



**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

Oversight Hearing: Fiscal Year 2027 DCLA Preliminary Budget

Wednesday, March 18, 2026, 11:30AM – 250 Broadway, 8th Floor, Hearing Room 1

**Testimony Presented by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Deputy Commissioner
Alton Murray**

Good morning, Deputy Speaker Williams and members of the committee. I am Deputy Commissioner Alton Murray from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, here today to testify in regards to the agency's proposed Fiscal Year 2027 preliminary budget. I am joined today by our general counsel Lance Polivy and other colleagues from the agency.

I will begin today with a review of the numbers from Mayor Mamdani's proposed FY27 budget for DCLA. In FY27, the budget allocates a total of \$215.6 million in city funds to DCLA, including:

- \$52 million for the Cultural Development Fund (CDF);
- \$52.9 million to cover energy costs for groups on city property;
- \$100.6 million for operating subsidies to the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG);
- \$8.2 million for agency staffing and operations; and
- \$2 million for CreateNYC and other initiatives.

Please note that these figures do not include any one-time funding allocations, such as Council initiatives, that are typically added at budget adoption each year. By comparison, at this point in the process last year, the preliminary FY26 budget allocated \$164 million to DCLA -- \$52 million less than we currently have allocated for FY27. We look forward to working in the months ahead toward adopting a budget for FY27 that builds on the strong record of support for arts and culture that our agency has historically provided.

Our FY26 expense budget remains at a record-setting \$300 million for our agency. This robust funding has allowed us to support affordable, accessible, diverse cultural programs across the city. Recently, we publicly announced the FY26 CDF awards (award notifications went out in December). This cycle saw more than \$74 million in grants for public programming at 1,171 cultural organizations. More than 84% of applicants received awards, and 96% of funded organizations offer free or subsidized programming. Over half of the grantees are receiving multi-year awards following recent reforms that expanded eligibility for multi-year support, providing greater financial stability to organizations across the sector. The FY26 CDF also maintained a 15% increase for the city's borough arts councils – funding that goes to hundreds of working artists across the city - and includes targeted initiatives such as the Disability Forward Fund and Language Access Fund. The CDF Equity Fund also delivered \$2.1 million in increased funding to 283 organizations in lower-income neighborhoods. Together with

continued Safety Net funding for longtime grantees, these initiatives reflect the city's ongoing commitment to strengthening a diverse, equitable, and community-rooted cultural sector.

I am delighted to report that the application period is now open for the next cycle of CDF. The agency has worked hard to launch the process as early as possible in the fiscal year so that award notifications can go out sooner. We understand that this is a priority for the field and for our new commissioner, and we want to shout out the hard-working team in the DCLA Programs Unit for moving this process forward. FY27 CDF applications are due April 2, and there's one more webinar coming up on March 25. For anyone who hasn't been able to join a webinar, we have also posted a recording on our website. It's the most informative 90 minutes you could spend, so we encourage all interested applicants to check it out. All of this information is available on our website at nyc.gov/culture.

DCLA's Capital Unit has also been hard at work on advancing our capital construction and equipment projects for cultural groups across the city. Requests for funding for projects including funding from the borough president's offices were due on February 19. All other capital requests are due tomorrow. Eligible organizations were invited to two capital funding seminars earlier this year, both of which were at capacity! We are also excited to continue the Capital Feasibility Planning program into its fourth year. The program matches consultants with smaller organizations to help them define, plan, and strategize successful capital projects. Applications to take part in the program will open in April.

The NYC Create in Place program, which is an inter-agency collaboration based at DCLA, continues to open up new pathways of support for smaller organizations beyond direct funding. As part of this work, the Create in Place team has organized a series of webinars, which start tomorrow. The webinar series will bring together experts in finance, legal services, government, and nonprofit consulting to provide practical guidance for creative small businesses and nonprofit arts organizations. Participants will learn about strengthening organizational capacity, accessing capital through grants and financing tools, and connecting with pro bono legal resources tailored to the creative sector. If you're interested in joining an upcoming webinar, visit nyc.gov/CreateInPlace.

DCLA's public art team is continuing to bring extraordinary, community-centered installations to neighborhoods around the city. Last month, they joined partners at the Parks Department and DDC to unveil the new Shirley Chisholm Rec Center in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. This new facility is the first-ever rec center in Central Brooklyn, and features a remarkable permanent installation by artist Vanessa German, commissioned by our Percent for Art program. German's artwork - THE EAST FLATBUSH PEOPLE'S MUSEUM OF LOVE AND WONDER - is a communal art museum inspired by the people of East Flatbush. Its dynamic and multifaceted components are installed throughout the center, celebrating the people, places, and connections that illuminate the community with love and wonder.

Through our Public Artists in Residence, or PAIR, program, artists are working within a variety of city agencies to bring their creative practice to bear on a range of civic challenges. Our PAIR with the Commission on Human Rights, Caitlyn McCain, has been working at the intersection of theater and housing policy. She has been leading a series of "Fair Chance Performances" in areas of Brooklyn where residents are at higher risk of housing displacement. Caitlyn is working with both professional actors and New Yorkers directly impacted by the criminal legal

system to collaboratively develop this performance. This work dramatizes the barriers formerly incarcerated individuals face when seeking housing — and rehearses strategies to dismantle them. In partnership with both CCHR and MOME, we've also been releasing a series of videos acting out McCain's Fair Chance Performances. These will be integrated into the city's resources to aid tenants. As you might know, Commissioner Viji co-founded-and-led PAIR when it was established at our agency over ten years ago, and the Mayor has expressed admiration for the program. So we look forward to building on the success of PAIR in the new administration and continuing to work with artists to explore the possibilities of creative practice as public service.

DCLA's amazing Materials for the Arts program also continues to foster a greener and more affordable arts landscape for our city. Last fiscal year, MFTA provided 4.1 million pounds of materials value at nearly \$17 million to 2,500 member organizations, schools, and agencies across the city. That's an average of roughly \$6,800 worth of supplies provided to each member, completely free of charge. Recent donations facilitated by MFTA include 50 high end office chairs donated by Morgan Stanely, which went to the Martha Graham Dance Company just this week. A premium velvet curtain donated by the Met Cloisters went to Teatro LATEA, where it will now be draped over the theater's incredible productions. Thanks to MFTA and their generous partners, these high quality, donated items avoid a fate in the landfill, and instead help arts groups and educators stretch every dollar. Tomorrow, March 19, they will also open "All Night I Hear the Noise of Water Sobbing," a solo exhibition featuring recent work by artist Mary Mattingly. As MFTA's Artist-in-Residence, Mattingly has had unlimited access to MFTA's warehouse of donated supplies, where she has collected found objects to create the installations featured in her solo exhibition. We hope you can join us for the opening or to see the exhibition at some point before it closes this summer.

We've been delighted to work with the Mayor's Office under the new Administration to both highlight existing and create new opportunities for all New Yorkers to experience the joy and connection that comes from engagement with the arts. In January, Mayor Mamdani partnered with the Under the Radar Festival to offer free tickets to festival performances, ensuring all residents could afford to enjoy the unmatched experience of live theater. He broke ground on Timbale Terrace, an exciting new housing development in East Harlem that will also provide a permanent home for Belongo / the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance, funded by DCLA. For Black History Month, he worked with the Louis Armstrong House Museum to offer free tours, and joined Brooklyn Museum for their free First Saturday program. We were also honored to join the Mayor to cut the ribbon on a restoration project of Weeksville Heritage Center's historic Hunterfly Road Houses, which once anchored the free Black community of Weeksville. Together, these show a clear direction that we're excited to explore further with our new commissioner. We want to foster a city where cultural organizations can thrive, where our legacies and heritages are honored, and where every New Yorker has the opportunity to feel the sense of belonging, purpose, and inspiration that only culture can provide.

I thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today. We are happy to answer any questions you might have.

Oral Testimony for Cultural Affairs Committee, Wednesday, March 18 at 9:30am

Good afternoon. My name is Ned Hanlon, and I am President of the American Guild of Musical Artists, the union of singers, dancers, and stage staff in opera, dance, and concert performance. But first and foremost, I'm a working artist who just rushed here after a rehearsal for La Traviata at the Met Opera.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, surrounded by those who share a commitment to the arts. I want to specifically emphasize the critical situation faced by the nonprofit performing arts, where downward trends in federal funding and private donations present escalating challenges, and by its artists, who struggle every day with the increasing cost of living in New York and beyond.

Nonetheless, organizations in this country continue to thrive artistically. To name just a few, the Met's production of Tristan und Isolde – which I performed in last night – has received critical acclaim and sold-out houses. Voices of Ascension continues to bring world class choral music to the Village, now under a contract that makes their singers key partners in the company. And Dance Theatre of Harlem opens its 57th season next month, the first in decades under a union contract. They are one of several organizations and artists who have been forced to withdraw from their engagements at the Kennedy Center.

Artistic excellence is vital to the city. The Met Opera alone generates \$1.3 billion in economic activity and the creative industry altogether contributes as much as 13% of the city's total economic output or GDP.

But the arts that give so much to our city need support, which is why we are asking for a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

I'm also here to insist that our arts funding strategy must center artists and provide good jobs, safe jobs, secure jobs. Which usually means union jobs that have the protections of a collective bargaining agreement.

Union jobs close conventional wage inequities, while also providing artists the security to report instances of discrimination and harassment, and to stand up for themselves on the job.

New York is a vibrant artistic hub. It is our collective responsibility to preserve that by funding the arts in ways that allow artists to thrive and prosper.

Thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to speak here today.



Wednesday, March 18, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations
250 Broadway, 8th Floor, Hearing Room 1
New York, NY 10007

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Hew Rose Evans. I'm speaking on behalf of the [American LGBTQ+ Museum](#) today in support of its FY27 DCLA Cultural Development Funding renewal request. The Museum provides public educational programs exploring the achievements and lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people in all five boroughs of New York City. In addition to our public programs, we are currently developing [a 5,000 square foot core exhibition](#) at our new physical home, opening in May 2028 at the New York Historical Society on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Last fiscal year, support from the DCLA's Cultural Development Fund allowed us to pilot a new programmatic series, the *Queer Legacies Project*, which is a set of 4 archiving workshops with LGBTQ+ Elders at SAGE's Edie Windsor Senior Center in Chelsea. These workshops were an incredible success, serving over 125 registrants and sourcing enough content to produce a [four-episode docuseries, which is currently available on our YouTube channel](#). This month, we are proud to say we're successfully continuing the project, having launched our first session of Queer Legacies at SAGE Center Harlem last week, and we plan to bring the project to more senior centers in the Bronx and Brooklyn in future fiscal years.

This year, the American LGBTQ+ Museum is requesting a renewal of our FY26 funding and an increase to \$100,000. We recognize that this request is more than the Museum has sought before, but it represents the scale of our expanding scope of services. Funding for FY27 will support our entire season of programs, allowing us to produce recurring educational events and cultural partnerships in all five boroughs. In addition to the *Queer Legacies Project*, this includes:

- Our monthly [Lavender Literary Society](#) Book Club, spotlighting queer literature at online and in-person events hosted in collaboration with local bookstores around Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn, and including [a new spin-off focused around Teen and Young Adult fiction with Queens Public Library](#).
- Our quarterly [Continuum](#) series, exploring the connections between contemporary art and LGBTQ+ History in partnership with the Leslie Lohman Museum of Art in SoHo.

- Our quarterly [Reverb](#) series, celebrating LGBTQ+ cultural heritage within modern theatrical, musical, and dance performance in partnership with CultureLab in Long Island City.
- Our annual [October film screening](#), spotlighting historical films with queer themes in partnership with NewFest LGBTQ+ Film Festival.
- And, our annual June Pride Festival activations in Harlem, Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, and the Bronx, including gathering a [marching contingent in NYC Pride of LGBTQ+ workers from Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums](#) across NYC to celebrate their work in their respective institutions.

These New York City-based series are just one part of [the more than 50 public programs](#) we produce annually across the nation, and these services are essential to building trust and public awareness with our Museum. And, we need your help to maintain the Museum's growth. We are humbly asking committee members to advocate for the Museum to your fellow colleagues, helping us increase our DCLA Cultural Development funding to \$100,000 in FY27 and providing local district and borough allocations through City Council Discretionary Funding as you are able. Together, we can build a museum that honors the memories of all LGBTQ+ New Yorkers and their communities. Sincerely, I want to thank the committee for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Hew Evans

Hew Rose Evans (All Pronouns)
Senior Development Associate
hew@americanlgbtqmuseum.org
917-382-1339

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American LGBTQ+ Museum
45 West 36th Street, Floor 8
New York, NY 10018

Deputy Speaker Williams and distinguished members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and Intergroup Relations, my name is Dohini Sompura, Director of Government and International Affairs, and I am providing testimony on behalf of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) at this Preliminary Budget hearing today.

The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) is one of 39 esteemed cultural institutions that make up New York City's Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). Together, we are responsible for maintaining some of the city's most significant public properties across all five boroughs. Beyond preserving history and culture, our institutions serve as powerful economic drivers, fueling tourism, employment, and commerce while offering vital cultural, educational, and workforce development programs to New Yorkers.

CIG institutions collectively contribute over \$20 billion annually to the city's economy, while the broader cultural sector generates \$110 billion—representing 13 percent of New York City's total economic activity. AMNH alone generates more than \$2 billion in economic impact each year, including approximately \$500 million in direct spending on local vendors for goods and services.

Access to the Museum remains a defining part of the AMNH's public mission. AMNH is one of the few cultural institutions in New York City that continues to uphold a pay-as-you-wish admission policy for New York State residents. This policy allows local visitors to pay as little as one penny for General Admission, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent New Yorkers from visiting the Museum. In a city where the cost of living can make cultural participation inaccessible for many, AMNH's commitment to pay-as-you-wish admission plays a critical role in maintaining the Museum as a truly public institution, welcoming students, families, and lifelong learners from all economic backgrounds.

Beyond this policy, the Museum provides free admission to all New York City public schools and camp groups, ensuring that students across the five boroughs can engage meaningfully with science, culture, and discovery regardless of their school's financial resources. The Museum also offers complimentary memberships to New York State recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), providing year-round access to ticketed exhibitions for families and individuals who might otherwise face barriers to visiting. In addition, AMNH participates in a range of citywide and community-based initiatives that distribute free tickets to New York City residents, further strengthening the Museum's role as an inclusive institution committed to education, equity, and public engagement.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselining this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.
- 2. Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
- 3. Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**
 - a. Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
 - b. Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.

- c. **Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration, and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.

Fiscal 2027 City Council Expense and Capital Requests

AMNH is deeply grateful to the City Council for its support in Fiscal 2026 of Discovery Days, Sci Network, STEM2City, and the Museum Education Experience Program (MEEP) for high school students. These initiatives expand access to high-quality science education and create meaningful pathways to science education and workforce development for young people across the city. We respectfully seek the Council's continued support for these vital programs in Fiscal 2027 so that we can sustain and build upon their impact.

Discovery Days Program

Since 2014, AMNH has been proud to partner with the New York City Council to offer New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) families an opportunity to participate in the AMNH Discovery Days program, which organizes Saturday visits to the museum for NYCHA residents from selected developments. The program, funded at \$100,000 in Fiscal 2025, supports families by offering transportation to the Museum for special programming that includes facilitated experiences with Museum collections, engaging parents and children alike in conversations about the natural world and science while providing them with the resources needed for continued engagement after their visit such as vouchers to the Museum. This year, AMNH is requesting a \$30,000 enhancement to work directly with local communities that include several NYCHA buildings to deepen our understanding of how to more effectively make the Museum

programs more accessible and inclusive to the families. **For Fiscal 2027, AMNH requests \$130,000 from the City Council to continue this program.**

SCI Network

New York City is a world-class cultural hub and leader in science education. At the forefront of these efforts are eight science-based cultural institutions: the American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York Botanical Garden, New York Hall of Science, Queens Botanical Garden, Staten Island Zoo, Wave Hill, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Together we act as STEM career development centers, supporting young New Yorkers as they build their STEM skills, professional experience, and social capital.

In Fiscal 2026, SCI Network NYC funding supports AMNH's Museum Education Experience Program (MEEP), a flagship workforce development initiative. MEEP prepares college students for careers in education, science communication, and museum careers more broadly through a paid internship and post-internship professional development opportunities for program alumni. **In Fiscal 2027, along with our partner institutions, AMNH requests \$2,000,000 from the City Council to continue to support the SCI Network NYC.**

Cultural Workforce

Through programs such as MEEP, AMNH is proud to be among the leading cultural institutions offering workforce development opportunities for New York City's youth. Our programs equip participants with the essential skills to become impactful science communicators, analyze complex data, and present this information in clear, accessible, and meaningful ways.

With support from the Council this fiscal year, AMNH expanded the scope of our workforce development programs to build connections between city agencies through our STEM2City initiative. This month, youth from the Museum's Science Research Mentoring Program (SRMP), Museum Education Experience Program (MEEP), the SCI Network NYC, and Consortium youth groups will participate in a career fair that will facilitate the exploration of future employment at New York City agencies. City jobs offer not only financial security through competitive wages and

benefits but also opportunities for long-term professional growth, skill development, and advancement within various sectors. Additionally, increasing representation of individuals with backgrounds in the arts, sciences, and cultural fields within City agencies will help cultivate a more dynamic workforce that reflects the richness of New York City itself. **In Fiscal 2027, AMNH is requesting \$225,000 to support the STEM2City initiative.**

In addition, with support from the City Council, AMNH expanded our current Museum Education Experience Program (MEEP) program through a high school adaptation of this program, Science Communication Internship Program (SCIP) to offer an earlier introduction to museum careers and pathways in science and culture to New York City Youth through a paid internship experience that includes career-readiness activities. **With support from the City Council, AMNH would like to recruit 25 high school students to participate in this program with a cost of \$75,000 in Fiscal 2027.**

Capital Request – Phase 4 Roof Replacement Project

For Fiscal 2027, AMNH requests \$27M from the City Council for the restoration of roofs across three of our buildings as the fourth phase of this project. Many of these roofs are over 100 years old and well beyond their useful life. The buildings in need of roof repairs house our scientific offices and laboratories, public exhibition halls, scientific collections storage areas, and infrastructure facilities, all of which play an integral role in fulfilling the Museum’s mission of science and education. Water damage caused by the leaking roofs presents a risk of mold and delamination of asbestos, which is a health and safety hazard to our staff and visitors and compromises the scientific collections and laboratory spaces housed in these buildings.

By replacing our roofs, we will be able to preserve and protect our extensive collections, maintain our historic landmarked building, and continue to provide an exceptional experience for visitors. Funding this project will continue to build on the successful private-public partnership, with City funding for the maintenance and improvements of this City-owned asset.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Arts in Education **NYC** ROUNDTABLE

New York City Arts in Education Roundtable

Testimony: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations

Hon. Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Thank you to Deputy Speaker Williams and the City Council for hosting today's hearing and happy Arts in our Schools Month! My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am proud to be the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. I'm testifying as part of the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding and policy change that improves arts education in NYC and supports its robust workforce.

The arts are the heartbeat of our great city. Dance, theater, music, media, visual arts, and literary arts are a vital engine for the city's economy, cultural identity, and a critical component of a culturally-responsive education.

Yet, bureaucratic hurdles in contracting, the skyrocketing cost of living, and chronic inequities in access are stifling our City's most vital resource — leaving our students and our creative workforce behind.

In NYC, arts education is a cross agency effort — employing a workforce of 11,000 teaching artists and 2,887 certified arts teachers. Cultural organizations and teaching artists work in partnership with in-school arts teachers to strengthen opportunities, support sequential arts learning, and provide arts instruction where schools lack an arts teacher altogether. For context:

- Over 900 cultural organizations partnered with NYCPS in FY25¹
- 84% of all responding schools partner with at least one cultural arts organization annually¹
- 72% of schools hosted at least one CDF program during FY2022 (as reported by IBO at the April 2025 Oversight Hearing on Arts Education)²
- 23% of schools report using external funding from cultural organizations to fund arts education¹

But our city doesn't make this easy — contract delays (CASA and NYCPS' MTAC) mean late or unrealized start dates, loss of employment for artists, and lost educational opportunities³. Inconsistency of year-over-year funding across agencies makes it difficult to build sustainable, long-term partnerships between schools and cultural organizations, and stable employment for our teaching artists.

This in turn has a trickle-down impact on the workforce, where many teaching artists only earn a median individual gross income of between \$35,000 – \$50,000⁴, with no access to health insurance through an employer. As a result, 79% of Teaching Artists do not feel their work sufficiently supports living in or near NYC³. Yet NYC is relying on this workforce.

Beyond the grave implications for our workforce, this continues to threaten arts education access and participation rates still rebounding from the pandemic. 31% of middle school students meeting state arts learning requirements simply isn't acceptable¹. Unless our city takes action, we are at-risk of losing one of the most diverse and impactful parts of the cultural sector.

To sustain and grow this vibrant ecosystem, we must prioritize bureaucratic efficiency — ensuring our educators and artists are paid in a timely, efficient manner, and affordability — ensuring educators and artists can afford to

live and work in the city that they inspire. We have a window of opportunity to define our city's future: **that starts with the arts**. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to protect our workforce and invest in our students. This includes:

ADDRESS COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS FOR ARTS EDUCATION WORKFORCE

- **Continue reforms to contracting with city agencies.** specifically targeting NYCPS' Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) and CASA contracts, to ensure timely contract remittance and payments, accessible processes, and fair per-class rates that reflect the true cost of programming and labor.
- **Launch insurance pilots to support teaching artist affordability.** Aligned with Creatives Rebuild NY and the Center for an Urban Future, NYC can reduce economic precarity for the arts workforce by piloting a freelancers portable benefits program and a pooled insurance program for smaller orgs.
- **Restore and Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$30M).** Baselining this one-time addition supports arts organizations and workers city-wide, offering sector-wide stabilization and preventing further artist displacement.

PRESERVING & IMPROVING ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

- **Require NYCPS arts funding be spent on the arts.** Boost the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$89.76, and require that allocated money be spent on arts education.
- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teacher:** Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, in part by reviving the successful supplemental arts certification program (\$4M) and funding a PE Works-inspired improvement plan using the already baselined arts education funding.
- **Restore and Enhance "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative funding.** Increase allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand for increased arts learning opportunities.
- **Improve arts education data transparency.** Require mandatory reporting on school-level arts education access, participation/enrollment, spending, and MTAC procurement (R1129/R1180) via T&C.
- **Update the NYCPS Blueprint for Arts Learning** to define sequential pathways for arts learning that integrate culturally-responsive pedagogy and reflect rapid advancements in media and technology (last updated in 2015).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sources:

¹ NYC Public Schools Arts Office 2024-2025 Arts in Schools Report: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15dgP8o30sHV25WomYMOZSNTxP1EQoYfw/view?usp=drive_link

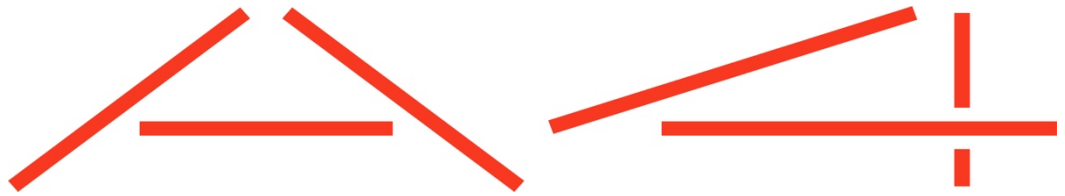
² Testimony on Cultural Development Fund Programs in NYC Public Schools: https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/arts-education-funding-testimony-april-2025_final.pdf

³ Roundtable Brief: Recommendations for NYC Public Schools Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) Process to Support Partnership with NYC Arts Vendors (published February 2025): <https://bit.ly/47AzJRu>

⁴ Paying for Professionalism 2025 - A Report on New York City Teaching Artist Compensation & Employment (published July 23, 2025): <https://nycaieroundtable.org/advocacy/paying-for-professionalism-2025/>

29 W 38th Street, Fl 9
New York, NY 10018

(212) 941-9208
aaartsalliance.org



**Public Testimony
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Relations
March 18, 2026**

Good afternoon, Madam Chair Williams and Members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Lisa Gold, and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance, or A4, and a member of the Cultural Equity Coalition. For over 40 years, A4 has worked to ensure greater representation, equity, and opportunity for Asian American and Pacific Islander artists and cultural organizations across all disciplines.

I want to start with a simple question: can you name a famous Asian American?

If no one comes to mind, you are not alone. A recent study (1) found that 42% of Americans could not name a single Asian American public figure. And those who could most often named Jackie Chan (who isn't American) or Bruce Lee (who is dead).

This isn't just about celebrity. It's about visibility. It's about belonging. And ultimately, it's about safety. When communities are unseen, they are too often unheard—and underserved.

That is where culturally specific organizations come in.

Organizations like A4 create spaces where artists and cultural workers of color are not only supported but understood. We build community, provide resources, and create pathways to opportunity—so that the stories shaping our culture actually and accurately reflect the people who live here.

And yet, at a time when the federal government is actively rolling back equity efforts, and private funding is shrinking, our city must step up—not step back.

**ASIAN
AMERICAN
ARTS
ALLIANCE**

Instead, we are facing a lack of transparency and persistent inequity. Based on DCLA funding data that I've researched, AAPI organizations receive roughly 5% of Cultural Development Fund grants—already far below our share of the population. But even more concerning, those grants are, on average, 23% smaller than others. And with no dedicated AAPI-led or -serving CIG, less than 2% of total cultural funding is allocated to our community—despite representing 18% of New York City (2).

That gap is not just a number. It is lost opportunity. It is silenced voices.

Culturally specific organizations—like A4, LxNY, and the LGBTQ Museum—are essential infrastructure. We ensure that artists can thrive, that communities feel seen, and that New York's cultural landscape reflects its true diversity.

I join my colleagues in supporting the sector-wide ask to restore, baseline, and index \$30 million in arts funding for FY27, and to take meaningful steps toward equitable distribution across our sector—including ensuring data transparency.

Because when you invest in culturally specific organizations, you are investing in a city where everyone belongs.

Thank you.

(1) The Asian American Foundation STAATUS Index 2025. <https://www.taaf.org/our-work/staatus-index-2025>

(2) Asian American Federation, <https://www.aafederation.org/our-work/research/>



Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Annie Ferdous, and I am the Founding Member of Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts (BIPA), a member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color. BIPA (Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts) is dedicated to preserving and promoting Bangladeshi arts and culture. Through music, dance, theater, and educational programs, we provide opportunities for children, youth, and the community to learn, perform, and celebrate our heritage.

I am here to urge the Council to increase the **Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color like us across New York City. Many organizations have experienced reductions or eliminations in Cultural Development Fund (CDF) support, making CTC funding an essential source of stability for artists, cultural workers, and community programming.

This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

With CTC support, we have been able to hire artists, present multiple programs, and engage diverse audiences and youth in our community.[brief example: artists employed, programs produced, audiences served, or students engaged].

We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to **\$8 million in FY2027** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds to sustain their operations and serve communities across New York City.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

Sincerely

Annie Ferdous, Founding member, BIPA

March 17, 2026



Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
March 18th, 2026
Andrew Clarke, Executive Director, braataproductions@gmail.com, 917-668-2209 ext 6

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the City Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Andrew Clarke, and I am the Executive Director of Braata Productions, a member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) cohort. Braata Productions is a multidisciplinary performing arts organization founded in 2009, named after the colloquial Jamaican term for “more,” to bring high-quality Caribbean culture into New York City spaces through music, stories, movement and theater, while achieving greater recognition for the inherent beauty of Caribbean art and its larger influence on current culture. Through public performances and educational programming, we give space and voice to the immigrant experience, and provide a platform for Caribbean performers, writers, and directors.

I am testifying to respectfully request the Council to increase the Coalition of Theatres of Color Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs. The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color like us across New York City. Many organizations have experienced reductions or eliminations in Cultural Development Fund (CDF) support, making CTC funding an essential source of stability for artists, cultural workers, and community programming. This modest \$2.3 million increase will boost CTC organizations’ grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

For organizations like ours, CTC funding has helped support the dozens of performances our Braata Singers do as part of our “Braata Visits” program, taking lunch hour concerts to senior centers across Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. We provide cultural enrichment and emersion for family at our three annual festivals CariBites, Bankra Caribbean Culture Festival, and Christmas Grand Market. CTC funding has allowed us to continue to offer music, dance, theatre, visual art and folk art programs, serving young people and seniors in Queens and Brooklyn. These programs center on building artistic skills while increasing knowledge about the contributions of the artists and culture bearers on whose shoulders we stand. Our other public performances include The Braata Singers Off Broadway, our Theatre reading series and mainstage productions, as well as Queens Carnival and Labor Day celebrations floats which serve thousands of New Yorkers. Through all of these offerings we engage and support well over 100 artists across from the five boroughs.

At the heart of our mission is the communities we serve, largely made up of lower-income families whose identities reflect diverse Caribbean backgrounds from Black, Indo-Caribbean, Indigenous among others. Our artists come from across the five boroughs, though most live in neighborhoods and areas that have historically had fewer resources and support systems despite greater need.

Braata Productions is powered by a team of 20, including four staff members, six professional teaching artists, 10 choral ensemble members, and administrative and support personnel who reflect the diversity of the communities we represent. Deeply rooted in our neighborhood, our organization continues to play a vital role in creating meaningful change in the lives of the patrons we serve.

We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027 and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds to sustain their operations and serve communities across New York City.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

Andrew Clarke



3.18.26

Remarks for FY27 City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing

Good Afternoon Chair Williams & City Council Committee Members,

My name is Judith Insell & I am the Executive Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble, a 54-year-old institution annually providing over 20,000 residents of the Bronx with "FREE OF CHARGE" live performances presented by professional Local 802 union musicians in multiple music genres, aiming to provide culturally relevant live events to the neighborhoods we serve.

I join my colleagues in the New York City Arts and Culture sector in asking that the City Council restore and baseline last year's \$30 million to the culture budget & that the baseline be indexed to automatically increase with inflation annually. These asks are crucial to continuing the work of the Bronx Arts Ensemble and thousands of other city cultural institutions committed to serving New Yorkers.

Each year, thousands of Bronx residents experience the Bronx Arts Ensemble's live performances in their neighborhoods, and they tell us how much our performances have a positive impact on their lives. Through our audience surveys, Bronx citizens express gratitude to our organization for providing them a community-building experience that has healing and restorative emotional effects on their mind, body, & spirit. We are also aware that our concerts provide an economic boost to local businesses in the neighborhoods where we perform. Whether it's audience members purchasing snacks at a bodega before our outdoor concerts in Van Cortlandt Park or dining at an Italian restaurant on Arthur Avenue before one of our concerts at Mt Carmel Church, our concerts are helping keep Bronx neighborhoods economically vibrant.

Bronx Arts Ensemble is struggling with the challenges of rising operating costs while striving to remain on mission to provide free live music performances to the Bronx, a borough at the center of an affordability crisis. Without funding from the Department of Cultural Affairs' Cultural Development Fund, my institution can not continue to serve the Bronx with free services. Bronx Arts Ensemble is just one example of the thousands of nonprofit arts & culture institutions in New York City that need the City Council to restore and baseline last year's \$30 million to the culture budget, while adopting a mandate that the baseline be indexed to automatically increase with inflation annually.

I hope the City Council will receive my message positively and respond to the sector's request for the support we so desperately need to continue meaningfully serving the citizens of New York City.

Thank you.

Judith Insell, Executive Director
Bronx Arts Ensemble



725 EXTERIOR STREET, BRONX, NEW YORK, 10451-2028 • WWW.BRONXCHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG
TEL: 718-775-3450 • EMAIL: INFO@BRONXCHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Wednesday, March 18, 2026
Bronx Children's Museum
Denise Rosario Adusei
Denise@bxcm.org**

Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)
Emailed to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Bronx Children's Museum FY27 Advocacy for Arts and Culture

Last week, a child walked into the Bronx Children's Museum, picked up a book, and asked, *"Is this mine?"* His caregiver told me they had never owned a book before. That same week, a mother shared that the community she found at the Museum helped her heal from postpartum depression. For many families in the Bronx, spaces like ours offer connection, belonging, and a place to grow.

Chair Williams and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Denise Rosario Adusei, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Bronx Children's Museum, a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group, a coalition of 39 cultural institutions across New York City.

Thank you for prioritizing culture and securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline for the arts and culture sector in FY26. That investment is already reaching children and families across the Bronx.

The Bronx is rich with organizations that nurture and support children every day. For decades, the borough did not have a dedicated children's museum. Today, we are proud to serve that role for our borough's families. We serve a borough where more than 90 percent of residents are people of color, rich in culture, language, and creativity. Our mission is to inspire lifelong learning through experiences in science, art, nature, and community.

For many Bronx children, a visit to our museum is a first. The first time they hold a book of their own. The first time they see their community reflected in a cultural space. The first time they

experience science, art, and nature as something that belongs to them. We are a vital cultural anchor in the Bronx, ensuring that children and families have consistent access to early learning, creativity, and community connection.

In 2025 alone, we delivered measurable impact across the Bronx:

- Served 50,000 children and families, including 8,000 students on field trips
- Reached 2,000 participants through community festivals and nearly 1,500 students and educators through 16 school partnerships
- Distributed more than 1,500 free books and hundreds of back-to-school backpacks to support literacy
- Provided sensory-inclusive programming for neurodiverse children and families
- Hosted 93 guest artists across 32 days and trained 200 educators and Head Start leaders
- Supported 19 interns in career pathways, with 10 percent transitioning into staff roles
- Expanded hours to increase access for working families
- Became the first Bronx institution inducted into the Cultural Institutions Group in 47 years

Each of these numbers represents a child discovering something new, a family finding connection, and a community building pride in where they live.

The Museum has respectfully submitted requests for \$336,000 from the New York City Council to expand access across the Bronx:

- Field trips for students in every Bronx Council District
- In-school programming and CASA-supported afterschool learning experiences
- Free Family Days at the Museum, including a targeted, CII-sponsored celebration
- Expansion of our 3D Lab: Design, Develop, Display, bringing digital literacy and technology access to middle and high school students

This investment will bring thousands of students into the Museum, place arts and literacy programs directly into classrooms, expand free access for families, and open pathways for middle and high school students to engage in digital learning and career exploration.

Our ability to meet demand is constrained by limited and unstable funding. Without sustained investment, these gaps widen:

- The Bronx has one of the lowest preschool enrollment rates in New York City, placing children at long-term academic risk
- Only 14 percent of Bronx elementary schools offer full-time arts programming
- Demand for sensory-inclusive programming continues to grow, yet funding has not kept pace with the needs of neurodiverse children and families

Families are already turning to us. We are ready to serve them at scale. Cultural institutions are ready to deliver. What we need now is stability to do it well.

We urge the Council to support cultural institutions across New York City through three key actions:

- **First, restore and baseline the \$30 million** added in the FY26 budget to support the Department of Cultural Affairs and the cultural sector. Stable funding allows organizations to plan, retain staff, and sustain programs.
- **Second, implement annual cost adjustments** to reflect inflation and rising operating costs, ensuring that cultural workers are paid fairly and institutions remain sustainable.
- **Third, improve and reform the capital project process** by increasing transparency, advancing long-term infrastructure planning, and streamlining timelines so projects can move forward efficiently.

For many of our families, we are not an extra. We are essential.

The Bronx is full of brilliance, creativity, and possibility. With sustained investment, we can ensure that every child has access to the experiences that shape how they see themselves and what they believe is possible.

When we invest in cultural institutions, we invest in the future of this city.

Today, that same child has a growing bookshelf of books at home. And that mother returns every Tuesday and Thursday morning for Toddler Time, not just for her child, but for herself and the community she has found. This is what sustained investment makes possible. It turns a single visit into a routine, a resource into a relationship, and a moment into something lasting.

On behalf of the Bronx Children's Museum and the families we serve, thank you for your continued partnership.

**BRONX RIVER ART CENTER***street address*1087 EAST TREMONT AVENUE
BRONX, NEW YORK 10460*phone* 718-589-5819*mailing address*P.O. BOX 5002
BRONX, NEW YORK 10460

WWW.BRONXRIVERART.ORG

Written Testimony**Akia Squitieri, Executive Director**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Akia Squitieri**, and I serve as the Executive Director of the **Bronx River Art Center (BRAC)** in West Farms, Bronx. Since 1987, BRAC has been a cornerstone of arts education, visual and performing arts, environmental stewardship and creative community engagement in one of the most culturally vibrant yet economically underserved boroughs in New York City. Our mission is simple but powerful: to provide **accessible, high-quality arts opportunities** that empower youth, support professional artists, and strengthen the local community.

In FY25, BRAC engaged over **1,300 youth across more than 5,400 class sessions**, served nearly **5000 community members through exhibitions and performances**, and provided **nine affordable, fully equipped artist studios**. These studios not only allow professional Bronx-based artists to create and sustain their practice, but also foster mentorship, teaching collaborations, and intergenerational creative exchange. Our tuition-free programs—including **MSCreate for middle school youth, Teen Project Studio for grades 9-12, and Freshwater Fridays across ages**—ensure that creative and steam opportunities are available to all, regardless of income or background.

The Bronx faces persistent economic and social inequities. Nearly **27% of our neighbors live in poverty**, and many have limited access to arts education, cultural experiences, and safe creative spaces. BRAC addresses these gaps by providing **free or low-cost, accessible programs**, celebrating cultural diversity, and offering professional pathways for artists and students alike. Our programs integrate environmental stewardship with creative practice, using the Bronx River as a living classroom to engage youth and families in science, civic responsibility, and creative problem-solving.

Despite our impact, organizations like BRAC operate under constant uncertainty. Rising costs, aging facilities, and staffing limitations make sustainable growth a challenge. That is why we urge the Council to support the cultural sector through **four critical actions**:

1. **Restore and baseline the \$30 million added to the FY26 cultural budget.** One-time funding cannot sustain staffing, programming, or long-term planning. Baseline ensures that small, community-rooted organizations have the predictability needed to thrive.



BRONX RIVER ART CENTER

street address

1087 EAST TREMONT AVENUE
BRONX, NEW YORK 10460

phone 718-589-5819

mailing address

P.O. BOX 5002
BRONX, NEW YORK 10460

WWW.BRONXRIVERART.ORG

2. **Index the baseline to inflation.** Costs for rent, materials, and staff salaries continue to rise. Indexed funding allows organizations to maintain fair wages, expand services, and preserve program quality.
3. **Reform the capital funding process for culture.** Capital projects can take **6 to 10 years** to complete. Streamlined, transparent, and efficient capital funding will allow organizations to maintain safe, high-quality facilities and create spaces where communities can gather, learn, and engage in the arts.
4. **Increase the Coalition of Theaters of Color initiative to \$8 million** and restore flexibility for general operating support. These 63 organizations serve expanding communities, yet funding has not increased in five years. Flexibility ensures that funds meet real operational needs, supporting staffing, space, and production costs.

Investing in these four areas is an investment in **New York City's communities, creative workforce, and cultural infrastructure**. At BRAC, these investments translate directly into **youth discovering their creative potential, artists sustaining careers, and neighborhoods gaining vibrant, safe, and accessible cultural spaces**. Every dollar that supports organizations like ours has a multiplier effect—strengthening families, schools, and communities, and contributing to the city's \$100 billion creative economy.

Our commitment to **equity, accessibility, and cultural relevance** means that funding reaches communities that need it most: Bronx youth, families, caregivers, and BIPOC artists. Programs such as our upcoming **Reignite Residency for caregiver artists, Bronx River Moves dance series, and Bronx River Speaks storytelling and theatre series** exemplify how sustained investment allows small, community-rooted organizations to innovate, respond to community needs, and create lasting impact.

We ask the Council to recognize that **a strong cultural sector is a stronger, healthier, and more equitable New York City**. Restoring, baselining, indexing, and reforming funding for arts and culture is not just about sustaining organizations—it is about sustaining **creativity, opportunity, and community**.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to New York City's cultural communities.

Sincerely,

Akia Squitieri

Executive Director

Bronx River Art Center

asquitieri@bronxriverart.org

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Committee On Cultural Affairs, Libraries And International Relations

Nantasha M. Williams, Chair | Members: Crystal Hudson; Farah N. Louis; Virginia Maloney; Chi A. Ossé; Althea V. Stevens; Sandra Ung

Hearing: Wednesday, March 18, 2026, 11:30 AM | 250 Broadway – 8th Floor – Hearing Room 1

Agenda Item: T2026-1351 – Budget and Oversight Hearing - FY27Preliminary Budget

Arts Service Organizations

How does an artist *become* an artist? Artists do not just appear. Arts Service Organizations provide the infrastructure that nurtures artists across their full lifecycle.

They are the connective tissue of the cultural ecosystem. This work is often invisible—less like the skin, and more like the veins—carrying support, resources, and relationships that keep the system alive. By building deep relationships, Arts Service Organizations also serve as a vital bridge between complex funding ecosystems and the people who make the city’s cultural life possible: the working-class vogue artist creating spaces of queer belonging, the immigrant auntie keeping folk dance traditions alive between hospital shifts, the emerging artist who simply needs a place where someone believes in what she might become.

One artist in BAX’s residency program recently shared that BAX was the first place where she felt believed in—not for what she had *already* done, but for what she *might* do. She developed her work at BAX, premiered it at a major venue, and is now on tour. That kind of sustained support is what allows artists—thousands of them across the coalition—to stay in New York and build a life here.

And the need is profound. Arts Service Organizations are vital lifelines for the 326,000 New Yorkers who work in the creative sector. Yet 63% of NYC artists do not have the cash to cover a \$400 emergency. Dance/NYC’s State of NYC Dance 2023 report found that 37% of dance workers lack health insurance, and 64% pay for their work out of pocket. As Dance/NYC’s data shows, arts workers are already among the most economically vulnerable in the city, and the affordability crisis is deepening inequities for working-class and marginalized artists.

Unlike presenting organizations, service organizations do not rely on ticket revenue, and much of their work is not public-facing. It is ongoing and relational. They maintain studios, run residencies, offer professional development, and provide long-term support that is essential to the artistic process, but often harder to fund because it is less visible. The highly responsive yet often invisible nature of this work means that project-based funding models designed for presenting organizations do not work for Arts Service Organizations. Too often, they are asked to compete for the same limited pool of funding as the people and organizations they exist to serve, undercutting the stability of the ecosystem as a whole.

At the same time, Arts Service Organizations are facing rising costs across rent, staffing, healthcare, and materials, while philanthropic and federal funding becomes increasingly unstable. This is especially true for organizations whose work supports BIPOC, queer, migrant, and disabled artists.

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That is why we support the sector-wide ask to establish a baseline for the \$30 million addition. But beyond that, Arts Service Organizations need a separate funding process, including general operating support, so that they can serve rather than compete. They also need the city's partnership in serving their artist constituency, including through portable benefits and arts space subsidies.

If New York wants artists not only to become artists but to sustain their practice and remain in this city, it must recognize Arts Service Organizations as essential infrastructure. The city must view arts workers not only as service providers and necessary workers, but as valued constituents with support needs of their own. Strengthening the partnership with Arts Service Organizations is one of the first moves needed to make that possible.

We want a city where artists and cultural workers can **live, work, play, and stay**.

Muchas gracias.

Thank you!

Marlène Ramírez-Cancio, Artistic and Co-Executive Director of BAX | Brooklyn Arts

Raquel Du Toit, Dance/NYC

ABOUT BAX

My name is Marlène Ramírez-Cancio, and I'm the Artistic and Co-Executive Director of BAX | Brooklyn Arts Exchange—a multigenerational arts incubator that has supported artists for 35 years through residencies, education, and affordable rehearsal space.

ABOUT DANCE/NYC

Our organization serves and represents the estimated 6,000 dance workers and 1,700 dance entities in our city through advocacy, regranting, and knowledge sharing. Submitted by Raquel Du Toit Dance/NYC Executive Director.

ABOUT CULTURAL EQUITY COALITION



**Testimony of
Kathryn Glass**

**Interim Co-Director and Chief Public Affairs Officer
Brooklyn Botanic Garden**

New York City Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Preliminary Budget Hearing –

Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

March 18, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Kathryn Glass, and I am the Interim Co-Director and Chief Public Affairs Officer for Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Fiscal Year 2027 preliminary budget.

ABOUT BBG

Founded in 1910, Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) is an urban botanic garden that connects people to the world of plants to create a greener, more beautiful, and more sustainable city. Situated on 52 acres in the heart of Brooklyn and open year-round, the Garden is home to more than 12,000 kinds of plants and over 30 specialty gardens. Each year, we welcome nearly 900,000 visitors.

FISCAL YEAR 2027 OUTLOOK

First, I want to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$30 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

1000 Washington Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11225 | bbg.org

Because of steep cuts in 2024, along with inflation, rising labor costs, and especially higher health care costs, BBG has continued to hold staff vacancies, pause new initiatives, and adopted a deficit budget in 2025. Although the proposed Mayoral cuts in Fiscal 2025 were ultimately reversed, their specter still leaves us in a painful limbo. As we approach a new City fiscal year, we continue to move forward cautiously.

CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE FORCED TO OPERATE IN THE RED

Cultural institutions are public facilities maintained for the benefit of all New Yorkers, and the City is responsible for keeping them open with sufficient staff to provide basic operations. We are deeply grateful for the Council's role in baselining \$45 million in Fiscal Year 2026 and adding an additional \$30 million for the 39 CIG members. Even so, City-mandated wage increases, along with unfunded healthcare and pension cost increases, amount to an unsustainable burden on the City's public institutions.

Simply put, CIGs are forced to fight every year for City funding, creating a destabilizing environment for the sector. Cultural organizations employ nearly 16,000 full- and part-time workers, 5,800 union members, and more than 6,000 artists and educators. In a city with \$110 billion in revenue, how can a \$75 million investment in culture be seen as dispensable? How can OMB fail to adequately fund one of the few City services that generate a return on investment—measured in private dollars raised—of more than 400 percent?

SUPPORT IS CRITICAL TO SUSTAIN NEW YORK'S CULTURAL SECTOR

As an 115 year old institution, Brooklyn Botanic Garden has weathered many turbulent times and, with support from the city and private funders, has remained open serving New Yorkers and visitors from around the world. That history leads us to propose three ways the City and Council can better support cultural institutions:

First, end the budget insecurity that makes it so difficult to make long-term staffing and programming commitments by baselining the additional \$30 million for CIGs.

Second, establish annual cost adjustments to keep pace with inflation and rising labor costs in arts and cultural organizations. Overall costs continue to climb, and we need a sustainable system that allows us to retain staff, grow responsibly, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.

Third, pursue much-needed capital project process reform with these three approaches:

- Create transparency by updating the open data portal for cultural capital projects, which has not been updated since 2021, and by holding a hearing so Council Members fully understand the issues.

- Plan responsibly by developing a cultural capital infrastructure plan that helps organizations build and maintain facilities more efficiently.
- Identify key process improvements so that cultural capital projects—which now often take 6–10 years or more—can move forward more quickly, allowing CIGs and other institutions to leverage City capital funding, preserve their buildings, and effectively serve their communities.

BBG'S WORK ALIGNS WITH THE CITY'S AFFORDABILITY AGENDA

Brooklyn Botanic Garden's work aligns closely with Mayor Mamdani's and the Council's affordability agenda by providing free and low-cost entry to beautiful landscapes, ecological education, and cultural experiences. Free and low-cost cultural opportunities, like museums and gardens, help make New York a world-class city by ensuring broad access to nature and culture. Botanic gardens in particular are leading the way on green solutions to the climate crisis inspiring visitors with beauty, and centering plants in ecological solutions to the most pressing issue of our time.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden is always free for all children under 12. Since the pandemic, we have expanded free access through our community ticket program, which now welcomes nearly 300,000 guests a year—available to anyone who requests a ticket; no questions asked. BBG's educational workshops, seasonal festivals, and environmental learning opportunities for children and adults express our core identity as a community-based cultural institution deeply embedded in the lives of our visitors. Through youth education, workforce development, and neighborhood environmental initiatives—such as street tree care, community garden mentoring, and urban gardening—we are fostering community cohesion and literally planting the seeds of a stronger city: more connected and more resilient in the face of climate change and social instability. Together, these efforts make the Garden an affordable, welcoming public resource that supports community well-being while advancing the City's broader goal of equitable access to essential cultural and environmental assets across the five boroughs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.



**Testimony of Cierra Reimche, Chief of Staff
The Brooklyn Museum
Before the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International
Relations
March 18, 2026**

Thank you Chair Williams and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Cierra Reimche and I am the chief of staff at the Brooklyn Museum. On behalf of our Director Anne Pasternak and the Board of Trustees, we want to thank the City Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in FY26. We are proud to promote free arts access for New Yorkers and to employ over 300 cultural workers at the Brooklyn Museum.

The Brooklyn Museum is committed to making art accessible to all. We are one of the last New York City art museums that offers pay-what-you-wish admission for all. Over 500,000 people visit us each year, and nearly half visit for free. We organize free museum visits for students in Title I schools. Our beloved First Saturdays are evenings of free gallery access, performances, and artmaking that regularly welcome over 5,000 attendees. Our Museum on Wheels visits communities throughout Brooklyn and hosts intergenerational arts programming. Its neighborhood partners include schools, community centers, and NYCHA housing.

In addition to free admission and programs, we support the local creative community. We employ teaching artists and performers. We showcase Brooklyn creatives through our popular pop-up markets. We are proud to employ many unionized workers represented by UAW and DC-37 members.

Yet as we seek to increase arts access and support artists, we are also struggling with the city's affordability crisis. In recent years, inflation has added millions of dollars to our everyday costs, outpacing our revenue streams. We have struggled to grow our revenue to meet rising compensation and institutional needs, leading to budgetary deficits and strained cash flow. These pressures are further compounded by the slow post-pandemic recovery of museum attendance. Increased City funding is essential as we face these pressures.

We ask that the City Council build on the historic successes of Fiscal Year 2026 by restoring and baselining the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support the City's CIGs in the DCLA budget. Baselining this funding is critical to ending the budget uncertainty and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. The huge swings in annual funding levels make it extremely difficult to plan staffing and programming on a year to year basis.

Looking ahead, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. The Cultural Institution Group serves the city and its residents year-round with



free programming and community events, even acting as polling sites and cooling centers; yet we are faced with the same budget uncertainty every year. We ask that the city consider a system for sustainable annual growth in support for our organizations that will allow us to retain and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.

Furthermore, we ask that the city improve and reform the capital project process. The Brooklyn Museum is housed in a historic, 100-year-old City-owned building (like many CIGs). To steward this landmark building into the 21st century, we require basic repairs like accessibility improvements, climate control, and security upgrades. There are key process improvements needed, including timely repayment on requisitioned funds, that would allow CIGs to utilize these funds more effectively.

The Brooklyn Museum has served this city for over 200 years and look forward to another 200 bringing stellar programming and art to New York City. With the city's investment we can continue to innovate and present exceptional exhibitions. We are grateful to this Committee and the City Council for your collaboration in ensuring that arts & culture institutions can thrive and remain accessible to all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cierra Reimche
Chief of Staff, Brooklyn Museum
Cierra.Reimche@brooklynmuseum.org



BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
TESTIMONY ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2027 PRELIMINARY BUDGET
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations
March 18, 2026

Good morning. I am Linda Johnson, President & CEO of Brooklyn Public Library. Thank you to Speaker Menin and to our new chair, Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams, as well as Finance Chair Lee, the members of the committee, and the entire City Council, for your steadfast support of New York City's libraries. Your commitment to libraries makes it possible for us to deliver the programs, services, and resources New Yorkers count on every day.

I would also like to recognize and thank the library workers who make this work possible, including our partners at DC37 and Brooklyn Public Library's Local 1482. Library staff are the front line of service for millions of New Yorkers — their dedication is the reason libraries are among the most beloved and trusted institutions in our city.

For years, libraries have endured an annual ritual no city organization should face: funding allocated as a temporary measure, only to vanish from the next preliminary budget, requiring us to return here and make the case all over again. That pattern has had real consequences — for staff morale, for our ability to plan, and for the New Yorkers who depend on us.

The Mayor's preliminary budget takes a step toward ending the 'budget dance:' both baselining \$2 million of the \$32.7 million increase the Council secured in Fiscal Year 2026 and pledging to work with us to maintain service levels. We have had many productive conversations with the Administration and they have been transparent about the city's budget pressures. They also understand what the Council has long championed: that libraries are central to the city's affordability agenda and must be a priority. We are hopeful, and we will continue that conversation.

Libraries Strengthen New York

I often say the library is the modern-day town square — a trusted space to access information, connect with neighbors, and discuss the critical questions of our time. We welcome New Yorkers from every neighborhood and every walk of life, and we ask for nothing in return.

Your investment last year marked an important step forward for libraries. At Brooklyn Public Library, your support enabled us to open Bay Ridge and Bedford Libraries on Sundays, hire additional staff, expand our collections, and address emergency building maintenance.

