



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

Oversight Hearing: Fiscal Year 2024 DCLA Executive Budget

Thursday, May 18, 11:45AM – City Council Committee Room

Testimony Presented by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo

Good morning, Chairs Ossé and Brannan and members of the committees. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, here to testify in regards to the agency's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 executive budget. I am joined today by a number of my colleagues from DCLA.

I'll begin my testimony with a review of the numbers in the latest budget proposal. The Mayor's proposed preliminary budget allocates a total of \$157.3 million for the Department of Cultural Affairs. This reflects an increase over the preliminary FY24 budget proposal, which included \$149.5 million for DCLA. The increase primarily reflects adjustments due to collective bargaining agreements and changes to heat, light, and power costs covered by the agency.

The \$157.3 million includes:

- \$28.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund baseline;
- \$72.3 million for operating expenses the Cultural Institutions Group;
- \$47.6 million for energy subsidies at cultural groups on DCLA property;
- \$7.1 million for agency staff and operating costs; and
- \$1.8 million for other agency initiatives, such as the Public Artists in Residence and CUNY Cultural Corps programs.

I'd like to note that at this same point in the FY23 budget process, DCLA's budget was \$154.7 million. At this stage, these figures do not include any of the one-time funding, such as City Council initiatives, which are typically added at budget adoption.

I'd also like to highlight that DCLA's executive budget figure does not reflect a PEG reduction. Mayor Adams exempted DCLA and the libraries from these budget reductions, showing how much this Mayor and his administration understand the irreplaceable value and importance of culture to our communities. It also reflects the strong advocacy and case that our sector helps to make for the importance of culture. The arts attract tourists, they uplift students, and they make our city the vibrant place it is. We are proud to be a part of an administration that understand this, and invests accordingly.

Turning for a moment to DCLA's capital budget, we received applications for 106 projects at 90 organizations this year. As you know, capital funding for cultural infrastructure is part of a close partnership between DCLA, the Mayor's Office, City Council, and the borough presidents. No other city in America invests in its cultural community to this degree, and it's a public-private partnership that continues to produce extraordinary cultural facilities for all New Yorkers. Just this month, I was thrilled to join Chair Ossé and Mayor Adams to help cut the ribbon on the spectacular new Gilder Center at the American Museum of Natural History. This remarkable space will not only engage and educate New Yorkers of all ages for generations to come – it makes it unmistakable that our city is moving forward, and ready to welcome visitors from across the globe. The City was proud to provide more than \$90 million – invested over multiple years and from multiple City leaders – for this incredible space. And that's just the most recent example. We're excited to have a full slate of ribbon cuttings and ground breakings coming up – from Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, to Louis Armstrong House in Queens, to the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance in East Harlem, to the Universal Hip Hop Museum in the Bronx and Snug Harbor on Staten Island. City investments continue to deliver world-class cultural spaces in every corner

of New York, and we look forward to working with Council to continue to be a good member of this crucial public-private partnership.

Turning for a moment to the Cultural Development Fund, the deadline for the FY24 CDF was last week. We received over 600 applications for support. Note that because of the new reforms, many CDF grantees – 653 in all – are in the middle of a multi-year cycle. For these groups, the renewal application is scheduled to launch by the end of May. We are still looking for panelists to help review CDF applications and make recommendations on which organizations will receive awards. The application to serve as a panelist is available on our website at nyc.gov/culture. Please share this among people in your district you think might be interested in serving!

This year marks the 40th anniversary of New York's Percent for Art program. Public art makes our civic buildings and open spaces more vibrant, more engaging, and more reflective of the dynamic city they serve. Percent for Art has had a transformative impact on the city's public realm in the last 40 years. From mosaics in our city's schools, to innovative architectural interventions in our libraries, to iconic sculptures that define how people relate to open spaces, we're proud of the deep investment in artists and artwork that the program represents. A new installation just outside City Hall features more than 40 artworks commissioned through Percent over the years, and we have more exciting things in store to mark the anniversary later this year. There are dozens of public art commissions underway across the city. Among them is the monument honoring Shirley Chisholm, planned for the southwest corner of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, adjacent to the communities this great woman served. After being stalled by the pandemic, this important monument is moving full steam ahead, and updated designs will be presented to the local community boards in the weeks ahead.

Materials for the Arts is alive with activity, as usual. Earlier this month, I joined the Executive Director of the Office of Arts and Special Projects at DOE, Paul Thompson, and MFTA Executive Director Tara Sansone to flip the ceremonial switch on the first-ever MFTA After Hours. This new initiative offers evening shopping hours for DOE educators. This expands access to this amazing group of people who are dedicated to bringing the arts into our schools by keeping the warehouse open until 7pm, past the end of the school day. This is something our educators have asked for, and we're so happy we could deliver it to them. MFTA has also been a crucial hub for providing supplies to the asylum seekers who continue to come to New York in record numbers. Just last week, the team at MFTA delivered desperately needed clothing and supplies to a shelter housing asylum seekers in Manhattan.

The cultural community more broadly is also stepping up to help address this humanitarian crisis. Members of the Latinx Arts Consortium of New York, for instance, have provided a wide range of amazing programs and services for these newest arrivals to our city. During the holiday season, the LxNY network conducted a clothing food drive, and Teatro SEA provided free performances for asylum seekers. El Puente has been actively supporting families arrived from Venezuela and Colombia with academic support, counseling, and arts-based enrichment programs for young people. Repertorio Español has been providing free performances for residents of the Skyline Hotel in Chelsea, sponsored by Council Member Erik Bottcher through the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. These performances featured a bilingual puppet show called "Hansel and Gretel and the Tooth Fairy. The list goes on, but I'm deeply moved and gratified to know that our arts sector is helping restore the humanity and dignity to these people who came to our country looking for a better life.

Spring is in the air in New York City. The outdoor performance season is upon us – Free Shakespeare in the Park, River to River, BRIC's Celebrate Brooklyn, Summerstage, and many more will soon be filling our parks with music, performances, and crowds of joyful New Yorkers. Another important summer ritual I want to remind people of is the city's Summer Youth Employment Program. With Mayor Adams' visionary support for this program, we are again looking to place 100,000 New York City youth in paid positions this summer. Last year, more than 90 cultural organizations hosted SYEP participants. We want to see even more cultural groups sign on this year! There is no better way to establish new connections with the unparalleled pool of talent that our city's young people represent. I was at Snug Harbor on Staten Island earlier this year, where an amazing young woman named Yolanda is now a full time employee of their education department, after having served as an SYEP participant. This program changes lives! So cultural groups, please consider signing up – visit www.nyc.gov/HireNYCYouth for details.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.