
6 recipients that, with this new baseline, we should  
7 not anticipate increases, and that the newest DCLA  
8 funding formula that is based on an organization's  
9 annual operating budget, does not allow for an  
10 organization like mine to receive an award greater  
11 than \$50,000. We presently receive \$31,000. And that  
12 the new Cultural Equity Fund (TIMER) for which  
13 eligibility is determined by (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-  
14 TALK)

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
16 Your time has expired.

17 MELODY CAPOTE: for which my organization  
18 straddles both 10035 and 10029, in one of the most  
19 distressed districts in the city, and for which we  
20 received an additional \$7,000. That's a total of  
21 \$39,000 for an organization that has a historic and  
22 stellar track record of presenting artists and  
23 scholars for and from communities of color, and like  
24 DCLA, will mark its 50th anniversary next year in  
25 2026.

1  
2 How can we possibly scale up? I ask you again,  
3 where is the equity? We are not prepared to  
4 celebrate, at least not yet. We ask that you  
5 scrutinize how and where these funds are and will be  
6 distributed, and who is not reaping the benefits of  
7 these increases.

8 I come before you today to rally for the  
9 additional \$30 million to DCLA with an insistence  
10 that there be an assurance that funds be equitably  
11 allocated to the over 1,200 CDF program groups and to  
12 assure the sustainability and thrive-ability of its  
13 operations and programmatic success of our  
14 organizations. Let's work together with DCLA to  
15 secure greater transparency and practices, reexamine  
16 the agency's panel review process, and create a  
17 blueprint for equitable distribution of these  
18 additional funds. Let's make this a real win for us  
19 all. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much,  
21 Melody.

22 Now we have Noel Allain.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

24 NOEL ALLAIN: Thank you, Chair Rivera, Chair  
25 Brennan, and all Council Members present. I'm Noel

1  
2 Allain, Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the  
3 Bushwick Starr Theatre.

4 First, I want to thank the Mayor's Office for  
5 baselining DCLA funding at \$45 million. This is an  
6 important, historic step to ensure stability for  
7 cultural organizations in New York City, especially  
8 in moments of great uncertainty, like the one we're  
9 living through right now. And I want to emphasize the  
10 tremendous significance of this decision.

11 My organization, the Bushwick Starr, has gone  
12 through dramatic growth over the past five years,  
13 having purchased and renovated a building in our  
14 neighborhood of Bushwick, Brooklyn, through a capital  
15 campaign with strong support from the city and state,  
16 for which we are extremely grateful.

17 Because of the success of these efforts, after  
18 18 years of existence, we have now established the  
19 Starr as a permanent asset for arts and education in  
20 our neighborhood. Our yearly season of programming  
21 offers three, month long runs of premier works, six  
22 readings of new plays, after-school classes for  
23 elementary and high school students, writing  
24 workshops for seniors, intergenerational workshops  
25 with our seasoned artists, and more -- including

1  
2 drama classes at the Ridgewood Public Library  
3 supported by the Friends of the Library that was  
4 mentioned earlier in earlier testimony.

5 We bring 5,000 visitors to Bushwick over the  
6 course of the season and serve our neighbors with our  
7 season programming and enriching programs. As the  
8 Starr grows, so does our ability to offer more paid  
9 internships, training, and employment opportunities  
10 to our neighbors. We are an institution that is a  
11 destination as well as a true neighborhood arts  
12 center. Yet in this moment, when we are flourishing,  
13 we are also facing the existential threat of a  
14 shifting and shrinking funding landscape. When major  
15 foundations are changing their priorities and funding  
16 that the field has relied on for (TIMER) decades  
17 suddenly disappears... (CROSS-TALK)

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you for your testimony.  
19 Time has expired.

20 NOEL ALLAIN: (INAUDIBLE) that individual donors  
21 will be able to fill that void sufficiently.

22 The Starr's mission is to offer free programs  
23 and affordable tickets to ensure access to the work  
24 that we do. Our earned income is 16% of our total  
25 budget. In order for us to be able to continue to

1  
2 serve our constituents, it is essential that we have  
3 reliable funding sources dedicated to preserving  
4 local institutions like ours to serve New York's  
5 communities.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you...

