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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

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February 9, 2026
Start: 1:13 p.m.
Recess: 5:15 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor -
Hearing Room 1

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
David Carr
Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis
Virginia Maloney
Chi A. Ossé
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung

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

Eli Dvorkin
Center for an Urban Future

Audrey St. Clair
DLCA

Lance Polivy
DCLA

Brad Hoylman-Sigal
Manhattan Borough President

Leah C. Johnson
Lincoln Center

Christopher Durosinmi
Wildlife Conservation Society

Aaron Bouska
New York Botanical Garden

David Freudenthal
Carnegie Hall

Clemente Luna
Brooklyn Academy of Music

Patrick Willingham

Sami Abu Shumays
Flushing Town Hall

Natalie Bedon
Flushing Town Hall

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

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Michael Rosenberg
New York City Center

Dina Rosenthal
Staten Island Children's Museum

Russel Granet
New 42

Hassiem Muhammad
New 42

Connie Butler
MoMA PS1

Kimberly Olsen
NY Arts in Education Roundtable

Randi Berry
Indie Space

Lucy Sexton
New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Francine Garber-Cohen
Regina Opera Company

Lisa Gold
Asian American Alliance

Brittany Bellinger
Museum Hue

DJ McDonald
Dance Parade

Rasu Jilani
Brooklyn Arts Councils

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

- Jesus Lopez-Jenson
Brooklyn Arts Councils

- Mohammed Yousuf
Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

- Jamaine Smith
Staten Island Arts

- Leah Okin
Two Local 764, IATSE

- Angela Johnson
Local 798, IATSE

- Noel Jacoby
Local 798, IATSE

- Daniel Arnow
Actor Fund Housing Dev. Corp.

- Jillian Gersten
Museum of Jewish Heritage

- Esther Robinson
ArtBuilt

- Ariel Savransky
92nd St Y

- Maren Berthelsen
Symphony Space

- Risa Shoup
A.R.T. New York/ Theater Makers

- Eva Davis
Latinx Arts Consortium of NY

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COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

5

Mauricio Delfin
Culture & Arts Policy Institute

Penn Genthner
The Classical Theatre of Harlem

Bar Barca Manu (SP?)
Self

Andrew Sotomayor

Katrina Jeffries

Potrirankamanis Queano Nur

Maria Scali

Libertad Guerra

Nicole Touzien

Christopher Leon Johnson

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning ladies and
3 gentlemen. This is a mic check for the Committee on
4 Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International
5 Intergroup Relations. Today's date is February 9,
6 2026, we are in Hearing Room 1 and this is being
7 recorded by Michael Kane.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet down please. Quiet down
9 please. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.
10 Welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
11 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
12 International Intergroup Relations. If you wish to
13 testify today, please fill out a witness slip at the
14 back of the room with the Sergeant at Arms, even if
15 you've registered online.

16 At no point may you approach the dais and please
17 silence all devices. Chair, you may begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. [GAVEL] Good
19 afternoon. I am Council Member Nantasha Williams,
20 Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
21 Libraries, and International Relations. Welcome to
22 our oversight hearing on Affordability in New York
23 City's Arts and Cultural Sector. This is my first
24 hearing as Chair of the Committee.

25 [APPLAUSE FROM CROWD]

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3 Well, thank you. I feel very privileged to Chair
4 a Committee that is dedicated to New York City's
5 brilliant and innovative arts and cultural community,
6 which does so much to bring New Yorkers together in
7 good times and in difficult times, which contributes
8 to substantially to our local economy and which makes
9 New York City the arts capital of our country. I'll
10 also say the world, while also drawing in tourists
11 from around the world.

12 Before talking about our hearing today though, I
13 want to note that we are in the early days of Black
14 history month, which is a time when many of our arts
15 and cultural organizations including our many
16 museums, spotlight the accomplishments of Black
17 artists throughout our history who have brought their
18 dance, art, music in theater to all New Yorkers.

19 It is also a time when our public libraries offer
20 up their extensive collections for reading and
21 research and reflection on the importance of Black
22 authors in the telling of our history. Let us
23 remember, not just this month, but every month that
24 Black artists and cultural leaders across all
25 disciplines have made invaluable contributions to our
city.

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3 In addition to our oversight topic today, we will
4 be hearing the following pieces of legislation.

5 Preconsidered Resolution sponsored by this Speaker,
6 Council Member Julie Menin, which would recognize
7 April 6 annually as Tartan Day in the City of New
8 York. Preconsidered Resolution, sponsored by myself,
9 which would designate March 22nd annually as a Tribe
10 Called Quest Day in the City of New York and honor
11 their innovative mix of hip hop and jazz that
12 impacted generations of musicians and audiences.

13 Resolution 15-2026, sponsored by Council Member
14 Joann Ariola, which would declare July 2nd annually
15 in the City of New York as Freedom Day to commemorate
16 the anniversary of the vote of the Second Continental
17 Congress to declare independence from Great Britain
18 in 1776.

19 And Resolution 16-2026, also sponsored by Council
20 Member Ariola, which would declare March 14th
21 annually as Innocent 11 Remembrance Day in the City
22 of New York in honor of those who were murdered by an
23 anti-Italian mob in New Orleans in 1891. Let me
24 invite Council Member - oh - oh okay. So, they
25 messed up, not me. That the first one is actually
sponsored by our Minority Leader David Carr, and so,

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3 with that I will first turn it over to him to speak
4 on his Resolution.

5 MINORITY LEADER CARR: Thank you Deputy Speaker
6 and congratulations to you on Chairing your first
7 hearing of this Committee. I look forward to many
8 interesting and productive hearings to come.

9 I'm very privileged to be introducing today's
10 Preconsidered Resolution, establishing April 6th
11 annually as Tartan Day in the City of New York. This
12 is an occasion that has long been recognized
13 federally and it's with good reason because there are
14 many of Scots ancestry who have been a part of this
15 country since before the founding. They have been an
16 integral part of our culture and our communities
17 across the five boroughs and the 50 states and have
18 done so much to become a part of the tapestry of our
19 great nation. Whether it was fighting alongside
20 George Washington's patriot forces in the American
21 Revolution to Sam Wilson, the eponymous Uncle Sam in
22 the War of 1812, to people who have contributed to
23 arts and culture, like Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash,
24 Edgar Allan Poe, James Carnegie, one of our great
25 philanthropists. So, to whom we owe much in this
city and beyond. And so, this is definitely an

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3 occasion worth recognizing here at the New York City
4 level and that's why I'm proud to bring forward this
5 Resolution, establishing April 6th annually as Tartan
6 Day in the City of New York and encourage all my
7 colleagues to sign on as co-sponsors. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And now I'll turn it over
9 to Council Member Ariola, who is joining us on Zoom
10 to talk about her Resolution.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Thank you Chair. First,
12 I'd like to talk about Freedom Day. The 249 and a
13 half years ago on July 2, 1776, the sweltering
14 chamber in Philadelphia, the members of the Second
15 Continental Congress, took a vote that changed the
16 world forever on that day, not July 4th as so many
17 believe, the founding fathers declared that 13
18 American colonies were henceforth free and
19 independent states.

20 John Adams himself, wrote that July 2nd would be
21 celebrated for generations. Yet over time, that date
22 has faded. That's why I'm asking for you to support
23 Resolution 15 to designate July 2nd as Freedom Day in
24 New York City. This new day does not replace July
25 4th but instead, it will deepen the meaning.

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3 I'd also like to acknowledge that I am co-prime
4 sponsor on the Resolution declaring April 6th
5 annually as Tartan Day in the City of New York and as
6 the proud wife of a first generation American of
7 Scottish decent. I am proud to co-sponsor with the
8 Minority Leader.

9 On the Intro. regarding the uhm, the - on March
10 14, 1891, 11 men were dragged into the streets of New
11 Orleans and brutality murdered before a cheering
12 crowd. One of them, a mentally ill 28-year-old, was
13 hanged from a land post to death while another man
14 was hanged from a nearby tree.

15 These men were either acquitted and had their
16 trial declared a mistrial. They were not tried in a
17 murder case and that had actually gripped the city
18 despite the acquittals and mistrials however, the
19 forces of bigotry and hatred prevailed and these men
20 were murdered and not because of any crime but
21 because of who they were and the fact that they were
22 Italian. And for that, I'm so glad that you have
23 taken up the charge of hearing the Innocent 11 Bill
24 and I look forward to my colleagues signing on and
25 passing. Thank you so much for the time.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and now for a
3 few words about our oversight topic. In 2015, former
4 Mayor Bill de Blasio, signed Local Law 46 requiring
5 the creation of a comprehensive cultural plan for New
6 York City entitled 'Create NYC'. The plan was
7 designed to map support for arts and culture
8 throughout the five boroughs to coordinate existing
9 and future programming to meet established needs and
10 fill gaps and services and to ensure growth.
11 Excellence and equity now and long into the future.

12 One of the eight key issues the plan focused on
13 was affordability or as the plan put it, the
14 protection of cultural spaces under threat and the
15 creation of new spaces to ensure that living, work,
16 and presentation spaces remain affordable for artists
17 and cultural organizations across disciplines.

18 The DCLA issued an update to create NYC in its
19 2019 Action Plan, which condensed 28 objectives into
20 just five. One of which, was to address the
21 affordability crisis for the cultural community. The
22 Action Plan set out five strategies for DCLA to work
23 on and implement including supporting living wages
24 for artists and cultural workers, preserving and
25 developing long term affordable - okay, lots of

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3 difficulties on my first hearing. The Zoom just went
4 down, so we have to pause. So, please hold. Thank
5 you. [PAUSE 00:09:02-00:10:02]. Okay, we're back.

6 As I was saying, the Action Plan set out five
7 strategies for DCLA to work on and implement
8 including supporting living wages for artists and
9 cultural workers, preserving and developing long-term
10 affordable artist workspace and housing, and
11 promoting the inclusion of cultural facilities and
12 city led development. The Committee is interested in
13 an update on DCLA's progress on the five strategies.
14 We are fortunate today to have an expert witness, the
15 authors of a new report published last December by
16 the Center for an Urban Future entitled, 'Creative
17 New York 2025.'

18 The report states that and I quote, "the creative
19 sectors importance to the city's economy and civic
20 life has never been greater, yet an intensifying
21 affordability crisis has led to stagnant job growth
22 an exodus of artists, and a mounting challenge for
23 the city's next generation of leaders.

24 The report provides many statistics to support
25 its claims including that the number of individuals
who are making a living in the creative economy has

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3 dropped and that New York City market share of the
4 creative economy workers compared to other U.S.
5 city's has also declined. While New York City's
6 creative workers earn less nationally than their
7 peers after adjusting of course for a very high cost
8 of living in New York City.

9 Artists of color earn still less than White
10 artists but it is not just individual creative
11 workers who are facing hard times. The report notes
12 that many nonprofit organizations in this sector are
13 increasingly on shaky financial ground and that
14 almost 50 arts venues have closed since 2020. We
15 know that nonprofits are struggling to keep afloat as
16 costs increase and as public funding and private
17 philanthropy decrease because we hear that on a
18 weekly Cultural at 3 Zoom call, which we have been
19 attending by hundreds of leaders of nonprofit arts
20 organizations in New York City since the beginning of
21 the pandemic.

22 I want to thank all of the organizers of the
23 Cultural at 3 calls but especially Lucy Sexton at New
24 Yorkers for Cultural and Arts for their amazing
25 persistence. The Center for an Urban Future offers
ten policy recommendations in the report and I look

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3 forward to discussing those recommendations in this
4 hearing as we begin to address the affordability
5 crisis. Now, I want to acknowledge my colleagues on
6 the Committee who are present, Council Member Hudson,
7 Ossé, Ung and Maloney. Oh, I would also like to
8 thank Priyanka, my Chief of Staff, Shakee, Alejandro,
9 Regina, and Carolina and I would like to remind
10 everyone that from the public who wishes to testify
11 in person today that you must fill out an appearance
12 card, which is located on the desk of the Sergeant at
13 Arms at the back of the room. Please fill out the
14 slip even if you've already registered to testify in
15 advance.

16 When you are called, please limit your testimony
17 to two minutes, whether you are testifying in person
18 or on Zoom. I am also going to ask my colleagues to
19 limit their questions and comments to five minutes.
20 We are ready to call Eli from the Center for an Urban
21 Future as our first witness and with that, I welcome
22 you.

23 ELI DVORKIN: Good afternoon. Hey Chair
24 Williams, thank you so much and thank you to the
25 whole Committee for the honor of testifying today.
My name is Eli Dvorkin. I'm the Editorial and Policy

3 Director at the Center for an Urban Future and the
4 author of our coauthor of our Creative New York
5 Report.

6 Since the pandemic, the city's arts ecosystem has
7 faced serious new threats, driven in large part by an
8 affordability crisis that is hitting artists,
9 creative workers and cultural organizations
10 especially hard.

11 Our new creative New York report finds that since
12 2019, New York has seen an 18.8 percent decline in
13 dancers, an 8 percent drop in actors, and a 3 percent
14 decrease in musicians. Overall, the city's resident
15 artist population is down 4.4 percent, after
16 increasing by nearly 35 percent between 2004 and
17 2019. So, why is this happening now? Affording life
18 in New York has never been easy for artists. What
19 our research shows is that the pressure has
20 intensified to a breaking point as expenses have
21 risen far faster than incomes or revenues, both for
22 artists and for the organizations that employ and
23 serve them.

24 New data in our report from Arts Pool, which
25 provides administrative support to small and mid-
sized arts organizations, illustrates this gap

1 clearly. Between 2019 and 2024, median revenues
2 among member organizations rose just 2.2 percent
3 while median operating expenses shot up 64 percent.
4 That level of expense growth relative to revenues is
5 just unsustainable.

6
7 And for workers, this squeeze is just as severe.
8 After adjusting for New Yorks cost of living,
9 creative workers now earn about 23 percent less than
10 the national average in New York City, worse than a
11 15 percent gap that our research identified a decade
12 ago. And these pressures are compounded by long
13 standing disparities as the Chair noted, our report
14 shows that artists of color, earn roughly 27 percent
15 less than White artists in New York City further
16 narrowing who can afford to live and work as an
17 artist in New York City.

18 At the same time, creative employment has shifted
19 dramatically toward freelance and contract work.
20 Since 2019, self-employment in creative industries
21 has grown by more than ten percent even as overall
22 creative sector employment has declined six percent
23 and the number of independent artists, writers, and
24 performers has surged, creating deeper levels of
25 financial insecurity.

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3 Taken together, these trends point to a
4 structural shift in the cultural sector one that is
5 unlikely to reverse without deliberate policy action.
6 Fortunately, investments in the Department of
7 Cultural Affairs have enabled some meaningful
8 progress in recent years. Baseline funding has grown
9 thanks to the leadership of the City Council; both
10 the Cultural Institutions Group and the Cultural
11 Development Fund have expanded and diversified and
12 recent initiatives like Create in Place point in the
13 right direction towards safeguarding cultural spaces
14 and infrastructure. But the affordability pressures
15 now reshaping the creative sector extend far beyond
16 DCLA's core focus areas.

17 So, while DCLA should be championing this work at
18 every turn, it cannot do this alone. This is across
19 agency affordability challenge and it requires a
20 citywide response. Our report points to several
21 steps the City Council has well positioned to
22 advance. First, the City Council should advance a
23 City of Yes for artists package that fully integrates
24 arts infrastructure into land use and rezoning
25 decisions. This could include creating a citywide
artist live, work standard, incorporating artist

1
2 space into office to residential conversions and
3 major public projects and launching an artist housing
4 accelerator to help cover early stage costs that
5 often stall these developments before they start.

6 Second, New York needs a little bit of artist
7 housing everywhere. The Council can make this
8 possible by clarifying that artist preference housing
9 is permitted within affordable housing development
10 citywide and work with mission driven developers to
11 build it. The urgency is real. Over the past
12 decade, our research shows that while other U.S.
13 cities have created nearly 3,000 units of artist
14 preference housing, New York City has created none.

15 Third, the city should pilot portable benefits
16 for freelance and independent creative workers. A
17 growing share of the creative workforce lacks basic
18 benefits and protections and a city led pilot would
19 help stabilize careers, reduce inequities and retain
20 our creative talent.

21 Fourth, the city should address out of control
22 insurance costs by pooling purchasing power and
23 helping negotiate better terms, the city can reduce a
24 major destabilizing force for small venues and
25 community based cultural organizations alike.

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3 The fifth, the Council should require a biannual
4 artist survey, so that city policies grounded in up
5 to date data on artist housing income and workspace
6 needs, and inclusive of artists who can't make a
7 living off of their artistic practice solely and who
8 are often counted in the Census Bureau as restaurant
9 workers or teachers and not as artists.

9 And finally, the city should expand paid
10 opportunities for artists to be able to actually
11 generate more revenue in New York City. By launching
12 the city's first true five borough cultural festival.
13 This week long event would put artists to work while
14 drawing New Yorkers into Parks, Plaza's, open streets
15 and cultural venues citywide.

16 To make this sustainable, the city should reform
17 the temporary place of assembly permitting process
18 and deepen the integration of artists across city
19 government building on but expanding on the public
20 artists and residents program.

21 If these pressures continue unchecked, the city
22 risks losing not only its cultural vitality but a
23 core pillar of its economic and civic life. The
24 choice before policy makers is whether to treat arts
25 and culture as an amenity or as an essential

3 infrastructure deserving of a serious coordinated
4 affordability strategy.

5 I look forward to working with this Council and
6 all the colleagues behind me to ensure that New York
7 remains a place where artists and cultural
8 organizations can afford to thrive. Thank you so
9 much for the opportunity to testify today.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Uhm, I have a
11 few questions for you. So, in writing, your Creative
12 New York 2025 Report, did you have any discussions
13 with DCLA about the affordability issues you
14 addressed or about your recommendations?

15 ELI DVORKIN: Yes, we did. I mean there's some
16 you know really tremendous colleagues at DCLA that
17 provided input on the report. I was particularly
18 hardened by the work that's launched more recently in
19 the form of the Create in Place Initiative, which is
20 working to help stabilize arts organizations that may
21 be at risk of closing or losing their spaces but that
22 work needs more resources to be able to not only
23 identify the problems and respond with you know
24 initially but to be to actually coordinate investment
25 across the city to help solve some of those problems
that are identified through that process. And I

1 would say that's maybe true across the agency in
2 general. As our research shows, funding for DCLA has
3 increased remarkably over the last decade. It's up
4 almost 90 percent and but at the same time, I think
5 many, many arts organizations, they're not feeling
6 that funding increase. One of the points that our
7 report makes is that the number of cultural
8 nonprofits in New York City has surged over 30
9 percent just since 2019 alone. So, when
10 organizations report that they feel like they are
11 fighting for scraps or that there's more competition
12 than ever, our data really underscores that that's
13 true. And so, even though funding has increased, it
14 struggled to keep pace with the growth of our
15 creative sector and at the same time, many of these
16 challenges can't be addressed by an agency that even
17 after the funding increases over the past decade,
18 still receives just about a quarter of one percent of
19 a \$117 billion annual budget.
20

21 So, those are some of the takeaways in terms of
22 what more is needed there.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And what do you think
24 would be the most important recommendation for DCLA
25 to pursue immediately?

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3 ELI DVORKIN: Well, I mean I do think that the
4 you know codifying this approach to addressing
5 affordability was the right step. Uhm, I mean
6 ideally DCLA could help convene and lead a citywide
7 effort to address these challenges that would extend-
8 that would include DCLA but it would extend to other
9 city agencies where they have the levers, the budget,
10 the tools, and the resources to be able to execute on
11 more of the strategy. There was an effort a decade
12 ago for DCLA to partner with other agencies to help
13 create artist workspace and artist housing. Housing
14 has not succeeded. We haven't seen a single new unit
15 in a decade. The work space effort was modest. You
16 know we were able to see you know a small amount of
17 space generated through that initiative. So, I would
18 love to see those approaches get additional focus and
19 attention but in addition to see support from the
20 Council and leadership from the Administration, to
21 bring other agencies to the table to help execute on
22 those core needs, which I think will fall outside of
23 what one of our city's smallest agencies could do on
24 its own.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And what do you see as the
25 role of the City Council in advocating for the

1 implementation of these recommendations and in
2 supporting that implementation financially,
3 legislatively or in other ways?

4
5 ELI DVORKIN: Yeah, well first of all, thank you
6 to all of you, you and your colleagues for convening
7 this hearing today. It's an amazingly important step
8 in the right direction. I think you're shining a
9 light on exactly the issue, which we reported on a
10 decade ago that the biggest threat facing the arts
11 was affordability but unfortunately, without enough
12 policy action and response, the challenge has only
13 deepened and it's led to the situation we're in today
14 where we're losing artists for the first time in
15 generations in New York City.

16 In terms of what the Council can do, I think
17 several of the ideas that I outlined, could be done
18 by the Council or supported directly by the Council.
19 Some of them I think have a legislative component,
20 like, a biannual artist survey. Some of them,
21 there's actually legislation pending, including
22 legislation that uh Council Member Bottcher and
23 Powers introduced last year, that would take a step
24 toward addressing the lack of housing with an
25 preference by clarifying that artist preference

1 policy is allowed under the city's affordable housing
2 policy.
3

4 But I think some of these other steps could
5 potentially be led by the Council as well. I think
6 the idea of a portable benefits pilot program is
7 something the Council could potentially help to
8 initiate and find the insurance challenge, while
9 difficult to fund by the Council alone could
10 potentially be supported in the form of a feasibility
11 study and potentially a pilot that could help to
12 advance the work of creating a risk retention group
13 or pooling insurance demand and negotiating directly
14 to lower rates. And absolutely this idea I think of
15 a City of Yes type of initiative for the arts, which
16 would really focus on how do we ensure that when the
17 city makes major land use decisions, obviously where
18 the Council plays a leading role, that those
19 decisions incorporate affordability for artists, arts
20 organizations, space to make work, produce work and
21 present work. Uh, all too often, artists feel like
22 when they hear about major land use changes in their
23 neighborhoods that they don't have a seat at the
24 table. They haven't been consulted and in many
25 cases, they don't know what the levers are that exist

1 to be able to you know where they hear about
2 community benefits agreements or other concessions
3 that invest in schools because of overcrowding
4 concerns or you know infrastructure, like sewer
5 systems. I think many organizations across New York
6 City feel like they're unaware that those same tools
7 could potentially create space that would benefit all
8 New Yorkers by improving affordability for artists.

9
10 So, to me, those are some of the dimensions where
11 I think the City Council could play an absolutely
12 critical role.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'll turn it
14 to my colleagues who have questions and first up is
15 Council Member Ossé.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much Chair.
17 I'm really intrigued by that City of Yes for artists
18 idea that you have especially around artist housing.
19 You referred other cities that had a similar type of
20 program when it comes to land use decisions and
21 building housing with set asides for artists. What
22 are those specific cities and how those programs been
23 put into work?

24 ELI DVORKIN: Yeah, thank you Council Member.
25 So, I mean, several other cities have built a lot

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3 more artist housing in the last decade than New York
4 has, especially given that we're at zero. From San
5 Francisco to Boston to Chicago, and smaller cities
6 too including some cities upstate like New Rochelle
7 that have actually been able to - if there's anybody
8 in here from West Chester, that's not upstate but New
9 Rochelle and also cities upstate, what I think
10 typifies those projects is a couple of things. One
11 is clarity either at the state level or the city
12 level that an artist preference is allowable under
13 their affordable housing framework. And the good
14 news for New York, for New York City is that New York
15 State actually has that policy in place. Uhm, you
16 know the state HCR has developed a thoughtful, a
17 simple policy that provides affordable housing
18 developers with a framework for incorporating in
19 artist preference. And I would say one of the
20 keystones of that policy is that the definition of an
21 artist is not based off of your W2's, your 1099's.
22 It's based off of a portfolio review that's inclusive
23 of artists that have a meaningful, sustained artistic
24 practice but may not be able to pay their bills as an
25 artist every month of the year. Artist income is so
incredibly variable and it's only gotten more

1 variable as more of that work is shifted to freelance
2 employment. So, those are some of the pieces that
3 other cities have put into place. Fortunately, we
4 have a robust affordable housing you know policy in
5 New York. We've got financing tools that can help
6 but there's been a chilling effect I think by the -
7 two factors, one, the idea that the artists of New
8 York City don't reflect the true diversity of New
9 York City, which is kind of a misperception that
10 flows from that census data that I mentioned before,
11 which doesn't count artists who don't say that their
12 primary source of income is their artistic practice.
13 And so, we're missing tens of thousands of artist in
14 that data that could really benefit from an artist
15 preference policy that is portfolio based and not
16 just based off of your earnings and then the other
17 component is making sure that there is a - there's
18 clarity for mission driven you know developers in New
19 York City that this is a priority for New York. That
20 something that New York, that policy makers want to
21 see in their communities and I would argue that
22 rather than the previous generations of affordable
23 housing for artists that we've had in New York and we
24 have some of the pioneered projects in the whole
25

1 nation, like Manhattan Plaza. That I don't think the
2 solution is necessarily new all affordable housing
3 for artist development but that instead integrate an
4 artist preference into projects all over New York
5 City, so that five percent here or ten percent there
6 becomes I think more feasible but also would expand
7 the benefits of creating stability, housing stability
8 for artists to communities across the five boroughs.

