

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL  
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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February 18, 2021  
Start: 10:08 a.m.  
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing, Virtual Room 3

B E F O R E: Jimmy Van Bramer  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Jimmy Van Bramer  
Laurie A. Cumbo  
Darma V. Diaz  
Mark Gjonaj  
Francisco P. Moya  
Mark Levine  
Ydanis Rodriguez

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

Gonzalo Casals  
Commissioner  
New York City Department of Cultural  
Affairs

Lisa Kersavage  
Executive Director  
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Anthony Fabre  
Director of Community and  
Intergovernmental Affairs  
New York City Landmarks Preservation  
Commission

Jacob Morris

Dominique Barnuka Hood

Rachel Wallman

Julie Finch

Linda Nat Nolan



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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: I have the PC running  
3 right now.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Recording to the cloud  
5 all set.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Backup is rolling.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: And Keith will you  
8 start with the opening statement.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Good  
10 morning and welcome to the remote hearing on the  
11 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
12 International Intergroup Relations. Will council  
13 members and staff please turn on their video at this  
14 time? Once again, will council members and staff  
15 please turn on their video at this time. Thank you.  
16 To minimize disruption, please place all cell phones  
17 and electronics to vibrate. You may submit your  
18 testimony at [testimon@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimon@council.nyc.gov). That's  
19 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Chair, we are ready to  
20 begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
22 much. Good morning everyone and welcome to today's  
23 hearing. I am Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, chair  
24 of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
25 International Intergroup Relations. Today we are

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2 joined by several council members, ah, members of the  
3 committee, but also the sponsors of two pieces of  
4 legislation that we're hearing today. So first I  
5 want to recognize Council Member Darma Diaz, member  
6 of our committee, and I see Council Member Francisco  
7 Moya, also a member of our committee, and as special  
8 guest we have Council Member Mark Levine, who has  
9 introduced an important piece of legislation that he  
10 will talk about, and also Council Member Ydanis  
11 Rodriguez, who has also introduced an important piece  
12 of legislation that we'll be hearing today. We want  
13 to welcome all of them. As I mentioned, ah, we have  
14 three pieces of legislation that we are considering  
15 at today's hearing, but, ah, I would be remiss if I  
16 did not start by addressing that so much has happened  
17 since our last hearing. Ah, the details and  
18 guidelines for Open Culture, the Open Culture program  
19 that we're so proud of, ah, have been released. Ah,  
20 we have a new president. Ah, the state announced an  
21 upcoming series of New York pop-up performances in  
22 New York City and everyone is recognizing how vital  
23 arts and culture are to our revival, ah, and a just  
24 recovery. We've seen new support for the arts coming  
25 from Washington D.C. as Majority Leader Chuck Schumer

2 has, ah, heeded the calls of, of so many, ah, to save  
3 our stages, save the arts, which really are the soul  
4 of our city. And I'm very proud to have been the  
5 prime sponsor on Open Culture and we are thrilled  
6 that coming very soon will be the first of its kind,  
7 ah, ticketed performing arts events breaking out all  
8 over the streets of New York City and with the  
9 weather we hope at some point warm enough and we hope  
10 sometime not having snow, ah, on the ground we will  
11 see dance and song and comedy and acting, ah, all  
12 over, ah, the City of New York. So we hope everyone  
13 is, ah, staying tuned and all of our cultural  
14 partners are inclined to be a part of this program.  
15 Ah, we're moving the needle, ah, the time when the  
16 cultural community needs it most. This will be the  
17 fourth hearing, ah, where I'm opening by talking  
18 about arts and culture in this incredibly important  
19 sector in New York City as the second hardest hit  
20 industry by COVID-19, ah, with regards to job loss  
21 after restaurants and cultural workers need us.  
22 Which brings us to today's hearing. Ah, we're  
23 focusing on legislation, ah, aimed at addressing  
24 several important projects. Intro 1814, ah, which I  
25 sponsored, relates to the selection of outdoor works

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2 of art for the Percent for Art program. Introduction  
3 number 2048, sponsored by Council Member Mark Levine,  
4 is related to creating a front-line worker memorial  
5 task force in New York City and Introduction number  
6 293, sponsored by Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez,  
7 relates to the creation of a Freedom Trail task force  
8 to recognize, commemorate, and memorialize our city's  
9 history with slavery and the Underground Railroad.

10 I'll talk a little bit about my piece of legislation  
11 and then ask Council Members Levine and Rodriguez to  
12 speak about their important bills. Intro 1814 would  
13 require at least 50% of all chosen artworks funded  
14 through the Percent for Art program be installed  
15 outdoors and require that more information about  
16 these public works be posted online, which I believe  
17 will also fulfill the aim of bringing more art to  
18 people in New York City neighborhoods and allow for  
19 our city to have public art more accessible in every  
20 neighborhood across this great city of ours. Now I  
21 will ask my colleagues, ah, Council Members, ah,  
22 Levine and Rodriguez, ah, to speak to their  
23 legislation. Ah, we currently have a foundation  
24 around African American Freedom Trail in lower  
25 Manhattan with sites, ah, all around City Hall, with

2 sites all around City Hall, and I am proud that we  
3 are hearing these important task force bills to move  
4 the conversation forward, ah, about the importance of  
5 embracing and understanding, ah, our history,  
6 especially during Black History Month and of course  
7 with regard to Council Member Levine's bill as we  
8 began to, we hope, emerge from this horrific  
9 pandemic, um, and recognize the heroism of so many  
10 workers. So with that I want to call first on  
11 Council Member Mark Levine, ah, to speak about his  
12 important piece of legislation.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you so  
14 much, Chair Van Bramer. Thank you for everything  
15 you've been doing to fight for arts during this  
16 crisis and for expediting a hearing for this bill,  
17 Intro 2048, which is so critical, I believe, ah, to  
18 the city. Um, we are approach the first year  
19 anniversary of the start of this pandemic and of the  
20 dates on which we began to lose loved ones in the  
21 city. Ah, this is a crisis which has been defined by  
22 inequality, ah, not just inequality in health care  
23 and housing, but also inequality in employment. One  
24 of the major drivers of the disproportionate impact  
25 that COVID-19 has had on New Yorkers of color is



2 disproportionate presence of this community amongst  
3 those essential workers who have been out there  
4 serving us, caring us, caring for us, protecting us  
5 throughout this crisis. Workers in mass transit,  
6 workers in health care, workers in supermarkets,  
7 workers on fire trucks and ambulances who never  
8 stopped, never stopped over the last year and have  
9 put themselves at risk in the process, have paid a  
10 price in the process. We believe that thousands of  
11 essential workers have died because of COVID-19.

12 It's a staggering loss, one that I don't believe we  
13 have adequately accounted for and one which we must  
14 pay homage to and memorialize. And so I'm thrilled  
15 today that we're hearing legislation, again, Intro  
16 2048, which would do what we did after 9/11, would  
17 create a commission, a commission to form, um, to  
18 plan for a creation of a memorial to essential front-  
19 line workers that we have lost in this crisis. Ah,  
20 this commission would consist of two front-line  
21 workers themselves, also city commissioners from the  
22 Parks Department and the Department of Cultural  
23 Affairs, and other appointments by the mayor and the  
24 City Council, and this, this commission would be  
25 charged with identifying locations and a design for a

2 memorial to essential workers within nine months of,  
3 ah, passage of this legislation. We know this takes  
4 time. Ah, we don't want to wait until after this  
5 crisis is over to begin the process of coming  
6 together as a city to, um, to begin to reckon with  
7 this loss and how we can memorialize it. Um, I  
8 really grateful that we're hearing the bill today,  
9 um, and I want to acknowledge some of the staff of  
10 the committee who have worked so hard, ah, to bring  
11 this bill, ah, forward, including Brenda McKinney and  
12 Kristen McWapnick, Kristie Dwyer, and my own  
13 legislative director, Amy Slattery. Ah, thanks  
14 again, um, Chair Van Bramer, for hearing the bill  
15 today. Ah, back to you.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
17 much, ah, Council Member Levine for this, ah,  
18 important piece of legislation. And we were thrilled  
19 to, ah, put this on the fast track, ah, because it's,  
20 it's that important and we appreciate your work on  
21 it. Ah, we're also thrilled to have Council Member  
22 Ydanis Rodriguez, ah, with us today to speak about  
23 his incredibly important and timely, ah, piece of  
24 legislation. Council Member Rodriguez.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you,  
3 Chairman, and thank you for your commitment,  
4 dedication to support effort to resource and  
5 celebrate the contribution of all American. And  
6 that's the future of our nature. Eh, no doubt that,  
7 eh, New York City today is not the same one that we  
8 have at the beginning of the 20th century, where more  
9 than 90% of the population that were white. Today  
10 New York City population is 29% Latino, 27% African  
11 American, 15% Asian. The rest of us Irish, Jewish,  
12 Anglo. So we are the, the great, eh, eh, diversity  
13 city and I feel that as my experience as a former  
14 social study teacher for 15 year more than my 11 year  
15 that I have as a council member, take me to go to  
16 Boston in a number occasion, teaching social study,  
17 teaching American history, where we went and walked  
18 through the Freedom Trail site that they have in  
19 Boston. Why we don't have it in New York City? It's  
20 a matter of timing. It's a matter the new  
21 generation. I'm so proud. I know that we have the  
22 most progressive class of the council that we have  
23 ever had in our history, too. So this is our time.  
24 Eh, the important of creating the, the, the task  
25 force that will study the feasibility to create the