7 NOEL ALLAIN: In this moment of uncertainty, I  
8 ask the City to add the additional \$30 million to the  
9 DCLA Budget, to ensure healthy and robust cultural  
10 institutions that will ensure that New Yorkers of all  
11 ages and income levels have access to the arts. Thank  
12 you very much.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.

14 Now we have Jimena Martinez.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 (PAUSE)

17 JIMENA MARTINEZ: Good afternoon, my name is  
18 Jimena Martinez, and I'm the Executive Director at  
19 the Cumbe Center for African and Diaspora Dance.  
20 Thanks so much for this opportunity to speak today.

21 Through year-round classes, performances, and  
22 cultural partnerships with community organizations,  
23 each year, Cumbe engages 7,500 preschoolers, public  
24 school students, adults, including older adults,  
25 (LOST CONNECTION) in the transformative power of

1  
2 Africa (LOST CONNECTION) (INAUDIBLE) the members of  
3 the Council, my sincere thanks.

4 Funding from the New York City Council and the  
5 Department of Cultural Affairs has been incredibly  
6 important to Cumbe. Without it, we wouldn't be able  
7 to serve thousands of New Yorkers, aged three to 99,  
8 each year.

9 And yet I add my voice to those of my  
10 colleagues that we've heard today. This is an  
11 extremely challenging time for smaller arts  
12 organizations. We're struggling to sustain donation-  
13 based and free programming while providing adequate  
14 compensation for our staff and artists. And like many  
15 of our fellow organizations, Cumbe's 2025 grants from  
16 the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities  
17 New York, whose own funding from the National  
18 Endowment for the Humanities was cut, have been  
19 withdrawn.

20 Now, more than ever, we need New York City to  
21 support cultural institutions, particularly those  
22 that serve residents of color and smaller  
23 organizations.

24 At a time when our communities are exhausted,  
25 the (INAUDIBLE) are at a high, dance invites people

1  
2 back into their bodies and into meaningful  
3 connection.

4 And I'll end by sharing this story that my  
5 studio manager told me just this morning. Last year,  
6 a Bed-Stuy resident (TIMER) would stand outside our  
7 studio...

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
9 expired.

10 JIMENA MARTINEZ: (INAUDIBLE) and cry, saying,  
11 "I don't really want to be alive." Our staff  
12 encouraged her to keep coming and listening to those  
13 drums. And a year later, she now takes two classes a  
14 week and is looking lighter and happier.

15 Cultural funding, the \$30 million we are asking  
16 to be added to the baseline, makes these  
17 transformations possible. Thank you for your  
18 leadership.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

20 Now we have Seth Rosen.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

22 (PAUSE)

23 SETH ROSEN: Thank you to the Co-Chairs and all  
24 Council Members present for the opportunity to speak  
25

1  
2 today. My name is Seth Rosen, and I am the Chief of  
3 Development at the American LGBTQ+ Museum.

4 For FY26, we are requesting an increase in City  
5 Council discretionary funding, specifically  
6 increasing our Speakers' Initiative funding to  
7 \$200,000 for LGBTQIA community service. This funding  
8 will support the expansion of our educational  
9 initiatives and partnerships across all five  
10 boroughs, as well as the hiring of additional staff  
11 members to implement this expansion.

12 The Museum is rapidly expanding its audience  
13 across all five boroughs and online. Our e-  
14 newsletter, the museum's main form of communication,  
15 has grown from about 8,000 subscribers in 2024 to  
16 almost 14,000 in the past year, representing an  
17 astounding 75% annual increase. This is due largely  
18 to investments made by the New York City Council  
19 toward our public programs.