New Yorkers noticed this investment. Brooklyn Public Library's 62 locations received over 6 million visits last year. Patrons checked out nearly 10 million items, including books and digital materials as well as items from our Library of Things, borrowing board games, musical instruments, power tools for home projects, telescopes, vinyl records, museum passes, and even artwork. Overall, our circulation is 7% higher year-to-date over the last fiscal year. Our Culture Pass program is set to have its strongest year since launching in 2018, with over 75,000 passes checked out between July 2025 and February 2026.

Library workers hosted more than 80,000 free programs in Brooklyn alone — including our Tax Help programs, which helped over 1,500 Brooklyn residents collectively save more than \$2 million on their taxes last year. Attendance at our First Five Years programs is up 13%, putting us on pace for our busiest year of early childhood programming since the pandemic — driven in large part by programs funded through the Council's City's First Readers initiative.

The Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

The preliminary budget moves libraries in the right direction, and I am optimistic that the adopted budget will build on the Council's Fiscal Year 2026 investment and put us on a path toward greater stability.

The challenges are real: the federal prohibition on passport services at nonprofit libraries alone costs Brooklyn Public Library nearly \$1 million annually; our participation in the City's cost savings exercise; and personnel, materials, and maintenance costs continue to climb. These are real pressures, but they also underscore the importance of investing in what libraries can deliver for New Yorkers.

We welcome the conversation about what one-half of one-percent of the city budget would unlock for New York City's libraries. In Brooklyn, this means hiring specialists dedicated to every age group across our branches, so children, teens, adults, and older adults all have access to the programs and resources they need, no matter where they live. It means expanding service hours so working families can visit after work and students have more time to study. It means responding quickly to urgent building needs, rather than waiting years for a capital project to wind through the pipeline — keeping our doors open and our libraries safe. It is the level of service New Yorkers deserve — and, as a January New York Times poll showed, proudly demand.

Capital Needs

With the Council's support, we have made important progress modernizing Brooklyn Public Library's more than one million square feet of library space. From the beautifully restored Bedford Library to the soon-to-open Walt Whitman, Red Hook, Carroll Gardens, and Mapleton branches, we are creating welcoming and flexible spaces that reflect how people use libraries today. These projects show what sustained capital investment can accomplish.

But our work is far from complete. Brooklyn Public Library is contending with a growing capital crisis, with more than \$500 million of unfunded capital needs throughout our system. Two-thirds of our branches shoulder more than \$1 million in outstanding repairs, and more than half require at least \$5 million. At the same time, we continue to address systemwide shortfalls following the prior Administration's removal of \$47 million from Brooklyn Public Library's capital budget in Fiscal Year 2025.

In 2025, due to failed HVAC, elevators, and other basic infrastructure malfunctions, we lost 1,074 hours of public service in Brooklyn alone.

I respectfully request the Council, alongside Brooklyn's Delegation, again allocate \$10 million in discretionary capital funding for systemwide repairs, project shortfalls, and essential upgrades at Brooklyn's branches — to continue this progress and prevent further deterioration of aging infrastructure.

This year, we are submitting a capital plan to the Administration totaling \$276 million over the next ten years. These funds will help us plan and care for our physical plant, address shortfalls, upgrade our technology, and fund critical infrastructure projects. As part of our ten-year plan requests, the three library systems are highlighting the need for a transformational investment in our buildings. With a capital infusion of \$150 million for each system, we will be able to comprehensively upgrade more than a dozen libraries across the city. These top-to-bottom renovations address multiple improvements in a single project, saving time and money, and reducing interruptions to service. Our experience has shown it to be the most efficient way to create inspiring state-of-the-art libraries to serve our current patrons and last for future generations.

Our capital work extends beyond renovation. Brooklyn Public Library pioneered New York City's first library-housing co-location at Sunset Park Library, and we are now working with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development on what may become the largest such project by number of units to date, at New Utrecht Library in Bensonhurst. This model is good for libraries and good for Brooklyn — it allows us to modernize beloved community spaces while

helping address one of the borough's most urgent needs. We are proud of these projects and look forward to continuing this work with Speaker Menin and the Council.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the preliminary budget. The Council has been a longstanding champion of libraries and we are all grateful for your leadership. I'd like to end by sharing a very brief poem by Liv Lusk, a patron of Marcy Library:

My library is loud...

- *With children giggling over picture books with faces that look like theirs,*
- *With hushed conversations — a man is rehearsing for his job interview on Friday, the first one since he was incarcerated,*
- *With keyboards clacking — a young man is watching a video on how to create the best transit city in Minecraft,*
- *With printers spitting fresh copies of a missing cat poster — a father and daughter will spend all afternoon placing them around the neighborhood, only for Mittens to appear at 6 p.m. sharp for dinner,*
- *A woman is soothing herself with rhythmic chants because the library is the only place she feels safe to do so.*

My library is loud, and I feel joy.

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



City Council Testimony

March 18, 2026

Supporting Arts & Culture for NYC

Building for the Arts (BFA) expands access to the performing arts through three key programs: Theatre Row, the American Playwriting Foundation, and Music and the Brain.

NYC DCLA FUNDING IS CRITICAL TO ENSURE ACCESS TO ARTS & CULTURE -- INVEST IN THE ARTS TO KEEP NYC THE CREATIVE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD --



Introduction & Mission

I'm Nicole Gardner, Director of Advancement at Building for the Arts NY (BFA). You may know us best for Theatre Row on 42nd Street and Music and the Brain (MATB) in NYC schools. Our mission is to expand access to the performing arts.

Founded in 1977 as the 42nd Street Development Corporation, BFA partnered with the City to transform West 42nd Street into an inclusive performing arts hub. That work became Theatre Row—**built on the belief that culture strengthens community and should be accessible to everyone**, a belief that continues to guide us.

Today, BFA provides **essential cultural infrastructure** through three programs:

- **Theatre Row**, offering affordable performance and rehearsal space;
- **The American Playwriting Foundation**, supporting playwrights and composers with funding and opportunities to develop new work;
- **Music and the Brain**, providing in-school music education to under-resourced schools.

Theatre Row: Cultural Infrastructure for All New Yorkers

For nearly fifty years, Theatre Row has been **one of NYC's most important affordability engines for small and emerging arts organizations and the development of new work**. More than 300 companies and 3,000 artists rely on our theatres, rehearsal studios, and offices each year—including disability justice groups, culturally specific theatres, youth ensembles, and community-based organizations.

As rising costs force many companies to give up their spaces, Theatre Row fills a critical gap by **offering shared, accessible, and affordable creative space**. Subsidized rentals, discounted rehearsal rooms, and community partnerships return hundreds of thousands of dollars in value to artists annually.

Lighting Systems Upgrade: A Direct Affordability Intervention

One of the most significant production expenses for small companies and independent artists is lighting. **Our current effort to replace our outdated theatrical lighting systems with modern, sustainable LED equipment is a direct affordability intervention**. Here's how—



Currently, our outdated systems force companies to rent lighting equipment from outside vendors—often \$1,500 per week—just to realize their designs. For nonprofits operating on shoestring budgets, that cost is prohibitive. While we make our systems available for only a small maintenance fee, we don't have well-functioning equipment to offer, so most creators can't take advantage of those savings without sacrificing artistic vision and production quality.

But an FY26 capital allocation from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, together with New York City Council and Manhattan BP, is changing that. Thanks to the City's support of our proposal last year, we are now working with NYC DCLA to upgrade lighting in three of our five theatres. This year, we are requesting an additional **\$392,000 in DCLA capital support** to complete the remaining two.



A performance of 2025 Relentless new musical finalist, "Francois & the Rebels" by Jaime Cepero

Once finished, these lighting systems will:

- **Save more than \$212,000 every year for companies/artists** presenting at Theatre Row
- Reduce energy use and maintenance costs and make Theatre Row a greener facility
- Ensure artists can realize their creative visions without expensive equipment rentals

This is one example of how we translate our arts access mission into concrete, measurable affordability for the creators who need it most.



A student learning the language of music at an NYC Music and the Brain partner school.

Music and the Brain: Equitable K-12 Music Education Partnerships

Music and the Brain, which is supported by CDF, discretionary, and initiative funds, **delivers high-quality, school-day music instruction to more than 58,000 students across more than 150 NYC schools each year, in all five boroughs.** Many public school music teachers continue to face challenges like inequitable resources, a lack of curriculum and instruments, and isolation as the only music teacher. **We supply an extensive curriculum, instruments, abundant digital and physical classroom resources, ongoing training, and a support network, for free.**

When you **work with teachers to provide them with the tools and support they need**, the result is a **more equitable system** with high-impact music education programs in under-resourced schools. Independent research from Columbia University shows higher ELA and Math proficiency rates in schools with MATB than in non-partner schools, as well as a host of other benefits.



When we introduce Music and the Brain to a school, **entire school cultures transform**. Students develop a lifelong connection to learning, teachers rediscover their purpose, and a new space to experience success, calm, and belonging emerges at school. **DCLA funding is crucial** for maintaining this work, which helps overcome systemic barriers in K–12 music education. Ongoing City support enables us to provide instruments, ready-to-use resources, standards-aligned curriculum, comprehensive professional development, and culturally responsive content—while also expanding to schools currently on our waitlist.

Why Continued City Support Matters

BFA strengthens New York’s cultural ecosystem by making creation, performance, and arts education accessible across all five boroughs. **Continued City support ensures that the arts remain a shared civic resource** and that artists, teachers, and students have the opportunities they deserve.

For students and teachers, Music and the Brain **addresses deep-rooted systemic barriers to arts education**: inequitable resources, a lack of culturally responsive curriculum, and teacher isolation. We offer a comprehensive, supportive, replicable solution that consistently delivers research-proven results for NYC students, teachers, and entire school communities.

For performing arts creators: Theatre Row is **essential cultural infrastructure**. It is one of the few remaining spaces where artists can afford to take creative risks, where new voices can be heard, and where the next generation of theatre-makers can build careers **without leaving the city they call home**.

If New York is to remain the creative capital of the world, we must invest in the places that make creation possible.

Continued support from the City—especially through DCLA CDF and capital funding—ensures that access to the arts remains a **shared civic resource**, not a privilege.

And **when you help sustain shared creative spaces and equitable arts education, you exponentially broaden the impact of that support**—reaching artists and groups who would not otherwise be able to tell their stories.

On behalf of everyone at Building for the Arts, thank you for your time and for **your commitment to sustaining New York City’s cultural ecosystem**. We look forward to continuing this work together.

Nicole Gardner, Director of Advancement
Building for the Arts NY
nicole@bfany.org



Company-In-Residence New York City Children’s Theater performs “The Pocket Park Kids” at Theatre Row.



Summary of Request: Theatre Row Lighting Systems

Building for the Arts (BFA) expands access to the performing arts through three key programs: Theatre Row, the American Playwriting Foundation, and Music and the Brain.



NEW LIGHTING SYSTEMS WILL SAVE HUNDREDS OF OFF- AND OFF-OFF BROADWAY COMPANIES A TOTAL OF MORE THAN \$2M IN THE FIRST 10 YEARS OF USE.



Building for the Arts (BFA) was founded in 1976 as the **42nd Street Development Corporation**. We anchored the transformation of West 42nd St. by developing the theaters, restaurants, and apartments known as **Theatre Row**.

Today, Theatre Row is a landmark performing arts center on West 42nd Street that **offers affordable and diverse performing arts experiences to 70,000 audience members, 300 theatre companies and 3,000 artists annually.**



The complex, which includes five theatres, rehearsal studios, and office space for theatre companies, underwent its last full renovation in 2002; as a result, many systems, such as theatrical lighting, are now beyond their useful life.

BFA requests Capital support to replace obsolete theatrical lighting systems in 2 theatres at Theatre Row. This is Phase 2 (of 2) of a project that will replace the lighting systems in all five theatres at the Theatre Row facility. Our existing systems are outdated and cannot accommodate LEDs, the current standard in theatrical lighting. We will subsidize the use of the new LED systems, enabling artists and companies to conserve their limited production funds by eliminating the need to rent outside lighting equipment.



Because Theatre Row serves as the creative home for hundreds of companies and thousands of artists, **this urgent Capital project will enhance affordable production opportunities for a diverse cross-section of NY creators and their audiences**, benefiting the health of the performing arts ecosystem, especially the financially struggling Off-Broadway community. In addition, the energy savings provided will **make Theatre Row more environmentally sustainable**, reducing utility costs and bringing us into compliance with NYC Local Law 97.



BUILDING FOR THE ARTS REQUESTS:

Capitally Eligible Equipment: Theatrical Lighting System Replacement in Five Theatres - Total equipment cost: \$392K. We request \$300K from Manhattan BP Hoylman-Sigal and \$92,000 from District 3, Speaker, & Manhattan Delegation.

The total equipment cost for the 2 remaining lighting systems is \$392,314. Though it would delay savings for small theatre companies to phase further, **the project could be further phased if the full requested allocation is not received:** the system for Theatre 1 costs \$178,106 and the system for Theatre 4 costs \$214,208. Funding will help keep NYC's performing arts ecosystem strong, allowing audiences to enjoy high-quality artistic productions, and showing artists' work in the best light possible, with the lowest carbon footprint. Thank you for your consideration of this critical project and the theatre community it supports.

BUILDING FOR THE ARTS - 2027 SUPPORT REQUEST FOR: MUSIC AND THE BRAIN

FEIN: 13-2852371

STRENGTHENING YOUNG MINDS THROUGH THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC



Building for the Arts (BFA) expands access to the performing arts by providing creative space, learning opportunities, and hubs for artistic connection.

BFA operates Theatre Row, The American Playwriting Foundation, and Music and the Brain



Music and the Brain (MATB) provides high-quality, school-day music education to NYC public school students. For 29 years, we have integrated musicianship and piano learning to build lifelong academic and social-emotional skills in all learners. We impact 58,000+ students at 150+ NYC schools each year.

Partner school music teachers, deliver MATB's curriculum with ongoing professional support, instruments, and digital learning tools ensuring equitable access to sustained music instruction for students. **All MATB program services and equipment are provided at no cost to NYC schools.**

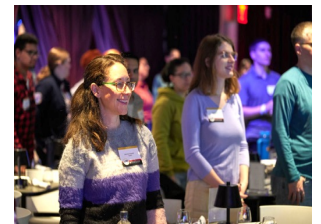


Columbia University's Center for Arts Education Research found **more NYC students score proficient and above on third grade standardized ELA and Math tests at schools that use Music and the Brain each year with fidelity.**

Music and the Brain Serves 58,000+ Students in 150+ Schools, and 160+ Music Teachers Annually Across the Five Boroughs



- ✓ **20,000+ Online Resources** for deeper learning
- ✓ **550+ Physical Materials**, including piano/keyboards.
- ✓ **Ongoing Professional Support** for music teachers
- ✓ **Digital Inclusion & Literacy** through our award-winning online platform at [learn.musicandthebrain.org](https://www.learn.musicandthebrain.org)



"I'm a proud product of NYC public schools, a performing vocalist, and nonprofit executive because of music education. Music and the Brain opens doors for all NYC learners, to build life and essential skills through school-day music instruction. Thank you for supporting the power of music education and for your consideration of our high-impact program!"

Lisala Beatty, Director, Music and the Brain

BUILDING FOR THE ARTS REQUESTS SUPPORT FOR MUSIC AND THE BRAIN:

\$10,000 Local and Digital Inclusion and Literacy

Support from City Council Districts we serve:

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51

\$50,000 support for Music and the Brain through the following citywide initiatives:

- **Speakers Initiative**
- **Educational Programs for Students**
- **Support for Arts Instruction**
- **Digital Inclusion and Literacy Initiative**

[musicandthebrain.org](https://www.musicandthebrain.org)



2026 NYC COUNCIL MEMBER DISTRICTS SERVED BY MUSIC AND THE BRAIN

District 1 – Christopher Marte

4,412 Students and 6 Teachers
Served since 2007

P.S. 2M, P.S.20M, P.S. 140M, P.S. 343M
P.S. 124M, P.S./I.S 276M

District 2 – Carlina Rivera

851 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2010

P.S. 63M, P.S. 34M

District 3 – TBD

7,329 Students and 5 Teachers Served since 1999

P.S. 11M, P.S.111M, P.S. 212M,
De La Salle Academy

District 4 – Virginia Maloney

882 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2015

P.S. 281M

District 6 – Gale A. Brewer

1,451 Students and 2
Teachers Served since 2017

P.S. 84M, P.S. 75M

District 7 – Shaun Abreu

3,620 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 1999

P.S. 36M, P.S.145M, P.S. 862M,

District 8 – Elsie Encarnacion

7,407 Students and 13 Teachers
Served since 2005

Reece School, P.S. 182M, P.S. 5X,
P.S.30X, P.S. 49X, P.S. 65X, P.S. 102M

District 9 – Yusef Salaam

5,426 Students and 8 Teachers
Served since 2004

P.S. 129M, P.S. 149M, PS 185M, M.S. 371

District 10 – Carmen De La Rosa

5,096 Students and 6 Teachers
Served since 2007

P.S. 132M, P.S. 152M, P.S.189M, P.S. 513M,
KIPP Washington Heights Middle

District 11 – Eric Donowitz

2,524 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2016

P.S. 20X, P.S. 77X

District 12 – Kevin Riley

2,631 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2008

P.S. 153X, P.S. 596X, P.S. 41X

District 14 – Pierina Ana Sanchez

1,581 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2019

P.S. 363X

District 15 – Oswald Feliz

406 Students and 1 Teacher
Served since 2024

P.S. 391X

District 16 – Althea Stevens

1,691 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2005

P.S. 443X

District 17 – Rafael Salamanca Jr.

5,843 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2006

P.S. 1X, P.S. 157X

District 18 – Amanda Farias

5,018
Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 1999

P.S. 36X, P.S. 107X, M.S. 562X
P.S. 481X

District 19 – Vickie Paladino

2,358 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2008

P.S. 107Q

District 20 – Sandra Ung

1,246 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2017

P.S. 20Q

District 21 – Shanel Thomas-Henry

9,438 Students and 8 Teachers
Served since 2002

P.S. 92Q, P.S. 14Q, PS Q329

District 22 – Tiffany Caban

3,834 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2006

P.S. 17Q, P.S. 85Q, P.S. 171Q,

District 23 – Linda Lee

4,161 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2008

P.S. 46Q, P.S. 115Q, P.S. 133Q,
P.S./I.S. 208Q

District 24 – James F. Gennaro

2,180 Students and 5 Teachers
Served since 2014

P.S. 201Q, P.S. 219Q

District 25 – Shekar Krishnan

8,001 Students and 6 Teachers
Served since 1998

P.S. 7Q, P.S. 149Q, P.S. 212Q, P.S. 398Q

District 26 – Julie Won

3,133 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2004

P.S. 78Q, P.S. 111Q

District 27 – Dr. Nantasha Williams

4,817 Students and 7 Teachers
Served since 2010

P.S. 360Q, Riverton St. School, P.S. 182Q,
P.S. 133Q

District 28 – Ty Hankerson

1,012 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2019

P.S. 155Q, P.S. 161Q

District 29 – Lynn Shulman

2,860 Students and 7 Teachers
Served since 2015

P.S. 196Q, Tiegerman High School,
P.S. Q056, Q273



2026 NYC COUNCIL MEMBER DISTRICTS SERVED BY MUSIC AND THE BRAIN

District 30 – Phil Wong

8,938 Students and 6 Teachers
Served since 2002

P.S. 58Q, P.S. 71Q, P.S. 128Q, P.S. 68Q

District 31– Selvena N. Brooks-Powers

1,829 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2014

P.S. 181Q, M.S. 356Q

District 32 – Joann Ariola

10,583 Students and 8 Teachers
Served since 2007

P.S. 207Q, P.S. 63Q, P.S. 114Q, P.S. 91Q,
P.S.119Q, P.S. 97Q

District 33 – Lincoln Restler

5,688 Students and 9 Teachers
Served since 2006

P.S. 38K, P.S.110K, P.S. 307K,
Brooklyn Rise Charter

District 34 – Jennifer Gutierrez

6,605 Students and 5 Teachers
Served since 2005

P.S. 17K, P.S. 123K, P.S. 132K,
P.S. 257K

District 35 – Crystal Hudson

2,188 Students and 5 Teachers
Served since 2012

P.S. 316K, P.S.705K

District 36 – Chi Osse

781 Students and 1 Teachers
Served since 2015

P.S. 628K

District 37 – Sandy Nurse

4,048 Students and 5 Teachers
Served since 2005

P.S. 45K, P.S. 151K,
P.S. 383K, P.S. 214K

District 38 – Alexa Aviles

2,539 Students and 3 teachers
Served since 2017

P.S. 971K, Sunset Yards Elem, P.S.
200K

District 39 – Shashana Hanif

4,805 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2008

P.S. 130K, P.S. 124K

District 40 – Rita Joseph

2,402 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2004

P.S. 139K

District 41 – Darlene Mealy

928 Students and 5 Teachers Served
since 2019

P.S. 770K, P.S. 446K

District 42 – Chris Banks

6,791 Students and 7 Teachers
Served since 2004

P.S. 66K, P.S. 233K, P.S. 346K, P.S. 557K,
Brooklyn Scholars Charter

District 43 – Susan Zhuang

7,492 Students and 8 Teachers
Served since 2010

P.S. 101K, P.S. 247K, P.S. 682K,
P.S. 105K, P.S. 227K

District 44 – Kalman Yeger

1,642 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2007

P.S. 199K

District 45 – Farah Louis

3,820 Students and 4 Teachers
Served since 2009

P.S. 193K, P.S. 361K,
Brooklyn Dreams Charter

District 46 – Mercedes Narcisse

2,283 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2009

P.S. 114K, M.S. 366K, P.S. 207K

District 47 – Kayla Santosuosso

2,881 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2021

P.S. 188K, P.S. 170K

District 48 – Vernikov

1,524 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2024

P.S. 254K, P.S. 100K

District 49 – Kamilla Hanks

1,304 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2024

P.S. 045R, I.S. 027R

District 50 – David Carr

1,629 Students and 2 Teachers
Served since 2023

P.S. 30R and P.S. 39R

District 51 – Frank Morano

2,841 Students and 3 Teachers
Served since 2016

P.S. 36R, P.S. 42R, P.S. 55R

CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026
March 18, 2026

Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Deputy Speaker Williams and Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of funding for culture in the City's FY27 budget.

I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal Year 2026.

As member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), a collective of 39 nonprofit museums, performing arts centers, historical societies, zoos, and botanical gardens across all five boroughs with a distinct private-public partnership with the City of New York and a commitment to serving all New Yorkers. In pursuit of meaningful, sustained public support of the vast array of cultural programming and public resources offered by our CIG colleagues and the NYC arts and culture community at large, Carnegie Hall endorses the field's request for:

- \$30 million baseline increase to the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) budget – to invest in cultural institutions, programs, and artists across New York City and support DCLA.
- Annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations.
- Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process.

As it currently stands, DCLA's baseline is stagnant. Flat funding is essentially a cut as operating support hasn't kept up with rising costs. This leaves culture vulnerable every year. Ending the annual battle for one-time operating support and programmatic funding would secure NYC's standing as the heart center of arts and culture in the United States. A commitment to funding the arts and culture is a commitment to workforce development, community healing, education, and public safety, as well as an investment in economic resiliency and growth – arts and culture generates \$110 billion in economic impact in NYC, representing 13% of the City's economic activity. Sustained investment in the arts and culture is a statement to each and every person who calls New York City home that their holistic wellness matters, and we urge this sector's outsize impact to be recognized and duly supported.

I'm glad for the opportunity to outline Carnegie Hall's profound impact on New York's cultural identity and how the longstanding partnership with the City's human service agencies including the Department of Cultural Affairs is essential to this organization's ability to serve our communities, including those in challenging circumstances.

Carnegie Hall's mission is to present extraordinary music and musicians on the three stages of this legendary hall, to bring the transformative power of music to the widest possible audience, to provide visionary education programs, and to foster the future of music through the cultivation of new works, artists, and audiences. True to Andrew Carnegie's vision that "all causes may here find a place," the Hall has been both a beacon of artistic excellence and a platform for civic engagement since its founding in 1891. It has showcased the world's greatest artists across nearly every musical genre while also providing a public forum for pivotal social movements—from women's suffrage, labor, and civil rights to AIDS activism and criminal justice reform. More than a concert venue, Carnegie Hall stands as a living testament to America's cultural evolution, reflecting the nation's diverse voices and its commitment to the democratic ideal of free expression.

In 1960, the iconic building was saved from demolition by a citizen's campaign led by violinist Isaac Stern. An act of the New York State Legislature allowed the City of New York to purchase the building and establish the nonprofit, The Carnegie Hall Corporation, to operate the facility in service to all New Yorkers. Today, Carnegie Hall welcomes more than 750,000 attendees each season to the 170 concerts it produces and approximately 500 events presented by outside producers, both on its three stages and in community venues throughout New York City's five boroughs.

Beyond its stages, Carnegie Hall is a leader in music education and social impact. Its programs reach hundreds of thousands of people annually—in New York City, across the United States, and around the world—supporting music learning in schools, orchestras, arts organizations, and in settings as diverse as homeless shelters, correctional facilities, refugee camps, and hospitals. These initiatives nurture the next generation of musicians and audiences, advance the future of music education, and display how music can better.

Highlights of Carnegie Hall's offerings throughout the five boroughs include many of our partnerships with human services agencies:

- **The Council's \$25,000 initiative and \$200,000 Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative allocation** supports **The B Side**, a free intensive program for New Yorkers ages 14-22 interested in the business of music, with a focus on those from under-resourced communities. The B Side provides participants an interactive space to learn about the inner workings of the music industry. Curriculum is designed and facilitated by teaching artists, and music executives, while guest speaker panels, and field trips guide participants through the many roles and career paths across the industry. Participants, experienced youth development facilitators, and guests are encouraged to co-create a learning community that supports the development of aspiring artists and future music industry leaders.

This season, participants will progress through activities beginning with an exploration of the various career tracks through the music industry and an introduction to key terms and concepts. Activities will include engaging in lessons/curricular activities; presentations from guest speakers; field trips to record labels, music tech companies, local recording studios, music festivals, venues; panels and interactive discussions; and jam sessions/performances. This is a paid experience. Participants receive a stipend, transportation and meals.

Through The B Side, Carnegie Hall draws upon our experience creating meaningful youth development programs to deepen our impact and provide young people with the tools they need to thrive, lead, and transform the music industry.

The B-Side is now being piloted as an innovative diversion program on Rikers Island, giving eligible justice-involved youth the tools they need to explore careers in the music industry, providing workforce development, a supportive network of peers and mentors, and an invaluable outlet of expression.

- In partnership with NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Carnegie Hall’s **Future Music Project (FMP)** harnesses the transformative power of music to nurture, amplify, and celebrate the creativity of young people ages 14-19 in juvenile justice settings. Carnegie Hall’s Teaching Artists engage young people through workshops, field trips, and performances that explore many facets of music—from honing skills in songwriting and performance to discovering career paths in the music industry. Using music as a vehicle, FMP supports young people navigating the trauma of incarceration by providing a space to learn and express their creativity.
- Carnegie Hall’s early childhood programs encourage connection, well-being, and creativity for families, most of whom are facing challenging personal circumstances.
 - The **Lullaby Project** is an evidence-informed, low-cost, safe, and scalable approach to supporting caregivers, infants, and early relational health. The program pairs new and expectant parents and caregivers with professional artists to create, sing, and record personal lullabies, fostering maternal health, aiding child development, and strengthening the bond between parent and child. Since its launch at Jacobi Medical Center in 2011—developed in response to patient care needs identified by the hospital’s neonatal unit staff—the Lullaby Project has helped families, often in high-stress environments, create approximately 4,000 lullabies in over 40 languages.

Through partnerships with city agencies such as the NYC Departments of Homeless Services (DHS), Correction (DOC), Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Education (DOE’s LYFE program), the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Health + Hospitals (H+H), and the Housing Authority (NYCHA), the Lullaby Project has reached more than 1,800 families across New York City. Furthering its commitment to promoting health and well-being, Carnegie Hall recently became the flagship cultural partner for DOHMH’s HealthyNYC initiative.

Evaluations of the program indicate that it is a source of mutual delight: parents develop self-confidence, well-being, creativity, and their capacity to be loving, sensitive, and responsive caregivers, while infants benefit from exposure to soothing vocabulary, figurative language, and elegant phrases that support development and learning. The project’s impact extends beyond participating families, as a growing library of online recordings and live-streamed performances

shares these deeply personal songs—and the diverse languages and cultures they reflect—with people everywhere.

- **Big Note, Little Note** is a 10-week music class for NYC families, offered at no cost, that offers a range of experiences for families and caregivers to engage with their babies through musical play, singing, instrument exploration, and more. The program centered around community, and supports family well-being, early childhood development, and parent-child connection.
- Regarded by DOE’s Office of Arts and Special Projects as a lead partner in music education, **Carnegie Hall’s school programs** have effectively delivered the agency’s standards for music education, providing high quality, fundamental music instruction and best practices by amplifying and celebrating the cultural richness of our city for over a decade. Our learning and engagement programs inspire the next generation of music lovers in NYC’s K-12 classrooms and support local teachers in refining their skills.
 - **Musical Explorers** connects students in grades K–2 to NYC’s rich and diverse musical community as they build fundamental music skills through listening, singing, and moving to songs from all over the world. Each season, students meet six NYC–based artists who each represent a different musical genre and cultural tradition. Teachers have access to a free curriculum, professional development, and a culminating interactive concert for their students.
 - **Link Up**—Carnegie Hall’s longest running education program—introduces the orchestra to children in grades 3-5, inviting them to sing and play an instrument in the classroom and perform with a professional orchestra from their seats at a culminating concert at Carnegie Hall. Both programs continue to expand with digital platforms that provide teachers with free online resources, including lesson plans, artist-led videos, and virtual concert experiences.
 - **Music Educators Workshop** provides on average more than 450 NYC K–12 music teachers monthly professional development each year, in a vital space for teachers to recognize their shared experiences and receive support, community, and professional growth. The program leverages teachers as catalysts to enhance the quality of instruction for almost 30,000 NYC students each year.
 - **Ensemble Connect** is a program of Carnegie Hall and The Juilliard School in partnership with DOE. Ensemble Connect places extraordinary young classical musicians for a two-year fellowship in NYC public schools. Fellows partner with DOE music teachers to bring insight, creativity, and artistry to classrooms; and create interactive performances in schools and at community sites.

Programs like these continue to be critical components of the city’s strategy to meet people directly, effectively, and safely where they are. The Council’s continued investment in these partnerships is absolutely critical to

ensure that these essential services for our city's youth and families continue. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually to discuss Carnegie Hall's programming partnerships in your district.

Carnegie Hall respectfully asks the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations support for the following requests:

- **Renewal of \$225,000 through the Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative would underwrite the next year of The B-Side**, a free intensive program for a minimum of 40 New Yorkers ages 14-22 interested in the business of music, with a focus on those from under-resourced communities. The B Side provides participants an interactive space to learn about the inner workings of the music industry. Curriculum designed and facilitated by teaching artists, guest speaker panels, and field trips guide participants through the many roles and career opportunities across the industry. Participants, experienced youth development facilitators, and guests are encouraged to co-create a learning community that supports the development of aspiring artists and future music industry leaders.
- **Renewal of \$150,000 Speaker's Initiative for Carnegie Hall's Music and Well-being programming with an increase to \$200,000**: In alignment with the Council's Mental Health Roadmap, Carnegie Hall's Lullaby Project is an evidence-informed, low-cost, safe, and scalable approach to supporting caregivers, infants, and early relational health. The Lullaby Project invites families, often in high-stress environments, to create, sing, and record their own personal lullabies. Since its inception in 2011 in response to patient care needs identified by Jacobi Medical Center's neonatal unit staff, the Lullaby Project has helped to create approximately 4,000 lullabies, in over 40 languages, and currently has 60+ Lullaby Partners across the U.S. and globe. Carnegie Hall's Well-Being Concerts combine world-class musical performances with elements of self-care and mindfulness, animated by evidence that music helps people heal and thrive. Each concert creates an immersive, nurturing space in which audiences and performers share in the soul-nourishing benefits of music, create shared experiences, and explore tools for well-being that last long after the performance.

Programs like these continue to be critical components of the city's strategy to meet people directly, effectively, and safely where they are. The Council's continued investment in these partnerships will be absolutely essential in the year ahead to ensure that these essential services for our city's youth and families continue.

We thank the Committee for their interest and investment in these programs, and we encourage the Council to continue to support this important work and other programs by our cultural colleagues across the city.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually to discuss Carnegie Hall's school and community programming partnerships in your district. Thank you for your support for and consideration of our requests, and thanks to our public partners, artists and arts organizations, teachers, stakeholders, and the talented young people involved in these programs for being a part of truly transformational changes.

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026
Stephanie Hill Wilchfort, Chair, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Stephanie Hill Wilchfort. I am the Ronay Menschel Director of the Museum of the City of New York and Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)— a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

First, I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026. Your leadership and advocacy for our **#CultureForAll** campaign in partnership with New Yorkers for Culture for Arts (NY4CA) was critical in supporting the vital role arts and culture plays in making our communities safe, accessible, and educational for New Yorkers, as well as making the city more affordable and improving quality of life for artists, cultural workers, and families.

CIG members have a deep commitment to ensuring that access to culture is affordable for all New Yorkers. Many of our organizations, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn Museum, and the Museum of the City of New York, are free to New York City residents. Our institutions are open and accessible to everyone, welcoming over four million free visits each year and providing safe, public spaces for people of all ages and all walks of life.

Each of our institutions expands its reach through partnerships with city agencies and community-based organizations to provide a host of services that complement our core missions, including field trips and teacher professional development for hundreds of thousands of public school students and educators annually. Other partnerships have included providing COVID test and vaccination sites, facilitating food distribution, implementing the IDNYC program, and serving as polling sites, among many others.

The CIG's unparalleled educational partners to New York City Public Schools and make the city a national leader in Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics—STEAM—education, training and public programs. Our institutions offer crucial programs and services tailored for older adults, neurodivergent audiences, people with disabilities, youth, educators, and families. Annually, students account for 2.5 million visits to CIGs and participate in CIG educational programs.

Our cultural sector is central to the success of our City's local economy and workforce. The cultural economy generates \$110 billion in economic activity in NYC, 13 percent of the city's

economic activity. Our institutions are major employers with 15,700 full- and part-time employees, including over 6,000 union employees. CIG members also employ approximately 6,000 contractors , including teaching artists, musicians, explainers, educators, and other professionals. Staff at cultural institutions are largely New York City residents, where wages paid to employees are spent within the surrounding communities, providing neighborhood economic benefits.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselineing this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.
- 2. Annual Increases:** This year we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
- 3. Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**
 - a. Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021 and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
 - b. Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
 - c. Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.



Testimony to City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations, Preliminary Budget Hearing

Submitted to the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations on March 20, 2026

Prepared by Melinda Wang, Research and Advocacy Manager of Dance/NYC

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC ([Dance.NYC](https://www.dance.nyc.org)), a service organization for the 6,000 individual dance artists and 1,700 dance entities in the New York City metropolitan area. We champion the dance sector by fostering a more just, equitable, and inclusive landscape where dance workers and organizations can thrive. Rooted in research, Dance/NYC engages in advocacy, regranting, and knowledge-sharing that works toward establishing dance as a valued form of cultural expression and a common good.

Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking you for your leadership and calling on you to:

- **Restore and baseline the \$30 million** that was added to the FY26 budget to support the Department of Cultural Affairs
- **Index the baseline for DCLA funding to increase with the inflation rate** to ensure stability amongst rising costs
- **Improve and reform the capital project process** to increase transparency, efficiency, and ease for cultural institutions
- **Increase the Coalition of Theaters of Color Council Initiative to \$8 million** to stabilize the 63 organizations
- **Establish a separate funding process for arts service organizations (ASOs)**, so our organizations aren't competing with the people we serve
- **Increase city support for the arts workforce** through portable benefits, healthcare coverage, and affordable arts space subsidies

The dance sector is vital to building a stronger and more livable New York City

Dance and the arts are an inextricable part of thriving community life. Dance programming takes place across theaters, community centers, schools, faith institutions, public parks, and more, with 65% of dance entities conducting programming in public space.¹ Our dance workers are deeply embedded in their communities, with 28% working in education, 23% in healthcare and wellness, and 19% in leisure and hospitality. Our larger sector buttresses the development of our students, as 900 arts and cultural organizations partnered with NYC public schools during the 2024-2025 school year.² This interconnectedness shows that cultural assets are associated with improved outcomes in health, schooling, and personal security.³ **The research is clear: funding the arts creates safer, healthier neighborhoods where students are engaged as whole people and residents can participate in a diverse neighborhood culture.**

This increased vitality is reflected in our economic impact. **Research indicates that arts and culture create the conditions for healthy economies by driving foot traffic and encouraging local spending.**⁴ **The dance industry alone contributes an estimated \$300 million⁵ annually to the city's economy.** This does not include fiscally sponsored organizations, for-profit enterprises, sole proprietorships, and individual dance workers. In addition to being the number one driver of tourism to the city, the broader arts and cultural sector generates \$143.8B in economic activity and accounts for nearly 13% of New York City's total economic output.⁶ In 2019, New York City's arts,

¹ State of NYC Dance 2023: Findings from the Dance Industry Census.

https://hub.dance.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/State-of-NYC-Dance-2023-Report-FINAL-23_12_11_ACC.pdf

² [NYC Public Schools Arts in Schools Report 2024-2025.](#)

³ The Social Wellbeing of New York City's Neighborhoods: The Contribution of Culture and The Arts.

<https://repository.upenn.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/d7531a8f-f046-497f-aa37-494486d98cf4/content>

⁴ Center for an Urban Future, Big Ideas to Help NYC Thrive in a Post-Pandemic Economy

<https://nycfuture.org/research/big-ideas-to-help-nyc-thrive>

⁵ State of NYC Dance 2016 & Workforce Demographics 2016.

<https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/State%20of%20NYC%20Dance%20and%20Workforce%20Demographics%20Online%20Version.pdf>

⁶ Office of the New York City Comptroller (2019). *The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City.* <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>

entertainment, and recreation sector employed 93,500 people in 6,250 establishments, amounting to \$7.4 billion in wages.⁷

Dance workers and organizations can't make ends meet

Despite our sector's outsized social and economic impact, our workers and organizations are struggling. Based on Dance/NYC's 2023 report,¹ **40% of dance organizations classify their financial health as weak or very weak. More than half of them have no reserves, meaning even modest funding fluctuations threaten to shut down organizations. On average, dance workers earn about 15% below NYC's living wage, while dancers and choreographers earn about \$23,000.** This makes living in our city entirely unaffordable for our workers—the median asking rent in 2023 was 82% more than the average dancer's monthly pre-tax income from dance.⁸ Nearly a quarter of dance workers have no savings, leaving them vulnerable to the sector's economic fluctuations. Despite this, 64% of producing dance workers fund their work out of pocket, reflecting the scarcity of external funding for dance.

This affordability crisis has very real impacts not just on an individual level but also on the dance ecosystem's ability to survive and thrive overall. **Since before the pandemic, the city has lost 18.8% of its dancers. 1 in 4 arts organizations in lower-income zip codes lost their only physical space** during the same period. The cumulative effects of the sustained underresourcing of our sector are clear: dance is being literally erased from the map of New York City.

Sustained, holistic support for dance workers & organizations is key

By baselining last year's funding levels and indexing the baseline to inflation, we can begin building sustainability for the sector and prevent the culture from being erased by rising costs. But intervening in the affordability crisis in our sector requires more: **it means treating dance workers as service providers and necessary workers, but also as valued constituents with support needs of their own. Strengthening partnerships with arts service organizations is the first move in this process.**

⁷ Office of the New York State Comptroller (2021). *Arts, Entertainment and Recreation in New York City Recent Trends and Impact of COVID-19*. <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/osdc/arts-entertainment-and-recreation-new-york-city-recent-trends-and-impact-covid-19>

⁸ Office of the New York City Comptroller (2024). *Spotlight: New York City's Rental Housing Market*. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/spotlight-new-york-citys-rental-housing-market/>

Arts service organizations, or **ASOs**, are **vital lifelines for the 326,000 New Yorkers who work in the creative sector**. We provide the vital, yet invisible infrastructure that holds the ecosystem together, providing funding, resources, and relationships that sustain workers and small organizations across all stages of their careers. We bridge the gap between complex funding ecosystems and the working-class vogue artist creating spaces of queer belonging, or the immigrant auntie keeping folk dance traditions alive between hospital shifts.

Yet, the current funding ecosystem leaves ASOs struggling, forced to do more with declining resources. The highly responsive yet invisible nature of our work means that project-based funding models designed for presenting organizations don't work for us. We are asked to compete for the same pool of funding as the people & organizations we serve, undercutting the stability of the ecosystem.

City government must begin to view arts service organizations as real partners. **This begins with a separate funding process for ASOs so we can serve, not compete.** This funding process must include general operating support so we can respond to artists' needs in the moment rather than on a grant timeline. Our role as intermediaries, connectors, and stewards of the precarious arts workforce must be truly recognized and accounted for in the funding process.

More than that, we need the city to truly meet us in supporting our arts workers. The 37% of dance workers without health insurance need real, sustainable options, like **portable benefits models supported by the city**. They need support for **subsidized rehearsal spaces**, so that dancers making an average of \$22/hour don't have to pay the \$70 hourly market rate.¹ And we need stable, growing funding so that employers can pay a living wage, making it so that dance workers can stay, work, play, and thrive in New York City.

Once again, we call on the city government to:

- **Restore and baseline the \$30 million** that was added to the FY26 budget to support the Department of Cultural Affairs

- **Index the baseline for DCLA funding to increase with the inflation rate** to ensure stability amongst rising costs
- **Improve and reform the capital project process** to increase transparency, efficiency, and ease for cultural institutions
- **Increase the Coalition of Theaters of Color Council Initiative to \$8 million** to stabilize the 63 organizations
- **Establish a separate funding process for arts service organizations (ASOs)**, so our organizations aren't competing with the people we serve
- **Increase city support for the arts workforce** through portable benefits, healthcare coverage, and affordable arts space subsidies

If we want all New Yorkers to continue to experience the healing, community-generating impact of dance and the arts, we must support the workforce behind that impact. Your investment and partnership is critical.



**Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Relations
Presented by Nicole Touzien on March 18, 2026**

Good afternoon Chair Williams and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony here today. My name is Nicole Touzien and I am the Executive Director of Dancewave.

Dancewave is a 30-year old dance education organization with a community center in Brooklyn and service spanning all five boroughs. Our programs foster a safe and welcoming environment for creative expression, facilitate multicultural exchange that fosters deep community building, open doors for careers in the arts, and promote physical, mental and social wellbeing that contributes to the improved health and vibrancy of our City.

Thanks, in part, to this committee's focused advocacy and the city's investment, Dancewave is empowered to provide no- and low-cost programming to over 6,000 individuals of all ages and backgrounds each year. With City funding, we are able to ensure that everyone who wants to participate in our programs, can. Simply put, this funding transforms lives.

As we look ahead to the fiscal year 2027 budget, I join my colleagues in the following requests:

1. Restore and baseline last year's \$30M addition to the culture budget
2. Index the baseline so that it automatically increases with inflation, allowing us to provide living wages for cultural workers
3. Streamline the capital funding process for culture for greater ease and efficiency, holding a hearing so that Council Members understand the issues
4. Increase funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color Initiative to \$8M to reflect the now 63 participating organizations facing rising costs of operations

Baselining \$30M in cultural funding is critical for sustaining our impact. Volatile funding levels impede staffing, program development, and direct service at small community-based organizations like Dancewave where City funding plays an outsized role. Like many other organizations represented here today, Dancewave faces no shortage of challenges. The City's investment in our work should not be one of them.

Thank you,

Nicole Touzien
Executive Director
Dancewave

Kathleen Collins
Kips Bay
New York, New York 10010
Cell phone & Text number [REDACTED]
Email address: [REDACTED]

March 16, 2026

Council Member Nantasha M. Williams
Chair
New York City Council Committee On Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Relations

Sent Online at <https://council.nyc.gov/testify/>

Emailed to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Re: T2026-1351 New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Dear Chair Williams;

My name is Kathleen Collins. I am a native New Yorker who is a congenital quadruple amputee who uses a wheelchair. I am on the board of Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (also known as Disabled In Action or DIA).²

Disabled In Action is a 501(c)(3) grassroots civil rights organization run by and for people with disabilities. Disabled In Action's mission is to eliminate discrimination for people with all kinds of disabilities.

Libraries are important to everyone, but they are especially vital for New Yorkers with disabilities. We are living in a time where we are experiencing a deluge of information and data. Thus, it is essential that everyone—including people with disabilities—has equal access to that knowledge.

The Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library is a lifeline for many New Yorkers who are blind, visually impaired, or have reading disabilities. It provides access to books, technology, and information that would otherwise be out of reach.

Personally, I have benefited greatly from being able to read books from the three New York City public library systems. That access has been a wonderful and enriching experience for me. It shows what is possible when our libraries are accessible, in person and online, and are well supported.

However, more needs to be done. New York City must increase funding for all our public libraries, and especially for the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library. Increased funding will help expand accessible materials, improve assistive technology, and ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in the information age.

I strongly believe in the statement, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” When we invest in education and access to knowledge for people with disabilities, we invest in the future of our city.

History shows that people with disabilities have changed the world—individuals such as Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Senator Bob Dole, Senator Tammy Duckworth, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The next great scientist, artist, or leader could be a New Yorker with a disability who simply needs access to knowledge.

If New York City truly believes in opportunity for all, then we must invest in accessible libraries—because the cost of lost potential is far greater than the cost of funding them.

Finally, access to information is a civil right. When people with disabilities are denied equal access to books, technology, and knowledge, they are effectively shut out of education, employment, civic participation, and

culture. In the digital age, the divide between those who can access information and those who cannot grows wider every day. By strengthening funding for the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library, the City Council can affirm that New York City remains committed to equity, inclusion, and the fundamental principle that knowledge must be accessible to everyone.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments.

Very truly yours,

Kathleen Collins
New York City Council District 2



**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Wednesday, March 18, 2026
El Museo del Barrio
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of arts and culture across New York City.

My name is Cynthia Carrión, and I am the Director of Government and Community Affairs at El Museo del Barrio, a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group.

I would also like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026. Your leadership affirms that culture is not a luxury in New York City—it is an essential infrastructure for our communities.

Founded in 1969 by Puerto Rican parents, educators, artists, and activists during the Civil Rights era, El Museo del Barrio was created to demand cultural representation and educational equity for our communities. More than fifty years later, El Museo remains deeply rooted in East Harlem — El Barrio — serving as a cultural home for Latine New Yorkers.

While we welcome visitors from across the country and around the world, our deepest responsibility is to the communities that surround us. Families, youth, artists, and elders from East Harlem and throughout New York City come to El Museo to participate in exhibitions, public programs, and cultural celebrations that reflect their histories, languages, and traditions.

Programs like our Uptown Bounce, Super Sábado, Día de los Muertos, and our Three Kings Day celebration bring thousands of New Yorkers together each year to celebrate Latine art, music, and cultural traditions. Our community concerts and performances in our 570-seat theatre create space for artists and neighbors to gather, perform, and share culture together.

Institutions like El Museo contribute directly to the health, equity, and economic vitality of our neighborhoods, supporting artists and educators, creating welcoming spaces for immigrant and multilingual communities, and attracting visitors who support nearby small businesses. Initiatives like CASA and SU-CASA allow us—and community-based organizations across the city—to deepen our roots and impact in the communities we serve.

212-831-7272
info@elmuseo.org

1230 Fifth Avenue
at 104th Street
New York, NY, 10029



We are proud to stand alongside the many community-based cultural organizations across our city that ensure the arts remain accessible, representative, and rooted in our neighborhoods.

As a member of the Cultural Institutions Group, we ask the Council to:

- Restore and baseline the \$30 million added in the FY26 DCLA budget
- Consider annual cost adjustments to support the cultural workforce
- Improve the capital project process so institutions can maintain the public cultural spaces New Yorkers rely on

Cultural institutions are more than destinations — they are essential community anchors that advance cultural equity, strengthen neighborhoods, and ensure that all New Yorkers see themselves in the cultural life of this city.

At El Museo del Barrio, we see every day how Latine art and culture strengthen New York City, connect generations, and ensure our communities remain visible and valued.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cynthia Carrion".

Cynthia Carrion
Director of Government and Community Affairs
El Museo del Barrio

212-831-7272

Info@elmuseo.org

1230 Fifth Avenue
at 104th Street
New York, NY, 10029



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**Written Testimony of EMERGE125 (E125)
Submitted by Juliane Slater, Executive Director**

**To: NYC Council Cultural Affairs and Education Committees
Re: FY27 Preliminary Budget – Arts & Arts Education Funding**

March 20, 2026

Dear Council Members,

My name is Juliane Slater, and I am the Executive Director of EMERGE125 (E125). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

EMERGE125 (E125) is a Black female-led modern dance company based in Harlem, dedicated to using dance as a tool for civic engagement, equity, and youth education. Through our performances, workshops, and community programs, we aim to make dance accessible, meaningful, and transformative for all New Yorkers.

Artistically, EMERGE125 creates and presents powerful contemporary dance works that tour nationally and internationally while remaining deeply rooted in Harlem. We believe that high-quality dance should be accessible to all audiences, not just those who can afford high ticket prices. Through subsidized ticketing, community partnerships, and free performances, we work to ensure that New Yorkers from all backgrounds can experience world-class dance in their own communities.

Each year, EMERGE125 engages hundreds of youth and families in Harlem and across the city through our tuition-free and low-cost education programs. These programs not only provide professional-quality dance training but also teach teamwork, discipline, self-expression, and cultural literacy. In addition, our performances and community partnerships amplify diverse voices, celebrate Black cultural leadership, and foster civic dialogue around equity and social justice.

City investment in arts and culture makes our work possible. Public funding enables organizations like EMERGE125 to offer free and subsidized performances, scholarships, and community-centered education programs that reduce financial and cultural barriers to participation. In FY25, E125 served over 5,300 students through our workshops and educational programming in public schools, private schools, and afterschool programs.

EMERGE125 also sustains a strong training-to-professional pipeline, with 44% of our current company dancers first participating in our Summer Intensive. To expand access to this opportunity, we provide two scholarships each year for our New York City Summer Workshop, helping emerging dancers connect to professional opportunities within the city's cultural ecosystem.

City funding for arts and culture is essential to sustain this work. Support from the Department of Cultural Affairs and arts education initiatives enables us to reach more young people, retain highly skilled teaching artists, and expand programs to underserved communities. Reductions in funding would directly limit opportunities for youth engagement, cultural enrichment, and workforce development in the arts sector.

Our Artistic Director Tiffany Rea-Fisher said it best:

"Everyone that is a part of EMERGE125 in some way, shape, or form, was a young person that saw an artist and was like, yes. There was something about that that spoke to them, that allowed them to dedicate their lives to this. The arts are deeply important and inform who we are. And if we want the world to change, to see positive change, if we want to see any type of movement in that direction, we need to invite and make accessible art to this next generation." - Tiffany Rea-Fisher, EMERGE125 Artistic Director.

We respectfully urge the City Council to **baseline a \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)** and continue prioritizing funding for arts and arts education in the FY27 budget. These investments are not luxuries—they are critical to the creative, educational, and social fabric of New York City.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of arts and culture in our city.

Sincerely,


Juliane Slater
Executive Director
EMERGE125

TESTIMONY - Wednesday, March 18, 2026
City Council Hearing - Arts & Culture
Ryan Gilliam, Executive Director, Fourth Arts Block (FABnyc)
ryan@fabnyc.org

Good afternoon. I'm Ryan Gilliam (she/her), Executive Director of FABnyc—a team of artists and organizers working to preserve, strengthen, and grow the cultural vibrancy of the Lower East Side.

For 25 years, FABnyc has partnered with our community, bringing artists and arts strategies to help address displacement, affordable housing, equitable economic development, public space stewardship, public safety, racial equity, and cultural preservation. We are an embedded part of the civic infrastructure of our neighborhood.

I'm here to support investment in DCLA —and also to make the case that the cultural sector be seen as a professional services partner who can be contracted to assist the City in delivering on its goals for equity, community engagement, and responsive government.

Although NYC currently contracts with the arts and culture sectors through a few agencies, there are obstacles in the procurement systems that make it challenging for agencies to seek out arts and culture partners or for artists and small cultural organizations to participate.

DCLA's PAIR artist residency program provides one model, and I support its expansion. But PAIR residencies can take six months to scope and are among the most complex ways artists engage with government—the program isn't suited to shorter, more immediate projects.

One thing we can learn from PAIR projects is how many agencies use that residency to develop new and creative ways to engage communities —particularly those historically underserved. That is core infrastructure work, and it is exactly what organizations like mine do at a neighborhood level - often using community artmaking, storytelling, and engagement in local cultural traditions.