2 Freedom Trail is so especially important that we  
3 having this discussion in this month when we  
4 celebrate the, the contribution and struggle of the  
5 African American community, our brothers and sister  
6 that shoulder to shoulder we work to turn our city as  
7 a city full of opportunity. History is so important  
8 and that's why the most important group that we have  
9 in New York City dedicate the holiday to talk about  
10 the history of and how that's so important for the  
11 present and the future generation. Taking the  
12 children to the site that represent the history is  
13 important for everyone. So with this plan, with the  
14 Freedom Trail task force, eh, we hope to see a group  
15 that will be studying the feasibility to create  
16 walkable site associated with the abolitionist  
17 movement and the Underground Railroad, including  
18 those site already mark and more than that should be  
19 marked. Those sites should be important for the rest  
20 of New York City and for all visitors. Thank you to  
21 Jacob. Thank you who has been a champion advocating  
22 with us. Thank you to you, Chair. And we hope again  
23 that as our nation and our city was built, eh, of the  
24 [inaudible] American, of the African American, we  
25 should celebrate their fight, their struggle, and the

2 important contribution that they make to our city.

3 Gracias.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
5 much, Council Member Rodriguez. Ah, this is  
6 incredibly important, ah, and biggest part of the,  
7 ah, citywide, nationwide, and worldwide reckoning,  
8 um, with, ah, white supremacy. So, ah, appreciate  
9 your efforts on, ah, all of this. I do want to  
10 recognize folks from the administration who are here  
11 today. We have Commissioner Gonzalo Casals, um,  
12 joined by, ah, Kendal Henry. I don't know if Kendall  
13 is testifying, but, ah, Kendal Henry, the director of  
14 the Percent for Art, ah, program is here with us and,  
15 ah, Lisa Kersavage, I hope I'm saying that correctly,  
16 um, executive director of the Landmarks Preservation  
17 Commission, ah, here as well and our committee staff  
18 will let me know if I have left anyone, ah, off. But  
19 I want to thank, ah, Commissioner Casals, ah, for his  
20 incredible work and, um, advocacy on behalf of the  
21 cultural community in the City of New York. Thrilled  
22 to have him as our commissioner. And I want to thank  
23 all the members of the community, ah, the cultural  
24 community and, ah, others who are joining us today.  
25 I hear we have a very healthy amount of people

2 viewing the hearing today. So we're thrilled with  
3 that. Um, let me thank, ah, my staff, our  
4 legislative director, Jack Bernadovitz, my chief of  
5 staff, Matt Wallace, and our counsel committee, ah,  
6 ah, our committee counsel rather, Brenda McKinney,  
7 ah, Kristie Dwyer, our policy analyst, and Aliah Ali,  
8 our principle financial analyst, ah, for all of their  
9 work on all of the pieces of legislation and for  
10 everything they do on this committee and on behalf of  
11 the cultural community. Ah, I'm told we also have  
12 Anthony Fabre and Timothy Frye from the Landmarks  
13 Preservation Commission as well. So with that I  
14 think I am going to throw this back to our counsel,  
15 Brenda McKinney, who will set the stage, ah, for this  
16 hearing and we will start to hear testimony.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,  
18 Chair Van Bramer, and good morning, everyone. Um, so  
19 before we start and move to the administration and  
20 Commissioner Casals, um, and our guests from LPC I'm  
21 just going to go over several procedures for today.  
22 So I'm Brenda McKinney, ah, I'm counsel to the  
23 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
24 International Intergroup Relations at the New York  
25 City Council. Um, I'll be moderating today's hearing

2 and I will be calling on panelists to testify. So  
3 before we begin I'd like to remind everyone that you  
4 will be on mute until I call on you to testify and  
5 then after you are unmuted you will be, after you  
6 called then you will be unmuted by the host. When  
7 you are unmuted a little box will pop up on your  
8 screen and you have to accept the unmute, um, and  
9 there is about a two-second delay, just so, just so  
10 you know. Please listen for your name. I will  
11 periodically announce who the next panelist will be.  
12 Ah, for council members, questions will be limited to  
13 five minutes. And council members, please note this  
14 includes both questions and witness answers. Please  
15 also note that we will not be having or allowing a  
16 second round of questions at today's hearing. For  
17 public testimony and members of the public I will be  
18 calling up individuals in panels, and today we only  
19 have one panel. So I will be calling everyone at  
20 once. Um, just to let you know that the people that  
21 are coming and then individually. Um, we do check at  
22 the end if there's anybody that we inadvertently  
23 missed, so don't worry if you don't hear your name.  
24 Um, apologies. Um, again, if, ah, hear your name  
25 someone from our staff will unmute you and the

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2 Sergeant at Arms will give you the go-ahead to begin  
3 speaking, um, after setting the timer. Today all  
4 public testimony will be limited to two minutes.

5 Again, after I call your name please wait a brief  
6 moment for the Sergeant at Arms. Ah, so today I will  
7 begin by calling, um, the administration to testify.

8 So we'll call everyone's name and then I will deliver  
9 the oath after I call your names and call each person  
10 individually to answer the oath. So we will unmute

11 you as well. Ah, so now the following members of the  
12 administration will be testifying. Gonzalo Casals,

13 commissioner of the New York City Department of  
14 Cultural Affairs, Kendal Henry, director of Percent  
15 for Art at the Department of Cultural Affairs, Lisa

16 Kersavage, apologies in advance for any

17 mispronunciations, executive director of the

18 Landmarks Preservation Commission, ah, Anthony Fabre,

19 director of Community and Intergovernmental Affairs,

20 and Timothy Frye, director of Special Projects and

21 Strategic Planning at the Landmarks Preservation

22 Commission. Um, so I will now administer the oath to

23 all of you. If you can please raise your right

24 hands, members of the administration. Thank you. Do

25 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and



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2 nothing but the truth to this committee, ah, before  
3 this committee, and to respond honestly to council  
4 member questions today? Commissioner Casals.

5 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Mr.  
7 Henry.

8 DIRECTOR HENRY: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Kersavage?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERSAVAGE: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ms., ah,  
12 Mr. Fabre. Mr. Fabre, or Fabre, I, we see you.  
13 Sorry, we'll, we'll try to unmute you. Oh, I think  
14 you're muted again. Just one moment.

15 DIRECTOR FABRE: Can you hear me?

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

17 DIRECTOR FABRE: OK, I do.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And then  
19 Mr. Frye.

20 DIRECTOR FRYE: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

22 OK. Um, apologies for the technical difficulties,  
23 and that is the oath. So thank you, and Commissioner  
24 Casals, you may begin your testimony when ready.

25

2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you, Brenda.

3 Good morning. I'm Gonzalo Casals, commissioner of  
4 the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs,  
5 here to testify regarding the proposed legislation.