9
10 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Yeah, I think that was my
11 next question. Is, in the forms that you've seen
12 artist preference take place when it comes to the
13 conversation around housing, has it been you know a
14 citywide percentage that's been allocated towards
15 housing for artists or is it project by project?
16 Does that fold into negotiation?

17 ELI DVORKIN: Yeah, it's a bit of both. I mean,
18 some places have kind of set a clear policy goal for
19 developing artist housing municipal - you know at the
20 city level but typically it takes place at the level
21 of individual projects. We actually have seen
22 probably more projects that are designed to be all
23 artists then what we're proposing but in part, that's
24 because not every city has the kind of robust
25 affordable housing programs that New York City does.

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3 I think maybe the best model is to combine those
4 two elements though where it's an artist preference
5 that is determined through a portfolio review
6 process, not run by government necessarily but in
7 many cases, run by a partner organization so that the
8 decisions aren't being made by let's say DCLA. They
9 are decisions that are being made by a panel of
10 artists that are commissioned by a nonprofit for
11 example. I think that's just a better, more
12 democratic kind of distributive way to do it and then
13 the other component being a small artist preference
14 everywhere rather than only seeing artist housing as
15 unique buildings that require a major investment in
16 just one you know place.

17 And that hasn't been the case necessarily
18 nationwide but I think increasingly cities are
19 recognizing the data approach could be more equitable
20 ultimately in terms of the impact and also more
21 doable because that means that every artist housing,
22 every affordable housing project could potentially
23 have an artist preference component, rather than only
24 a small, tiny handful that have a unique 100 percent
25 artist housing framework. So, those are a couple of
things we're seeing nationally.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you.

3 ELI DVORKIN: Thank you so much Council Member.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Council Member Ung and
5 then Council Member Maloney.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Hi, thank you for your
7 testimony today. You said earlier that DCLA can
8 benefit from collaboration, working with other
9 agencies. Can you be a little bit more specific on
10 that?

11 ELI DVORKIN: Sure, and I would say I mean DCLA
12 certainly does collaborate with other agencies and I
13 think would be the first to champion the power of
14 those partnerships. I think part of what we're
15 getting at in our report is the immense opportunity
16 to integrate policies that support artists and
17 culture across the rest of city government. So, for
18 instance, uh at the Economic Development Corporation,
19 you know we have not seen in recent years a major
20 focus on arts and culture in the broader, creative
21 economy. There certainly are some smaller
22 initiatives but EDC's been largely focused I think in
23 other parts of the economy.

24 That should change. You know there should be a
25 major new level of focus on in kind of the, the - you

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3 know in EDC going forward that may be more focused on
4 affordability then ever but to say, we need to make
5 sure that part of this agency's work prioritizes not
6 only creating jobs in the creative economy where
7 we're seeing real pain right now but also making sure
8 that additional projects create opportunities for the
9 arts. Whether that's city owned land being used to
10 develop you know major new you know housing project
11 or you know mixed use development. How do we make
12 sure that part of those projects includes a. space or
13 the arts, and b. potentially some of the capital
14 budget actually going to arts, to artists like we do
15 three percent for art for example.

16 But it's not just you know EDC. I would say the
17 issues around the vulnerabilities that are booming
18 freelance workforce space, that could be a
19 partnership including with DCWP and other agencies.
20 Looking at some of the challenges that we're seeing
21 around artist housing. Well, there's got to be
22 momentum from HPD or it's going to be very
23 challenging. DCLA on its own isn't going to be able
24 to kind of break that law jam for example.

25 So, I think in all these areas, I see there's an
appetite for more collaboration. I would argue with

1 leadership from the Council and from the Mayor, there
2 can be a clear focus on every agency reporting back
3 frankly to all of you on how are we integrating
4 artists into our policy agenda going forward? Into
5 our investments and into our policy agenda?
6

7 Frankly, many agencies are just never asked. So,
8 even if there's an appetite for collaboration, there
9 isn't necessarily any accountability to focus on, how
10 are those other parts of government advancing the
11 needs of our arts communities while they you know
12 execute on their core mission?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you.

14 ELI DVORKIN: Thanks Council Member.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you for being
16 here. I had some follow-up questions on the decline
17 you mentioned. So, you said it's a decline of about
18 6.1 percent since 2019. Do you have any data on
19 which sectors of the creative economy are being hit
20 the most?

21 ELI DVORKIN: We do, uhm, unfortunately it's all
22 of them. You know there's really not a single
23 industry that's actually grown in terms of employment
24 since 2019. One of the few bright spots was actually
25 in music production but when we dug deeper into the

1 data, all of the increase was in freelance work.

2 None of it was actually in full-time employment.

3 Every industry is seeing declines. There was some

4 really notable declines that are even more than the

5 average, that six percent average. For instance, you

6 know film and TV employment has declined by double

7 digits since 2019. Advertising is down by about

8 eight percent. Fashion employment has dropped by

9 almost 25 percent, which is a really striking

10 finding. So, what we're seeing is really across the

11 board in terms of the creative industries, not just

12 artists, that we're seeing declines really for the

13 first time in years.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: I also saw on the report

15 that art venues are closing. And it said something

16 like 50 arts venues had closed. What does that mean

17 for the pipeline for emerging artists and for

18 employment opportunities?

19 ELI DVORKIN: Yeah, thank you for that question

20 Council Member. I think it is a major red warning

21 light for the whole New York City economy. We see

22 many of those smaller and medium sized organizations

23 are kind of the canaries in the coal mine in terms of

24 the damage that we're incurring in the city due to

1 the growing lack of affordability in the arts. And
2 to your point of your question absolutely, we can't
3 have Broadway you know, a \$13 billion, \$14 billion
4 industry without an ecosystem of small theaters and
5 commissioning organizations that are willing to take
6 risks and enable artists to try new things.
7 Ultimately, the strength of our arts ecosystem is in
8 its grassroots. And fortunately, this affordability
9 crisis is hitting many of those smaller organizations
10 especially hard. They also deal with the variability
11 of funding, including city funding. They're in an
12 unpredictability there and so many of their workers
13 are among those that are really struggling right now,
14 unable to earn a living wage in our economy even as
15 the organizations that pay their salaries have
16 struggled to figure out how we're going to increase
17 those salaries given how our expenses have risen so
18 much faster than our revenue.
19

20 So, taken together, I think we're seeing damage
21 across the ecosystem from the very large to very
22 small but I'm especially concerned about the impact
23 of this affordability crisis on small and mid-sized
24 organizations and you're right, that is the - that's
25 the fertile soil that the rest of our creative

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1 economy depends on for to pollinate and incubate new
2 work and so, we could potentially still be a city,
3 which is accommodating to world renowned artists who
4 have already kind of made their name performing their
5 work at a very you know well paid with high ticket
6 prices you know for a global audience but our arts
7 ecosystem can't survive off of that level of
8 performance alone. We need to be a city that is able
9 to incubate new work and create spaces where
10 organizations and artists can take risks and
11 unfortunately, that risk taking is deeply threatened
12 by an affordability crisis that has made it so
13 unsustainable for those smaller organizations to
14 operate here.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Yeah, last question is
17 about the pandemic that many of the artist leaving
18 cited a pandemic driven decision. What does the data
19 show about that trend and is it job opportunities,
20 housing costs, that has kept them from coming back?

21 ELI DVORKIN: Yeah, you know I appreciate the
22 question in part because when we began the research
23 process, I think one of our hypotheses was actually
24 that we were going to see a recovery from the
25 pandemic. We were writing extensively all through

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3 2020, 2021 about the impact of the pandemic artists
4 and cultural organizations but my hope is actually
5 that we are going to see finally some reversion to
6 the mean and then the question was going to be, where
7 do we go from there? And instead, what we actually
8 found was, we haven't recovered from the pandemic.
9 Arguably, as the pandemic began to finally loosen its
10 grip on New York, we saw the affordability crisis
11 only worsen. And so, so much of the increase in cost
12 in New York City has been since 2020 and as a result,
13 where I was once hopeful that we were going to see
14 kind of a full recovery in the performing arts in
15 particular but across the creative economy more
16 broadly, instead we've seen quite the opposite and
17 none of these industries are on the trajectory to
18 return to their level of employment that we saw in
19 2019 anytime soon.

20 So, so that's sort of the overall takeaway. In
21 terms of where the artists and creative workers go, I
22 think that's part of the risk that New York faces in
23 this moment, in this very moment, which is that you
24 know for years, we've been hearing about artists
25 potentially leaving New York for greener pastures,
cheaper pastures frankly. You know whether that's

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1 Baltimore or Mexico City or Berlin. And first of
2 all, many New Yorkers or artists, don't have the
3 flexibility to leave New York. They're here, they
4 want to be here. They don't have opportunities
5 necessarily to leave and they feel increasingly
6 squeezed. But at the same time, I think what we saw
7 previously was the sense that there was always an
8 argument. Look, New York's been an incredibly
9 expensive city to be an artist for decades. It's not
10 new but the opportunities couldn't possibly match up
11 elsewhere. So, sure you could go to another U.S.
12 city and live a life that's cheaper, in a lot of ways
13 easier, but you wouldn't have the creativity, the
14 interconnectedness of the creative ecosystem in New
15 York City and you'd miss that. You'd miss the
16 opportunities here and ultimately that felt like
17 there was still a valued proposition here that could
18 keep artists in New York because even if it was
19 incredibly expensive here and only increasingly so.
20 The opportunities were incomparable. Well, one of
21 the things our research shows is that that is
22 starting to shift. Now New York City still is the
23 largest creative economy in the nation and we should
24 be proud of that and do everything we can to hold
25

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1 onto that but we've seen that the share of all U.S.
2 employment in the creative industries in New York
3 City has declined for the first time in decades. You
4 know down to 8.6 percent from over 9 percent just a
5 few years ago. In addition to that, we're seeing
6 other cities aren't standing still. A creative
7 industry employment has surged by double digits
8 everywhere from Denver to Nashville and beyond. And
9 so, even though a couple of other major cities have
10 seen declines, that are also expensive cities, places
11 like San Francisco and Chicago and many other U.S.
12 cities have actually gained ground on New York City
13 during this time. So, I think, while I don't believe
14 anytime soon that suddenly we're going to see you
15 know Dallas or Denver become a bigger, more
16 attractive, creative you know capital than New York.
17 The thread is real and I think we're seeing it in
18 terms of where artists are moving because the
19 combination of greater affordability and greater
20 opportunity then existed even five years ago is
21 beginning to shift their thinking and by the way, the
22 rest of our state has benefited. I mean the resident
23 artist population in the Hudson Valley has doubled
24 during the same time period. So, even if the overall
25

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2 numbers are relatively small, we're definitely seeing
3 artists you know voting with their feet and New York
4 City if suffering the consequences of that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MALONEY: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much for
7 joining us. I know I personally appreciate the
8 thoroughness and I consider myself wonky so I
9 appreciate all of the data that you all have put
10 together to make this analysis and we look forward to
11 with you and others in the room to really try to
12 address this crisis.

13 ELI DVORKIN: Thank you so much Deputy Speaker
14 and also I should have mentioned this earlier but you
15 know full support for Tribe Called Quest Day. I wore
16 out my cassette tape. I'm old enough to have one of
17 the low end theory, so very much appreciate your
18 efforts there.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

20 ELI DVORKIN: Thank you all so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Yes, some
22 great artists come from the 27th Council District,
23 Tribe Called Quest being one, yes.

24 Okay I will now turn this over to Committee
25 Counsel to swear in the Administration.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair, just one minute.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for your
4 patience. I want to acknowledge that Council Member
5 Louis has joined us over Zoom and Council Member
6 Stevens has also joined us. Hi.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uhm, good morning. Now, in
8 accordance with the rules of the Council, I will
9 administer the affirmation to the witnesses from the
10 mayoral administration. I will call on each of you
11 individually for a response, please raise your right
12 hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
13 truth and nothing but the truth before this Committee
14 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions
15 Audrey St. Clair?

16 AUDREY ST. CLAIR: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lance Polivy?

18 LANCE POLIVY: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin
20 your testimony.

21 AUDREY ST. CLAIR: Good afternoon Chair Williams
22 and Members of the Committee. I am Audrey St. Clair,
23 Assistant Commissioner for Program Services at the
24 Department of Cultural Affairs. I thank you for the
25 opportunity to testify on today's topic,

3 Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural
4 Sector. I am joined today by DCLA's General Counsel
5 lance Polivy and other colleagues from the agency.

6 Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our city's
7 cultural community faced tremendous challenges
8 related to the affordability crisis. Real estate
9 that was affordable and easy to come by was already a
10 distant memory. Working artists, who are often
11 double rent burdened by paying for both housing and
12 studios, were constantly in search of space they
13 could work, create, and present in. All too often,
14 cultural spaces closed for good, artists left the
15 city or stopped practicing their work so they could
16 make their monthly rent.

17 The warning signs were already flashing red with
18 the pandemic hit, and all of these problems were only
19 made worse by its widespread and unprecedented
20 impacts. Organizations that had found a way to be
21 nimble and stay open suddenly had to shutter
22 indefinitely. Artists began to leave the city in
23 greater numbers, a trend borne out by the Center for
24 an Urban Future's new report. And our creative
25 sector, which is so crucial to what makes our city

1 vibrant, dynamic, and welcoming was pushed to the
2 brink.
3

4 Only the massive aid programs rolled out
5 throughout the pandemic, along with the remarkable
6 work, sacrifice, and commitment of our cultural
7 community, saved our creative sector from disaster.
8 Nonprofit venues received federal aid through
9 programs like the SVOG, and the city launched
10 programs like City Artist Corps to support working
11 artists, also with federal aid. But even as the most
12 acute impacts of the pandemic faded, the
13 affordability crisis has only intensified. Groups
14 are struggling to attract the same audiences they did
15 prepandemic. Federal aid has dried up, federal arts
16 funding is at risk, and private philanthropy is
17 shifting its focus. We're proud that city support
18 for culture has remained robust throughout these
19 challenging times but as the Center for an Urban
20 Futures report states, DCLA alone cannot address the
21 tremendous challenges our sector is facing. We need
22 our city's artists and institutions to continue
23 creating work, engaging New Yorkers and delivering
24 for our communities the kind of uplift, joy and
25 vibrancy that only culture can create. But it's

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3 going to take collaboration across a wide range of
4 sectors to offer the support our cultural community
5 needs to thrive.

6 Through DCLA's support for cultural programming,
7 institutions, capital needs and more, we've been able
8 to partner with a wide range of communities to ensure
9 that access to the arts remains a right, not a
10 privilege for New Yorkers. We support affordability
11 in the cultural sector from every angle, offering
12 major support for cultural organizations so they can
13 continue delivering services to New Yorkers. Through
14 our record high investments through DCLA, we're also
15 funding access, affordability, and subsidized
16 programs so that New Yorkers can engage with and
17 experience our unparalleled cultural assets.

18 The Cultural Development Fund, which I oversee at
19 DCLA, provides grant funding to approximately 1,100
20 cultural nonprofit each year. This represents the
21 agency's broadest reach into and support for the
22 cultural life of communities across the city. And
23 affordability is baked into the CDF process. The
24 first criterion our CDF panelists use to evaluate
25 applications is Public Service and Impact, which
looks at whether an organization provides programming

1 with consideration toward accessibility,
2 affordability and equity. Evidence may include,
3 among other things, reduced financial barriers with
4 relative affordability by using discount programs,
5 scholarships, sliding scale prices or other
6 subsidies. As a result, CDF is a major driver of
7 cultural affordability and accessibility across the
8 five boroughs.
9

10 In the latest cycle, 96 percent of all CDF
11 grantees are either offering their programs free of
12 charge or offering some kind of discount to make the
13 activity more financially accessible. 40 percent of
14 grantees do not charge for their services at all.
15 From audience access to affordable artist studio
16 space, programs supported through CDF include
17 Theatre Development Fund, which operates the famous
18 red TKTS Booth in Time Square, expands access to
19 performing arts through discounted tickets, arts
20 education for students, community partnerships, and
21 affordable costume rentals for nonprofits.

22 Bronx Art Space, supports Bronx based artists
23 through paid residencies and provides free, drop in
24 community art classes fostering hands on creative
25 engagement for all ages.

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3 International Studio and Curatorial Program,
4 offers subsidized studio space and professional
5 development to New York based artists. Maker Park
6 Radio, operates a free community radio station
7 offering training, resources, and public programming
8 that amplify Staten Island's local arts and culture.
9 Octavia Project engages Brooklyn teens in free, five
10 week summer programs using science fiction, writing
11 and technology to build confidence and leadership
12 skills. Cool Culture, provides free cultural access
13 passes and programming to tens of thousands of
14 underrepresented families with young children across
15 NYC.

16 Dance Entropy, operates Green Space, offering
17 affordable 24/7 studio rentals accessible to artists
18 across all movement disciplines. New 42nd Street,
19 partners with NYCHA to provide free tickets to New
20 Victory Theater performances for public housing
21 residents.

22 UpBeat NYC, delivers free, bilingual after-school
23 and summer music education to South Bronx youth
24 through long-term skill based instruction. And this
25 year, we've also maintained a 15 percent increase in
funding for the local arts councils in each borough.

3 Funding that goes to hundreds of individual artists,
4 collectives, and small nonprofits across the city.

5 Through the agencies relationship with the 39
6 members of the Cultural Institutions Group, we
7 further affordability and access for both visitors
8 and artists alike.

9 Last year, DCLA worked with the American Museum
10 of Natural History and the Human Resources
11 Administration to create a new, free membership
12 program for SNAP recipients. While New Yorkers can
13 access AMNH with suggested admission, the new
14 membership opens opportunities for audiences to
15 experience the full breadth of the museum's
16 offerings, including special exhibitions free of
17 charge.

18 This year, MoMA PS1 announced it had received
19 private funding to offer free admission to all
20 visitors. Other members of the CIG offer free or
21 suggested admission at various times. The Bronx
22 Museum is entirely free. The Met Museum offers
23 suggested admission to city residents and places like
24 the New York Aquarium offer free admission at regular
25 times throughout the week. One of our newest CIG
members, the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens,

1 recently partnered with the Mayor to announce free
2 tours for Black History Month, which took place this
3 past weekend.

4
5 In addition to these efforts to welcome as many
6 New Yorkers as possible, the CIG has a number of
7 programs aimed at creating affordable opportunities
8 for artists to work and create.

9 Flushing Town Hall, offers free use of their
10 space to support new, emerging, and mid-career
11 performance artists to develop projects. BAM's
12 Professional Development Program, provides
13 professional development training and deeply
14 discounted subsidized theater and rehearsal studio
15 rental to nonprofit Brooklyn arts organizations. New
16 York City Center, offers subsidized studio space for
17 nonprofit dance and music rehearsals. The Jamaica
18 Center for Arts and Learning and Snug Harbor Cultural
19 Center both offer discounted rehearsal spaces,
20 residencies and studio spaces.

21 Through the agency's capital program and in
22 partnership with our fellow agencies, DCLA has also
23 made major strides in integrating arts organizations
24 into city-led developments. This not only creates
25 housing and assets that meet community needs for

1 locally based cultural engagement and hubs, they also
2 provide cultural groups and artists with stable long
3 -term space to create and connect with residents.
4 Examples include Indie Space Hell's Kitchen, which
5 will be a 5,500 square foot space designed to serve
6 the Indie theater community. This facility
7 integrated into a larger HPD development will be a
8 long overdue home for itinerant artists, one that is
9 welcoming, high quality, accessible, and most
10 importantly affordable.
11

12 We recently broke ground on the Brownsville Arts
13 and Cultural Apartments, a mixed-use development in
14 Brooklyn with affordable housing and a multipurpose
15 art space. The facility will provide a new,
16 permanent home for Purelements, a Brooklyn based arts
17 organization that cultivates young artists, through
18 pre-professional dance training and arts in education
19 programs. In partnership with the nonprofit
20 ArtSpace, it will also house space for a number of
21 local Brooklyn arts and cultural groups.

22 Affordable and accessible cultural space for the
23 People's Theater, 651 Arts, Belongo, and more are
24 also in development or recently opened.
25

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3 DCLA's beloved Materials for the Arts program has
4 been a huge resource for cultural groups and arts
5 educators since it was established in 1978. MFTA has
6 5,000 member organizations across the five boroughs,
7 including arts nonprofits, public schools, and city
8 agencies who receive materials free of charge that
9 allow them to stretch budgets and offer free and
10 affordable arts programming to New Yorkers across the
11 city.

12 In just the last month, MFTA has provided nearly
13 \$240,000 worth of free supplies to member
14 organizations. Groups received an average just over
15 \$500 in free supplies per visit. This translates
16 directly into organizations and educators who can
17 bring low cost and free cultural programming to
18 communities across the city. A few examples of MFTA
19 donations from just last month include Gibney Dance,
20 picked up a baby grand piano for their rehearsal
21 spaces. The New York Latin American Art Triennial
22 received a Singer Sewing Machine for their fiber arts
23 creative projects.

24 Triskelion Arts, a small Brooklyn performance
25 space, acquired cast off carpet from the Pace gallery
in Manhattan.

2 The Brooklyn Academy of Music, got a cache of
3 bright red fabric from a pop up store in midtown and
4 reused it in a sold out event as part of the Next
5 Wave Festival.

6 When it comes to giving artists and arts workers
7 the materials they need to create programs that are
8 affordable and accessible, MFTA has a tremendous
9 impact.

10 A newer program at DCLA that was launched
11 specifically to help smaller organizations and
12 creative businesses navigate the affordability
13 crisis, is NYC Create in Place. Launched in December
14 2024. Create in Place serves as a centralized
15 support system focused on cultural real estate and
16 infrastructure, offering technical assistance,
17 interagency coordination, and public resources to
18 help cultural nonprofits and creative small
19 businesses, stabilize access, and expand space.

20 To date, Create in Place has provided support for
21 more than 80 organizations across all five boroughs,
22 expanded collaboration among 16 city agencies, and
23 successful interventions. These include playing a
24 key role in preserving the wild project on the Lower
25

1 East Side, which purchased its longtime home, thanks
2 in part to support from Create in Place.
3

4 Following this successful effort to safeguard the
5 wild projects home, Governor Hochul announced the
6 creation of the NY SPACES program, investing \$10
7 million to support similar efforts to safeguard art
8 spaces statewide. Create in Place represents a
9 meaningful response to affordability pressures and a
10 significant step towards stabilizing New York City's
11 creative ecosystem.

12 We're proud of our robust stable support for the
13 cultural sector and our many programs and initiatives
14 that strive to meet the moment and offer flexible,
15 innovative, solutions to the cost of living crisis in
16 New York. But as the CUF report makes clear, we will
17 need to work with public, private, and nonprofit
18 partners to push for the far reaching efforts we
19 need. I thank you for the opportunity to testify
20 today on this important topic and we are happy to
21 answer any questions you might have.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and fun fact,
23 when I was the SYEP intern, I worked at Materials for
24 the Arts, so I'm very familiar with that
25 organization.

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3 AUDREY ST. CLAIR: Awesome.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, generally speaking,
5 what is DCLA's level of commitment to carrying out
6 steps to accomplish the objectives set forth in
7 Create NYC and in a subsequent 2019 action plan?

8 LANCE POLIVY: Thank you very much for that
9 question Deputy Speaker Williams. It's very nice to
10 see you and welcome to your new role as Chair of this
11 Committee. It's been such a pleasure working with
12 you on arts and culture issues throughout Southeast
13 Queens and we're really looking forward to partnering
14 with you in this role.

15 We are incredibly proud as an agency of the work
16 that we did to prepare for the 2017 and subsequent
17 2019 Action Plan. It involved a lot of community
18 engagement, which we think is so important to go out
19 into communities in New York City and really listen
20 to what artists and arts and culture nonprofits need
21 most and that plan laid out a series of
22 recommendations that we've been working on
23 implementing in the nearly decade since.