I believe we could open up new opportunities to employ artists and advance city agendas by building on a partnership model between agencies, intermediary cultural organizations like FAB, and artists.

To that end, I recommend that the Council convene a roundtable with DCLA and community focused organizations like mine. This working group would:

- Name the barriers artists and cultural organizations face in securing city contracts
- Define the role intermediary organizations could play in mitigating those barriers
- Identify agencies interested and ready to contract for creative services
- Establish a clear pathway for agencies to move forward with procuring services from the arts and culture sector

Thank you.

Subject: Testimony on Cultural Equity, Youth Development, and the Role of Dance in Community Healing

**Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs
Submitted by Flex Dance Program**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the role of arts and culture in advancing equity and supporting young people across New York City. Flex Dance Program (FDP) is a Brooklyn-based nonprofit that works with justice-involved youth, youth in foster care, and young people from underserved communities through dance, mentorship, and creative expression.

We are currently facing a critical moment for both youth mental health and cultural equity. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have experienced significant increases in anxiety, depression, and social isolation, while access to arts programming—especially culturally relevant forms rooted in their communities—has not kept pace with need.

At the same time, inequities persist within the dance and performing arts field. Street dance forms such as Flex, which originated in Brooklyn’s Caribbean communities, remain underrepresented and under-resourced despite their cultural significance and global influence. Many talented young artists lack access to training, performance opportunities, and pathways into sustainable creative careers.

Flex Dance Program works to address both challenges simultaneously—using dance as a tool for healing while advancing equity in the arts. Our teaching artists serve as credible messenger mentors: individuals with lived experience who reflect the communities we serve and are uniquely positioned to build trust with young people. Through this model, youth are not only learning dance—they are developing confidence, discipline, and a sense of belonging.

Dance offers a powerful, non-verbal outlet for young people to process emotions and express their identities. Research shows that movement-based practices like dance can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression while improving emotional regulation and social connection. In our programs, youth channel their experiences into creative expression, transforming trauma into artistry.

Importantly, we center youth leadership in our work. Through youth advisory boards and peer mentorship opportunities, young people help shape programming, lead workshops, and participate in performances that elevate their voices and stories. This approach ensures that arts programming is not only

accessible but also responsive and empowering.

We urge the Committee to prioritize:

- Investment in culturally relevant dance and performance programs rooted in NYC communities
- Greater equity in funding for street and community-based art forms
- Support for credible messenger teaching artists as both cultural workers and mentors
- Expanded arts programming in schools, detention centers, and foster care settings
- Youth leadership initiatives that position young artists as creators and decision-makers

Arts are not a luxury—they are essential infrastructure for healthy communities. When we invest in culturally grounded programs like Flex Dance, we are investing in both the well-being of our youth and the preservation of New York City’s cultural identity.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with the City to expand access to equitable arts programming and ensure that all young people have the opportunity to express themselves, heal, and thrive.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,

Flex Dance Program

Email: Flex@flexdanceprogram.org

Website: www.flexdanceprogram.org

Instagram: @flexin_flexout

Bronx Independent Living Services • Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled • Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York • Civics League for Disability Rights • Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York • Downstate New York ADAPT • Greater New York Council of the Blind of the American Council of the Blind of New York State • Harlem Independent Living Center • Metropolitan Asian Deaf Association • National Federation of the Blind of New York, Vanguard Chapter of Greater New York • New York DeafBlind Advocates • One Heart, One Vision • Self-Initiated Living Options, Inc. • Staten Island Center for Independent Living

March 20, 2026

Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha M. Williams
Chair

New York City Council Committee On Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Relations

Sent Online at <https://council.nyc.gov/testify/>
Emailed to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Re: T2026-1351 New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams:

The undersigned disability organizations submit this testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations. The Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library has a vital mission: to provide free, accessible reading materials and technology to people in New York City and Long Island who are blind, visually impaired, or have reading disabilities. Operating under the motto of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, "That All May Read," the library provides braille books, talking books, mail delivery service, and assistive technology training. These services ensure that thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities, who range in age from toddlers to senior citizens from various diverse backgrounds, can access literature, information, and educational resources that many others take for granted.

However, there are still important gaps in accessibility. Currently, the available resources do not include services and programs specifically designed for New Yorkers whose first language—and in many cases their only language—is American Sign Language (ASL), as well as DeafBlind New Yorkers need for Tactile ASL/ProTactile services. Without intentional inclusion of those with sensory and communication disabilities, such as those who are blind, deaf, deafblind or have a visual and/or, hearing disability, many talented New Yorkers will remain excluded from information, services, programs, and

activities that others can access easily. True accessibility must recognize that disability communities are diverse and that language and full communication access is essential for equal participation in education, employment, civic life, and culture.

We are living in the 21st-century Information Age, defined by a rapid shift toward an economy centered on information technology, connectivity, and data. The rise of the internet, social media, artificial intelligence, and mobile computing has made information instantly available and transformed communication, commerce, and everyday life. This includes ensuring that digital and technological access is meaningfully available to individuals who rely on braille, tactile communication, ASL, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), and other non-visual or non-auditory formats, and that they have the literacy skills necessary to fully utilize these tools.

In this environment, access to information is not a luxury—it is a necessity, especially to be employed. It is therefore critical that New Yorkers with disabilities have equal access to knowledge, data, and digital resources. Libraries play a central role in ensuring that this access is available to everyone, regardless of income, disability, or background.

Of course, all our public libraries deserve and require increased funding. However, funding for the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library has a particularly profound impact. For many New Yorkers with disabilities, this library represents the difference between access to knowledge and living in an informational desert.

Therefore, we urge the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations to increase funding dedicated to the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library so it can expand accessible services for New Yorkers with disabilities. This funding should support the development of ASL and Tactile ASL/ProTactile accessible programs and resources, the expansion of digital and assistive technology training and braille literacy, modernization of accessible formats and online services, and increased outreach to disability communities across the five boroughs, Long Island and lower New York State. Investment in these areas will help ensure that New Yorkers who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, deafblind, or who have other reading disabilities, such as the inability to hold or turn pages in a physical book or unable to visit a library due to being immune compromised or due to lack of transportation, are not left behind in the digital age.

Access to library materials for all New Yorkers with disabilities is vital and will have a compounding effect, especially for New Yorkers with sensory and/or communication disabilities. This is not only a matter of equity—it is also an investment in New York City’s economic future. When individuals have access to accessible books, technology, data, information and training, it leads to improved literacy, greater educational attainment, and increased employability. In turn, this expands workforce participation, reduces reliance on public benefits, and generates greater tax revenue for the City. Accessibility creates opportunity, and opportunity strengthens our economy and City.

Now more than ever, increased funding for the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library is essential. Investing in New Yorkers is our best investment. Strengthening this institution will ensure that New Yorkers with disabilities have equal opportunities to learn, communicate, and fully participate in every aspect of life in New York City.

If you would like additional information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned organizations.

Thank you for your continued work on behalf of all of us.

Sincerely,

Bronx Independent Living Services

Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled

Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York

Civics League for Disability Rights

Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York

Downstate New York ADAPT

Greater New York Council of the Blind of

American Council of the Blind of New York State

Harlem Independent Living Center

Metropolitan Asian Deaf Association

National Federation of the Blind of New York,

Vanguard Chapter of Greater New York

New York DeafBlind Advocates

One Heart, One Vision

Self-Initiated Living Options, Inc.

Staten Island Center for Independent Living

*** Bronx Independent Living Services**

Bronx Independent Living Services' (BILS), a non-profit, community-based organization dedicated to empowering all people with disabilities, philosophy is based on the belief that people with disabilities can and should make their own decisions and take control of the issues that affect their lives. From helping to devise simple, practical aids for everyday living to assistance in negotiating the maze of bureaucracy, BILS strives to make individuals aware of the range of opportunities and programs available to them and to which they are entitled. Since BILS's beginning in 1983, BILS has assisted people with disabilities by demonstrating ways of breaking down barriers.

Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled

The Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled (BCID), founded in 1956, became an independent living center in 1981. We are disability-led and provide free services to and advocate for the civil rights of disabled people in Brooklyn and beyond.

Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York

As an Independent Living Center, the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) has provided critical services to people with disabilities in New York City since its founding in 1978. By providing services that address the social determinants of physical health, mental health, education, employment, housing, and transportation, as well as providing support for the development of independent living skills, CIDNY helps people with disabilities navigate the ever-changing service system, and enables them to live independent, fully integrated lives in the community.

Civics League for Disability Rights

The Civics League for Disability Rights is a group for New Yorkers with disabilities and their friends who advocate for themselves and their communities and are constantly educating themselves to do so more effectively.

Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York

Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York (DIA) is a fifty-six (56) year old, 501(c) (3), grassroots, civil rights organization run by and for people with disabilities. DIA's mission is to eliminate discrimination for people with all kinds of disabilities.

Downstate New York ADAPT

Downstate New York ADAPT (DNY ADAPT), a chapter of National ADAPT, national grassroots, non-hierarchical community of people with all types of disabilities advocating for the civil rights of people with disabilities, including, but not limited to, the right to live and fully participate in the larger community. Downstate New York ADAPT covers the five counties in New York City, the two counties on Long Island as well as Westchester, Dutchess, Orange, Rockland, Putnam, Ulster and Sullivan counties in New York State.

Greater New York Council of the Blind, a chapter of the American Council of the Blind of New York State

The Greater New York Council of the Blind (GNYCB) is a chapter of the American Council of the Blind of New York State (ACBNY) which is a nationwide member - driven advocacy organization that strives to increase the security, independence, economic opportunity, and quality of life for people who are blind and experiencing vision loss.

Harlem Independent Living Center

The Harlem Independent Living Center (HILC), incorporated on May 31st, 1990, to address the lack of access to independent living services by people with disabilities in Harlem and surrounding areas, is a disability-focused organization that advocates for community change and empowers people to be independent. Harlem Independent Living Center's objective is to provide an array of independent living services to persons with disabilities to increase their ability to function independently within their community. The Center is a community-based, non-residential, non-medical, consumer-controlled organization that provides a "peer" approach to services, i.e., a place where people with disabilities frequently assist their peers.

Metropolitan Asian Deaf Association

The Metropolitan Asian Deaf Association (MADA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, founded in 2002, is an advocacy organization which works to improve the lives of Deaf Asian New York City residents by increasing and improving their self-awareness and self-esteem as well as by advocating for meaningful systemic changes to improve the lives of Deaf Asian New Yorkers in New York City.

National Federation of the Blind of New York, Vanguard Chapter of Greater New York

The National Federation of the Blind of New York's Vanguard Chapter of Greater New York believes in the full capacity of blind people and believes that blind people have the power, influence, diversity, and determination to help transform dreams into reality.

New York DeafBlind Advocates

New York DeafBlind Advocates is a group of New Yorkers living with deaf blindness seeking the creation of a funded statewide co-navigator program, and promotes greater awareness of DeafBlind concerns, issues and our culture.

One Heart, One Vision

One Heart, One Vision is a 501(c) (3), grassroots, nonprofit, charitable organization that provides services to disabled and blind women in underserved communities and is engaged in advocacy.

Self-Initiated Living Options, Inc.

Self-Initiated Living Options, Inc. (SILO) is chartered by the New York State Legislature and contracted by NYSED, ACCES-VR, ILC Department to provide independent living services through-out the Long Island Region. SILO partners with the New York State Department of Health, New York State Office for the Aging, New York Association for Independent Living and over 300 Human Service agencies and private vendors on Long Island to ensure a comprehensive set of services for our participants and clients.

Staten Island Center for Independent Living

Staten Island Center for Independent Living's (SICIL) mission is to provide individuals with disabilities with the information, life skills training, and facilitative assistance which will result in independence and integration in their own community. SICIL is committed to providing the support, information, and resources necessary for people with disabilities to reach their full potential.



Hello, my name is Dylan Ward and I serve as Legal Program Director for the Freelancers Union, which is the largest and oldest union for freelancers in the nation. One of our biggest achievements include the passage of Freelance Isn't Free laws in New York City in 2017, and later statewide in 2024 I spend a great deal of time working closely in partnership with the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) on issues affecting independent workers across the city. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the committee.

In my role, I work directly with hundreds of independent workers across New York City navigating wage theft, misclassification, unsafe working conditions, and retaliation. In 2025 alone, the Freelancers Union engaged with 368 freelancer complaints spanning nonpayment, delayed payment, contract manipulation, and other violations of worker protections.

A critical part of our work is directing freelancers to file complaints under the Freelance Isn't Free Act (FIFA) with the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. This law—and DCWP's enforcement of it—has become one of the most powerful tools freelancers have to secure payment and accountability.

Through written demand letters and the DCWP process, we resolved 104 freelancer complaints in 2025. In this work, DCWP was instrumental in providing both the legal legitimacy that motivated bad acting hiring parties to come to the table and rectify their abuses, and if necessary, providing a rebuttable presumption that freelancers could take to court. Together, we identified nearly \$2 million in unpaid wages—but recovered just over \$200,000. This gap underscores both the scale of wage theft in the freelance economy and the urgent need for stronger enforcement capacity.

In 2026, we have been excited to take our joint efforts a step further. Thanks to the keen interest of DCWP leadership under Commissioner Sam Levine, Litigation Director, Emily Hoffman and Senior Staff Counsel, Emily Whalen – we are actively pursuing enforcement through multiple high-impact collection action cases involving dozens of unpaid freelancers owed hundreds of thousands of dollars, and other wide scale pattern-and-practice violations of FIFA.

For example, two freelance journalists recently came to us after completing extensive reporting for a national publication—only to be ignored for months without payment. After filing a FIFA complaint with DCWP, the publication responded within a day and entered negotiations. This is exactly what effective enforcement looks like: immediate leverage, accountability, and a pathway to justice.

But stories like this also highlight the broader need. For every case resolved, many more freelancers remain unpaid, under-resourced, or unaware of their rights.

To build on the success of the Freelance Isn't Free Act, we urge the Council to increase funding for DCWP's enforcement efforts. This includes expanding staff capacity, strengthening outreach and education for freelancers, and investing in high-impact litigation strategies that can address systemic violations across industries.

New York has been a national leader in protecting independent workers. With the right investment, we can continue to set the standard for what a fair and modern labor market looks like.



Dylan Ward
Legal Program Director
Freelancers Union
241 37th Street, Suite A326, Brooklyn, New York, 11232



**Written Testimony: Oversight – Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Relations, Wednesday, March 18, 2026
Hon. Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams**

Thank you to Deputy Speaker Williams and the City Council for holding these important hearings. My name is Alan van Capelle, and I am proud to be the Executive Director of Friends of the High Line, the nonprofit organization responsible for the High Line's maintenance and operation. The High Line has always been more than a public park, and there are few other places in the city where everyone can be surrounded by museum-quality art, botanical gardens, and performance space, regardless of their economic means.

The High Line welcomes over 6 million annual visitors, but our deepest impact is felt locally, and our greatest responsibility is to the people who rely on the High Line as green space, to freely experience art in new and unexpected ways, for employment and education opportunities, and more. I am raising my voice to join the chorus asking the city to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA. Baselineing this funding is critical to sustaining equitable access to the arts and jobs in the cultural sector, including fair pay for artists.

It is certainly central to the High Line's work: High Line Art removes barriers to access and inclusion—from the costs of creating and experiencing art to curatorial practices that limit opportunities for audiences and artists alike—to commission projects from overlooked or underexposed artists, reaching an audience that is far more diverse than a traditional museum or gallery audience. We disrupt the notion of the starving artist by offering competitive artist fees to participating artists, and pay for all production costs for commissions. Artists retain full rights and ownership of their work, allowing them to sell, exhibit, or donate the work as they see fit—in addition to the artist's personal economic benefit, the commissioned artwork's later life further contributes to the city's cultural economy.

As the affordability crisis only deepens it is more urgent than ever to elevate the work of artists—whether they are emerging, mid-career, or established—whose work deserves a broader audience and new attention. We prioritize working with artists from a diverse range of backgrounds, and further prioritize a balance of artists who have previously created public art and those who have not yet realized a public commission. Recent commissions—such as Faheem Majeed's *Freedom's Stand*, an exploration of the importance of community-generated news named after the first Black-owned and operated newspaper in New York City; Kapwani Kiwanga's *On Growth*, which drew on the colonial histories of institutional and

commercial botanic nurseries, and Britta Marakatt-Labba's *Urmodern*, an invitation to critical dialogues about indigenous rights and feminism—have addressed deeply resonant themes, spurring visitation and discourse. Of course, art can also be fun, and events like last year's Pigeon Fest brought people together for a joyous, irreverent celebration of Iván Argote's *Dinosaur*. By presenting diverse artists and a variety of works in a democratic—and free—venue, High Line Art also promotes cultural access; historically, New Yorkers cite cost and (in many iterations, in many studies) the idea that art and cultural opportunities are “not for someone like me” as the primary barriers to engaging with arts and culture.

Moments of connection, joy, and belonging are an opportunity to heal, and engaging in dialogue can be an act of activism in support of art, artists, and New York's people and culture. It is critical that the High Line, and all cultural organizations, receive adequate funding, and that these opportunities are available to everyone.

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Régine M. Roumain, and I am the Executive Director of Haiti Cultural Exchange, Inc., a member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color. We are the only organization in New York City with a mission focused on presenting the arts and culture of Haiti and its Diaspora and operate out of a performance space/gallery in the Brooklyn Cultural District.

I am here to urge the Council to increase the **Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color like us across New York City. The economic environment remains challenging for small organizations across the city, including our own. Our support from CTC has enabled us to reach expanded audiences and provide our constituents with cultural program that is otherwise hard to access in New York.

This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

CTC funding has helped us support more than 30 artists a year with presentations that reach nearly 4,000 constituents annually, many from neighborhoods in central Brooklyn that are underserved by arts and cultural organizations.

We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to **\$8 million in FY2027**.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

Régine M. Roumain

Executive Director

Haiti Cultural Exchange

35 Lafayette Ave

Brooklyn, NY 11217



March 18, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Winston Estevez, Executive Artistic Director of IATI Theater, a Latino-led performing arts organization in New York City, founded in 1968. IATI Theater develops and presents multilingual, interdisciplinary work while supporting emerging and established artists and engaging diverse communities across the city.

I am writing to urge the Council to increase the Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color across New York City. At a time when many organizations are facing reductions in other funding sources, CTC funding remains essential to sustaining artists, cultural workers, and community programming.

“This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.”

For IATI Theater, CTC funding has been essential in sustaining our artistic and community-based work. In 2025 alone, we supported over 700 artists through performances, workshops, and development programs.

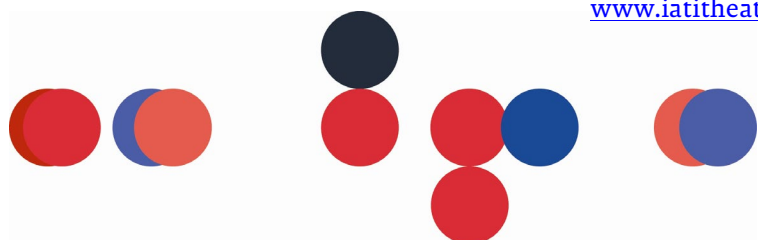
We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027 and restore flexibility so organizations can continue to stabilize operations and serve communities across New York City.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Winston Estevez
Executive Artistic Director

IATI Theater:
64 East 4th Street,
2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003

(212) 505-6757
winston@iatitheater.org
www.iatitheater.org





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RE: Written testimony - March 18, 2026 - New York City Council Hearing – Preliminary Budget - Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup

Founder/Director

Moira North

Executive Director

Jirina Ribbens

Chair

William J Candee IV

Vice Chair

Betty Wasserman

President

Moira North

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Lisa Renda

Dear Chairperson Williams, representatives of our cultural sector and staff:

My name is Jirina Ribbens, and I am the Executive Director of Ice Theatre of New York®, the City's one and only ice dance company.

Since our founding in 1984 by Moira North, our mission is to create dance on ice as an art form through our professional dance company, partnerships with choreographers, and public performances and classes for people of all ages.

Dance contributes about 300 million to the city’s economy — not including for-profits + individuals, enlivening public areas and digital spaces, engaging millions of people each year,

The creative industry is a major economic driver for NYC generating thousands of jobs and contributing as much as 13% to the city’s total economic output or GDP

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Social impact of culture and the arts include improved outcomes in mental health, education, youth involvement in the criminal justice system, safety, and other dimensions of social well-being of a community.

Every year Ice Theatre of New York® presents over 30 performances to over 12,000 viewers and introduces 1,500 NYC public school children to skating and dancing on ice, all around the City.

Our sector is in crises, and we deserve more public support. Particularly because support has decreased in the last 10 years and even then, it was only .25% of the budget.

We are asking to be restored to the .25%, but I think that ideally our City, which depends so much on the cultural sector for its economic output (\$110 billion) and for attracting visitors, should at least put 1% of the budget towards the non-profit arts sector.

We ask for more funding, easier and more timely processes, and some stability in the funding stream, so we can adequately plan and do not live in fear of not getting funded for programming we already implemented.

ITNY was among the lucky ones to receive funding from the DCLA for FY26, and we are grateful. However, we should not have to live in fear every year of losing the City’s support.

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Page two – Ice Theatre of New York®
Budget hearing March 18, 2026

Watching ITNY's ice dance performances fills our audiences with beauty and joy, and strengthens their mental health. We connect people across differences; strengthen communities; drive traffic to local businesses and improve public safety in the parks where we perform. We enrich the education of the participants in our outreach programs and introduce them to a whole new sports industry and the performing arts. We are the organizations that inspire and train and ultimately provide the talent for the commercial sector.

Equity must be at the center of all budget allocations by the City. The City government must invest back its fair share in the Arts and Culture sector that more equitably reflects the sector's role in the City's economy and impact on the quality of life of all New Yorkers.

I thank you for your attention and for your support in the budget negotiations.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jirina Ribbens', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jirina Ribbens,
Executive Director

Testimony in Support of Increasing the Coalition of Theatres of Color Initiative to \$8 Million in FY2027

Sandie Luna, Executive Director • ID Studio Theater • South Bronx, NY

Good afternoon, Madam Chair Williams and Members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is **Sandie Luna**, and I am the Executive Director of **ID Studio Theater** — a South Bronx theater company making original Spanish-language and bilingual theater from within our Latine immigrant community. Founded over 25 years ago, we have called the South Bronx home for more than a decade. Our award-winning work has traveled from here to Bogotá, to Ciudad Juárez, to Dakar. Along with the members of this panel, I testify as a member of the **Coalition of Theatres of Color** — a network of organizations rooted in and accountable to communities of color across New York City — and the **Cultural Equity Coalition of New York**, together representing more than 3,300 arts organizations and over one million New Yorkers.

Our CTC grant last year supported six original productions and reached **4,000 people** directly. It made possible **Cuarto Oscuro** — co-produced with the Clemente Center — where performers were hired directly from the Randall's Island migrant shelter. No auditions. No bureaucratic barriers. We went to where our newest neighbors were, worked with their stories, their images, their voices — creating a space that welcomed them as artists, and invited the rest of us to see them as more than what they have endured. This is the kind of work our organizations make possible every day — work that strengthens cultural identity, builds connection across communities, and contributes to the civic life of this city. **CTC funding unlocks work like this. These are dollars that multiply — in measurable and immeasurable ways.**

The Coalition of Theatres of Color was **among the first cultural initiatives this Council ever created**. It paved the way for every initiative that followed. Those programs have grown. CTC has not — **no increase since 2021**.

We are asking this Council to **increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027** and to **restore flexibility for general operating support**. General operating support allows organizations like ours to respond to our communities in real time — to hire locally, to follow our neighbors to where they are, to take creative risks that program-restricted funding cannot accommodate. It is the difference between an organization that survives and one that can lead.

The communities this coalition serves are resilient — but they are on the front lines of this political moment. The capacity to support them — the trust, the relationships — takes years to build. **We are asking you to protect it**. Honor the initiative this Council created. The investment this work deserves is overdue.

Thank you,

Sandie Luna A. -

Sandie Luna

Executive Director, ID Studio Theater Performance and Research Center
South Bronx, New York

ideas4living@gmail.com

ID Studio reaches its audiences through deep partnerships with community service organizations including Make the Road New York, CaringKind, the Hispanic Federation, and Unidad Latina en Acción.

Submitted as written testimony to the NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Relations •
FY2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing • March 18, 2026

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Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Laura Martínez, and I am the Development Manager of INTAR Theatre, a member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color. Our mission is to commission, develop, and produce bold, innovative, artistically significant live theater works generated by an intersectional array of Latine artists. For 60 years, INTAR has served as an intergenerational creative community that represents the vast diversity of the Latine experience.

I am here to urge the Council to increase the **Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color like us across New York City. Many organizations have experienced reductions or eliminations in Cultural Development Fund (CDF) support, making CTC funding an essential source of stability for artists, cultural workers, and community programming.

This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

For organizations INTAR, CTC funding has helped support the core of our programming which is our Mainstage Productions: employing around 50 artists every year. These productions are integral to the woven tapestry of Latine theater in New York City and beyond. Support from CTC does not only give a space for artists and audiences to experience new, bold Latine theatre; we also forge a path for these artists and productions to exist and develop beyond our walls. Through these productions, we serve around 1,200 audiences each year, coming from all boroughs of NYC.

We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to **\$8 million in FY2027** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds to sustain their operations and serve communities across New York City. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

TESTIMONY

Hearing: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations

March 18, 2026

New York City Council

Susan Hapgood, Executive Director

Dear esteemed Committee members Dr. Nantasha Williams, Virginia Maloney, Althea Stevens, Sandra Ung, Crystal Hudson, Chi Ossé, and Farah N. Louis,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on New York City's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027. My name is Susan Hapgood, I am the Executive Director of the International Studio & Curatorial Program, based in East Williamsburg. Today I testify as someone working closely with artists and cultural workers across New York City. While I unfortunately am unable to attend in person, I do not want to miss any opportunity to advocate for sustained and expanded investment in arts and culture in our city.

I know I am preaching to the choir, but it is always good remind ourselves: Art is essential to civilization. It shapes lived experience into something we can share, reflect on, and understand together. Across this city, artists bring our communities together and create opportunities for expression that are both personal and collective.

Here is just one example that reflects a much larger reality. At ISCP, we are currently presenting *En tránsito*, the first institutional solo exhibition by Bryan Fernández, an alum of our program who was born and raised in Washington Heights. Fernández's work centers the Dominican diaspora and responds to a lack of authentic representation in mainstream media. Fernández's art presents a range of diverse experiences and counters colonial and anti-Black narratives. The exhibition explores diasporic movement, transportation, and the surveillance and policing of communities in public space—issues that resonate far beyond our exhibition. The exhibition reflects the kind of thoughtful collaboration that strengthens New York's cultural ecosystem. Projects like this are only possible through sustained cultural investment; they create the conditions for artists to tell complex, necessary stories that deepen understanding, foster dialogue, and strengthen communities.

Cultural funding ensures that New Yorkers have access to channels of expression, and that artists have the resources to create work that reflects all that this city inspires. Your actions and support protect freedom of expression. Your support sustains spaces, both formal and informal, where respectful and open dialogue happen. Even small moments,

like conversations that unfold during public programs, can foster respect, curiosity, and expansive discourse in a time of disillusionment, polarization and distrust.

New York’s cultural sector is truly international – something we see reflected at ISCP, where artists and curators from 105 countries have come to partake in our residency program. The exchange of ideas across borders and communities is central to our institution’s actions, and are what make this city such an invigorating global cultural capital.

Nonetheless, the financial pressures facing arts institutions are increasingly severe. Reductions in national arts funding have placed increased strain on organizations, particularly small and mid-sized ones. According to SMU DataArts’ National Trends 2025 Study, contributed revenue now accounts for just 59% of unrestricted income—the lowest percentage since 2019—and 44% of organizations reported operating deficits the prior year. These shortfalls have reduced median working capital from 6.75 months in 2021 to a mere 4.25 months in 2024. This has significant trickle-down effects for arts workers: the largest reductions in arts organization budgets have been in personnel costs, which have dropped by 23%, signaling a significant contraction in support for the people who sustain this sector.

We appreciate the very hard work that you do to support culture in New York City, and we thank you for your instrumental role in sustaining what makes this city magic.

From: [J CHEN PROJECT](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony in Support of Arts & Culture Funding – J CHEN PROJECT
Date: Wednesday, March 18, 2026 12:47:51 PM

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

My name is Jessica Chen, and I write on behalf of [J CHEN PROJECT](#), a dance organization dedicated to celebrating and advancing Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) culture through performance and education in New York City.

For the past four years, J CHEN PROJECT has been a recipient of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Cultural Development Fund, receiving \$10,000 annually. This funding has been transformative. It enabled us to create [AAPI Heroes](#), an original performance work that brings AANHPI stories and representation to young audiences across the city. Through this program, we perform at public elementary schools, including PS 184 in Manhattan, reaching approximately 300 students last year. For many of these children, it is the first time they see themselves reflected on a stage.

I write today in strong support of the advocacy priorities put forward by New Yorkers for Dance, and I urge the Council to act on all of them.

Baseline Restoration the \$30 Million for Culture

The \$30 million added to the culture budget in FY26 must be restored and baselined. For small, community-based organizations like ours, unpredictable funding year to year is not just an inconvenience but an existential threat. When we don't know whether our funding will exist next cycle, we cannot hire staff, plan programming, or make the long-term commitments that allow our work to grow. Making this investment permanent would signal that New York City genuinely values cultural equity, not just in good budget years, but as a lasting commitment.

Annual Increases

We also ask that cultural funding be adjusted annually for inflation. The costs of renting rehearsal space, compensating teaching artists, and producing performances have all risen significantly, yet our grants have not kept pace. Without this kind of adjustment, organizations like ours effectively receive less support every year even when the dollar amount stays the same. Tying funding to inflation would allow us to retain a fairly paid cultural workforce and sustain the programming our communities depend on, rather than quietly absorbing rising costs through cuts and underpayment.

Streamline the Capital Funding Process

We support reforms to the capital project process to bring greater transparency, planning, and efficiency. While J CHEN PROJECT is not currently a capital grantee, the dysfunction in that system affects the entire cultural ecosystem and the facilities we rely on as a presenting and

performing organization.

Increase the Coalition of Theaters of Color Initiative to \$8 Million

Finally, we strongly support increasing the Coalition of Theaters of Color Council Initiative to \$8 million. The CTC serves 63 organizations, a number that has grown by 20% over five years while funding has remained flat. These are the organizations, including those in our own AANHPI community, doing the most vital work of cultural equity in this city. They deserve resources that reflect their actual numbers and rising costs. We also urge DCLA to restore flexibility in how CTC funds can be used, allowing organizations to apply them as general operating support rather than solely as programmatic funding.

New York City's cultural identity, its diversity, its vibrancy, its soul, is built by organizations like ours. We ask the Council to protect and invest in that identity.

Thank you for your time and your service to our communities.

With respect,
Jessica Chen

Artistic Director, J CHEN PROJECT
<https://www.jchenproject.com/>
[@jchenproject](#)



March 18, 2026

Dear Committee Members, and chair Chi Osse,

I appear before you today to beseech you, in your capacity as the Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations, to hold the line in the city's FY27 budget at last year's level, at a minimum.

The past biennium has seen a profound contraction in Federal funding for arts and cultural non-profits. In addition to the outright loss of funds, the extreme volatility in Federal funding has wreaked havoc on many NYC non-profit budgets. Surely, these two facts are not news to you.

Our organization, Japan Society, was able to weather these storms in part due to the exceptional support of the Department of Cultural Affairs, whose Cultural Development Fund allocation to Japan Society actually increased slightly year-over-year from 2024/25. We are most grateful to the council for enabling this stop-gap funding, which we understand the council graciously extended to many many city non-profits over the past year. Thank you.

Now, we face another budget crisis in the city, which will surely challenge your committee to reduce funding to the DCLA, and specifically to the Cultural Development Fund. Let me be clear why I think such an action would be a mistake.

Of course, I may quote many data sets and studies that might support my perspective by demonstrating, as the Mellon Foundation's current Creative's Rebuild New York initiative does, that the arts account for over \$120 billion in contributions to the state economy, supporting nearly half a million jobs in the metro region. But to me, these data points and solicitous arguments, while helpful, miss the central point, and evade answering the most fundamental question we must ask: Why? Why support the arts at all?

In 1997, I was a callow young film critic in Seattle, I conducted an interview with famed Russian director Alexander Sokurov. As part of that interview, I posed a bombastic question, "Why make art at all? What is the purpose of Art?" Mr Sokurov, without missing a beat, answered my question directly, sidestepping its ironic undertones to say, "Isn't the point of art to make us all softer, more gentle, and more human?"

This answer, profound in its simplicity, seems to me well worth bearing in mind as you make the sausage of our city's budget for FY27. We, as a city, as a nation, as a people, are more desperately in need of softer, gentler, more human interactions. Art is the avatar of these aspirations. Let's not shirk our duties as a people just now to engage those aspirations, and move towards the light. Thank you.



March 18, 2026

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,

My name is Eli Yamin, and I am the Managing and Artistic Director of The Jazz Drama Program, doing business as **Jazz Power Initiative (JPI)**, a New York City-based nonprofit dedicated to transforming lives through jazz arts education, performance, and community engagement.

I am here to urge the Council to increase the **Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs. The initiative has not received a funding increase since 2021, and in the context of rising costs across all aspects of cultural production, flat funding over multiple years effectively represents a decrease in real support, limiting the ability of organizations to meet growing community needs.

This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

In Upper Manhattan, where we primarily serve, communities continue to face systemic inequities that restrict access to high-quality, free, and low-cost cultural programming. Jazz, a foundational American art form, remains inaccessible to many of the communities that created it. CTC funding plays a critical role in addressing this disparity by enabling organizations like Jazz Power Initiative to deliver culturally responsive, community-centered programming.

Through CTC support, we have produced the Intergenerational Jazz Power Festival, a free annual event that has reached more than 1,000 attendees over four years and engaged over 200 artists and 100 youth, expanding access to live jazz while fostering mentorship, cultural preservation, and paid opportunities for artists. We are now expanding this work into a year-round model across Upper Manhattan; however, rising costs for artist compensation, production, space, and administration threaten this growth, and without increased investment, we will be forced to limit our impact.

This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Council to **increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds to sustain their operations and serve communities across New York City.

Thank you for your continued commitment to equity in the arts.

Eli Yamin, D.M.A.

Managing and Artistic Director

Jazz Power Initiative | 5030 Broadway Ste 645, NY, NY, 10034 | (917) 818-1759 | www.jazzpower.org

KAUFMAN

MUSIC

CENTER

March 16, 2026

Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams
New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Re: Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

Dear Deputy Speaker Williams and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Tony Mazzocchi, and I serve as President & CEO of Kaufman Music Center—a multi-faceted cultural institution in Lincoln Square that is home to a community arts school, concert hall, and K–12 public school. Founded in 1952 with the belief that music is an essential component of education for all people, we reach more than 50,000 New Yorkers each year through music education and performances that span ages, incomes, and skill levels.

At the heart of our programs is Special Music School—the nation’s only K–12 public school to make music, like math, science, and history, an indispensable part of every student’s daily education. Founded in 1996 through a groundbreaking partnership between the Center and New York City Public Schools, SMS provides free, comprehensive music education—including private lessons, ensembles, choir, and classes in music theory, history, and technology—woven into the academic day alongside rigorous academics. As a public school, all Music Program expenses are provided at no cost to families and are covered through private contributions to the Center. This model ensures that any child may benefit from rigorous musical instruction and the myriad personal, intellectual, and socio-emotional benefits it provides, regardless of family income.

When students learn music, they are not only learning an art form—they are learning how to listen deeply, collaborate with others, manage fear, and present their ideas with courage in front of a community. These experiences cultivate creativity, discipline, empathy, and resilience—qualities that serve students well beyond the classroom.

This year, we are working to expand this vision throughout the City, guided by a simple conviction: when music is part of a child’s daily life—not an extracurricular activity, but a core part of education—students develop the habits of mind and collaboration that allow them to thrive. Guided by this principle, in the 2025–26 school year we launched *SoTru* Music School in partnership with New York City Public Schools at P.S. 149 in Harlem. Conceived and implemented in close collaboration with Chancellor of Education Kamar Samuels, *SoTru* extends our flagship Music Program to a new generation of learners—demonstrating both the adaptability of our model and the City’s continued investment in its enduring, citywide impact.

The ripple effects of programs like SMS and *SoTru* go far beyond individual achievement. Each year, SMS sustains more than 50 teaching artists—where most schools have just one or two—fueling New York’s creative workforce and stimulating the local economy. One-third of SMS graduates go on to pursue careers in the arts and music, carrying with them the discipline, collaboration, and problem-solving skills that allow them to contribute

meaningfully to today's economy. Abundant data supports the arts sector's economic impact; according to Americans for the Arts, the arts sector contributes \$5.6 billion to the New York City–New Jersey economy, supporting over 117,000 jobs and generating more than \$2 billion in personal income.

Yet despite the clear educational, workforce, and economic benefits of the arts, funding for cultural institutions remains precarious. At Kaufman Music Center, contributed support defrays just under 30% of annual costs; of this total, government funding represents just 2%. With federal support increasingly uncertain, municipal commitments are more vital than ever to sustain these essential programs.

At a moment when technology and artificial intelligence are rapidly reshaping how we learn and work, the uniquely human capacities cultivated through the arts—creativity, collaboration, empathy, and resilience—are becoming more valuable, not less. Sustained investment in arts and cultural institutions is therefore not simply cultural policy; it is workforce policy, education policy, and economic policy.

We thank you for your steadfast support of New York City's arts and cultural life, and we urge you to keep this investment strong—not only for our students but for the future vitality and economic prosperity of New York City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Mazzocchi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tony Mazzocchi
President & CEO

From: [Potri Ranka Manis](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony for Culture and Arts
Date: Thursday, March 19, 2026 5:37:05 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. Report suspected phishing emails with the Phish Alert Button or forward them to phish@oti.nyc.gov as an attachment.

Good afternoon Chair Dr Williams and council members in the Committee,

My name is Potri Ranka Manis Queano Nur, Founder and Artistic Director of Kinding Sindaw, a nonprofit cultural organization with 34 years of service to New York City's immigrant, public school, library, underserved, and Indigenous communities. We are member of NYCulture&Arts coalition.

Kinding Sindaw preserves and advances the living traditions of the Indigenous peoples and sultanates of Southern Philippines in diaspora through dance, kulintang music, storytelling, martial arts, and community-based cultural education. We serve youth, families, and seniors across schools, libraries, and public programs—primarily in underserved communities.

For many we serve, Kinding Sindaw is more than an arts organization—it is a cultural lifeline. Our intergenerational programs sustain Indigenous in diaspora languages, oral traditions, and embodied knowledge, strengthening identity, belonging, and mental health.

Our work aligns with the City's priorities in equity, public health, and culturally responsive services. We support social-emotional learning, reduce isolation, and build resilience among immigrant communities—serving as both a cultural anchor and a bridge for cross-cultural understanding.

However, small cultural organizations like ours face ongoing structural underfunding. Rising costs for space, transportation, and fair wages for teaching artists threaten the sustainability of this work.

We respectfully urge the Council to increase baseline of 30 million dollars funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs and prioritize the CTC Initiative.

For Kinding Sindaw, CTC funding represents nearly 50% of our artistic operating budget. It is essential to sustaining our artists, preserving endangered traditions, and providing free

and low-cost programming across New York City.

We ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027 and restore funding flexibility to ensure equitable, multi-year support for community-based cultural organizations.

Invest in the cultural workers already delivering measurable impact across education, health, and community development.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to cultural equity.

--

Potri Ranka Manis
Founder and Artistic Director
Kinding Sindaw Melayu Heritage
potrirankamanis@kindingsindaw.org
www.kindingsindaw.org
917-710-2335 cell phone



Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Date: March 18, 2026

Testimony Regarding the FY 2027 Preliminary Budget

Good morning, Dr. Williams and members of the Committee. Before we begin, LibraryPAC would like to formally recognize and thank Dr. Williams, Chair, for her steadfast commitment to our public libraries. Your tireless advocacy for the branches within your district and your leadership on library issues citywide have been vital to the communities we serve. We are grateful to have such a dedicated champion heading this committee.

I am Emily Drabinski. I am a librarian, former President of the American Library Association, and Associate Professor and Chair of the School of Information Studies at Queens College.

Today I speak in my role as a leader of LibraryPAC. LibraryPAC is an independent political action committee dedicated to supporting and advocating for New York City's public libraries. Our mission is to endorse and financially support candidates for local and state office who recognize the intrinsic value of libraries in improving the lives of all New Yorkers. We advocate for a future where our libraries are robustly and equitably funded, ensuring safe staffing levels and consistent operating hours that meet the public's needs across all five boroughs.

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

During his campaign, Mayor Mamdani made a clear, historic commitment to public libraries. He pledged to:

- **End the "budget dance"** that forces advocates to spend enormous energy just to maintain the status quo.
- **Ensure baselined funding** to protect libraries from the "budget whiplash" that harms their operating ability and consequently, workers and patrons.
- **Commit 0.5% of the City's expense budget** to public libraries.

Despite these promises, the February Financial Plan proposes only \$492M for all public libraries. This represents a \$36M reduction from the 2026 levels—a nearly 7% cut that leaves our libraries in a state of instability. On a proposed City's budget of \$127B, the current proposal allocates just 0.39% to libraries, falling woefully short of the Mayor's 0.5% pledge. It is also notable that while the Mayor's commitment to .5% baselined funding is historic, it is still woefully short of the national average and what our contemporaries in other big US cities commit to libraries.

By presenting a preliminary budget that includes a reduction, the Administration has effectively kicked off the very "budget dance" it once called damaging. This process is "penny wise and pound foolish." Instead of focusing on growth and innovation, library supporters must now direct their energy toward the City Council simply to restore lost funds and maintain a status quo.

We urge this Committee to work with the Administration to fulfill its original vision of an affordable, equitable City. We look forward to celebrating an Executive Budget that establishes a combined baseline budget for research, NYPL, BPL, and QBPL that equals .5% of the operating budget.

Providing this level of support is not just about stability; it is about allowing the City Council to move past mere restoration and toward making meaningful investments in our public libraries.

We look forward to working with you to ensure our libraries can fulfil their potential to be a cornerstone of a more equitable, affordable and liveable city for all.

LibraryPAC

www.librarypac.nyc

librarypacnyc@gmail.com

@librarypacnyc

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.
FY27 Preliminary Budget Testimony
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations
March 18, 2026

Thank you, Chair Dr. Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations for accepting testimony about the critical need for city investments in culture.

New York City has been and always will be a city of vibrancy, opportunity, and innovative thinking. This is in large part due to the contributions of our cultural community. As a city we've established and sustained our place as a global cultural capital. Despite making up 2.6% of the United States population, New York City is home to 5% of all American arts, cultural, and humanity organizations. Here arts and culture are essential, and like any significant piece of civic infrastructure our cultural institutions require robust public support.

Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations. **This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:**

1. **Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselining this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.
2. **Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
3. **Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:** Cultural capital project reimbursements can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. There are efficiencies that can be explored to improve the process so cultural institutions may leverage city capital funding in timely ways to invest in our buildings in ways that better serve New Yorkers.

Today, New York City's cultural ecosystem is approaching a tipping point. It is becoming more difficult for artists and creative workers to sustain living here, audience behaviors are changing, and there is growing financial strain on cultural organizations with funding sources falling behind rising costs. New York City has been a leader in supporting the arts, and we thank the City Council for securing last year's historic increase and baselining of arts funding, but the sector needs City Hall and the Council to double down their support and ensure we remain the cultural capital of the world.

Serving as both cultural and community hubs, the arts are the beating heart of this city nurturing the mind, body, and soul of all that live here and those that visit. A healthy cultural ecosystem helps enrich our economic resiliency and growth, uplifts the mental and civic health of communities, and lays the foundation for an equitable, educated, and strong city. We at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts join our colleagues in the Cultural Institutions Group and across the sector in seeking sustained public support to ensure stability across our cultural ecosystem and artistic communities.

Serving as both cultural and community hubs, the arts are the beating heart of this city nurturing the mind, body, and soul of all that live here and those that visit. A healthy cultural ecosystem helps enrich our economic resiliency and growth, uplifts the mental and civic health of communities, and lays the foundation for an equitable, educated, and strong city. We at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts join our colleagues in the Cultural Institutions Group and across the sector in seeking sustained public support to ensure stability across our cultural ecosystem and artistic communities.

At Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, we agree with Mayor Mamdani that the arts are a public good, not a luxury reserved for the few. In 1956, Lincoln Center was founded on that very principal as “an experiment in cultural democracy”, to showcase the best of the arts for the most and serve as an invaluable part of daily civic life with the arts broadly accessible to all. Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, as the steward of the 16.3 acre artistic and civic cornerstone, is a member of the CIG. Lincoln Center’s 11 resident arts and arts education nonprofits are part of the city’s ecosystem of cultural organizations, artists, creative workers, and educators that are deeply embedded into all aspects of New York City life. Arts and culture organizations, including those located at Lincoln Center, are critical drivers of the economy, social wellbeing, and the City’s workforce. Every New Yorker deserves the arts, and the arts deserve New York City’s support.

Culture is an economic powerhouse. The cultural organizations that make New York the cultural capital of the world welcome over 307 million tourists and locals every year. Over 77% of those are attending for free. In 2024, the Lincoln Center campus alone contributed \$4.5 billion in economic impact welcoming 4.2 million annual audiences and visitors from NYC, the US, and abroad who then spent \$210 million in New York City. For every dollar invested in the arts, there is a \$3 return to our economy.

Culture is a jobs creator, employing more than 326,000 New Yorkers, relying on a dedicated workforce of artists, creative workers, porters, caterers, educators, administrative staff, and more. Members of the Cultural Institutions Group collectively employ 15,700 full and part time employees, 5,800 union members, and work with more than 6,000 artists, educators, and per diem staff. Since the pandemic and the growing affordability crisis, that arts and creative workforce has declined by 6.1% since 2019.

Culture nurtures the whole student. Cultural organizations of all sizes uplift young New Yorkers by providing space, inside and out of the classroom, to explore the world and themselves through the arts. Last year we welcomed more than 35,000 student visitors through partnerships like DOE’s *Middle School Audition Bootcamp*, *Summer Rising* field trips, interactive *Create-a-thons*, and year-round family programming. Programs like *Young Artist Pipeline* and *Access Ambassadors* prepare students for careers in the arts, eliminating the costs of arts trainings for Title 1 students and introducing job schools and creative career possibilities for students with disabilities.

Culture is inclusive. For nearly 40 years Lincoln Center has been an institutional leader developing targeted programs around the experience of audiences with disabilities within the live performing arts, for free. Celebrating its 10th year, *Lincoln Center Moments* is designed for older adults living with dementia and their caregivers, serving more than 2227 participants attending both in-person and virtually for healing performances and art making. For young people with disabilities, *Passport to the Arts*, one of our longest running access programs, provides free and inclusively designed classes, performances, and behind the scenes experiences with world class artists, in person and virtually. Twice a year we host Big Umbrella Festival, a free large-scale campus takeover designed to be accessible for neuro-diverse participants and their caregivers. Last year more than 11,000 people participated in both programs. Public investment is imperative to the long-term attainability of these programs. We are

immensely grateful for the City Council's Autism Awareness and Older Adult Mental Health Initiatives that have been critical to continuing and strengthening these programs.

Culture serves as a community anchor. Deeply rooted in their communities, cultural organizations understand the needs of their neighbors as cultural and civic cornerstones. At Lincoln Center we continuously work with and for our neighbors, including distributing free tickets, turkeys, and holiday gifts to our NYCHA neighbors in Amsterdam Houses, Amsterdam Addition, Harborview Terrace, and throughout Manhattan. We coordinated with the local basketball league on a creative arts program in the community center, painted local murals, and broke bread through a culinary arts program co-led by Tatiana by Chef Kwame Onwuachi. We leverage our spaces to serve the city, operating as a polling site, host to community blood drives, older adult tech clinics, Community Board meetings, engaging in citywide initiatives like the census, and during extreme weather serve as warming and cooling centers for New Yorkers.

Culture welcomes. Lincoln Center believes the arts are an essential part of civic life and that all New Yorkers should be able to see themselves and their stories represented. Since the first *Summer for the City* in 2022 we have welcomed more than 2 million visitors to our campus for series featuring hundreds of free outdoor concerts and the vibrancy of New York. More than half of last year's 6000,000 visitors attended one of our performances for the first time and more audiences are coming from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Year-round *Lincoln Center Presents* offers free and low-cost civic and artist programming.

Investing in a more affordable city where artists can pay rent without being overworked and arts spaces can cover operational costs and living wages, would pay dividends back into our city's economy. Without bold and creative solutions, we risk losing the artists and arts organizations that make New York City the cultural center of the universe. As critical infrastructure core to a citizenry that thinks critically, engages civically, and navigates complex differences with empathy - The arts are essential.

Culture has the data-proven ability to strengthen communities, improve education outcomes, decrease youth involvement in the criminal justice system, and improve the mental health and well-being of neighborhoods. City funding allows the cultural sector to fulfill its role within a healthy democracy as spaces for convening, learning, and healing.

Your vision and commitment to New York's cultural landscape come at an especially meaningful time when artists, institutions, and the creative sector need the partnership of city government.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleni DeSiervo
Senior Director, Government and Community Relations
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.
70 Lincoln Center Plaza, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10023
ljohnson@lincolncenter.org
(212) 875-5101



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**Testimony from the Lower Eastside Girls Club
City Council FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Cultural Affairs 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Nantasha Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs. My name is Jenny Dembrow, and I am the Executive Director of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. I've been with the organization since its founding in 1996—nearly 30 years of watching young women, gender-expansive youth, and their families grow through free programming and the transformative power of the Arts. Our members tap into their creative passions, explore a variety of mediums, and connect with the thriving Arts scene in New York City. In 2022, we launched the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness, extending our mission to reach all genders and generations, enabling us to reach 5,000 New Yorkers annually.

Creative expression fuels empowerment at Girls Club. Our Art and Sound Studios are the spaces where creativity becomes confidence, voice, and agency. From painting to podcasting, welding to songwriting—we share the tools to bring bold ideas to life. In **Visual and Material Arts**, members experiment with clay, acrylics, watercolors, charcoal, murals, mosaics, and screenprinting. Through **Performative Arts and Movement**, our members express themselves through dance, poetry, and song. Best of all, our creative expression courses span generations—from fifth graders to elders—at the Center for Wellbeing. Our **Design Studio** offers hands-on exploration in woodworking and crafting, where students transform concepts into tangible creations. In our **Digital Media and Sound Studios**, members sharpen technical skills and master storytelling through photography and podcasting for **WGRL** (Where Girl Radio Lives) and Liberation Lab. **Music Production** classes in DJing and composition give members access to cutting-edge equipment to record, mix, and produce their own beats and melodies. And for young adults ages 18-23, our partner, **Building Beats**, leads the **Frequency Society** Program, which provides **workforce training** and mentoring in **radio production**.

Our Center for Wellbeing & Happiness has become a cornerstone of intergenerational care on the Lower East Side. Since opening in 2022, CWBH has enrolled 1,731 members, including 260+ seniors ages 62+, and offers 100+ free arts and wellness courses annually. Our lobby at the Girls Club and Happiness Hall at the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness are living galleries, spaces where art, storytelling, and community converge. From textiles to photography, our exhibitions celebrate creativity as a force for connection, reflection, and change. In 2025, we hosted 30 Art events, and thousands of New Yorkers benefit from our free public Arts programming each year.

As one CWBH member, Sabura Rashid, recently testified,

“For older adults on the Lower East Side, this place is a lifeline for long-time residents who have watched our neighborhood change around us. Through the arts and movement programs at CWBH, I found a place where I could strengthen my physical wellbeing, prevent social isolation, and connect with other mature adults in a safe space, surrounded by people who truly acknowledge, honor, and respect one another. I’ve had the privilege of teaching a writing class here — sitting with neighbors, helping them find their words and tell their stories. Through movement classes like yoga and Tai Chi, I’ve also been able to maintain my mobility and positivity through these uncertain times.”

We are requesting **\$1,090,000** in total City Council support in FY27 to sustain the full scope of our work—including Arts education programs, community gallery programming, and the continued growth of the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness.

LESGC’s mission to provide Joy, Power, and Possibility is more urgent than ever. Community-based organizations like ours are not a supplement to the city's social safety net. We are foundational, providing integrated, culturally responsive services across generations. The return on this investment is measurable, proven, and urgently needed.

Thank you.

Make the Road New York

FY27 Budget Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs

3/18/2026

My name is Sarah Landes, Co-Director of the Youth Power Project at Make the Road New York. Thank you for the chance to testify about our arts and culture programs for immigrant youth and youth of color. The Youth Power Project offers in-school and after-school programs, an intensive summer program, year-round leadership development training, college access support, and a warm community where youth can find mentorship, peer support and a chance to explore their creativity and vision. These services, and the self-expression and exploration that arts and culture work allow for, are more important than ever as our youth face the fear and uncertainty of heightened immigration enforcement. This is on top of under-resourced schools where they are too often criminalized.