6 I am joined today by Kendal Henry, the director of  
7 Percent for Art at the Department of Cultural  
8 Affairs. I'll begin with Intro 1814 of 2019, which

9 would require at least half of all the artworks

10 funded through the Percent for Art program being

11 installed outdoors. We're grateful for Chair Van

12 Bramer's and Majority Leader Cumbo's advocacy for the

13 Percent for Art program in recent years. You have

14 spearheaded an updated funding formula for the first

15 time in the program's history and expanded the

16 community's voice in the arts selection process. So

17 thank you for that. Percent for Art has commissioned

18 over 400 artworks in the last 35 years. One driving

19 inspiration for all Percent projects is commissioning

20 art that that is publicly accessible. Sometimes this

21 is indoors, like in libraries and schools. Other

22 times this is outdoors in a park or a plaza. Looking

23 back, about 40% of all projects commissioned through

24 Percent for Art are outdoors. That figure increases

25 to 70% when looking at only Percent for Art projects,

2 not including school buildings, where much of the  
3 artwork is located indoors. All of them are publicly  
4 accessible . This results from the Percent for Art  
5 team working in close collaboration with construction  
6 agency and local communities throughout the program's  
7 history. The flexibility to integrate artworks into  
8 each project has been a cornerstone of the program's  
9 success. Not only do indoor installations make more  
10 sense in many sites, but commissioning work outdoors  
11 drastically increases project costs from fabricating  
12 with materials that are exposed to the elements, the  
13 installation, and the maintenance needs. The  
14 diversity of media from mosaics to murals to stand-  
15 alone sculptures are even innovative, and even  
16 innovative interactive artworks also means that an  
17 ability to select between indoor and outdoor  
18 locations is critical to working with artists and  
19 residents to realize their visions. Thanks to  
20 council legislation the Percent for Art panels  
21 includes robust representation from arts workers,  
22 community members, architects, engineers, and more.  
23 The current approach puts faith in our expertise to  
24 work with galleries in selecting artworks that  
25 respond to each [inaudible] site. We're always happy

2 to have conversations about how to improve this  
3 program. We have reservations about a broad mandate  
4 to locate certain artworks outdoors. We look forward  
5 to discussing with you ways to ensure that Percent  
6 for Art pieces remain open and accessible to New  
7 Yorkers. I'll now turn into Intro 293 of 2018, which  
8 proposes creating a task force to consider the  
9 creation of a Freedom Trail in the city. New York  
10 State fully abolished slavery in 1821. But we're  
11 still fighting for racial justice in our city even  
12 today. New York became a hotbed of activism and for  
13 slavery abolition and civil rights. But New Yorkers  
14 have changed not only our city but the whole world  
15 through their collective creative energy and  
16 [inaudible] delegates. Sites like Weeksville in  
17 Brooklyn and the location of the former Seneca  
18 Village were nearly forgotten, but in recent decades  
19 have been better understood for the important role in  
20 American history. My colleagues in the Landmarks  
21 Preservation Commission have created a dynamic  
22 website that commemorates much of New York's own  
23 history related to abolition and civil rights and  
24 it's reflected in our landscape. The digital map  
25 called New York City and the Path to Freedom was

2 published last year and contains a remarkable  
3 collection of information that brings the courage and  
4 resilience of these figures, places, moments, and  
5 moments in history to life. Exploring to build and  
6 amplify of these amazing resource may be a more  
7 effective path forward. My colleagues from the  
8 Landmarks Preservation Commission will say more about  
9 their work in this area later in today's hearing.  
10 Finally, I'll turn to Intro 2048 of 2020, which  
11 proposes creating a task force for a memorial to  
12 front-line workers who died from COVID-19. New  
13 Yorkers have all suffered and fought together for  
14 months against the isolation, fear, financial  
15 hardship, and loss brought by the pandemic. Our  
16 front-line workers helped us to get through the  
17 toughest times, staff in hospitals, [inaudible], and  
18 keeping our city moving. Far too many of them gave  
19 their lives to meet our society's most basic needs.  
20 We owe them and their families at debt of gratitude  
21 that can never be fully repaid. We have no doubt  
22 that permanent memorials will help New Yorkers mark,  
23 remember, and process the times we're living through.  
24 While we have every reason to believe the end is in  
25 site, the pandemic continues to range around us.

2 Memorials are one way we collectively remember key  
3 events and periods of time, often traumatic ones.  
4 From the [inaudible] local disaster to September 11  
5 attacks our city has carved out space for remembering  
6 and reflecting on these painful transformative  
7 moments. Is now the right time to establish a  
8 memorial task force while we're still trying to make  
9 sense of the different ways communities have been  
10 affected? While I'm not sure of the timeline in this  
11 legislation, I look forward to collaborating on  
12 efforts to commemorate those lost to the pandemic, as  
13 the full scope becomes clearer in the months and  
14 years ahead. Thank you for the opportunity to  
15 testify today, and I'm happy to answer any questions  
16 you may have.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
18 Commissioner. Are we hearing from others?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, yes, Director,  
20 Executive Director Kersavage will also testify.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, Ms. Kersavage,  
23 ah, you may begin when ready, and then we'll take  
24 questions at the, at the end.

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERSAVAGE: OK, great,  
3 thank you. Um, good morning, Chair Van Bramer and  
4 members of the committee. I am Lisa Kersavage,  
5 executive director of the Landmarks Preservation  
6 Commission, here to testify regarding the propose  
7 legislation of Intro 0293 of 2018. I'm joined today  
8 by my colleagues, Timothy Frye, director of Special  
9 Projects and Strategic Planning, and Anthony Fabre,  
10 director of Community and Intergovernmental Affairs.  
11 The Landmarks Preservation Commission is an expert  
12 agency responsible for protecting New York City's  
13 architecturally, historically, and cultural  
14 significant buildings by granting them landmark or  
15 historic district status and regulating them after  
16 designation. LPC's research department is  
17 responsible for identifying and documenting New York  
18 City's historic places. The nationally regarded  
19 department, nationally regarded, excuse me,  
20 department is committed to the highest standards of  
21 historical scholarship and archival research, and to  
22 bringing complex issues to light. They have done  
23 considerable amount of research on the important role  
24 that New York City played in the effort to abolish  
25 slavery nationwide and to assist those seeking to

2 escape it and the places that best tell that story.

3 Intro 0293 proposes establishing a task force to  
4 consider the creation of a Freedom Trail in the city.

5 We agree that New York City's places related to  
6 abolitionist history, the Underground Railroad, and  
7 nineteenth century free black communities are most  
8 certainly worthy of enhanced recognition. We believe  
9 that building on existing efforts would be a more  
10 effective path forward than the legislation.

11 Throughout the years LPC has designated an improve  
12 collection of sites that help tell the story of  
13 abolitionism and the Underground Railroad. The  
14 commission has designated 18 places with documented  
15 associations to the abolitionist movement which are  
16 intact to that period, including the First Free  
17 Congregational Church in Brooklyn, Plymouth Church in  
18 Brooklyn Heights Historic District, the Brooklyn  
19 Friends Meeting House, the Lamartine Place Historic  
20 District, the Manhattan, and the Curtis House on  
21 Staten Island, among others. The commission recently  
22 designated 227 Duffield Street in downtown Brooklyn  
23 for its long and documented association with noted  
24 abolitionist, Harriet and Thomas Truesdale. In  
25 addition to its important role of identifying,



2 documenting, and protecting such places, LPC has  
3 increasingly focused energies on raising public  
4 awareness of the histories embodied by designated  
5 landmarks in historic districts. And, as mentioned  
6 by our colleagues, in December 2019 LPC launched New  
7 York City in the Path to Freedom, which documents  
8 designated buildings associated with the multiple  
9 ways people and institutions engaged with the anti-  
10 slavery movement before the Civil War. It's highly  
11 visual and interactive, and also includes a three-  
12 mile walking tour of downtown Brooklyn, which I urge  
13 you all to take, um, a neighborhood that was very  
14 active in abolitionist activities and contains an  
15 incredible concentration of resources. We created  
16 this multimedia tool in the hopes that New Yorkers  
17 would be inspired by the stories of abolitionists who  
18 took great personal risk to house enslaved  
19 individuals and to publicly advocate for abolition.  
20 Finally, the National Park Service has already  
21 developed guidance for evaluating sites and  
22 properties with Underground Railroad history and LPC  
23 has adopted them as part of our evaluation. Further,  
24 the National Park Service has criteria for inclusion  
25 in their National Underground Railroad Network to

2 Freedom program and it is important that these  
3 standards are applied in identification of properties  
4 believed to have ties to the Underground Railroad and  
5 LPC is adept at incorporating these important federal  
6 standards into our own evaluation of New York City's  
7 abolitionist and Underground Railroad sites. Given  
8 LPC's expertise and extensive work in this area, we  
9 think future efforts to further recognize and  
10 interpret this important history should build upon  
11 our work and the proposed legislation is not  
12 necessary to pursue these very important goals.  
13 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this  
14 Intro.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

16 Um, Chair Van Bramer, we do not have any council  
17 members' hands raised, but we can move to question  
18 for the administration at this time.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. And  
20 obviously if there are any, ah, questions from the  
21 other sponsors, you know, I'm happy to, ah, have them  
22 go at any time. But, ah, I will, ah, start by, ah,  
23 talking to Commissioner Casals a little bit and, of  
24 course, ah, if, ah, Mr. Henry wants to chime in he  
25 can. As you mentioned in your testimony, I am huge

2 supporter of the Percent for Art program and very  
3 proud of the work that this committee has done to  
4 expand it and, and as you mentioned, there are so  
5 many important pieces that are installations that are  
6 all over the city. And as someone who worked for the  
7 Queens Public Library before I became a Council  
8 Member I am very familiar with some incredible  
9 projects like the Flushing Library, ah, among others,  
10 but, ah, you know, I think the intent of the  
11 legislation, and I'm sure you would agree, is, is to  
12 say that a city that has more public art is a better  
13 city, right? Ah, the city that has public art for  
14 everyone to enjoy in every neighborhood is, is a  
15 stronger city and, and so maybe just talk a little  
16 about some of the, the successes you've seen in other  
17 places, too. New York is great. We, we always say  
18 we are the cultural capitol of the world, but, you  
19 know, I, I've definitely been to cities all over the  
20 world and, um, have, ah, seen a lot of public art, a  
21 lot of really incredible, ah, works and, and, and I  
22 think what we're trying to say here is that we can  
23 always and should always strive to bring more public  
24 art to the people, right? And, and so maybe you can

2 share your, your own thoughts and experiences on  
3 that.