24 From fostering a more equitable cultural sector
25 to tackling the affordability crisis, we've really
26 been able to focus on things like the CDF Equity

1 Fund, Affordability Initiatives, and one of the
2 things that you heard about during Assistant
3 Commissioner ST. Clair's testimony, is Create in
4 Place, which I think really speaks to the spirit of
5 the 2017 Plan. And so, at this point, the landscape
6 has changed. Our commitment to affordability has not
7 and in fact, we're as committed to affordability now
8 in 2026 as we were when we were at those initial
9 listening sessions in 2015. So, I thank you for the
10 question and it is front burner for our agency.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Actions take into carry
13 out strategies designated in the action plan are
14 supposed to be recorded on the action plan website,
15 established by DCLA but no actions related to
16 objective four have been recorded since 2020. Why
17 not and what is the process for updating the website?

18 LANCE POLIVY: That's a very good question and we
19 looked into it in preparation for this hearing. It
20 turns out that the website that we had established in
21 2017 for this plan is really, really difficult to
22 update and so, we are working with OTI on
23 transitioning all of that data onto a new website
24 that would be much easier for us to regularly update
25 on our own and not needing to partner with other

1 people in order to do so. So, we are getting that
2 addressed and, in the meantime, we're always happy to
3 come and testify to have offline conversations with
4 the Council and to let you know about our progress.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Sounds like bureaucracy.
7 Generally speaking, what do you think of the policy
8 recommendations in the Creative New York 2025 Report
9 written by the Center for an Urban Future?

10 LANCE POLIVY: We think that any type of report,
11 any partner that's going to dig in, get hard data on
12 what's happening in our cultural sector is an
13 incredible benefit to our entire cultural community.
14 We're very grateful to the Center for an Urban Future
15 for all of the work that they did analyzing what's
16 going on in the creative sector today and putting
17 forward this very thoughtful evidence based report.

18 These are big ideas and it's going to take
19 collaboration both across city agencies and outside
20 of city government to make some of these wonderful
21 ideas turn into a reality. And so, we think that
22 this is a call to action, this is the beginning of a
23 process to try and implement these important
24 initiatives and we look forward to working with our
25 nonprofit arts and culture partners, other city

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3 agencies and foundations in the private sector to see
4 if there are ways to implement some of these
5 important recommendations.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. What do you
7 think of recommendation three, to launch New York
8 City's first ever five borough cultural festival?
9 And I want to say in the testimony one thing that
10 came to mind about other cities, which as a Native
11 New Yorker, I'm always going to think New York City
12 is the best place ever. However, we do travel to
13 other cities. One thing I notice is like innovation
14 from their government and I think because New York
15 City is so large and there's so much going on and we
16 have so many programs that already exist, often times
17 it feels like a lack of creativity or it feels like
18 bureaucracy where you might have the idea but it's
19 very hard to like quickly like mobilize to do
20 something that might be like really creative because
21 some of the things that I see other cities doing,
22 it's like wow, that's so cool but you know they don't
23 have eight million people living there so it might be
24 a little easier. I don't want to be critical but I
25 thought that uhm, that idea was really cool. I'm
also trying to figure out how like the Council can

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1
2 execute on parts of that because we don't have like a
3 large scale cultural festival. Like people travel
4 for south by southwest as an example. Like, we don't
5 have - we have many things but we don't have
6 something large like that in New York City.

7 LANCE POLIVY: Well, I think that it's a really
8 good question and a great point. We're always open
9 to having discussions about ways to highlight the
10 festivals and cultural programming that's already
11 happening in the five boroughs and to see if we can
12 serve as a convener and amplifier of ways to market
13 the things that are happening everywhere already into
14 something that could really focus on tourism to New
15 York City and the importance of having a signature
16 festival for New York City.

17 We already are doing things like Gen Arts NYC,
18 NYC By Design, the Mayor was promoting the under the
19 radar festival, film festivals, summer concerts and
20 on and on and on. There are a lot of things that are
21 happening like this in New York City but I think
22 you're exactly right that maybe it's about connecting
23 the threads of what's happening with programming all
24 throughout the five boroughs, putting it under one
25

1 banner and working collaborative to really promote
2 that and to have our own signature festivals.

3
4 So, I think it's a really interesting one and
5 what our agency does best is funding arts and culture
6 nonprofit organizations so if we can work to convene
7 a group of them and collaborate, but it's really lead
8 by our arts and culture nonprofits who are the ones
9 who do this incredible work, there's a lot of
10 potential.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I mean, there's so
12 much going on in New York City at any given time, and
13 so, I don't think it's like a lack of things going
14 on. It certainly just feels like a lack of
15 intentionality around like a central event or series
16 of events that take place. And I'm just thinking, I
17 remember reading some reports on Coachella right and
18 I know this is like a music festival, which is very
19 specific to music and we're talking about something
20 that's a little bit more broad but the way that the
21 city like invested in like building out the
22 infrastructure to support Coachella is like something
23 that should be studied.

24 And so, I don't - I don't really see us doing
25 that at a high level. So, like obviously we want to

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3 work with the organizations or we want to work with
4 even like private sector folks that can really have
5 the resources to bring it together but I think where
6 it seems like New York City is lacking, is creating
7 the environment or the opportunity for something like
8 that to exist here and I definitely think that's an
9 opportunity for us because people want to come to New
10 York and I feel like we make it difficult you know
11 and I think about doing stuff in the parks. I know
12 you guys are not Parks Department but like the Parks
13 Department is a nightmare to do things. Like, we
14 make it very complicated for people to do these types
15 of things, so I would love to see us as a collective
16 city do better about like making it easy and actually
17 giving carrots, incentivizing people to want to do
18 something like this.

19 What do you think of recommendation 8, embedding
20 artists across city government through a major
21 expansion of DCLA's Public Artist and Residents
22 program and the additional full-time artist positions
23 and major New York City agencies?

24 LANCE POLIVY: Uhm, that is a very good question.
25 I will address that one but to just get back to the
point that you made. I do want to note that we have

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3 been hosting more large music festivals and one
4 really good example coming from Queens, which I know
5 is near and dear to you are some of the improvements
6 that have been made to Flushing Meadows Corona Park,
7 to be able to support really large multi-thousand
8 person music festivals in the park and that when you
9 make investments for a big festival like that, you're
10 also improving public space for the community 12
11 months out of the year. And so, we are really
12 supportive of the work that is already happening and
13 this Administration is really focused on cutting red
14 tape. It's been one of the major initiatives of the
15 Mayor is to look for ways to cut red tape, to do big
16 things here in New York City.

17 So, I think we're going to find a lot of ways to
18 partner there and I wanted to make sure to note that.
19 In terms of embedding artists across city government
20 for over ten years, we've had a program called PAIR,
21 that does exactly that. That picks artists and puts
22 them in residence in city agencies. And once they do
23 that, there are really extraordinary things that
24 happen and I want to really highlight our public art
25 team at the City's Department of Cultural Affairs,
because they are an extraordinary group of artists

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3 and leaders and innovators that run that program and
4 make it possible. And they find these gems, these
5 absolutely phenomenal artists that spend time
6 learning about city agencies, creating art that
7 speaks to the work that they do and that makes it
8 really accessible to the public.

9 So, we are thrilled about the PAIR program. We
10 celebrate the PAIR program. We would love to
11 continue working on ways to expand PAIR. And so, I
12 think it was a great recommendation in the report and
13 we're going to continue looking for ways to amplify
14 what is already happening in PAIR.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, I went to a festival
16 this summer at the Park. My speakers are done but it
17 was a good time. Uhm, what can the City Council do
18 to support the DCLA in implementing these
19 recommendations and questions financially,
20 legislatively, or in other ways because I do think
21 about partnering so, would love to know if you have
22 any thoughts on how we can be useful in the Council.

23 LANCE POLIVY; I mean, one of the wonderful
24 things is just how collaborative the city's
25 Department of Cultural Affairs and the Council have
26 been over many, many years and that happens every

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3 year during the budget cycle where we are working
4 together to promote arts and culture. It happens in
5 City Council initiatives that create free programming
6 throughout the five boroughs for arts and culture.
7 It just - it really resonates in all the legislation
8 that you've passed. You passed two bills in the last
9 term all about the City Canvas program, which puts
10 art on scaffolding and that program has been able to
11 do so much more because of the legislation that you
12 passed. And so, I think that there are going to be
13 many more opportunities for additional legislation.
14 We are tracking and looking forward to getting
15 updates about the artist housing bill that was
16 introduced last term that will be reintroduced this
17 term and to see what happens to that bill. And so, I
18 think it will continue to be about legislation and
19 funding and working together to achieve really big
20 things to help support our arts and culture sector
21 who is struggling so much these days and I think
22 everything we can do in and out of government to
23 support them is critical to the thriving of the
24 sector.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Do my
25 colleagues have any questions?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Good afternoon. What do
3 you think the recommendations for number ten,
4 launching a creative pathway initiative across New
5 York City Public Schools and CUNY?

6 LANCE POLIVY: We think it's a great idea. Uhm,
7 we have been really proud of investments in SYEP,
8 placing more than 3,000 individuals in arts and arts
9 adjacent industries, such as media, entertainment,
10 tourism. We did a big announcement one year at SNUG
11 Harbor with the full SYEP cohort in Staten Island.
12 And so, we think that that's a really important tool
13 and so expanding SYEP and the arts, is one place that
14 we will focus.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, no, the arts do a
16 great job with SYEP. Shout out to them. I know the
17 Bronx was one of the bigger providers who have over
18 300 young people. Yeah, I know SYEP's. That's my
19 jam.

20 LANCE POLIVY: So, that's sucks that they give
21 you Cultural Corps.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: But for me, that's not
23 enough for us to be talking about what does it look
24 like. So, if you can go onto something else.

25

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3 LANCE POLIVY: Yeah, so the next thing we do is
4 called the CUNY Cultural Corp., which provides paid
5 internships at 86 different cultural institutions
6 offering students \$20 per hour for hands on
7 experience across disciplines and we think this is
8 such a critical tool. It's like, how do people get
9 into arts administration and get into the arts? It's
10 because they had that first opportunity. So, we've
11 been doing the CUNY Cultural Corp for several years
12 now and we think that it is pivotal to the future of
13 developing the next Corp of leadership in the arts.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, that's something
15 that I know that I've had a number of conversations
16 with the CGI's about is like what does it look like
17 to make sure that we have a diversified, not just in
18 the workforce but in the leadership because that
19 doesn't necessarily is reflective. And so, like
20 other than that, what else are you doing to kind of
21 make sure that that even leadership in these
22 institutions have diversity at the management level
23 and not just you know the workforce and admin work.

24 LANCE POLIVY: Well, for the CIG's, one tool that
25 we used was that we now mandate that CIG's produce a
DI action plan and so, they have all been working on

1 those. That's several years old at this point and
2 that is one way that we partner with them on exactly
3 that initiative. They've been thinking a lot about
4 diversity in their boards, diversity in their
5 leadership. And so, I think that their goals are
6 heavily aligned with exactly what you're asking and
7 there are lots of workforce development programs
8 within the CDF too. We support programs that reduce
9 economic barriers, build skills, expand access. So,
10 in sort of all of the areas of our agency, we're
11 thinking about that workforce development. We think
12 about our public art program in these original
13 commissions in places including Roy Wilkens Park, we
14 uhm, we're always trying to select community based
15 artists who maybe haven't gotten an enormous
16 commission yet but have shown incredible promise.
17 And that's a way of them getting a percent for our
18 commission and that hopefully helping to launch lots
19 of other commissions once they see the incredible
20 work of these artists.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Uhm, and as you was
23 talking, I was thinking too and even thinking about
24 when you were talking about SYEP. Are there any
25 other ways because I know like obviously that is

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3 where a bulk of the young people are coming in but
4 when we're thinking about other pathways, how are we
5 getting young people excited about being in those
6 fields? Because I like to say all the time, young
7 people don't know what they don't know and sometimes
8 exposure is important, so what are you guys doing to
9 expose to the many jobs that are in art and not just
10 the front facing ones? And that doesn't get done
11 through just the SYEP program, so what are you guys
12 doing around that?

13 LANCE POLIVY: No, absolutely not. I mean
14 another thing that actually the Council really does
15 is through your member items. There are a lot of
16 Council Members that are sponsoring field trips to
17 these cultural institutions and they're going;
18 they're getting really specific guided tours to help
19 walk them through what these places are about. What
20 they can find there and get them excited about the
21 work that happens and that's sort of the hope of a
22 pipeline. Maybe you go on a field trip to the
23 American Museum of Natural History when you're in
24 elementary school and then you revisit and you get to
25 the New York Botanical Garden when you're in middle
school. And you're seeing more and more of these

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3 institutions. You're learning more. The tours are
4 appropriate for your age group and that you're
5 hopefully getting excited, so that when you get to
6 SYEP age, you want to choose one of those cultural
7 internships because you want to be a part of the
8 program. You want to do more of what they're doing.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, I would love for
10 you guys to think about more of a holistic approach
11 because yes a tour is nice and again, you kind of see
12 the front facing stuff but not some of the back end
13 stuff. So, how do we then promote other things like
14 curators and things like that that young people
15 wouldn't know from just going to a tour or even
16 working in these institutions and I think part of the
17 work to make their jobs easiest to figure out how do
18 we as a government then promote those things and
19 highlight those things in creative and interesting
20 ways and so, thank you. I think that's my time.
21 That's such an aggressive thought, alright.

22 LANCE POLIVY: Thank you Council Members Stevens.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That's all. Thank you so
24 much. I know we have so many groups that have signed
25 up and not that I don't love the agency but would
love to hear from all the people who have been very

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3 patiently waiting to testify and I look forward to
4 working with you Lance and Deputy Commissioner on how
5 to advance arts and culture in my city.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Is the Borough President?
7 I don't see the borough president here but is someone
8 from his office here? Okay, we did get an alert that
9 the Borough President of Manhattan is going to be
10 coming to testify, which is exciting so we will pause
11 when he blesses us with his presence.

12 LEAH C. JOHNSON: Okay, cool, so we're going to
13 go to public testimony now, so exciting. I have to
14 read a long swear because people act up at hearings,
15 is really why this has started.

16 I now open the hearing for public testimony. I
17 remind members of the public that this is a formal
18 government proceeding and that decorum shall be
19 observed at all times. As such, members of the
20 public shall remain silent at all times. The witness
21 table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No
22 video recording or photography is allowed from the
23 witness table. Further, members of the public may
24 not present audio or video recordings as testimony
25 but may submit transcripts as such recordings to the
Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

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3 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill
4 out the appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms.

5 If you have not already done so and want to be -
6 please wait to be recognized. When recognized, you
7 will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing
8 topic, Affordability in New York City's art and
9 cultural sector.

10 If you have a written statement or additional
11 written testimony you wish to submit for the record,
12 please provide a copy of that testimony to the
13 Sergeant at Arms. And I will now call the first
14 panel, which is Chris David, and Leah and Clemente,
15 correct me when you speak because I want to make sure
16 I'm saying peoples names correctly and Aaron from
17 Brooklyn. Nobody from Queens, that's crazy.

18 Alright, whoever wants to go first. You want to
19 start this way? Hi, how are you? I'm good. Thank
20 you.

21 Thank you. Thank you Chair, Deputy Speaker
22 Williams and members of the Committee. My name is
23 Leah Johnson. I'm Executive Vice President for
24 Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. New York
25 City's cultural landscape is that inflexion point.
Artists and creative workers can't afford to live

3 here and there is a growing financial strain on
4 cultural institutions.

5 To ensure the city remains the world's creative
6 capital, we must address arts and culture as a non-
7 negotiable investment in public infrastructure.

8 Cultural organizations and the creative workforce are
9 at the beating heart of our city. Annually, this
10 sector generates \$110 billion in economic activity,
11 13 percent of the city's economy.

12 In 2024, the Lincoln Center campus alone
13 contributed \$4.5 billion in economic impact welcoming
14 4.2 million visitors. For every dollar invested in
15 the arts, there is a \$3.00 return to our economy. To
16 maintain the cultural vibrancy of New York City, we
17 must provide affordable access to the arts for all
18 New Yorkers, make it possible for artist who live and
19 work here and sustain the organizations that connect
20 audience with New York.

21 At Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, we
22 believe artists carry us forward and everyone
23 deserves access to transformational arts experiences.
24 We are committed to free and low-cost access to the
25 arts for all New Yorkers.

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3 Last fiscal year, there were over 500 free
4 performances at the Lincoln Center campus. During
5 our summer for the city season alone, we welcomed
6 600,000 visitors over a nine week, all free and
7 choose what you pay festival. Providing artists with
8 space and support to hone their craft, experiment by
9 offering multiple fellowships and full time artists
10 and residents programs and partnering with fellow
11 arts organizations and civic leaders to divide
12 innovative solutions to our most pressing challenges.

13 Without bold and creative solutions, we risk
14 losing the artists and arts organizations that make
15 New York City the culture center of the universe.
16 Arts and culture is not a luxury. It's a human
17 right.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'm sad about
19 Winston, so I guess I'm like, [INAUDIBLE 01:18:45] at
20 Lincoln Center. What are you guys going to do?

21 LEAH C. JOHNSON: Well, we're going to find the
22 next generation of amazing jazz musicians.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Fair, fair, fair, but he
24 found it.
25

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2 LEAH C. JOHNSON: He did, he did but you know
3 it's time, it's time. So, we can find the next and
4 he's been cultivating a lot of people, so.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, great.

6 CHRIS DUROSINMI: Thank you Deputy Speaker,
7 Members of the Committee. My name is Chris
8 Durosini, Director for Government Community Affairs
9 for the Wildlife Conservation Society and a member of
10 the Cultural Institutions Group.

11 The Wildlife Conservations Society, operation the
12 Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo,
13 Queens Zoo, and Prospect Park Zoo. While our mission
14 advances Global Wildlife Conservation, our impact
15 here at home is just as critical.

16 Our park side central community resources,
17 particularly in neighborhoods that have historically
18 faced barriers to access and opportunity. In the
19 last year alone, 69 percent of New York City
20 residents, who visited the Bronx Zoo, more than half
21 of a million people did so for free or at a
22 discounted rate.

23 A cornerstone of this work is our Community
24 Access program, which provides complimentary access
25 for seniors, young people, individual disabilities,

1 individuals experiencing homelessness and community
2 based organizations.
3

4 Through partnerships with city agencies and local
5 nonprofits, DCS has distributed more than 30,000 free
6 tickets and hosted community days that included
7 education activities, meals and family programming in
8 2025 alone. These efforts ensure that New Yorkers
9 can experience and benefit from the city's cultural
10 assets regardless of income. In addition to cap, we
11 offer multiple pathways for free or reduced access
12 for New York City residents and special populations.
13 We offer free or reduced admission through programs
14 like free eliminated admission on Wednesdays at the
15 Bronx Zoo, free hours at the New York aquarium,
16 discounted school visits for more than 250,000
17 students and chaperones annually. Complimentary
18 access for undergrads at the zoo, free admission for
19 military and veterans, and longstanding partnerships
20 like Urban Advantage and IDNYC.

21 Beyond access, WCS is deeply invested in
22 workforce development. With the City Council
23 support, our stone career lattice now serves more
24 than 1,900 young people each year through paid
25 internships and employment opportunities. Since

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3 2018, participation has nearly tripled. In 2025
4 alone, youth has earned more than \$5.5 million in
5 income in stipends. We also co-lead on Site Network
6 NYC, which provides paid stem internships across
7 eight cultural institutions. One right next to me,
8 NYGB, serving more than 1,100 young people last year
9 and helping launch future careers in science,
10 education, and conservation. And these young people
11 earn more than \$2.4 million in stipends and wages.

12 Continued Council's support, allows WCS and our
13 cultural partners to expand access, advance equity
14 and prepare the next generation of New Yorkers for
15 meaningful careers. While keeping our cultural
16 institutions open, inclusive and rooted in the
17 communities we serve. Thank you.

18 AARON BOUSKA: Good afternoon Madam Chair. I
19 heard you recognize that there was not a Queens
20 organization here but I am proud to say that we are
21 featuring partnership with Mr. Flower Fantastic right
22 now, who is a Jamaican Native and grew up there. And
23 so, he's featured at NYBG right now, so I won't try
24 to represent him but I just want to give him a shout
25 out.

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2 I am Aaron Bouska, Vice President of Government
3 Community Relations at New York Botanical Garden.

4 I'm also the Bronx Vice Chair of the Cultural
5 Institutions Group. My sincere thanks and
6 appreciation to you Chair Williams, especially as you
7 appointment of Chair of this Committee and as Deputy
8 Speaker, I am sure this is synergy that will benefit
9 the community in ways that we have yet to even
10 imagine. So, congratulations on that.

11 NYGB has been connecting people, plants and the
12 planet since 1891. We're rooted in the cultural
13 fabric of New York City from the heart of the Bronx,
14 the city's greenest borough.

15 For more than 130 years, we've invited millions
16 of visitors to explore and enjoy the tranquil beauty
17 of the Bronx with 250 acres, NYBG is home to renowned
18 exhibitions, immersing botanical experience, books
19 and manuscripts, arts and music and events with some
20 of the most influential figures and plants, science,
21 horticulture and the humanities. NYBG continues to
22 serve as an inextricable link between the plants and
23 people and aluminates the importance of gardens to
24 human health and the improvement of the city's
25 quality of life. Quality of life may be one of the

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3 outcomes of a city that is truly affordable for all.

4 Barriers like excessive rent, cost of child and
5 healthcare or stagnant wages are all diminishing
6 qualities of life for New Yorkers and Bronxites in
7 particular. It prohibits them from participating
8 fully in the cultural life and vibrancy of New York
9 City.

10 Our public cultural institutions as you've heard
11 already cannot solve all of these complex matters on
12 our own but we do offset these chronic challenges
13 head on and mindfully. Here are four examples of how
14 NYBG contributes. First, we provide affordable or
15 free access to nature. Second, and if I may just
16 finish two points, we've been building close to 600
17 units of truly affordable housing with our partners
18 on Webster Avenue. We are doing capital projects
19 that improve accessibility and our quality of jobs
20 over 500 employee at New York Botanical Garden, 175
21 are DC37.

22 Thank you for this opportunity. We wouldn't be
23 sitting here if it were not for the Council's
24 restoration of funding to Department of Cultural
25 Affairs this current fiscal year. Thank you.

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2 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Dr. William, Council Member

3 Stevens, I'm David Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall.

4 Thanks for the opportunity. The [INAUDIBLE 01:24:57]

5 fantastic report has a focus on the individuals that

6 are facing this crisis and we have with my colleagues

7 here a perspective of the institutions and our role

8 in supporting the arts and ensuring making arts

9 happen and ensuring it's successful and affordable to

10 New Yorkers. Carnegie Hall believes deeply in that

11 work and in addition to our hundreds of concerts each

12 year, we have a deep commitment to our city schools,

13 our work in justice spaces with early childhood, in

14 mental health. It's a big - it is - most of its free

15 or very, very low cost. A great example is our

16 citywide program; 40,000 New Yorkers participate in

17 these free concerts every year. There are lots of

18 fantastic programs that happen across New York City.

19 The Council supports the B-Side, our workforce

20 development program. The support from the city

21 through cultural affairs, through the City Council,

22 is the way that organizations like this one, like my

23 colleagues here are able to provide these free low

24 cost services to New Yorkers.

25

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3 You funding, it cannot be taken out of the
4 equation. Not that you would suggest otherwise but
5 to understand the good that it does and enables those
6 extraordinary programs at this organization, my
7 colleagues here and all of the many ones you're going
8 to hear after us, that do every day for New Yorkers.
9 Thank you for your time and consideration.

10 CLEMENTE LUNA: Good afternoon Chair Williams and
11 Members of the Committee. My name is Clemente Luna;
12 I'm the Director of Institutional Giving at Brooklyn
13 Academy of Music. In my role, I support our
14 community programs, education initiatives and
15 education and evaluation strategies all of which help
16 us understand how we're showing up for our artists,
17 audiences, and community.

18 When we talk about affordability in New York,
19 we're talking about equity. We're talking about who
20 gets to stay and who gets pushed out. At BAM, we
21 work with seven unions every day and we are deeply
22 committed to fair wages and a well-supported
23 workforce. But even when people are paid fairly, the
24 cost of living in the city is forcing difficult
25 choices.

1 Artist, stage hands, teaching artists, and staff
2 who once lived nearby are now commuting more than an
3 hour each way or leaving five boroughs altogether.
4 That turn has consequences. Culture depends on
5 continuity. Artists build careers over time,
6 institutions build trust over decades, audiences grow
7 through repeated encounters. When affordability
8 breaks that continuity, the impact is lasting. This
9 matters because arts and culture is not a marginal
10 sector in New York City. Culture is part of our
11 economic power and civic and infrastructure.
12

13 Today, the city's creative and cultural
14 industries employ more than 326,000 New Yorkers
15 across the five boroughs. Before the pandemic, the
16 sector generated roughly 110 billion in economic
17 impact and supported about \$30 billion in wages.
18 Nearly six years since the pandemic began, the sector
19 remains about six percent below pre pandemic
20 employment levels with particularly sharp losses
21 among dancers, actors and musicians, the very artists
22 whose careers depend on proximity and community.