Youth Power Project has done youth arts and culture work for 25 years, and we have gratefully received culture and arts funding for many years via multiple DCLA initiatives and programs, but I will focus here on Coalition of Theaters of Color (CTC).

Make the Road respectfully asks the Council to renew \$70,000 under CTC for our Theater for Social Justice Program. This program provides culturally competent, theater-based social justice programs for young people of color to develop as leaders and produce street theater for social justice. Funding enables MRNY to engage participants in street theater, prop and set creating, performance skills workshops, theater-based Know Your Rights education programming, and using performance in public spaces to highlight injustices in their communities. This includes advocating for immigration justice, LGBTQ justice, and ending the school-to-prison pipeline. These activities are specifically creative performance-oriented rather than focusing on other aspects of visual or fine arts. You can see our youth performances at citywide actions for social justice, as well as at virtual social justice events.

The program operates from Make the Road's community centers in Bushwick, Brooklyn and Corona, Queens, and directly engages 100 youth per year, reaching a much broader audience of New Yorkers through public performances, in-school workshops, and more.

We thank the Council for supporting this program for many years, and urge you to renew the \$70,000 allocation in FY27. Thank you for joining with us to serve youth who are underserved with arts programming, supporting them to explore, express themselves, and become the next generation of leaders. Alumni of this program currently include a Co-Executive Director and Deputy Director of Make the Road, as well as our youth arts staff.

Thank you for your support.

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

Below is written testimony from Mark Morris Dance Group employees, who share in their own words the importance of the arts in New York City and advocate for increased funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Lauren Cherubini, Director of Development

My name is Lauren Cherubini, and I serve as Director of Development for the Mark Morris Dance Group. For more than 30 years, I have worked as an arts administrator because of my deep commitment to supporting the arts organizations that make New York City one of the great cultural capitals of the world. I believe the arts are not a luxury, they are essential to building strong, vibrant communities. I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Elise Gaugert, Dance Center Director

My name is Elise Gaugert and I'm the Dance Center Director with the Mark Morris Dance Group. As New York grapples with an affordability crisis that is pushing artists out, one of the most immediate and effective solutions is hiding in plain sight: sustained investment in the nonprofit arts organizations that provide artists with steady work, affordable space, and a creative home. For more than two decades, organizations like the Mark Morris Dance Group have quietly built the kind of infrastructure artists need to stay and work in New York, providing employment, subsidized rehearsal space, and daily access to creative resources.

To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs. Thank you for investing in the arts in New York City!

David Leventhal, Dance for PD® Program Director

I'm David Leventhal, Program Director of Dance for PD® at Mark Morris Dance Group. I have the privilege of working with thousands of New Yorkers living with Parkinson's and their families each year. In our studios and community spaces across the city, I see every day how the arts are not a

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

luxury—they are a lifeline, supporting physical health, emotional well-being, and meaningful social connection. For many participants, dance is a vital tool for managing symptoms and reclaiming a sense of agency, joy, and identity. Programs like ours depend on sustained public investment to reach the communities who need them most. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Elisa Clark, Rehearsal Director

Hello, my name is Elisa Clark, and I am currently the Rehearsal Director for the Mark Morris Dance Group. As a graduate of the Juilliard School, and a recipient of a prestigious Princess Grace Award in Dance, I understand the importance and value of high-level art, and the impact it can have on the community. There are no shortcuts to art-making, it is a beautiful craft in which the product comes to exist through a very rich and collaborative creative process, which takes time and resources. In order to support this work being possible, I ask for a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Bianca Golden, Dance Center Director

My name is Bianca Golden, and I serve as Director of Education at the Mark Morris Dance Group. Our work is grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy, which informs all of our programming across our school, community classes, and pre-professional training. Through this approach, we ensure that dance education is inclusive, relevant, and accessible, reflecting and honoring the diverse communities we serve. To sustain and expand this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Julia Weber, Company Manager

My name is Julia Weber, and I am the company manager for the Mark Morris Dance Group. My role affords me the opportunity to directly see the Dance Group's impact on audiences and communities. It is incredibly meaningful to me and our dancers to be able to share our work at home in NYC through partnerships with other local arts organizations like BAM and The Joyce Theater. Programming of this scope is only possible with the support of the

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

Department of Cultural Affairs, and to continue this important work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in their funding.

Lauren Grant, Major Gifts Officer

I, Lauren Grant, lived my dream dancing for 24 years with the Mark Morris Dance Group. My husband, David Leventhal, performed with the Dance Group as well. We continue our passion for this organization serving in other roles now – me as Major Gifts Officer, and David as Director of our globally celebrated Dance for PD program which serves as a lifeline for people living with Parkinson’s Disease. Our son, now a teenager, formed a love for dance growing up as a student in our School at the Mark Morris Dance Center and now is a member of a youth ballet company. Our lives are profoundly and positively impacted by the many branches of this organization’s work. We also see countless others uplifted every day through the performances, the classes for people of all ages with and without disabilities, and the many meaningful artistic experiences people enjoy at our Dance Center, in the theaters, and around the world. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Lily Khan, School Manager

My name is Lily Khan, and I am the School Manager with the Mark Morris Dance Group. As an arts professional and dance educator, it is deeply meaningful to me that MMDG serves over 2,000 children annually through adaptive and inclusive classes for young people of all ages and abilities, while also maintaining accessibility to arts programming through scholarships and tiered pricing options. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs

Calvin Rollins, Community Education Programs Manager

My name is Calvin Rollins, Community Education Programs Manager with the Mark Morris Dance Group. As a dance educator, administrator, and professional dancer, it is vital that we continue to partner with over 13 partners through yearlong dance residencies, group classes, and community engagement activities. We are striving to deepen the relationship with our community

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

partners to continue to provide equitable and accessible excellent dance education to school, community centers, and other NPOs. To support this work, it is vital that a baseline \$30 million investment is made in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Maria Portman Kelly, Dance for PD® Programs and Engagement Manager

My name is Maria Portman Kelly, and I'm the Dance for PD® Programs and Engagement Manager with the Mark Morris Dance Group. Through my work, I've seen firsthand how the organization fosters meaningful connection and well-being through dance, particularly for older adults and individuals living with Parkinson's in New York City. These programs not only provide access to high-quality artistic experiences, but also build community and support health in deeply impactful ways. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Emily Arden Jones, Rental Manager

My name is Emily Arden Jones, and I am the Rental Manager at the Mark Morris Dance Center. As both an artist and an administrator, I have directly experienced the immense value of our subsidized rehearsal space program; first as a participant, and now as someone who facilitates this opportunity for hundreds of local artists each year.

Accessible and affordable space is the lifeblood of Brooklyn's vibrant dance community. These resources empower artists to create, collaborate, and enrich the cultural fabric of our city. To sustain this crucial work, I respectfully urge you to support a baseline increase of \$30 million in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs. This investment will ensure that artists continue to have the support and resources they need to thrive. Thank you for your commitment to the arts in NYC!

Lily McAteer, Institutional Giving Associate

My name is Lily McAteer and I am the Institutional Giving Associate with the Mark Morris Dance Group. As an arts professional, it is deeply meaningful to me that MMDG serves 55,000 New Yorkers annually through accessible,

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

high-quality performances with live music, inclusive classes for all ages and abilities, and subsidized rehearsal space for artists. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Rima Yamazaki, Database Administrator

My name is Rima Yamazaki. I'm an artist/filmmaker and art worker living and working in New York City for more than 15 years. The arts and cultural sectors are what make New York City special. They enrich the city's life and attract people from all over the world to New York. They stimulate the local economy and generate jobs. They directly serve diverse communities, including artists, low-income families, and underserved groups, through arts and educational programming across five boroughs. However, many arts non-profit organizations, especially small ones, rely on public funding. To make New York a bold model for other cities, we need to expand arts funding. I request a baseline \$30 million increase to the Department of Cultural Affairs' budget.

Carol Alvarez, School Administrator

My name is Carol Alvarez, and I am the School Administrator with the Mark Morris Dance Group. As a professional dancer and dance educator, it is important to continue to make dance education accessible to everyone, as well as continue serving our community. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Amy Bauman, Dance for PD® Programs Assistant

My name is Amy Bauman and I am the Programs Assistant for Dance for PD. It is so important to be inclusive of people living with Parkinson's Disease. People living with PD are constantly feeling that their lives are LESS, mean LESS. They are indeed in a downward spiral. The classes that we provide at DFPD bring joy and a sense of community. To support this work, I urge a baseline \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs.



MA-YI THEATER COMPANY

330 West 38th Street, Suite 902 • New York, NY 10018
(212) 971-4862 • Ma-YiTheatre.org

Producing Artistic Director

Ralph B. Peña

Executive Producer

Jakob Carter

Tow Foundation Resident Playwright

Lisa Sanaye Dring

CRNY Resident Artist

Jesse Jae Hoon

Literary Manager

Joi Barrios

Associate

Borna Barzin

Legal Counsel

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March 17, 2026

**Testimony of Ma-Yi Filipino Theater Ensemble, Inc.
Before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Relations
New York City Council**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ralph B. Peña, and I write on behalf of **Ma-Yi Filipino Theater Ensemble, Inc.**, one of this city's leading Asian American theater companies and a proud member of the **Coalition of Theaters of Color**.

We are deeply grateful for the New York City Council's support of the Coalition. That investment has not been symbolic. It has been essential. It has allowed organizations like ours to continue serving New Yorkers through professional theater, community engagement, and culturally specific programming that reflects the full richness of this city.

But this support must grow to meet the urgency of the moment.

Immigrants and communities of color are under pressure from every direction: politically, economically, and socially. In times like these, cultural institutions are not a luxury. They are part of the civic fabric. They tell our communities that we belong here. They preserve stories that would otherwise be erased. They create public space for empathy, memory, identity, and dialogue. In a city as diverse as New York, that work is not optional. It is necessary.

For AANHPI communities in particular, this support matters profoundly. Our stories are too often flattened, sidelined, or ignored. Ma-Yi exists to change that. We create programming that celebrates the diversity, complexity, and humanity of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander lives, while also underscoring the the enormous contributions these communities make to the cultural vibrancy of New York City.



MA-YI THEATER COMPANY

330 West 38th Street, Suite 902 • New York, NY 10018
(212) 971-4862 • Ma-YiTheatre.org

We are asking the Council to **increase funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color** so that organizations like ours can expand our service to the public. With stronger support, we can do more: produce more work, employ more artists, reach more neighborhoods, and deepen our engagement with the communities who need us most.

You should also know that the economics of producing theater in New York have changed dramatically. The cost of producing has **tripled since the pandemic**. For companies like Ma-Yi, that is not an abstract budget line. It affects every rehearsal, every artist contract, every production decision. We produce professional theater under union agreements because we believe artists deserve fair wages and dignified working conditions. That commitment is non-negotiable. If New York values cultural workers, then public investment must help make that value real.

The question before us is simple: what kind of city does New York want to be? One that talks about diversity, or one that funds it. One that praises immigrant communities in words, or one that gives them the resources to speak in their own voices.

We urge the Council to increase its investment in the Coalition of Theaters of Color. The return on that investment is enormous: jobs, audiences, neighborhood engagement, and a cultural life that truly reflects the people of this city.

Yours truly,

Ralph B. Peña

Producing Artistic Director, MA-YI Theatre Company
330 West 38th St, Suite 902
New York, NY 10018
ralph.pena@me.com
212-971-4862 x 101



Good afternoon Chair and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Brittany Bellinger, and I am the Director of Programs and Innovation at Museum Hue, a New York City–based, member-driven arts organization dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion in the cultural sector through research, advocacy, education, and community engagement.

I am here today to speak on the importance of sustained and equitable investment in the arts as part of New York City’s preliminary budget and to ensure that organizations led by and serving people of color are meaningfully included in that investment.

Arts and culture are not a luxury in New York City—they are essential infrastructure. They shape how we understand ourselves, preserve our histories, and connect across communities. They drive tourism, support local economies, and contribute to the identity that defines this city globally.

At Museum Hue, we represent and work alongside a growing network of arts and cultural organizations founded and led by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and all People of Color. These institutions are deeply embedded in their communities. They are not only sites of cultural expression, but spaces of education, advocacy, and care.

Yet despite their impact, these organizations continue to face systemic barriers to funding and government resources. Many operate with significantly less support than their larger, historically established counterparts, even as they serve communities that are often under-resourced and underrepresented.

Through our HueArts & Cultures research initiative, we are documenting this landscape by mapping institutions of color across the country and highlighting both their impact and their needs. What is clear is that these organizations are critical to a more complete and accurate cultural narrative of New York City, but they cannot continue to operate on inequitable footing.

If we are serious about building a just and vibrant cultural sector, our budget must reflect that commitment.

This includes:

1. Increasing equitable funding allocations for arts organizations led by people of color across all five boroughs;
2. Expanding access to city resources, grants, and opportunities that have historically been out of reach for smaller and mid-sized organizations;
3. Investing in leadership development and capacity-building initiatives that sustain the long-term growth of these institutions;
4. Supporting pathways to permanent and affordable space for cultural organizations rooted in their communities.

Organizations of color have long demonstrated resilience, innovation, and deep community impact often in spite of chronic underinvestment. Imagine what would be possible with consistent, equitable support.

As a lifelong New Yorker and arts professional, I know that the strength of our cultural sector depends on whose stories are resourced, preserved, and uplifted. Ensuring equitable access to funding is not just a matter of fairness it is essential to the future of New York City.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to continued dialogue and meaningful action.



Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

My name is Jilian Cahan Gersten, and I am the Chief Development Officer at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including museums, zoos, gardens, and performing arts organizations.

I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026. The Museum wholeheartedly supports these investments, which not only strengthen New York City's standing as a global leader in arts and culture but also ensure that every New Yorker can enjoy our wealth of cultural resources.

Since 1997, the Museum of Jewish Heritage has been a vital anchor in New York City's cultural landscape. As an essential part of the City's museum ecosystem, we educate diverse audiences about Jewish life and culture before, during, and since the Holocaust, welcoming approximately 170,000 visitors each year, including 33,000 schoolchildren. The Museum stewards an unparalleled collection of 46,000 historical artifacts, curates cutting-edge exhibitions, presents public programs designed to build dialogue across communities, and provides a wide range of free educational programs for both professional and general audiences.

Our staff has repeatedly witnessed how cultural engagement helps people confront bias, reduce fear, recognize shared humanity, and build empathy and allyship—within and well beyond the Jewish community. These outcomes make clear that arts and culture are not luxuries; they are essential civic tools. They strengthen social cohesion, counter hate, and foster a more informed and united New York City. Arts and culture serve as a diplomatic force—one that is easy to underestimate but impossible to replace.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselineing this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.

- 2. Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
- 3. Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**
 - a. **Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
 - b. **Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
 - c. **Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions and organizations to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration and look forward to strengthening our partnership by exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026
Museum of the Moving Image
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Isabella Haid, Special Assistant to the Executive Director, Museum of the Moving. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

Museum of the Moving Image (MoMI) celebrates the art, history, culture, and technology of the moving image in all its forms. Since 1989, the museum, located on the campus of the historic Kaufman Astoria Studios, has introduced millions of New Yorkers to creative technologies, fed their passions for film and TV, and united fans and creatives alike in its state-of-the-art facility. The museum has been an invaluable part of New York City's creative economy – a sector that continues to grow and evolve each year. Over 300k yearly visitors come to Astoria to visit our museum, many of them from all over the world. 80k students from the metropolitan area participate in our educational programming. In addition, the museum is home to an incredibly successful workforce development program, education center, free community space with weekly programming, a repertory cinema, a cooling space with free WIFI and more.

MoMI's **Workforce Development Program** currently hosts over 120 paid interns annually from 11 partnering nonprofit community organizations. The program allows interns to explore careers in everything from conservation and event planning to augmented reality education and video game design. These programs are in ever-increasing demand, and the Museum is seeking to expand the in-house internship program to meet it. 85% of our interns go on to permanent positions in related fields or continued education. Our interns form the front-line interface between our education labs, game design lab, media and VR lab, and our students and visitors.

In order to support the Workforce Development Program, MoMI is respectfully requesting \$100,000 in operational support.

In 2024, the Museum launched its placemaking initiative known as **Open Worlds**, which combined free-to-access space on our ground floor with a slate of community-facing events throughout the year. The program began with a modest private grant of \$50K and is partly responsible for a 100% increase in year-over-year attendance and \$35K additional earned income every month. While Open Worlds began as a May-October program, this year we are extending it year-round to provide more free public programming to our community. In its inaugural year, with total 20 events, the program was responsible for a 10% increase in visitorship to the

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

Museum. With nearly 50 events hosted in 2025, Open Worlds attendance increased 65%, totaling 69k visitors. Past events have included New York on Location – a celebration of organized labor in New York’s entertainment industry, in collaboration with IATSE and the East Coast Teamsters; a sold-out Yu-Gi-Oh Fan Day; a weekend celebration of science and the moving image; Day of the Dead and much more. Open Worlds welcomes New Yorkers into the building for free to create and celebrate with each weekend year-round. **In order to support this expanded version of Open Worlds, MoMI is respectfully requesting \$100,000 in operational support.**

The Museum’s **Media and Game Labs** have served as the Museum’s education space to explore and experiment with new forms of the moving image. Visual effects, video game design, VR/XR, and other forms of digital art are explored and nurtured in our media and game labs, with the guidance of our artist-educators. Our **Emerging Technology Lab** opens this year, providing a space for the public to discover cutting-edge technology like quantum computing to machine learning/artificial intelligence. We will also host two creative technologists in residence, whose work will culminate in a series of hands-on, public-facing workshops and an artistic showcase at the museum. While many New Yorkers have limited access to AI mentorship and emerging technology, the museum provides expensive hardware and costly subscriptions for free on premises, including one-on-one tutelage, media camps, and more. **In order to support our Educational Labs, MoMI is respectfully requesting \$100,000 in operational support.**

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselineing this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.
- 2. Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
- 3. Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**
 - a. Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
 - b. Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

- c. **Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions and organizations to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.



Powering
New Victory
& NEW 42 Studios

Recipient of a 2025 Tony Honor
for Excellence in the Theatre

March 18, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations:

New 42 thanks the New York City Council and the esteemed committee, especially Speaker Julie Menin and Deputy Speaker and Cultural Affairs Chair Nantasha Williams, for their continuous efforts to support arts and cultural organizations across New York City.

As the cost of living in the City rises, access to performing arts and arts education opportunities is often the first to fall out of reach for working families. Driven by the belief that arts access is a human right, New 42's mission is **to make extraordinary performing arts a vital part of everyone's life from the earliest years onward**. Today we spark wonder for **60,000+** children, families, artists and educators citywide through our **New Victory Theater** and its **New Victory Education** and **Bring Your Family** programs ("Arts Access Programming"). Research proves that quality, early arts exposure drives socioemotional development, confidence and higher education aspirations in young people, and we firmly believe a child's economic background should never determine access to the transformative power of the arts.

Our **New Victory Education** and **Bring Your Family** programs create affordable pathways for New York City students and families to experience the arts. For many of the **21,000 students and educators** we serve each year from **150+ partner schools**, New Victory Education is often their only exposure to live performing arts education during the school year. We provide **\$2 subsidized tickets** to matinee performances, **750+ in-classroom workshops** and a **free arts education resource library** to ensure cost never stands in the way of a child's creative development. Bring Your Family addresses the City's need for equitable, family-friendly arts access by annually providing **1,200+ free tickets and transit passes** to the New Victory Theater for children and families living in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residences. By removing economic barriers to entry, we ensure access to repeat, long-term performing arts engagement among low-income families.

We thank the City Council for your past support and urge you to continue advocating for New 42's current funding applications. **In FY27**, New 42 is requesting **\$125,000 in restored Speaker Initiative Funding**, which provided critical support for New Victory Education prior to being cut in 2024. Restored funds would enable us to present impactful Arts Access Programming across the City. We are also requesting **\$25,000 from the Autism Awareness Initiative** in support of our Sensory-Friendly programming, which provides a welcoming experience for audiences of all abilities. New 42 hopes to secure **\$674,000 in City Council support** for our **\$874,000 Capital Funding request** to replace video screens at the New Victory Theater, increasing energy efficiency and introducing interactive features for families in our lower lobby.

With your help, New 42 can continue to reach thousands of young people and families next year.

Sincerely,


A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Granet".

Russell Granet
President and CEO



c/o WP Theater
55 West End Ave, Fl 1, Unit 2
New York, NY 10023

+1 (212) 353-1176 

info@newfederaltheatre.com 

newfederaltheatre.com 

March 17th, 2026

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Elizabeth Van Dyke, and I am the Producing Artistic Director of Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theatre — one of the founding members of the Coalition of Theatres of Color. For 56 years, New Federal Theatre has stood as one of America's premier Black professional theater companies, training and showcasing generations of artists of color and women, and bringing their stories to New York City and the world. We launched the careers of Denzel Washington, Phylicia Rashad, Chadwick Boseman, Ntozake Shange, and countless others whose work has shaped American culture. We are here because that work continues — and because the conditions that make it possible are under serious threat.

I am here to urge the Council to increase the Coalition of Theatres of Color Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget, and to restore flexibility so that organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is not a luxury. It is a lifeline. For theatres of color across New York City — organizations that have historically received a fraction of the public funding directed toward larger, predominantly white institutions — CTC funding represents one of the few sources of support that recognizes both our cultural significance and our structural inequity. Many of our member organizations, including New Federal Theatre, have experienced reductions or outright elimination of Cultural Development Fund support. The CTC Initiative has been essential to our survival and our ability to serve artists and communities who depend on us.


Let us be honest about the moment we are in. Operational costs have not merely risen — they have tripled and quadrupled. Production costs, staff salaries, union standards, and the basic expenses of running a professional theater organization have grown dramatically, while our funding has remained at levels that do not begin to reflect that reality. At the same time, the current federal administration has made clear its intention to defund, dismantle, and erase the histories, cultures, and contributions of communities of color — to cut us off at the root and keep us there. What this Council does in response to that effort matters enormously. Increasing CTC funding is not simply a budget decision. It is a statement about whose culture this city values and whose stories it will protect.




WOODIE KING JR'S
**NEW FEDERAL
THEATRE**

ELIZABETH VAN DYKE, PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

c/o WP Theater
55 West End Ave, Fl 1, Unit 2
New York, NY 10023

+1 (212) 353-1176 

info@newfederaltheatre.com 

newfederaltheatre.com 

CTC funding has made NFT's work possible in ways that are concrete and measurable. It supported the New York Premiere of *The Wash* by Kelundra Smith — a production that won four

AUDELCO Awards including Best Production, Best Playwright, Best Ensemble, and Best Sound, and was named among the New York Times' best off-Broadway choices of the season. It supported the Ancestral Voices Solo Festival, celebrating the legacies of Paul Robeson,

Augusta Savage, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Shirley Chisholm. It has sustained the Solo Performance Collective, an initiative supporting emerging artists creating original work, and *Wonderment and Wisdom*, an intergenerational program bringing artists across generations into dialogue and creation. In calendar year 2025 alone, NFT presented 52 performances to more than 3,000 attendees while directly supporting 115 artists, designers, playwrights, and technicians with paid opportunities. This is what CTC funding makes possible.

The proposed \$2.3 million increase would boost grants to CTC organizations by nearly 30% — a minimum of what is needed to stabilize these institutions and allow them to grow. For New Federal Theatre, as for our coalition partners, that increase is the difference between sustaining the work and slowly losing the capacity to do it.

We respectfully and urgently ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027 and restore flexibility so that organizations can use these funds to sustain their operations and serve the communities of New York City that need us most.

We have been here for 56 years. We intend to be here for 56 more. We ask this Council to stand with us.

Thank you.

Elizabeth Van Dyke.
Producing Artistic Director
Woodie King Jr.'s
New Federal Theatre

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and Members of the Committee. My name is Angel Hernandez, Director of Government Relations for the New York Botanical Garden. NYBG is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) – a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations. I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak today. I also want to thank you and your colleagues in the City Council for prioritizing culture and advocating in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in FY26.

NYBG has maintained its presence as a local cultural institution, despite its international acclaim. The institution took root in the Bronx just as the borough was entering an era of development and growth that would transform into the place we live in today. In this regard, NYBG has always been part of the local community and its efforts over time to seek a better quality of life, especially in the cases of affordability and youth development. The following NYBG initiatives are examples of partnerships with the local Bronx community that address two concerns: Maintaining low affordability and free access to NYBG's quality programming, both on and offsite, and empowering younger Bronx generations with career aspirations through free workforce development programs.

Affordability in the Bronx Community

- In 2025, NYBG welcomed 220,000 New Yorkers for free, **mostly** Bronx residents under our *Bronx Neighbors* initiative and through our Free Wednesdays for all New Yorkers. In total, this represents about 20% of the Garden's attendance visiting at no charge.
- Our Bronx Green-Up team maintains partnership with hundreds of local community gardens under the *Bronx Community Farm Hubs* initiative where fresh produce is grown at various sites and distributed within a network of community gardens serving as food pantries. Such as the case with Karol's Community Urban Farm; a site located in the Castle Hill NYCHA Houses in council district 18.
- At 2850 and 2868 Webster Avenue locations, just a couple of blocks from NYBG, we have made investments in affordable housing for seniors and families where we partnered with developers to bring over 650 units of 100% affordable housing to council districts 11 and 15. All residents receive complimentary NYBG family membership.

Career Empowerment for the Next Generation

- NYBG's very one GROW (Green Ready Opportunities Work Force) program that offers career-readiness training in Horticulture and Landscape design for Bronx young adults. The program offers two certificates in each sector and are licensed by the New York State Department of Education through the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision (BPSS). These specialized certificates align with both industry and community needs that offer career pathways within city, county, and private organizations.
- Our institution has joined a coalition with three other city botanical gardens to create the *Rooted in Accessibility* initiative, which expands accessibility programming at our respective sites. In FY27 we are advocating the creation of this new city-wide initiative, which would be the first of its kind solely dedicated to accessible programming at our city's botanical gardens. With new funding, our institutions can hire and train entry-level staff and promote young volunteers and interns to paid positions.

- The *Sci Network NY* coalition, where NYBG, along with seven other science-based CIGs, offers valuable paid internships to 1,100 city high schoolers every year, where students receive STEM education and the essential tools in the various sciences that prepare them to meet emerging challenges and drive innovation for the future.

Although these few examples provide insight into NYBG’s diverse efforts to make life affordable and invest in the future of our city’s youth for the betterment of humanity, these efforts cannot be made without support from the City Council and the Mayor’s office. This is why NYBG, along with the rest of the city’s Arts and Culture community, request the City Council in FY27 to ask City Hall to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. In the same momentum, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for organizations in our sector.

I would like to highlight one last example of NYBG’s ongoing commitment to serve the Bronx community: NYBG’s planned Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center capital project. This major project will be transformative for the area, as it seeks to improve pedestrian safety at a busy intersection located within a small radius of three schools and enhances the visitors’ experience at our institution. This plan involves the development of a second access point just north of the current Mosholu entrance to accommodate vehicular traffic, while the current entrance remains as a pedestrian entrance. In addition, a new Welcome Center will be constructed at the pedestrian Mosholu Entrance in efforts to engage visitors and the community with an orientation center fit for multi-use space, retail, and other public-use features. A project that seeks to better connect all Bronx residents to nature and our free access programs, the Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center capital project will have lasting positive impacts in the community for many years to come.

NYBG has enjoyed many years of partnership with the City Council and remains grateful to your collaboration and support. We look forward to strengthening our partnership in FY27 and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities. We must ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers, and the future of our city’s youth remains prosperous and bright.

Thank you,



Angel Hernandez, *Director of Government Relations*
The New York Botanical Garden

FY 2027 NYBG Funding Requests

FY 2027 Council Speaker and Bronx Delegation Requests:

Program/Project	Amount Requested	Application #
Edible Academy School Partnership	\$75,000	2215479
NYCHA Castle Hill Garden	\$50,000	2215671
Sci Network NYC	\$282,200	2215639
Community Composting at Cultural Institutions	\$100,000	2240370
Rooted in Accessibility	\$250,000	2242198
G.R.O.W (Green Ready Opportunities Workforce)	\$150,000	2240705

FY 2027 Capital Request to Council Speaker and City Council:

Program/Project	Amount Requested	Application #
Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center	\$21,000,000	131693134 P-3731

FY 2027 Request Summaries:

Edible Academy School Partnership is NYBG’s intensive school-based nutrition programs offered at the state-of-the-art Edible Academy. These multi-sessions for Bronx Title 1 public schools allow for successive learning, based on a curriculum that includes at least 5 visits per classroom. Students enjoy culinary workshops that focus on state standards on STEM, ELA, Nutrition, Health and Wellness through hands-on cooking lessons. There are 15 schools participating, across 5 Bronx city council districts.

Karol's Urban Community Farm is located at the NYCHA Castle Hill Houses. Funding will support staffing, operational, and programmatic aspects of this partnering site with NYCHA. Administered by the Bronx Green Up (BGU) task force, funding also allows more youth and adult programming for residents, fresh produce distributions to residents, host a series of community workdays and other free public engaging events, provide tools and other resources for residents working at the site, provide horticultural advice and offer professional development, bring in nutritional chefs to offer free cooking demonstrations, and free compost workshops.

Sci Network NYC is a coalition of eight science-based cultural institutions where funding supports paid internship opportunities for high school students who seek to gain firsthand experience in various sciences. At NYBG, internships are based on plant studies, food justice and sustainability, environmental conservation, school and public education, and other various fields of learning.

Community Composting at Cultural Institutions initiative funding allows NYBG’s Bronx Green Up (BGU) taskforce to continue its longtime compost outreach and education program for Bronx residents. With many decades of experience, BGU provides composting certificate courses, technical assistance and volunteer workdays at community compost sites, and opportunities to engage Bronx residents in composting through various events and fairs. Courses are held in the Bronx, targeting residents, partnering community gardens and urban farms, school gardens and more. All events are free and open to the public.

Rooted in Accessibility funding support enhances and expands accessibility programming at four city supported botanical gardens, including NYBG. Funding for this specific initiative will enable the partnering gardens to make their grounds, exhibitions, online and in-person programs, and facilities more accessible and inclusive to all who visit. Funding also provides learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and developmental and cognitive abilities, providing workspaces for students to work comfortably, and ensuring accessibility to visitors who use wheelchairs or have mobility challenges.

G.R.O.W. (Green Ready Opportunities Workforce) is a NYBG specialized certificate program that aligns with both industry and community needs and is offered to young Bronx adults as a pathway to jobs within city, county, and private organizations. The program offers two certificates, for Horticulture and Landscape Design, and is licensed by the New York State Department of Education through the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision (BPSS). Funding would support cohorts of up to twenty students and will engage in specialized horticulture classrooms and experiential instruction, in addition to career readiness curriculum.

Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center capital project seeks to enhance the visitor experience at NYBG. The project will introduce a separate vehicular gate entry at the intersection of Southern Boulevard and Mosholu Parkway to separate pedestrian and vehicular access to improve overall pedestrian safety. Also, the existing entry gate area will be expanded with a new pavilion featuring a bespoke architectural canopy to welcome visitors with a covered ticketing area. The new building will serve as an orientation hub with enhanced visitor amenities including a plaza, terrace, cafe, retail space, and restrooms.

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026
New York City Ballet
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

New York City Ballet is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

We would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

New York City Ballet's mission is to preserve the ballets, dance aesthetic, and standards of excellence established by its founders; develop new work that draws on the creative talents of contemporary choreographers and speaks to the time in which it is made; and make the Company accessible to the broadest possible public through educational programming, media, and other initiatives. The Company maintains a roster of over 100 dancers, a 66-piece orchestra, and employs hundreds of both union and non-union arts workers. Each year we serve audiences of over 300,000 New Yorkers and tourists through more than 150 performances on the Lincoln Center campus, as well as more than 20,000 individuals through educational programming across all five boroughs—in schools, hospitals, and community settings.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselineing this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.
- 2. Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
- 3. Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**

- 1. Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
- 2. Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
- 3. Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions and organizations to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.

Lauren Hallford
Director of Foundation & Government Relations
New York City Ballet



Written Testimony for the
New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries,
and International Intergroup Relations

March 19, 2026

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Mike Rosenberg and I am the President & CEO of New York City Center, a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

City Center was founded more than 80 years ago when New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia transformed a magnificent City-owned building into Manhattan's first performing arts center with a commitment to making the very best of dance and musical theater accessible to all New Yorkers. Today, our on-stage productions welcome more than 100,000 New Yorkers annually while our education and community engagement work serves more than 13,000 students, educators, and emerging creative workers throughout the five boroughs. Our work is guided by our mission, instilled by Mayor La Guardia, that the arts should be accessible and affordable for all.

The Council admirably prioritized arts and culture in its budget for Fiscal Year 2026, with our sector receiving an historic \$75M increase, including a \$45M baseline increase. This has provided a critical lifeline for institutions that continue to navigate an uncertain sea of rising costs, changing audience behaviors, and decreasing private philanthropy. Robust City support for the arts provides stability and confidence, allowing organizations large and small to continue providing vital services and performance opportunities for New Yorkers all while inspiring private philanthropists to lend their support as well.

Looking forward to Fiscal Year 2027, I join my CIG colleagues in asking the Council to continue its support of our beloved cultural institutions in three ways: Baseline Restoration; Annual Increases; and Capital Process Reform. Your action on these three items will benefit the millions of New Yorkers who engage with CIG programming each year, including the 2.5M NYC students who visit CIGs annually and the more than 15,000 jobs CIGs support across the five boroughs sustain each year. More broadly, this support would ensure that all cultural organizations can continue providing free and discounted access to high quality arts programming that enriches the lives and communities of all New Yorkers.

Firstly, we ask the City to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY2026 budget to support the DCLA. Baselining this funding will support sustainable growth within the field, allowing for long-term strategic and artistic planning. Massive swings in annual public support impede staffing and our ability to effectively respond to changing creative and economic environments. This year's historic budget increase helped to support one of the most ambitious slates of programming in our history, with artists from all around the world convening in our historic Midtown theater.

Secondly, we ask the City to consider ongoing annual cost adjustments to the DCLA budget year over year, which will support staff wages and the increased costs that arts and culture organizations face because of the ongoing affordability crisis. Costs for cultural organizations continue to rise at rapid rates, far faster than ticket sales and donations are able to cover. Without predictable public investment, organizations are forced to reduce programming, delay hiring, and shift costs onto audiences.

Finally, we ask the City to improve and reform the capital funding process. Increased transparency around projects, including updates to the open data portal for cultural capital projects, which has not been updated since 2021, would bolster a shared understanding within the creative community about the scope and scale of ongoing capital projects

New York City Center

130 West 56th Street

New York, NY 10019

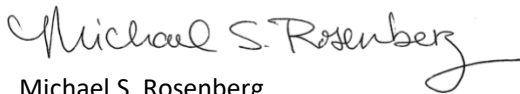
Contact: MRosenberg@NYCityCenter.org | 212-763-1207

throughout the sector. We support the creation of a capital infrastructure plan for cultural organizations, providing both CIGs and Cultural Development Fund (CDF) grantees with a framework to help maintain our beloved spaces more effectively. We hope that the Council and DCLA will consider key process improvements to allow CIGs and CDF grantees to preserve and invest in our buildings in a timelier manner. Many capital projects can take between 6-10 years to complete for cultural organizations; this extended timeline severely dampens an individual organization's ability to effectively fulfill its mission and can negatively impact the quality and quantity of services they offer to their constituents.

City Center's capital ask for FY2027 to the City (including DCLA, the Manhattan Borough President, and Council Members) exceeds \$25 million with a projected implementation timeline of more than five years. This funding will support critical infrastructural improvements on our stages, in our studios, and throughout our front-of-house areas, allowing us to more effectively serve artists and audiences. A reformed capital process will help facilitate the successful execution of this project ahead of the current timeframe, thereby allowing us to keep our doors open widely to all New Yorkers.

The artists, students, teaching artists, audiences, staff and Board of New York City Center remain grateful to the Council for its steadfast partnership in supporting cultural organizations of all sizes. As we move towards a new fiscal year, we look forward to strengthening that partnership and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities. This will ensure that arts and culture remain affordable and accessible across the five boroughs.

Onward and upward,



Michael S. Rosenberg
President & CEO
New York City Center





New York City Council
Committee on Finance
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 18, 2026

Title: NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2027 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARINGS

Good afternoon, Chair Williams, Finance Chair Lee, and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for having this preliminary Budget Hearing on the importance of having a budget that truly reflects a better New York City and the impact of arts and culture across New York City.

Located in Queens, NY, one of the most multicultural and diverse communities in New York City, NYSCI is committed to creating a world where diversity drives innovation, and where individuals learn to utilize science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) to tackle complex 21st-century challenges. We are a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), a collection of 39 diverse cultural institutions located in all five boroughs— including science centers, zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations. As such, we are tasked with stewarding a unique historical and environmental asset for the city, a mission crucial to public health, public life, and public benefit.

NYSCI is New York City's only hands-on science and technology center, serving as a dynamic civic platform where curiosity meets community and learning launches opportunities. Born from the 1964 World's Fair, we have evolved into an essential part of New York's educational fabric. Each year, we reach over 250,000 visitors, train 2,500+ educators, and mentor 2,000+ high school and college students. Located in the heart of Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, we sit at the center of a vibrant cultural ecosystem. We are more than a museum; we are a launchpad for 21st-century innovation.

The Impact of Recent Funding

Last year's budget was a turning point in the cultural field, and I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million investment and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026. For NYSCI, that investment allowed us to:

- Provide 24-hour security: Maintaining a safe, accessible environment for our visitors and the precious historical assets we steward.
- Stabilize our operational budget: Ensuring we can keep providing our program to the diverse families of Queens.



Furthermore, investing in our Science Career Ladder (SCL) through SciNetwork NYC, it allowed us to continue to be a national model for workforce development. This program provides pathways to STEM careers for minority youth from under-resourced neighborhoods.

- 87% of our participants come from Queens.
- 95% of our "Explainers" go on to college.
- 70% of our alumni are now working in STEM careers.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions in three critical ways:

1. **Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the additional \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire sector. Baselineing this funding is critical to ending the "budget dance." For NYSCI, this funding is the difference between consistent community service and destabilizing uncertainty.
2. **Annual Increases:** We ask the city to consider annual cost-of-living adjustments to support staff wages and combat inflation. To retain a world-class cultural workforce, we must provide fair, competitive pay.
3. **Fully fund all Council Initiatives**
 - a. The Council Initiatives are critical to the health of cultural organizations of every size. These funds make an impact in all 51 Councilmanic Districts and organizations rely on these funds to provide services to our communities.
 - i. **CASA** serves our City's children in after-school programs;
 - ii. **SU-CASA** uses arts and culture to reduce the insolation of our Seniors, and build community;
 - iii. **Coalition of Theaters of Color** supports BIPOC-led and serving organizations;
 - iv. **Cultural Immigrant Initiative** invests in the rich array of cultural organizations by which immigrant New Yorkers make this place their home.
 - v. **SCI Network NYC**- supports teen internships for over 1200+ youth with a focus on populations underrepresented in STEM-based careers.

The city's cultural organizations are its lifeblood, impacting every aspect of New York life. Investing in our cultural institutions has lasting effects on our communities and the city's vibrant cultural life. The return on investment in our institutions has been outstanding, and with your help, we hope to continue strengthening the public life, public health, and public benefit of the city as a whole.

I urge the City Council to make a historic investment in the cultural sector to ensure the vitality and vibrancy of New York City cultural organizations—large and small, in every borough—in





FY27. Investing in arts and STEM education is crucial for cultivating a vibrant, innovative society. We are actively empowering the next generation to think broadly, solve complex problems, and contribute meaningfully to our cultural and scientific landscapes that will shape our future.

We appreciate the Council's hard work on behalf of New Yorkers and thank you for including our testimony.

Respectfully submitted by:

Frances Escano
AVP of Government Affairs
New York Hall of Science
47-01 111 Street
Queens, NY 11368
NYSCI.org | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#)





**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
Intergroup Relations March 18, 2026**

T2026-1351 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Relations

Testimony of the New York Shakespeare Festival d/b/a The Public Theater

Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams, councilmembers, and staff. My name is Rosalind Barbour, Administrative Chief of Staff for the New York Shakespeare Festival d/b/a The Public Theater. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony during today's important hearing.

As the City Council begins to assess the FY27 budget, I am here to respectfully ask the City to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector, and to ask the Council to support our request for a \$350K Speaker Initiative item to help pay for The Public's free programming in all five boroughs.

Each year, The Public serves more than 150,000 New Yorkers with free programming through Shakespeare in the Park at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, our Mobile Unit performances in parks in all five boroughs, our community pageant, and our classes for seniors, youth, immigrants, military members, union members, and more. This free programming costs The Public over \$10 million in direct expenses each year to produce, not including costs related to full-time staff salaries and benefits, operational support, and other general expenses.

This year, we are requesting \$350K from the City Council to help underwrite these programs. We do this knowing that the City budget is tight, but we aren't looking for a handout. The City's creative economy generates \$110 billion in economic activity each year—we are simply seeking a small reinvestment of that output in order to continue serving the people of New York City with free, high-quality, inclusive programming.

We, like you, believe all New Yorkers deserve lives that include access to awe-inspiring live performing arts experiences that transport them from the daily grind of living in this City. We believe these experiences should not be limited to those who can afford to spend \$300 or more on a for-profit theater ticket, and they should not be limited to those who live in affluent areas.

This is why we bring our programming to parks including Brownsville Recreation Center, Roy Wilkins Park, and J. Hood Wright Park. It is why we partner with libraries in all five boroughs to distribute tickets to Free Shakespeare in the Park. And it is why we anchor our community programs with partners including Casita Maria and the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. The City Council's investment of \$350K will allow this work to continue and serve as another step forward in making the City a more affordable, more just, and more enjoyable place to live.

In addition to these financial requests, we also seek partnership with the City Council in implementing common-sense solutions to bureaucratic issues that cost our institution money and



**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
Intergroup Relations March 18, 2026**

T2026-1351 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Relations

Testimony of the New York Shakespeare Festival d/b/a The Public Theater

reduce the amount of funds we have available for free and affordable programming. Specifically, we ask the Council to partner with CIGs to improve and reform the capital project process.

The Public Theater recently completed a large renovation of the Delacorte Theater, a City-owned building that is home to our largest expression of free programming. In undertaking this work, we incurred over \$2.5 million in interest fees on a line of credit used to finance more than \$42 million in City funding for the renovation. This is money that could have been spent on more free programming, more classes in all five boroughs, more new work commissioned, and more cultural workers employed.

We urge you to hold a hearing and call upon our collective expertise to develop recommendations for improving this process.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration, and in particular for securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal Year 2026. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new chapter and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for all New Yorkers.

My name is Lucy Sexton and I lead New Yorkers for Culture & Arts, a coalition of more than 400 artists and cultural groups.

We realize the city is facing a tough budget year and will be rightly struggling to protect jobs, healthcare, housing and so many essential services for our city. I'm here today to say that culture and arts are essential services. It is data proven that robust cultural assets in neighborhoods provide measurable improvements in everything from mental and physical health, small business vibrancy, public safety and social cohesion, and more. Kids in low wealth communities with strong arts and culture score 91% higher in standard tests than their peers in communities lacking in culture and arts.*

And of course, if you're looking at the economy, the last thing you want to cut back on is the engine for economic activity that culture provides!

This year many cultural anchors received unexpected cuts in funding from both DCLA and NYSCA. We need to act now to

stabilize cultural groups, especially those in historically disinvested communities.

So this year's request addresses these by asking the city to --Restore and baseline the \$30M added in the FY26 budget. This is most necessary if we are to stem the city's loss of cultural jobs**. Baseline funds let organizations predict their funding and to hire and retain staff.

--and to further stabilize the sector, we ask that the culture budget be indexed to increase yearly as costs increase.

---further we request reforming and streamlining the cultural capital process. We need more data transparency—as you heard from DCLA it's hard to track what is happening! And we need to build in a plan for projects in advance, so that each project doesn't suffer long delays!

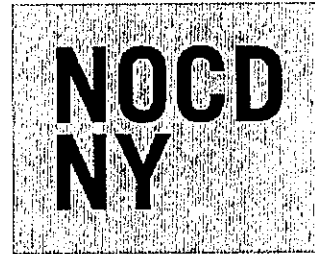
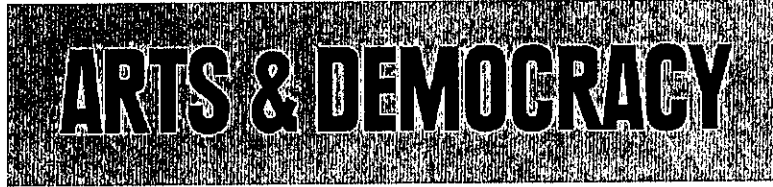
---Finally we ask to Increase the Coalition of Theaters of Color Council Initiative to \$8 Million The last increase CTC received was in 2021, when it served 54 groups. It is now funding 63 groups and desperately needs an increase.

The city desperately needs what culture provides-----a city where people feel safe and connected, filled with vibrancy, community, and joy. Invest in this vision for our city Consider it an investment in New Yorker's lives and the city's economy.

Thank you for hearing my testimony

*UPenn Social Impact of the Arts Project

**Center for Urban Future report on Affordability in NYC's Cultural Sector



Testimony to the NY City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations, March 18, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Caron Atlas and I direct two small cultural nonprofits, Arts & Democracy and Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY). I am here to support the cultural sector's requests including that the Council restore and baseline last year's \$30 million dollar add to the culture budget, that the baseline increases with inflation, and that the Coalition of Theaters of Color Initiative be increased to \$8 million.

I also believe that funding for arts and culture should be part of multiple agency budgets given all that the arts contribute to our communities and city - be it DOT, DOHMH, or SBS who have all supported us. I am sharing with you NOCD-NY's Reimagining NYC recommendations which are grounded in equity and this cross sector approach. You can find them online at <https://www.nocdny.org/reimagining-new-york-city-policy-recommendations>.

Two days ago Arts & Democracy joined with cultural partners and Councilmember Shahana Hanif to host our multicultural Community Iftar in Kensington Brooklyn, a neighborhood with large immigrant communities. In spite of the rain more than 400 people showed up. This joyful event, in its 10th year, exemplifies why arts and culture matter and should be well supported. In a time of polarization and hate crimes it brought communities together, including Muslim and Jewish neighbors. In a time when we feel overwhelmed and paralyzed by the news, it offered an opportunity to connect, belong, and know we can make a difference. It highlighted the voices and creativity of Muslim women artists and the nuances of their diverse cultures, when they are too often stereotyped. Neighborhood youth who grew up with this program got production jobs that will continue throughout the summer as we animate our local plazas.

I've shared our event with you but there are many such impactful programs across the city. Please support the small cultural organizations and resilient networks with deep roots in their neighborhoods that make these extraordinary programs happen.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Amanda Selwyn • Notes in Motion Dance Theatre

FY27 Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries Budget Hearing
March 18, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Janet Cesarotti, and I am a Program and Development Associate at Notes in Motion / Amanda Selwyn Dance Theatre.

Founded in 2000, Notes in Motion is a New York City nonprofit that presents innovative dance performances and provides comprehensive arts education in public schools. As a long-time Department of Education vendor, we serve students from 3K through 12th grade in styles ranging from modern and ballet to hip hop, Latin, African, Bollywood, and musical theater.

Since our founding, we have directly served over 93,000 students across 190 schools, and reached more than 528,000 young people in communities throughout New York City. Today, we partner with 125 schools across 45 Council Districts.

Our organization is in a period of strong growth. In just three years, we have expanded from 87 programs to 168, and from 45 to 85 school partners annually. This past year alone, we delivered over 6,700 dance sessions to more than 20,000 students. We consistently hear from teachers and parents about students who gain confidence, discipline, and joy through our programs—including students who were previously disengaged and are now participating, leading, and showing up to school differently.

And yet, access to the arts remains inequitable. State data shows that only about one-third of eighth graders are meeting New York's arts education requirements. In fact, recent data shows that approximately 69% of middle school students are not meeting these requirements. (*Arts in Education Roundtable, May 2025*)

Too many students—especially in underserved communities—are denied consistent, high-quality arts education, creating a gap that directly impacts their academic engagement and well-being.

We respectfully urge the City Council to increase baseline funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs and prioritize arts education providers serving public school students.

Arts funding is not optional—it is essential to the vitality, equity, and future of New York City.

Thank you,



Janet Cesarotti
Program/Development Associate

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and Members of the Committee. My name is Angel Hernandez, Director of Government Relations for the New York Botanical Garden. NYBG is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) – a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations. I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak today. I also want to thank you and your colleagues in the City Council for prioritizing culture and advocating in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in FY26.

NYBG has maintained its presence as a local cultural institution, despite its international acclaim. The institution took root in the Bronx just as the borough was entering an era of development and growth that would transform into the place we live in today. In this regard, NYBG has always been part of the local community and its efforts over time to seek a better quality of life, especially in the cases of affordability and youth development. The following NYBG initiatives are examples of partnerships with the local Bronx community that address two concerns: Maintaining low affordability and free access to NYBG's quality programming, both on and offsite, and empowering younger Bronx generations with career aspirations through free workforce development programs.

Affordability in the Bronx Community

- In 2025, NYBG welcomed 220,000 New Yorkers for free, mostly Bronx residents under our *Bronx Neighbors* initiative and through our Free Wednesdays for all New Yorkers. In total, this represents about 20% of the Garden's attendance visiting at no charge.
- Our Bronx Green-Up team maintains partnership with hundreds of local community gardens under the *Bronx Community Farm Hubs* initiative where fresh produce is grown at various sites and distributed within a network of community gardens serving as food pantries. Such as the case with Karol's Community Urban Farm; a site located in the Castle Hill NYCHA Houses in council district 18.
- At 2850 and 2868 Webster Avenue locations, just a couple of blocks from NYBG, we have made investments in affordable housing for seniors and families where we partnered with developers to bring over 650 units of 100% affordable housing to council districts 11 and 15. All residents receive complimentary NYBG family membership.

Career Empowerment for the Next Generation

- NYBG's very one GROW (Green Ready Opportunities Work Force) program that offers career-readiness training in Horticulture and Landscape design for Bronx young adults. The program offers two certificates in each sector and are licensed by the New York State Department of Education through the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision (BPSS). These specialized certificates align with both industry and community needs that offer career pathways within city, county, and private organizations.
- Our institution has joined a coalition with three other city botanical gardens to create the *Rooted in Accessibility* initiative, which expands accessibility programming at our respective sites. In FY27 we are advocating the creation of this new city-wide initiative, which would be the first of its kind solely dedicated to accessible programming at our city's botanical gardens. With new funding, our institutions can hire and train entry-level staff and promote young volunteers and interns to paid positions.

- The Sci Network NY coalition, where NYBG, along with seven other science-based CIGs, offers valuable paid internships to 1,100 city high schoolers every year, where students receive STEM education and the essential tools in the various sciences that prepare them to meet emerging challenges and drive innovation for the future.

Although these few examples provide insight into NYBG's diverse efforts to make life affordable and invest in the future of our city's youth for the betterment of humanity, these efforts cannot be made without support from the City Council and the Mayor's office. This is why NYBG, along with the rest of the city's Arts and Culture community, request the City Council in FY27 to ask City Hall to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. In the same momentum, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for organizations in our sector.

I would like to highlight one last example of NYBG's ongoing commitment to serve the Bronx community: NYBG's planned Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center capital project. This major project will be transformative for the area, as it seeks to improve pedestrian safety at a busy intersection located within a small radius of three schools and enhances the visitors' experience at our institution. This plan involves the development of a second access point just north of the current Mosholu entrance to accommodate vehicular traffic, while the current entrance remains as a pedestrian entrance. In addition, a new Welcome Center will be constructed at the pedestrian Mosholu Entrance in efforts to engage visitors and the community with an orientation center fit for multi-use space, retail, and other public-use features. A project that seeks to better connect all Bronx residents to nature and our free access programs, the Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center capital project will have lasting positive impacts in the community for many years to come.

NYBG has enjoyed many years of partnership with the City Council and remains grateful to your collaboration and support. We look forward to strengthening our partnership in FY27 and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities. We must ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers, and the future of our city's youth remains prosperous and bright.