4 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Um, good morning,  
5 Chair Van Bramer. Um, um, you know, once again we're  
6 in complete, um, alignment here and agreement, to the  
7 point that I'm not sure I'm allowed to have  
8 favorites, but the artwork at the Flushing Library,  
9 it's one of my favorites, um, of them all. Um, I  
10 love, you know, that work so much, and I love how  
11 people engages with it. Um, I think, you, um, it's  
12 important to, um, start our conversations by, um,  
13 just sort of, um, previously has been a little bit  
14 semantics. Um, I think it, we should not use  
15 accessibility and outdoors as, um, interchangeable  
16 words. Um, not every work that is outdoors is  
17 accessible and not every work that it might be  
18 indoors in a public building is not accessible. And  
19 accessibility, um, at the Percent for Art, um,  
20 program starts from the, from the minute that, you  
21 know, the project starts, right? Not only by the,  
22 ah, engagement as you has, um, help us, um, create  
23 through our legislation of, um, communities in, in  
24 the neighborhood [inaudible] and the location that  
25 the artwork happens, but it's also in the selection

2 of the artist and, um, one of the, um, concerns I  
3 had, um, by this legislation is really, um, if we're  
4 going to be moving, um, a lot of work outdoors, um,  
5 in hopes that that's, um, easily accessible to, um,  
6 to, um, to more, um, New Yorkers we may be closing  
7 the door to a lot of artists that have benefitted,  
8 um, even emerging artists that have benefitted from  
9 participating in these projects. Um, just, you know,  
10 because of, um, lack of expertise in working with  
11 materials and working with the constraints that it  
12 means to create, um, outdoors work, but also to, um,  
13 the costs, um, that, um, increase a lot, you know, as  
14 I said in my testimony in the, um, fabrication and  
15 installation and then maintenance of the outdoors  
16 work. Um, at the core of the, um, um, Percent for  
17 Art project there are guidelines that dictate and  
18 help, um, make decisions to the multiple partners  
19 that work in this process, um, that, to make sure  
20 that the work is accessible, as accessible as it can  
21 be. An example of that is, um, in a school and this  
22 is also mostly for public buildings. Um, one needs  
23 to be able to enjoy and be able to access the artwork  
24 before even, um, crossing a security checkpoint,  
25 right? Um, so any of us can, um, go to any of the

2 many schools that we have installed artwork, um, look  
3 at it, enjoy it, without necessarily having to go  
4 through, um, um, a security checkpoint, which is  
5 sometimes, you know, one of the ways in which, um,  
6 many of our fellow New Yorkers feel intimidated and,  
7 you know, would make, you know, artwork, um, more  
8 accessible. So, um, that's, that's a little bit of  
9 the gist of that, right? We could certainly, um,  
10 work together and look at it examples in which work  
11 may have, um, been a little more accessible, but I  
12 wouldn't just, um, put everything under the umbrella  
13 of indoors or outdoors because, um, it might create  
14 a, another unintended outcomes.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, no, I, I  
16 don't think we are, ah, conflating those two things  
17 and, and I think that we, ah, very aligned here. I  
18 mean, I would, I would just say that, ah, while I  
19 understand that a, an outdoor installation is, ah,  
20 more costly, ah, in, in the long run certainly, it  
21 is, it is still sort of the unfinished business of,  
22 of our city that the amount of money that we allocate  
23 for a percentage for art needs to be dramatically  
24 increased, and if we did do that as a city and, ah,  
25 for example you could help pay for that by taxing

2 billionaires appropriately, um, and then you would be  
3 able to, ah, be able to build and create incredible  
4 works of art, both indoors and outdoors at, that  
5 [inaudible] art people, right? And, and, and both  
6 create more opportunities for emerging artists, as  
7 you and I both want to see happen, ah, get paid for  
8 their work, but, ah, also to, um, have some, you  
9 know, larger-scale and, and, and important pieces all  
10 over parks and, ah, in streetscapes in the City of  
11 New York, which I think is, ah, is in fact a sign  
12 that our city understands what art, ah, and culture  
13 means to people, right? That it is, it is  
14 sustaining, ah, it is inspiring, and it is, ah, it is  
15 something that I, I believe in. Um, and I know, ah,  
16 ah, the sponsors, um, are, of the two other pieces of  
17 legislation, who I want to thank, are not here, but,  
18 um, I know, ah, Commissioner Casals, you expressed,  
19 um, support, of course, for a memorial for, um, ah,  
20 ah, the folks we have lost, ah, as a result of the  
21 pandemic, ah, and, but in the timing of that. But  
22 maybe you could talk a little bit more about that  
23 and, um, vis a vis the, the, the effort that Council  
24 Member Levine has laid out here.

2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you. Um,  
3 I'm, I'm, I think it's a perfect segue, but I justice  
4 want to clarify that I agree with you that there's  
5 always room for more art in New York City, public  
6 and, you know, all kinds of art and, um, you always  
7 had a, will always have an advocate in me for that.  
8 Um, to the point that, um, you know, um, just another  
9 technicality, when we talk about Percent for Art  
10 we're just talking a very discrete program, um, which  
11 is, um, artwork that is supported by investment of  
12 capital projects, um, for the city, ah, but that, um,  
13 practice, um, has been extended to the work that we  
14 do in schools and it also extended to a, ah, a little  
15 bit of public artwork we have been doing with using  
16 the same process, um, that, um, again, makes sure  
17 that an artwork is an accessible but also there's a  
18 process that engages, um, communities in, in the  
19 creation of that. Um, in terms of the COVID memorial  
20 and in the, ah, little experience that I have as a  
21 commissioner, but also in the last years following a  
22 lot of the conversations that have been happening  
23 around monuments, the memorials, um, if there is one  
24 thing that we all learn is that we should not rush  
25 to, um, jump to bronze and marble, um, until, you



2 know, we really understand, um, what's, what's the  
3 impact that, um, um, in this case the pandemic has  
4 had on our communities. Um, there, um, we're still,  
5 the crisis is still evolving, as you very much know.  
6 Um, I'm calling you from Jackson Heights and a few  
7 blocks from here there's people waiting in line on a  
8 food pantry, um, to access food. Um, and as we  
9 continue, the crisis continue to unfold we continue  
10 to, um, understand better the multiple ways in which  
11 many different communities have been affected, um,  
12 beyond health. Um, all that I'm saying is that, ah,  
13 yes, um, we certainly need a way to memorialize this,  
14 but is also to give a way for our communities to, um,  
15 make sense of the changes, um, that have been, um,  
16 effected in our lives, but at the same time, um, I  
17 just want us to, um, just to make sure that, um, we  
18 understand exactly what we're trying to do before we  
19 move forward with a process.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Understood.

21 And, and Council Member Rodriguez's Freedom Trail,  
22 ah, task force, um, surely you and I can agree, um,  
23 that the city has a lot to do in terms of, ah,  
24 reckoning with history of slavery and, and oppression  
25 and, ah, and it's been in particular recognizing and,

2 ah, marking the Underground Railroad and, and so  
3 speak to that, um, you know, both Council Member  
4 Rodriguez's legislation but also the role that you  
5 see the department playing in, um, in making right  
6 what is so terribly clearly wrong.

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah, and I, I  
8 believe that that's another, um, point in which you  
9 and I were in agreement. But, um, when we talk about  
10 more arts for New York City we're not necessarily  
11 just speaking of arts for art's sake, right? But,  
12 you know, arts that has a, um, a tremendous impact on  
13 our communities. And a project like this, for sure,  
14 right, you know, how we can use, um, arts and culture  
15 to bring up, um, moments in history that need to be,  
16 um, not forgotten and then they need to be  
17 highlighted and to inform our society today. Um, I  
18 wanted to pass it to our colleagues at LPC to, um, to  
19 expand a little bit more on this notion.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Before  
21 you do that, I just want to recognize we've been  
22 joined by Council Member Mark Gjonaj and I see  
23 Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo as well. So I welcome  
24 the other members of the committee to the hearing.  
25 And now, ah, Lisa.