20 Within the last year, the museum has produced  
21 over 40 educational events, extending our reach  
22 citywide through a robust online presence and  
23 satellite partnerships with community institutions  
24 within all five boroughs. So far, we have developed  
25 public programs in collaboration with the Queens

1  
2 Public Library, Weeksville Heritage Center, NewFest -  
3 LGBTQ+ Film Festival, Bronx Academy of Arts and  
4 Science, the Schomburg Center for Research and Black  
5 Culture, Alice Austin House, and many more.

6 Last month, we also launched the Museum's first  
7 archivist preservation program in partnership with  
8 SAGE USA and StoryCorps, named the Queer Legacies  
9 Project, which includes facilitated archiving  
10 workshops that convene LGBTQ+ elders and help them  
11 preserve their personal archives and oral histories  
12 for future generations.

13 Looking ahead FY26, we are currently piloting a  
14 partnership with Culture Lab LIC to co-produce a  
15 series of lectures, film screenings, and creative  
16 workshops that illuminate local queer histories,  
17 provide research, and activism (TIMER)

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
19 expired.

20 SETH ROSEN: and raise... and raise awareness  
21 for our museum project.

22 These cultural partnerships are just the  
23 beginning, and with discretionary support from  
24 Speaker Adams, the New York City Council, and this  
25

1  
2 Committee, we are hopeful of expanding available  
3 resources ahead of our 2027 opening.

4 I would like to thank you for your time, and we  
5 appreciate your consideration of our request.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

7 Now have Hew Evans.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 (PAUSE)

10 HEW ROSE EVANS: There we are, now I'm unmuted.

11 Hi, and thank you so much for the opportunity  
12 to speak today on behalf of my organization. My name  
13 is Hew Rose Evans, and I am the Senior Development  
14 Associate here at the American LGBTQ Museum.

15 To add to my colleague's testimony and provide  
16 some background, our museum's mission is to preserve,  
17 investigate, and celebrate the dynamic histories and  
18 cultures of LGBTQ people, as well as the emergent and  
19 adjacent identities within our communities. Using  
20 exhibitions and programs, we seek to advance LGBTQ  
21 equality through the lens of social justice  
22 movements, including, but never limited to race,  
23 gender, class, immigration, and disability.

24 As of today, there is no major LGBTQ+ cultural  
25 institution in the United States dedicated to

1  
2 preserving queer history and culture, illustrating  
3 its many impacts on broader society or presenting it  
4 to the public in an accessible way. An American  
5 LGBTQ+ museum would be a unique cultural institution  
6 that would enhance the civic and historical  
7 infrastructure here in New York City, filling a great  
8 educational and cultural vacuum and recognizing  
9 LGBTQ+ people as major contributors to weaving the  
10 fabric of American society.

11 In 2027, our museum will open a core exhibition  
12 in Manhattan in partnership with the New York  
13 Historical. Over the next three years, our  
14 organization will embark on an ambitious strategic  
15 plan, which includes significant staff expansions,  
16 stakeholder engagement, design and construction, and  
17 public awareness initiatives. The resulting 6,000-  
18 square-foot exhibition will broadly explore the lives  
19 of LGBTQ+ Americans and their contributions to all  
20 aspects of our country's history. And it will be  
21 accompanied by a robust suite of public programs,  
22 digital exhibitions, and online resources that tell  
23 more specific stories about our various communities  
24 and identities.

1  
2 Construction of the Tang Wing of the New York  
3 Historical has already topped out, and we will begin  
4 the interior build-out of our space next year. With  
5 support from Speaker Adrian Adams in the New York  
6 City Council, we will be in New York and indeed our  
7 nation's LGBTQ+ museum, (TIMER) and we are opening  
8 very soon.

9 I would like to thank you for your time, and we  
10 sincerely appreciate your consideration of our  
11 request.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

13 We will now hear from Nicole Touzien.

14 NICOLE TOUZIEN: Thank you so much. Chair  
15 Rivera, Chair Brennan, Members of the Committee, and  
16 staff, thank you for the opportunity to provide  
17 testimony on behalf of Dancewave.