Thank you,



Angel Hernandez, Director of Government Relations
The New York Botanical Garden



FY 2027 NYBG Funding Requests

FY 2027 Council Speaker and Bronx Delegation Requests:

Program/Project	Amount Requested	Application #
Edible Academy School Partnership	\$75,000	2215479
NYCHA Castle Hill Garden	\$50,000	2215671
Sci Network NYC	\$282,200	2215639
Community Composting at Cultural Institutions	\$100,000	2240370
Rooted in Accessibility	\$250,000	2242198
G.R.O.W (Green Ready Opportunities Workforce)	\$150,000	2240705

FY 2027 Capital Request to Council Speaker and City Council:

Program/Project	Amount Requested	Application #
Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center	\$21,000,000	131693134 P-3731

FY 2027 Request Summaries:

Edible Academy School Partnership is NYBG’s intensive school-based nutrition programs offered at the state-of-the-art Edible Academy. These multi-sessions for Bronx Title 1 public schools allow for successive learning, based on a curriculum that includes at least 5 visits per classroom. Students enjoy culinary workshops that focus on state standards on STEM, ELA, Nutrition, Health and Wellness through hands-on cooking lessons. There are 15 schools participating, across 5 Bronx city council districts.

Karol's Urban Community Farm is located at the NYCHA Castle Hill Houses. Funding will support staffing, operational, and programmatic aspects of this partnering site with NYCHA. Administered by the Bronx Green Up (BGU) task force, funding also allows more youth and adult programming for residents, fresh produce distributions to residents, host a series of community workdays and other free public engaging events, provide tools and other resources for residents working at the site, provide horticultural advice and offer professional development, bring in nutritional chefs to offer free cooking demonstrations, and free compost workshops.

Sci Network NYC is a coalition of eight science-based cultural institutions where funding supports paid internship opportunities for high school students who seek to gain firsthand experience in various sciences. At NYBG, internships are based on plant studies, food justice and sustainability, environmental conservation, school and public education, and other various fields of learning.

Community Composting at Cultural Institutions initiative funding allows NYBG’s Bronx Green Up (BGU) taskforce to continue its longtime compost outreach and education program for Bronx residents. With many decades of experience, BGU provides composting certificate courses, technical assistance and volunteer workdays at community compost sites, and opportunities to engage Bronx residents in composting through various events and fairs. Courses are held in the Bronx, targeting residents, partnering community gardens and urban farms, school gardens and more. All events are free and open to the public.

Rooted in Accessibility funding support enhances and expands accessibility programming at four city supported botanical gardens, including NYBG. Funding for this specific initiative will enable the partnering gardens to make their grounds, exhibitions, online and in-person programs, and facilities more accessible and inclusive to all who visit. Funding also provides learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and developmental and cognitive abilities, providing workspaces for students to work comfortably, and ensuring accessibility to visitors who use wheelchairs or have mobility challenges.

G.R.O.W. (Green Ready Opportunities Workforce) is a NYBG specialized certificate program that aligns with both industry and community needs and is offered to young Bronx adults as a pathway to jobs within city, county, and private organizations. The program offers two certificates, for Horticulture and Landscape Design, and is licensed by the New York State Department of Education through the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision (BPSS). Funding would support cohorts of up to twenty students and will engage in specialized horticulture classrooms and experiential instruction, in addition to career readiness curriculum.

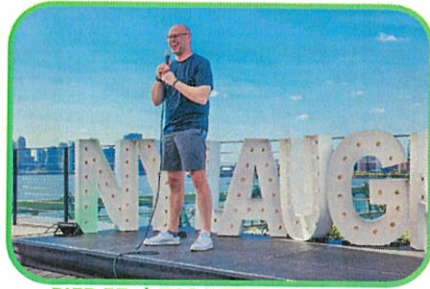
Mosholu Entrance and Welcome Center capital project seeks to enhance the visitor experience at NYBG. The project will introduce a separate vehicular gate entry at the intersection of Southern Boulevard and Mosholu Parkway to separate pedestrian and vehicular access to improve overall pedestrian safety. Also, the existing entry gate area will be expanded with a new pavilion featuring a bespoke architectural canopy to welcome visitors with a covered ticketing area. The new building will serve as an orientation hub with enhanced visitor amenities including a plaza, terrace, cafe, retail space, and restrooms.

A LAUGHING NEW YORKER IS A BETTER NEW YORKER!! (ESPECIALLY ON A STALLED F TRAIN)

FY 27 Discretionary Funding Application #2247400 REQUESTING \$150K TO SUPPORT NYLaughsfest27

FY 27 Discretionary Funding Application #2249168 REQUESTING \$60K TO SUPPORT INITIATIVES IN LOCAL COUNCIL DISTRICTS

STAND-UP COMEDY FESTIVALS 2024 - 2025 (3)



PIER 57 | 700 ATTENDEES



NYLAUGHSFEST26 / COMEDY IN THE SQUARE
1000 ATTENDEES FOR FREE EVENT



COMEDY UNDER THE STARS | 700 ATTENDEES



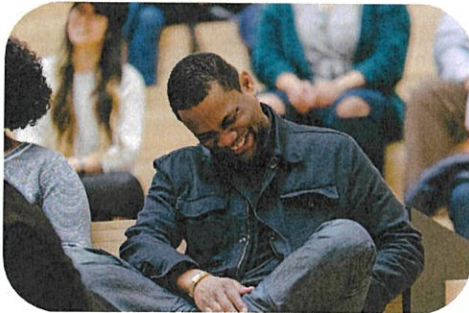
CITY HALL | IRISH CAUCAUS COLLABORATION



LAUGHTER IN THE PARK



NYPL LIVE COLLABORATION IN 2025



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A LAUGHING NEW YORKER IS A BETTER NEW YORKER!!! (ESPECIALLY ON A STALLED F TRAIN)

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PAST TALENT APPEARANCES



Roy Wood Jr.



Zarna Garg



Aasif Mandvi



Michelle Buteau



Judd Apatow



Wanda Sykes



Murray Hill and more...

MISSION

NYLaughs believes in the power of punchlines to build a better New York City. Since 2007, we've championed stand-up comedy as a vital cultural force—one that connects strangers, lifts spirits, and captures the city in real time. We bring free, high-quality comedy to public spaces across all five boroughs—parks, libraries, plazas—making laughter accessible to all New Yorkers. Because in a city like this, joy shouldn't be a luxury. It should be infrastructure.

HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

NYLaughs was founded on a simple idea: if New Yorkers can gather for free Shakespeare in the park, why not stand-up—the art form born here? What started as a show for ten people (and a few very opinionated pigeons) has grown into a citywide movement, reaching over 30,000 New Yorkers and visitors. Along the way, we've helped shift comedy from nightlife to a recognized, essential part of NYC's cultural landscape.

PROGRAMS & PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

Our flagship program, Laughter in the Park, turns public spaces into open-air comedy clubs each summer. Laughter in the City, launched in 2016, brings that same energy indoors during the winter in partnership with cultural venues.

VISION: ESTABLISHING NYC AS A GLOBAL COMEDY CAPITAL

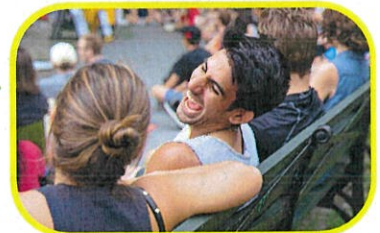
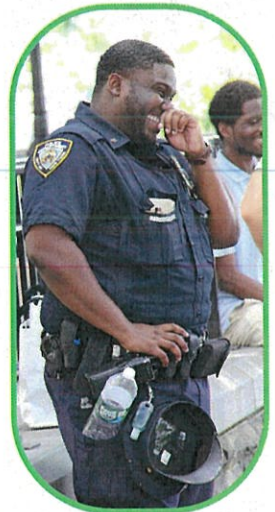
NYLaughs is building toward an annual, five-borough Stand-Up Comedy Festival, launched in 2025 and anchored in Union Square. Our 2025 festival included SNL Alumni Sam Jay, Chris Redd and Emil Wakim. This festival will serve New Yorkers while positioning NYC as the global hub for comedy. By establishing a June festival, we aim to anchor an international circuit alongside ones in Montreal and Edinburgh—driving tourism, supporting artists, and generating economic impact. From neighborhood parks to iconic public spaces, this is a festival for all five boroughs—accessible, inclusive, and unmistakably New York. Because this city doesn't just belong in the comedy world—it should lead it.

INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATORS PAST & PRESENT

Brooklyn Museum, Bryant Park Corporation, Lincoln Center, NYPL Live, NYS Battery Park City Authority

HIGHLIGHTS

- NYC City Council Discretionary Funding 14x
- NYC Dept. of Cultural Affairs Awards 6x (2 renewable awards)
- NYS Council on the Arts 3x
- NYS Council on the Arts + NYC Dept. of Cultural Affairs via the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council 13x
- Arts Alliance of Resident Theatres/NY + Howard Gilman Foundation Small Theatre Fund – 2yr award
- Arts Alliance of Resident Theatres/NY 3x
- New York Times Critics' Pick 23x
- Critics pick: NY1, NY Magazine, NY Post, Wall Street Journal, WABC, Time Out NY, WNBC



CONTACT

phone
+1 212-633-0474

e-mail
suzettesimon@nylaughs.org

mail
Old ChelseaStation
PO Box1503
NYC 10113-1503

TURN OVER ----->





**New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings
on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal
Years 2027-2030, and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report**

March 18, 2026

Good morning, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president of The New York Public Library (NYPL). I want to thank City Council Speaker Menin, Deputy Speaker and Committee Chair Doctor Williams, and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Preliminary Budget.

Over the past several years the Library has repeatedly faced significant cuts to its operating budget. We have started most of these years at a setback and subsequently spent precious resources through robust advocacy efforts to get back to even. Although last year was one of the first times we were held harmless and even allocated additional \$2M to expand Sunday service, we still had to campaign for these funds to be baselined. Ultimately Libraries were not baselined in the FY26 budget even though peer institutions were.

Starting each fiscal year with a laborious, costly quest to get out of the red and secure our funding at its current level is what is known as the budget dance. It diverts valuable resources from our vital offerings to the fight to keep our heads above water at the current level of service. This fight, a near-annual, costly exercise, has left us with a mostly flat budget for several years amid rising costs.

Accordingly, we were thrilled to learn of then-Mayoral Candidate Zohran Mamdani's promise to literally "end the budget dance" with consistent, baselined funding at 0.5% of the City budget. His Mayoralty marks, in the words of his inauguration speech, "a new era" for Libraries and the

chance to start over with an administration that understands that Libraries' are an integral piece to a more affordable New York.

Since the Mayor took office, we have engaged in collaboration and partnership on his agenda. The Library was pleased to lend Mayor Mamdani the Qur'an he used to recite the oath of office during his midnight swear-in ceremony. We have since hosted him for the City's annual Interfaith Breakfast, collaborated on an initiative to deliver Valentine's Day cards of appreciation to local businesses, and discussed future partnership on shared priorities within digital equity and literacy.

This positive relationship has extended to encouraging discussions about the city budget. We are grateful for the baselined \$2M in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget to maintain the added Sunday service locations last year. The administration has been receptive to the impacts of the proposed Savings Targets for the current and forthcoming year as well as reductions in the FY27 Preliminary Budget on our offerings. We are aware of the \$5 billion budget deficit and the ongoing conversations with the State. But we have been heartened by the administration's acknowledgement of the outsized return on investment libraries provide to New Yorkers. It is still early in the process and we are confident that the Mayor is intent on delivering on both of his campaign promises.

Baselined funding at 0.5% stands to transform Library service into a resource with a credible presence that New Yorkers never have to question. It allows us to fortify our services. That means more hours, and more days of operation. Expanded operations mean a local branch can spend more time as hub for a graduating high school senior looking for college and career advice, a Teen Center for a young adult to socialize with their peers, an open place for kids to drop-in for After School tutoring, or a trusted venue for New Yorkers of all income levels and backgrounds to file their taxes. We know that the demand for more services is there. A recent

Teen Career Resources Fair at NYPL hosted 1,600 attendees with over 40 businesses, organizations, and nonprofits for internships, early-career opportunities, and workforce development programs. Last school year, total attendance for our after school program was just over 68,000 and we expect to surpass that number this year as quarter-over-quarter growth already shows a 25% increase in attendance. The FY26 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report (PMMR) shows a steady increase in key metrics such as program attendance, library card holders, and computer and wireless sessions from FY23 through FY25. In January, a New York Times survey of 3,500 New Yorkers showed "more funding for libraries" to be their top choice for how the new Mayor could improve the city.

Reliable funding at this level is also a chance to address our unmet needs of \$24M, which are a byproduct of operating on this flat budget alongside the rising costs of collections, staff wages, and information technology such as cybersecurity over the course of several years.

We are hopeful that the Mayor's commitment to Libraries can extend to our capital agenda. Our services are of little value if they do not happen in places that feel safe, welcoming, and respectful of New Yorkers' right to knowledge and opportunity. The Libraries currently have \$1.2 billion in unmet capital needs, with \$485 million for NYPL. Many of our spaces are in a constant state of disrepair and face critical issues that leave patrons feeling uncomfortable. This is because most of the buildings in our system are aging, small, structures. We know that the city capital process often results in costly budget shortfalls and significant project delays. Mayor Mamdani's commitment to excellence in government gives us hope that we can address these systemic issues with long-needed reform in the near future. Concurrently, we look forward to partnership on short term fixes. One example is a transformational investment as part of the 10-year capital plan that follows the model of the \$100M allocated in 2016 for the full renovation of five century-old Carnegie libraries in high needs areas in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten

Island. Another is colocation projects that incorporate libraries within affordable housing developments such as the recently opened Inwood Library.

While this is a new era for the Mayoralty, we know that little has changed within this body. Every time the library faced significant cuts it was the City Council who took up our cause and joined us in the fight for restoration and even additional funding in FY26. Speaker Menin confirmed this continues to be the case recently when she stated that libraries are New Yorkers' most trusted institutions.

We know this is a difficult time for our city financially. At the same time, we understand that

these challenges were inherited as well as the intergovernmental dynamics at play. We also know that it is still early in the budget process, that the City Council continues to be with us, and that we now have a Mayor who appreciates libraries as an unparalleled, crucial public good within the lives of New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

Arts in Education **NYC** ROUNDTABLE

New York City Arts in Education Roundtable

Testimony: Preliminary Budget Hearing - Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations

Hon. Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Thank you to Deputy Speaker Williams and the City Council for hosting today's hearing and happy Arts in our Schools Month! My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am proud to be the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. I'm testifying as part of the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding and policy change that improves arts education in NYC and supports its robust workforce.

The arts are the heartbeat of our great city. Dance, theater, music, media, visual arts, and literary arts are a vital engine for the city's economy, cultural identity, and a critical component of a culturally-responsive education.

Yet, bureaucratic hurdles in contracting, the skyrocketing cost of living, and chronic inequities in access are stifling our City's most vital resource — leaving our students and our creative workforce behind.

In NYC, arts education is a cross agency effort — employing a workforce of 11,000 teaching artists and 2,887 certified arts teachers. Cultural organizations and teaching artists work in partnership with in-school arts teachers to strengthen opportunities, support sequential arts learning, and provide arts instruction where schools lack an arts teacher altogether. For context:

- Over 900 cultural organizations partnered with NYCPS in FY25¹
- 84% of all responding schools partner with at least one cultural arts organization annually
- 72% of schools hosted at least one CDF program during FY2022 (as reported by IBO at the April 2025 Oversight Hearing on Arts Education)²
- 23% of schools report using external funding from cultural organizations to fund arts education

But our city doesn't make this easy — contract delays (CASA and NYCPS' MTAC) mean late or unrealized start dates, loss of employment for artists, and lost educational opportunities. Inconsistency of year-over-year funding across agencies makes it difficult to build sustainable, long-term partnerships between schools and cultural organizations, and stable employment for our teaching artists.

This in turn has a trickle-down impact on the workforce, where many teaching artists only earn a median individual gross income of between \$35,000 – \$50,000⁴, with no access to health insurance through an employer. As a result, 79% of Teaching Artists do not feel their work sufficiently supports living in or near NYC³. Yet NYC is relying on this workforce.

Beyond the grave implications for our workforce, this continues to threaten arts education access and participation rates still rebounding from the pandemic. 31% of middle school students meeting state arts learning requirements simply isn't acceptable. Unless our city takes action, we are at-risk of losing one of the most diverse and impactful parts of the cultural sector.

To sustain and grow this vibrant ecosystem, we must prioritize bureaucratic efficiency — ensuring our educators and artists are paid in a timely, efficient manner, and affordability — ensuring educators and artists can afford to

live and work in the city that they inspire. We have a window of opportunity to define our city's future: **that starts with the arts**. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to protect our workforce and invest in our students. This includes:

ADDRESS COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS FOR ARTS EDUCATION WORKFORCE

- **Continue reforms to contracting with city agencies.** specifically targeting NYCPS' Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) and CASA contracts, to ensure timely contract remittance and payments, accessible processes, and fair per-class rates that reflect the true cost of programming and labor.
- **Launch insurance pilots to support teaching artist affordability.** Aligned with Creatives Rebuild NY and the Center for an Urban Future, NYC can reduce economic precarity for the arts workforce by piloting a freelancers portable benefits program and a pooled insurance program for smaller orgs.
- **Restore and Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$30M).** Baselineing this one-time addition supports arts organizations and workers city-wide, offering sector-wide stabilization and preventing further artist displacement.

PRESERVING & IMPROVING ARTS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

- **Require NYCPS arts funding be spent on the arts.** Boost the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$89.76, and require that allocated money be spent on arts education.
- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teacher:** Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, in part by reviving the successful supplemental arts certification program (\$4M) and funding a PE Works-inspired improvement plan using the already baselined arts education funding.
- **Restore and Enhance "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative funding.** Increase allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand for increased arts learning opportunities.
- **Improve arts education data transparency.** Require mandatory reporting on school-level arts education access, participation/enrollment, spending, and MTAC procurement (R1129/R1180) via T&C.
- **Update the NYCPS Blueprint for Arts Learning** to define sequential pathways for arts learning that integrate culturally-responsive pedagogy and reflect rapid advancements in media and technology (last updated in 2015).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sources:

¹ NYC Public Schools Arts Office 2024-2025 Arts in Schools Report:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/15dgP8o30sHV25WomYMOZSNTxP1EQoYfw/view?usp=drive_link

² Testimony on Cultural Development Fund Programs in NYC Public Schools:

https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/arts-education-funding-testimony-april-2025_final.pdf

³ Roundtable Brief: Recommendations for NYC Public Schools Multi-Task Award Contract (MTAC) Process to Support Partnership with NYC Arts Vendors (published February 2025): <https://bit.ly/47AzJRu>

⁴ Paying for Professionalism 2025 - A Report on New York City Teaching Artist Compensation & Employment (published July 23, 2025): <https://nycaieroundtable.org/advocacy/paying-for-professionalism-2025/>



MISSION

New York City Children's Theater (NYCCT) inspires young people's imaginations and supports social and emotional growth through original theatrical experiences on stages, in schools, and in the community.

LEGAL NAME: MAKING BOOKS SING DBA NEW YORK CITY CHILDREN'S THEATER

EIN: 13-4201577

My name is Cathy Hung, and I am the Executive Director of Making Books Sing, doing business as New York City Children's Theater. I appreciate the opportunity to share how our work impacts children across New York City and why continued support for arts access is essential.

I often begin by inviting people to think back to their very first theater experience. Whether you were onstage or in the audience, you likely remember that spark—that moment when it felt possible to fly, or sing, or be the funniest person in the room. Theater gives children permission to imagine, to explore new possibilities, and to believe they can be anything.

At New York City Children's Theater, we use that same **power of imagination** to help children **heal, learn, and grow**. Whether we are in a classroom in the Bronx or a family shelter in Queens, we see every day how storytelling opens a door for children who are carrying more than any child should.

I think of a little boy in one of our shelter residencies who had not spoken for weeks. During a simple drama game, pretending to be animals, he suddenly let out the tiniest roar. The room froze. Then he did it again, louder. By the end of the session, he was leading the group. That roar wasn't just play. It was agency. It was **confidence** returning.

In a Brooklyn classroom, a group of second graders adapted a book through our core program, **Literature at Play®**, a program rooted in our original name, Making Books Sing. One student said, "I didn't know I could make a story. I thought stories were only in books." That is the moment we live for: when a child realizes they are the storyteller.

Our teaching artists—experts in **trauma-informed** practice—use theater, music, and active play to help children process big emotions, solve problems, build empathy, strengthen literacy, and rediscover joy. These are not simply arts activities. They are social-emotional lifelines. They are literacy tools. They are moments of possibility. And in a world where so many children are navigating instability, fear, and loss, imagination becomes more than creativity—it becomes **resilience**.

This work is only possible because of the City's investment in children—our future. The CASA program, Arts Access funding, the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and the Speaker's allocation have allowed us to reach thousands of young people who would otherwise have no access to the arts. These funds ensure that children in shelters, multilingual learners, and students across all five boroughs experience the joy, healing, and learning that theater uniquely provides.

Our programs—including professional Main Stage productions, Literature at Play®, anti-bullying workshops, and Theater for the Very Young touring productions—are active across 24 City Council districts and serve more than 16,000 students annually.

As you make decisions for the coming year, we respectfully ask for your continued—and renewed—support for these critical funding streams. They are not just line items. They are lifelines. They make it possible for us to bring imagination, stability, and hope to the children who need it most.

We are requesting Speaker Initiative support of \$150,000; Cultural Immigrant Initiative funds to support our Multilingual Learning through Music and Theater program; and continued support through CASA and Arts Access to ensure our programs remain accessible to all.

Thank you for your leadership and for believing in what the arts can do for New York City's children.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Hung
Cathy Hung
Executive Director

FY27 Discretionary Ask

2201089 - CASA

2201112 - Cultural Immigrant Fund

2201756 - Art Access - Literature at Play® Residency

2201822 - Art Access - Touring Productions

2202385 - Art Access - Field Trip to Main Stage

2156150 - Speaker's Initiative

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Literature at Play®, our signature program for K – 5th, uses theatre and songwriting to adapt a children's book into an original musical. Children engage in creative play, storytelling, and songwriting to explore the vocabulary, plot, characters, and themes of the book. Selected books address topics relevant to NYC public school students and feature characters reflecting the city's diverse communities



Our Achievements:

- Supported 19 schools citywide, collecting 91 original plays created by students
- Assisted 150 students with emotional disturbances and disabilities with a highly adaptable curriculum
- Enhanced students' language and literacy skills through theatre and songwriting
- Expanded students' writing abilities, focusing on literary elements, dialogue, and expressive or descriptive language



Music for Multilingual Learners, supported through the **Cultural Immigrant Initiative**, is an interactive program that combines songwriting, theatrical storytelling, and play to enhance language skills in second-grade multilingual learners in some of the poorest districts in NYC. An independent review of our work demonstrated that the program significantly improved speaking, reading, and writing skills among the city's most vulnerable children, while also increasing classroom participation.

Our Achievements:

- Guided 600 second-grade children and the youngest New Yorkers in multilingual classrooms through the process of creating their own original musical based on a storybook.
- Provided part-time employment for 10 teaching artists.
- NYCCT is the sole partner of the Department of Education in training teaching artists and classroom teachers on effective methodologies for educating multilingual learners across the city.

ABOUT

New York City Children's Theater (NYCCT) began in 1996 as Making Books Sing, a family theater and education program of the Tony award-winning Vineyard Theatre. In 2001, we became an independent 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. NYCCT envisions a world in which theater is a vital and regular part of every child's experience. We reach children and their communities with a wide range of programming, including full-scale productions, small touring shows, interactive workshops and in-school residencies, and engage with them in traditional theater spaces, school auditoriums, classrooms and cultural venues in their neighborhoods.

PROGRAM SUMMARY (continue)

Art Access Program through our Main Stage and Touring Productions

Every year, NYCCT invites students to experience live theater through our Main Stage Productions and touring productions in classrooms. Our touring productions, which include anti-bullying stories like *Avery's Story* and *Fair and Square* as well as sensory and bilingual productions like *Five/Cinco*, delight students from pre-K to 5th grade with relatable stories. When young people experience bullying, especially from someone they consider a friend, it can be hard to know what to do. The power of these interactive dramas is that they allow students to imagine and practice what to do when they themselves are facing a bully.



Pinocchio

Our Achievements:

- 44 classes from nine schools enjoyed 12 school-day performances of *My First Nutcracker* and *Pinocchio*.
- 990 pre-k to 2nd graders enjoyed *Avery's Story*, 810 3rd graders participated in the *Fair and Square*, and 72 performances of *Five/Cinco* were presented citywide.
- Last year NYCCT engaged 17,120 children and caregivers in 2,282 hours of theater in schools, shelters, and cultural institutions throughout NYC.



Transitional Housing Residencies Using Songwriting and Theater

(TRUST) program emerged from our collaboration with the DOE as Afterschool Reading Club (ARC) program in shelters. When the ARC program, which had reached 36 sites at its peak, was shuttered in Spring 2021, many partner sites implored NYCCT to continue the initiative. Starting with private support, we have gradually rebuilt from two sites to currently operating in 10 sites. This expansion would not have been possible without the invaluable support of the Speaker. We are profoundly grateful for this support, as it has enabled us to continue and expand our service

Our Achievements:

- Modeled after our Literature at Play® curriculum, it addresses literacy loss experienced by students in transitional housing.
- Strengthening a young person's sense of belonging by utilizing play and storytelling to bridge cultural gaps.
- Reliable, recognizable session leaders support an environment that allows for vulnerability when young people require it.

Cultural After-School Adventures (CASA)

NYCCT has been a proud partner of the Cultural After-School Adventures (CASA) program since its inception. Our after-school theater and songwriting residencies foster imagination, collaboration, and help children make gains in reading and writing. These programs also develop communication skills and teach emotional management. During each CASA residency, children use creative play alongside drama and songwriting activities to explore the vocabulary, plot, characters, and themes of a children's book.



CASA @ PS161Q

Our Achievements:

- Each CASA residency supports up to 120 elementary school students.
- Strengthen a young person's sense of belonging by utilize play and storytelling to bridge cultural gaps



**Written testimony submitted to the Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations
on the Preliminary Library Budget
March 18, 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the preliminary library budget. I will focus on the need for investment in libraries as a key component of family support infrastructure, and the potential of libraries to contribute to reductions in child welfare involvement in New York City.

Founded in 2021, NYC Family Policy Project (FPP) explores and builds evidence—through original research, policy and data analysis—for the policy visions of parents and youth impacted by the child welfare system. Policy visions developed by the parent and youth advocacy groups [Rise](#), [YouthNPower: Transforming Care](#), [Black Families Love and Unite](#) and [Narrowing the Front Door to NYC's Child Welfare System](#) emphasize the need for a limited child welfare system and expansive and reparative investment in families and communities. FPP focuses on economic investments that can strengthen family well-being and reduce child welfare involvement; investments in community conditions that support healthy family life; and policy and practice efforts to move toward a more limited child welfare system with a narrow front door.

FPP is in support of the NYC Public Library Action Network's (NYC PLAN) call for 0.5% of the city budget to be committed to libraries – a request which Mayor Mamdani committed to throughout his campaign. Unfortunately, the preliminary budget falls short of that promise.

Significant research shows that where a family lives influences a wide range of outcomes, including [health and mental health](#), [economic mobility](#), [crime](#) and [child development](#). Even side-by-side communities with similar demographics can have [very different family health and well-being profiles](#). In short, neighborhood conditions shape family stress, safety, connection and access to resources in ways that can safeguard against or compound hardship.

For decades, a small number of NYC neighborhoods have borne the brunt of child welfare system involvement. Hotline calls, investigations and family separations are [highly concentrated and segregated in NYC](#), where the 15 neighborhoods that drive involvement have remained largely the same for two decades. While poverty is a significant driver of child welfare involvement, and child poverty is high in these neighborhoods, decades of research shows that neighborhoods exert their own influence on family life, safety and well-being.

Parents understand intuitively that raising children can be made easier, or harder, by the conditions that surround families. A [playground](#) down the block, a [local library](#) with 'mommy & me' classes, or a nearby

grocery store with healthy food options—simple neighborhood amenities can make everyday life feel more supported.

Public libraries serve as a vital resource for families, promoting [health](#) and well-being and connecting patrons to needed resources. One study found that summer educational services at the New York Public Library created a [“safe haven”](#) for learning, supporting community connection, resilience-building and the formation of reading and learning habits, especially for low-income children.

These impacts likely extend to parents, too. In a study interviewing caregivers to understand how they thought a neighborhood’s built environment could be affecting child maltreatment, parents described shared public places like parks, libraries and community centers as [“relief valves”](#) that give children outlets and allow caregivers to rest and connect with others. As one parent explained: “Community centers, playgrounds, libraries...things that the children can do that are positive, so parents can kind of get that reprieve...maybe be at home prepping dinner or just having a moment to relax.”

[Social infrastructure](#) and civic organizations like libraries play a distinct role in [supporting collective efficacy](#). Neighborhoods with high collective efficacy consistently have lower crime, reduced child welfare involvement, stronger local engagement and greater resilience during crises. On child welfare, one study in Chicago found that [neighborhoods with a stronger social fabric had lower substantiated cases of neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse](#). In NYC too, neighborhood collective efficacy appears to have an effect on child welfare involvement. An analysis by the Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy found that, controlling for other factors, higher rates of collective efficacy are associated with lower rates of indicated investigations and foster care entries at the zip code level.

The city has made progress reducing child welfare system involvement since 2019, with investigations and foster care placements declining by 10 percent or more. Sustaining these gains however, especially in the face of federal cuts, will require that the city and state adopt new policies and broader public health approaches that invest in family support infrastructure and buffer families from hardship.

FPP supports NYC PLAN’s request that public library funding be increased to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million in public library funding for the FY27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding.

3/18/2026

Libraries Subcommittee Meeting

Good afternoon, My name is Dr. Abby Emerson, I'm a NYC educator and I am here today as a member of NYC PLAN, the Public Library Action Network, which is a group of patrons and library workers organizing together to amplify, strengthen, and progress the futures of NYC's three public library systems.

I was here exactly one year ago, to the day, testifying with the same ask. I am frustrated that I am spending another day doing so.

At the moment, the proposed libraries budget sits at 0.39% of the overall NYC budget.

This is woefully inadequate for multiple reasons.

- 1) We have been asking for a stable 0.5% for multiple years now. This is a fair and reasonable ask. For this coming cycle that would translate to \$635 million that the libraries so desperately need.
- 2) The mayor campaigned with a platform of meeting the 0.5% we've asked for, but has since stepped back from that.
- 3) The current 0.39% is even less than last year when we were under the Adams administration, which was about 0.42%
- 4) The libraries are operating within a deficit. We have a duty to help them close the gap.

Nationally our public goods are being stripped away at every turn and we have an obligation to ensure that does not happen at the local level.

Too often libraries are taken for granted, but the complex work they do both technically behind the scenes and socially in their communities is essential. I personally find libraries one of the most emotionally moving spaces in our city – where else is everyone truly welcome without payment?

Despite the magic they somehow pull together, as a patron I want more from my library. I often visit libraries when I travel to other places and I am struck by the creativity of their offerings. I can only imagine what NYC library workers could do with a properly funded budget. I know I would benefit, my kids would benefit, and you would benefit too.

So I am asking once again that we commit a stable and baselined 0.5% for libraries in this budget cycle and every budget cycle.

<https://nycplan.org/scorecards/library-funding-stances-by-city-council-members/>



- The financial year (FY) 2027 **Preliminary Budget** estimate total for public libraries is \$491,436,000 (\$491.4 million). The total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127,000,969,000 (\$127 billion). So the current FY '27 est. funding for libraries is a measly 0.39% of the total budget.
- The demand from NYC PLAN is that the city council and Mayor Mamdani increase that number from 0.39% to at least 0.5% (half of 1%) of the total city budget. For FY '27, that would be \$635,005,000 (\$635 million).
- Another way to think about this is that we're demanding an **increase of \$143,569,000 (\$143.5 million) in public library funding in the FY '27 cycle**, or a **23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year**.

And if there's a follow up asking why we settled on that number, you could say:

"We think it's a realistic but significant number. We believe this would allow libraries, which are relied on now more than ever, to be more fully staffed, and to accommodate patron needs."

One other piece of financial info that is important for us to understand, is that **the three library systems together are operating under a structural financial deficit, mainly because of growth in overall expenses due to inflation since 2021. The current operational deficit is \$44.6 million.**

The NYC PLAN demand for \$143 million more in library funding for FY '27 means **there would only be \$98.4 million available for a true increase** in service or staffing levels from their current state if \$44.6 million is just getting the libraries caught up with inflation for current operations.



Preliminary Budget Hearing for NYC Committee on Libraries

In alignment with NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN), I am submitting written testimony today to request that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,000) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, we ask that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets. This is a request which Mayor Mamdani committed to throughout his campaign, and unfortunately, the preliminary budget falls short of that promise.

- The financial year (FY) 2027 **Preliminary Budget** estimate total for public libraries is \$491,436,000 (\$491.4 million). The total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127,000,969,000 (\$127 billion). So the current FY '27 est. funding for libraries is just 0.39% of the total budget.
- We demand that the city council and Mayor Mamdani increase that number from 0.39% to at least 0.5% (half of 1%) of the total city budget. For FY '27, that would be \$635,005,000 (\$635 million).
- Another way to think about this is that we're demanding an **increase of \$143,569,000 (\$143.5 million) in public library funding in the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.**

We understand that **the three library systems together are operating under a structural financial deficit, mainly because of growth in overall expenses due to inflation since 2021. The current operational deficit is \$44.6 million.**

The NYC PLAN demand for \$143 million more in library funding for FY '27 means ***there would only be \$98.4 million available for a true increase*** in service or staffing levels from their current state if \$44.6 million is just getting the libraries caught up with inflation for current operations.

This is a realistic but significant number. We believe this would allow libraries, which are relied on now more than ever, to be more fully staffed, and to accommodate patron needs.

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Committee On Cultural Affairs, Libraries And International Relations

Nantasha M. Williams, Chair | Members: Crystal Hudson; Farah N. Louis; Virginia Maloney; Chi A. Ossé; Althea V. Stevens; Sandra Ung

Hearing: Wednesday, March 18, 2026, 11:30 AM | 250 Broadway — 8th Floor — Hearing Room 1

Agenda Item: T2026-1351 — Budget and Oversight Hearing - FY27Preliminary Budget

Partners in Cultural Stewardship Coalition

Dear Chair Williams and members of the committee:

Introduction: Cultural Stewardship as Public Infrastructure

The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) relies on a largely unrecognized group of cultural organizations to steward city-owned capital assets. These nonprofit organizations care for public-facing cultural facilities, preserving these civic assets and keeping them active through long-standing partnerships with DCLA. The Partners in Cultural Stewardship Coalition brings together these organizations for peer learning and support, and to better interact with the agency. This combined testimony aims to name the public functions, demonstrate the scale of our impact, and call for a stronger framework to sustain our service to New Yorkers.

Our coalition brings together organizations that care for civic and historic spaces, preserve public assets, operate venues that remain open and accessible, and provide programming for New Yorkers across boroughs, generations, and communities. We are united by a shared commitment to stewardship, access, equity, and collaboration, and by the understanding that public-private partnership is one way this city delivers culture and the arts at a meaningful scale.

Together, we represent organizations that do far more than present programs. We support artists, educators, students, and community partners, and create places where culture, learning, and civic life can take root across generations.

Across this coalition, we steward a combined 250,000 square feet of city-owned cultural space. Together, our institutions reach roughly 450,000 locals and tourists each year, and employ upwards of 500 full-time and part-time workers annually across member institutions.

Public Programs as Standing Civic Resources

Our coalition stewards a wide range of public-facing cultural venues, including theaters, galleries, dance studios, artist studios, rehearsal rooms, classrooms, community gathering spaces, archival and interpretive spaces, outdoor convening areas, and flexible multi-use facilities that support everything from neighborhood festivals to school partnerships, residencies, and major performances. Across those spaces, we sustain youth education, artist residencies, free and deeply subsidized creative

space, performance and exhibition programs, civic and neighborhood-based cultural programming, and publications and archives that preserve and circulate New York's cultural life.

These are not isolated programs. They are public resources. Signature examples include: Harlem Stage's WaterWorks and E-Moves, The Clemente's Historias initiative and International Puppet Fringe Festival, Dance Theatre of Harlem's DTH School and Dancing Through Barriers®, Performance Space New York's Open Movement and First Mondays: Readings of Works in Progress, Movement Research's Open Performance and Studies Project, Theatre for a New Audience's World Theatre Project, Mabou Mines' SUITE/Space, Bronx River Art Center's Bronx River Sounds, and UrbanGlass's open-access studios and GLASS: The UrbanGlass Art Quarterly.

Representative Institutions and Site-Based Impact

The organizations represented in this testimony serve different neighborhoods and publics, but share a common reality. The Clemente is a longstanding cultural anchor of the Lower East Side, stewarding a 100,000-square-foot historic public building with 46 subsidized studios, four theaters, two galleries, and outdoor public space. Performance Space New York and Movement Research help activate the 122 Community Center through interdisciplinary performance, dance, rehearsal, and public exchange. Dance Theatre of Harlem is a global cultural institution whose company, school, and community engagement programs extend from Harlem to audiences and students across the city and beyond.

Three Structural Pressures Facing Cultural Stewards

The situation we face is not simply the legacy of the pandemic. It is the convergence of three ongoing pressures that are destabilizing the cultural stewardship of city-owned buildings across New York City.

1. Rising Operating Costs and Inflation: The costs of NYC cultural nonprofits have risen far faster than revenue. Center for an Urban Future, drawing on ArtsPool member data, reports that between 2019 and 2024 median revenues rose just 2.2%, while median operating expenses climbed 64% including utilities, insurance, maintenance, supplies, security, transportation, and labor. These pressures affect many sectors, but for cultural organizations, they are compounded by public-service obligations, aging facilities, and limited flexibility to absorb rising costs.

2. Delayed Capital Repairs and Infrastructure Risk: Coalition members are responsible for facilities that require long-term upkeep, but essential repairs and upgrades are too often delayed by an overwhelmed and slow-moving capital process. Needed improvements to roofs, HVAC systems, accessibility, energy infrastructure, and core building conditions can take years to move from need to approval to completion. Those delays increase costs, deepen risk, and leave organizations trying to deliver public service in facilities that are harder and more expensive to maintain each year.

3. Affordability Crisis and Institutional Strain: Second, New York City's affordability crisis is not only affecting individuals and families. It is also affecting the institutions that hold neighborhoods together.

Nonprofit arts organizations are facing rising operating costs, workforce strain, and mounting barriers to sustaining accessible programming in the communities they serve. Many coalition members are relied-upon cultural anchors in changing neighborhoods. The same city that has become harder for working people to afford has also become harder for public-serving cultural organizations to sustain.

At the same time, this coalition is part of the solution to that affordability crisis. We provide deeply subsidized multi-use space and venues for cultural producers, community groups, and artists, along with services and project support that keep public culture accessible. But sustaining those low costs has too often come at a price: deferred maintenance in facilities that are constantly in need of repair and renovation, and pressure on staffing and benefits as organizations absorb unexpected building costs from already strained operating budgets.

Taken together, these pressures make clear that the issue is structural, not temporary. The City already depends on cultural public-private partnerships to steward major civic assets, but the policy framework around that stewardship remains uneven, under-coordinated, and insufficiently responsive to current conditions.

Cultural Stewardship as a Public Service Function

This matters because our organizations do far more than operate buildings. We steward public cultural spaces that function as sites of learning, gathering, artistic development, memory, and neighborhood life. We serve children, families, youth, students, seniors, neighborhood residents, public school communities, working artists, cultural workers, researchers, and visitors from across the city and beyond. We also serve communities that have too often been excluded from sustained cultural investment, including Black, Latino, immigrant, multilingual, and low-income communities, as well as artists and audiences seeking affordable and welcoming places to create and participate.

What makes this coalition distinct is not only its scale but also the depth and continuity of what we provide. These are standing programs and long-term public resources that extend the City's own cultural mission. Through our facilities and programs, New Yorkers gain access to education, public performance, exhibitions, neighborhood gathering spaces, archives, preservation, and opportunities for creative development that would otherwise be far less available.

Toward a Citywide Stewardship Strategy

Taken together, these organizations help the City Administration fulfill its own public mission. We create access to culture, sustain neighborhood vitality, support artists, educators, and cultural organizations without venue space, preserve living histories, and offer places where New Yorkers can gather and belong. This is not peripheral to the city's well-being. It is part of the social and economic infrastructure New Yorkers rely on every day.

For that reason, our closing point is not simply a request for more project funding. It is a call for a more intentional stewardship strategy, one that matches the public function these organizations already perform on the City's behalf.

That strategy could include:

- **A shared repair and stabilization fund** for urgent building needs that do not rise to the level of major capital projects but cannot be absorbed by nonprofit operating budgets.
- **Expanded access to shared services and group-rate systems** that lower the cost of insurance, health coverage, retirement benefits, and other essential expenses.
- **A more coordinated interagency approach** to the facilities, workforce, and compliance challenges that come with caring for public-facing cultural buildings.

This is not about treating cultural organizations as isolated grantees. It is about recognizing them as long-term stewards of civic assets and building the systems to support that responsibility. A stronger framework would protect public facilities, reduce the long-term cost of deferred maintenance, stabilize the workforce that makes these services possible, and allow organizations to direct more of their limited resources toward artists, audiences, students, and neighborhoods.

Conclusion: Recognizing Long-Term Civic Partners

Our call is for the City to recognize cultural stewardship as a public systems issue and to develop the tools that recognition requires. These buildings, public services, and publics already exist. What is needed now is a framework that protects them more effectively.

Thank you for your attention to the often invisible work of cultural stewardship, and to the opportunity to recognize these organizations as essential long-term partners in the City's civic infrastructure.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ana Sepúlveda
Performance Space New York

Libertad Guerra
The Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center

Barbara Bryan
Movement Research

Anna Glass and Gwen Kingsberry
Dance Theatre of Harlem

Participating and aligned organizations in this category include: Performance Space New York, Movement Research, The Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Harlem Stage, Bronx River Art Center, Mabou Mines, Theatre for a New Audience, and UrbanGlass.

FY27 City Council Budget Hearings
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Subject: Making Children's Play a Cultural Priority

Thank you, Chair Williams, and the Committee for holding this hearing and giving us an opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Stephanie Skaff and I am the Executive Director of play:groundNYC, a nonprofit dedicated to transforming the city through play.

We would like to testify about the role of children's play in shaping cultural values. At play:groundNYC, we believe that opportunities for self-directed play, where children guide their own experiences and make their own choices, are too few in our city. Public schools are often lacking in open space for play, making recess unavailable or unrealistic for many children. Traffic has made neighborhood play too dangerous. Traditional playgrounds and open space are plentiful in some neighborhoods and non-existent in others. Children's mental health is affected by the lack of opportunities to slow down and play freely.

We believe—and we see it first hand through our programs at The Yard and in the public school system, which serve around 11,000 children each year—that when children have the opportunity to play freely, with minimal adult intervention, they have joyful, imaginative, surprising and challenging experiences that shape how they learn, how they feel about themselves, and how they socialize with others. Parents and caregivers bring their children to The Yard because of how unusual and transformative it is. Educators bring their students for field trips, and come to us for professional development in order to learn how to build more free play into the school environment.

"It's like a scrap yard, and then kids come and turn it into a utopia," said a child at The Yard.

As an organization, we are trying to ensure that children's play is treated as a right rather than a privilege. As an uncompromising and essential aspect of a healthy childhood. The Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations could support this work by considering play as a cultural priority through their funding and advocacy. Improving recess environments for public school children, encouraging school yards to remain open to the public in the evenings and on weekends, supporting open streets as a way for children to play safely in their neighborhoods, and educating the public about play. Together, we could give New York City's children opportunities for amazing play everyday.

At play:groundNYC, we thank you for allowing us to testify about this important subject that is very dear to us, and brings us joy. We hope to find a way to work with the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations to improve play for all children in all neighborhoods throughout NYC.



PREGONES / PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATER
Two Great Stages, One Great Theater!

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026

This testimony is submitted on behalf of **Pregones/Puerto Rican Traveling Theater**, named to the **Cultural Institutions Group** in 2025 and recently recognized for sustained impact in the arts by the Drama Desk Awards and the Obie Awards. We are a multigenerational theater ensemble, multidiscipline presenter, and steward of renowned bilingual facilities in the South Bronx and Manhattan's Theater District. Our company took root in these neighborhoods back when both were sites of urban blight. Our enduring presence and enhanced menu of activities today are testament to collective tenacity, open disposition, and the embrace of community, history, and belonging. Year-round performances, artist residencies, educational workshops, master classes, and digital programs employ upwards of 350 creative workers, serve upwards of 20,000 direct participants, and reach more than 350,000 area households each year.

For close to six decades, our organization labors to realize its full potential in three ways: **as a theater company** managing the development and empowerment of a multigenerational Latinx ensemble, nurturing relevant relationships with a wide range of visiting, associate, and collaborating artists; **as a creative workforce hub** caring for a growing mix of full-time, part-time, and adjunct staff and volunteers, many with long tenures in our service; and **as a cultural anchor and legacy arts organization** catalyzing and contributing towards lifelong learning and participation in the arts, and overall gains in quality of life for all New Yorkers.

This year, we join the CIG in asking the New York City Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baseline this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.
- 2. Annual Increases:** We kindly ask the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for institutions like ours continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.

3. Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:

- a. **Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
- b. **Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
- c. **Identify key process improvements.** Consider improvements that may shorten time to completion and help culturals meet capital needs more effectively.

In addition, this year we join fellow recipients of Coalition of Theaters of Color (CTC) Initiative funding in asking the New York City Council to support in two ways:

1. **Allocation and Grant Increases:** We ask the city to increase the CTC available funds to **\$8 million** in the FY2027 Budget. This modest increase over FY2026 can significantly boost CTC grants by an estimated 30%, helping recipients meet escalating costs.
2. **Restore Flexibility:** Restored flexibility in use of CTC funds to include general operations, capacity building, workforce development, and/or programs validating the proven rigor of both CIG and CDF recipient organizations.

In closing, we invite elected officials and agency representatives alike to be in dialogue with the Latinx Arts Consortium of New York (LxNY), a network of over 50 Latinx-serving cultural entities, and the Cultural Equity Coalition of New York (CECNY), dedicated to ensuring the cultural sector truly reflects and serves our lived diversity. We value their research and advocacy and cherish their aspirations.

We believe creativity and imagination empowers all peoples. We know this work unites all of us across disciplines, industries, and lived experiences. We thank the New York City Council for its commitment to listening, dialogue, and investment in support of our expansive labors.

Submitted by: Arnaldo J. López, Ph.D., Managing Director, ajlopez@pregones.org

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 18, 2026
Queens Botanical Garden
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

My name is Evie Hantzopoulos, and I serve as Executive Director of Queens Botanical Garden, located in Flushing, Queens. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

Queens Botanical Garden (QBG) is an urban oasis where people, plants, and cultures are celebrated through inspiring gardens, innovative educational programs, and real-world applications of environmental stewardship. We serve over 250,000 visitors each year including 25,000 schoolchildren primarily from Title 1 schools, older adults, 194 youth interns of all developmental, physical, and cognitive abilities, and guests from the local, regional, and global community. We offer low-cost admission and ample free hours during our peak seasons, and over three months of free admission to the garden from December 16 to March 31.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

1. **Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselining this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge

swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.

2. **Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.

3. **Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**

- a. **Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
- b. **Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
- c. **Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions and organizations to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.



Statement by Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO, Queens Public Library

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030 and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

March 18, 2026

Good morning. I am Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO of Queens Public Library (QPL). Thank you, Deputy Speaker Chair Dr. Williams, Speaker Menin, members of this esteemed committee and Council Members, for the opportunity to testify today, and for the years of incredible support for the three public library systems.

Amid the challenges of our times, libraries remain a cornerstone of democracy, ensuring free and open access to knowledge and opportunity for all. **With additional investments championed by the City Council in the adopted Fiscal Year 2026 budget, Queens Public Library was able to strengthen our operations and expand seven-day service to five more branches.** The expanded seven-day locations have since had over 32,500 visits on their extra day, giving even more New Yorkers access to free, high-quality collections, programs and resources in welcoming environments.

Demand for library resources remains high. Systemwide in FY25, QPL saw over 6.5 million visits, and circulation rose 25 percent. Program attendance was 964,000, Wi-Fi sessions increased by 51 percent, and there were 982,000 computer sessions. Our four teen centers (Cambria Heights, Central, Flushing and Long Island City branches) and standalone Far Rockaway Teen Library provide young adults with their own dedicated space, along with robust programming and guidance from trusted staff. We also created Innovation Stations at 22 additional libraries that provide opportunities for discovery through afterschool STEAM activities for middle and high school students. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, QPL's Mail-A-Book program, which operates from the Queens Village Library, delivers collections and programs to homebound users. At its annual virtual New Year's Eve celebration, more than 130 people rang in 2026 together. As our branches do, this service provides a lifeline for our users, combatting social isolation and allowing them to connect with others.

QPL also strengthened existing partnerships and established new ones. At the Central and Cambria Heights teen centers, as well as the Far Rockaway Teen Library, we are offering expanded STEM-based resources with NYC FIRST. We revitalized the library at the NYS Veterans Home in St. Albans, restocking it with 1,000 print titles that reflect the residents' interests, and QPL staff visit monthly to provide library service. Our QPL Baby program expanded to the Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Centers, joining Elmhurst, Queens, Flushing and Jamaica Hospitals, and LIJ Forest Hills, giving more caregivers and their newborns access to QPL's early learning resources.

New Yorkers depend on these indispensable services, and they want to see more: more one-on-one job search assistance; digital literacy workshops; after-school homework help; and access to

technology, such as laptops, tablets and 3-D printers. In FY25, we had an attendance of 61,000 for ESOL classes, with a waiting list of 2,000 at any given time. Attendance at our older-adult-focused *Creative Aging* workshops was more than 9,300, and this past summer, we had an attendance of 120,000 for QPL's Summer at the Library programming.

The Mayor's pledge to commit 0.5 percent of the City budget to libraries recognizes the power of libraries to transform people's lives and to create a more equitable, affordable New York City. An additional \$143.6 million baselined for the three systems (\$40 million for QPL) would be monumental, allowing us to fortify our operations and deliver even more for all of our communities. Increased and sustained funding, which the City Council has long advocated for, would make libraries even more accessible to New Yorkers across the city, allowing us to extend hours, hire much-needed staff, expand programs to meet demand, and make available more books, computers and other essential library resources. Additionally, we would finally be able to plan effectively for the out-years, rather than waiting and worrying about what our upcoming budgets would be.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget baselined \$2 million for the three systems from the current year's budget, for which we are thankful; **however, it did not include \$30.7 million of vital FY26 funding (\$8.6 million for QPL) required to support systemwide needs.** Last year, we spoke about our immense unmet expense needs, which have since grown to \$16.5M. We look forward to continuing conversations with the Administration, as well as the City Council, to ensure libraries are fully restored in the year ahead and beyond.

Our operations are further complicated by recent instructions to undertake a savings exercise. QPL is a lean organization, and any loss of funding would impact our offerings, such as hours of service, collections, technology, and programs, and our ability to address repairs and maintenance of our buildings. We are hopeful that any reduction to our budget will not become a reality.

The Library's capital portfolio recently hit several milestones. In December, we celebrated groundbreaking for the Rego Park Library, an 18,000-square-foot, three-floor replacement building, and the Astoria Library, a comprehensive renovation and expansion including an elevator that will make each floor accessible. In September, we broke ground on the Baisley Park Library for a renovation that will modernize the branch and restructure the main floor to gain programmatic space. This year, DDC expects the administrative construction start of the Laurelton Library renovation and the physical construction of a brand-new Douglaston-Little Neck Library.

The replacement of critical infrastructure is paramount in ensuring our branches can remain inspiring, fully functioning spaces. Earlier this month, Rochdale Village Library closed for an HVAC replacement, and we expect DDC to return the Queensboro Hill branch to QPL this spring after an HVAC replacement. Later this year, DDC anticipates completion of the day tank upgrade at our busiest branch in the system – and in the nation – the Flushing Library, as well as the administrative construction start of the roof and masonry project at the Ridgewood Library.

QPL currently has 41 active projects, a majority managed by the NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC). **We are incredibly thankful to the Council for its traditional allocation of lump sum funding for QPL.** This unrestricted capital pot is crucial in allowing us to fill project shortfalls as soon as we are notified by DDC, avoiding project delays and increased costs. **For FY27, we are requesting continued support for this essential capital allocation in the amount of \$10 million.**

Queens Public Library's total capital need in FY27 is nearly \$271 million and is comprised of critical infrastructure, resiliency, accessibility, renovation and replacement building projects. Our buildings function as social infrastructure, one of the few locations where the public can go to connect with others without barriers to entry. Library users and staff deserve state-of-the-art, safe and welcoming libraries that they can count on to be open, but this can only happen with investment. **QPL is requesting a transformational \$150 million investment from the Administration in our capital portfolio (\$450 million total for the three systems), allowing us to complete comprehensive renovations and address our most urgent projects across the borough.**

Public libraries are key to a stronger and more equitable New York City. Our users have unlimited access to our resources, without needing to worry if they can afford them. Anyone is welcome to get the help they need, explore diverse ideas and perspectives, and discover their own voices and passions. An investment in Queens Public Library and the city's library systems is an investment in the future of all New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Queens Museum
New York City Building
Flushing Meadows Corona Park
Queens, NY 11368

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Testimony Submitted by:
Debra Wimpfheimer, Deputy Director, Queens Museum
March 18, 2026

Good Afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Debra Wimpfheimer, and I serve as Deputy Director of the Queens Museum, which is a member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG).