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERSAVAGE: Hello.

3 Um, sure, I mean, you know, absolutely this history  
4 is, it's just incredibly important and New York  
5 City's role, um, is, is incredibly important to, you  
6 know, the nation as well. So we certainly agree  
7 that, that these are places that are worthy of, you  
8 know, more recognition. Um, it's something that  
9 we've been, you know, investing a lot of energy into  
10 both in terms of the survey and identification and  
11 designation of places that have this documented  
12 history and are intact. But also, you know, telling  
13 the whole story of New York and, you know, weaving  
14 together, you know, the, the narrative of how these  
15 places connect to that history. Um, and certainly  
16 we, um, you know, encourage different ways to do this  
17 interpretation as well. You know, we've been  
18 focusing now on, um, digital platforms, um, and we're  
19 experimenting with new digital platforms, um, you  
20 know, and I think the role of the arts and culture is  
21 important in that as well. Um, so it's something  
22 that we're certainly, you know, continuing to move  
23 forward and invest a, a great deal of energy into.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Um,

25 I appreciate that. Do any other members have any

2 questions for the administration on any of these  
3 three pieces of legislation? Um, if not, then we  
4 will go to public testimony. Um, Brenda, you let me  
5 know if.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair, we're not  
7 seeing any council member hands. If there are any  
8 council members, just one last check, that have  
9 questions for the administration please raise your  
10 hand in Zoom. OK. I believe that's it.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So with that  
12 I'll say thank you again, ah, to Commissioner Casals,  
13 Executive Director Kersavage, and your, ah, teams for  
14 being here. Ah, I want to thank obviously again  
15 Council Member Levine and Council Member Rodriguez  
16 for their important, ah, pieces of legislation that,  
17 that we've, ah, introduced and heard here today, and,  
18 ah, we will excuse the, ah, administration panel, ah,  
19 although you're welcome to stay for as long as you'd  
20 like, and we will turn it over to Brenda to start the  
21 public testimony portion of today's hearing.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK, thank you so  
23 much, Chair Van Bramer. Um, and thank you so much to  
24 members of the administration. Ah, so today, so now

2 we will move to the public testimony portion of  
3 today's hearing.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Wait, ah,  
5 Brenda?

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I see Council  
8 Member Rodriguez has his hand raised.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Correct, apologies.  
10 So, ah, I see Commissioner Casals, excellent, is  
11 still here. Ah, Council Member Rodriguez.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Yes. Thank  
13 you. First of all, thank you, Chair, for your  
14 leadership and, and, and I'm disappointed that the  
15 Landmark, eh, eh, Commission, eh, on behalf of City  
16 Hall is taking that position. Eh, eh, again, just go  
17 to, just go to, to the Boston Freedom Trail and you  
18 will see how much they publicize. And how much they  
19 let people know this is the area that represent the  
20 history of, of, of, of Boston. When it come to New  
21 York City I, I never thought that an institution that  
22 is assigned to, again, identify historical site and  
23 as a social study teacher, as I said before, I do  
24 believe that this is important not only for our  
25 generation, but for the future generation. Instead

2 of looking to expand what you're doing you, you  
3 comfortable to stay that what you're doing is enough  
4 and, and, and of course I will continue pushing on  
5 this, working with my colleague, eh, things that I  
6 have support with large, of large numbers not only of  
7 members of the council, but also a lot of academic  
8 leaders, a lot of members of the Historical Society.  
9 So how instead of looking to expand, creating just a  
10 task force to study the feasibility you come here to  
11 testify to be against it.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: Um, Lisa, you're muted.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're justice working  
14 to unmute members of the administration. One moment.  
15 Ah, Ms. Kersavage, you should be unmuted now.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERSAVAGE: OK, great,  
17 thank you. And, um, Council Member, you know, I do  
18 want to really emphasize that, that we share, I  
19 think, um, the, the goal with you of, you know,  
20 getting more recognition, whether that's a, you know,  
21 a trail of some sort, um, or physical, you know, sort  
22 of markings. Um, there's a lot of different means to  
23 have that kind of trail. Um, you know, I think  
24 recognition of these places is important and we  
25 really, you know, share your goal with that. You

2 know, I think it's just, you know, the matter of how  
3 we get to that shared goal, um, is the issue. We're,  
4 we're not opposed to the idea of a Freedom Trail by  
5 any means. Um, you know, we're, we've, um, included  
6 trails in our, um, you know, in our own, in a digital  
7 documentation and, you know, we're, we're really  
8 wanting to tell this story because we agree that it's  
9 very important for future generations and today's  
10 generation and it's, um, you know, New York City has  
11 a wealth of history that I think the world, you know,  
12 should see more of.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Can we unmute  
14 Council Member Rodriguez?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Apologies, there's a  
16 delay with unmuting.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Um, we're unmuting  
19 Council Member Rodriguez.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Eh, thanks,  
21 thank you. And, and, and I'm happy to hear that  
22 approach and that clarification. Eh, again, this is  
23 about getting to our goal and hopefully, you know,  
24 with the chair bringing [inaudible] and you guys we  
25 can continue having conversation to see how we can

2 advance in our goal. You know, this is about telling  
3 the story, eh, of Juan Rodriguez, you know, someone  
4 who was the first, eh, known Native American who  
5 settled in New York City. He's not included in our  
6 history. He's not included about this is the  
7 potential area where probably when the Dutch brought  
8 Juan Rodriguez in 1613 he could be in this area. So  
9 and this is about the abolitionism, abolitionism  
10 movement, you know, and, and, and, again, I'm happy  
11 and so that I [inaudible] recognize your commitment,  
12 your dedication to, you know, identify those site.  
13 But for me as someone that, eh, came here at the age  
14 of 18, eh, that raising my two daughter, 14 and 13,  
15 knowing that they black, they Latina, they Dominican,  
16 I think it is important, again, to, you know, do the  
17 best we can. It's not only about the, the Freedom  
18 Trail. It's about when you look about DOE like most  
19 of the books used by the teacher is like doesn't  
20 reflect other who are black, who are Latino, who are  
21 Asian. So when you come to, you know, who, even when  
22 you look up on how in, in the past we and, and thank  
23 you to the chair and former speaker Melissa Mark-  
24 Viverito knows we've been able even to change, make,  
25 bring some changes in the formula of how we



2 distribute funding to the cultural institution  
3 because the one that we've been using, the same one  
4 that was established like decades ago. So it's not  
5 just about the Freedom Trail, it's about for me how  
6 we make decision to give the investment the respect,  
7 the publicity, and, and I'm happy to hear, again,  
8 that [inaudible] no, but it's about, eh, again, how  
9 can we get there, and, and I do recognize the work  
10 that you do and hopefully we can continue this  
11 conversation.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERSAVAGE: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
14 Council Member Rodriguez for your, ah, passion and  
15 for never letting, ah, this go and so many of the  
16 other fights that you have fought, ah, for justice.  
17 It is, ah, incredibly important. And, and Lisa, just  
18 to put a, put a finer point on it, ah, the  
19 administration is not opposed to Council Member  
20 Rodriguez's bill. Correct?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERSAVAGE: Well, I  
22 think what, you know, I think we share a goal of, you  
23 know, seeing some ways to, you know, better enhance  
24 the understanding of these places, you know, and  
25 whether that's a Freedom Trail or other, other means,

2 you know, I think that that is definitely a shared  
3 goal. Um, you know, and LPC has done a lot to, to  
4 recognize these places and, you know, are eager to  
5 work with colleagues to do more.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK. Um, so I  
7 did not hear opposition, ah, to the bill, which is  
8 good. Ah, and, ah, we will, we will take that, ah,  
9 and I realize you're, you're, ah, ah, you're  
10 speaking, you know, on behalf of, ah, the greater  
11 team, ah, and, and maybe you can't go, ah, and say  
12 certain things but, um, I, I think we do believe in  
13 the urgency of this, right? Ah, that, ah, we cannot  
14 delay justice and, and as Council Member Rodriguez  
15 pointed out, right, there are inequities throughout  
16 our education system and, and we can't just have an  
17 app or something that, you know, seeks to tell this  
18 history, right? It's got to be, ah, ah, public.  
19 It's got to be, um, permanent, and, and it's got to,  
20 um, force us to confront history and then also, um,  
21 ah, celebrate some of the good, ah, ah, and amazing  
22 parts of our history, um, like the Underground  
23 Railroad. Ah, I see Council Member D. Diaz, ah, has  
24 her hand raised. I think Laurie was just, um, air

2 clapping, ah, there for a second [laughs]. But  
3 Council Member D. Diaz.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: Am I unmuted?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You're unmuted.