23 Private and public support for the arts has been
24 in decline for decades. In response, there's often
25 been an implicit expectation that cultural

1 institutions should simply change their business
2 models to survive by relying on more heavily on
3 earned revenue or exclusivity.
4

5 When culture is forced to operate primarily on a
6 market logic, art becomes more expensive to make and
7 harder to access. Artists without independent wealth
8 are pushed out, audiences narrow and cultural
9 institutions are asked unintentionally to become
10 complicit with the affordability crisis.

11 At BAM we believe that art is a public good that
12 belongs in every day life, not a luxury reserved for
13 the few. Each year, we serve thousands of New
14 Yorkers through free programming. Our Senior Cinema
15 is a monthly film series that offers thousands of
16 older New Yorkers an opportunity to get together and
17 experience film for free.

18 Here Dance Africa, our longest running program,
19 which celebrates its 50th Anniversary next year, more
20 than 40,000 people gather at our free outdoor bazaar,
21 drawing communities across the five boroughs and
22 broader tristate area. Dance Africa is a living
23 example of cultural continuity. Intergenerational
24 community rooted and deeply New York.
25

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3 If New York is to remain a place where culture is
4 made, not just consumed, affordability must be
5 treated as a cultural policy. That means stable
6 public investment, support that keeps pace with real
7 costs, and alignment between cultural funding and
8 housing strategies. Because equity in the arts isn't
9 just about access, it's about who gets to stay long
10 enough to help shape our shared civic line. Thank
11 you for your leadership and for this opportunity to
12 share what we see every day.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and I
14 participated in Dance Africa since I was a child, so
15 I love Dance Africa.

16 Uhm, so just a question. You all don't have to
17 answer but before I dismiss you. Do you have any
18 initial reactions to the report by the center on
19 Creative New York and do you have any specific
20 actions by DCLA or the Council that you think would
21 have the greatest immediate impact on affordability
22 for the artists, also the cultural institution?

23 If you have nothing, that's fine because there's
24 tons of people after you but I do want to also just
25 offer that question to each panel.

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3 LEAH C. JOHNSON: I think reintroducing the bills
4 that would really sort of ease the pathway for the
5 building of affordable housing for artists. I think
6 that would be really, really important. That's
7 something that we've been talking about a lot at
8 Lincoln Center, one of many.

9 AARON BOUSKA: Madam Chair in our experience of
10 partnering on affordable housing in the Bronx, one of
11 the efforts that we explored was preferential option
12 for artists and my understanding is at the time, HPD
13 was not allowed to even give preferential option for
14 Community Board members. And so, uhm, obviously
15 there's some sort of policy legal mechanism at work,
16 which I think was referenced by previous speakers
17 that needs to be further explored. But there was
18 certainly a desire for us to sort of do an artist
19 community and it was just not something that could be
20 considered at the time for whatever regulatory
21 reason.

22 CHRISTOPHER DUROSINIMI: And I just want to add
23 continuing investment in workforce development
24 initiatives, like SI network will be beneficial for
25 young people and the next generation of conservation
stewards and science professionals. For a lot of

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3 these young people, these are their first jobs and
4 opportunities and the Council has been really uhm,
5 been a key stone in starting those careers and so, I
6 think continuing an investment in initiatives like
7 those will be helpful.

8 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Yeah, I'll underscore Chris's
9 point there. It's about afford- the other side of
10 the equation of affordability is you know it's jobs
11 access to and the work that the Council supported in
12 finding the pathways to good paying jobs is so key.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and yes, I have
14 tracked that bill down. The Council has a very
15 convoluted process of reintroducing bills. Both
16 people are no longer with the Council, so it's going
17 to be a sponsorless bill but hopefully I'm able to
18 carry it. We'll see because we have a process but I
19 have tracked that bill down and when the legislative
20 division does their process, hopefully it's a bill
21 that we can swiftly reintroduce and hopefully get
22 passed. So, thank you so much for testifying and I
23 hope you have a great day.

24 Oh, and just on time, the Borough President has
25 walked in. everybody is aware that you are gracing
us with your presence. We're super excited to have

1 you testify. Yes, you get all the special
2 privileges. You walk in and you get to immediately
3 speak. That's what happens when you're the Borough
4 President. Oh, I know it's fancy, yeah. Yeah, so
5 you can begin whenever you want.
6

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT HOYHLMAN-SIGAL: Good afternoon
8 Chair Williams. Thank you for the opportunity to
9 testify. My name is Brad Hoylman-Sigal, I'm the
10 Manhattan Borough President and as Manhattan Borough
11 President, I represent a borough that anchors New
12 York City's cultural economy from Broadway and
13 Lincoln Center to the Jewish Museum to El Barrio to
14 the Studio Museum to the Museum of Chinese in the
15 Americas. I could go on and on but I don't have to
16 tell you, as you've heard today that this community
17 is arguably under attack.

18 Already, compared to peer nations, the United
19 States invests significantly less public funding in
20 the arts. In Germany, roughly 80 percent of arts
21 funding comes from public sources. That's roughly
22 \$270 per capital. For instance, over \$4 billion
23 annually on national cultural subsidies. That's
24 about \$69 bucks per capita but U.S. Federal arts
25

3 funding amounts to only around \$4 per capital each
4 year.

5 To compound this, the Trump Administration is
6 desecrating our cultural institutions, one after
7 another, cut after cut. Thousands of previously
8 approved NEA grants were abruptly canceled or
9 rescinded. Now of course Trump wants and has affixed
10 his name to the Kennedy Center and is demanding that
11 the Smithsonian restructure itself in his political
12 image.

13 At such a dangerous moment in our history, local
14 government should step up. The creative sector, as
15 the Center for an Urban Future study points out,
16 employees 326,000 New Yorkers. A larger workforce
17 than the finance and insurance sectors combined.
18 It's one of our city's core economic engines and a
19 defining competitive advance for our city. In fact,
20 the density of artists itself, feeds directly back
21 into our economic vitality. It enables a gallery and
22 a museum ecosystem to flourish in a way that only a
23 few peer cities can match. Research published just
24 last year shows that authors strongly increase their
25 publication output after moving to New York City
because of the presence of publishing housing and

1 other authors. The creative sector is the reason
2 talent moves here, it's the reason tech giants expand
3 here, it's the reason tourists fill our hotels. It's
4 the reason why CEO's want to make New York City their
5 headquarters. And yet, as we've heard, artists are
6 being priced out of our city. As you are well aware,
7 the CUF report showed that New York's share of the
8 national creative workforce has fallen from 9.3
9 percent to 8.6 percent since 2019.

11 Adjusted for cost of living, created workers here
12 earn 23 percent less than the national average. This
13 is an unsustainable trend. Reversing it will require
14 the city's focused attention and investment.

15 Addressing affordability begins with expanding
16 housing supply and I want to commend you and your
17 colleagues for advancing legislation to do exactly
18 that. The city must also move proactively to convert
19 underutilized public assets into affordable artist
20 workspace and modernize benefit structures to meet
21 the needs of a growing freelance workforce.

22 The return of this investment is measurable.
23 Research from PENN shows that in lower income
24 neighborhoods, cultural assets correlate with a 14
25 percent reduction in child abuse and neglect, an 18

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3 percent increase in student achievement and an 18
4 percent reduction in serious crime.

5 Cultural infrastructure is civic infrastructure
6 and we must treat it that way. Beyond the data,
7 there is a stark human reality. In difficult
8 moments, we gather in our theaters, our galleries,
9 our museums, our cultural spaces. They become the
10 safe harbors where movements are born, where
11 communities are built, and where our collective
12 resilience is forged. We need them now more than
13 ever. That's why today, I'm happy to let you know
14 Chair that I am dedicating the entirety of my FY 2027
15 Capital Funding allotment to affordable and
16 accessible arts and cultural projects.

17 APPLAUSE FROM AUDIENCE

18 We're calling this initiative the Manhattan
19 Multiplier for Arts and Culture. The idea is that
20 the Manhattan Multiplier will leverage the Borough
21 Presidents capital funds will provide it in
22 philanthropic matches, prioritizing projects that
23 expand access, preserve affordability, and strengthen
24 long term cultural infrastructure.

25 The operative question will be, how can we turn
my capital budget, say it's \$50 million of taxpayer

1 dollars into \$75 million total from private
2 philanthropy corporations and individuals.

3 Applications will be open on my website at
4 bpbhs.com/.budget through February 19th and I
5 encourage everyone in our borough to apply. If New
6 York intends to remain the cultural capital of the
7 world, we must support that culture with commensurate
8 resources and policy.

9 Thank you for your time and your stewardship of
10 New York's artistic and cultural legacy. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Well, thank you. You
12 dropped like a positive bomb.

13 BOROUGH PRESIDENT HOYLMAN-SIGAL: I tried. That
14 was the plan.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, great plan. You need
16 to get your other VP friends to do the same because
17 all the other boroughs are going to be very jealous.

18 Thank you so much.

19 BOROUGH PRESIDENT HOYLMAN-SIGAL: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: For testifying and for I
21 guess, like are we like the first to know?

22 BOROUGH PRESIDENT HOYLMAN-SIGAL: You are,
23 breaking news.
24

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, well, we're happy to
3 be the first to know about the Manhattan multiplier.

4 BOROUGH PRESIDENT HOYLMAN-SIGAL: Multiplier, yes
5 indeed.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah and I look forward to
7 working with you.

8 BOROUGH PRESIDENT HOYLMAN-SIGAL: Thank you.
9 Thank you Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Have a good day. Okay,
11 the next panel is Michael Rosenberg, Dina Rosenthal,
12 Sami, Natalie, Patrick, Patrick Willingham. Sami
13 Shumays, did I say that right from Flushing Town
14 Hall? And Staten Island Children's Museum. Okay, we
15 can start this way this time. Hi.

16 PATRICK WILLINGHAM: Fabulous, good afternoon.
17 How are you Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams, Community
18 Members, staff? I'm Patrick Willingham. I'm the
19 Executive Director of the Public Theater and I thank
20 you for the opportunity to speak today and
21 specifically I want to thank you for your attendance
22 at our peoples filibuster last month. It was great
23 to have you there. I'm also just having - it was
24 freezing cold, still is. We're breaking that trend.

25

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3 I also just want to note; I am so over the moon
4 about Bad Bunnies performance at the Super Bowl
5 yesterday. I think if there's any arguments for the
6 importance for arts and culture to change hearts and
7 minds, that is exactly it.

8 The public was founded on the radical belief that
9 culture belongs to everyone, regardless of economic
10 background or life circumstances. A value that's
11 reflected across programs, like free Shakespeare in
12 the Park, the Mobile Unit, and Public Works. This
13 past summer free Shakespeare in the Park served more
14 than 62,300 New Yorkers at the Delacorte Theater
15 bringing together audiences across neighborhoods,
16 generations and backgrounds. Last year, the Mobile
17 Unit reached over 16,000 New Yorkers with a free
18 bilingual production of much to do about nothing in
19 parks and correctional facilities across all five
20 boroughs. Public Works partners with eight community
21 organizations citywide to offer nine months of free
22 weekly classes, serving over 300 community members
23 including approximately 60 high school age students,
24 all culminating in an annual community performance at
25 the Delacorte Theater attended by thousands of fellow
New Yorkers but free performances and programs are

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3 only possible if the artists and cultural workers
4 creating them can continue living and working in New
5 York City.

6 Our city is becoming more expensive by the minute
7 and many artists struggle to access health insurance,
8 stable housing and consistent income. Over the past
9 five years, the public has piloted direct payment and
10 income support programs for artists and partnerships
11 with programs including Creators Rebuild New York,
12 recognizing that financial stability is essential to
13 creative work.

14 In addition, we are proud to partner with
15 Brooklyn College, Hunter College and more in the CUNY
16 system to provide eight month long paid fellowships
17 to develop the talent pipeline for cultural workers.
18 The public strongly supports many of the
19 recommendations from the Center for an Urban Future
20 Report, particularly the creation of a dedicated
21 recurring revenue stream for artists. We invest more
22 than \$10 million annually to produce our free
23 programming and the rising cost of other expenses
24 puts all of that at risk. So, we really stand beside
25 you as we implement pilot solutions with the city.
Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And just really quickly, I
3 know I saw the Theater. It sounds like the Manhattan
4 Borough President -

5 PATRICK WILLINGHAM: Hmm, hmm. I got Brad on
6 speed dial.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I know.

8 PATRICK WILLINGHAM: Thank you.

9 We're testifying together, so I'm going to start
10 and pass it over.

11 SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: Good afternoon Chair Williams.
12 Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify on
13 this important topic. My name is Sami Abu Shumays,
14 Deputy Director of Flushing Town Hall. One of the
15 smaller CIGs based in Queens. I also sit on the
16 steering committees of the Latinx Arts Consortium of
17 New York, LXNY and the Cultural Equity Coalition of
18 New York.

19 I'm joined by my colleague Natalie Bedon, the
20 Manager of our Queens Cultural Mapping Initiative.

21 Affordability of the arts and cultural sector is
22 a multifaceted problem. Most obviously, we have a
23 broad affordability problem for everyone in New York
24 City that effects artists as much as everyone else.

25

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3 In terms of housing, I don't like to separate
4 artists from the general population because in my
5 mine, everyone is an artist or a potential artist.
6 But it is affordability, not talent that holds many
7 people back. Housing solutions specific to artists
8 will inevitably privilege those artists who already
9 have some recognition, will force severe competition
10 for a small number of slots and will play into the
11 art washing dynamic, where developers are allowed to
12 create more unaffordable housing for regular New
13 Yorkers by creating special units for artists or
14 community space for arts organizations.

15 So, I don't favor it. The arts community needs
16 us to solve the affordability problem for everyone.
17 However, there are other facets to the affordability
18 problem and I'd like to highlight some of these by
19 referring to a report that Flushing Town Hall has
20 just published. In 2024, the New York State Council
21 and the Arts, NYSCA, commissioned us to undertake a
22 cultural mapping of Queens, which has several goals.
23 For us to learn more about the artists and small arts
24 organizations based in the borough, which would help
25 support our regranting programs. For us to learn
about the challenges artists and arts organizations

1 face. For us to crowd source solutions to these
2 problems from the arts community itself. Over the
3 course of 2024 to 2025, our two community
4 coordinators held 157 women on interviews, five town
5 halls and seven artist meetups and conducted a
6 detailed survey that received 95 responses.
7

8 On the basis of this data, we put together a 65
9 page report just released because of the Executive
10 summary I'm holding up here. We created a digital
11 map of Queens Arts assets that currently has 118
12 organizations on it and more of come from the second
13 year of funding.

14 I'm going to turn it over to Natalie who is one
15 of the community coordinators promoted to manager of
16 the initiative now that we've received funding for a
17 second year from NYSCA.

18 NATALIE BEDON: Hello, thank you so much for the
19 opportunity to speak here today. One of the main
20 findings in our report is that affordable space is a
21 critical constraint at every level of the arts
22 ecosystem. The ongoing challenge of limited access
23 to physical space for work, creation, exhibitions and
24 performances remains a persistent issue. When asked
25 about the greatest priorities for improvement in the

2 cultural sector, 95 percent of survey respondents
3 selected improved access to affordable spaces.

4 Our recommendations are to advance the
5 repurposing of vacant and underutilized buildings,
6 support the creation of affordable studio spaces for
7 our artists, provide increased support for existing
8 organizations that already provide studios,
9 residencies, exhibitions and performances.

10 Other affordability challenges are less obvious
11 but just as impactful, particularly around
12 transportation and organizational capacity. Queens
13 109 Square mile geography presents fundamental
14 challenges to the cultural connectivity of this
15 borough.

16 As New Yorks largest borough, Queens suffers from
17 large gaps in public transportation, with many
18 neighborhoods classified as transit deserts or two
19 fair zones, which require multiple transfers and
20 lengthy commutes. Regions without available
21 transportation also have fewer cultural resources,
22 creating inequities in arts access across the
23 borough.

24 Our recommendations are to pilot shuttle services
25 and ridesharing programs for cultural events, develop

1 hyperlocal cultural hubs in underserved
2 neighborhoods, foster across neighborhood
3 collaborations.

4
5 Finally, the lack of adequately funding for
6 cultural organizations in Queens and the huge
7 problems with funding structures, outdated
8 reimbursement models, and project based models for
9 funding. The lack of consistent support year to
10 year, create numerous downstream problems, including
11 a lack of stability in organizations, a lack of
12 adequate staffing and an over reliance on unpaid and
13 underpaid labor and sustainable burdens on
14 organizational staff.

15 Hence, only those who are already [INAUDIBLE
16 01:48:05] on sustainable burdens- sorry. Hence, only
17 those who already possess sufficient resources, time,
18 money and energy, can afford to create or work at
19 these organizations, resulting in fewer opportunities
20 for artists, as well as audiences and community
21 members. Our recommendations are to provide more
22 cultural funding, resources to areas of Queens that
23 suffer from these gaps, such as Southeast Queens and
24 the Rockaways. Prioritize multiyear general
25 operating support over project based grants. Shift

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3 to upfront payments rather than reimbursement models.
4 Invest in leadership development and mentorship
5 programs and support peer learning and training for
6 volunteer coordination.

7 SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: Just to cap it off, the more
8 detailed information are continuing in the 2025
9 Queens cultural mapping report, diversity, resilience
10 and the power of community. Just published this
11 week, I've attached the executive summaries. We're
12 going to be sending out full copies to your offices.
13 We have a digital version and we're going to be
14 hosting a parental conversation on March 25th and we
15 hope you'll be able to attend.

16 Thanks very much.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, I am excited about
18 this and you referenced my hood so yes, I would love
19 to see more opportunities there and I will say
20 geographic isolation is probably the number problem.
21 Many artists from Southeast Queens have to travel
22 outside of the borough or outside of the community,
23 especially when they get to a certain place in their
24 career, so I'm just - as a person who grew up in
25 dance school, at a local dance school you know when
you want to go to get more technique and you have to

1
2 travel into the city to Alvin Ailey. You know or
3 whatever, you know Broadway Dance Center. Name
4 whatever you know professional dance school. So,
5 yes, I would love to get the report and I'm really
6 excited that you all have done this research. Yes, I
7 am bias because I'm a Queens girl.

8 MIKE ROSENBERG: Hello, my name is Mike Rosenberg
9 and I'm the CEO of New York City Center. Manhattan's
10 first performing arts center and home to the Fall for
11 Dance Festival, the Tony award winning encore series
12 of Musical Theater, Manhattan Theater Club's Off
13 Broadway performances, Alvin Ailey American Dance
14 Theater, Dance Theater of Harlem, Ballet Hispanico,
15 and many more. We are proud to be part of the
16 cultural institutions group and to provide education
17 programs in all five boroughs.

18 The City Center was created in 1943 by Mayor
19 Fiorello La Guardia who believed that all New Yorkers
20 should have access to the arts at affordable prices
21 and for more than 80 years, we bring the worlds best
22 to our stage and turn affordability into action in
23 partnership with the DCLA and the New York City
24 government.

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3 This commitment to affordability is demonstrable.

4 Last year, the average household income of our
5 audience was \$163,000 a year. Compare that to the
6 average Broadway audience, which was \$276,000 a year.
7 This difference is not accidental. It is absolutely
8 what happens when pricing and access are designed for
9 the city and not just for the market. La Guardia's
10 focus and plan is an example the City Council should
11 continue to follow today.

12 We support 316 union jobs across our buildings
13 and with our full time administrative staff of 65,
14 our entry level starting salary is determined
15 annually by the MIT living wage calculator for New
16 York State. We create pathways to these backstage
17 administrative and front of house jobs through paid
18 apprenticeships, paid fellowships, and paid job
19 exposure for young people and their families.

20 For the City of New York to make a strong shift
21 towards centering affordability, the arts will
22 continue to play a key role, from the artists we
23 support to the audiences we serve, to the workforce
24 we employ. All of us at New York City Center look
25 forward to continuing this important work in
partnership with you. We thank you for your

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3 leadership, your action and your belief in these
4 ideals.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I do believe in them. As
6 you know, every year I go to City Center to see Alvin
7 Ailey ever since a child and even when it was at
8 Lincoln Center for a bit. So, yes, I do believe in
9 it.

10 DINA ROSENTHAL: Hello, my name is Dina
11 Rosenthal. I'm the Executive Director of the Staten
12 Island Children's Museum and I first want to start
13 off with talking about what is the Children's Museum
14 and why do we matter. Children's Museums introduce
15 children to culture, not just as something to look at
16 but as something they actively create.

17 At the Staten Island Children's Museum, children
18 learn through hands on interactive play that helps
19 them understand the world around them. That learning
20 looks different at different ages. It can be
21 something as simple as realizing insects aren't
22 something to be afraid of or as complex as
23 understanding how green screen technology works.
24 Children create visual art, explore movement through
25 dance and performance, make music and engage in
collaborative play. These experiences build

1 curiosity, confidence and problem solving skills
2 early when it matters most. For many families, a
3 Children's Museum is the first stop on the cultural
4 pipeline. It's where children learn that museums,
5 arts, science, and civic spaces, are places where
6 they belong. The Staten Island Children's Museum,
7 serves working families. 90 percent of our audience
8 coming from Staten Island and Brooklyn mirroring
9 congressional District 11. About half of our
10 visitors are families coming on their own time and 40
11 percent are school children who rely on us during the
12 week through school visits and after school
13 partnerships.

14
15 As this Administration focuses on affordability
16 and supporting working parents, the Children's Museum
17 already functions as a trusted partner. This
18 weekend, we hosted the largest pre-K enrollment fair
19 in New York City serving more than 1,000 families for
20 free in collaboration with nonprofit partners and
21 city agencies to sign up kids for Pre K. Families
22 show up because they trust the space and the city
23 succeeds because it's where families already are.

24 We also partner with New York City Emergency
25 Management to host the citywide kickoff of National

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3 Preparedness Month, helping families prepare for
4 emergencies in ways that are practical and designed
5 for children. We are affordable, easy to access and
6 open when working families need us. We are not just
7 a cultural institution; we are a partner of the
8 city's families support infrastructure. And I'll
9 stop there. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes and just to be
11 consistent, if anyone has any initial reactions to
12 the report by CUF or and/or anything that you think
13 the agency or the Council can do immediately to
14 address the affordability crisis.

15 SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: It was mentioned that our
16 cultural sector is only .25 percent of the city's
17 budget and for many years people have been calling
18 for maybe one percent of the city's budget. Our
19 cultural affairs budget should be over one billion,
20 not \$250 million. That's then first thing we should
21 do. There are a lot of underserved areas of the city
22 where new investments would triple down to smaller
23 organizations to artists and to cultural workers and
24 so, the city as an investor in jobs and artists with
25 more resources would do a lot.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: No, there was an
3 initiative for Parks and Parks doesn't necessarily
4 generate probably, I'm sure I don't have the data,
5 generate as much revenue as the cultural sector. So,
6 that's a little incentive. Someone should start that
7 initiative one percent.

8 PATRICK WILLINGHAM: I would love to pick up on
9 the idea that resonated for you, which is some sort
10 of a citywide festival. I've been newly on this a
11 lot. You know I'm in show business. So, I know what
12 draws interest, what draws energy, what draws
13 vitality is putting on an incredible show and
14 thinking about something that could galvanize the
15 entire sector in this city that culminates in our own
16 Bad Bunny Super Bowl performance. I think there's a
17 real possibility there but it's going to require some
18 gravitational funding and some gravitational
19 organization. So, I'd be happy to talk to you
20 further about that because I've been advancing a game
21 plan.

22 MICHAEL ROSENBERG: Yeah, City Center certainly
23 will jump in on that Citywide Festival. Also,
24 encourage the city to do more support for workforce
25 development. As we think about primarily union jobs

1 that exist in the arts and culture center. These are
2 great opportunities where you don't need a fancy
3 degree from a fancy college someplace else. You can
4 really go to work with job guarantees, healthcare,
5 and a pension unlike so many other sectors in the
6 city.
7

8 NATALIE BEDON: I would also add to the
9 Boroughwide festival, this is something that we've
10 been exploring at Flushing Town Hall also and we were
11 thinking about something specific to Queens. There
12 are so many great initiatives, like you said and I've
13 also working in museums, have seen large museum
14 conferences and we don't have anything like that for
15 us. Specifically in Queens, I think what we really
16 need most is not only an opportunity to showcase but
17 an opportunity to learn from each other, from all the
18 people in this room, all of our artists, our
19 community organizers and other people in between who
20 are already doing the work. So, we are also trying
21 to pilot some sort of Queens arts and cultural
22 festival that could potentially also include key
23 institutions across Queens because Queens is also
24 very big. So, there's many different interest across
25 just different neighborhoods in Queens and I think

1 that there's real potential to develop something
2 really impactful there.