We are deeply grateful for the Committee's longstanding partnership and support of the Queens Museum.

Queens Museum is soon breaking ground on our \$42 million capital renovation, which will significantly strengthen our ability to serve children, teens, families, and seniors across the borough. The Museum of the future will be greener, more sustainable, and fully accessible.

This renovation will:

- Address long-standing accessibility challenges;
- Establish the Suna Children's Museum at Queens Museum — the borough's first dedicated children's museum for arts and culture;
- Create a World's Fair Archive, Exhibition Galleries, and Study Center honoring Queens' global legacy;
- And introduce a new outdoor playscape designed for broad public use.

Relating to this project, Queens Museum is requesting \$1M in capital from the New York City Council, \$2M from the Department of Cultural Affairs and \$1M from the Borough President to replace our roof, which has over 47 leaks and is damaging the building currently.

Replacing the roof before the larger renovation proceeds is essential to protecting the City's \$42 million capital investment. Without full replacement, new construction, finishes, and building systems would remain vulnerable to water damage, potentially resulting in delays, change orders, and avoidable future capital costs.

This funding will allow us to move forward responsibly and safeguard the long-term success of this transformative project.

In addition to our capital request, we are seeking:

- \$50,000 in Queens Delegation funding; and
- \$150,000 from the Speaker

This funding will support educational capacity-building as we prepare for this next phase of growth. As we expand our physical footprint, we must also expand our outreach to schools, senior centers, and community-based organizations across Queens. Our Education team, led by Chief Learning Officer Kimaada LeGendre, will continue conducting focus groups and piloting programs informed directly by community needs, with a strong emphasis on equity, access, and inclusion.

The roof replacement, combined with strategic investment in educational capacity, will ensure the safety, accessibility, and long-term vitality of the Queens Museum — and will allow for the successful launch of Queens' first Children's Museum for arts and culture.

We are also here to stand in partnership with all of our partnering CIG organizations. We were so thankful for the Council's support in securing a historic \$75M baseline increase for FY26. **On behalf of the CIG, we are also here to request that the City restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added to the FY26 budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector.**

We are also asking for **improvement and reform to the Capital Project process.** Queens Museum in particular has experienced first hand how costly the delays in the process can be. We finished the first phase of our capital project in 2013 and we are just now able to break ground on the final phase over a decade later.

We also advocate for the full funding of all Council initiatives such as CASA and SUCASA, which are so critical to the work we do at the Museum.

We thank you for your continued partnership and for your consideration of this request. With your support, the Queens Museum will be fully equipped to meet the growing needs of our borough.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Wednesday, March 18, 2026
Staten Island Museum
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

1000 Richmond Terrace, Bldg A
Staten Island, New York 10301
StatenIslandMuseum.org

TEL 718 727 1135
FAX 718 273 5683

Chair Williams and Members of the Committee, I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million, including a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026. We respectfully request that these levels are sustained as we enter FY27. City council funding for arts and culture is critical to providing vital and affordable educational and creative experiences for New Yorkers.

The Staten Island Museum provides interdisciplinary exhibitions, educational programs, and community events annually, engaging with more than 60 community partner organizations. In 2026, SIM opened the exhibition, *Here You Are: Staten Island Triennial*, that highlights seven artists providing support and WAGE aligned stipends to the creative sector of New York City. This spring, SIM will open a Public History Gallery highlighting Staten Island history and its significance in broader city and national historical events to celebrate America 250.

Founded in 1881, the Museum's collection encompasses over 1 million items spanning art, science and history that we steward. SIM is one of 39 proud members of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). SIM employs 14 FT and 9 PT staff to deliver public exhibitions, education, and community programs that reach 30,000 daily visitors, and 7,500 community program participants annually. We are open and accessible to the public with suggested admission. SIM's school programs serve 12,000 students, 53% of which are from Title 1 schools, through field trips, in-school lessons, and CASA programs.

Investing in culture is investing in safe, public spaces for New Yorkers of all ages from all walks of life. Engaging in the arts and culture supports wellness and health, counteracts social isolation, and enhances civic life. We are also an integral part of the city's economic success. The cultural economy generates \$110 billion in economic activity in NYC - 13 percent of the City's economic activity.

I add my voice to requesting a significant investment from NYC in FY27 to safeguard NYC's cultural institutions, especially as federal priorities have shifted. Our budget **requests include baseline restoration of \$30M; consideration of year-over-year cost increases; and capital process reform.**

The Staten Island Museum has an active capital project that has been in planning for more than 8 years. We are actively working with DCLA and DDC to bring the project to construction but keep hitting roadblocks. We are hopeful that a new CM Build program will advance our project. Capital process reform to bring efficiencies is necessary.

I urge City Council and the Administration to baseline \$75M to provide stability and demonstrate NYC's commitment to the cultural organizations -- including the Staten Island Museum -- that make NYC great and contribute significantly to the wellbeing of New Yorkers. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Monger, President & CEO, Staten Island Museum
P: 718.483.7113 JMonger@StatenIslandMuseum.org

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026
Queens Theatre
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

Good afternoon, Chair Dr. Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is **Dr. Julia del Palacio and I am the Executive Director of the Queens Theatre**. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) - a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

The Queens Theatre reflects the lived experiences of Queens residents while supporting local creators, first-time producers, schools, and community organizations, with accessibility and representation at the core of our mission.

One of our initiatives, Theatre for All (TFA), launched in 2017, advances inclusion for Deaf and Disabled artists, students, cultural workers, and audiences through services such as ASL interpretation, captioning, audio description, tactile tours, and professional training led primarily by Disabled artists. Through Theatre for All Training (TFAT), we have served more than 250 Deaf and Disabled performers since 2018, with alumni going on to Broadway, Lincoln Center, and national television.

Queens Theatre also prioritizes immigrant and underrepresented communities through Developing New American Voices (NAV), which has developed more than 160 plays centered on immigrant and first-generation stories.

In addition, our Queens Theatre Education (QTEd) serves 3,000+ students annually, many from arts-poor schools.

Lastly, we serve multiple districts across Queens through CASA and SU-CASA allocations and have the capacity to do more.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

- 1. Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector.

2. **Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations.
3. **Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**
 - a. **Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions.
 - b. **Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
 - c. **Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years — or more — to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions and organizations to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities.

The Queens Theatre serves one of the most diverse populations in New York City, expanding access to arts education and cultural participation, supporting local artists and community organizations, and acting as a trusted civic partner and neighborhood anchor. We remain grateful to the Council and Chair Williams for your collaboration and look forward to strengthening our partnership, exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities, and ensuring that culture remains affordable and accessible for all New Yorkers.

TESTIMONY OF JESSICA BAKER VODOOR
PRESIDENT & CEO
SNUG HARBOR CULTURAL CENTER & BOTANICAL GARDEN
CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS GROUP (CIG) VICE CHAIR, STATEN ISLAND

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Williams and members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Jessica Baker Vodoor, President & CEO of Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden and CIG Vice Chair for Staten Island. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)—a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations. Our site is home to three additional CIGs—the Staten Island Museum, Staten Island Children’s Museum, and Noble Maritime Collection—and multiple CDF organizations. Staten Island boasts two more CIGs in Historic Richmond Town and the Staten Island Zoo. Together, we are the cultural backbone of our borough.

We thank the City Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026. Our work is not done.

Now entering our 50th year, Snug Harbor is a culture park on Staten Island offering arts, nature, history, education, and events for all. We envision a more culturally connected and thriving Staten Island. Snug Harbor confronts affordability barriers by providing accessible programming for our under-resourced community and the general public—much of it free or pay-as-you-wish—thanks to consistent support from the City of New York. We are the City's only free botanical garden, open 365 days a year. We steward a historic 83-acre campus, providing free open green space adjacent to environmental justice communities. Our workforce development initiatives—funded with both private and City support—train emerging and young adults in environmental stewardship. Our artist residencies are sought after, providing stipends and professional development as well as space to live, work, create, and share with the public—this in addition to 39 subsidized artist studio tenants that cross genres from visual to performing arts. We welcomed 517,000 visitors in FY25, 335,000 of them attended for free.

Government support makes this impact possible.

This year, we are asking the Council to support cultural institutions and organizations in New York City in three ways:

1. **Baseline Restoration:** We ask the city to restore and baseline the **\$30 million** that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baselineing this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and

supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming, and are most damaging to small community-based organizations in our coalitions.

2. **Annual Increases:** This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce.
3. **Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process:**
 - a. **Create transparency.** Update the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and hold a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues.
 - b. **Plan responsibly.** Develop a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
 - c. **Identify key process improvements.** Cultural capital projects can take 6-10 years—or more—to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities

Arts and culture generate over \$110 billion annually for the city, support 325,000 New Yorkers, and fuel a tourism engine that adds another \$74 billion to our city coffers. The sector represents 13% of the city budget, yet the Department of Cultural Affairs receives less than one-quarter of one percent of the budget. The health of the cultural sector is not optional, it is foundational to the health of the city. The 39 members of the Cultural Institutions Group are integral to a thriving, vibrant city.

Snug Harbor and the five additional Staten Island CIGs remain grateful to the City Council for your collaboration and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.

Thank you.



JESSICA BAKER VODOOR

President & CEO

Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden

CIG Vice Chair for Staten Island

718.425.3501 / jvodoor@snug-harbor.org



The 92nd Street Y, New York
1395 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10128

**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Finance & Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Wednesday, March 18th, 2026**

Thank you to the New York City Council, Chairs Nantasha Williams and Linda Lee, and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and the Committee on Finance for the opportunity to share testimony on the NYC Preliminary Budget. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am the Director of Government and Community Relations at The 92nd Street Y, New York (92NY), a nonprofit cultural and community center in Manhattan.

92NY's Mission and Reach

Since 92NY's founding more than 150 years ago, we have offered services for children, families, and individuals across New York City. Each year, more than 700,000 people of diverse racial, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds come to 92NY to enjoy and create the arts and literature, engage their minds through lectures and classes, and strengthen their bodies through fitness and wellness programming.

Through a wide array of educational programs, community outreach initiatives, and affordable performances, 92NY strives to make the arts accessible to individuals of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural identities. By offering scholarships, subsidies, and opportunities for NYC public school students to attend events at 92NY, we work to ensure that cost is never a barrier to participation.

Whether through collaborations with local schools, partnerships with underrepresented artists, or a deep commitment to diversity in programming, 92NY continues to advocate for a more equitable and accessible arts landscape.

NYC Council initiative partnerships:

We are grateful for our partnership with the NYC Council allowing us to provide:

- **Eight free Cultural After-School Adventures (CASA) programs** in schools throughout the city, which have included residencies in:
 - Hip-hop, instrumental arts, visual arts, percussion, and more.
- **One SU-CASA program focusing on choral arts instruction at the Roosevelt Island Senior Center** (Since FY19)
 - Teaching Artists report that participants are enthusiastic not only about singing, but also about discussing the music, reminiscing, and sharing personal stories.

We hope we can continue our existing CASA and SU-CASA programming in FY27 as well as expand into additional schools and senior centers throughout the city.

Programs for public school students:

For more than 35 years, 92NY's School Engagement in the Arts (SEA) has provided sustained, high-quality arts education to New York City public school students who would otherwise have limited or no access to the arts.

Programs include:

- In-depth classroom visits from professional teaching artists
- Innovative curriculum design embedded into the school day
- Interaction with 92NY mainstage artists from around the world
- Access to professional internships and early career opportunities

Our reach:

- **More than 9,000 students and teachers in over 400 classrooms across more than 80 public schools citywide – a more than 100% increase from last academic year.**

We offer a **comprehensive, sequential K–12 arts education model** that is unmatched in New York City. Moving beyond short-term enrichment, our programs provide **multi-week residencies (some up to 18 weeks)**, sustained classroom engagement, and **direct access to professional artists and live performances at one of the city’s leading cultural institutions**.

This approach reflects the City’s stated priorities around sequential arts education, student engagement, and equitable access to cultural resources, and demonstrates 92NY’s long-term commitment to learning and impact. Just as importantly, 92NY is **committed to maintaining long-term partnerships with schools** allowing us to grow alongside school communities as their needs evolve.

Our work is grounded in a simple belief that access to the arts should not depend on a student’s zip code or a school’s budget. 92NY partners closely with principals, teachers, and arts liaisons to understand the financial realities facing schools and communities. As a result, school fees are heavily subsidized by 92NY to ensure accessibility and equity and we **will never turn a school away due to inability to pay**.

In FY26:

- Approximately 92% of our partner schools are Title I
- More than 70% of participating students come from families living in poverty.

Without public support, the depth and continuity of these programs would not be possible.

FY27 Focus: Expanding Equitable Access

In Fiscal Year 2027, 92NY is focused on expanding equitable access to arts education through several key programs.

Elementary/Middle School: Discovery Series

At the elementary and middle school level, our Discovery Series introduces students to global music and dance traditions through in-class lessons with professional teaching artists and live performances in our historic Kaufmann Concert Hall.

- Each participating classroom receives:
 - Four to eighteen in-school lessons
 - Tickets to two live performances
 - Original teaching materials and student activity books
 - Professional development workshops for classroom teachers.

This year alone, **we are reaching approximately 6% of New York City public elementary schools. Participation has grown by 35% over the past year**—from 143 classrooms to 193 classrooms—and **our goal is to reach 10% of elementary schools citywide** as sequencing expands.

High School: Broadway Spotlight

At the high school level, we are responding directly to student and educator feedback through the new Broadway Spotlight program, a 10-week residency launched in FY26 in partnership with Kaleidoscope Dreams, the foundation founded by Alicia Keys. **For many of these students, this is their first experience attending a Broadway production**—an opportunity that would otherwise be financially out of reach. This program opens the world of Broadway to students not just as audience members, but as creators—exploring storytelling, performance, design, and production.

In its first year, Broadway Spotlight is serving 900 students from 13 public high schools across the city, most of them Title I schools.

- Program components include:
 - Participation in 10-week residency
 - Attendance at Broadway matinees, including *Hell’s Kitchen* and *&Juliet*.
 - Post-show talkbacks with artists, with opportunities for students to help facilitate conversations.
 - Creation of original final projects inspired by what students have seen and learned.

Free initiatives: The Christopher Lightfoot Walker Literature Project

This free initiative for high school students removes cost barriers entirely while cultivating lifelong engagement with the arts. Programming provides students with:

- Access to live concerts, author readings and writing workshops
- Artist Q&As

Looking ahead:

Looking ahead, New York City Council support is essential to sustaining and expanding this work. **With continued investment, 92NY aims to reach 18,000 students by Fiscal Year 2028**—doubling our impact while ensuring that affordability is never a barrier to participation.

Programs for children, families and individuals

In addition to programs for public school students, 92NY offers a variety of arts and cultural education programs for children, families and individuals. In FY25, 92NY awarded more than \$1.55 million in financial aid to hundreds of individuals and families and we encourage those who need scholarships to apply. We are committed to ensuring equity and access in the arts and making our programming accessible to a diverse 92NY community.

Programs include:

- Music education for all ages and skill levels
- Dance classes ranging from ballet and modern to hip-hop and swing
- Visual arts classes, including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and digital arts
- Theater and performing arts education, including acting and improvisation
- Adult learning classes in literature, history, philosophy, and languages

We also offer **programming for older adults through our Himan Brown 60+ Program**, providing opportunities for community engagement and enrichment. Members can access numerous in-person, online, and hybrid programs each week, including lectures, writing workshops, and studio art classes.

Conclusion

Public funding is crucial for our organization to be able to provide New Yorkers with experiences that expand thinking and expression as well as bring joy. We are fortunate to receive annual funding through the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Department for the Aging. We remain committed to **investing in long-term, high-quality partnerships that bring arts education directly into schools, support working artists, and ensure that the next generation of New Yorkers sees themselves reflected in—and empowered by—our city’s cultural life.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ariel Savransky

Director, Government and Community Relations

P: 212.415.5465 | ASavransky@92NY.org



Testimony to the New York City Council Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and Intercultural
Intergroup Relations Committee & Finance Committee on the Fiscal 2027
Preliminary Plan for the Department of Cultural Affairs

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Good afternoon Deputy Speaker & Chairman Williams, Chairman Lee, and the members of the Committees on Finance and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations. My name is Shadawn Smith, I am the Executive Director of The Billie Holiday Theatre, located in the legendary neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant and serving the residents of Central Brooklyn and beyond for 53 years.

The Billie Holiday Theatre (“The Billie”) is a state-of-the-art creative campus and the only multi-platform performing arts center with presenting, institutional residency, and education programs designed for and led by the nation’s most prominent African American community — Central Brooklyn. **Our mission is to convene unapologetic, authentic voices to make American Black Theater and other performing arts a rigorous space to disrupt and foster social change.**

Located in the heart of Bedford-Stuyvesant at Restoration Plaza, The Billie has long served as a cultural hub, providing an open, creative space that amplifies diverse voices and addresses social justice issues. We tackle socioeconomic inequities head-on, producing programming that inspires and reflects **This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations**

the African American and diasporic experience, offered at accessible times, locations, and costs for low- and moderate-income audiences and those with disabilities.

The Billie is the home for storytellers in every artistic sector and the launching pad for some of today’s iconic artistic voices like Debbie Allen, Samuel Jackson, Vanessa E. Williams, and Omari Hardwick. We are the home for Bed-Stuy’s own, Ronald K. Brown, and his EVIDENCE, a dance company. We are one of the few remaining theatres forged during the Black Arts Movement, and the only one in the borough of Brooklyn. Over the years, we have expanded services from theatre to all performing arts, visual arts, top notch arts education programs, and premier residency programs.

Thanks to the robust support from the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs, The Bille has been able to survive and remains a beacon of hope for our

communities. ***We are one of the original recipients of the Coalition of Theaters of Color initiative when the total funding was under \$1 million for about eight theaters. While we are proud to witness the continued support of this initiative where the total funding is now \$5.7 million and now includes approximately 63 theaters, performing arts venues, and other cultural centers, we are adding our voices to the call for funding to increase to \$8 million to adequately support these organizations. This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.***

We are also proud recipients of the Council's Cultural Immigrant Initiative, Speaker's Fund, and the Department's Cultural Development Fund and Equity Initiative. *These local resources allow us to bring world-class art to Central Brooklyn, support primarily Black and brown creatives across the City, develop and maintain a talent pipeline, bolster local businesses, and serve over 50,000 community members annually through our core programming in education, performing arts, and visual arts.* Therefore, we are so pleased to see no planned cuts to the Department of Cultural Affairs budget, and we hope that the Mayoral Administration and City Council will ensure that the department's baselined budget does not endure any cuts by budget adoption. With the cultural sector losing millions of dollars from the federal government, every public sector dollar from the City and State is a precious commodity. It is my hope that the City will once again be a nationwide leader by increasing its support of the cultural sector, particularly those organizations that historically serve Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian communities.

I have been leading The Billie for almost three years and am proud of the work we are doing to uplift, amplify, and nurture artistic storytelling for Bed-Stuy and all of Central Brooklyn. *The cultural corridors of Fulton Street and Eastern Parkway are vibrant footprints that make New York City, a global cultural capital. I am equally proud to serve alongside the other cultural leaders of the Brooklyn Arts & Cultural Kollektive (BACK): 651 Arts, BAM, BRIC, BAC, Brooklyn Children's Museum, Cool Culture, Drive Change, Ifetayo, Laundromat Project, MoCADA, Prospect Park, Recess, and Weeksville.*

In conclusion, we ask for the modest increase to the Coalition of Theaters of Color, increase the Department of Cultural Affairs baseline budget, and continue the support of The Billie through the Speaker's Fund and the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. Thank you for all that you do to support and uphold the NYC cultural sector. I hope to welcome you home to The Billie soon.

Submitted by,
Shadawn Smith
Executive Director
The Billie Holiday Theatre
ssmith@restorationplaza.org
website: billieholidaytheatre.org IG: [billieholidaytheatre](https://www.instagram.com/billieholidaytheatre)



729 SEVENTH AVENUE TEL 212-764-1122
5TH FLOOR FAX 212-944-2136
NEW YORK, NY 10019 BROADWAYLEAGUE.COM

Testimony for the Broadway League Before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations for New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

My name is Joseph Thomas, and I am the Director of Governmental Affairs at The Broadway League. The Broadway League was founded in 1930 and continues to serve as the principal trade association for the national commercial theatre industry. Today, it represents over 700 theatre owners, operators, producers, presenters, general managers and suppliers of theatrical goods and services across North America and around the world. We thank Chair Williams and the distinguished members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs for the opportunity to discuss budget priorities for the Broadway League as this Committee and the Council are during budget considerations.

Broadway serves as an economic engine for New York City, the industry creates and maintains jobs, helps to bring hundreds of thousands of people to the theaters week after week and millions of tourists each year. The identity of Broadway is tied to that of New York City, and we want to make sure as many New Yorkers, and particularly New York City High School students, have access to Broadway. Launched in 2017, The Broadway Bridges is an initiative from The Broadway League; its goal is to give every tenth-grade student in New York City public high schools the chance to attend a Broadway show. The FY25 program served 27,090 students and chaperones from each of the 51 City Council Districts. Mounted with the active support of the United Federation of Teachers and in partnership with NYC Public Schools' Arts Office, Broadway Bridges secures tickets that usually sell for \$49-\$200 for just \$20 as a special price extended by the producers of participating shows. The program then offers these tickets to schools for \$10 each. Broadway Bridges tickets are available over a 10-week fall cycle and 10-week spring cycle, both of which are timed to complement the seasonal demands of the school calendar and the Broadway box office. The funds we have received from the Council are used primarily to cover Broadway Bridges staffing and ticketing costs, allowing for more students to attend performances.

The Council's partnership has been key to the program's success, and we are hoping to continue to expand the number of students that participate. We are requesting money from the Speaker, individual members and this committee for funding which can help expand the number of students who can benefit from this program. Broadway Bridges has opened an avenue for diversifying Broadway audiences and its workforce. The program establishes a mechanism through which New York City public schools can enhance their arts offerings to students by bringing them to live theatre; in doing so it both gives students valuable life experience and serves as a broad introduction to a sector of New York City's economy that generates 96,900 jobs annually. The program also demonstrates the industry's commitment to making Broadway financially accessible to New Yorkers of every background. Since its inception, Broadway Bridges has provided access to Broadway shows for over 170,000 10th-grade students and their chaperones across New York City. As the Council continues to discuss the FY 2027 budget, we hope this Committee and the entire Council sees the continued value of this program so that we may continue to enhance the opportunities and access that people can have to the arts. Thank you for your time.

**Cultural Institutions Group Testimony for
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Tuesday, March 18, 2026
The Bronx County Historical Society
Member, Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)**

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Dr. Steven Payne, and I am Director of The Bronx County Historical Society. Our institution is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)—a coalition of 39 cultural institutions located in all five boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and performing arts organizations.

I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

The Bronx County Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the rich and dynamic history of the Bronx. We are not just a repository of the past; we are an active participant in the borough's present and future. Our work ensures that the stories of the Bronx—from its Indigenous roots and Revolutionary War history to its immigrant waves and cultural movements—are documented and told by and for the community.

This past year, we have been deeply engaged in several major initiatives that exemplify this mission, and I'll provide just a couple of examples:

This winter, we launched the "South Bronx History Keepers" program at the Mott Haven Library. This free, public series is designed to support local "history keepers"—an intergenerational group of residents who collect stories, photographs, and artifacts documenting their neighborhoods but who are not employed by higher education or cultural institutions. Sessions have included a showcase of over 1,000 community photographs, a hands-on scanning party where we helped families digitize their cherished photos, and a family-friendly collage workshop using historical images. This program directly empowers Bronx residents to become active participants in preserving their own heritage.

In 2026, we are spearheading a yearlong series, "America 250: The Bronx," commemorating the borough's pivotal role in the founding of the United States. Our programming kicked off in January with the Gouverneur Morris Endowed Lecture at Fordham Law School, celebrating the

birthday of this Bronxite and key drafter of the U.S. Constitution. February featured a lecture on Thomas Paine and a Black History Month presentation exploring new research on how Black folks experienced the Revolution in today's Bronx. Upcoming events include a performance of the 18th-century play "Cato: A Tragedy" and a lecture on the complex loyalties of Revolutionary-era families.

Beyond these special projects, our core work continues. Our Research Library and Archives remain the only facilities in New York City solely dedicated to Bronx history, housing over 75,000 photographs, 7,000 books, and 184 archival collections that document the borough's diverse communities, including The Bronx African American History Project and The Bronx Latino History Project. We continue to provide free and accessible resources to students, scholars, and the public, ensuring that The Bronx's stories are available to all.

Our impact is local, but it is vital to the city's cultural ecosystem. We are a safe, accessible third space for Bronx families, immigrants, and seniors—a place where the community sees itself reflected and is empowered to contribute to the historical record.

To continue this work and ensure that culture remains affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers, we join our CIG colleagues in making three critical requests of the Council this year:

- 1) We ask the city to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector. Baseline this funding is critical to ending the budget dance and supporting sustainable culture and culture jobs. Huge swings in annual funding levels impede staffing, planning, and programming. For smaller community-based organizations like ours, which rely on a small, dedicated team, these swings are the most damaging, making it impossible to retain the expert educators, curators, and archivists our community relies on.
- 2) This year, we are asking the city to consider annual cost adjustments year over year to support staff wages and increased costs connected with inflation for arts and cultural organizations. Costs overall for our cultural institutions continue to increase, and we ask the city to consider a system for sustainability for our organizations that will allow us to retain, expand, and provide fair pay for the cultural workforce. The 15,700 CIG employees citywide—including the educators and curators here in The Bronx—deserve living-wage jobs that allow them to live in the communities they serve.
- 3) Improve and Reform the Capital Project Process by:
 - a) Updating the open data portal for capital projects at cultural institutions, which has not been updated since 2021, and holding a hearing on capital projects so that Council Members understand the issues. Our historic buildings, including the

Museum of Bronx History (the Valentine-Varian House) and the Edgar Allan Poe Cottage, require constant maintenance to preserve these national landmarks and the collections they hold.

- b) Developing a capital infrastructure plan for culture to allow all organizations to build and maintain infrastructure more efficiently.
- c) Identifying key process improvements. Cultural capital projects can take 6–10 years, or more, to complete. Consider key process improvements that allow CIGs and other cultural institutions to leverage city capital funding in timely and efficient ways to preserve and invest in our buildings and effectively serve our communities.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities.

Thank you.



Contact

1850 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10031

347.688.6304

info@cthnyc.org

www.cthnyc.org

My name is Penn Genthner, and I'm here with The Classical Theatre of Harlem. I'd like to thank our Committee Chair Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams, Speaker Menin, and Council Members Abreu, Brewer, and Salaam and other members of the Committee. Your support and the work you do to help the arts and culture thrive is deeply appreciated.

I'm here in New York with a job I love in the theatre because when I was growing up in Pennsylvania, my grandparents took me to see Broadway shows. One that I saw with them, *Ragtime*, is enjoying a phenomenal revival at Lincoln Center right now that I encourage everyone to see. As an impressionable fourteen-year-old, that powerful story of what America can be is in large part responsible for how I understand and what I value about citizenship and patriotism today.

Individuals such as myself who are drawn from all over to participate in New York's legendary cultural sector consistently spend their money locally. What we earn working at theatres, we spend seeing more theatre. We buy each other's books and donate to each other's projects.

New York City's deeply interconnected cultural infrastructure makes it one of very few places anywhere in the world that a work of art like a Broadway musical can come into existence. Such an endeavor can take a decade to launch, creating employment for thousands while bringing - and spending - millions of dollars on local businesses that exist to support the cultural industry.

Even with tiny organizations, art can be a powerful amplifier for the local economy. When The Classical Theatre of Harlem was able to offer the City's first post-pandemic theatre with its free outdoor performances, we sought to leverage every connection we had to bring life back to our streets and parks. Today, in partnership with Uptown Grand Central and a coalition of hundreds of unique street vendors, nearby shops and restaurants, and peer nonprofits, we are able to activate our more than 30,000 visitors to generate over \$600,000 in business for the neighborhood in a single month.

Because of the lighting and sound equipment CTH brings to Marcus Garvey Park each summer and shares with our peers, more performances by other cultural groups are possible during the month of our residency than at any other time of the year.

With the wisdom of experience from the recent pandemic, New York's cultural sector has banded together for mutual support like never before and has the power to overcome the challenges facing the City's finances today. The resources we share mean that public investment resounds across the local economy, driving physical industry and nightlife, making public spaces safe and prosperous, increasing the value of real estate, and drawing tourism. Your support perpetuates the legend of New York as the destination for a young person who feels they have something to contribute.

Thank you again to the members of this Committee, who clearly understand the public value of the arts. I hope my words can be of use in your important work.



The Clemente
107 Suffolk Street
New York, NY 10002
(btw Rivington & Delancey)

info@theclementecenter.org
(212) 260-4080

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Libertad Guerra, Executive Director of The Clemente Soto Vález Cultural & Educational Center, and a member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

The Clemente is a longstanding cultural anchor on the Lower East Side, stewarding a 100,000-square-foot City-owned building that houses one of the city's largest studio programs, four theaters, galleries, and outdoor public space. We provide direct support to artists, independent producers, and small cultural organizations, while producing original research, exhibitions, festivals, and public humanities programs. More than 80 percent of our programming is free, reflecting our mission to sustain access to culture in an increasingly unaffordable city.

Our performing arts ecosystem illustrates both the scale of this work and the gap in current funding structures. We house four active theaters, including Teatro SEA, which receives its own CTC allocation yet continues to rely on our infrastructure, staffing, and co-production support for its annual festivals. We also host Teatro LATEA and its full roster of programming, which does not receive CTC funding, alongside two additional venues that support 30 to 50 performance events annually by independent cultural producers and small organizations at deeply affordable rates, in addition to our own programs and commissions.

Our current CTC allocation of \$40,000 for eligible program outputs makes a material difference. It allows us to accept proposals from producers who cannot afford market-rate venues. However, it does not begin to cover the full cost of producing our own programs, nor the overhead and ongoing subsidy required to sustain shared infrastructure and support our anchor theater partners.

I am writing to urge the Council to increase the **Coalition of Theatres of Color** (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget and to restore flexibility so these funds can support general operations, capacity building, workforce development, and programming.

For organizations like ours, CTC funding is essential to sustaining a public-good model that is not driven by box office revenue and has limited access to traditional earned income. It enables us to maintain subsidized space, support artists over time, and absorb costs that would otherwise be passed on to tenants, partners, and audiences.



The Clemente
107 Suffolk Street
New York, NY 10002
(btw Rivington & Delancey)

info@theclementecenter.org
(212) 260-4080

At the same time, as members of the **Partners in Cultural Stewardship Coalition**, we underscore that organizations stewarding City-owned buildings face distinct structural pressures.

Inflation has raised the cost of maintaining public-facing facilities, from insurance and utilities to staffing and operations. The city's affordability crisis is also institutional, making it harder to sustain accessible programming while retaining staff and stabilizing long-term cultural tenants. Aging buildings require ongoing repair and upgrades, yet capital processes remain slow and fragmented, leaving organizations to absorb risk and deferred maintenance.

Despite this, organizations like The Clemente are part of the solution. We provide deeply subsidized, multi-use space and services that keep public culture accessible across the city, even as those subsidies strain operating budgets.

This reflects a structural gap. The City depends on nonprofit partners to steward major civic assets, yet funding and policy frameworks do not fully support that responsibility. These institutions function as cultural infrastructure.

We encourage the Council to align support with that role through increased operating investment, better coordination across agencies, and tools to address urgent building needs that fall outside capital projects. Increasing the CTC Initiative to \$8 million and restoring flexibility would provide immediate stabilization while recognizing the essential role theatres of color and cultural stewards play in New York City's civic life.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**Written Testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget
New York City Council, Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations**

**Anais Reyes, Deputy Director at the Climate Museum
Testifying on behalf of the Climate Museum
March 18, 2026**

Greetings, Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Anais Reyes, and I am the Deputy Director at the Climate Museum—the first museum in the U.S. dedicated to climate change and climate action. We use arts and cultural programs to educate visitors about the climate crisis and offer ways for visitors to take civic and collective action. Since 2018—over the course of 18 exhibitions, 350+ events, and 180,000+ visitors—the Climate Museum has helped move people from feeling despair and isolation about this existential threat to feeling informed, connected, and empowered to act.

The Climate Museum is currently in the early stages of building our permanent location. In December 2024, the Museum was selected by New York State as the cultural anchor of a large-scale, multi-use development project on the Far West Side of Manhattan set to open in 2030. As we work to design and build our future home, we are also beginning a capital campaign, fundraising for an interim exhibition space, and continuing to present public events with partner organizations.

I am here with an urgent request for the committee today: that you strengthen the civic fabric of New York City's cultural leadership by expressing your support for the Climate Museum—in particular through the Speaker's Initiative.

In December 2025, the Committee on Environmental Protection, Resiliency and Waterfronts passed a Resolution supporting the mission and growth of the Climate Museum. During the hearing, New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds—organizational partners, former high school interns, scientists, educators, artists, and more—shared their stories about how being a part of or experiencing the Museum's work moved them. The resolution continues to play a major role in elevating The Climate

Museum, and we are deeply appreciative for this statement of support from the Committee and from Chair Gennaro.

Additionally, in FY26 we received our first Speaker's Initiative Grant for \$100,000—a critical inflection point for the Museum as we seek to achieve eligibility for receipt of capital funds. This grant will allow us to present programs that keep us in dialogue with our community as we work toward our next exhibition and future home—including an Earth Day Concert in Times Square with the Broadway Green Alliance; a game show night hosted by drag queen and environmental activist Pattie Gonia; a book launch for climate leader and bestselling author Dr. Katharine Wilkinson; and a World Ocean's Day concert in collaboration with the New York Climate Exchange, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and the Met Orchestra Musicians. Now, our key strategic objective is to secure a Speaker's Initiative grant of \$100,000 for the second year in a row in order to continue establishing eligibility to apply for capital funds from City Council, so that the Museum can continue to be an institution of, by, and for the people of New York City first and foremost, and to continue building our permanent home.

Through the Resolution and the support from the Speaker, the city council has not only lifted up arts and culture, but maintained and grown New York City's position as a global leader on climate.

In 2025, the Climate Museum coauthored a peer-reviewed study with researchers from the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication. The study found that, after seeing our exhibition, visitors left more aware of just how much others are concerned about climate change, more hopeful that it can be solved, and more confident and more determined to speak out about it.¹ The Climate Museum does the critical cultural work of seeding a sense of agency and possibility in the public. This cultural work lays the foundation for meaningful and sustained change.

As President Trump continues to maliciously attack public services, civil rights, and democracy itself, we all feel a sense of collective urgency. Now is the time to come together around an issue we are all concerned about. Now is the time for New York City to defend our values and stand as a symbol together for unwavering climate, cultural, and civic leadership.

Today, I am asking for your support in helping the Climate Museum continue to do this vital work. We have submitted a request as part of the Speaker's Initiative and ask for your support with Speaker Menin and her team. We appreciate the past support we've received from the council and hope to have your continued partnership.

Thank you again for your support, for your time today, and for your service.

¹Nicholas Badullovich, Amanda Nesci, Miranda Massie, John Kotcher, Edward Maibach; "Communicating about 'The End of Fossil Fuel' in a museum setting: a mixed-methods investigation of the climate museum," PLOS Climate, February 19 2025. <https://journals.plos.org/climate/article?id=10.1371/journal.pclm.0000518>

Dr. Lauren Britt-Elmore

Executive Director, The Flea Theater

Testimony Before the New York City Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

March 18, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Williams and members of the Committee. I am Dr. Lauren Britt-Elmore. I'm proud to be the Executive Director of The Flea Theater in Tribeca, NYC.

The Flea's mission: **we support and invest in experimental art by Black, brown, and queer artists.** We do so by providing commissioned opportunities, mission-aligned residencies, subsidized rehearsal and performance space, and production support. In the last 5 years, this has happened both in our space and across the city. From The Bronx to Coney Island. From the west side to Governors Island.

In 2025 alone, The Flea directly supported **150 artists** and welcomed nearly **15,000 audience members** to our space. For many of those artists, organizations like ours are their entry point into New York's robust and diverse cultural ecosystem.

However, that role is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

Small organizations like The Flea are operating in a climate where costs continue to rise, while expectations for public service and artist support continue to grow. We are often the most nimble and responsive part of the sector, while being the most financially vulnerable.

Public investment through the Department of Cultural Affairs allows us to continue doing this work.

City funding doesn't just support individual programs—it stabilizes the organizations that artists depend on. It ensures that New York remains a place where artists can begin their careers, not just sustain established ones. It's those emerging artists who make New York the most interesting city on earth.

As you consider the FY27 budget, I urge you to increase funding for small and mid-sized theaters—**so the art The Flea champions doesn't just survive in New York, but continues to define it.**

Thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to testify.



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New York City Council
Preliminary Budget Hearings FY27
Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Committee
Wednesday March 18, 2026

My name is David Johnston and I am the Development Director for The Jazz Gallery. I am with Miriam Dalaei Fodera, Festival Director for the NoMad Jazz Festival.

The Jazz Gallery presents over 380+ concerts a year to in-person audiences of over 17,000. We have been bringing top-quality jazz to New York City audiences since 1995 and celebrated our 30th anniversary in 2025. We offer free tickets each month to the students of the Institute for Collaborative Education, a public school located on the Lower East Side.

We provide educational programs for the South Bronx Charter School for International Cultures and the Arts. and free concerts in Hudson Yards and the Financial District. Last year, through Culture Pass we distributed 468 free tickets to New Yorkers to 75 shows at The Gallery. We offer low-cost memberships to students, professional musicians and veterans. We offer free tickets to active-duty military personnel.

In 2025, we partnered with the Flatiron NoMad Partnership, the NoMad Alliance and Madison Square Park Conservancy for the inaugural NoMad Jazz Festival. This festival, which took place in Madison Square Park in August 2025, attracted 70K visitors per day. Pre-festival programming the week before increased foot traffic in the area by 44% vs. the prior year, strengthening commercial engagement and increasing visibility. 10 mainstage concerts featured 170 artists at 15 community venues, indoors and outdoors.

Over 70K New Yorkers enjoyed world-class free jazz featuring Ravi Coltrane, Lizz Wright, Brandee Younger and newer emerging artists like Arta Jekabsone, Dabin Ryu and the Caracas Trio.

We share the City Council and the new Commissioner's commitment to affordability - for artists and audiences alike. We are proud to be a long-time grantee of DCLA

"The fact that the overwhelming majority of grantees offer free or subsidized programming underscores the importance of public funding in keeping cultural access affordable and accessible for New Yorkers," Dr. Nantasha Williams, Chair of the Cultural Affairs Committee

"Art is a public good, not a luxury reserved for the few." Zohran Mamdani, Mayor of New York City

We are asking the City Council for support for this initiative. We hope you will support this effort. We look forward to deeper public partnerships in support of the NoMad Jazz Festival.

Questions?
David Johnston, Development Director
david@jazzgallery.org
646-753-2260





.....
Norah Yahya
Chief Government Affairs Officer

T 212 650 2122
Norah.Yahya@metmuseum.org

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Preliminary Budget Testimony
The New York City Council
FY 2027

Thank you to Speaker Menin, Chair Lee, Chair Williams and the Committees on Finance and Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Norah Yahya, and I am the Chief Government Affairs Officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Met is known for its iconic permanent collection spanning over 5,000 years of artifacts, objects and art from around the world, and its current, must-see exhibits, but the Museum also serves as a unique destination for training programs, educational opportunities for all ages and abilities as well as supporting world class research divisions in preservation, conservation, and archeology. Further, the Met's multi-disciplinary offerings are available both virtually and in-person, and in recent years, brought millions of attendees to over 30,000 events. The Met hosts nearly 180,000 school children annually, with over 2.5 million annual student visits across the Cultural Institutions Group organizations citywide.

The Met employs approximately 2,000 staff, more than 1,600 of whom are New York City residents, and roughly 80 percent of whom are union members. More broadly, the cultural sector supports over 100,000 jobs citywide, including 15,700 at Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) organizations.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art appreciates the proposed executive budget. We would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration, and we look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new time and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for ALL New Yorkers.

We take pride in our role in this landscape and in the impact, we have on local and widespread communities. Last year, The Met welcomed 5.7 million visitors and for the second consecutive year, local visitorship exceeded pre-pandemic figures. The Museum strives to serve local and global audiences alike, as well as diversity of communities as reflected in the variety of exhibitions, events, and programming. Nearly half of the visitors last year were local and from New York state, most of whom made use of the museum's Pay As You Wish program for entry.

The Museum's reach extends deeply into communities across all five boroughs. The Met partners with more than 500 community-based organizations through its festivals and public programming and collaborates with approximately one-third of New York City senior centers through the Met's ArtBox program. Through initiatives such as Community Wednesdays, the Museum welcomes seniors, veterans, CUNY students, and other underserved groups for dedicated access to the galleries. The Met also hosts major cultural programming, including Lunar New Year, Museum Mile, MetFest, and Teens Take The Met!, drawing thousands of families, young people, and community partners each year. Accessibility remains a core priority, with thousands of visitors with disabilities served annually through dedicated programs. In 2025, these audiences included people with dementia and their caregivers, people with developmental and learning disabilities, people who are blind or partially sighted, the deaf community, older people with disabilities, and veterans with disabilities in hospital and residential settings.

The Met strives to be a place for all New Yorkers, regardless of income, and actively works to reduce barriers to access. This includes paid internship opportunities, with 25 annual positions reserved for NYCHA residents, and transportation support for community programming, particularly for participants from the outer boroughs.

Building on this progress, we ask the Council to support cultural institutions in three key ways:

Baseline

Restore and baseline the \$30 million added in the FY26 Budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs. Establishing this funding as recurring is essential to ending year-to-year uncertainty and enabling stable staffing, long-term planning, and consistent programming across the sector, particularly for smaller community-based organizations.

Restoration

Annual

Support annual cost adjustments tied to inflation and rising operational expenses. Cultural institutions continue to face increasing costs, and a

Increases

predictable funding framework is critical to sustaining operations, retaining talent, and ensuring fair wages for the cultural workforce.

Capital

Process

Reform

Improve and modernize the capital project process for cultural institutions:

- Increase transparency by updating the capital projects open data portal and holding oversight hearings.
- Develop a comprehensive cultural infrastructure plan to guide long-term investment.
- Advance process improvements to address prolonged timelines, as projects can take 6–10 years or more to complete, limiting institutions’ ability to effectively maintain and invest in their facilities.

The Met remains committed, alongside our partners in the Cultural Institutions Group, to serve all New Yorkers and strengthen the City’s cultural and economic vitality. Continued and sustained investment from the city is essential to ensuring that culture remains accessible, affordable, and impactful for all.

Lastly, we thank the Council and the Committees on Finance and Cultural Affairs for the opportunity to offer testimony and their commitment to a thriving cultural sector in New York.



Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

To: Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams

From: Aya Esther Hayashi, Ph.D., Development Director

Date: March 18, 2026

Dear Madame Chair Dr. Williams,

We are so grateful for your leadership as the Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations, and your steadfast support of the arts. I write on behalf of [The People's Theatre](#), where **we create theatre with and for immigrant communities to build a more just and equitable world**. Through professional productions, high-quality free arts education programs, and advocacy, we serve over **2,500 artists and audiences annually**, rooted in the belief that immigrants telling their own stories can change hearts, minds, and policy. Thanks in part to a **\$25.7 million** capital investment by the City, we are on the cusp of opening **The People's Theatre: Centro Cultural Inmigrante**, a state-of-the-art, 20,000-sf center dedicated to the immigrant experience.

Today, I testify as a member of the **Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC)** and the **Cultural Equity Coalition**. Together, we serve more than **one million New Yorkers** each year. We see every day how artists, cultural workers, CBOs, funders, and policymakers are interconnected. When one part of this ecosystem is under-resourced, entire communities lose access to cultural opportunity, economic activity, and creative expression. **When equity is prioritized, neighborhoods thrive**. While I represent an immigrant-centered organization, the **CTC Initiative funds 63 arts nonprofits**, including legacy Black and Indigenous organizations—it is one of the few initiatives to support these groups who are core to our city's cultural history.

I join the sector-wide ask today and urge the Council to **increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget**. For context, the law establishing CTC allows us to use these funds for general operating support. Because it is administered through DCLA, we are confined to using the funds as program support. **This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30% and serve as a Cost-of-Living Increase after being stagnant for 5 years**. We also ask that the Council **restore flexibility** so organizations can use these funds to sustain their

operations, build capacity, and support workforce development. This allows us to serve New Yorkers more richly, more abundantly.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Aya Esther Hayashi, Ph.D.
Development Director

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations March 18, 2026

T2026-1351 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Testimony of the New York Shakespeare Festival d/b/a The Public Theater

Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams, councilmembers, and staff. My name is Rosalind Barbour, Administrative Chief of Staff for the New York Shakespeare Festival d/b/a The Public Theater. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony during today's important hearing.

As the City Council begins to assess the FY27 budget, I am here to respectfully ask the City to restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector, and to ask the Council to support our request for a \$350K Speaker Initiative item to help pay for The Public's free programming in all five boroughs.

Each year, The Public serves more than 150,000 New Yorkers with free programming through Shakespeare in the Park at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, our Mobile Unit performances in parks in all five boroughs, our community pageant, and our classes for seniors, youth, immigrants, military members, union members, and more. This free programming costs The Public over \$10 million in direct expenses each year to produce, not including costs related to full-time staff salaries and benefits, operational support, and other general expenses.

This year, we are requesting \$350K from the City Council to help underwrite these programs. We do this knowing that the City budget is tight, but we aren't looking for a handout. The City's creative economy generates \$110 billion in economic activity each year—we are simply seeking a small reinvestment of that output in order to continue serving the people of New York City with free, high-quality, inclusive programming.

We, like you, believe all New Yorkers deserve lives that include access to awe-inspiring live performing arts experiences that transport them from the daily grind of living in this City. We believe these experiences should not be limited to those who can afford to spend \$300 or more on a for-profit theater ticket, and they should not be limited to those who live in affluent areas.

This is why we bring our programming to parks including Brownsville Recreation Center, Roy Wilkins Park, and J. Hood Wright Park. It is why we partner with libraries in all five boroughs to distribute tickets to Free Shakespeare in the Park. And it is why we anchor our community programs with partners including Casita Maria and the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. The City Council's investment of \$350K will allow this work to continue and serve as another step forward in making the City a more affordable, more just, and more enjoyable place to live.

In addition to these financial requests, we also seek partnership with the City Council in implementing common-sense solutions to bureaucratic issues that cost our institution money and reduce the amount of funds we have available for free and affordable programming. Specifically, we ask the Council to partner with CIGs to improve and reform the capital project process.

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations March 18, 2026

T2026-1351 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Testimony of the New York Shakespeare Festival d/b/a The Public Theater

The Public Theater recently completed a large renovation of the Delacorte Theater, a City-owned building that is home to our largest expression of free programming. In undertaking this work, we incurred over \$2.5 million in interest fees on a line of credit used to finance more than \$42 million in City funding for the renovation. This is money that could have been spent on more free programming, more classes in all five boroughs, more new work commissioned, and more cultural workers employed.

We urge you to hold a hearing and call upon our collective expertise to develop recommendations for improving this process.

We remain grateful to the Council for your collaboration, and in particular for securing a historic ~~\$75 million increase and a \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal~~ Year 2026. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Council in this new chapter and exploring new areas of collaboration to better serve our communities and ensure that culture is affordable and accessible for all New Yorkers.



P.O. BOX 150253
BROOKLYN, NY 11215
Email: info@reginaopera.org
718-259-2772

PRESIDENT
Francine Garber-Cohen

EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT/ SECRETARY
Linda Cantoni

TREASURER
Joseph Delfausse

March 18, 2026

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

Dear Members of the NYC Council,

I am Francine Garber-Cohen, President and Producer of the Regina Opera Company. For 56 years, Regina Opera has offered year-round FREE and TICKETED fully-staged operas and TICKETED and FREE concerts in Southwest Brooklyn.

Regina Opera performances are places where thousands of Brooklyn residents, many of them retirees, are able to meet friends - getting them out of their homes where many live alone. Regina Opera provides affordable entertainment for audiences who may not otherwise attend live opera performances. Some are on a fixed income and cannot afford the tickets to the Metropolitan Opera. But in order to provide these services, Regina Opera, like other arts organizations, needs increased support from New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Our Company participates in many FREE cultural events hosted by the Sunset Park Business Improvement District, the 3rd Avenue Merchants Association in Bay Ridge, and Bay Ridge Arts and Cultural Alliance. These events not only reach low-income and underserved music lovers, especially Senior Citizens who make up over 65% of our audience, but also bring new and existing customers to these neighborhoods. Additional audience members increase the visibility and income of the local stores and restaurants, as well as generate tax money to New York.

Regina Opera depends on grants from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, to meet our budgeting needs, especially for the FREE performances. The costs of these productions keep rising. Therefore, we request that the NYC Council add \$30 million to the budget for Culture. In addition, we request that the dollar amount automatically increase annually with the percentage of inflation. Our dedicated and hard-working Arts workforce is relying upon us to fight for them.

Thank You.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Francine Garber-Cohen' in a cursive script.



520 Eighth Avenue, Suite 801
New York, NY 10018
(212) 912-9770
www.tdf.org

Deeksha Gaur, Executive Director, TDF

**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Relations**

Hon. Nantasha Williams, Chair

Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 18, 2026

Thank you Deputy Speaker Williams, Councilmembers,

My name is Deeksha Gaur and I am the Executive Director of Theatre Development Fund or TDF, a nonprofit that has been focusing on affordability and access to the performing arts for close to 60 years. You may know us through our iconic TKTS booths in Times Square and Lincoln Center. I am here to join my colleagues in urging the City to restore and baseline \$30 million to the budget of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

TDF is a grateful recipient of multiyear funding from the Cultural Development Fund, which last year alone, allowed us to serve 1.3 million New Yorkers and visitors, in all 51 council districts. This number includes 60,000 students, veterans, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and members of New York's vast network of community organizations. Additionally, we provided discounted or free tickets to educators, healthcare workers, freelancers, arts workers, union members, government workers, and more.

Did you know, that when people sit in a room together having a shared artistic experience, their heartbeats synch? Imagine 1000 people, sitting in a room, their hearts beating as one. When people attend the arts, they relax, they engage with new ideas, they experience joy and catharsis. They connect with their humanity, and it makes them more likely to vote, to volunteer and donate, and to contribute to their communities. The arts have an outsized impact on both individual well-being, and community health.

At TDF, we believe that our work is not done until every New Yorker feels ownership of and belonging in the performing arts, and we have been making strides towards this goal. In 2025, 14% of all Broadway admissions were sold through TDF. And 26% of Broadway theatregoers found their shows through a TDF outlet. And in the second year of our

Graduation Gift program, through which we offered a free TDF membership to every graduating senior of an NYC public high school, 7% of the graduating class signed up. They received a graduation party in Times Square followed by a Broadway show just for them, and are now receiving monthly free and \$20 ticket offers to Broadway.

To continue our vital work as the country's largest arts service organization, TDF has requested funding from the New York City Council, including the following citywide initiative requests to make theatre affordable and accessible to all:

- \$100,000 allocation from the Speaker's List for our theatregoing programs
- \$100,000 in support from Autism Awareness Initiative, providing free admission to TDF's Autism Friendly Performances for students attending District 75 programs at New York City public schools;
- \$110,000 from Veterans Community Development Initiative to distribute free tickets and curate gatherings through the Veterans Theatregoing Initiative

TDF cannot do this work alone. We are fueled by our partnerships in the theatrical ecosystem, with city government, and with audiences across all 5 boroughs. We humbly request any recommendations for community organizations that we may partner with to build new and long-lasting relationships between New Yorkers and the performing arts. And we offer our partnership as you consider your own initiatives to make the arts more accessible for our city's residents.

New Yorkers deserve both bread and roses—to live well and to thrive. We deserve healthier individuals and communities. On behalf of TDF, I thank you for your time and consideration.

THE ARTS BELONG TO ALL OF US.

Since 1968, TDF has been dedicated to removing the physical, financial, and invisible barriers to attending the performing arts. With more than five decades of experience in audience building, we work in deep collaboration with historically underserved communities, forging pathways to transformational arts experiences that inspire empathy, empower, and lead to healthier and more fulfilling lives. **Every season, our programs reach over 1 million New Yorkers and visitors** with free and deeply discounted access to live theatre, dance, and music performances.