6 Thank you, Council Member.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER D. DIAZ: Great. I, I

8 just wanted to share the excitement at this end what

9 I'm hearing my fellows, um, supporting and, and

10 endorsing the conversation that we're having here

11 today and publicizing and, and acknowledging our

12 history. And I share that to say I'm looking forward

13 to opening, ah, Afro-Latino museum in the 37th

14 Councilmatic District. As, as I traveled [inaudible]

15 tours down to, to, um, Alabama and, um, was able to

16 walk through the halls where Martin Luther King, you

17 know, was a heroine that, that, you know, it, it

18 brought me to wanting to highlight our history in the

19 37th Councilmatic District where I represent, ah, I

20 think it's like 29% of African Americans and the

21 balance being Latino and Asian, it's important that

22 we know our history. We, we stand on the shoulders

23 of, of many. That is not to exclude the Anglo

24 participation, but, again, it's just important to me

25 that we share for those to come, for our little

2 people, right, that they know how we started, how  
3 we've become, and in order for us to continue to  
4 succeed as a society we need to have true  
5 conversations. So, again, just letting you know my  
6 interest in, in establishing more visuals throughout  
7 the 37th Councilmatic District. I want to see some  
8 plaquards, you know, I, I live by, by Highland Park  
9 and, and Cypress Hills, and we have many mountains  
10 and many hills and I'm told that George Washington,  
11 you know, ran through with horses, you know, um, on  
12 the very street where I live. I, I want to be able  
13 to see more of, of those visuals. We also happen to  
14 have the National Cemetery, ah, within our district.  
15 To me that, that's a landmark and it, and it says a  
16 lot to the district that I represent that normally is  
17 only heard of for crimes and, and negativity. So  
18 thank you for, for this conversation and looking  
19 forward to working on landmarking a lot of the, the  
20 positive visuals that we have in the 37th  
21 Councilmatic District. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
23 Council Member D. Diaz. And, um, you have  
24 successfully mentioned that museum at virtually every  
25 hearing that we've had since you joined this

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2 committee, so I want you to know that, ah, that point  
3 has been made loud and clear, um, and, and I  
4 appreciate your advocacy. Um, ah, do we have any  
5 other questions from members of the committee or the  
6 council for the administration, um, at this time,  
7 Brenda?

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair, I'm not seeing  
9 any hands raised in Zoom or, um, physically. So I  
10 think that's it for questions from council members.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK. And I  
12 think, ah, ah, we had a false alarm the first time,  
13 but now I think we are, um, saying goodbye to the  
14 administration unless there are any, ah, ah,  
15 questions from council members. Of course, ah, I  
16 encourage the administration to, um, have folks  
17 remain. Oh, I see Majority Leader Cumbo's hand  
18 raised.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Majority Leader  
20 Cumbo is raising her hand. Ah, there's just a delay  
21 in unmuting you. We're doing that now, Majority  
22 Leader.

23 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I was trying to  
24 resist because you all had said it all so eloquently  
25 and sometimes you don't need to resay the same thing

2 that everybody has already said so eloquently. But  
3 I, I will just continue to, I just want to stand in  
4 support of my colleagues. It's so incredible that,  
5 um, that this hearing and this conversation is taking  
6 place. I, too, have had the opportunity to go on  
7 civil rights tours and to travel other cities and to  
8 really see how they, ah, put forward their history of  
9 their city in such a proud and defining way and we're  
10 really missing the boat here in New York City because  
11 we have such a great history to tell and we're also,  
12 you know, there's some people that can only  
13 understand things based off of the economics, and so  
14 for those who don't see the value in this history,  
15 these civil rights tours and, ah, ability for people  
16 to come and travel to New York City to see our, our  
17 treasures and, and the history is a booming industry  
18 and business that New York City is not benefitting  
19 from. I'd also like to add with the Black Lives  
20 Matter movement we've spoken at length to the  
21 administration in terms of what is the, what is the  
22 response of the administration to the Black Lives  
23 Matter movement and I can think of, you know, I can  
24 think of a gazillion things, but certainly this is a  
25 key response to the Black Lives Matter movement that

2 this history, that our culture, that the true story  
3 of New York City is finally told. Um, you know,  
4 it's, it's really a reminder every time we walk  
5 through City Hall and we walk through many of our  
6 historical buildings, there have been a lot of  
7 efforts, not with the same level of investment, but  
8 there have been a lot of efforts to show the  
9 diversity of the City of New York and the true  
10 history, um, of our city. So I, I, think it's  
11 important because to see in places like Borough Hall  
12 and other places to really only see white old men,  
13 um, revered is really very telling, um, of our city  
14 and what we value and whose stories we value. So I,  
15 I stand in full support of this. Um, it's important  
16 that we have this history told. It's important that  
17 we, um, celebrate what has gotten us to this point.  
18 And I think this is a clear step and answer to, ah,  
19 many of the demands of the Black Lives Matter  
20 movement and to show that black lives have mattered  
21 we'll be chronicling the history and the  
22 contributions, um, that they have made, that we have  
23 made to this city. So thank you so much, ah, Chair  
24 Van Bramer, for hosting this hearing. Um, I've, I'm  
25 excited to hear from, ah, I see many familiar faces

2 on this particular Zoom, so I look forward to hearing  
3 what they have to say, and thank you so much.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
5 much, Majority Leader Cumbo, ah, for your important  
6 contribution to this hearing but also to this, ah,  
7 ah, citywide and worldwide reckoning that is  
8 happening, and, um, and with that I want to say, ah,  
9 thank you to the administration. I hope we can work  
10 together quickly, um, and with the same passion that,  
11 ah, ah, Majority Leader Cumbo and, and Council Member  
12 Rodriguez, and Council Member D. Diaz and so many  
13 others, um, ah, bring to this discussion and, and  
14 pass this pieces of legislation and make sure that  
15 the history, the full history, of our city is told  
16 and appreciated. Ah, with that I'll hand it over to  
17 Brenda, who will call the names of the first panel of  
18 public testimony.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,  
20 Chair Van Bramer. So with this we've concluded the  
21 administration's testimony and we will now turn to  
22 public testimony. For members of the public please  
23 note I will call up individuals in panels, but today,  
24 as mentioned, we have one panel. So I will be  
25 calling up the five witnesses that we have



2 registered. Um, if there is anyone we inadvertently  
3 missed we will be calling names at the end. Ah,  
4 council members, if you have questions for a  
5 particular panelist please use the raise hand  
6 function in Zoom and you'll be called on after  
7 everyone on the panel, so those five witnesses, have  
8 testified in the order that you raised your hand, and  
9 for panelists once your name is called a member of  
10 our staff will unmute you and then the Sergeant at  
11 Arms will give you the go-ahead to begin after  
12 setting the timer. As a reminder, all testimony will  
13 be limited to two minutes today. Please wait for the  
14 Sergeant at Arms before you begin. Ah, so today we  
15 will start with the first panel. I will read, the  
16 only panel. I will read, ah, names in order, um, and  
17 then call you one by one. Um, again, there is a  
18 delay in unmuting and you should see a box pop up.  
19 But, um, apologies for the delay. So panel one is  
20 Jacob Morris from Harlem Historical Society and the  
21 New York City Freedom Trail Foundation, Dominique  
22 Barnuka Hood, apologies for any mispronunciations,  
23 from Historic Richmond Town, Rachel Wallman, Wallman,  
24 from Greenwood Cemetery, Julie Finch from Friends of  
25 Hopper Gibbons Underground Railroad House, and

2 finally Linda Nat Nolan from the Brooklyn Monthly  
3 Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Um, so  
4 with this we will begin with our first witness, Mr.  
5 Morris. You may begin once the sergeant calls the  
6 clock.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

8 JACOB MORRIS: Ah, thank you, thank you.  
9 Um, I want to thank, ah, I want to thank Council  
10 Member Rodriguez, first of all, for his continuing  
11 support and, ah, as he showed today his, his passion  
12 and appreciation for making this happen and working  
13 on making it happen. And, um, I, I also want to  
14 thank, ah, Chairman Van Bramer, ah, so deeply for  
15 having this hearing today, finally [laughs]. It's  
16 been a long time, ah, that we've been hoping to get  
17 this, ah, to committee so that you guys can vote in  
18 favor and get it to the floor of the council, and we  
19 can make this happen for New York City. Ah, this is  
20 a task force to study how best to implement this.  
21 But, um, if the examples of, um, of Boston, where the  
22 Boston Freedom Trail has done so much for Boston, it  
23 is by far the number one tourist attraction in  
24 Boston, and that's some appreciation for Boston's  
25 role in, ah, the struggle for freedom from England.