3
4 DINA ROSENTHAL: I think one of the ways is the
5 way the city is already using some of its - the
6 cultural organizations, properties to help with
7 voting during the COVID crisis distribution of masks
8 for the Children's Museum sector. Right, there is an
9 issue about childcare and expansion of the 2K, 3K,
10 Pre K and our spaces might be places to look at
11 collaborations to help with affordability and
12 bringing down the cost of childcare for working
13 families.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much and I
15 hope you enjoy the rest of your day and I look
16 forward to working with you all. Thanks for being
17 here. Okay, third panel, Connie, Kimberly Olsen,
18 Randi Berry, Russell Grant? Granet oh, reading is
19 fundamental, okay. Hassiem? Hassiem, yes, please
20 correct me. Everybody always mispronounces my name,
21 so I want to make sure I pronounce other peoples
22 names correctly.

23 RUSSEL GRANET: Good afternoon. I am Russel
24 Granet, President and CEO of the Tony Award winning
25 New 42. I would like to thank New York City Council

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1 and the esteemed Committee for your efforts in
2 supporting arts and culture organizations like New
3 42. Driven by the belief that access to the arts is
4 a human right, New 42's mission is to make
5 extraordinary performing arts a vital part of
6 everyone's life from the earliest years onward. But
7 the rising cost of doing business in our city makes
8 this work more difficult every year. From New 42,
9 for our fellow arts and culture organizations and for
10 the many artists who ensure our city remains one of
11 the cultural capitals of the world.

12
13 At New 42 raising costs have made it increasingly
14 difficult to curate a season that both excels in
15 quality and reflected that the broad interests of New
16 York City families.

17 Our 2025-2026 New Victory Theater season has a
18 budget of \$3 million. With rising costs, the season
19 is presenting 7 fewer shows in over 14 fewer weeks
20 than before the pandemic. That translates to fewer
21 families attending our shows, fewer students field
22 trips to our 150 school partners and less work hours
23 for 60 plus high school and college students who make
24 up our front of house staff and less opportunities
25 for our 50 teaching artists.

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3 Despite this sectors impact, New 42 remains
4 committed to providing a service to so many New
5 Yorkers who at times experience hardship. We
6 continue to offer free tickets and transit cards to
7 families residing in NYCHA housing and \$2 tickets,
8 which we started 30 years to all New York City
9 students. That is supported by subsidies from
10 private funders. Additionally, free family arts
11 activities, low cost concessions and dedicated
12 performances offer accessibility, supports and ensure
13 that all New Yorkers are welcomed to the New Victory
14 Theater. Thank you.

15 HASSIEM MUHAMMAD: Hello, Hassiem Muhammad,
16 Actor, Teaching Artist representing the New 42.
17 Rising costs in rent, healthcare and insurance, are
18 also challenging to artists ability to continue to
19 call New York City home. Teaching artists like me,
20 are often faced with the narrative, if you love what
21 you do, then the pay should come secondary. Yet
22 artists are needing increasing financial support to
23 remain in the city. The New 42 is committed to
24 ensuring a thriving future towards teaching artists
25 by providing competitive, livable wages, investing
nearly \$800,000 annually in salaries.

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3 In a recent survey, many teaching artists
4 attributed the New Victory Theater's competitive
5 compensation, flexible schedule and creative
6 community with providing the support necessary to
7 pursue the arts as a viable livelihood.

8 One shared, New 42 understands the demands of
9 being a teaching artist, needing to work while
10 wanting to create and share those creations. New 42
11 has also attempted to secure artist access to
12 healthcare benefits and subsidies towards insurance
13 premiums. However, many artists do not meet
14 necessary federal and state mandated wage and hour
15 caps.

16 City support for insurance programs would provide
17 another crucial support to ensure that the artists
18 who make this city great are able to continue to live
19 in it. We urge the City Council to continue its
20 support of the arts and culture sector and work
21 alongside arts organizations like New 42 to address
22 affordability when it comes to our programming and
23 the artists that bring the joy of the arts to
24 thousands of audiences and community members every
25 year. Thank you.

2 CONNIE BUTLER: Good afternoon Chair Williams.

3 My name is Connie Butler and I'm the Director of MoMA
4 PS1. For nearly 50 years, MoMA PS1 has been proud to
5 serve Long Island City through our art exhibitions,
6 community partnerships, and free public programs
7 welcoming over 150,000 visitors annually and
8 contributing millions to Long Island City.

9 At the core of our mission is affordability,
10 ensuring that all New Yorkers can access and engage
11 with contemporary art. On January 1st, we eliminated
12 admission fees entirely removing all financial
13 barriers to entry and making PS1 the largest free
14 museum in New York City.

15 The response over the last month has already been
16 extraordinary. The message is clear when financial
17 barriers are removed, New Yorkers show up. Free
18 admission builds on our recent efforts to bolster
19 accessibility and make all New Yorkers feel welcome.
20 Our signage and interpretive texts are English,
21 Spanish and amplified Chinese. We offer free event
22 tickets for local resident and we've expanded
23 community partnerships with Queens based
24 organizations.

1 Looking ahead, we're planning a renovation to
2 open up our campus in the heart of Long Island City
3 as a new public open space for our growing community.
4 We're equally committed to supporting artists who
5 live and work here. Opening in April, our signature
6 exhibition series Greater New York is the only
7 ongoing survey of artists dedicated to artists across
8 New York City.
9

10 Over the past 25 years, more than 500 emerging
11 and under recognized artists have been championed on
12 this international stage. Through ongoing
13 initiatives like our Home Own program, we regularly
14 partner with local Queens based organizations and
15 highlight artists connected to our community
16 partners.

17 As a cultural institutions group member, MoMA PS1
18 is committed to being affordable, accessible and
19 fostering New York City's creative ecosystem. We ask
20 that the City Council consider supporting city
21 investments in cultural institutions such as ours to
22 advance our shared goals of access, equity and
23 affordability. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and thank you
25 for letting the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus use

1 your space and uh, a quick question. Do you still
2 have like those like parties in the summer?
3 Remember?
4

5 CONNIE BUTLER: We have a lot of parties.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah.

7 CONNIE BUTLER: We do and we're increasingly
8 doing community based - we're doing a neighbor night
9 coming up in a few weeks for example, but yeah,
10 you're thinking of Warm Up in the Summer, which is
11 our music series.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, okay.

13 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Great, thank you so much Deputy
14 Speaker Williams for having today's hearing. My name
15 is Kimberly Olsen and I'm proud to be the Executive
16 Director of the New York City Arts and Education
17 Roundtable. Also, a fellow Queens girl as well. We
18 are a nonprofit service organization working to
19 improve and advance arts ed across New York City.

20 In New York City, arts education is taught in
21 partnership in both school and community settings by
22 in school arts teachers but also teaching artists,
23 like we heard from Hassiem before. This is a
24 workforce of at least 10,000 strong working across
25 all five boroughs. Teaching artists are practicing

1 professional artists that integrate there and teach
2 their art form, perspectives, histories and skills
3 into a wide range of learning settings. Think
4 schools, veteran centers, senior centers, libraries,
5 justice and incarceration centers, the list goes on.

6
7 Last year, the roundtable undertook doing a field
8 wide survey of hiring organizations and teaching
9 artists and produced a report called, 'Paying for
10 Professionalism.' A report on teaching arts
11 compensation and employment. The report findings
12 underscored significant challenges related to
13 stagnant wages, limited access to benefits, and
14 delays in government contracting. All which all
15 ultimately impact the sustainability of the
16 profession.

17 As it relates to essential benefits, as one
18 teaching artist put it, "I'd like to work just as a
19 teaching artist. The one thing that is preventing me
20 from going there entirely is the fact that I do not
21 get health insurance." I need to leave my profession
22 of 22 years in order to have children, so I can get
23 proper insurance.

24 A report found that while 88 percent of teaching
25 artists reported having health insurance, only six

1 percent received it through an employer. Barriers to
2 providing these benefits included limited and
3 inconsistent funding, the part time or seasonal
4 nature of teaching artists roles and insurance
5 carrier restrictions.
6

7 These structural barriers make it challenging for
8 employing organizations to offer these benefits, yet
9 piloting a portable benefits program or a pooled
10 insurance program for smaller organizations could
11 alleviate some of these barriers. As it relates to
12 government contracting, we can't talk about
13 affordability without talking about the broken
14 systems that are threatening affordability and the
15 livelihood of our workforce. From employing
16 organizations, engaged in contracts with the cities,
17 persistent delays in payments and the reimbursement
18 model of contracting, greatly impacting an
19 organizations cashflow. The MTAC or New York City's
20 Multitask Award Contract, is a prime example.
21 Organizations are waiting 15, 18, 28 months for
22 contracts to be renewed. All the while losing
23 revenue, disruptions to arts programming for students
24 and lost income for teaching artists.
25

2 Furthermore, the financial negotiation stage of
3 the process puts increasing pressure on arts
4 organizations to lower their pricing.

5 I'll leave it with, as one organization put it;
6 after engaging in the MTAC process for nearly nine
7 months, we were asked to cut our budget so we'd be
8 paying our teaching artists just above minimum wage.
9 We love providing high caliber teaching artists to
10 our schools and ensuring a high level of service and
11 the pricing change in particular doesn't seem
12 sustainable to us. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I have a quick question.
14 Uhm, so when like when you see public schools hire
15 teacher artists, are you saying they're not awarded
16 the same benefit as like teachers that teach English?

17 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Yeah, so an in school licensed
18 or certified arts teacher, that is somebody that
19 would be part of the union that is hired as a regular
20 sort of teacher. Like an English teacher or a social
21 studies teachers. However, in New York City, it is
22 not only a partnership of those teachers actually
23 teaching the arts, but also external groups and
24 artists, such as New York City or such as like New
25 42, MoMA PS1, several of the others that shared that

3 come in and bring their teaching artists. And so,
4 those folks are not afforded those same benefits.
5 They are paid by the external arts vendor and there
6 isn't necessarily that same thing offered to them.
7 It all very much depends on the individual arts
8 organizations but by and large, we found that
9 benefits are not able to be offered.

10 RANDI BERRY: Good afternoon Chair Williams and
11 members of the Committee. My name is Randi Berry and
12 I'm the Executive Director of Indie Space and I'm
13 also a steering committee member of the Cultural
14 Equity Coalition.

15 Indie Space is a community organizer in Queens.
16 A Queens girl and a service organization dedicated to
17 supporting New York City's lower income artists,
18 cultural workers, and smallest budget arts
19 organizations. Particularly through funding and
20 access to affordable stable rehearsal and performance
21 space, which remains one of the greatest threats to
22 the sustainability of our cultural sector.

23 As a service organization, our work undergirds
24 the cultural ecosystem and ensures that artists that
25 may not have capacity to receive support from

1 philanthropy or government, are not lost in the
2 shuffle and left without any safety net.
3

4 Indie Space was created in response to a reality
5 that many arts organizations know too well. That
6 soaring rents, speculative development, short term
7 leases and opaque real estate practices are what's
8 pushing arts organizations out of neighborhoods and
9 increasingly out of New York City altogether.

10 There are many ways that the City Council, DCLA,
11 and service organizations can partner together to
12 address this pressing issue. Some ideas. We can
13 reexamine the definition of use for community
14 facility space to prioritize smaller budget arts
15 organizations and community based nonprofits over for
16 profit medical use.

17 We can require cultural carveouts in these new
18 commercial to residential conversions that already
19 need creative ideas for their unusable corp. We can
20 allocate housing for historically excluded artists
21 that are often disqualified from housing connect
22 lotteries because of their fluctuating income and
23 numerous 1099's and W2's. We can maybe reinstate the
24 acquisition program at DCLA to leverage the New York
25 space fund that Governor Hochul has just announced.

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3 We can work with community boards to be sure that
4 community based arts and culture nonprofits are not
5 left behind with the new ULURP approval process that
6 passed with the recent ballet initiative. I thank
7 the City Council for holding today's oversight
8 hearing and for investing in programs that preserve
9 and expand affordable, cultural infrastructure.
10 Particularly, for small independent and community
11 rooted organizations.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and I was going
13 to mention this but I do want to acknowledge that we
14 still have DCLA here. I mean I'm sure they're
15 listening, which is really exciting. So, thank you
16 for still being here.

17 Same question, you kind of already answered the
18 question but any initial reactions or comments,
19 thoughts on the report and anything you think that
20 DCLA or the Council can do immediately to address the
21 affordability crisis and how long has Indie Space
22 been around?

23 RANDY BERRY: We've been around since 2012.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, okay because I'm
25 like you know when I was in high school, I was in the
dance group and we used to practice in my friends

1 basement and I'm like, you know, we could have used
2 space.

3
4 RANDY BERRY: Yeah, leases and there are no
5 leases generally for the basements, right and the
6 short term leases that are affecting specifically low
7 income arts organizations because there's no long
8 term protections.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: This is a really good
10 initiative that I wish existed when I was in high
11 school.

12 RUSSEL GRANET: I'm happy to start, I think
13 increased funding to DCLA. You've heard that before
14 but that's something we would certainly advocate for.
15 Secondly, you've heard it a couple times on this
16 panel, teaching artists as well as any sort of part-
17 time or an artist that hasn't made a certain
18 threshold with their union are not offered health
19 insurance and it is a huge issue and expense for
20 artists in this city that needs to be addressed.

21 HASSIEM MUHAMMAD: If I could add onto that, as
22 an artist who is back and forth with health
23 insurance. Works for stage actors, the actors
24 equity, you have to work a certain amount of weeks to
25 earn your insurance and then basically once you use

1 up those weeks, you lose it again. For screen actors
2 with SAG-AFTRA, it's a dollar amount threshold that
3 you have to pass.
4

5 So, you can work ten jobs but if they don't add
6 up to the thing, right, you could be on TV multiple
7 times but if all those paychecks don't add up to the
8 thing, you don't get health insurance. Uhm, as
9 teaching artists, many of us, myself included work
10 for multiple organizations and we piece together a
11 livelihood but as Russel said, because at any one of
12 those, we don't work a certain amount of hours. The
13 health insurance carriers won't write a policy and we
14 spent years at the New 42, actually I was on a
15 taskforce looking into this. We spent two years and
16 at the end of that came up against a dead end because
17 the carrier, they were just like, we can't take the
18 risk, even though there's - I mean there's thousands
19 of us but they were like, it's each individual
20 organization that they'd write the policy for. So,
21 some kind of subsidy for health insurance would be
22 absolutely massive.

23 CONNIE BUTLER: I think I would just underscore
24 the importance of support for small and midsize
25 organizations, especially with the decrease in

1 federal funding and the chilling effect that we've
2 seen in private philanthropy because of that, that
3 just capital in general operating support for small
4 and midsize organizations.
5

6 KIMBERLY OLSEN: And just to underscore as well,
7 I think the portable benefits recommendation in the
8 CUF report is something that has real legs to be able
9 to address the challenges that teaching artists are
10 facing, as they are working in multiple settings but
11 being, having the benefits live with them as opposed
12 to with these individual organizations. I think has
13 tremendous potential to totally revolutionize my
14 field.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Thanks for
16 being here and I'll call the next panel. I'm going
17 to mess - oh, I'm like why can't I see it? Lucy, it
18 looks like Luwow the way it's written. Lucy, DJ
19 McDonald, we have a DJ in the house, that's kind of
20 cool or maybe that's just a nickname. Okay, Francine
21 and Lisa and Brittany Belinger.

22 And maybe I'll stop with my like random fun facts
23 of my life but honestly, I was telling my friend the
24 other day that I didn't realize how much I buried my
25 own artistic history being in this government field

1 that sometimes isn't quite artistic. So, I think I'm
2 more excited about Chairing this Committee than I
3 thought I was because it allows me to talk about my
4 growing up in the art world. So, bear with my random
5 fun facts for the next couple of hearings. Until
6 I've said them all and then I'll have nothing to say.
7

8 LUCY SEXTON: I love your random fun facts, it's
9 also because you grew up here in New York, so you
10 know a lot about what that is to come through this
11 system, so I appreciate it.

12 My name is Lucy Sexton, I lead the citywide
13 Cultural Advocacy Coalition, New Yorkers for Culture
14 and Arts. Thanks to all the members of the Committee
15 and thank you Deputy Speaker Chair Williams for
16 citing the Create NYC plan, which underscores that
17 affordability has been a systemwide issue impacting
18 our sector and artist lives for decades. I'll start
19 with the cultural organizations.

20 This year, the cultural Development Fund of the
21 Department of Cultural Affairs, funded many new
22 organizations but did so at the cost of cutting and
23 zeroing out many cultural organizations that have
24 been long funded and have provided valuable
25 programming to New Yorkers.

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3 Arts house, schools for instance in Coney Island
4 led by Sophia Harrison has provided affordable dance,
5 music, and arts classes to low income families and we
6 saved funding for it from the city to do it for 17
7 years. This year, for the first time, they received
8 zero. This is unacceptable.

9 It also makes it clear that the current funding
10 for the Department of Cultural Affairs, is
11 insufficient to meet the need. We need increased
12 support to ensure that DCLA can accommodate the
13 increased number of organizations applying.

14 There are also policy initiatives which can
15 transform the ability of artists and cultural workers
16 to live and work in our city. First, remove the ban
17 on occupation specific housing, which currently makes
18 it impossible to build artist preference housing.
19 Council Members Powers and Bottcher, as you said,
20 introduced it last fall, we need Council Members like
21 you. Thank you to introduce and advance and pass
22 this bill.

23 Second, we need to address health insurance and
24 benefits. One of the policies suggested by the
25 Mayor's Theater and Live Performance Industry Council
on which I served, was for the city to do a study on

1 what it would take to create a city backed health
2 plan providing portable benefits for artists and
3 affordable group rates for cultural organizations.
4

5 The Mayor's Office for Media and Entertainment
6 just completed a modest study looking at similar
7 plans in other cities. The Council should move
8 forward in funding a real study and plan to build
9 this. There are several large foundations that are
10 ready to partner. Thank you for this hearing and for
11 addressing the chronic affordability issues which
12 have weakened our sector to a breaking point.

13 FRANCINE GARBBER-COHEN: I'm Fran Garber-Cohen,
14 President of Regina Opera Company in Brooklyn, Sunset
15 Park, which has offered year around fully staged
16 operas and ticketed and free concerts in Southwest
17 Brooklyn for 56 years.

18 At these performances, thousands of Brooklyn
19 residents, especially senior citizens, they meet
20 other music lovers. They get out of their home.
21 They come back discouraged of loneliness and feelings
22 of isolation. For them, music is medicine but this
23 medicine is getting more expensive every month.
24 Attendance for the ticketed events and the resulting
25 income is decreasing while attendance at our free

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3 events is increasing. As a result, we are presenting
4 more events, spending more of our funds to
5 accommodate the needs of these senior citizens and
6 other low income people.

7 We represent the rest of the cultural sector of
8 New York City. People who attend our performances
9 feel better after the shows but our musical artist is
10 suffering. They no longer have a place to live and
11 work. They can't afford the rent, cost of lessons,
12 coaching, rehearsals, studio rental so they move out
13 of the city.

14 Our stage director, Brooklyn resident, long term
15 moved to California to live with family members since
16 the cost of rent, food and insurance were becoming
17 unmanageable. Some of our singers also moved to New
18 Jersey to Suffolk County upstate rural areas where
19 rent is less.

20 This is a loss to New York City economy because
21 they are now spending their dollars elsewhere.
22 Investment in the arts is an investment in New York
23 City. Thank you.

24 Okay, hi. It's nice to meet you Dr. Williams.
25 I'm Lisa Gold. I'm the Executive Director of the
Asian American Arts Alliance and we are a 43 year old

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3 nonprofit service organization that works to ensure
4 greater representation, equity, and opportunities for
5 Asian American artists and arts organizations. We're
6 the only organization in the country that does that
7 and as we've heard from the Center for an Urban
8 Future report, you know the issues facing the
9 creative community are just crushing with studio and
10 rehearsal space, housing, healthcare, childcare, out
11 of reach. You know how are artists supposed to
12 survive.

13 Now add on top of that, limited English Language
14 proficiency and racial bias and it becomes almost
15 impossible. So, in the AAPI community, one in four
16 New Yorkers live in poverty. That's nearly two times
17 the rate of White New Yorkers and 48 percent have
18 limited English skills making it even harder for them
19 to access the help that they need.

20 So, Asian Americans, we make up 18 percent of the
21 New York City population and almost 47 percent live
22 in Queens. And yet, we have no AAPI led CIG. No
23 Queens Borough Art Council, and our community is
24 perpetually underfunded by the Department of Cultural
25 Affairs. In FY25, AAPI organizations received only
five percent of the CDF funding, which translates to

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3 you know less than two percent of the total budget,
4 while we're 18 percent of the population. And then,
5 of the grants that we did receive, they were on
6 average 28 percent less than the main grant amount.
7 So, we have to stabilize our institutions. My own
8 organization, we have seven people crammed into a
9 tiny space that is like a temp of the size of this
10 room and we are on the edge of losing our healthcare
11 because if one employee leaves because we can't
12 afford that, then our whole staff loses their
13 healthcare. So, it's really - it's really a crisis
14 for our community.

15 I love what Ann Delcasio is doing the Create in
16 Place. We just need it on a mega scale and I just
17 want to echo my thanks to you for investing this and
18 uhm, I just hope that we have your commitment to
19 saving the soul of New York, which is our artists and
20 our cultural organizations.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You have my commitment.

22 BRITTANY BELINGER: Good afternoon Chair and
23 Members of the Committee. Thank you for the
24 opportunity to testify today. My name is Brittany
25 Belinger. I am the Director of Programs and
Innovation at Museum Hue. A New York City based

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3 member driven arts organization dedicated to
4 advancing equity and inclusion in the cultural sector
5 through research, advocacy, education and community
6 engagement. I am here today to address the growing
7 unaffordability crisis facing arts and cultural
8 professionals in New York City and to share how
9 organizations like Museum Hue are working to support
10 this workforce even as systemic challenges continue
11 to outpace philanthropic and nonprofit solutions.

12 I join my colleagues working across creative
13 disciplines throughout the city and thanking the
14 Committee for their leadership.

15 Arts professionals are essential workers in New
16 York City's cultural ecosystem. They are educators,
17 curators, preparators, teaching artists, designers,
18 conservators, administrators and cultural workers
19 whose labor sustains museums, galleries, libraries,
20 community arts organizations and creative small
21 businesses across all five boroughs.

22 Yet increasingly, these same workers cannot
23 afford to live anywhere near the institutions and
24 communities they serve. At Museum Hue, we see this
25 crisis first hand. Our work centers arts
professionals of color who are historically under

1
2 paid, under represented and most vulnerable to
3 displacement. Through our Hue Arts Leadership
4 Fellowship, we provide paid cohort based professional
5 development, mentorship and institutional access to
6 mid-career arts professionals. This fellowship is
7 designed to support career sustainability, leadership
8 advancement and long term retention in the cultural
9 sector. However, even with the leadership training
10 and professional support, many fellows continue to
11 struggle with housing insecurity, rising rents and
12 the loss of affordable workspaces, professional
13 advancement alone cannot offset a cost of living
14 crisis.

15 Talented experience cultural workers are still
16 being forced to leave New York City, not because of
17 lack of skill or commitment because they can't simply
18 afford to stay. Thank you for your time.

19 DJ MCDONALD: Good afternoon. DJ McDonald, the
20 purpose of this hearing I am representing the Dance
21 Parade, which on May 16th, will for the 20th time,
22 over 20 years take over the streets of New York and
23 introduce an aspect of New York that is here all the
24 time but it's only seen on that day.

25

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3 I have very little to add to the amount, amazing
4 amount of information that you've been presented with
5 today but I want to thank you for holding this
6 hearing and holding it now. You've gotten a lot of
7 information, not only this - the Center for an Urban
8 Future Report, we have the announcement of the Queens
9 mapping project and then the Manhattan Multiplier, in
10 which the Borough President said something that I
11 consider magic words, leveraging using the funds
12 available to the Manhattan Borough President to
13 leverage both philanthropy and the private sector.