11,000

public school students from all five boroughs attend FREE theatre and dance education programs. TDF is the sole arts provider in 68% of the schools we serve.

15,000

tickets distributed at no cost to 128 partner organizations throughout the five boroughs.

10,000

audience members impacted by autism attend TDF's welcoming and inclusive Autism Friendly Performances.

4,800

seniors from NYC public and charter high schools sign up for FREE TDF Memberships through our Graduation Gift program.

2,700

veterans and active-duty service members attend Broadway shows at no cost during Fleet Week and throughout the year.

30,000

audience members purchase deeply discounted tickets for accessible seating, as well as audio described, open captioned, and ASL-interpreted performances.

"For 15 years TDF has enriched both the emotional and intellectual lives of my students. When they attend the theatre, they see possibilities and their worlds open up. Not only do they become theatregoers, they learn to think in new ways while still remaining true to themselves. TDF transforms lives."

- LILY VERO WELSH, DRAMA TEACHER, THE FLUSHING INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

For more information, visit www.tdf.org or email Jaime Totti, Director of Development at jaimet@tdf.org

tdf



235 East 11th Street New York, NY 10003
212.777.3240 thirdstreet.nyc



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations
Hon. Dr. Nantasha Williams, Chair
March 18, 2026

As the nation’s longest running community music school, Third Street has transformed lives through the arts for 131 years. Emilie Wagner, an arts education pioneer, founded Third Street in 1894 with the belief that music played a critical role in both childhood development and community advancement. She made arts education the foundation of a settlement house that provided both social services and music instruction to immigrant families. Today, Third Street ensures access to music education for students of all backgrounds and harnesses its power to create a supportive and collaborative community. Generations of NYC students have benefitted from Third Street’s programs which improve the social and cultural well-being of our surrounding neighborhoods, promote community engagement, and prepare students for lifelong success in the arts and other endeavors.

Third Street’s onsite programs at our East Village headquarters engage more than 2,300 students from across New York City every week with music and dance lessons, ensemble classes, and enrichment courses. These programs run seven days a week and serve students ages 1 to 91 with beginner to pre-professional level instruction, and we ensure equitable access through over \$1.6M in financial aid each year. We also bring music and dance instruction to 3,900+ 3K-12th grade students in 40 underinvested public schools, public housing, and community center sites across all five boroughs. Our public school and community-based programs are offered at no cost to students or their families, enabling students who might otherwise lack opportunities to study music and dance to experience the transformative benefits of arts education. And, Third Street enriches our surrounding community with an annual series of 150+ free public performances by students, faculty, and professional guest artists.

Our programs encourage meaningful school and community engagement; promote social-emotional learning; and instill essential life skills that equip young people for success in college and the workforce. There is an abundance of evidence demonstrating that participation in arts education programs can positively impact the trajectory of a student’s life, no matter their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Students who engage in music instruction outperform non-music students in assessments of math, reading, English language arts, and second languages; they demonstrate superior fine motor, working memory, and critical thinking skills; and they surpass their peers on tasks measuring perseverance and creativity. K-12 students who study the arts are more likely to graduate high school and go on to earn a bachelor’s degree, and are prepared with the discipline, problem solving, and collaboration skills needed to succeed into adulthood.

Third Street and our peer cultural organizations contribute immensely to the social, economic, and cultural vitality of New York City. Third Street joins our colleagues in advocating for affordability for the arts education workforce and increased access to arts education across the five boroughs. We call on City Council to baseline \$30M in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs to support arts organizations and workers across the city, offering crucial stability to our sector. Additionally, we implore the Council to restore and enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding and to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition to help ensure that every student and school in our city can access quality arts learning opportunities.

The arts are the key to a vibrant and thriving City, and Third Street urges the New York City Council to renew and bolster its investment in arts and culture, thereby investing in the wellbeing of all New Yorkers.





MISSION

“Developing the community in the area of arts and social services with the focus on educating the community on Caribbean culture”

TAGLINE

“Using Culture as a Tool for Social Transformation”

PROGRAMS

- After School Programs*
- Artist Resource Center*
- Authors Connecting*
- Award of Excellence*
- Body of Vibration Dance & Theater*
- Choral Singing*
- Concert Series*
- Musicians Mentoring Musicians*
- Spirit of the Arts Award*
- Stilt Walkers /Moko Jumbies*
- The Art of Masquerade*
- The Art of Photography/Videography*

SLOGAN

Official Home for Caribbean Culture

Serving all New Yorkers with programming & events in:

Serving the community with programming throughout Brooklyn, parts of Queens, Bronx and Manhattan and expanding.

March 17, 2026

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Alton Aimable, and I am the President and Founder of Tropicalfete, Inc., a nonprofit cultural arts organization and proud member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color. For over a decade, Tropicalfete has been dedicated to preserving and promoting Caribbean and global cultural heritage through performing arts, arts education, and community-based programming across New York City.

Through our work, we provide year-round programming including youth arts education, steel plan and stilt-walking training, community performances, and cultural showcases that engage diverse audiences and uplift underrepresented voices. We partner with schools, community organizations, and public institutions to ensure access to the arts, particularly for youth and communities of color.

I am here to urge the Council to increase the Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color like ours across New York City. In recent years, many organizations have experienced reductions or eliminations in Cultural Development Fund (CDF) support, making CTC funding essential for sustaining operations, retaining cultural workers, and continuing community programming.

For Tropicalfete, Inc., CTC funding directly supports:

1. Employment opportunities for teaching artists, performers, and cultural practitioners
2. Free and low-cost arts education programs for youth across Brooklyn and beyond
3. Community events and performances that celebrate Caribbean heritage and foster cross-cultural dialogue
4. Safe, creative spaces that engage young people in positive, skill-building activities

This modest \$2.3 million increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which represents the minimum needed to build capacity and stabilize organizations like ours that serve as cultural anchors in their communities.

We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027 and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds to sustain operations, expand impact, and continue serving communities across New York City.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

Alton Aimable
President and Founder



425 JERSEY STREET•STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK 10301
Phone: 718.273.5610 • Email: info@utasi.org • www.utasi.org

ARTISTIC-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RASHIDA LADNER-SEWARD

March 20, 2026

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Hon. Dr. Nantasha Williams
Chair, Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup
Relations
New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

RE: Written Testimony to the New York City Council | Coalition of Theaters of
Color FY 2027 Increase

Dear Chair Williams and members of the Committee:

My name is Rashida Ladner-Seward, and I serve as the Artistic-Executive Director of Universal Temple of the Arts (UTA), a community-based cultural institution rooted on Staten Island. I am writing to express my strong support for increasing funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 New York City Budget, along with expanding flexibility in how these funds may be used.

UTA has served New York City for decades as a cultural anchor dedicated to preserving and advancing Black and African diasporic arts, particularly jazz. Located in a historically disinvested community, our work extends beyond performance to include arts education, workforce development, and community engagement that reaches youth, families, and local residents who have traditionally had limited access to high-quality cultural programming.

Since 2015, the CTC Initiative has been a critical source of support for our organization, particularly during a period of transition, recovery, and renewed growth. These funds have enabled us to sustain programming, support artists and cultural workers, and continue serving our community with consistency and integrity. At UTA, CTC funding has directly supported teaching artists, youth engagement initiatives, and community-based performances that collectively serve hundreds of residents annually, while also creating paid opportunities for cultural workers.

CTC funding levels, however, have not increased since 2021, while the cost of

operations, staffing, artist fees, and program delivery has risen significantly. Organizations like ours are being asked to do more with less—expand access, deepen impact, and stabilize our infrastructure—without the necessary increase in resources to do so sustainably. This modest \$2.3M increase Coalition members are requesting will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these historic and vital organizations.

In addition to the increase, flexibility in funding use is essential. Organizations like UTA must be able to allocate resources toward general operating support, workforce development, and organizational infrastructure in order to build sustainable systems that support long-term impact. Flexible funding allows us to retain talent, invest in leadership development, strengthen administrative capacity, and respond more effectively to community needs.

It is also important to recognize that CTC organizations are not only cultural institutions—we are economic drivers and workforce hubs. We employ artists, educators, production staff, and administrators, and we create pathways for young people to access careers in the arts and creative industries. Investment in CTC is an investment in New York City's cultural economy and future workforce.

At a broader level, the CTC Initiative represents one of the City's most important commitments to cultural equity. Sustained and increased investment ensures that institutions rooted in communities of color are not only preserved, but positioned to grow, innovate, and lead.

I respectfully urge the City Council to support the increase of the CTC Initiative to \$8 million in FY2027 and to ensure these funds are flexible enough to meet the evolving needs of our organizations and the communities we serve.

Thank you for your continued commitment to arts and culture in New York City.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rashida Ladner-Seward', written in a cursive style.

Rashida Ladner-Seward
Artistic-Executive Director

UPTOWN FILM CENTER – Ira Deutchman testimony – 3/18/2026

I would like to thank Chair Williams and the committee on Cultural Affairs for this opportunity.

My name is Ira Deutchman and I'm representing The Uptown Film Center, a nonprofit that believes in the power of film to educate and to bring people together.

Upper Manhattan has become what we call a "cinema desert," which is why, with the support of New York State and over 700 individual donors, we have purchased the long-shuttered Metro theater at 99th and Broadway in Manhattan and plan to build a 5-screen independent cinema arts and education center to serve a very diverse and economically disadvantaged community.

The 5 zip codes that are within 1.5 miles of the theater, have a population living below the poverty line that ranges from 7.8% in 10024 to 30.6% in 10027. Approximately 35% of that population speaks a language other than English at home, including 22% who speak Spanish. The area around the theater has Manhattan's highest concentration of post-Covid empty storefronts.

Nonprofit independent cinema venues, such as the one we are trying to build, have proven to boost local economies--driving foot traffic, supporting small businesses and creating jobs.

While we are working on building this facility, we have been offering a sample of our programming as guests in whatever auditoriums we can get access to. We are grateful to Majority Leader Abreu for the grant we received to our "Science on Screen" series which is going on right now.

Also, we have begun pilot programs in neighborhood schools. The first took place this past fall in 5th grade classes at PS 84 and we are currently applying to DCLA for a grant to expand the program.

We appreciate your continued support for our programming and educational programs, and hope that the city of New York can play a large part in helping us raise the \$29 million we need to build out the facility.

I would welcome the opportunity to talk further with any and all of you about the details of the plan. Thank you for your time and your support.

UPTOWN

FILM CENTER

OUR MISSION

The Uptown Film Center will preserve and transform the landmarked Metro Theater into Manhattan's only full-time independent arthouse cinema north of Lincoln Center, creating a cultural hub that connects communities through film, education, and shared experiences.

Since the Uptown currently does not have a physical space, everything about our project speaks to the need for one. Other cultural venues in the neighborhood exhibit films on an infrequent basis. Our pop-up programming has allowed us to begin engaging with the community and has demonstrated why this new facility is so needed.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SCREENINGS BUDGETARY REQUEST: \$50K FOR 2027

EDUCATION IN ACTION

Film in the Classroom pilot (Launched October 2025): Through an eight-week program, PS 84's 5th-grade students experienced weekly screenings of international short films carefully selected to align with their curriculum, paired with hands-on activities.



POP-UP SCREENING SERIES

For the Love of Cinema (2025): Featuring 10 films that celebrated the importance and pleasures of the cinematic experience, the program included Hollywood, independent, and international films—a distillation of our planned programming mix. Screenings were held at the Thalia, JCC Manhattan, the Maysles Documentary Center, JCC Harlem, Lycée Français and in NYC parks and streets. More than 1,100 community members participated.

Science on Screen (2026): Underwritten by a New York City Council discretionary grant, this program—developed by the Coolidge Corner Theater in Boston in partnership with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation—features three science-themed films, each used as a jumping-off point for a speaker to introduce current research or technological advances in a manner that engages popular culture audiences.

Tales of the Immigrant City (2026): Hosted in conjunction with The New York Historical and the Latin American Film Center, this series features films about the immigrant experience in NYC through the lens of the wide variety of ethnic groups who are part of the fabric of the city. Screenings include guest speakers.

"The Uptown is already making a real impact in our school community through its new film education programs. [They have] shown us how powerful film can be as a teaching tool. It helps students express themselves creatively, builds media and literacy skills, and strengthens empathy and awareness."
—Dr. Evelyn J. Lolis, principal, PS 84

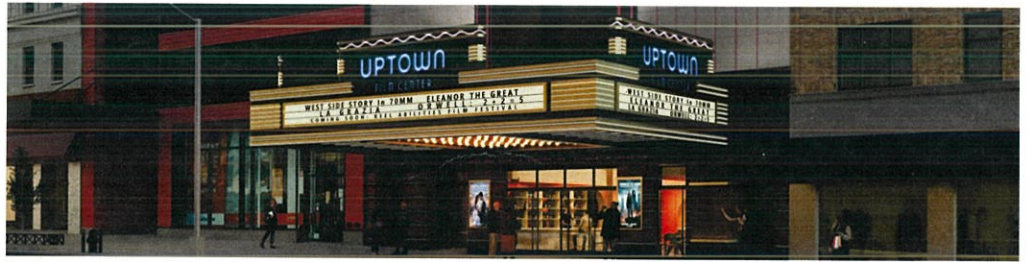
"Uptown Film Center stands out as a model of what is possible when inclusion is prioritized from the outset. It is exciting to see how a newly designed theater can take accessibility to new heights."
—Isaac Zablocki, CEO, ReelAbilities International

"The doors of the theater are more than a year away from opening, yet the Uptown Film Center is doing more for the community than many other organizations that have been here far longer have done."
—Hedy Campbell, chair, West 102nd & 103rd Streets Block Association

"The Uptown's plans for daytime screenings, post-film discussions, intergenerational programs, and collaborations with local organizations offer exactly the kind of environments where DOROT participants and volunteers can form the meaningful relationships that sustain healthy aging and strengthen community well-being."
—Amy Stein-Milford, director of Onsite and Special Programs, DOROT

UPTOWN

FILM CENTER
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN



The Need:

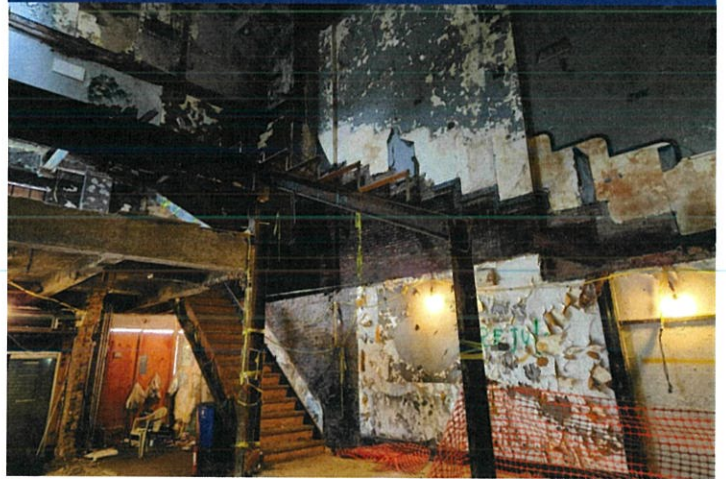
- There are no independent arthouse cinemas anywhere north of Lincoln Center, while Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn each have 20+ full-time screens.
- Manhattan's highest concentration of post-COVID empty storefronts surrounds the theater at Bway & 99th Street.
- NYC currently has no robust film educational program on par with institutions in other parts of the country.
- This 93-year-old Art Deco landmark has sat vacant for more than 20 years and is in urgent need of restoration.

The Solution:

A five-screen cinema arts and education center with a community café will:

- restore a designated NYC landmark while creating a modern, accessible venue;
- drive economic revitalization by attracting foot traffic and cultural tourism;
- provide diverse film programming and educational initiatives for all ages while also providing community gathering spaces;
- become a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, fostering understanding in an increasingly polarized world.

Before:



After



Total project budget of \$36 million

- Building Purchase - \$6.9 million
- Construction - \$20 million
- Professional Fees - \$3.5 million
- Furniture and Equipment - \$2 million
- Contingency and Other - \$3.5 million

Nearly \$11 million raised to date

- The \$6.9M property purchase was completed April 2025 with support from the State of New York and more than 500 individuals.
- Raised more than \$3 million toward construction as of December 2025
- Received preservation grants from NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission and New York Landmarks Conservancy

"The Uptown is more than just a building; it's a cultural touchstone for the Upper West Side and a reminder of the power of cinema to bring people together. The vision for the Metro's revival as a nonprofit cinema and educational center is inspiring—it's about reclaiming a piece of our history while creating a space for future generations to gather, learn, and connect."

—Shaun Abreu, City Councilman, District 7



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS RE: THE FY 2027 PRELIMINARY BUDGET

March 18, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Lauren Comito, I'm a librarian here in NYC and the Executive Director of Urban Librarians Unite, a 501c3 organization based in Brooklyn that focuses on supporting library workers in cities across the US. Thank you so much to Speaker Menin, Committee Chair Dr Williams, and all the committee members for the opportunity to speak on the budget proposal for libraries in FY27.

In my work as a librarian, I see firsthand how essential libraries are to this city. Our branches are places where New Yorkers come to learn English, apply for jobs, complete schoolwork, access the internet, and find safe, welcoming spaces in their neighborhoods. For many people—especially immigrants, seniors, students, and families—libraries are not optional services. They are core public infrastructure.

But right now, our libraries are yet again being asked to do more and more with less.

The Mayor's FY27 Preliminary Budget allocates approximately 0.39 percent of the city's expense budget to public libraries, falling short of the commitment made during his campaign to dedicate 0.5 percent of the city's budget to libraries annually. That promise mattered deeply to library workers and advocates because it offered something we have not had for decades: stability.

Instead, the budget includes a cut of \$307 million, and we continue to be stuck in the "budget dance"—a cycle where libraries must fight each year to restore funding that should never have been uncertain in the first place.

This cycle has real consequences. When funding is unclear, libraries delay hiring, branches operate short-staffed, programs are scaled back, and repairs are postponed. Workers spend time advocating for the survival of our institutions instead of focusing fully on serving the public.

Even when funding is eventually restored, the disruption has lasting consequences.

Urban Librarians Unite is asking the City Council to take several steps to support our libraries and the workers who keep them running.

- First, restore the \$307 million allocated in FY26 so that libraries can maintain current services and staffing levels.
- Second, work with the administration to ensure that the FY27 adopted budget dedicates 0.5 percent of the city's expense budget to public libraries, fulfilling the commitment that was made to New Yorkers.
- Third, baseline that funding so libraries are no longer forced to return year after year to fight for the same resources.

Finally, we urge the city to begin addressing the \$345 million in unfunded capital needs across our three library systems so that our buildings remain safe, accessible, and welcoming for the staff who work in them and the communities who depend on them.

Libraries show up for New Yorkers every single day. With stable and adequate funding, we can continue to provide the services and spaces that make our city stronger.

Thank you for your time and for your continued support of New York City's libraries.



**Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries & International Intergroup Relations
Christopher Durosinmi, Director, Government & Community Affairs
Wildlife Conservation Society
March 18, 2026**

Thank you, Chairwoman Dr. Williams and members of the Committee. My name is Christopher Durosinmi, Director of Government and Community Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and a member of the Cultural Institutions Group. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

The Cultural Institutions Group is a coalition of 39 organizations that care for many of New York City's most significant publicly owned cultural assets across the five boroughs. Together, we help sustain New York's identity as a global cultural capital. Our institutions are welcoming spaces where New Yorkers and visitors gather in our buildings, classrooms, parks, and performance venues. At our core, we are committed to expanding access and opportunity for all. I would like to thank the Council for prioritizing culture and for its advocacy in securing a historic \$75 million increase, and more specifically the \$45 million baseline increase for the arts and culture sector in Fiscal 2026.

We are asking the Council to support New York City's cultural institutions by restoring and baselining the \$30 million added in the FY26 Budget in FY27, and by implementing annual funding adjustments to keep pace with rising costs, sustain jobs, and ensure fair wages across the sector. We also urge improvements to the capital project process through greater transparency, better long-term infrastructure planning, and streamlined procedures to reduce delays and help organizations more effectively maintain and invest in their facilities. Finally, we request continued support for programmatic initiatives like Sci Network, Urban Advantage, CASA, the Immigrant Initiative, and others that expand cultural resources and opportunities for a broad and diverse range of constituents.

Cultural institutions are powerful economic engines, generating 110 billion dollars in economic activity and supporting local vendors with approximately 500 million dollars in annual spending. At WCS, we operate the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and Queens Zoo.

Saving wildlife is central to our mission, and ensuring public access to that work through our parks is fundamental to how we engage and educate New Yorkers. In Fiscal Year 2025, 69 percent of New York City residents, more than half a million visitors, attended the Bronx Zoo through free or discounted admission programs.

Through our Community Access Program (CAP), WCS provides complimentary admission to seniors, young people, individuals with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness, and community-based organizations. In partnership with city agencies, including the New York City Department of Homeless Services, the New York City Administration for Children's Services, and the New York Police Department and the New York City Housing Authority, we distributed more than 32,000 free tickets in 2025. In addition to CAP, WCS offers multiple pathways to free or reduced-price access for New York City residents, including Free Wednesdays at the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium, where visitors can reserve tickets for up to four guests. The organization also provides free weekday admission year-round



for NYC school groups, reaching over 253,000 students and chaperones, and offers complimentary Limited Admission to NYC undergraduate students with proof of eligibility. WCS honors active U.S. military members and veterans with free admission, along with discounted access for their families. Through partnerships like the Urban Advantage Program, WCS has delivered free admission and STEM learning experiences to students and teachers since 2004. Additional initiatives, including free memberships through IDNYC and community partnerships like Community Mayors Inc., ensure access for vulnerable populations and children with special needs across the city. These programs ensure that our parks remain accessible spaces for recreation, learning, and connection.

Workforce development is another critical pillar of our work. Across our parks, WCS provides meaningful pathways for young people to gain skills, experience, and employment. With the support of the City Council, WCS has expanded its STEM Career Lattice, a tiered workforce development model that provides youth ages 14 to 24 with paid opportunities and clear career pathways. Each year, participating youth collectively earn approximately \$5.5 million dollars while gaining valuable professional experience. The program currently serves more than 1,900 young people, with strong participation from those underrepresented in STEM fields. Seventy-seven percent of participants identify as youth of color, collectively representing 49 languages.

Building on the success of the Career Lattice program, public support and City Council investments in youth help leverage additional resources to expand opportunities beyond our parks. Through the Eco-Vivencias program, young people gain direct, hands-on exposure to conservation in places like Puerto Rico, while creating a pathway to bring that knowledge and experience back to our parks in New York City. Experiences like the Puerto Rican crested toad restoration project provide students with a real-world understanding of how conservation is practiced both in the wild and at our zoos and aquarium and help inspire the next generation of conservation leaders.

WCS also led the creation of SCI Network NYC, a collaboration of 8 science-based cultural institutions. With City Council support, in 2025, this network provided 1,141 interns across more than 60 types of internships in fields such as animal care, horticulture, science research, education, and conservation advocacy, earning more than \$2.4 million in stipends. These results underscore the tangible value of public investment. Our efforts go beyond student engagement; they establish lasting pathways into growing and in demand career fields. Participants often move forward into seasonal positions, permanent roles, and leadership opportunities within our institutions and across New York City's economy.

As the City Council considers its priorities for the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, we respectfully urge continued investment in cultural institutions by restoring and baseline the \$30 million that was added in the FY26 Budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector, implementing annual funding adjustments to keep pace with rising costs and improvements to the capital process. We also request continued support for programmatic initiatives like Sci Network, Urban Advantage, CASA, the Immigrant Initiative, and others that expand cultural resources and opportunities for a broad and diverse range of constituents. Sustained investment ensures WCS can continue delivering for New Yorkers, expanding access, supporting jobs, and strengthening communities across the city.

Thank you.



Chongren Fan, Artistic Director & Sally Shen, Executive Director
520 Eighth Ave. #360 | New York, NY 10018
www.yzrep.org

March 19, 2026

Dear Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams and members of the Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide a written testimonial today. My name is Sally Shen, and I am the Executive Director of Yangtze Repertory Theatre (Yangtze Rep), a member of the Coalition of Theatres of Color. Yangtze Rep is one of the longest standing Chinese American theater companies in the country. For over 30 years, we have been producing and presenting works by immigrant artists from Asia and from the AAPI community. Since 2017, the programming focus had shifted to focus on nurturing new voices for the American stage. Today, we have three programming pillars: residencies, commissions and productions. Our 2023 production *Salesman 之死* won Outstanding New Play in the 68th Obie Awards, the honors' top prize.

I write to urge the Council to increase the **Coalition of Theatres of Color (CTC) Initiative to \$8 million in the FY2027 budget** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds for general operating support, capacity building, workforce development, and programs.

The CTC Initiative is a critical source of support for theatres of color like us across New York City. Many organizations have experienced reductions or eliminations in Cultural Development Fund (CDF) support, making CTC funding an essential source of stability for artists, cultural workers, and community programming.

This modest \$2.3M increase will boost CTC organizations' grants by nearly 30%, which is a minimum of what is needed to increase capacity and stabilize these vital organizations.

For organizations like ours, CTC funding has helped support vital work by, about and for the AAPI community. During our 24-25 season, 97% of artists we hired were from the AAPI community. Aside from mainstage productions, all our readings, workshop presentations and virtual programming are free of charge. Public funding like CTC allowed us to reach a wider audience and reduce the barriers to access our programs.

We respectfully ask the Council to increase the CTC Initiative to **\$8 million in FY2027** and restore flexibility so organizations can use these funds to sustain their operations and serve communities across New York City.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sally Shen'.

Sally Shen
Executive Director, Yangtze Repertory Theatre
ssh@yzrep.org | 203-6066298



IN THE KEY OF *love*

Young People's Chorus of New York City®

Francisco J. Núñez, Founder/Artistic Director

37 West 65th Street, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10023

T: 212.289.7779 | F: 212.289.6918 | www.ypc.org

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**Committee on Cultural Affairs
Preliminary Budget Testimony
Francisco J. Núñez, Artistic Director
Young People's Chorus of New York City
March 18, 2026**

Good Afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Francisco J. Núñez, and I am the Founder and Artistic Director of the Young People's Chorus of New York City (YPC). For more than 35 years, YPC has provided transformational music education to over 2,000 young people ages 8–18 across all five boroughs on an annual basis. Our choristers reflect the extraordinary diversity of New York City, with many coming from historically underserved communities. For these young people, YPC is not simply an after-school program — it is a lifeline.

In an era when young people continue to struggle with the long-term social and emotional impacts of the pandemic, YPC provides something increasingly rare: a joyful, phone-free space where children sing, collaborate, build friendships, and grow in confidence. Through music, they discover their voices — both artistic and personal — and develop the discipline, resilience, and leadership skills that carry into every aspect of their lives.

YPC's three core program areas include:

Performance Choruses

Students attend rehearsals at YPC's headquarters and receive comprehensive instruction in vocal technique, music literacy, performance, and choreography. These ensembles perform throughout New York City and represent our city nationally and internationally at festivals and competitions. Through our College Bound initiative, choristers also receive up to 100 hours annually of academic enrichment and life-skills training, including SAT/ACT preparation, financial literacy, college advising, and career readiness. To date, 100% of YPC seniors graduate high school and are accepted to college — compared to 81% citywide.

Community Choruses

Hosted in partnership with trusted community organizations, these neighborhood-based programs ensure access for families who may not otherwise be able to travel to Manhattan. Students rehearse and perform locally, strengthening community pride and expanding cultural access where it is needed most.

We have historically held Community Choruses in Washington Heights and Goddard Riverside. In 2025, we were excited to expand this model to the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club in the Castle Hill section of the Bronx.

School Choruses

YPC delivers its nationally recognized choral curriculum in 16–18 New York City public schools annually across Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. Students perform repertoire spanning cultures and languages, fostering curiosity, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding while building perseverance and confidence.

At YPC, music is the entry point — but the outcomes are much broader. Our College Bound program provides individualized academic support, essay coaching, audition preparation, and scholarship guidance. We prioritize whole-child development, ensuring every chorister has the tools to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

We have included our FY27 Discretionary requests below:

- **\$150,000 Speaker Request** (*Performance & Community Choruses, including cultural exchange with visiting high school chorus from China*)
- **\$30,000 Cultural Immigrant Initiative** (*Programming in large immigrant neighborhoods*)
- **\$30,000 Manhattan Delegation Funding** (*School Choruses – Manhattan*)
- **\$20,000 Queens & Brooklyn Delegation Funding** (*School Choruses – Queens & Brooklyn*)
- **\$30,000 Bronx Delegation Funding** (*Community Chorus at Kips Bay in the Bronx*)
- **\$100,000 CASA Renewal** (*Councilmembers Ariola, Mealy, Sanchez & Schulman*)

We have also submitted Member Item requests to Council Members in districts where YPC programming operates. While some funds would support program expansion, the majority are essential to sustaining existing services — particularly in light of recent reductions in National Endowment for the Arts funding that have directly impacted YPC and many peer organizations.

YPC stands in solidarity with the broader arts and culture community today. YPC was so thankful for the Council's support in securing a historic \$75M baseline increase for FY26. **On behalf of the entire sector, are also here to request that the City restore and baseline the \$30 million that was added to the FY26 budget to support DCLA and the entire arts and culture sector.**

We are also asking for **improvement and reform to the Capital Project process and for the full funding of all Council initiatives** such as CASA and the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, which are so critical to the work we do at YPC.

New York City's young people need safe, inspiring spaces where they are seen, heard, and empowered. YPC proudly provides that space — and with your continued partnership, we will continue to lift up the voices of the next generation.

Thank you for your consideration and your steadfast support of arts education in New York City.

Lillian Young, Member of Local 1502, DC 37
Brooklyn Museum Workers
Before the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International
Intergroup Relations
March 18, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Lillian Young, I am an artist, the Family Programs Coordinator for the Brooklyn Museum, and a Board Member of the New York City Museum Educators Roundtable. I am here today to talk about the importance of funding the arts and cultural institutions, especially during these times when freedom of expression is being censored and attacked at Federal levels. During the 4 years that I have been at the Brooklyn Museum and in my over 10 years experience being an art educator, I have seen first hand how big of an impact the arts have for children and their families.

The family programs at the Brooklyn Museum are made for intergenerational audiences with a focus on families with children ages 0 to 6 years olds. One of our most popular programs is our Sunday Art class, Families Create, that helps kids ages 4 to 6 start to consider the intention and agency in their own art. In the past this program consisted of 24 classes offered throughout the year. Due to the financial hardships we had to cut this program down to 9 classes for the year, serving 42 families instead of 288.

I love that I'm in a position that helps people find their artistic voice, see themselves in museums and connect in ways that they didn't realize were possible. But, in the recent years of financial instability at the museum we have been given contradictory directives to do more with less resources. Working with financial instability is not sustainable for the artists like myself who run the programs nor the Brooklyn families we serve, who deserve to have consistent access to art education.

New York is a cultural hub of the world and every time I have to tell a family that a Stroller Tour is cancelled because of budget cuts I feel the pain of this contradiction. Our museum gives so many people the chance to create and engage with works of art that connect them to the world. I implore the City Council to fully fund and increase the budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Imani Williford, Member of Local 1502, DC 37
Brooklyn Museum Workers
Before the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International
Intergroup Relations
March 18, 2026

My name is Imani Williford. I am a proud fourth generation New Yorker who works at the Brooklyn Museum as the curatorial assistant for photography, fashion and material culture. Growing up in Brooklyn, going to publicly funded cultural institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum significantly influenced my decision to become a curator.

As a part of the Brooklyn Museum's curatorial team my job is:

- To assist in developing collections and exhibitions
 - that engage, educate and address the distinct and diverse audiences of Brooklyn and the city at large,
 - that document current trends in art and underrepresented areas in art such as Global Africa and Its Diaspora and Brooklyn-born or -based Photographers
- I Act as conduit between the public and art objects through extensive research, writing, public programs and tours in the specialized areas of fashion and photography
- I Support scholars and other museum professionals from around the world by providing information about the collection and the museum's history

I'm so proud that my work ensures that Brooklyn has a world class art institution, but with the rising cost of living and student debt impacting myself and my colleagues, it is getting harder to meet the demands of our profession. My mother worked for the New York City law department for more than thirty years. Due to the cost of living crisis she no longer lives in the city. I view my work at the Brooklyn Museum and as a DC37 member as an opportunity to give back to my city by continuing the decades of civil servant work that put a roof over my head and clothes on my back.

Increasing funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs is an essential commitment the city must make to working New Yorkers like myself who have dedicated our educations and expertises to enriching our city's cultural sector.

Enrique Mendia, Member of Local 1502, DC 37
Brooklyn Museum Workers
Before the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International
Intergroup Relations
March 18, 2026

Thank you for this time. My name is Enrique Mendia — I'm an educator and cultural programmer at the Brooklyn Museum, a proud member of DC 37 Local 1502 for almost 5 years, and I'm also an artist.

I work at the Brooklyn Museum because I believe in the work we do, in the possibility of museum spaces - especially when they're brought to life with people, with New Yorkers!

And the Brooklyn Museum can be many things: it's First Saturday that brings 10s of thousands of new yorkers free cultural programing a year at a time when nightlife can be prohibitively expensive and all people want to do is be together, Or it's the work that I and the rest of our School Programs teaching artists do to teach thousands of students a year, and from every borough, in our galleries and art studios.

The Brooklyn Museum is everyone that visits it, and it's also all of us that sustain it, watch its galleries, keep it clean, put on our exhibitions, and bring the sense of commitment that is needed to care for this 200 year old building and run its programs.

But more and more my union colleagues and I are being asked to do more with fewer resources and little recognition of this reality:

Reduced staff capacity due to attempted layoffs has been felt across the Brooklyn Museum, and disproportionately by certain departments. our education and public programs staff lost 4 union educator positions due to attrition, with no sign of any of those positions being filled, despite the city council providing additional funding to keep staffing levels the same last year. Since last spring, The Museum has since hired three executives but not a single full time educator. Yet, me and my colleagues make up the work, teach every class that comes to visit, and stretch every resource we have to fulfill the very deep need for art education in our community.

All this is to say my teaching artists are tired, my colleagues are tired, and the burn out is here. And so while we champion the education and public programs that make the Brooklyn Museum what it is, it is vital to articulate that these are the very programs that are consistently at risk whenever the Brooklyn Museum and the Department of Cultural Affairs has its budget reduced — it is us workers that steward these programs who feel

this the most.

Just as New Yorkers should be able to count on our art classes and free programs, art workers and artists should be able to count on this city, and its arts institutions. Too often talented artists leave NY because the money just no longer makes sense, it's not sustainable — and that's our loss. We all want to be in a city where art thrives, and so it is a matter of prioritizing the artists and art workers that make that possible— with increased funding!

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations

March 18, 2026

Alicia Peaker, Ph.D.



I'm writing to ask that you support increasing the New York City libraries budget to 0.5% of the total budget this year and to commit to this amount in future years. I am a life-long beneficiary of public libraries and a frequent patron of both NYPL and the Brooklyn Public Library. I don't just borrow books and ebooks and DVDs (over 150 check-outs each year), I also attend events hosted by or in library spaces. I drop in to libraries to stay warm or cool between appointments and meetings. I get great recommendations from staff on topics and resources new to me. It was through a public library that I was able to access SAT-prep books that opened doors to first a college degree and later a Ph.D. that led to a career in academia and academic libraries.

Libraries are imperative to the health and well-being of New Yorkers. Currently, the libraries are working under a structural deficit caused by inflation. Increasing the portion of the city's budget that is allotted to libraries to just 0.5% will correct that issue and allow libraries to better meet patrons' needs.

Subject: 0.5% for libraries

I have lived in New York City for nearly a decade and am a frequent library patron. I am also a member of Brooklyn Community Board (CB) 6 where I serve as the chair of the Business Affairs and Licenses committee. I live in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, where the Carroll Gardens branch has been closed for renovations for more than 2 years, a huge loss for the community. In my role as a member of CB6, I advocated for a temporary library branch during the construction, which was successful and now a small, but mighty pop-up operates out of 250 Baltic Street. Through this advocacy work and through every event I have attended at the library, it is clear how beloved New York City's libraries are by people from all walks of life.

I recently attended, "The Philosophy of Mathematics: Night in the Library" at the Brooklyn Central Library branch where what felt like thousands of library patrons were there. It was a stunning show of support for the public library system and a huge success. I was overwhelmed by the turnout, which further proves how much more funding libraries deserve in New York City. When the demand is this high for free, accessible activities, especially at nights and on weekends. When library funding gets cut, these programs are cut and communities miss out.

I am asking that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to **at least** 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,000) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, I ask that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets. We should not be forced to do this budget dance year after year. Library workers depend on their paychecks and they deserve raises. Library patrons deserve Sunday service and libraries in every neighborhood of every borough.

The financial year (FY) 2027 **Preliminary Budget** estimate total for public libraries is \$491,436,000 (\$491.4 million). The total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127,000,969,000 (\$127 billion). So the current FY '27 est. funding for libraries is a measly 0.39% of the total budget.

I think this is a realistic, but significant number and I believe this would allow libraries, which are relied on now more than ever, to be more fully staffed, and to accommodate patron needs.

The three, massive library systems in New York City together are operating under a structural financial deficit, mainly because of growth in overall expenses due to inflation since 2021. The current operational deficit is \$44.6 million. This increase in funding is more important now than ever. The demand for \$143 million more in library funding for FY '27 means **there would only be \$98.4 million available for a true increase** in service or staffing levels from their current state if \$44.6 million is just getting the libraries caught up with inflation for current operations.

Thank you for your time.

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of NYC PLAN's ask that **library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget** in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,00) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year. I also ask that 0.5% of the total city budget becomes the benchmark for all future library budgets.

I agree with NYC PLAN's reasoning for this number: it is realistic, but significant - and I believe it would allow libraries to be fully staffed and accommodate patron's needs.

The library is an irreplaceable service to me as a citizen of New York City. As a resource for knowledge, in the past year alone I have borrowed books from the library to learn about becoming a homeowner, help at my local community garden, and learn more about the Caribbean food so prevalent in my neighborhood. The library is also an invaluable place to meet - I've used it as a respite on many a long day in the city, and have attended workshops organized there.

Libraries are so important to this city (and every city), but they can only provide their services when they are open and properly staffed. I hope the committee will consider my testimony, and NYC PLAN's ask, strongly.

Sincerely,

Anthony Liu

Hello,

I am writing today in support of the New York City Library system.

We ask that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,000) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, we ask that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets.

Mayor Mamdani committed to 0.5% of the city budget being committed to libraries throughout his campaign but unfortunately, the preliminary budget falls short of that promise.

The three library systems together are operating under a structural financial deficit, mainly because of growth in overall expenses due to inflation since 2021. The current operational deficit is \$44.6 million.

The ask for \$143 million more in library funding for FY '27 means ***there would only be \$98.4 million available for a true increase*** in service or staffing levels from their current state if \$44.6 million is just getting the libraries caught up with inflation for current operations

This funding would allow libraries, which are relied on now more than ever, to be more fully staffed and to accommodate patron needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Beth Williams

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Brooklyn, NY 11201

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Testimony of Bright Limm (supporter of NYC Public Library Action Network) for the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Council on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations (held on March 18, 2026)

Dear members of the NYC Council on Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations:

I write to join the call of NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN) for both the mayor and the Council to ensure that at least 0.5% of the total city budget for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) be committed to funding for the city's public libraries.

Practically speaking, NYC PLAN's 0.5% request would amount to about \$143.6 million in public library funding for the FY27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, I join NYC PLAN in asking that the 0.5% of the total city budget be baselined for all future library budgets.

Currently, the FY27 Preliminary Budget's estimated total for public libraries is about \$491.4 million, and the total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127 billion, making the current FY27 proposal for libraries just 0.39% of the total preliminary budget. Increasing this item to at least 0.5% would amount to about \$635 million, or a 23% increase compared with the present fiscal year.

This increase is necessary in order to provide the city's public libraries with enough resources to perform the kinds and quality of services already expected by the public.

At a moment in which fascism threatens to consolidate in the federal government, we must not only maintain but strengthen our public libraries, which not only provide a wealth of intellectual resources and community-oriented activities but also serve as one of our key institutional pillars of democracy.

An investment of \$635 million in our public libraries is not only feasible; it is a price worth paying to build up our city's bulwarks against authoritarianism.

Sincerely,

Bright Limm 임대중
Resident of Jamaica, Queens, NYC
Day-1 supporter of Zohran for NYC

Caroline Cutroneo

Testimony in Support of Increased Library Funding

To the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations,

I am an employee of New York Public Library and I work in an area in which I see a high need for library services. Patrons often come into the library needing to use the computers to write resumes, take college courses, print legal documents, attend book discussions and events, and other important life activities. We have an active circulation of books and other items.

Our children's room is **active**, with children of all abilities using the room for after-school homework help, STEAM programs and educational activities, school visits, computer use for homework and enjoyment, playing with toys. Children and their caregivers in this heavily immigrant community depend on the library as a safe space.

The library is very important to this community, as are all libraries, and that is why I was surprised and disappointed to see that Mayor Mamdani's budget request actually defunds libraries when compared to former Mayor Adams' budget.

We are short-staffed and need more staff, as the current staff are stretching quite a bit to meet the multiple needs of many patrons. We need better building space and maintenance for employees and patrons.

Please commit 0.5% of the city's budget to libraries, it is very much needed to hire staff and maintain and improve library buildings and properties.

Thank you very much,

Caroline Cutroneo

From: [Chelsea Stone](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support libraries in the city's fiscal budget
Date: Thursday, March 19, 2026 11:02:47 AM

To council members,

I am a resident of Crown Heights and have the good fortune to benefit from our municipal library system. That's why I'm asking that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,000) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, we ask that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets.

Thank you for your continued support for such an important public good.

Chelsea Stone
- Sent from my phone

Dear Council Members,

My name is Christina Lee, and I live in Washington Heights with my husband and two children. Our local branch is the Fort Washington Library. I am also a member of NYC PLAN, a local library organizing group. Through both my personal experience and advocacy work, I have closely followed the city's library funding process.

I am writing to ask for two specific commitments:

- That public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in the upcoming fiscal year
- AND that 0.5% of the total city budget be established as the baseline for all future library funding.

A budget reflects our collective values. Public libraries are essential infrastructure, needed now more than ever. Public spaces are shrinking, and people's rights are increasingly under threat. It is remarkable that a place where people can access free resources, gather, learn, and connect with their community can feel so radical in a time of such uncertainty. Libraries truly are for everyone.

On a personal note: as a parent of young children, I rely heavily on our library. It provides a safe, accessible space for my kids on the hottest summer days and the coldest winter afternoons. It's where I can find the latest Dav Pilkey book my son is eager to read, pick up Spanish language picture books to support my children's learning, browse cookbooks and how-to guides, or take a class to pick up a new skill. The library is an essential part of my parenting toolkit and a big part of what makes NYC a place where I want to raise my family.

To meet the needs of our communities, libraries must be adequately staffed, and library workers must be fairly compensated. They should not be expected to shoulder growing societal challenges without the resources to do so. If we value libraries, we must fund them accordingly.

It has been incredibly disheartening to watch library funding repeatedly subjected to cycles of proposed cuts, followed by public outcry just to restore basic support. This pattern creates instability and undermines long-term planning. The mayor promised to end this cycle, and I urge the Council to take meaningful steps toward that goal now.

End the budget dance. Fund libraries at 0.5% of the total city budget. Set 0.5% as the baseline for future years.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christina Lee
NYC resident and NYC PLAN member

From: [Clarence Brooks](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Arts Funding
Date: Monday, March 16, 2026 6:51:50 PM

Hello,

I am writing to urge the council to support arts funding.

Just a few years ago, when the entire world was locked down, it was the arts and artists that not only entertained us, they were employed to educate and inform. I can still see/hear the videos and photos of Italians gathered on their balconies to sing to first responders. It was the arts that brought us together.

New York City is a world cultural capital. The most important artists in dance, theatre, music, and visual arts reside here and call The Big Apple home. People travel here from around the globe to experience Broadway productions. Contrary to actor Timothée Chalamet's statement, the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and so many other ballet/dance and opera companies, people DO care about them.

The arts are a major economic engine creating and sustaining jobs on stage, backstage, front of house, restaurants, florists, catering, marketing, clothing, hospitality, and so much more. The many thousands who keep art alive and well in NYC need support to make art and to make ends meet.

Please support arts funding! Thank you in advance for your time and attention to this plea.

Take real good care, Clarence Clarence Brooks (he/they), MFA, CMA, CET, RYT Dancer |
Educator | Choreographer Sent from iCloud

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Testimony of Cynthia Fels Price (member of NYC Public Library Action Network) for the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Council on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations (held on March 18, 2026)

Dear honorable members of the NYC Council on Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations:

I write to join the call of NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN) for both the mayor and the Council to ensure that at least 0.5% of the total city budget for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) be committed to funding for the city's public libraries.

Practically speaking, NYC PLAN's 0.5% request would amount to about \$143.6 million in public library funding for the FY27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, I join NYC PLAN in asking that the 0.5% of the total city budget be baselined for all future library budgets.

Currently, the FY27 Preliminary Budget's estimated total for public libraries is about \$491.4 million, and the total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127 billion, making the current FY27 proposal for libraries just 0.39% of the total preliminary budget. Increasing this item to at least 0.5% would amount to about \$635 million, or a 23% increase compared with the present fiscal year.

This increase is necessary in order to provide the city's public libraries with enough resources to perform the kinds and quality of services already expected by the public.

At a moment in which fascism threatens to consolidate in the federal government, we must not merely maintain but indeed strengthen our public libraries, which not only provide a wealth of intellectual resources and community-oriented activities but also serve as one of our society's key institutional pillars of democracy.

An investment of \$635 million in our public libraries is not only feasible; it is a price worth paying to build up our city's bulwarks against authoritarianism.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Fels Price

Resident of Brooklyn, NYC

March 16, 2026

Dear New York City's City Council,

Please commit at least .5% of the city budget to public libraries, for this year, and every year going forward.

Public libraries are one of the great and much-needed "third spaces," that every community and human being needs, places where someone can be, or gather, without being charged money, and borrow books or have other such important cultural experiences, as well as get out of the cold, or the heat, and even benefit from the many, many other services that libraries provide!

I grew up in a small town, with a huge library, and am sure that one reason I have been able to be a tax-paying, contributing, proud New Yorker, working in the book publishing industry, for a quarter century now, is because of that good fortune. Please, let's keep giving that kind of present and future to our children, and to everyone.

Thank you very much,

David Patterson

Thank you Deputy Speaker, **Dr. Williams**, and to the rest of this committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dylan Flesch and I'm a patron of the Brooklyn Public Library and a member of NYC PLAN, the Public Library Action Network.

I'm here to implore the City Council – especially council leadership, and the Budget Negotiating Team – to fight with every tool at your disposal to **fund our public libraries at half of one percent (0.5%) of the total city expense budget**. This number should be baselined and should be considered the minimum acceptable amount. I don't want the City Council to have to keep filling the gap through negotiations and discretionary funding year after year, as I'm sure you don't either.

I'd like to complement you, Chair Williams, **on your** handling of these proceedings today. I liked when **you** called out a previous speaker from DCLA for acting like the one-time funding that gets wrangled between the Preliminary budget and the Adopted budget was something they could count on, because **it's not**. And **similarly for libraries, they must act like the amount in the Preliminary Budget is the amount they are going to have to operate with**. They cannot and *should not* count on those numbers increasing between now and July. **And because of this, they can't plan, and they have to start operating under the logic of cuts**. They stop hiring, they start planning reductions to services, and generally, **they can't be all we need them to be**. This is the impact of the budget dance and we need it to stop.

Library management is tiptoeing around this conversation because they are trying to maintain positive relationships with the mayor while they're doing backroom negotiations. The library CEOs consistently fail to recognize the need that NYC PLAN and the patrons and workers of libraries have been highlighting for years. We **HAVE** to stop accepting crumbs in the budget and fight for **MORE**.

My son Griffin got his library card when he was two months old, and we've been able to access hundreds of books that we wouldn't have otherwise. We visit the Sunset Park branch of BPL frequently. It's a beautiful new branch with 100% affordable housing on top, but even my branch has now had to close the whole bottom floor due to a burst pipe and flooding.

There are 10 branches closed in Brooklyn right now. So, the 100 vacancies at BPL mentioned by Linda Johnson are being covered by the staff from these closed branches, but what happens when those branches open? The libraries desperately need more staff as they are, but emergency closures will continue to get worse without baselined funding.

I would **so much** rather spend my three minutes today talking about bigger dreams, like fighting to hire 1000 more library workers across the city, which is badly needed, or expanding affordable housing on top of libraries, but instead I'm here once again (for the 3rd year in a row) fighting against the same tired cuts we've seen for too long.

I'm calling on you to hold the mayor to his promise of ending the budget dance and join NYC PLAN in fighting for library funding to be *increased to at least half of one percent of the total city budget.*

Thank you,

Dylan Flesch

Here's some additional information on the numbers if helpful:

1. The financial year (FY) 2027 **Preliminary Budget** estimate total for public libraries is \$491,436,000 (\$491.4 million). The total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127,000,969,000 (\$127 billion). So the current FY '27 est. funding for libraries is a measly 0.39% of the total budget.
2. The demand from NYC PLAN is that the City Council and Mayor Mamdani increase that number from 0.39% to at least 0.5% (half of 1%) of the total city budget. For FY '27, that would be \$635,005,000 (\$635 million).
3. Another way to think about this is that we're demanding an **increase of \$143,569,000 (\$143.5 million) in public library funding in the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.**

And here's why NYC PLAN settled on 0.5% as our demand:

1. **We think it's a realistic but significant number. We believe this would allow libraries, which are relied on now more than ever, to be more fully staffed, and to accommodate patron needs.**

And here are some more ideas I'm sharing in my written testimony, since I'm no longer constrained to three minutes.

The importance of focusing on % of the budget

Inflation happens year after year, but the conversation around library funding in the budget often ignores this fact and acts like \$400 million in 2025 is the same as \$400 million in 2026 for instance. But it's not, costs go up every year for libraries just like they do for other city agencies and for workers across the city. So we can't just compare the raw numbers, we need to focus on the percent of the total expense budget. Libraries are also getting gouged by e-book publishers further increasing costs.

Air Rights above Public Library Renovation Projects Should be used for 100% Affordable Housing

You may or may not have caught it in the testimony on 3/18 when Tony Marx was talking about upcoming housing above library projects, but he said something about figuring out what percentage of them should be made affordable. I want to share my strong opinion that the only correct answer to that is 100%.

We Must Raise Library Worker Pay

Even if libraries do get their baseline funding, it's important to increase salaries and benefits for library workers so that they can make a living wage and so libraries can attract and retain workers.

We Need Staffing Minimums

The union locals want there to be at least 4 staff per branch minimum, but the library management are so far unwilling to add that to the collective bargaining agreements. They aren't even willing to add a staffing minimum at a lower level like 2-3 people per branch, not because

they don't think they have enough staff to do that, but because they don't know if they will still have enough next year for instance, because of the budget dance.

Have You Explored Legislation to Create a Minimum Funding Model for Public Libraries?

Past legislation attempts by NYC City Council (none have passed). Jimmy Van Bramer is the former city council member who sponsored this legislation when it was attempted several times between 2013-2018, he was chair of the New York City Council's Cultural Affairs and Libraries Committee. It attempted to allocate 2.5% of property taxes values levied towards public library funding. If passed it would have been an amendment to the city administrative code, specifically section 5-509.

It was first attempted in 2013 and the most recent attempt was in 2018. You can see the text and supporting documents, etc, for each attempt below:

1. 2013
 1. 1050-2013 (legislation text and history of actions)
 2. some press coverage:
 1. "Unsung heroes" fight for New York library funding
 2. Tired of the annual library budget fight
2. 2014
 1. 0114-2014 (legislation text and history of actions)
3. 2018
 1. 0680-2018 (legislation text and history of actions)
 2. video of city council meetings including discussion of the above
4. 2022
 1. 0345-2022 (legislation text and history of actions)

To the esteemed Committee Members,

I am writing to testify in support of increased funding for New York City's public library systems given their foundational importance to the fabric of this city and its people and their pressing needs for safe and healthy libraries and supported library workers. In support of these needs, I echo the proposal that 0.5% of the total city budget be dedicated towards funding our three public library systems, as pledged by Mayor Mamdani in his campaign and supported by several members of City Council.