2 Philadelphia copied Boston and modeled their  
3 Constitutional Trail, which has only been instituted  
4 in the past 10 years, um, and that is now one of the  
5 top five, um, tourist attractions for Philadelphia.  
6 And that tells the story, of course, of  
7 Philadelphia's role in making the Constitution. Ah,  
8 and, ah, and, um, America with the Declaration of  
9 Independence and, ah, the formation of our country.  
10 New York City...

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 JACOB MORRIS: ...has its own unique  
13 story. A great story, the story of the struggle for  
14 freedom, from chattel slavery and the dignity of  
15 humanity, the fundamental dignity of humanity. Um, I  
16 have to point out that a lot of these sites don't  
17 exist anymore. Let's call it a creative destruction  
18 of New York City and its buildings. So many of these  
19 locations do not exist. They exist in the echoing  
20 halls of memory. But they can, they absolutely,  
21 historical scholarship confirms that they happened.  
22 The slave market at the foot of Wall Street.  
23 Frederick Douglass landing at the dock on the Hudson  
24 River, escaping from slavery, 1838. David Ruggles  
25 and his boarding house where there happens to be a

2 plaque that was passed by the Landmark Commission on  
3 a building that was built much later. So many of  
4 these locations, they just need to be recognized.  
5 And there is really an incredible concentration of  
6 these Underground Railroad and abolitionist, ah, and  
7 other major historically significant, major  
8 historical significant locations, concentrated, so  
9 that New York City can have a walking tour and a  
10 bicycle tour Alexander Hamilton House and someone,  
11 ah, that people can visit that will bring tourism,  
12 that will, ah, ah, help our restaurants, that will  
13 help our culture, our children to bring history to  
14 life.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Mr.  
16 Morris.

17 JACOB MORRIS: I want to thank everybody  
18 today, ah, for, for moving this forward and  
19 supporting this. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Mr.  
21 Morris.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will move to the  
23 next panelist. Um, and just a reminder, and I  
24 apologize for not saying this earlier, um, but we do  
25 have a two-minute clock for testimony, which

2 sometimes we go over, but your written testimony can  
3 be as long as you would like and you can amend it up  
4 until the deadline. So the deadline for written  
5 testimony is 72 hours after the start of the hearing.  
6 Written testimony can be submitted to  
7 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Um, so we review both  
8 oral and written testimony, um, meticulously. Um, so  
9 just a reminder about written testimony as well. Um,  
10 so we'll move to the next panelist and then take  
11 questions from council members for panelists at the  
12 end. The next panelist will be Dominique Barnuka  
13 Hood from Historic Richmond Town. Thank you.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

15 DOMINIQUE BARNUKA HOOD: Thank you,  
16 Chair, and, ah, a very special thank you, thank you,  
17 to Counselor Rodriguez and members of the Committee  
18 on Cultural Affairs for hearing my testimony. My  
19 name is Dominique Hood and I am an educator at  
20 Historic Richmond Town on Staten Island and a  
21 dedicated student of Afro-originated history.  
22 Historic Richmond Town has long been a preeminent  
23 catalyst for historical and preservation programming,  
24 and I rise today to speak to, on behalf of our  
25 willingness and ability to provide research,

2 consultation, and participation in the work laid out  
3 before this proposed task force should this committee  
4 see fit to include the following site of Staten  
5 Island's key role in Afro-originated history and its  
6 connection to the Underground Railroad, and those who  
7 sought the trail to their self-emancipated freedom.

8 Afro-originated oystering communities were popular  
9 among free black settlements all along the east coast  
10 during the 17th and 18th century of our nation's  
11 history and the familial bonds and economic links  
12 between these towns are what laid the groundwork for  
13 the inherent solidarity of the underground resistance  
14 and smuggling to freedom which developed among these  
15 communities leading up to the Civil War. One

16 particular example of this I wish to make know to  
17 this committee today is the village of Sandy Ground  
18 in the neighborhood of Rossville on Staten Island.

19 Several prominent Afro-originated families moved to  
20 Sandy Ground in the 1840s from Maryland's Chesapeake  
21 Bay. This community became an indisputable hub of  
22 major abolitionist activity in the decades to follow  
23 as a result, and I mean no disrespect to the, ah,  
24 executive director. I'm honored she's here. But  
25 this site has been given a measly total of 18 words

2 by the Landmarks Preservation Commission database.

3 And so when we talk about whether or not this task

4 force is needed right now in this instance, as

5 Rodriguez was talking about, that's what I'm talking

6 about. The local church in particular played host to

7 such integral...

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 DOMINIQUE BARNUKA HOOD: ...figures as

10 Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner

11 Truth. The historical significance of this landmark

12 is undeniable in connection with the creation of a

13 walkable Freedom Trail exhibit within our city.

14 There may be few other locations within our body of

15 New York City knowledge which have such an original

16 link to diverse communities during the early colonial

17 period. Stark as our island's political history of

18 abolitionist rhetoric in actuation as well as an

19 unquestionable connection to the Underground Railroad

20 and those who worked, fought, bled, and died for the

21 emancipation of their fellow human beings. I submit

22 this testimony in the name of this resilience and I

23 implore you to include Sandy Ground within the

24 framework of this task force, which I hope is to be

25 created. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

3 Thank you very much, Mr. Hood.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. The next,  
5 ah, panelist will be Rachel Wallman from the  
6 Greenwood Cemetery. Ms. Wallman, you are unmuted.  
7 When the sergeant calls the clock you may begin your  
8 testimony.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

10 RACHEL WALLMAN: Thank you so much. Good  
11 morning and thank you to the members of the committee  
12 and those, um, others at this meeting, especially  
13 Chair Van Bramer, Council Member Rodriguez. My name  
14 is Rachel Wallman and I am the director of education  
15 at the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. I'm speaking  
16 here to share Greenwood's support for the creation of  
17 a New York City Freedom Trail and some resources we  
18 could bring to bear towards this initiative, and how  
19 [inaudible] interpret this history. Ah, for those  
20 unfamiliar with Greenwood, it is a 183-year-old  
21 active cemetery, a national historic landmark, a  
22 public arts space, and the most highly accredited  
23 arboretum in New York City. Um, and admission is,  
24 ah, free, 300 and, oh, am I still muted? No, I'm  
25 not, OK, sorry.



2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.

3 RACHEL WALLMAN: I thought was I still  
4 muted for a second. Um, ah, admission is free 365  
5 days a year. Abolitionist history runs deep at  
6 Greenwood. The Freedom Lot section of the cemetery  
7 contains the remains of 1300 black New Yorkers whose  
8 lives span the 19th century. We believe it is the  
9 largest known undisturbed black burial ground in the  
10 northern United States. Um, sorry, high school  
11 interns helped restore this area in 2015 and gave it  
12 its moniker. Visitors to the Freedom Lots can read  
13 interpretive panels and a free virtual tour of the  
14 area is available on our website. Black and white  
15 abolitionists permanent residents are interred  
16 throughout the rest of Greenwood. Among them are  
17 Samuel Cornish, founder and co-editor of Freedom's  
18 Journal, the first black owned and operated newspaper  
19 in the United States, Elizabeth Glasser, a black real  
20 estate magnate who gave funds to John Brown's raid on  
21 Harper's Ferry, and Abby Hopper Gibbons, who we've  
22 discussed already. Um, their and others' monuments  
23 and grave sites are worthy of public acknowledgement.  
24 We tell the stories of these pioneers regularly.  
25 More than 60% of Greenwood's programs for pre-K

2 through 12th grade, um, discuss abolitionism and  
3 slavery. Greenwood also features abolitionists in  
4 public programs, such as History Revisited,  
5 Celebrating Greenwood's Black Presidents, featuring  
6 Councilman Robert E. Cornegy, Jr., which is coming up  
7 on February 24. Finally, Greenwood's archives  
8 include burial resources that can assist scholars in  
9 researching black New Yorkers...

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 RACHEL WALLMAN: ...[inaudible] we support  
12 this effort and we hope to be a partner in this  
13 initiative. We thank the council, um, and  
14 [inaudible] for their time.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
16 Rachel, thank you.

17 JULIE FINCH: Hello, can you hear me?

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, we can.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Finch, you are  
20 the next panelist. Ah, you may begin when the  
21 sergeant calls the clock.