14 So, and that would I hope be pursued if we did it
15 on a citywide basis. The Council has a great history
16 of this but if we could use those same tools to reach
17 the one percent, uh goal of funding for the arts in
18 the city, it's an investment in what brings people
19 here, what keeps people here. What we're all
20 involved in together and the fact that I've heard so
21 much positive today about combining forces,
22 political, government, private industry philanthropy
23 to reenforce and support that. I think we can get
24 there. It's an investment in the future and
25 particularly in the future of the children that are
growing up here now who have come from all over the

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3 world. We've had a tremendous influx in the last
4 year and we're a refuge city. But those kids are
5 going to grow up to create the culture of the future
6 and it's happening right now.

7 So, thank you very much for holding this hearing.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and I don't want
9 to take all the credit because I'm really just new
10 here, so I want to thank Committee Staff Regina
11 specifically, who thought this was a really good
12 topic and I know everybody knows Regina, she's the
13 best and I'm really excited to work with her on this
14 Committee. So, yes, thank you all so much. Same
15 question just to be consistent. If you had and most
16 of you guys answered it already but if you have any
17 additional reactions to the report or anything you
18 want to add that you think is an immediate thing that
19 DCLA or the Council should take up to address this
20 crisis.

21 LUCY SEXTON: I just want to add that you know I
22 referenced that Theater and Live Performance Industry
23 Council. Some of us, many of here in the room were
24 on it and it was really a great bringing together of
25 commercial sector, nonprofit sector, workers,
organizations, and we came up with a lot of great

1 ideas and just as we were presenting them to our
2 Deputy Mayor's, the last Administration started to
3 fall apart and those Deputy Mayor's left.

4 So, I think it's worth looking back at that
5 committee to get together, looking at the things that
6 were proposed, because there were a lot of deep dives
7 done by the full sector and I would really be
8 interested in that being lifted up. I know that
9 Deputy Mayor, then Deputy Mayor Torres Springer was
10 particularly interested in this portable benefits
11 study to see if the city could be involved in this.
12 As I said MOME has just - Mayor's Office of Media and
13 Entertainment just came out with the first study on
14 it.

15 So, it really feels like that is something that
16 could move forward and would really, really matter as
17 you've heard artists talk about it at this panel.
18 How hard it is to have healthcare particularly at
19 this time when we know that the federal safety net is
20 falling apart. So, that would be my promotion.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes, we should talk
22 offline because I didn't know about that, so if there
23 is any reports or recommendations that you have, I
24 would love to see them.
25

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3 LUCY SEXTON: Wonderful.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And we really should start
5 this like serious one percent campaign because it's
6 only, I didn't know that the cultural community was
7 saying this. Because Parks, I know about Parks and
8 their one percent. I'm very serious about the parks.
9 We should do it.

10 LUCY SEXTON: They stole our idea but it's still
11 a good idea. I'm for parks as well as us but we
12 started it hmm 15 years ago.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I know but it kind of like
14 died. Like the last four years, like I didn't hear
15 that from this community.

16 BRITTANY BELINGER: One thing, there is an
17 initiative called, 'The Communities of Color,' a
18 nonprofit stabilization fund, which is an amazing
19 severely underfunded initiative and what we're
20 talking about is stabilizing these organizations.
21 Like, uhm, Coney Island. Like Sophias, like so many
22 of the organizations and part of Hue that are like
23 part of my community and I think it - a small
24 increase in that amount of funding would so such a
25 huge way to stabilize our sector.

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2 DJ MCDONALD: Just in direct answer to the
3 question that you asked, you've been asking all day,
4 I really was impressed and if we went back over the
5 transcript, Eli's emphasis, the way that because the
6 report lays out specific discreet things but he wove
7 them together in a way that I thought gave a sort of
8 flight path for entry into some of these areas where
9 they're working together. That's the only thing.
10 That's my opinion.

11 LUCY SEXTON: I will just add that in terms of
12 artist housing and should it be artist preference or
13 not, there's many historic labor housing developments
14 that were built in the country, you know 50 years
15 ago. We are the union. We are the labor union of
16 one of the main industries. So, making it a place
17 where your workers can live has some history to it in
18 terms of the labor movement.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Well, thank you all so
20 much. People have been asking me what my goal is and
21 I truly want to learn from all of you because as I
22 stated, I am new here. Even though I have grown up
23 in the arts community, living in New York City, uhm,
24 just being aware of like the issues and the history
25 is something that I really want to spend time

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3 learning over the next couple of months. So, please
4 fill free to educate me, correct me because I really
5 do want to understand again where you've been and
6 where we're trying to go. So, thank you all so very
7 much for being here.

8 Okay, next panel, Jesus, Rasu - I feel like I
9 messed that up. Please correct me or what is then?
10 Rasu, Mohammed, Jamaine Smith. That's an interesting
11 spelling. Who is Jamaine? Oh, of course it's you
12 with the spelling. Rasu, you can start. I'm sorry I
13 messed up your name.

14 RASU JILANI: It is all good, most people do. As
15 long as you didn't put a Z on my name, good. Good
16 afternoon Ms. Chair and Deputy Speaker.

17 Congratulations. My name is Rasu Jilani. I am the
18 Executive Director of Brooklyn Arts Council. I'm
19 here with my - uh, we celebrate our 60th year this
20 year. So, we've been in the Council working with the
21 city for 60 years.

22 I'm here with my colleagues Jesus Lopez-Jenson,
23 Executive Director of Bronx Council in the Arts, Mo
24 Yousuf, President and CEO of Lower Manhattan Cultural
25 Council and Jamaine Smith, Executive Director of
26 Staten Island Arts.

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3 Ms. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to
4 testify on behalf of the Arts Councils but the
5 greater cultural sector. Thank you for this
6 opportunity. We come to you today as the New York
7 City Borough Council Collective. Sorry, Borough Arts
8 Council Collective representing Brooklyn, the Bronx,
9 Manhattan, Staten Island.

10 Each of us leads officially the Arts Council, our
11 boroughs designated and contracted by DCLA to serve
12 artists, small cultural organizations and the public.

13 We acknowledge that our collective does not
14 represent - uh has a representation of Queens. We'll
15 get back to that later. We're not just here to talk
16 about affordability in abstract terms. We're here
17 because affordability crisis is directly impacting
18 the people who create and sustain New York City's
19 cultural identity. And because New York City needs a
20 strong, community rooted institution to carry out
21 affordability agenda that reaches everyone, not just
22 artists.

23 We believe that culture and the arts are not just
24 side issues in the conversation. There are central
25 infrastructure for stability, cohesion, economic
vitality, and belonging in our neighborhoods. But

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3 that infrastructure is vulnerable and so are we.

4 I'll pass it to Jesus.

5 JESUS LOPEZ-JENSON: Good afternoon Deputy
6 Speaker. Thank you so much for the opportunity.
7 Jesus Lopez-Jenson, Executive Director of the Bronx
8 Council and the Arts.

9 To pick off where my colleague Rasu left off,
10 Arts Councils were established because the city
11 cannot do this work alone, as we heard from DCLA
12 earlier, we serve as trusted intermediaries between
13 artists and city systems, especially for those
14 historically excluded from public funding. Each
15 year, we regrant millions of dollars directly support
16 thousands of artists across the boroughs and amplify
17 impact through the cultural programming these artists
18 bring to their communities.

19 We're not just re-granters, we're service based
20 institutions that provide one on one technical
21 support to thousands of artists each year, conduct
22 multilingual outreach, process microgrants faster
23 than city systems can, advise on compliance, access
24 and eligibility, coordinate cultural emergency
25 response. For example, the Redhook Fire Fund in

1
2 Brooklyn, partner with city agencies to embed artists
3 in public housing, elder care, schools and more.

4 Over the past two years, we've built a formal
5 cross borough collective. We meet twice a month,
6 strategize together and recently held a three day
7 retreat with DCLA, NYSCA and private funders to align
8 around shared goals. This is unprecedented
9 coordination and it's working but to deliver what the
10 city needs, we need a restructured relationship that
11 reflects our role as essential partners, not
12 temporary grantees. Thank you.

13 MOHAMMED YOUSUF: Great, thank you Chair
14 Williams. My name is Mo Yousuf, I'm the President
15 and CEO of LMCC, the lower Manhattan Cultural
16 Council. We were established in 1973 but since 1983
17 we've been the trusted partner of DCLA to do re-
18 granting for all artists in the borough of Manhattan.

19 As the Arts Councils Collective, we see the same
20 systemic pressures across every borough. Artists
21 facing housing insecurity, mounting debt and the
22 constant financial instability of working without
23 benefits or a reliable safety net. But when you look
24 at our 2025 Manhattan data, we see these pressures
25 have reached a critical breaking point that threatens

1 the cultural fabric of the entire city. There's
2 effectively a vanishing middle class for the arts.
3 Our internal tracking shows a massive reliance of our
4 funding in low income zip codes and for these artists
5 a Council grant is not extra funding, it is
6 foundational.
7

8 Our records show that many individual applicants,
9 while their total project expense is reached into the
10 thousands, their confirmed outside income is often
11 zero.

12 We are effectively the only thing keeping these
13 projects and these artist working in those
14 neighborhoods. There's also a loss of creative
15 space. We've seen a significant shift in where art
16 is happening. Our data shows that artists are
17 increasingly priced out of traditional theaters and
18 galleries. They are now almost entirely dependent on
19 public infrastructure, like NYCHA community centers,
20 public parks and libraries to host their work.

21 Without these public safety net venues and grants
22 to activate them, cultural life would be reserved for
23 only those with extreme economic privilege. And
24 there's a give in an economy with no safety net. The
25 vast majority of our applicants are individual

1 artists and small collectives, not institutions.

2 These creators are navigating a world of widely
3 fluctuating project based income without benefits.

4 Our data shows that even with limited resources,
5 these artists are providing a staggering public
6 service, reaching expected audiences of thousands of
7 New Yorkers while personally absorbing the rising
8 costs of production and cost of living increases.

9 However, it's not just the artists who are at
10 risk. It's the Arts Council ourselves. We cannot
11 effectively anchor the city's creative workforce when
12 we cannot be guaranteed multiyear regranting
13 contracts or increases in admin support, leaving our
14 own operations a state of constant uncertainty.

15 I'm going to pass it to Jamaine.

16 JAMAINE SMITH: Continued thanks to you Chair
17 Williams and City Council. Jamaine Smith, Executive
18 Director of Staten Island Arts. Shout outs to my mom
19 for the spelling of my name.

20 City Council Members, now that you have learned a
21 bit more about our purpose, power, and plight as your
22 Borough Arts Councils, we invite you into partnership
23 with us and the Department of Cultural Affairs and
24 one of my most favorite poems titled, 'Come Celebrate
25

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1 with Me' Lucille Clifton writes, Come Celebrate with
2 Me that every day something has tried to kill me and
3 has failed. To you all we say, let's partner to
4 increase our capacity to facilitate what I call and
5 has failed moments. For our city's artists and
6 cultural institutions, let's cocreate a better
7 delivery mechanism for the city's cultural and
8 affordability goals.
9

10 To do so, we recommend five actions. One,
11 recognize and invest in us, New York City's Borough
12 Arts Council's. As a vital citywide infrastructure
13 similar to CIGs and the CDF if our own distinct
14 category. We know that cultural equity across the
15 five boroughs demands an ecosystem that meets people
16 where they are. With our Council serving as trusted,
17 hyperlocal intermediaries.

18 Two, provide multiyear contracts of three to five
19 years or a dedicated baseline allocation in the city
20 budget for each Borough Council.

21 Three, ensure that these contracts include
22 operational funding beyond regranting for line items
23 such as staffing, community outreach, compliance,
24 navigation, and multilingual services.
25

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2 Four, resolve the disbursement time out of city
3 funds. Late allocation of city funds may force
4 Council to take bridge loans, effectively making us
5 lenders to the city. This is unsustainable and
6 creates additional financial risk. And five, allow
7 us to maintain access to the CDF and other
8 competitive funds while we build structure stability.

9 And finally, we call on the Council to resolve
10 the vacancy in Queens, which remains by the Borough
11 Arts Council. We've been holding space at our table
12 for our missing partner. This absence weakens our
13 collective capacity and thus we consist of these
14 delivery ecosystem. We say, let's fix that together.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

16 MOHAMMED YOUSUF: In closing, we are proud of
17 what we build across the boroughs. We're committed
18 to the city and the artists - well, that's not our
19 fault. We have nothing to do with that. We're
20 committed to the city and artists who bring its
21 neighborhoods to life but we cannot keep operating
22 from a place of precarity. Patching together
23 unsustainable budgets that deliver essential
24 services. If the city wants a serious affordability
25 strategy, it must invest in the cultural workers at

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3 the center of it and the Borough Arts Councils who
4 support them. We are here, we are organized, we are
5 ready to partner with you, DCLA, and with other
6 communities for the long term, not just for the now.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. So, same
9 question, any comments sought about the report and
10 anything you think we can do immediately in the
11 Council and DCLA to address the issues that you all
12 flagged? One, I think that you know it was
13 interesting to me, I didn't really know that because
14 you are kind of the grantor pass through, uhm, that's
15 very interesting how it doesn't seem sustainable, so
16 it also causes issues for you but we're asking you to
17 kind of regrant though. That was illuminating for me
18 but anything else you think we should immediately fix
19 or change?

20 JAMAINE SMITH: I mean we have - how much time do
21 we have?

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I mean, you know you want
23 to be kind to your other artists and cultural
24 friends.

25 JAMAINE SMITH: Understood.

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2 JESUS LOPEZ-JENSON: Well, I mean, we talk about
3 this every other week. I think the blueprints in
4 here and what Jamaine said, really the -

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: [INAUDIBLE 02:42:32].

6 JAMAINE SMITH: Yeah, it's on the second to the
7 last page, yup.

8 JESUS LOPEZ-JENSON: Yeah, so in addition to
9 those, I mean I'd also add this seems to be a moment
10 of imagination for this Administration and this
11 cultural committee and this city. And so, for us to
12 imagine a different way that we can do this, there
13 appears to be a lot of precedent, a lot of rigidity
14 in how funds are distributed right, project based
15 support. Let's fund the artist. Let's fund the
16 human being and not necessarily the project or the
17 outcome of it. The artist won't make work regardless
18 and so, when you're hearing about portable benefits
19 and housing security, these are things, access to
20 healthcare. These are things that are really
21 important and these are things at the Councils
22 because of our trusted relationship with the
23 individual artist. I'll say that we are the
24 mechanism that serves the individual. We have the
25

1 access to the individual and we've built the trust
2 over decades and so, let's us be a partner in that.

3
4 MOHAMMED YOUSUF: I'll add that you know amongst
5 the four Councils and we can project the impact of
6 Queens as a Council, circulate about \$8.5 million in
7 regranting money amongst the four Councils. If you
8 add Queens, that's \$10 million, right? So, that's a
9 lot of money to trust Arts Councils without putting a
10 ring on it, right? So, we need to really figure out,
11 yeah, yeah, so - it's an informal relationship that
12 needs to be consummated. So, I say all that to say
13 uhm, I'd like to see our CIGs, the Arts Councils, and
14 work that we do, we are responsible for our own
15 overhead but we're doing the work for the city.

16 So, some of our overhead should be covered and
17 that's one of our recommendations. We can talk to
18 you in detail what that looks like. Uhm, and you
19 know the other thing I would say is the artists are
20 at the center of the vin diagram of in affordability,
21 right? So, if you look at housing, if you look at
22 food access, if you look at equity rights, if you
23 look at immigrants rights, artists are at the center
24 and in fact, most of the time they make work around
25 that we support them, right?

2 So, I think this is opportunity to bring artists
3 at the center of the issues, whether it's crime or
4 housing, artists are still facing that.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

6 JAMAINE SMITH: And I'm from Springfield Queens
7 by the way.

8 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Fantastic, what did you
9 say?

10 JAMAINE SMITH: And I'm from Springfield Queens,
11 just so you know.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, you're from
13 Springfield, okay but you represent in Brooklyn?

14 JAMAINE SMITH: You know - not on top of the
15 line, Queens runs Brooklyn, just so you know it.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, it's true. If you
17 look at Hip Hop, Queens is really you know the
18 business behind all Hip Hop, even though they had the
19 artists, we actually had the business, so it's a good
20 line if we're not. Oh, I know, I'm sorry, Borough
21 award. Thank you so much.

22 Okay, next panel, Angela Johnson, Noel, Rachel,
23 William, and Leah. All union, so exciting.

24 When you guys speak, can you tell me like what
25 your unions do to? Like right before you speak, okay

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3 great. That's in your testimony? I met the unions
4 that do production. That work on TV sets. Oh okay,
5 I know you guys now, okay.

6 LEAH OKIN: Thank you for your time today and for
7 your already really on point remarks. My name is
8 Leah Okin. I am the Lead Business Representative for
9 the Theatrical Wardrobe Union, which is Local 764 of
10 the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage
11 Employees.

12 I'm here on behalf of the 1,900 members of Local
13 764, our retirees, and the next generation of
14 wardrobe workers, costume makers and child actor
15 guardians. The jobs Local 764 represents our
16 backstage and behind the scenes but today, I ask you
17 to put these workers, these artists, front and
18 forward in your mind.

19 The entertainment industry has its ups and downs.
20 You might be on a long running show that eventually
21 closes or a project that never even starts shooting.
22 You're probably thinking, doesn't that come with the
23 territory? That's what you signed up for and it's
24 not untrue.

25 Some folks are able to stick with New York
through these good times and bad. Increasingly, we

1 are finding that more people leave New York.

2 Depleting one of the largest economic drivers of our
3 city, not to mention of course it's history, it's
4 legend, it's fabulousness.

5
6 We want our members to stay here from their first
7 day on set through a long and stable retirement of
8 visiting their friends back stage at shows. Artist
9 preferred housing throughout the city near public
10 transportation should be one of the ways New York
11 City helps cultivate and care for its artists. We
12 ask that you prioritize and pass the Artist Housing
13 Bill 1047. We believe that taking action now will
14 help keep the artists here today and in the future.
15 I leave you with one last thought. There's a great
16 book called, 'The Philharmonic Gets Dressed.' And of
17 course, I am totally partial as a wardrobe person and
18 their business representative.

19 My parents read it to me as a kid, many, many
20 years ago and now, I read it to my two year old.
21 It's all about how these musicians from all over the
22 city get ready to go to work. It's great.

23 I worry that if we don't take action now, the
24 book won't even make sense because there won't be any

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3 artists left living here. Thank you for your time
4 and serious consideration.

5 It is a hard act to follow. Uhm, thank you for
6 hearing us today. My name is Angela Johnson, I'm the
7 President of Local 798, IATSE, representing makeup
8 artists and hair stylists. Members from up and down
9 the East Coast of the United States. 887 of those
10 members reside in the five boroughs and another
11 nearly five members live in New York City suburbs.

12 I, myself, moved to New York City at the age of
13 18 and built a 40 year career working on Broadway
14 film and television as a makeup artist. Local 798
15 represents those makeup artists and hairstylists that
16 work in entertainment. From Broadway, off Broadway,
17 Broadway Live Theater and the motion picture
18 industry, including the broadcast news. These are
19 good, middle class union jobs that provide health and
20 retirement benefits and still, many cannot afford in
21 the city - to live in the city in which they work.

22 We are also involved with training programs and
23 community based training as an introduction to our
24 crafts for underrepresented communities with
25 organizations such as Real Works and Future and Focus
connected with Roundabout.

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2 Local 798 supports the Artist Housing Bill 1047
3 for more affordable housing for artists and those
4 artists working in the entertainment industry. We
5 support all the efforts of the enhanced - to enhance
6 and fund the arts affordability, making it possible
7 for the entertainment industry to thrive for its
8 workers, the audiences, and patrons.

9 New York City is nothing if not the entertainment
10 and arts capital of the world. If we want to keep it
11 that way, we will need to make it possible for the
12 workers who produce and create art in New York City
13 to remain in New York City now and in the future.

14 Thank you.

15 NOEL JACOBY: Hi, I'm Noel Jacoby, I'm one of her
16 members. I am a makeup artist in Local 798 and I
17 wanted to say that I'm completely in support of any
18 efforts for affordable housing in New York City,
19 specifically for artists. Currently due to many
20 factors, my brothers, sisters, and kin have been
21 priced out of being able to afford to live in this
22 city.

23 Sorry, it makes me a little emotional. While I
24 appreciate and value things like affordable housing
25 lotteries provided by the city due to various

1 employers and difficulty providing income, those
2 programs are really hard for us to navigate. The
3 lack of work due to rising costs of production in the
4 city and still trying to recover from the pandemic,
5 we're losing talented individuals in our city and I'm
6 hoping that Affordable Housing Bill will help address
7 the one size fits all type of applicant, artist
8 housing and helps retain the talent to our beautiful
9 city. And as on a funny note, as the great Jimmy
10 McMullen would say, the rent is too damn high.

12 I'm sorry but it really is and I got to say on a
13 not a scripted note, I just want to be able to be in
14 this city and month to month, I'm afraid that I'm not
15 going to be able to stay here with how hard it is.
16 So, after a 20 year career in film and television and
17 in makeup artistry, it's about time for me to move
18 home and I don't know what else to do.

19 So, I'm really hoping that this helps.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you for being here
21 and thank you for sharing your lived experience
22 because it's you know one thing to hear the report
23 but I appreciate you sharing your lived experience.
24 So, same question, if you have anything else, I think
25 you've kind of pretty much answered the question but

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3 if you have anything else you want to add about your
4 reaction with hands on the report or anything you
5 think the city can immediately do to address the
6 affordability crisis.

7 LEAH OKIN: I think you hit the nail on the head,
8 we all came here today focused on one very specific
9 item. What I would say in general is of course
10 funding for all of the organizations and making sure
11 that people do have sustainable funding does make
12 sure that they can plan for benefits for their
13 employees. We're very fortunate. The workers we
14 represent have access to portable benefits through
15 the unions funds. They're structured specifically
16 for artists. So, we are able to provide that but we
17 do need our organizations to be funded to make sure
18 they have the money to put into those things.

19 What I would ask and I say this with complete
20 respect for the Committee and for you as the Chair,
21 please involve us in the discussions. We're here.
22 We're here to be a resource. We hear from the people
23 every day about how hard it is to stay in the city.
24 We lovingly represent venues in all of the boroughs
25 of this city and we want to make sure that people can
stay here, can live here and work. Uhm, whether it's

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3 up in the Bronx where I grew up all the way down
4 through Queens, wherever it is, we want to make sure
5 they can stay.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much.

7 Alright, next panel, Ariel, Daniel, Jilian, and Maren
8 and last but not least Esther Robinson.

9 Can we start?

10 DANIEL AMOW: Hello, my name is Daniel, I'm here
11 on behalf of the Entertainment Community Fund and
12 Actors Fund Housing Development Corporation. I'm
13 here to talk about the need for affordable artist
14 housing. Findings from the CUF report present a
15 grime reality. New York City's resident artist
16 population is declining for the first time in
17 decades. This is a bad indicator compounded by the
18 fact that New York City has built zero unit of artist
19 housing over a decade, over the past decade.

20 Over that same time period, we have seen
21 thousands of units of artist housing built across the
22 country, including hundreds upstate. For example, we
23 recently completed 152 units of artist housing in Los
24 Angeles.

25 CUFs report provides clear recommendations the
city can act on now to help shore up our fragile arts

1 ecosystem, including the creation of new affordable
2 artist housing.

3
4 One barrier is the perceived risk that artist
5 housing could violate for housing laws. Yet we know
6 an artist preference is allowable at the federal
7 level and building upon that, the state has released
8 an artist preference policy that addresses concerns
9 and lays out an approach to promote diversity. It's
10 now time for the city to follow suit.

11 CUFs analysis found that New York City's artists
12 are more racially diverse and more likely to be low
13 income in the city as a whole. And the report also
14 makes clear that artist of color are at a growing
15 risk of displacement. After adjusting for the cost
16 of living, all artists here earn less than the
17 national average but the gap is widest for artists of
18 color who earn less than their White peers in nearly
19 every creative field.

20 We also support the Artist Housing Bill that
21 would allow the city to provide an artist preference
22 without violating the New York City Human Rights Law.
23 People often ask why affordable housing for artists
24 and we often respond with stats on economic impact or
25 how artists incubate innovation or attract talent

1 across sectors. That is all true but let's not
2 forget that artists are also small businesses, they
3 are immigrants, they are experiencing homelessness,
4 they are living with disabilities, teaching our
5 children, serving us food and working across all
6 industries.
7

8 In closing, we urge the City Council to pass the
9 Artist Housing Bill and to embrace policies that
10 expand housing for artists and affordable workspace
11 for artists. Thank you.