18 My name is Nicole Touzien, and I'm the  
19 Executive Director of Dancewave. Thanks to the  
20 Council's focused advocacy and the City's investment,  
21 Dancewave is empowered to provide accessible,  
22 inclusive, and culturally competent dance programming  
23 to an all-ages citywide audience. We spend 80% of our  
24 budget, \$1 million annually, employing artists and  
25 art workers who engage 6,200 individuals with

1 meaningful arts experiences. Take Shaël, for example.  
2  
3 Shaël has been a student at Dancewave for 14 years.  
4 We have seen her grow from a shy toddler into a  
5 highly accomplished young woman, poised and excited  
6 to start college next fall as a dance education  
7 major. Dancewave has played a crucial role in Shaël's  
8 development, nurturing her artistic growth, expanding  
9 her perspectives and networks, and, thanks to our  
10 career development program, connecting her with over  
11 a million dollars in scholarship offers from  
12 universities across the country. Shaël's story is  
13 special to me because I've witnessed her grow up at  
14 our organization, but her story is not unlike many  
15 others at Dancewave.

16 As someone who is tasked to work miracles with  
17 a budget one one-hundredth of a percent of the City's  
18 budget, I understand and respect the dance of  
19 creative compromise we do during this process. Our  
20 administrative team is entirely composed of artists  
21 who have honed and polished their business skills,  
22 and, because of their lived experience as artists,  
23 have been able to maximize the impact of each of  
24 Dancewave's programs with less and less funding  
25 support each year.



1  
2 My name is Potri Ranka Manis, and I'm the  
3 Artistic Director and Founder of Kinding Sindaw  
4 Heritage Foundation.

5 I am about to start my show tomorrow. If you  
6 see my set, it's here. Our event is well-supported by  
7 DCLA. So I'm here to help and really assert that  
8 there should be good funding that will be allotted to  
9 DCLA because groups like mine are small, and we are  
10 33 years old. We have been asserting, reclaiming, and  
11 amplifying the voices of the unknown indigenous  
12 people in Southern Philippines.

13 I am a nurse who came to America in 1990, and  
14 I'm a traditional bearer, and I'm so afraid that the  
15 culture and tradition that I grew up with -- it is  
16 very essential to the life of the world's people,  
17 because Indigenous culture carries history that is  
18 not written.

19 So, I'm here to amplify that request from the  
20 Council that \$30 million has to be added, and has to  
21 be maintained, or more, to be given to the DCLA so  
22 that we, artist of this situation right now, who are  
23 facing endangerment to the current budget of  
24 different levels in our society, particularly in the  
25 federal level. Also, we're endangered with the list

1  
2 with the NAA funding. We haven't received any message  
3 yet, but we're such a small organization, hearing  
4 from the big organization that their budgets are cut.  
5 So, we're appealing that -- we artists in New York  
6 (TIMER) will preserve the tradition (INAUDIBLE)...  
7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has  
9 expired.

10 POTRI RANKA MANIS: and about that. Thank you so  
11 much.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, Potri. Thank you  
13 for sharing.

14 Let's hear from Christopher Leon Johnson.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

16 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello, my name  
17 is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thanks, Chair Brannan  
18 and Rivera, for holding this hearing today.

19 So I'm calling on the preservation of all  
20 libraries. We need to make sure that they stay open  
21 seven days a week. All libraries, I'm calling for all  
22 libraries in the City of New York to be open seven  
23 days a week. There's certain libraries in City of New  
24 York, like in my area, like, Eastern Parkway, my  
25 house is not open at -- is not open on a Sunday.

1  
2 And sometimes I need to use the library on a  
3 Sunday, so I (INAUDIBLE) I hope that my Council  
4 Members, Darlene Mealy, Crystal Hudson, find a way --  
5 and Reynoso, will find a way to open the library on  
6 Eastern Parkway on Sundays. Not only do they need to  
7 do that, but they also need to make sure that the  
8 library on Eastern Parkway is open at 10:00 a.m.  
9 instead of 1:00 p.m. I've been living there for 34  
10 years, and it's always opened at 1:00 p.m. That's  
11 kinda -- it's kind of stupid to me. I think it's kind  
12 of stupid. They need to open the library at 10:00  
13 a.m. on Tuesday mornings -- 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.  
14 every Tuesday, every day -- 10:00 to 6:00, but from  
15 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. And on Tuesday, it should be  
16 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., too, not just 1:00 to 8:00,  
17 even 09:00.