22 JULIE FINCH: Thank you. I am very  
23 eager.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.  
25

2 JULIE FINCH: Um, my name is Julie Finch  
3 and I'm co-chair of Friends of the Hopper Gibbons  
4 Underground Railroad House on 29th Street between 8th  
5 and 9th Avenue. I, I am so glad to hear the support  
6 of Councilman Rodriguez, D. Diaz, and Majority  
7 Leader, I'm not sure of her title, ah, Cumbo. Thank  
8 you very much for your support. Um, I have one  
9 suggestion. I would like a memorial for the 11 to 30  
10 black men who were lynched during the draft riots of  
11 1863. This has been ignored completely and I  
12 insisted that it be put on our plaque outside the  
13 Gibbons House, and I'm very glad to say that  
14 Landmarks reconsidered and added it to their plaque.  
15 Um, I went on a tour with Christopher Moore from the  
16 landing downtown at I think Warren or Chamber Street  
17 where Frederick Douglass stepped off a boat, and I  
18 think that this is a very important idea and I  
19 support completely the Freedom Trail. Um, especially  
20 the little house that belonged to, um, Mr. Wright on  
21 West Broadway that is such an exquisite house, and  
22 I'm just mentioning that Louis Napoleon, the  
23 Underground Railroad conductor who helped us, um, he  
24 lived, ah, for a time on Staten Island. So I, I just  
25 wanted to say thank you for that. Um, so I also

2 helped with the, ah, landmarking of Duffield Street,  
3 which took 17 years. Our own Hopper Gibbons House  
4 took 10 years, approximately, and I think that more  
5 attention needs to be paid and I support the Freedom  
6 Trail, an actual trail with actual markers.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 JULIE FINCH: Thank you. I, I am glad  
9 that LPC has their app, but we need much more and I  
10 would like to include indigenous people on  
11 [inaudible] on the trail. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Ms.  
13 Finch. Ah, I apologize for what I heard as a  
14 technical, ah, glitch there. I don't know if  
15 everyone else heard that. Um, but, ah, ah, very much  
16 appreciate, ah, you raising the draft riots and, ah,  
17 ah, the lynchings that took place. Very few people  
18 know about the history of, ah, what took place there.  
19 Um, do we have one more person testifying?

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, correct, Chair  
21 Van Bramer. Um, so the, the last panelist will be  
22 Linda Nat Nolan. Um, if you can please turn on your  
23 video, Ms. Nolan, Nat Nolan. We might be having  
24 technical difficulties. If you can bear with us,  
25 we're just working on it, but we have one more

2 witness. So Ms. Nat Nolan we can hear you but we do  
3 hear feedback. And I can you're speaking, but you're  
4 on mute. Um, just one, one moment.

5 LINDA NAT NOLAN: Hello, are we good now?

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

7 LINDA NAT NOLAN: Oh, great.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Nolan, we can  
9 hear you. So, ah, once the sergeant calls the clock  
10 you can begin your testimony.

11 LINDA NAT NOLAN: Thank you so much, and  
12 sorry for the problem, the technical problem.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

14 LINDA NAT NOLAN: Ah, my name is Linda  
15 Nat Nolan. I'm a member of the Library and History  
16 Committee of the Brooklyn Monthly Meeting of the  
17 Religious Society of Friends. Um, and I want to  
18 thank everybody for the testimony so far and I would  
19 like to add creating a Freedom Trail in New York City  
20 would not only give New Yorkers and tourists a better  
21 feeling for the past, it would potentially create  
22 better feeling in the present. For too long black  
23 agency in the abolitionist movement and the  
24 Underground Railroad has been downplayed or virtually  
25 eliminated from sight. Just a few people, that few

2 people know, include Peter Kroger, a black  
3 Presbyterian minister and found of the Brooklyn's AME  
4 Church and his brother, Benjamin, from Pearl Street  
5 in Brooklyn who, according to the Center for Brooklyn  
6 History, birthed the anti-slavery movement in  
7 Brooklyn. There is also Louis Napoleon, a black  
8 conductor on the Underground Railroad who with great  
9 strategic talent and daring helped approximately 3000  
10 people to freedom and spent his last days in  
11 Brooklyn. There is Harriet Jacobs, who was once a  
12 frightened runaway [inaudible] to Brooklyn and  
13 Manhattan. She became an agent for Quakers in  
14 Alexandria, Virginia, just after emancipation,  
15 helping to distribute clothing and supplies, and  
16 wrote an explosive anti-slavery memoir with a me too  
17 point of view. There are of course the Truesdales,  
18 black abolitionists who worked with William Lloyd  
19 Garrison, among others, and we thank the Land Parks,  
20 sorry, the LPC for their work here. And, ah, there  
21 are many more fascinating people to highlight. And  
22 in this comes an important point of why accurately  
23 pointing up the past can help the present and the  
24 future. The truth of the Underground Railroad that  
25 is emerging is that it was not an orderly system run

2 primarily by white people. That is a myth  
3 established about 1898 by Professor Wilbur H.  
4 Siebert. The understanding we have today is that  
5 black agency was very important in the antebellum  
6 period...

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 LINDA NAT NOLAN: ...and that's black and  
9 white people worked together in a worthy cause. This  
10 is so critical to get across. As Quaker historian  
11 Christopher Densmore states, somehow the emphasis  
12 shifted from the story of the enslaved seeking their  
13 own freedom largely and almost exclusively without  
14 help from the Underground Railroad to stories of how  
15 white people, often Quakers, aided fugitive enslaved  
16 people. By mid 20th century the Underground Railroad  
17 story was often told as if the only actors were white  
18 and the freedom-seekers themselves were passed from  
19 safe house to safe house. One must be suspicious of  
20 feel-good history. So we truly welcome the  
21 development of a Freedom Trail in New York and that  
22 it may allow all of us to understand the true history  
23 of the anti-slavery movement and will allow all of us  
24 to become a little more free. The truth does that.  
25 Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
3 much, ah, Ms. Nat Nolan, and appreciate that we were  
4 able to work out those technical glitches so we could  
5 hear your very important, ah, testimony. I would  
6 first ask to see if any of my colleagues have any  
7 questions or comments about the five speakers who  
8 have spoken so eloquently and, ah, powerfully about,  
9 ah, ah, Council Member Rodriguez's bill, which I  
10 think all of you addressed, um, but I, I will just  
11 say thank you, um, ah, Mr. Morris for, um, banging  
12 the drum very loudly here, ah, and making sure, ah,  
13 that this history is told and told, ah, correctly,  
14 ah, and appreciate your, your work on this. And, ah,  
15 to all of the others, um, you're all doing incredibly  
16 important work, um, and it's important that more  
17 people know what you're doing, ah, and, and the  
18 history that you are, um, sort of excavating in many  
19 ways, right, history that has been, um, buried or  
20 been intentionally made to disappear and, and you  
21 are, um, bringing it back and making sure that people  
22 know what really happened and, and that's really,  
23 really important. Ah, so I want to thank all of you,  
24 ah, for not letting it go, um, and for insisting that  
25 the stories be told and the history that has



2 systematically been erased, ah, is, is, ah, is  
3 retold, um, and in ways that people, ah, see it, feel  
4 it, know it, um, and when appropriate celebrate it.  
5 Um, so I want to just say thank you and I don't know  
6 if any of my colleagues have any, ah, ah, last words  
7 to say, but obviously we will, ah, push forward with,  
8 um, ah, Intro 293 and, um, and the other bills as  
9 well, ah, we will keep working on. But, ah, just  
10 want to say thank you for this important  
11 conversation. I'm really proud this committee has,  
12 ah, while passing Open Culture, um, has had several  
13 hearings, um, that, um, ah, that respond to the Black  
14 Lives Matter movement and have, um, really, um,  
15 leaned in, ah, to this, um, time, which of course is  
16 appropriate, ah, all of our activities and all of our  
17 work does that. But this committee in particular,  
18 um, so, ah, with that, unless anyone has any last  
19 words from the council members I will hand it back  
20 over to, ah, Brenda McKinney, ah, for some, ah,  
21 housekeeping, ah, before I close the hearing. Is  
22 that what I should do, Brenda?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Correct, Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK.

25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Um, thank you so  
3 much, Chair Van Bramer. So I, I also don't see any  
4 council member hands, either physically or in Zoom.  
5 So we'll, um, move forward. OK. Um, so we'll move  
6 forward. So at this point we have concluded public  
7 testimony. However, if we inadvertently missed  
8 anyone that would like to testify and who is logged  
9 in please use the Zoom raise hand function and we'll  
10 call on you in the order that your hand is raised.  
11 So we'll just take a moment. If there's anyone we  
12 missed, if you can please use the Zoom raise hand  
13 function. We're not seeing any hands. So, Chair Van  
14 Bramer, um, we have concluded public testimony for  
15 this hearing. Thank you so much.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Ah,  
17 thank you very much to everyone who participated, ah,  
18 and brought so much passion, ah, and, and fierce  
19 calls for justice, ah, and a true telling of the  
20 history of this city. Ah, and with that this hearing  
21 is adjourned.

22

23

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 13, 2021