12 JULIAN GERSTEN: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker
13 and Chair Williams and members of the Committee.
14 Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name
15 is Julian Gersten. I'm the Chief Development Officer
16 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, a living memorial
17 to the holocaust. The museum wholeheartedly endorses
18 efforts supporting affordability in New York City's
19 arts and cultural sector and urges the City Council
20 to continue advancing access to cultural institutions
21 for all New Yorkers.

22 Since 1997, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which
23 is a member of the Cultural Institutions Group, has
24 served as a vital educational and civic resource
25 welcoming visitors from across the five boroughs and

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3 beyond. Our mission is to educate diverse audiences
4 about Jewish life before, during and after the
5 holocaust while confronting the enduring dangers of
6 unchecked antisemitism and other forms of hatred. At
7 a time when misinformation and intolerance are on the
8 rise, our work is not only historically important but
9 deeply relevant to the current moon in our city.

10 Affordability is central to our ability to
11 fulfill our mission. Cultural institutions like ours
12 must remain accessible to students, educators,
13 families and lifelong learners regardless of income.
14 We proudly provide free admission to holocaust
15 survivors, New York City educators, New York City
16 Department of Education K-12 students, members of the
17 military and first responders.

18 In addition, we are open to the public free of
19 charge every Thursday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
20 welcoming New Yorkers who may otherwise be unable to
21 visit and ensuring that cost is never a barrier to
22 learning. Moreover, we operate a robust pre-tourist
23 program, which provides New York City public and
24 Charter school students with engaging, evidence based
25 holocaust education for free and as needed with
subsidized busing.

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2 Through this program, we welcomed over 18,000
3 public and Charter school students through our doors
4 the last school year and expect to exceed that number
5 this year. The Museum of Jewish Heritage is an
6 essential part of New York City's cultural and
7 educational ecosystem, continued city investment and
8 affordability in issues which includes supporting the
9 arts and culture, as resources for all New Yorkers
10 allows institutions like ours to remain open,
11 welcoming and impactful particularly for communities
12 that have historically faced barriers to cultural
13 participation. Thank you.

14 ESTHER ROBINSON: Good afternoon Chair Williams.
15 I want to commend your stamina and thank you for
16 remaining open hearted and looking towards keen
17 solutions. The future of our city - my name is
18 Esther Robinson, I'm the Executive Director of an
19 organization called, 'Art Build.'

20 The future of our city's creative capacity is at
21 a critical juncture. Without long term commitments
22 to the spaces where work is made, we risk becoming a
23 city that consumes culture, rather than creates it.
24 A city of spectacle, not production. The question is
25 simple; will New York remain a global leader of

1 making or allow the erosion of production spaces that
2 make that excellence possible?
3

4 We need change now and the good news is that we
5 already have a model that works and one that can be
6 strengthened and scaled right now. Ten years ago,
7 through an innovative public, private partnership
8 with the New York City Economic Development
9 Corporation, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and
10 multiple financing partners, my organization, Art
11 Built, developed 50,000 square feet of long term
12 affordable production space at the Brooklyn Army
13 Terminal. It could not have been done without city
14 leadership, public assets, and private capital
15 working together. It is the largest long term
16 affordable, nonprofit creative workspace built in New
17 York City in the past 30 years.

18 Today, 120 artists in art spaces businesses
19 operate there. They hire, they fabricate, they
20 export, it works but what does not work is building a
21 30 to 50 year production model, which Art Built is,
22 with a ten year lease.

23 Work space needs are perennial; rents escalate
24 but banks will not finance major build outs on a ten
25 year lease. They require longer terms to secure

1 their investment. When leases are capped at ten
2 years, which is a common thing at the city level, we
3 block access to the capital that allow us to build
4 for the long term. Instead of durable
5 infrastructure, we end up in repeated work arounds
6 and endless lease negotiations. We can fix this. We
7 can establish a 20 years lease framework, pair it
8 with dedicated city capital for improvements, and
9 unlock investment to finance affordability and we
10 know this is possible because we've done it.

12 Attached to the document you have in front of
13 you, is a letter to the incoming president of the New
14 York City Economic Development Corporation,
15 requesting a meeting to advance this 20 year lease
16 framework. I respectfully invite you to sign on to
17 this letter so that - or come and speak to me, so
18 that together we can innovate instead of despair and
19 build a city that defines the world creative future
20 and that we can build it to last. Thank you so much.

21 ARIEL SAVRANSKY: Thank you Chair for the
22 opportunity to testify today. My name is Ariel
23 Savransky, I'm the Director of Government and
24 Community Relations at the 92nd Street Y, which is a
25 non-profit culture on community center in Manhattan.

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3 For more than 150 years, 92nd Street Y has served
4 children, families, and individuals across New York.
5 Each year, over 700,000 people from diverse
6 backgrounds come to engage with arts, literature,
7 education, and wellness.

8 At the core of our mission is a simple belief,
9 access to the arts should never depend on a persons
10 zip code or ability to pay. Through scholarships,
11 subsidies, and deep partnerships with New York City
12 public schools, we ensure affordability is never a
13 barrier. We are grateful for our partnership at the
14 Council, which allows us to offer eight free CASA
15 programs across the city, as well as a SU CASA Coral
16 program for older adults on Roosevelt Island.

17 For more than 35 years, our school engagement in
18 the arts program has provided arts education to
19 public school students with limited or no access.
20 Today, we reach more than 9,000 students and teachers
21 in over 80 public schools, more than doubling our
22 reach in just one year.

23 Nearly all of these school are Title 1 and more
24 than 70 percent of participating students come from
25 families living in poverty. Our comprehensive
sequential K-12 arts education model goes beyond

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3 short term enrichment offering multiweek residencies,
4 some up to 18 weeks, sustained classroom engagement,
5 indirect access to professional artists and live
6 performances.

7 In FY27 we are focused on expanding equitable
8 access through programs like our Discovery Series for
9 elementary and middle school students and Broadway
10 spotlight, which is a new high school residency that
11 introduces students to Broadway as both audiences and
12 creators.

13 An opportunity that would otherwise be
14 financially out of reach. We also offer arts and
15 cultural education programs for children and families
16 and individuals. We offer a need based financial
17 assistance across all our programs, ensuring access
18 to music, dance, visual arts, theater and lifelong
19 learning as well as programs for older adults through
20 our Himan Brown 60 plus program. With continued City
21 Council support, we aim to double our impact by 2028.
22 We look forward to continuing our partnership to
23 ensure all New Yorkers can access high quality arts
24 and culture. Thank you.

25 MAREN BERTHELSEN: Good afternoon. Thank you.

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3 I'm Maren Berthelsen, I'm the Director of
4 Development at Symphony Space. Thank you so much for
5 holding this important hearing. I've been listening
6 to all the numbers and thinking about it and
7 realizing that I just want everybody to have what I
8 got to have. I came to New York, more - longer ago
9 than anybody even likes to think about and I had the
10 supportive parents who encouraged my dreams of making
11 a live in New York but we're not in a position to
12 underwrite them.

13 Following a college internship with the artistic
14 director at Symphony Space, it became my artistic and
15 professional home. I've worked in programming,
16 producing and administration, and went on to earn a
17 master's degree at CUNY and I've had a full career.
18 And now light years from my student internship, I'm
19 the Director of Development. It wasn't without
20 struggle but all of that was possible when I came
21 here decades ago.

22 I had a roommate but I didn't have four. I
23 didn't have to live with my parents. I didn't have a
24 two hour commute because the five boroughs were
25 outside of my financial reach and I was able to
devote my professional life to an organization that I

1 love. One that is anonymous with artistic
2 excellence, with community and with a warm welcome.
3 And that's why I do what I do. I work in not-for-
4 profit fund raising to fulfill that promise for the
5 other people who are at all stages of their careers,
6 for artists, arts administrators, production staff,
7 house management interns.
8

9 At Symphony Space, we offer affordable ticket
10 prices. We do have free programming, viable
11 employment, arts education programs for children and
12 adults, all to create an institution where people can
13 enjoy our programming as audience members but also to
14 see a possible path for their own careers. I do it
15 because my dream has evolved. I work to ensure that
16 the opportunities that I had continue and that
17 they're available to anyone with hopes to make a
18 meaningful life in the arts. Thank you for your
19 time.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Same question. Uhm,
21 anything you want to add on the report or any
22 immediate things you think that they can do and I do
23 feel like you all pretty much answered the question
24 but -
25

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3 MAREN BERTHELSEN: I definitely would put in
4 another plug for a timely payment from the city. You
5 know we go to the capital workshops and they say it's
6 24 to 36 months and the amount of time it takes us to
7 keep those grants moving forward is so expensive.
8 It's you know, they always say city money is the most
9 expensive money that we get but uhm, so yes, that
10 process with MOCS and DCLA would be very helpful.

11 ARIEL SAVRANSKY: I agree with that. Uhm, I also
12 just want to add in relation to your question about
13 innovation and the week long arts and culture
14 celebration and a pipeline to arts and culture, uhm,
15 professions. We have a program at the 92nd Street Y
16 called Team Producers, which is a two year long
17 internship. We have juniors and seniors and it
18 really kind of exposes them to all facets of
19 opportunities in arts and culture. They intern at
20 the Y, they are able to attend performances, take
21 lessons, intern with different departments, so it
22 kind of expands their horizons.

23 As part of that, we used to do what we call Teen
24 Arts Week, which was a partnership with 30 plus
25 organizations, the teens were organizing the whole
thing. During one of the year, teens could have

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3 access to programming at these 30 plus organizations
4 for free. So, it really allowed them to kind of
5 explore different organizations around the city.
6 They went to different boroughs that they maybe you
7 know hadn't had opportunities to go to, so. We are
8 not continuing the program right now but would love
9 to talk about ways that we can work together to kind
10 of provide some of our workforce development
11 programs. So, thank you.

12 ESTHER ROBINSON: Uhm, I just wanted to say one
13 true line that we're seeing across all of the
14 testimony, is these really short time horizons,
15 untimely payments, narrow time horizon. It's
16 Council's that can't function for more than one year,
17 small time horizons. If we're asking to talk about
18 the future of New York City, we must, must, must
19 commit to a long time horizon. So, for any of the
20 interventions you are doing, please challenge
21 yourself to ask, how long can we make it? Can we
22 make it 20 years? Can we make it two directors of an
23 organization? Can we get four different high schools
24 kids you know worth of people coming through a
25 system? And then I just want to say I - we have
other programming. We do uhm a financial literacy

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3 program that's free for all artists in New York City.

4 We could not do that programming without the Arts
5 Councils. Not having a Queens Arts Council has been
6 incredibly damaging to our ability to reach Queens
7 artists, right? Just to get them to say, hey, we got
8 free financial training about how to improve your
9 business year to year.

10 And so, that I just, I can't stress enough how
11 much they should be independently funded and they
12 should have a long term horizon. The issues are
13 perennial, then some of the solutions have to be
14 perennial. Thank you.

15 DANIEL AMOW: I just want to add, speaking of the
16 long term horizons, affordable housing should be long
17 term and should be in perpetuity and similar to that,
18 we should see our affordable art spaces have that
19 long term affordable component and I think that's
20 what Ester is speaking to. Thanks.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I just have to take a
22 quick break. [BREAK 03:10:20-03:14:22]

23 Sorry about that. You know, I forget that I'm
24 like a human and real things happen. So, I apologize
25 I got a call from my mom that my grandma is not
responsive, so sorry. I know.

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3 So, yes I'm being transparent to tell you guys
4 I'm really sorry I had to like pause to call her
5 back. Okay, so the next person is Risa. I feel like
6 I'm saying that wrong, right? Is it Risa? Oh, yay
7 okay. Mauricio, Eva, Penn, Raquel(SP?). Okay, oh
8 Dance New York City. You know I'm always going to
9 rep for the dancers and Barbara.

10 RISA SHOUP: Uhm, oh there we are. Thank you to
11 everyone especially you Deputy Speaker and Committee
12 Chair Dr. Williams. My name is Risa Shoup, I am a
13 Co-Executive Director of the Alliance of Resident
14 Theaters New York. We're actually going to be
15 meeting with you next week. We are a 53 year old
16 service organization that supports theater companies
17 and theater makers throughout New York City and New
18 York State with access to education and professional
19 development.

20 Subsidized workspace across three facilities
21 reflecting offices, rehearsal studios, meeting spaces
22 and two fully equipped professional theaters and all
23 kinds of financial resources that include both grants
24 and a cash flow loan program that we run with See
25 Change Capital Partners.

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3 Our city is only getting more expensive and
4 unfortunately for many of us, we're having a hard
5 time keeping up between purchasing meals and
6 groceries, paying our rent or mortgage, paying for
7 child care, paying for utilities, paying for
8 transportation, and paying for health care.

9 If we are even able to pay for these things at
10 all. And it doesn't matter if you're an artist or a
11 dentist, a poet or a plumber, you're probably
12 sacrificing one of these to pay for the other and
13 that isn't safe or sustainable. So, I really
14 appreciate the subject of today's hearing and I'm
15 glad to be here and I'm not just here on behalf of
16 theater makers. I'm here as a New Yorker.

17 Artists matter because we help create the new
18 world. The more affordable and just world and we
19 need to make that world fast. So, solving the crisis
20 of affordability for New Yorkers isn't just something
21 we need to do for artists but there are specific
22 needs as my colleagues have spoken about so
23 eloquently that artists have and that I want to
24 address here.

25 First, we do need access to affordable space. We
need more of it. We need that space to be stable, as

1
2 Esther spoke about so well and we need groups, the
3 groups who manage these spaces to have access to high
4 quality technical assistance so that they understand
5 the potential impact of taking on a lease or
6 ownership obligation and how to operationalize
7 management before it happens, and before they take on
8 that potentially pernicious expense.

9 And I also uplift what all of my colleagues have
10 said about increasing affordable housing overall and
11 increasing access to affordable housing for artists.

12 Slow procurement time is really harming all
13 sectors but particularly small arts nonprofits who
14 rely on public funding contracts and don't have the
15 cash to bridge to payment. I'm quoted in the CUF
16 report about this. I sit on the See Change Capital
17 Board and as I mentioned, at Art New York, we run a
18 cash flow loan program with See Change that primarily
19 supports arts groups who are waiting for their CDF
20 funding and other public contracts.

21 Please work with your colleagues in the
22 Administration to fix this. We need contracts to be
23 awarded in a way that is coterminous with the start
24 of the fiscal year and to be paid accordingly. We go
25 into debt fronting cash for contracts that are unpaid

1
2 for months or even years and this process needs to be
3 streamlined and patient. And I know you know this
4 but I'm really grateful that I can say this publicly
5 today.

6 And finally, we do need increased funding and
7 increased transparency about how public funding is
8 decided and distributed. Public funding should not
9 necessarily be the largest or the most robust grant
10 that you're eligible for but it should be the most
11 reliable. We deserve that as taxpayers. Thank you
12 very much.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and yes, you can
14 never say it enough. So, just keep saying it.

15 RISA SHOUP: I will.

16 EVA DAVIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 03:19:15] My
17 name is Eva Davis and I'm here speaking as the
18 Project Manager for LXNY, we're the Latinx Arts
19 Consortium of New York.

20 We are an intersectional network, working about
21 50 plus Latinx serving cultural organizations across
22 New York City and hopefully networking with more
23 because there are so many that service the Latinx
24 community.

3 Affordability in New York City's cultural sector

4 cannot be reduced to rent or ticket prices. For
5 Latinx serving organizations, affordability
6 determines whether culture can function as a public
7 good. Whether immigrant communities can fully
8 participate in civic life and whether New York
9 remains a city shaped by lived cultural practices,
10 rather than symbolic branding. Immigrant communities
11 are the foundational part of New York's cultural
12 ecosystem. Immigrant communities are not just an
13 audience, they are the artist, cultural workers,
14 organizers, caretakers, who sustain neighborhood
15 based cultural life.

16 This is why people come to New York, not only for
17 the flagship institutions but for the cultural
18 vitality that is rooted in communities. Latinx
19 serving organizations operate at the intersection of
20 culture affordability and civic infrastructure.

21 Across our network, affordability is inseparable from
22 access, especially in language, income, immigration
23 status and geography. This work requires labor and
24 infrastructure that funding systems rarely account
25 for, especially multilingual engagement,
intergenerational programming and long term trust

1 based relationships. These are not addons. These
2 are core operating functions.
3

4 A central challenge facing the sector is the
5 false separation between artists and the
6 organizations that make their work possible. Artists
7 depend on small and mid-sized organizations for
8 subsidized space, technical support, administrative
9 infrastructure, commissioning pathways for their
10 audience. With these organizations - when these
11 organizations are destabilized, artists are
12 displaced, even when direct funding goes to artists.

13 This is especially poignant in the Center for an
14 Urban Futures recommendation Number 8. It is
15 critical. Rather than treating capacity building as
16 a new or siloed intervention, the city should
17 recognize and invest in the existing and tangible
18 civic infrastructure that already exists by community
19 based cultural organizations.

20 Their expertise, trusted networks embedded public
21 service functions and affordability agenda for
22 culture cannot live within a single agency because
23 culture functions is a public utility that directly
24 affects housing stability, educational outcomes,
25 workforce development, public health, tourism, small

1 businesses and civic trust. New York City has
2 successfully advanced this model before, most
3 recently during the pandemic, the City Artist Corp,
4 in which DCLA partnered with City Council offices and
5 community anchored organizations to mobilize and
6 present artists citywide.
7

8 This approach also has deep precedence in the
9 CETAR project, which employed more than 500 under
10 employed artists in community based work and remains
11 the largest government supported artist initiatives
12 since the WPA.

13 These examples, demonstrate the investing in
14 cultural organizations as civic infrastructures and
15 it is not an experimental policy, it is proven public
16 model.

17 Latinx cultural organizations also function as
18 informal workforce, incubators and support systems
19 for immigrant artists navigating precarity, language
20 barriers and limited access to benefits. The labor
21 is essential yet largely underfunded and under
22 recognized. If New York City is serious about
23 cultural affordability, it must adapt an ecosystem
24 lens supporting immigrant rooted, culturally specific
25 organizations, because this is not a niche advocacy.

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3 It is an investment in civic infrastructure that
4 allows culture, community, and democracy to function
5 together. Thank you for your attention this
6 afternoon.

7 MAURICIO DELFIN: Chair Williams, members of the
8 Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify
9 today. My name is Mauricio Delfin and I am
10 testifying on behalf of the Culture and Arts Policy
11 Institute. Affordability in New York City cultural
12 sector cannot be addressed by funding levels alone.
13 It also depends on how the city governance culture,
14 how it designs, targets, and it evaluates its
15 interventions. At the center of the org is the
16 Department of Cultural Affairs and if DCLA is
17 expected to lead in affordability agenda as part of
18 the city's cultural governance, it must be equipped
19 to operate as an evidence driven policy agency.

20 Right now, DCLA is asked to make decisions about
21 program design, equity and impact without a permanent
22 in-house research and data unit. The kind other city
23 agencies take for granted. As a result, the city
24 relies on anecdotes and fragmented information,
25 instead of being able to measure who is being served,
who is underserved and what outcomes its programs

1 actually produce. This is not a technical issue.
2
3 This is a public accountability issue. A series of
4 research and data function would allow DCLA to
5 identify disparities, adopt programs in real time and
6 strengthen the credibility of cultural policy in the
7 budget process. Where evidence increasingly
8 determines what gets funded.

9 This matters because affordability for artists
10 and cultural workers intersects with housing,
11 workforce development, public health, immigration
12 services, small business support and neighborhood
13 investment. DCLA cannot collaborate effectively
14 across agencies if it cannot share and analyze
15 information across municipal systems.

16 To make this real, we recommend that the city
17 establish a permanent research evaluation and data
18 division within DCLA focused on four things,
19 interagency data sharing continues, section wide
20 monitoring, policy research tied to budgeting and
21 public facing transparency, the regularly updated
22 data. They should function as cultural governance
23 infrastructure, not a temporary project and not a
24 consultant driven effort.

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3 If DCLA collects information from the sector, it
4 is also responsible for complying with the City's
5 Open Data Law and sharing appropriate data publicly.
6 This is not just about transparency, it is about
7 service delivery, accountability, and the Council's
8 ability to exercise oversight.

9 In closing, we urge this Committee to treat
10 research evaluation and open data capacity at DCLA as
11 part of the affordability agenda and the city's
12 cultural governance itself. If the city is serious
13 about affordability, it must be serious about policy
14 that is measurable, equitable and accountable. Thank
15 you.

16 PENN GENTHNER: Good afternoon. My name is Penn
17 Genthner and I'm the Director of Development for the
18 Classical Theater of Harlem. I'd like to open by
19 saying thank you to Chair Williams and members of the
20 Cultural Affairs Committee.

21 I'd also like to thank Council Members Abreu and
22 Salaam, whose generous support enables us to bring
23 Broadway skill plays to working class families up
24 town for free.

25 As our government considers the value of cultural
allocations when negotiating its budget, we would

1
2 like you to consider the many ways in which our work
3 and that of our peers creates opportunity in
4 community that pay public funding back many times
5 over.

6 A grantor and organization like ours does not
7 just buy a free play for 30,000 New Yorkers. Through
8 our work with nonprofits like Uptown Grand Central,
9 we can leverage our gatherings for the economic
10 development of our neighborhood by bringing in vendor
11 tents we offer for free to local microbusinesses,
12 selling Harlem made food, fashion and crafts.

13 Hospitals and universities also take tents at our
14 productions, connecting with the audiences we draw
15 and offering valuable information on free and low
16 cost family health care. We share production
17 infrastructure like the lighting and sound systems we
18 bring to the park with our peer cultural groups
19 creating opportunities to perform for Jazz Mobile,
20 the Harlem Chamber Players, Harlem Opera Theater and
21 Young Peoples Chorus of New York City.

22 In all this work generates over \$615,000 in
23 economic activity for the neighborhood each summer.
24 All the while keeping Marcus Garvey Park a safe,
25

1 family friendly and prosperous environment throughout
2 the month of July.

3
4 CTH's year around programming fill stages all
5 over town. Our bilingual teaching artists provide
6 invaluable communications and collaboration skills to
7 the large immigrant population at Uptown and Bronx
8 Schools. All this is to say that every dollar spent
9 on New York's deeply interconnected cultural economy
10 resounds to the benefit of businesses, community
11 organizations, and their constituencies across the
12 city.

13 It's no coincidence that every moment we can look
14 to from history as exemplary of good government has
15 been a time when leaders recognize and invested in
16 the arts as a vehicle for community building, public
17 safety, economic development, education, and more.

18 Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you do the plays in the
20 park?

21 PENN GENTHNER: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, I've come to two shows
23 at that park.

24 BARBARA MANU: Good evening, my name is Barbara
25 Manu. I'm just going to quote uhm, something about

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3 [INAUDIBLE 03:28:46] by Anna Julie Cooper. She says,
4 "the cost of freedom." I know in the beginning in
5 your introduction, you were saying - there was some
6 topic about hatred and freedom. So, that's why I'm
7 trying to use the quote from Anna Cooper.

8 The cost of freedom is not the cost of a race or
9 ethics, or a party or a class, it's a cost of human
10 kind. They are very bad of humanity.

11 Why I'm saying this, I think I've been here so
12 many times and I spoke about being homeless with my
13 children. My 19 year old being detained at Rikers as
14 I'm talking now. He has not been eating for three
15 days. He has been deprived of food. He is 19 but he
16 look like 9 years old.

17 Also, he sleeps in a cold room. The reason I'm
18 saying that this is to me, it's a form of hate. Why?
19 Because as a mother, reporting on agents using my
20 children to commit crime 2018 is the result of my son
21 ICE detained him, treated as an animal and a slave at
22 Rikers. So, and also, reporting the crime by
23 Medicaid is a result of our Section 8 subsidy
24 terminated because we can agree and disagree.

25 I voted for people that I thought could protect
me as well as my children. My children were minors

1 when they became homeless and they're still homeless
2 and treated as slaves as such.

3 It's not - [INAUDIBLE 03:30:41] constitutional
4 right, it's also societal moral right to treat and
5 accuse -

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and I'm only -
7 the reason because if you notice, I didn't cut
8 anybody off but the topic is not - your talking is
9 not on the topic.

10 BARBARA MANU: I know but because of the hatred
11 topic, that's why I brought this in.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I'm letting you speak but
13 that's the only reason why I'm cutting you off is
14 simply because what you're talking about is not the
15 topic of the hearing but I let you speak for two
16 minutes.

17 So, can you wrap it up in ten seconds?

18 BARBARA MANU: Sure, no the reason I brought this
19 up because in the beginning, you remember we were
20 talking about -

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Black History Month.

22 BARBARA MANU: Black History - of the hate.

23 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I know, I saw the
24 connection is why I let you talk for two minutes.
25

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3 BARBARA MANU: Right.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: The topic.