18 So I'm calling for more extended -- find a way  
19 to allocate some money to the Brooklyn Public Library  
20 to add more time to my Library, the Eastern Parkway  
21 branch. I have to go all the way (INAUDIBLE) Library  
22 to do my -- do my thing, because it's open all day,  
23 every day, and it's open till 09:00. But I could  
24 travel two-three blocks away to my house, but it's  
25 not that good.

1  
2 So I'm calling for you to find a way to help  
3 out the Brooklyn Public Library allocate money for  
4 that Library, Eastern Parkway Branch. I hope y'all  
5 listen to this.

6 And by the way, while we're here, I know I have  
7 a few seconds left, (INAUDIBLE) Justin Brannan and  
8 Rivera, I know you have to get about the work  
9 (INAUDIBLE) project, the Deliveristas, ya'll need to  
10 give the (INAUDIBLE) hub outside City Hall Park.

11 That's all, and put it outside City Hall Park,  
12 and make sure you give us some money for (TIMER) out  
13 of the Culture budget for their nonprofit  
14 (INAUDIBLE)...

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time has expired.

16 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you so much.  
17 Thank you, and enjoy your day.

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.  
19 Seeing no one else online, I want to call on Sheila  
20 Lewandowski.

21 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: (INAUDIBLE)

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Of course, thank you for  
23 your patience.

24 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: So, thank you, Chairwoman  
25 Rivera, for all you do.

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CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Take us home.

SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Take us home!

I'm Sheila Lewandowski, Founder and Director of The Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island City, of immigrant parents, born in New York, a member of my community board, homeowner, voter, all of the above.

I stand with New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts and all of my colleagues, asking -- thanking the Administration for the baseline, asking for the bump, the \$30 million bump. I'm also sitting here from an organization that has been zeroed out for two years in a row, still standing here for all of us to get more funding. We don't fully know why, but we all stand together. We are just about out of our savings, but we're keeping going. We provide commissions. We provide salaries. We produce, host, and support other events, and we do this with a small staff on a relatively small budget.

I will just with close this. June 30th is my last day as Executive Director after 27 years in leadership for an organization, but I have fought since I was a child -- my mother ran cultural programming at the community center, and had us out petitioning, and I will continue as a board member of

1  
2 New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts, and I know you  
3 care. We need those dollars – so that The Chocolate  
4 Factory isn't zeroed out, so we keep children in arts  
5 education, so they grow up to be the artists who are  
6 in these cultural spaces or at Lincoln Center, or  
7 traveling the world, taking our culture out there,  
8 because culture is what it is to be alive. It is how  
9 we are empathetic. It is how we share. It's how we  
10 get to know each other.

11           And one thing I did want to say is, it needs to  
12 be supported (INAUDIBLE) I'm not looking, in New York  
13 City at the highest level, especially now when  
14 culture and freedom of expression and speech is being  
15 oppressed, suppressed, manipulated, attacked, and  
16 whitewashed. New York City will be the sanctuary for  
17 freedoms *if* we don't underfund and undermine the  
18 power of artists and shared cultures on a major  
19 scale. Culture is living, and artists are our guides.  
20 Please bump up that budget.

21           (APPLAUSE)

22           CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: That's the way you deliver  
23 a testimony!

24           (CHEERS AND WHISTLING)

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And thank you to everyone  
3 who stood with us through the hearing. I want to  
4 thank Chair Brannan.

5 I am just making sure that if anyone else is  
6 present in the room who has not had the opportunity  
7 to testify but wishes to do so, please raise your  
8 hand. And seeing no one who wishes to testify, I want  
9 to thank you all. We all know that arts and culture,  
10 and our libraries are transformative and important to  
11 our city.

12 And with that, the hearing is adjourned.

13 [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 27, 2025