I wrote to the previous committee urging this same adoption for the upcoming expense budget, and I am sorry to have to join with my neighbors in doing so again. Several times last year, including after his election as Mayor, Zohran Mamdani [promised](#) to dedicate .5% of the city's budget to the city's library system. His initial spending plan, however, allocates only about .39% of the city's budget to libraries – a reduction even from the preliminary budget of his predecessor Eric Adams last year, who notoriously cut the budget for libraries for the first three years of his time in office. Mayor Mamdani's backtracking on this funding is frustrating, but I urge the Council and this Committee to pursue 0.5% funding for the benefit of all New Yorkers.

I have been a patron of New York City's libraries my whole life. The Yorkville branch was a haven of learning, warmth, and community engagement for the entirety of my childhood. I returned to the stacks there as my reading tastes changed, and the librarians and neighbors gathered there provided a shared space in the city that I have not found anywhere else. My life has only continued to grow through the libraries in adulthood. As a current patron of the Brooklyn Public Library, their services, community spaces, and accessibility provide resources and refuge that simply has no other substitute. These are indispensable institutions, built and maintained by hard working staff and librarians, and yet they have still been under constant attack in the budget for the past several years.

Put simply, libraries cannot do the work that this city needs them to do without giving them more resources and space. This means funding: for staff hiring and retention, for necessary renovations to HVAC and infrastructure systems, for service hours and materials. There is no massaging this need – it's what the city runs on. To that end, I am writing as a member of NYC-PLAN and as a lifelong New Yorker to testify in support of allocating 0.5% of the total city budget for the library systems. This is a baseline necessity, and we call on you to meet your city's needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Elliot Galvis

Dear Councilmembers,

I don't think I need to explain to you how important libraries are. Even something as small as opening the Carroll Gardens Pop Up Library in Brooklyn has had a huge impact on the community. Libraries allow people to learn about history, which is very much something needed these days as we find ourselves repeating policies and practices that we've already tried and know don't work (racism, xenophobia, genocide, sexism, fascism, etc.). Please peg the library budget to 0.5% of the city budget. Our libraries should be well funded. If you don't know where to find that extra \$144 million from, might I suggest NYPD. They'd hardly notice it's gone. In fact, that's almost the exact amount we spend on SRG.

Eric

My name is Hal Schrieve, and I'm an author and librarian. In addition to writing YA fiction about queer teens, monsters and aliens, I have 8 years of experience working with books and the public. From 2017-2019, I worked doing library service at Rikers Island and bookmobile outreach at Queens Library. I was hired by NYPL as a children's librarian in 2019. I stepped in to a world of libraries dealing with consistent attacks on our institutional legitimacy— from book censorship fights in red states that have resulted in complete defunding of some local libraries¹ to COVID closures which left service interrupted and forced a quick pivot to virtual programs and outdoor outreach², these have not been quiet years for libraries. In addition to being a political flashpoint, many public libraries' budgets are, each year, up for debate— even in NYC. The biggest cuts occurred during The Great Recession in 2011, when a whopping 27% of the library's budget across three systems was hacked away, leading to many system closures and to staff shortages that, according to colleagues at NYPL, have never quite gone away since. Cuts are back this year— which is why I am writing this post.

Despite Urban Librarians Unite, the unions, and the library system presidents testifying each budget cycle for the City Council, a huge portion of the next year's library funding is always a bit of a question mark. Mostly, the library's board and admin assumes that funding will remain more or less stable—after all, libraries are vastly popular and are extremely useful at building social trust as well as supplementing public education. But you can't depend on precedent. In 2024, Eric Adams' proposed budget cut \$58 million from NYC libraries³— which at the time, amounted to something like **15% of the library budget**. His claim at the time was that migrants were using up so much city funding that there was nothing left for everyone else. Meanwhile, police got big robots that did nothing.⁴

Last year, Mayor Zohran Mamdani made history by running a campaign that made big promises unapologetically, spoke in hard numbers, and responded to the concerns of working people, renters, parents, teachers, as well as immigrants, nightlife workers and the homeless. I was a part of that campaign—but this didn't make me special. Mamdani's campaign, with its big commitments around childcare and housing combined with a willingness to tax the richest New Yorkers to make a more functional city, enjoyed a practically unprecedented groundswell of support from grassroots canvassers. This should tell you about the direction of our political future—and it was a beautiful thing. A million doors knocked takes a lot of people. My own contributions took the form of **emphasizing, at about 1200 individual doors and on phone calls and zoom calls with people from my union, that Mamdani was going to fund the libraries**. This wasn't just an assumption on my part. Early in his campaign, Zohran promised city workers at union-specific town halls that he would commit to giving a baseline 1% of the budget to parks and 0.5% to libraries. These were percentages that city workers asked for specifically based on the experience of constant scarcity and precarity with previous budgets. A 0.1% increase in library funding means millions of dollars for full staffing, roof repairs, and

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/22/us/alabama-library-defunded-book-bans-hnk>

² <https://www.gothamgazette.com/city/9974-new-york-public-libraries-adjust-pandemic-nyc/>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/nyregion/library-funding-cuts-eric-adams.html>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhH4uTMLyTA>

programs that help New Yorkers do what they need to with our printers, computers, archives and databases. Other candidates also signed on to these pledges; when they dropped out, Mamdani kept mentioning those numbers. He last mentioned them in December. “We will not be doing a dance around something that we believe is critical to New Yorkers,” Mamdani said on Dec 27, 2025. “If there’s something we think is important, we will make that clear in our own preliminary.”⁵ I was really looking forward to the release of this budget. I didn’t vote for the dimples or charisma– I voted for a functional city. And a lot of other people did, too.

But Mamdani’s initial budget, released February 17, doesn’t keep his commitment. Instead, it allocates \$456 million to all three library systems– which sounds like a lot, but is just about 0.39% of the 127 billion dollar budget, and in real dollars, over \$20 million less than either the preliminary or the adopted budget of FY26.⁶ He’s speaking now in the language of deficits– though the precise amount of this deficit keeps changing, as it did under Adams’ austerity pleas. Obviously, he needs Hochul and the state to implement the broad income tax; equally obviously, unfunded state mandates cause more deficits to wrangle with⁷. However, there are plenty of other sources of revenue besides our civic institutions. The police are still working with over 6 billion each year; my guess is that some of that funding is still going to the SRG that Mamdani committed to disband⁸, or to large cars that will then be parked on sidewalks.⁹

After the budget was restored under Adams after the push-pull¹⁰, ULU, the DSA, [abolitionist Mariame Kaba](#), and a huge number of patrons, librarians and library-lovers got together to try to figure out a plan to get politicians on board with establishing baseline library funding as a percentage of the city budget, so that large chunks of our operating budget could not be sporadically yanked away on the whim of an individual administration. The result was [NYC PLAN, or NYC Public Library Action Network](#). They (we) were part of the pressure on the mayoral campaigns to begin with. [Now, they’re asking that people write to Mayor Mamdani to ask him to give libraries what he promised– a consistent percentage of the budget](#). They also have a [convenient script to use to call your council member](#). I would invite you to do this, and also to attend a rally for libraries on March 21.

⁵ <https://nycplan.org/nycplan-newsletter-7/>

⁶ <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2025/03/Libraries-1.pdf>

⁷ <https://newyork.edtrust.org/new-york-citys-1-billion-crisis-education-leaders-urge-pause-on-class-size-mandate/>

⁸ <https://www.wnyc.org/story/inside-the-nypd-unit-mayor-zohran-mamdani-wants-to-dismantle/>

⁹ <https://tribecacitizen.com/2024/08/16/taking-on-the-nypds-cars-on-sidewalks/>

¹⁰ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/06/27/budget-funding-adams-council-library-parks/>

Do you love your library?

**Join NYC Public Library Action Network for
A People's Assembly!**

- Meet your neighbors and library defenders!
- Learn how to advocate for your local library!
- Discover all the ways libraries improve our city!

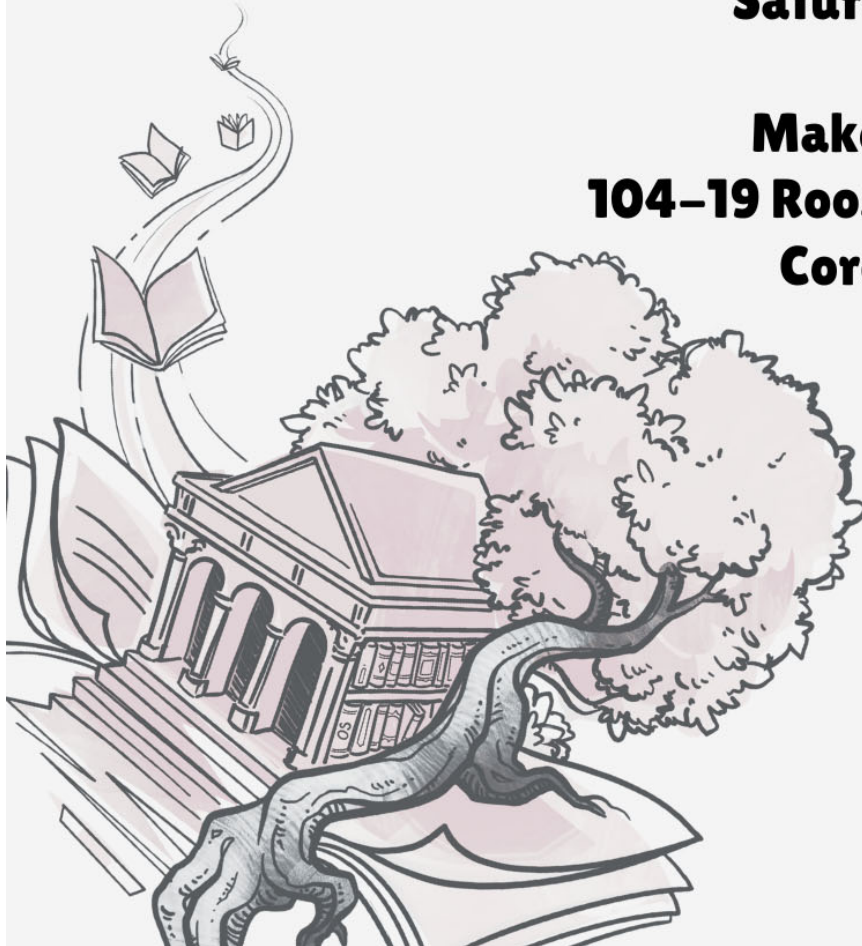
Saturday, March 21

12:45 pm

Make the Road NY

104-19 Roosevelt Avenue

Corona, NY 11368



During the budget season, seasoned policy wonks usually tell everyone to calm down– the money will be negotiated back after it's been held over our heads a while. However, as someone working at NYPL during the Adams budget tug-of-war, a massive proposed cut has

real consequences. **All libraries that had been open on Sunday closed for several months, hiring was frozen, planned repairs in Harlem were delayed, resulting in longer library closures. Other things, like expansions to after school tutoring, new computers, and about a third of new book acquisitions, were put on hold.** All of these interruptions affect actual library use. You see it in the library when they stop buying new books; patrons noticed too when fewer copies of new bestsellers were available. We were loud; we spoke to patrons about it. Others also protested. These cuts were seen as unnecessary and harmful¹¹, particularly as they are a tiny chunk of change in the overall budget, and after several months of exhausting advocacy, they were mostly reversed. What that meant in practice was that Sunday service came back and new books flooded in sometime in July.

In my time working for the public library systems, I have seen an awful lot of what is called (by librarians and city workers in other threatened institutions) “the budget dance”¹². But I think in one of the richest cities in America and the world, our library institutions should not be what’s on the chopping block, while Wall Street brokers take home millions annually from fossil fuel destruction, AI data center expansion and other rampantly destructive investments. Our city deserves a budget that focuses on the people here and cultivates education, civic life, and recreation for children, families, and new arrivals. That’s what makes NYC great.

¹¹ <https://prismreports.org/2024/03/28/nyc-library-budget-cuts-impacting-most-vulnerable/>

¹² You can explore blog posts about “the budget dance” on Urban Librarians Unite’s website here, such as this post from 2012. <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/why-we-still-fight/>

One of my first memories of the NYC public library system is when I went to the Queens Public Library at Flushing as a kid. I was visiting my family friends and I remember being deeply envious -- the local library in my New Jersey township was dingy and small, and never had any of the books I wanted. My parents couldn't afford to buy me new books either, so all I could do was borrow books from my friends and I felt so mortified and self-conscious about how poor my family was. I remember walking around the Flushing library and being excited about all of the books there -- whole rows of children's and YA books and plenty of comics. I begged my mom to let me check out some books and she said no, the logistical headache of returning the books wouldn't be worth it (something I now understand as an adult, but not as a child). It feels very magical to now be an NYC resident and have access to all that the NYC libraries have to offer. I've only grown to have more appreciation for all the services the library provides and all the pockets it fills for the community. This is only possible with the proper funding, and so I hope that the administration can commit to allocating the promised 0.5% of the city budget to libraries and to address the \$345 million in unfunded capital needs.

Testimony for the New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030 and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Dr. Hilarie Ashton
Brooklyn, NY

I'm writing today as a teacher, a writer, a library patron, a community member, and a member of NYC PLAN, a grassroots collective of New Yorkers organizing to increase, support, and sustain funding for New York City's public libraries. Since we began working together in the summer of 2024, our demand has been to raise the three library systems' funding to at least 0.5% of the City budget, and to keep that percentage locked in. Raising and safeguarding library funding will ensure that an essential public institution can offer service across the City, pay its workers, repair and maintain its infrastructure, and stay accessible to every New Yorker. We came together in the wake of Mayor Adams' repeated cuts to library funding, and part of our work is to prevent such cynical budget dancing from harming New Yorkers' library access and from harming library workers.

We were so thrilled to receive Mayor Mamdani's sign on to our 0.5% demand very early in his candidacy, and even more excited when he added it to his [platform](#). He pledged, "As Mayor, I will end the practice of using library funding as a bargaining chip in budget negotiations and commit 0.5% of NYC's budget to libraries, ensuring we have enough revenue for robust services and well-staffed facilities." And yet in the second month of his mayoralty, he shattered that pledge, submitting a preliminary budget that not only didn't raise library funding, but actually cut it, below the already too-low level at which Mayor Adams (an opponent of library sustainability) last had it, from 0.42 to 0.39%. It's a slap in the face to all New Yorkers who use the libraries, to those who work there, and to everyone who campaigned and canvassed for him in extreme cold and extreme heat.

We at NYC PLAN need Council members to work with the Mayor to raise this amount up to where it should be and where he promised to put it, to 0.5%. And New Yorkers more broadly deserve a budget that doesn't fall back on the austerity measures of the past that this Mayor—who is making many other policy moves that expand services, safeguard streets, and protect vulnerable community members—ran on ending. We need a budget that affirms an expansive vision of what's possible in our beautiful city, and library funding is central to that vision.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hilarie Ashton

Jacqueline Carr

Testimony for Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

March 18, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Jacqueline Carr and I am a Queens Public Library patron. The library is important to me for several reasons, however before I speak of them I must begin by saying that my interest piqued in the services of the library when I volunteered as an Adult Basic Education (ABE) tutor at the Rochdale Village Library. I was deeply encouraged even elated when I witnessed the students' progress. The moment they realized they could read their faces lit up, their confidence and persona improved, and they looked forward to their next class.

It's also important to me because of the many opportunities it has afforded me and members of the community as well — I utilize the computers, I also read the newspapers, in particular *The Times*. I especially appreciate that most libraries have book clubs. I am a member of Laurelton Literary Society. In the near future I hope to learn how to play Chess which is being offered at the Cambria Heights Library. I also learn to paint at the library, and some my artwork is now being exhibited at the Cambria Heights Library.

I particularly like that I was able to participate in a Defensive Driving Class, and for the past two years I have had my taxes done at the library, thanks to the alliance with AARP. Additionally, I can't emphasize enough how beneficial the work of QPL's Civic Engagement Department has been to me. I thoroughly enjoy the leadership programs which have helped me to become a better leader, and communicator.

The benefits that public libraries offer are enormous, however increased funding is essential to expand programming across our libraries. Greater resources would allow for the development of additional opportunities for teens — including financial literacy workshops, mentorship initiatives, and other enrichment programs, designed to equip them for the future. With sustained and increased support, libraries can continue to grow not only as centers of learning but as pillars of guidance, and community empowerment.

Jovayra Cabrera

Testimony for Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

March 18, 2026

Good evening. My name is Jovayra Cabrera. I am a New York City educator, a doctoral candidate researching Latino family engagement in bilingual early literacy programs, and a parent of two young children who regularly use Queens Public Library. The Queens Public Library system is central to both my personal and professional life. As a parent, I visit local branches with my children to attend cultural programs and access diverse books that reflect our community's languages and identities. Participating in the Kickoff to Kindergarten series was transformative for my family. I learned dialogic reading strategies that strengthened how I engage my children during our nightly reading routine and deepened my confidence as their first teacher.

As an educator and researcher, I have also seen how QPL serves as a trusted community hub where culturally and linguistically diverse families feel welcomed and empowered. QPL does more than lend books; it builds school readiness, provides bilingual resources, and ensures families have access to high-quality early learning experiences regardless of income or language background. Libraries like QPL are public institutions that advance equity and opportunity. When we fund libraries, we invest in children's futures. When we fund libraries, we support immigrant families. When we fund libraries, we strengthen our communities. If we truly believe in these priorities, then our budgets must reflect that commitment by fully funding our public libraries.

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Testimony of Julez Thompson (supporter of NYC Public Library Action Network) for the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Council on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations (held on March 18, 2026)

Dear honorable members of the NYC Council on Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations:

I write to join the call of NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN) for both the mayor and the Council to ensure that at least 0.5% of the total city budget for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) be committed to funding for the city's public libraries.

Practically speaking, NYC PLAN's 0.5% request would amount to about \$143.6 million in public library funding for the FY27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, I join NYC PLAN in asking that the 0.5% of the total city budget be baselined for all future library budgets.

Currently, the FY27 Preliminary Budget's estimated total for public libraries is about \$491.4 million, and the total municipal budget for FY '27 is \$127 billion, making the current FY27 proposal for libraries just 0.39% of the total preliminary budget. Increasing this item to at least 0.5% would amount to about \$635 million, or a 23% increase compared with the present fiscal year.

This increase is necessary in order to provide the city's public libraries with enough resources to perform the kinds and quality of services already expected by the public.

Simply put, I love libraries and I love New York City. Where else can you learn a new language, cool off in the summer time, and sit down with a book surrounded by folks with just as much of a love of reading? Our public libraries are struggling to maintain infrastructure when they should be thriving cultural hubs. Our public libraries should be able to support New Yorkers with vital resources. Libraries are one way in which we can show that public goods can actually do good.

Sincerely,

Julez Thompson

Resident of Astoria, Queens, NYC

Day-1 supporter of Zohran for NYC

Hi my name is K Agbebiyi and I live in Crown Heights. My Brooklyn library location is the Brower Park library. I go to the library every week, and walk by the library everyday. I am able to witness how many people rely on the library for services including children's programming, technology, and a safe and quiet place to work on projects. Libraries provide an invaluable service to our community and a place for people to connect when our world is so fractured. Funding them signals an investment into a society that works for us all, and doesn't privilege an elite few.

I'm also writing in collaboration with the NYC Public Library Action Network. We are asking that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,00) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year. This number, while significant, is realistic given growing patron needs. We need more spaces in pursuit of knowledge and creation, and libraries also provide more than that. From resume tips, to tax help, to children's story hours, to film screenings, to craft circles, libraries represent a world that we should be striving to build.

**Written Testimony: Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations**

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

March 19th, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Kelly Guerrero, and I am a freelance dance artist working in New York City. As both an artist and an administrator, I experience firsthand the many layers of the dance ecosystem in New York City. I care deeply about this issue because my livelihood, and the livelihoods of so many of my colleagues, depend on a cultural sector that is currently under-resourced and increasingly fragile. As an artist, I cannot emphasize enough how vital sustained public investment is to the survival and growth of our field.


Dance is not only a form of creative expression, it's a significant contributor to the city's economic and social vitality. The dance sector contributes approximately \$300 million to New York City's economy, enlivening public spaces, engaging millions of residents and visitors, and strengthening communities. More broadly, the creative industries generate thousands of jobs and contribute up to 13% of the city's total economic output. Beyond economics, the arts play a crucial role in improving mental health, educational outcomes, and community well-being.

Despite this impact, the dance sector is facing serious challenges. Since the beginning of the pandemic, New York City has seen an 18.8% decline in dancers, largely due to rising costs and lack of affordability. Forty percent of dance organizations report weak financial health, and nearly half of individual dance workers juggle up to four jobs just to make ends meet. Even with this effort, the average dance worker earns about 15% below the city's living wage, often without access to adequate healthcare or social safety nets. Personally, I hold jobs with four different dance/arts organizations, two of which are based in NYC, and I pick up additional gigs on the side. I also hold a fifth job in the restaurant industry to make up for any additional funds I need to support myself each month.

The arts sector plays a significant role in shaping both the economic and social fabric of New York City, and the City's investment should reflect that reality. Without intentional and sustained support, the sector and the communities it serves will remain under-resourced and at risk. For these reasons, I urge the City to baseline a \$30 million increase in funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs. This investment is essential to ensuring the resilience, sustainability, and equitable growth of the arts sector.

Thank you for your leadership and for this opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences. I appreciate your commitment to supporting arts and culture in New York City.

Sincerely,
Kelly Guerrero



Keren Abreu

Re: Preliminary Budget Hearing, Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations (March 18th, 2026)

Libraries are our great equalizer - Please Fund Them!

I want to start off by saying thank you to Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams, and to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations for the opportunity to testify in support of our libraries today.

My name is Keren Abreu and I'm a New Yorker, born and raised in the Bronx, currently living in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. I'm a 32-year-old artist and musician. I work in customer service by day to support myself, and in my remaining free time, I volunteer as a member of the Friends of the Sunset Park Library - a small group of devoted and dedicated community members who support our local branch through fundraising efforts, advocacy, and community engagement.

I have always loved libraries - as an avid young reader, I spent countless weekends of my youth tucked away in the NYPL Moshulu Branch, reading Junie B Jones and the Chronicles of Narnia. In the library, I explored worlds I'd someday hope to build. In the library, I saw myself represented, I learned to love my neighbor, and I felt all the possibilities of what my life could be.

Today, we are living in a time when truth is being manipulated, books are being censored, gruesome wars are being carried out with our tax dollars, and our very neighbors are being kidnapped, ripped apart from their homes and families. Today, more than ever, our libraries are critical. Libraries are our great equalizer – in the most expensive city in America, our libraries are the only truly free spaces we have, and they are a haven for all residents of our city to feel welcome, safe, and supported. Through their diversity of literature and resources, and their diversity of patronage, libraries are how we learn to live in community and how to cultivate and protect our village.

I became involved with the Friends of Sunset Park Library Group because, upon moving to Sunset Park 4 years ago, I immediately noticed that our local library branch was the heartbeat of our community. I submitted testimony for this exact hearing in 2024 when then-Mayor Eric Adams threatened to cut the library budget. Now, Mayor Zohran Mamdani has gone back on his initial campaign pledge to commit 0.5% of the city's budget to public libraries. In his preliminary FY27 budget, he has only allocated 0.39% of the city's expense budget to NYC public libraries. This 0.39% of the expense budget he has allocated is even less than Eric Adams allocated in his FY26 preliminary budget proposal!

I am urging this committee to help our libraries secure 0.5% of the city's expense budget for FY27. This funding would help ensure that every branch across our city has the staffing and resources to provide the life-changing services they offer to their communities. Please increase funding for our libraries, as they are the cornerstones of our communities.

Sincerely,
Keren Abreu

To the Council.

I am a resident of the East Village and frequent the Ottendorfer and Tompkins library branches, along with others when I'm in other parts of the city. The library provides knowledge, classes, space, and resources for the community.

I ask that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,00) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, I ask that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets at a minimum.

Thank you,

Kerry Recht



Zip code: 10003

Submitted by Kirstin Kapustik
Wednesday March 18, 2026 9:30am
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

First, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Kirstin Kapustik and I am an Arts Executive, having worked in New York City's cultural industry for the last 17 years. I have a Masters of Fine Arts and a Masters of Business and use both of my graduate degrees to inform my work as an arts manager, fundraiser, programmer and advocate. I am the Executive Director of Trisha Brown Dance Company, a \$1.5M budget nonprofit that employs 3 full-time staff, 4 part-time staff and 16 project based artists.

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to share my experience and make a case for cultural funding in 2026.

I care about cultural funding because ultimately this is about jobs—this is about fair pay for artists, and fair pay for cultural workers. This is also about New York City being a cultural hub for the world. If artists can no longer afford to live and work here, New York will be less attractive as a place for innovation, for tourism, and for the emerging workforce—and we will find our city becoming less dynamic, less equitable, and less globally competitive.

Cultural funding is not a luxury; it is essential infrastructure. It sustains a workforce of hundreds of thousands, fuels our economy, and defines the identity of New York itself. When we invest in artists and cultural organizations, we are investing in the long-term vitality, resilience, and relevance of this city.

I ask the City to increase the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) budget by \$40 million for FY27. While I understand New York City is in a grave financial position, it has been clearly demonstrated that communities, cities, and countries that increase cultural funding see a positive economic impact and increased revenues—through attracting national and international tourism, sustaining jobs in the creative sector, drawing new talent, and supporting industries that are deeply connected to the cultural economy. Furthermore, countries such as Ireland, have found that for every €1 paid to an artist, the return on investment is €1.39. If we apply that model to NYC, a \$40 million increase in cultural funding could generate more than \$55 million in economic return.

With foundation, government, and private support for the arts and culture sector shifting and, in many cases, declining, without increased investment from DCLA, New York City will continue to see erosion in its cultural ecosystem. This will directly impact jobs, the city's GDP and broader economic activity, the vital social impact the arts bring to communities, and New York's standing as a global cultural capital.

New Yorkers take immense pride in a city defined by creativity and innovation—a city that is home to Broadway, to some of the greatest theaters in the world producing and presenting work of the highest caliber, and to countless spaces where emerging artists are given the opportunity to begin their careers. These institutions and artists are not incidental; they are foundational to what makes New York, New York. Without increased investment from DCLA, we risk losing not only the artists who fuel this ecosystem and the economic return, but also the sacred venues and creative spaces that define our identity—diminishing the very spirit, vibrancy, and global leadership that set this city apart.

Thank you for your leadership and this opportunity to advocate for an increase in DCLA funding for FY27.

To the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations:

**RE: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations Hearing on
March 18, 2026 @ 9:30am**

My name is Lisa Filipek. I am a 15 year resident of City Council District 35 in Brooklyn and a member of the NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN). I am also an active patron and financial supporter of the BPL.

I am writing today to express my disappointment in Mayor Mamdani's inadequate funding of the public libraries in the preliminary budget. I am asking this City Council to hold Mayor Mamdani accountable to his campaign promise of allocating 0.5% of the total city budget to library funding. This allotment would translate to \$143.5 million in public library funding for the FY'27 cycle, or a 23% increase in library funding.

In addition, I would ask that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets.

Libraries serve a critical function within our communities and are needed more than ever to help fill gaps in our social safety net. It is a travesty that every budget cycle we have to engage in this fight just to make sure our libraries can afford to stay open and pay staff. It is a waste of energy and resources and makes it impossible for the library systems to create long term plans.

I believe that this funding is a realistic and significant number that will better enable our library systems to meet the needs of their local communities. I look forward to seeing this funding reflected in City Council's response to the preliminary budget.

Best,
Lisa Filipek
City Council District 35
Brooklyn, NY

March 18, 2025

Good Afternoon Chair Williams and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your time today. My name is Mandy Salley and I'm a member of the New York City Public Library Action Network or NYC PLAN. I'm also a resident of district 45 in Brooklyn and a patron of the Cortelyou Branch of Brooklyn Public Library. I'm here today to discuss funding for public libraries.

The preliminary budget released last month only allocates .39% of city funds to public libraries. This is unacceptable and I urge you to support an allocation amount of .5% in the final budget for fiscal year 27.

Libraries are vital to the residents of New York City, and they've been subject to the budget dance for far too long! NYC's three public library systems are currently operating under a structural financial deficit due to the growth of expenses because of inflation. The current deficit is \$ 44.6 million. The Council must work to allocate .5% of next year's budget to libraries to help relieve the financial strain they are under.

Our public libraries are critical public spaces and serve millions of New Yorkers every year. Our libraries are also vital to the infrastructure of our city with several branches serving as warming centers during the recent winter storms. Libraries are havens for all New Yorkers at a time when the cost of living in this city is skyrocketing. No one is ever turned away from the library when they need a quiet or warm place to study, assistance with applying for benefits or a place to print something important.

Our libraries are one of the last remaining institutions where the size of your paycheck doesn't matter. When I visit my local branch, I see families with children enjoying story hour, older adults reading the print edition of a newspaper, people co-working (pro-tip the library has way more outlets than your local coffee shop) and library workers offering all kinds of assistance to my neighbors.

We must do everything we can to protect these sacred spaces. Committee Members, I implore you to secure .5% of fiscal year 2027's budget for public libraries and ensure their success. Thank you for your time today.

Sincerely,

Mandy Salley
Brooklyn Resident
Member of NYC PLAN

Good afternoon council members My name is Mariame Kaba. I am a New Yorker born and raised and a member of the NYC Public Library Action Network, a grassroots group of NYC residents focused on a mission to amplify, strengthen, and progress the futures of New York City's three public library systems through community-led organizing, action, and increased funding.

Libraries, like most public institutions, perpetually deal with budget constraints. Mayors [propose or threaten to cut library budgets](#) and then, after public mobilization and outcry, sometimes restore funding at levels that do not keep up with inflation.

The [NYC Public Library Action Network](#) (PLAN), of which I am a member, has been strategizing and organizing to stop the destructive budget dance. Our main demand is that the city allocate 0.5% (half of 1 percent) of the expense budget to our public libraries annually. This demand has been [amplified by the NYC Public Library system](#) as well.

Zohran Mamdani [included our demand in his platform](#) during his campaign for Mayor. After he won, he [reiterated his support](#) at an event at Greenpoint Library in December 2025. On Feb 17, Mayor Mamdani released his FY 27 preliminary budget. In it, he allocated 0.39% of the city's expense budget to NYC public libraries for FY 27. This amount is well below the 0.5% of the city's expense budget that he promised during the campaign and reaffirmed after his election.

We are asking the City Council to join us in advocating for increased and most importantly STABLE funding for our public library systems which are essential democratic institutions and are being asked every single year to do more with not enough funding.

We live in a time of pervasive disillusionment. People are rightly mistrustful of most institutions. The library can serve as one way to show that public goods are actually GOOD and that institutions aren't meaningless.

I ask that the City Council support the demand of 0.5% of the city expense budget to be allocated to our public libraries.

As Rita Dove wrote: "The library is an arena of possibility, opening both a window into the soul and a door onto the world." New York is a city of possibility and it deserves fully funded libraries. Thank you.

From: [Martha Chapman](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Increase funding the Department of Cultural Affairs
Date: Thursday, March 12, 2026 12:10:48 AM

Hello,

My name is Martha Chapman. I am a dance worker in NYC with Peridance Center Inc., Steps on Broadway, Omega Dance Company.

As a dancer, choreographer, teacher and director, I know the power of dance and of all The Arts to feed our souls, keep us human and express the difficulties of life and the world. Not only this, but arts organizations always function as economic incubators in the neighborhoods they serve, bringing artists, students and audience members who support local restaurants, businesses, public transit and more.

Because of these artistic AND economic benefits, I urge not only keeping, but increasing the funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) by \$30 million, and making this a baseline for future budget years.

Financially, dance alone contributes around \$300 million to NYC's economy. Creative industries generate thousands of other jobs and contribute over 10% to the city's total GDP. It makes business sense to spend money that increases economic benefits.

The social and cultural impact of the arts show improvements in mental health, in education - music and dance training improves academic performance in students, improves youth involvement in criminal justice systems... the list goes on and on.

Yet, with all these proven benefits, the dance economy is fragile. We need more funding to ensure the resilience, growth and survival of the dance industry. Dancers have left NY in droves since the beginning of the pandemic. Rising costs and lack of good-paying work drives dance workers elsewhere. Almost half of NY dance organizations classify themselves as financially struggling. Many dancer workers, myself included, work multiple jobs to earn a living. Average dance worker earning

are below living wage for NYC prices.

Equity should be the center of all budget allocations by the City. NYC government must invest back its fair share into the Arts and Culture sector to reflect the tangible, measurable benefits brought economically and culturally by the Arts to our great city. All New Yorkers will benefit, all artists will benefit and the bottom line of the NYC budget will benefit.

Please do what's not only right, but economically smart. Invest in the Arts by funding the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Sincerely, Martha Chapman

dancers, arts advocate, choreographer, dance educator

choreographer, director



“Except for the point, the still point, there would be no dance, and there is only the dance.”
T.S. Eliot

[Martha's FB Page](#) [Martha's LinkedIn Profile](#)
[Omega Dance Company](#) [Find Omega on FB!](#)

Libraries are critical public goods and force multipliers in our community, so many people rely on them for meeting their basic needs, educating themselves, and improving their lives. It is a dereliction of duty to systematically underfund them, and constantly threaten library funding. This “budget dance” endangers their mission of meeting community needs because libraries cannot staff or plan for meeting them.

A guaranteed 0.5% of the city expense budget is a realistic but significant number that would allow libraries, which are relied on now more than ever, to be more fully staffed, and to accommodate patron needs.

For FY2027, 0.5% of the budget for libraries would mean an additional \$143 million to the preliminary budget amount of \$491.4 million proposed by Mayor Mamdani (a measly .39%). Cutting library budgets, and the threat of cuts hinders the mission of libraries and harms our public goods. I implore you to fund our libraries to at least 0.5% of the budget for FY2027 and every year after.

Natalie McGarry - NYC Public Library Action Network



City Council Hearing 2026-03-18

Friday, March 20, 2026

Testimony of Natasha Dwyer for the Preliminary Budget Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations (held on March 18, 2026)

Dear honorable members of the NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations:

I write to join the call of NYC Public Library Action Network (NYC PLAN) for both the mayor and the city council to ensure that at least 0.5% of the total city budget for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) be committed to funding for the city's public libraries.

Practically speaking, NYC PLAN's 0.5% request would amount to about \$143.6 million in public library funding for the FY27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

In addition, I join NYC PLAN in asking that the 0.5% of the total city budget be baselined for all future library budgets.

Currently, the FY27 Preliminary Budget's estimated total for public libraries is about \$491.4 million, and the total municipal budget for FY27 is \$127 billion, making the current FY27 proposal for libraries just 0.39% of the total preliminary budget. Increasing this item to at least 0.5% would amount to about \$635 million, or a 23% increase compared with the present fiscal year.

Library funding was an essential part of Mayor Mamdani's platform and one of the reasons I voted for him:

“Libraries are critical to our city's success—they enable access to the internet, provide cool from summer heat, serve as vital community hubs, and help New Yorkers seek career advancement and education. [...] As Mayor, I will end the practice of using library funding as a bargaining chip in budget negotiations and commit 0.5% of NYC's budget to libraries, ensuring we have enough revenue for robust services and well-staffed facilities.” (<https://www.zohranfornyc.com/platform>)

While I am deeply disappointed by the FY27 Preliminary Budget, I remain hopeful that the mayor and the city council can fix this. Please end the demoralizing budget dance that puts library services at risk year after year. Please fund our libraries!

Sincerely,

Natasha Dwyer

Resident of Brooklyn, NYC

Proud Brooklyn Public Library Card Holder

I am testifying in solidarity with NYC PLAN's demand to raise public library funding to at least 0.5% of the total city budget this upcoming fiscal year - and to keep the funding at 0.5% every year.

Our libraries are relied on now more than ever, not just as places to check out books, but as warming/cooling shelters and third spaces for everyone in a community to gather. To live up to those responsibilities, the libraries need reliable funding to remain fully staffed and able to accommodate a variety of patron needs.

Raising the library budget to 0.5% - and keeping it there in all future budgets - would ensure that our libraries always have the resources they need to serve our city, and shows that our city government is committed to prioritizing this crucial institution instead of holding it hostage every year.

If the city budget is, to quote the mayor, "More than a spreadsheet,... it's a statement of our values," then the city should value its public libraries at least 0.5% this and every year.

Hi there,

My name is Rachel Wilkerson Miller. I'm a journalist and have published two books with a third one coming out this October. I'm also a huge proponent of libraries, and am calling on the city council to please allocate 0.5% of the city's budget to our public libraries in the 2027 budget. Mayor Mamdani's Preliminary Budget released on February 17 only allocates 0.39% for public libraries. This is less than Mayor Adam's preliminary budget last year and it is flatly unacceptable. It is crucial that the City Council fights for public institutions, and secures 0.5% of the budget for our libraries.

To me, libraries are an example of community at its very best: we all agree to share something and take good care of it so others can enjoy it too, and, somehow, this generally works out. It's kind of a miracle actually! I really see libraries as an essential service, and I know how transformative and life-sustaining they can be for people of every age.

We are living in a moment when everything libraries represent and offer is under attack: Open information. A system for avoiding needless waste and dependence on Amazon. Free, climate-controlled public spaces. Help for non-English-speaking immigrants who need assistance navigating American culture, government, and educational systems. A place where marginalized people can safely exist, gather, and dream. An antidote to loneliness and isolation for people ages 0 to 100.

An increase to 0.5% of the city budget next year would go a long way in providing support for our libraries. That would allow them to maintain their current services while providing additional funding for library workers.

I hope the Council will treat 0.5% as the floor, not the ceiling, and do everything they can to ensure this vital public institution is funded in 2027 and beyond.

Sincerely,
Rachel Wilkerson Miller

Sofia Leung



March 18, 2026 – Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Written Testimony

I am writing to ask that public library funding be increased from 0.39% to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in this upcoming fiscal year. This would translate to \$143.5 million (\$143,569,00) in public library funding for the FY '27 cycle, or a 23% increase in total library funding in this upcoming fiscal year.

Additionally, I request that the 0.5% of the total city budget be the benchmark for all future library budgets.

As someone who grew up going to the Brooklyn Public Library every week and now as a parent of a 15-month-old who goes to the Windsor Terrace branch (also my childhood branch) daily, access to the public library is an important part of my and my family's life. We rely on story times, lego play time, and the space as a place to build community, especially as my son grows older. He has a two-year-old friend he sees every day at the library and I know they would miss their time together.

If the public library funding isn't increased, I know the hours of the library would be cut; there would be less services and available. This would be devastating to us as a family and as a community. This is the public service we use the most out of every public resource available.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Testimony for Libraries

Hi, my name is Steven Pei. I'm a huge fan of libraries and I'm worried that the NYC library system is being threatened. The prelim budget from the mayor represents a cut from 0.42% down to 0.39%, and I'd really like to see it get a funding increase up to 0.5%, and have that be the starting point going forwards in future years. This would be a massive win for the community and for the library workers that makes this incredible system possible.

March 18, 2026

Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries

Re: Participatory Budgeting & Public Library Funding (FY 2027)

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Suzan Hoffman, and I am a Queens resident and a member of NYC PLAN, the Public Library Action Network. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Libraries are often described as places to borrow books. In reality, they are something far more essential. They are among the last places in our city where anyone can walk in, stay as long as they need, and access knowledge, support, and community without cost or condition.

Our libraries are where someone goes when they do not have Wi-Fi at home but need to apply for a job, submit a housing application, or access public benefits. They are where a newly arrived New Yorker can begin to learn English, prepare for citizenship, and find their footing in an unfamiliar system. They are where students receive after-school support, where families build early literacy skills, and where older adults learn how to navigate a digital world that increasingly determines access to everyday life.

Libraries also serve as quiet connectors. They help people find legal assistance, workforce training, food access, and community-based programs. Often, they are the first place someone turns when they do not know where else to go.

Just as importantly, libraries are one of the last truly free third places we have left. They are spaces for gathering, for thinking, for being in community without the expectation of spending money.

This matters deeply right now.

At a time when many New Yorkers are experiencing isolation, economic strain, and the effects of a tense and shifting political climate, people are searching for places that offer connection, stability, and a sense of belonging. Libraries are already meeting that need. Through cultural programming, language access, and open, welcoming spaces, they support not only learning but also resilience. They create the conditions for people to show up for one another.

And yet, they are being asked to do all of this with too little.

Public libraries currently receive just 0.39% of the city's total budget. Less than half of one percent supports millions of people across the five boroughs.

When funding falls short, it does not fall evenly. The impact is felt first and most by those who rely on libraries the most. Low-income communities, immigrant communities, and communities of color depend on libraries not just for enrichment, but for essential access to information,

technology, and support. When hours are reduced, staffing is stretched, or programs are cut, it limits access to opportunity in very real ways.

NYC PLAN is calling for library funding to be increased to at least 0.5% of the total city budget in Fiscal Year 2027. This would mean an increase of approximately \$143.5 million, bringing total funding to roughly \$635 million.

This is a practical and necessary step.

Libraries are currently operating with a structural deficit of \$44.6 million due to rising costs in recent years. A portion of this increase would stabilize existing services. The remainder would allow libraries to extend hours, invest in staff, and expand programs in ways that reflect the reality of how heavily they are used.

This is not about expansion for its own sake. It is about sustaining and strengthening an institution that is already doing critical work.

It is also about equity.

If we believe that access to information, education, and community should not depend on income, immigration status, or neighborhood, then libraries must be funded accordingly. They are one of the clearest expressions of what public investment can look like when it is rooted in access and care.

Libraries are already showing us what is possible. Every day, they create space for learning, connection, and mutual support. Every day, they meet people where they are, often at moments of real need.

The question is whether we will choose to invest in that.

I urge the Council to adopt NYC PLAN's recommendation and commit to funding libraries at no less than 0.5% of the city budget, not only in Fiscal Year 2027 but as a baseline moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Suzan Hoffman

VIVIANE HAYS

Regarding: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Relations

My name is Viviane Hays. I am a longtime homeowner in Sunset Park Brooklyn, former CB7 board member and currently a Friends of Sunset Park Library member.

I am testifying for the need for funding of our public libraries. They are an extremely vital part of our community. They serve our families with programs for adults, teens and children, as well as for our vibrant immigrant community taking ESL classes and other programs geared to help them and their children.

We have a wonderful array of programs thanks to our dynamic head librarian Roxanna Benevides, but our needs also extend to money for the maintenance of these precious buildings. We recently had a flood in our lower level which closed off access to the teen and adult areas and meeting rooms, and knocked out elevator service to both the upper level children's floor and the lower level. Classes and special events like the one for Chinese New Year had to be canceled as a result.

Please restore the promised funding for this most vital institution that nurtures and educates our citizens and future citizens and provides a needed center for people to meet and learn.

I thank the committee and our council member Alexa Aviles for their consideration of these matters.

Dear City Council,

I write today to request that the budget for NYC Libraries be increased from ~0.39% to 0.5% of the NYC budget, or an increase from ~\$491.4 million to \$635 million.

Libraries are relied on, now more than ever, as community centers that offer education for all ages, relief from the elements, bonding space for local organizations, and centers for outreach by city and state agencies. Librarians are valuable guides who help expand visitors' understanding of themselves and of the world. In a world that is currently seeking to diminish our compassion for each other and establish parochial worldviews, libraries and their staff are the bulwark that promotes learning and empathy. The growth in expenses since 2021 has caused every library system in NYC to operate at a structural financial deficit, and it is imperative that we fund them sufficiently to remain the pillars of education and community that they currently are.

I have personally relied on libraries for ebooks, community organization, community events, state and city outreach, and cannot imagine another network of locations that offer the same hours, public access, and welcoming environment. Libraries are essential, and they need to be considered as such in the budget. I believe 0.5% of the city's budget is a realistic but substantial number that allows libraries to continue their laudable work.

Thank you,
Wayne Chuang

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lillian Young

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn NY 11230

I represent: [Redacted] DC37/Myself

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

Cultural Affairs in favor in opposition
1427 Prelim Budget Hearing

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Doria Juima

Address: _____

I represent: Cool Culture

Address: 80 Hester Pl. Suite 605 Brooklyn NY 11217

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LUCY SEXTON

Address: 64 Bleeker

I represent: New Yorkers for Culture Arts

Address: NY NY 10012

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marlene Ramirez - Cancio

Address: [Redacted] Bk

I represent: BAX

Address: 421 5th Ave Bk

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RYAN GILLIAM

Address: [Redacted] BKLYN NY

I represent: FOURTH ARTS BLOCK

Address: 70 EAST 4TH ST NY NY 10003

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Axia Squitieri

Address: [Redacted] Bronx NY 10463

I represent: Bronx River Art Center

Address: 1087 E Tremont Ave Bronx NY 10460

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DAVID JOHNSTON

Address: [REDACTED] NYC 10025

I represent: JAZZ GALLERY

Address: 1158 BROADWAY 10001

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LAUREN ELMORE

Address: [REDACTED] NYC 10034

I represent: The Flea Theater

Address: 20 THOMAS ST NYC 10007

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Caron Atlas

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn

I represent: Arts + Democracy + Naturally Occurring Cultural

Address: Same as above Districts NY (NoCo-NY)

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: J HOOK

Address: _____

I represent: JAPAN SOCIETY

Address: 333 E 47th ST 10017

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eva Davis

Address: _____ Brooklyn NY

I represent: Latinx Arts Consortium (LxNY)

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KATHRYN GLASS

Address: _____ BR, NY

I represent: BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

Address: 1000 WASHINGTON AVE

BROOKLYN, NY 11225

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Angel Hernandez

Address: NYBG-2900 S. Blvd, Bx NY 10458

I represent: New York Botanical Garden

Address: 2800 S. Blvd, NY 10458

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Sarah Mercanti

Address: 231 W. 39th St Ste 1200, New York NY 10018

I represent: Roundabout Theatre Company

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: MAURICIO DELFIN

Address: [Redacted] BROOKLYN

I represent: CULTURE AND ARTS POLICY INSTITUTE

Address: [Redacted] BROOKLYN

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: GONZALO CASTILLO

Address: _____

I represent: CULTURE & ARTS POLICY INSTITUTE

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lance Polivy

Address: 31 Chambers St.

I represent: DCLA

Address: 31 Chambers St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Judith Insell

Address: _____

I represent: Bronx Arts Ensemble

Address: 80 Van Cortlandt Park South Bx, NY

10463

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Norah Yahya (Ya-Ya) (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 3/1/2006

Name: En-Yu Ma (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Supervising Museum Technician

Address: 5th Avenue, 100th St, Box 3037

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Miriam Jalgei (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 1123 Broadway

I represent: NO MAD Jazz Festival

Address: same

Custard

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/18/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Imani W. Ford

Address: 125 Barclay St NY NY 10007

I represent: Senior Museum Instructor

Address: Local 1502, DC37 (St. Museum)

Custard

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lillian Young

Address: 125 Barclay St NY NY 10007

I represent: Senior Museum Instructor

Address: Local 1502, DC37 (St. Museum)

Custard

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Hyslop

Address: 125 Barclay St NY NY 10007

I represent: President Local 1321, DC37

Address: Union Library Workers

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

LIBRARIES

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: George Otken

Address: 121 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President Local 1482 DC37

Address: LAB Library Workers

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Allman

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President Local 1930 DC37

Address: NY Public Library Workers

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Philip H. Cohen

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President Local 374 DC37

Address: NYPP Security Guards - Cirkulians

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Philip Macaluso

Address: [REDACTED] BRKLYN, NY

I represent: DC37 Local 374

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trenton Price

Address: _____

I represent: Savadori

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CINDA JOHNSON

Address: BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

I represent: 10 GRAND ARMY PLAZA

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anthony Marx

Address: 11 W 40th St, NY NY

I represent: NYPL

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tony Marx

Address: _____

I represent: NYPD President

Address: 5th Ave

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emily Drabinski

Address: _____ Brooklyn NY 11218

I represent: Library PAC

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jovanna Cabrera

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jacqueline Carr

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dennis Wilcott

Address: 89-11 Merrick Blvd

I represent: Queens Public Library

Address: 89-11 Merrick Blvd. Jamaica

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brittany Bellinger (DCLA)

Address: _____

I represent: Museum Huc

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Freundenthal (DCLA)

Address: _____

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3-18-2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dennis Walcott

Address: _____

I represent: Queens Public Library

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Comito

Address: [redacted] Bk, NY 11222

I represent: Urban Librarians Unite

Address: 87 Richardson St Bk NY 11211

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hal Schriever

Address: [redacted]

I represent: myself + speaking as a librarian

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Patterson

Address: [redacted] Bk, NY 11231

I represent: Library users / Friends of Carroll Gardens Public Library

Address: 376 Clinton St Bk, NY 11231

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alton Murray

Address: De

I represent: DC LA / Deputy Comd

Address: 31 - Chambers

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: USA GOLD

Address: ASIAN AMER. ARTS MUSEUM

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: IRA DEUTCHMAN

Address: WEST END AVE.

I represent: UPTOWN FILM CENTER

Address: 2626 BROADWAY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kimberly Olsen

Address: [REDACTED] LIC, NY 11109

I represent: NYC Arts in Education Roundtable

Address: 520 8th Ave NY, NY 10018

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cynthia CARRION

Address: 1230 5th Ave.

I represent: EL MUSEO Del BARRIO

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: AYA HAYASHI

Address: 700 W. 192nd St, St 2, New York 10040

I represent: The People's Theatre / Coalition of Theatres of Color

Address: _____



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Suzette Brown (aka Suzette Simon)

Address: _____ NYC 10011

I represent: NKlaughn, Inc.

Address: Do Reg 1503, NYC 10013-1503

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Simon Salinas Jr

Address: _____ NY, NY 10033

I represent: The People's Theatre

Address: 700 W 192nd Suite 2 NY, NY 10140

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melody Emerson-Simpson (age 8)

Address: _____

I represent: Abby Emerson (NYC PLAN)

Address: 495 Madison St. BK NY 11221

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Coco Killingsworth

Address: 30 Lafayette Brooklyn Ave 11217

I represent: BAM

Address: same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gabrielle Gatto

Address: 500 25th St. Brooklyn, NY 11232

I represent: The Green-Wood Cemetery

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARJI MOLAVI

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: myself

Address: _____



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Penn Gentline

Address: [Redacted] N.Y.N.Y. 10034

I represent: The Classical Theatre of Harlem

Address: 1850 Amsterdam Ave.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cathy Hung

Address: _____

I represent: Making Books Sing dba New York City

Address: children's theater

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DJ McDonald

Address: _____

I represent: Dance Project

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: March 18, 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly K...

Address: 22-25 Jackson Ave LIC NY 11101

I represent: MOMA PS1

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nicole Touziah

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: Dancewall

Address: 152 Fourth Ave Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Barbara Bryan

Address: 150 1st Ave NY 10009

I represent: Cultural Stewardship Coalition / Movement Research

Address: 150 1st Ave NY 10009

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: GWENDOLYN KINGSBERRY-DTH

Address: 466 W. 152nd St

I represent: Partners in Cultural Stewardship

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Edward Hanlon

Address: [REDACTED] New York NY 10024

I represent: American Guild of Musical Artists

Address: 305 7th Avenue Suite 2A, New York, NY 10001

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: MARCH 13, 2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANA SEPULVEDA ECHIBARAY

Address: [REDACTED] BRONX NY

I represent: PARTNERS IN CULTURAL STEWARDSHIP (PERFORMANCE SPACE NEW YORK)

Address: 150 FIRST AVENUE, NY NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brittany Bellinger

Address: _____

I represent: Museum of Hue

Address: 495 Flatbush Ave

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rosalind Barbour

Address: 425 Lafayette Street

I represent: New York Shakespeare Festival

Address: 425 Lafayette St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trenton Price

Address: _____

I represent: Salvadori Center

Address: 475 Riverside Dr, Ste 239, NY, NY 10115

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LIBERTAD GUERRA

Address: _____

I represent: Partners in Cultural Stewardship Coalition

Address: and The Clemente

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RISA SHUP

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: American LGBTQ+ Museum

Address: 45 W 36th St NYC

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Imani Williford

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn, NY 11238

I represent: Imani Williford / DC37

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3.18.26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DEEKSHA GAUR

Address: 520 8TH AVE, # 801, 10018

I represent: THEATRE DEVELOPMENT FUND (TDF)

Address: 520 8TH AVE, # 801, 10018

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HEW ROSE EVANS

Address: 45 W. 36TH ST, NY, NY 10018

I represent: AMERICAN LGBTQ+ MUSEUM

Address: ↑ SAME

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/18/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: FRANCINE BARBER COHEN

Address: [REDACTED] BKLYN

I represent: REGINA OPERA COMPANY

Address: 599 E. 7 ST BKLYN

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/16/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: STEPHANIE HILL WILCHFURT

Address: 121 ST JOHNS PL

I represent: CULTURAL

Address: INSTITUTIONS GROUP

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SANDIE WAT

Address: _____

I represent: TD STUDIO

Address: 311 EAST 140th St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Raquel Dutoit

Address: _____

I represent: Dance/ NYC

Address: 152 Sherman ave