5 BARBARA MANU: Right, that's why I also brought
6 up about my Black son who has been also treated -

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I made the connection.

8 BARBARA MANU: Right, so lastly, I conclude by
9 saying by also using, listen, I don't know the last -
10 that's the last page of the US Passcode. Every
11 generation has the obligation to free men's mind.

12 Look, a new world. To look out from a higher plateau
13 down the last generation. In other words, we can not
14 go back to the past history of hatred.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay.

16 BARBARA MANU: And change - I think that's what
17 will change the next generation to love each other.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

19 BARBARA MANU: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: As I asked every panel, if
21 you have any additional comments about the report or
22 anything you think the Council or DCLA can do
23 immediately, anything that you know you didn't talk
24 about in your statement, would love to hear from you.

25 MAURICIO DELFIN: I really appreciate, this is
the consistent refrain and I actually want to flip it

1 a little, I think that our colleagues and most of us
2 on this panel have said all the things. I've
3 certainly reflected I think my organizations
4 priorities and goals and my own again as a New Yorker
5 and I also think that what we've said and what's in
6 the CUF report are not things that have been unsaid
7 before. And as much as I appreciate opportunities
8 like this one to speak and what I believe to be your
9 genuine investment in creating a more affordable New
10 York for all New Yorkers, what do you think we can do
11 that's more and different then what we're already
12 doing? Because everyone in this room are the people
13 that I'm always working with and grateful to do so,
14 who come to hearings and testify and organize and I
15 know that that's good work and I know that it has
16 impact. But since we're here and it's the end of the
17 day, I'm asking you, what else can we do?

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Well, I think you know my
20 colleague Council Member Stevens, that is to me - you
21 know we joke every year that this community, like if
22 you decided to just like go on a strike and not like
23 do anything, I feel like it would literally create
24 upheaval in New York City.

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3 And so, I'm not suggesting that we do that.

4 Although like it could be something tht we consider

5 but what I'm suggesting is, like really figuring out

6 a way to - and you all fight so hard every year, so I

7 don't and I'm new, and I want to keep saying that.

8 Like, I'm really trying to learn here. I don't want

9 to come off like I know what to do because I don't.

10 I'm trying to learn but I do think it would be good,

11 uhm, to maybe even think about how to recycle back

12 this one percent because honestly, my last four

13 years, that has not been dominant. I mean, we talk

14 about the libraries every like couple years and we

15 know that we want to give more to the institutions,

16 and we have but it hasn't been like something catchy.

17 I feel like in the age of like social media and sound

18 bites, like I feel like this community hasn't had

19 like a legitimate sound bite at least since I've been

20 here the last four years. So, I think figuring out a

21 way to work with us, I think a lot of times uhm, non-

22 government actors do their thing. They come to us

23 and complain or voice concerns and it's not

24 proactive. It's like we're being responsive to you

25 and so, I think one thing that you all can do, just

as much as you want us to bring you to the

1 conversation, I would also say bring us to the
2 conversation early to help cocreate advocacy
3 strategies. You can do your thing; we can do our
4 thing and to be a little bit more coordinated in that
5 work and it could look like putting it under a banner
6 of one percent and then having a series of strategic
7 things that we do. That could be like I said, going
8 on a strike you know. So, I do think that could be
9 something that could be helpful. To me, as a person
10 that's new here and thinking about some of the work I
11 did on my other Committee, which is I proactively
12 reached out to Human Rights and Civil Rights
13 organizations to think about a strategy as we went
14 into the budget around how we're going to advocate
15 for human rights and civil rights. So, I think that
16 would be one way is to invite us in proactively as
17 well. Not just when you come to a hearing or not
18 just when you want funding, which it's very easy to
19 do that but like really having us be a part of the
20 cocreation on what that advocacy campaign is.

22 MAURICIO DELFIN: That's great, thank you and I
23 haven't heard that before, not from someone in your
24 position anyway, so thank you so much. You can
25 trust, we'll do it.

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2 PENN GENTHNER: I'd like to add that uhm, when
3 CTH is in residence at Marcus Garvey Park despite the
4 fact that we're performing six nights a week. There
5 are actually more performances in that park while
6 we're there then in any other time of year because
7 we're able to share our production infrastructure.

8 Through partnerships like this, using civic
9 infrastructure like the Richard Rogers Amphitheater,
10 with groups that can provide that lighting and sound
11 equipment to make other performances possible. Yeah,
12 I would encourage that sort of - those sorts of
13 partnerships.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

15 PENN GENTHNER: I'll take this opportunity to say
16 that I think one of the greatest things that the
17 Council could do right now is really make sure that
18 the Department of Cultural Affairs complies with the
19 Open Data Law. I think that's a really important
20 conversation to have. This is a law that requires
21 public pressure but also the oversight of Council and
22 the continuity to make sure that it goes through. I
23 think that also there's a lot of public data that
24 DCLA holds as many as other public institutions that
25 needs to be put to public oversight but also for to

1 guarantee service innovation and prove service
2 delivery and in general for us to have a more nuance
3 understanding of the situation at hand.
4

5 As you know we're very excited when a report like
6 this one, we've been talking about it the whole time,
7 it makes impact appears on the scene and I think we
8 need to talk more about what it takes for that to
9 happen. Right now, most of the data that we have is
10 not updated. It's not accessible. It is not open
11 data but it is also, too many times we have to uh
12 have the budget to access private and corporate data
13 in order to answer public questions.

14 That is a problem and so, the Open Data Law is a
15 tool that could allow us to do that and complying
16 with that law takes the oversight and push of the
17 Council as much as civil society.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you be specific, like
19 what data are you talking about?

20 PENN GENTHNER: So, any public data that any
21 agency generates should be -

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What data are you -

23 PENN GENTHNER: So, for example, the Cultural
24 Development Fund itself like the grants that are
25 assigned, we only have very minimal information and

1 not enough granular information to know what kind of
2 impact has happened. Like, disaggregated by
3 location, by zip code. Uh, by - if the city - all
4 sorts of different measurements like the information
5 that the form itself from - that the city gathers, is
6 the kind of information that would allow us to not
7 only have a snapshot of what's going on but actually
8 look over the years as to like what is the impact of
9 that policy and of that fund in general?

11 It also allows us to have a very comprehensive
12 understanding of also what are those grants that are
13 not given. How many people apply? What are the
14 needs? How many people are not funded? And what are
15 those limits to what we're doing?

16 We can also see how much concentrates at the
17 borough level and really have a nuance understanding
18 of what is that investment looking on the ground.

19 RISA SHOUP: Can I add to that?

20 PENN GENTHNER: Yeah, please.

21 RISA SHOUP: A number of our partner
22 organizations are in this room but I want to uplift
23 Dance NYC and say that on this particular subject of
24 getting public data about CDF because it isn't
25 provided yet by the Department of Cultural Affairs,

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1 Art New York and Dance NYC partner to do a survey
2 every fiscal year of everyone who applied for a CDF
3 across all artistic sectors. Because you know we
4 agree that this information is essential. It makes
5 us better applicants and it can inform fundraising
6 strategy across all kinds of perspective donors, not
7 just through CDF but this information is so critical
8 and to not have it, puts a huge burden on those of us
9 who are trying to do it on our own. And we can't be
10 successful. Like, we don't have enough resources to
11 have the reach to get all of the information but
12 we're trying to get a representative sample, because
13 it's that important but if DCLA would provide it
14 because they already have it, we wouldn't have to do
15 this and again, we would all be better applicants and
16 better service providers.

18 AVA DAVIS: The reason I came because I saw
19 something about hatred, about hatred right? So,
20 that's why I came just to - I mean maybe the way I
21 constructed my sentences, maybe I did it in a wrong
22 way, but to me, I feel like the way my son is treated
23 is kind of hate. It's kind of hate. Why? Because
24 the cell that he's in right now is very cold and
25 also, he has not been given food for three days.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I know you've come to a
3 hearing before and said the same similar things. I'm
4 like wondering if there has ever been any follow up.
5 Because this is about affordability in the arts and
6 cultural sector. Not to say that what you're saying
7 is not important because it is important and I know
8 that there has been issues at Rikers, especially
9 since we've been having subzero degree weather around
10 heating, so I don't want to minimize what you're
11 saying. I just want to figure out and maybe Jackie
12 can get her contact information because I think this
13 is like an offline conversation.

14 EVA DAVIS: Yeah, because I have been here so
15 many times.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yes.

17 EVA DAVIS: Including Ms. Marie, the lady who
18 works in your office. I've been speaking to hear
19 back and forth but it didn't go nowhere but my most
20 concern is my son, the way he has been treated.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So, Shakee(SP?) from my
22 office is right there. You can follow up with him
23 and I'll try to help you as much as hospital. I
24 don't whose district you live in but I will try to
25 help you as much as possible. Thank you.

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3 EVA DAVIS: Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much.

5 PANEL: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Have a great day. We have
7 people online still. Okay, this concludes the in-
8 person portion of our public testimony. We will now
9 move to remote testimony. If you are testifying
10 remotely, please listen for your name to be called.
11 Once your name is called, a member of our staff will
12 unmute you. You may then start your testimony once
13 the Sergeant at Arms sets the clock and queues you to
14 begin.

15 And Andrew, you may begin once you are unmuted
16 and the Sergeant queues you.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 ANDREW SOTOMAYOR: Thank you so much to the
19 Council for your time today. My name is Andrew
20 Sotomayor and I'm a Emmy winning makeup artist and a
21 New York resident and an arts worker of 25 years.
22 I'm also a delegate for the young workers. I'm also
23 a delegate for my union. I'm a former Young Workers
24 Committee Chair. I'm currently the Social Media
25 Committee Chair for Local 798 hairstylist and makeup
artists.

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3 These folks have been my colleagues before and we
4 represent film, TV, live theater, commercials, makeup
5 artists and hair stylists. And I wanted to speak in
6 favor of - I'm going off script. Thank you for your
7 time, I know its been a long day.

8 I wanted to speak in favor of the Arts Housing
9 Bill. First, because we know that landlords often
10 prefer people who have a job in an office and one
11 single employer even sometimes over artists when they
12 are having a high earning year.

13 So, we need help specifically for artists in
14 terms of getting housing. And also, we've talked so
15 much about money and funding and budgets today. I
16 wanted to point out that artists uhm, there's return
17 in investment. When my colleagues are working more,
18 we spend more money on taxi's to get to work before
19 dawn. We spend more money at the local bodega's
20 getting a meal at 11 o'clock or 2 in the morning when
21 we get home and there's a lot of talk these days
22 about new studios that have been under construction
23 in this area from say Robert De Niro or Netflix is
24 talking about building and these sorts of things but
25 all of that's going to be for not if we don't do the

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3 work that is needed to keep the crews here in New
4 York City.

5 We know that since also the Guliani
6 Administration, more people have bought tickets to
7 Broadway shows every year than all the New York
8 sports teams combined. So, with all these people
9 here, we have a real opportunity to get a return in
10 investment. Back in 2019, there were \$81.6 billion -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has
12 expired.

13 ANDREW SOTOMAYOR: Thank you very much for your
14 time. We really appreciate it.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And if you want to wrap up,
16 you can.

17 ANDREW SOTOMAYOR: I'll just wrap up by saying
18 that I was late today because I was at a DEI
19 Committee meeting and I'm proud to report that our
20 local data census and two to five of our members are
21 non-White and I know that diversity is at the core of
22 what makes New York New York. I'm a Latino person
23 and I know that arts and culture and entertainment is
24 a place where we find home and we find good jobs.
25 And uhm, I think by supporting artists, you're
supporting a lot of different causes.

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3 So, I celebrate your work and encourage you to
4 work with other departments because arts is at the
5 center of a lot of different priorities within
6 various New York City agencies. So, thank you again.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I appreciate
8 your work and you said, did you say [INAUDIBLE
9 03:45:41]?

10 ANDREW SOTOMAYOR: Uhm, yes, that's correct but I
11 will tell you that I sent my trophy back to - I was
12 at Saturday Night Live for eight years. I sent my
13 trophy back to the Television Academy because the
14 greatest privilege of my career in 25 years has not
15 been getting to get an award. My greatest privilege
16 has been working with the multiple committees in our
17 union because we want our workers to be self-
18 sufficient and we know that we invest our dues back
19 and our time in building contracts that make it
20 hospitable for our workers to retire with dignity.

21 But the fact is that when times are slow and
22 right now, times are slow. Our production levels in
23 New York City that are our streaming services and
24 Netflix, it never existed. That's how bad the
25 production numbers in New York are right now, and
that means that our workers are relying more on

1 social services and unemployment and soup kitchens in
2 a way that we normally wouldn't have to because we've
3 worked so hard to get good contracts in place. But
4 the fact is we all need a little help sometimes, so
5 investing in the New York film and production
6 community is a return in investment at every level
7 and has long term benefits as well.

8
9 So, thank you for supporting artist housing in
10 New York and other causes across departments.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next person is
12 Katrina. You may begin again once you are unmuted.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 KATRINA JEFFRIES: Hello, my name is Katrina
15 Jeffries and I don't really - I just want to say that
16 uhm, many, many of the people who have presented
17 today have been part of my career as an artist and a
18 union worker in the entertainment industry.

19 I came here in 1982, and I first worked at Equity
20 Library Theater and also Super Mudd Pottery on the
21 upper west side. I just retired last year after 35
22 plus years of working IATSE Local 764, a wardrobe
23 union and now I have the benefit, the blessing and
24 the benefit of having worked in the arts community
25 and I'm also an artist. I had a pottery studio for

1 ten years. So, I continued to be an artist in my
2 retirement. What I am looking for is seniors having
3 affordable studio spaces, right? We have - you have
4 DCLA has given lots of programs, beautiful programs
5 to seniors but I don't need a program. I need studio
6 space and I just want to commend everyone on the
7 Council and all of you people who are working so hard
8 to support the arts in this city. I tried to leave
9 the leave the city many times but it wouldn't let me
10 go, and also there was no where else to go where I
11 would get supported as an artist as I am in New York
12 City.
13

14 So, kudos to everyone who has done this work. It
15 is so important and I thank you and uhm, appreciate
16 this opportunity to speak.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The next
18 person is Potrirankamanis. I definitely messed that
19 up but please correct me.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 POTRIRANKAMANIS QUEANO NUR: [SPEAKING IN OTHER
22 LANGUAGE 03:49:26-03:49:28] My name - uh good
23 afternoon and honoring Dr. Nantasha Williams the
24 Chair and everybody in the presence of this
25 conference.

1 I'm the Founder and Artistic Director of Kinding
2 Sindaw, a 34 year old AAPI arts and culture
3 organization that preserves Southern Philippine,
4 Indigenous and southern tradition, provides cultural
5 education and serves immigrant and indigenous
6 communities across New York City.
7

8 Kinding Sindaw, centered in indispensable
9 community service, yet its artists struggle to
10 survive here. Kinding Sindaw serves a culture
11 bridge. We carry the intangible heritage and
12 unwritten history from the DC heritage to RB Heritage
13 and the Latino heritage of the Philippines. That is
14 unwritten after the current of the Philippines of the
15 world know what happened and they're all embedded in
16 our [INAUDIBLE 03:50:21]. So, that is what they're
17 carrying around the city, raising consciousness that
18 they are all related to each other. This heritage,
19 so they're erased if your not being supported.

20 I just want to say that one of my just an
21 example, there in my group, performing artists face
22 impossible choices even every month, subway fare,
23 food, rent and health care. These are not luxury,
24 they are survival. Without them cultural services
25 stop and community programs vanish. Affordable

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3 housing is difficult, rising rents push artists out,
4 wrecking cultural continuity, affordable transit is
5 unsure without subway access. Artists cannot reach
6 the schools, community centers or origins. Health
7 insurance affordability is urgent; coverage must
8 include dental in addition and podiatry care because
9 their bodies are very essential for their
10 livelihoods. Equally essential is access to
11 affordable rehearsal space and secure storage for
12 indigenous musical instrument and hand woven
13 ceremonial wardrobes. Without these spaces, cultural
14 practices is limited -

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

16 POTRIRANKAMANIS QUEANO NUR: And positions cannot
17 be sustained. I will wrap up. We owe it to the
18 Council to treat AAPI artists as they are an
19 essential cultural worker and fund them as cultural
20 infrastructure. Expand affordable housing aside
21 cultural workers. Ensure transit affordability,
22 support accessible comprehensive health for artists,
23 provide affordable rehearsal space and secure storage
24 for indigenous instruments and woven wardrobe. Thank
25 you so much for allowing me to speak and sorry for my
voice, I'm very sick right now.

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2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, I hope you feel
3 better. Maria.

4 MARIA SCALI: Hi, my name is Maria. I am also a
5 makeup artist and Local 798 along with Andrew who
6 pretty much summed up everything that I wanted to
7 say. I also uhm, there are also many, many thousands
8 of other artists are not in the union that work in
9 the fashion end of the industry and I do as well.
10 Affordable housing has become a huge problem. It's
11 not attracting any new artists because they can't
12 make the decision of either do my art or pay rent and
13 eat at the end of the week.

14 Many artists are now getting closer to retirement
15 age and don't really know what they can do and where
16 they can live because they will be priced out of
17 their homes that they've known and lived in for many,
18 many, many years.

19 So, affordable housing and transportation has
20 gotten so outrageously expensive that even if you
21 move two hours out of the city, it's still not cost
22 efficient to be able to work in an industry that
23 gives back, not just to New York, to the entire
24 world. During the pandemic, many of us went back to
25 work while everyone else was still home and then we

1 were also faced with a major strike that effected
2 everyone that supports the actors and the writers.
3 I'm sorry, I'm battling laryngitis as well.

4 So, again, what Andrew said, thank you Andrew
5 because you speak so eloquently and on behalf of all
6 artists in our city that I love so much, we really
7 need to do something about it, not just talk about
8 it. Thank you for giving me the time to speak.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Libertad.

10 LIBERTAD GUERRA: Is it on Libertad? Thank you.
11 Good evening, it's been a long day. Thank you Chair
12 Williams for your stamina and earnest commitment.
13 I'm Libertad Guerra, the Executive Director of the
14 Clemente Soto Vález Cultural Center in the lower east
15 side. The Clemente was founded more than 30 years
16 ago at the intersection of affordability, access, and
17 representation in an abandoned school building. Our
18 model was never built around explosivity or box
19 offers revenue but on the belief that culture is a
20 public good and that immigrant and working class
21 communities, artists and independent producers
22 deserve sustained access to cultural space.

23 We carry that mission still through the
24 stewardship of the city on building but we are not
25

1 simply a property management and manager. We operate
2 this building as shared civic infrastructure while
3 also producing original research, artist commissions,
4 exhibitions, festivals, public humanities programs,
5 you name it and within this ecosystem was steward one
6 of the city's largest studio programs. Very, very,
7 very, deeply affordable, four theaters, multiple
8 galleries and deeply subsidized rehearsal performance
9 space that provide stable homes for a dozen small
10 cultural arts organizations as well.

12 Keeping these spaces affordable often depends not
13 on dedicated operating support but on the staff and
14 leadership, sweat equity. Absorbing deferred
15 maintenance, operation strains and unfunded labor to
16 prevent displacement and preserve access. More than
17 80 percent of our programs are free. This public
18 good model expands access and artists affordability
19 but it also has structural consequences as you might
20 imagine because our work is not box office driven; we
21 have limited leverage for traditional membership or
22 individual giving models. In our case, our
23 affordability actively constraints revenue as it
24 expands public benefit.

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3 In reference for CUF, the Center for
4 recommendation 3 and 10, on citywide cultural
5 coordination across agency cultural support, we'll
6 speak for lived institutional practice.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

8 LIBERTAD GUERRA: Okay. So, thank you. I'm just
9 saying that there's some points in the report that we
10 are already taking into account and I wish that the
11 City Council would learn more about this group of
12 organizations that are not CIGs but are also
13 stewarding city owned facilities and buildings
14 through many of the proposals that today were an
15 example, yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Nicole.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 NICOLE TOUZIEN: Chair Williams and members of
19 the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to
20 testify today on behalf of Dance Wave where I serve
21 as Executive Director.

22 For 30 years, Dance Wave has provided inclusive
23 and empowering dance education to New Yorkers across
24 all five boroughs. Last year, Dance Wave provided
25 3,300 hours of free, multicultural dance programming
in public schools, older adult centers and community

1 spaces. We supported 300 high school students
2 pursuing college pathways in the arts and awarded
3 \$130,000 in scholarships so that 1,000 New Yorkers
4 could access professional development and training
5 regardless of income.
6

7 We are proud of this impact but the affordability
8 challenges facing our sector threaten our ability to
9 sustain this work. Dance Wave is currently awaiting
10 \$50,000 in DYCD reimbursement for services we
11 provided two years ago. For a community based
12 organization, delays like this are not just
13 accounting challenges. They directly effect our
14 ability to pay teaching artists, expand programs and
15 plan responsibly for the future.

16 At the same time, 18 month plus delays in the
17 MTAC contracting process are forcing schools to
18 navigate complicated bidding procedures, just to
19 continue partnerships that already serve their
20 students.

21 When these partnerships pause, young people lose
22 access to arts education and artists lose income they
23 depend on to remain in the city. Finally, arts
24 funding has not kept pace with inflation and rising
25 operating costs. While Dance Wave invests over \$1

1 million annually in employing artists and arts
2 workers, our cultural development fund award
3 continues to lose purchasing power.
4

5 I encourage the Committee to address contracting
6 delays, reimbursement inefficiencies in long term
7 under investment in the arts sector. Supporting
8 cultural organizations is essential to New York
9 City's economic vitality, educational ecosystem, and
10 community wellbeing. Thank you for your time and
11 consideration.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Christopher.

13 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Okay, yeah hello, my
14 name is Christopher Leon Johnson. Thank you for
15 having this hearing Mrs. Chair Williams.

16 I'm calling on the City Council to make it where
17 that if you're a nonprofit and you get government
18 funding, just like the last two panels like Dance
19 Wave and uhm, the Clemente and many other nonprofits,
20 be able to use the government spaces for free.

21 Why that when you look on the DCAS website and
22 you try to get a space at Chamber Street, the Circuit
23 Courthouse, or all the Borough Halls including the
24 city - not the City Council Chambers, you have to pay
25 thousands of dollars just to rent it for like an

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1 hour. Even with the nonprofit discount, you're still
2 paying thousands of dollars. You could say okay
3 security, you got to pay for internal staff, like
4 cleaners and like that but the city give these
5 nonprofits money. They could be trusted. That's why
6 they get government money because they're trusted to
7 do the job and I'm calling on the City Council mainly
8 the Speaker and you with the Deputy Speaker to make
9 it aware that the place that you're sitting at right
10 now in hearing room, I think hearing room 1 be able
11 to be used by the public. That's a nice little space
12 in all four spaces. Hearing room 1, hearing room 2,
13 hearing room 3 and the old floor room, big, nice,
14 wide spaces that people, I think many nonprofits
15 would love to use for their events and I know you all
16 like do this for MOCS, City Council hearings and MOC
17 hearings for City Council, the civic CUNY but I
18 believe that going forward I think that you all
19 should be able to unlock or make it move to provision
20 where like people should not be paying for spaces.
21 If it's a for profit organization, I understand they
22 should pay but you're a nonprofit unless you're
23 getting discretionary funding or capital funding, we
24
25

1 should be able to use the spaces in the city for
2 free.
3

4 And I think starting at that spot right there in
5 the City Council Chambers, hearing rooms 1, 2 3, and
6 4 on the 8th Floor at City Hall. I mean at 250
7 Broadway but I understand they're paying and like I
8 said, I think that and I'll end this here that I
9 believe that many, the City Council should really
10 starting vetting more -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

12 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: When it comes to these
13 pro-house organizations. So, thank you so much and
14 enjoy your day. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thanks. Is anybody online
16 has anything else to add? I just want to be
17 consistent in this final panel about the report or
18 anything DCLA or the Council can do to immediately
19 address affordability crisis, this is your chance.

20 If not, everyone have a great day. Katrina?

21 KATRINA JEFFRIES: Uhm, I just want to say that
22 one of the in terms of the affordability situation, I
23 only found out about HDFC co-ops last year and I was
24 able to get into one, and I don't know if many people
25 around the city, especially union members are aware

1 of HDFC co-ops. And uhm, I almost did not get the
2 back loan because of my varied employment situation
3 being in the entertainment industry. So, I think if
4 there's more information put out about these kind of
5 spaces, which are specifically meant for working
6 class people, this is housing for working class
7 people. I think that would be very helpful for
8 people to learn about. Thank you.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you and seeing no
11 other hands, okay, well, seeing no one else who
12 wishes to testify, this 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 March 5, 2025