



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

Oversight Hearing: Fiscal Year 2023 DCLA Executive Budget

Friday, May 13, 2022, 11:30AM – Virtual Hearing

**Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Commissioner Laurie Cumbo**

Good morning, Chairs Brannan and Ossé and members of the committees. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. I am here today to testify in regards to the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget for DCLA. This will be my first time on this side of a City Council hearing. So I'm excited for today's conversation. A number of my staff from the Department are joining me today, including Deputy Commissioner Sheelah Feinberg, Chief of Staff Shirley Levy, and Finance Director Phillipa Shao.

I've had the pleasure of meeting a number of you in person and seeing you at cultural events around the city. Chair Ossé and I were throwing pink and blue powder at each other at the Brooklyn Children's Museum Holi celebration a few weeks ago. But for those who might not know my background: I previously served in the City Council for eight years, representing the 35th District in Brooklyn. During my tenure, I was a proud champion of the arts. I helped spearhead the effort to save Weeksville Heritage Center by adding it to the Cultural Institutions Group. I passed legislation that created the Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence, and also invested in arts groups to reduce gun violence through the Art a Catalyst for Change initiative. I fought to expand the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative from just \$700,000 for 8 theaters, to over \$3.7 million for more than 50 theaters encompassing a wide range of communities of color, like Thalia Spanish Theater, Chinese Theater Works, and Amerinda. And I fought for DCLA to cover energy costs for organizations on DCLA property. I also passed legislation that will expand the City Canvas pilot, transforming construction sheds around the city into platforms for community-driven art and expression. Before joining the Council, I was the founding director of the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in Fort Greene, and worked at various cultural institutions around the city before that. While leading MoCADA, I also helped to establish the Cultural Equity Group, a citywide coalition that fought for more equitable support for organizations of color. I am thrilled and humbled to be starting this next chapter as Commissioner and look forward to working with you, Chair and members of the committee, to help uplift cultural groups in every corner of NYC.

Now, turning to today's hearing topic, let's take a look at the budget numbers. The Mayor's FY23 executive budget allocates \$154.7 million in City funds to DCLA. This includes:

- \$33.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund, an increase of \$5.2 million from the preliminary budget, which I'll say more about in a moment;
- \$111.1 million for the Cultural Institutions Group;
- \$1.25 million for energy grants to groups on DCLA-owned property;
- \$6.7 million for agency operations; and
- Just over \$2 million for other agency programs and initiatives.

As is typical for the Mayor's executive budget, this figure does not include any one-time additions that tend to be added at budget adoption such as Mayoral adds or the Council's member items and initiatives. By comparison, DCLA's executive budget for FY22 at this same point in the process was \$144.9 million. So not only is our funding higher, but I'm pleased – and I know my team is very pleased – to report that the executive budget includes an addition of six full time positions for the agency, bringing us to a total of 55. These new and restored staff lines will help us move everything from procurement to capital equipment projects forward – which are critical for smaller nonprofits. We can't wait to fill these positions and start delivering even more great services for cultural nonprofits. This Administration is committed to supporting our Cultural community and understands the vital role this community plays in New York City's recovery. We see this commitment in the Executive budget and DCLA's important place in the Blueprint for Economic Recovery. We are looking forward to continuing work with you at Council and our partners at City Hall and OMB to find the best ways to provide robust support to our Cultural Community as we continue in this process.

While FY23 capital funding won't be allocated until adoption, DCLA's amazing capital portfolio includes \$976 million for hundreds of cultural projects around the city. These range from a new education center for Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens, improvements to the Children's Adventure Garden at NYBG in the Bronx, and renovations of the historic houses at Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn. No other city in America matches our commitment to supporting cultural groups' capital needs. It makes us a partner in ensuring accessible, sustainable, extraordinary cultural infrastructure that serves all New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing to make these unique, targeted investment alongside the Mayor's Office, Council, and Borough Presidents.

That's where we stand in the executive budget. I'm happy to answer any questions you have about the budget during Q&A. But first, I'd like to provide a few updates from DCLA and the wider cultural community. Several members of this committee and their staffs joined us for a briefing on the agency last week. We focused on how we collaborate with the City Council in supporting cultural groups. I appreciate the time you all took for this briefing – we know it was dense! But it's a great way to kick off our work

together. And it should give you good context for the programs and initiatives I'm about to talk a little more about.

- Cultural Development Fund: My team in the DCLA Programs Unit is hard at work on the upcoming Cultural Development Fund application review process. After launching the application last month, we're preparing to review what we anticipate will be the largest-ever round of applications – more than 1,200 from nonprofits across the city. A couple of important points about this year's CDF: for one, this is the first time we're bringing groups back for competitive panel reviews since the start of the pandemic; two, this year will include a number of exciting reforms to make the process fairer, simpler, and more equitable. And there are two calls to action for our cultural community right now: first, we need panelists to help review the applications. We're looking for people who represent the full breadth of NYC's diversity to bring their perspectives and expertise to the review process – learn more at on.nyc.gov/CDFpanels. And second – applications are due Monday, May 16! That's three days from now. Go to our website, we've got recorded webinars, we've got an FAQ, we've got everything you need to apply. As the founder of an arts nonprofit, I know how much that DCLA grant means, so please consider applying this year. Visit nyc.gov/culture for more.

This year's CDF will include a \$5 million boost, provided as part of Mayor Adams' economic recovery blueprint. This will deliver much-needed funding to groups across the city as they continue to recover from the pandemic, and bring their communities with them. The blueprint also includes funding for a pilot program that will help smaller groups navigate the process of undertaking major capital projects. The goal is to make sure these organizations can benefit from this important source of support, and in turn help them serve as anchors for recovery in communities across the city.

- DCLA's Public Artists in Residence program – or PAIR – embeds artists in City agencies to tackle intractable civic problems through creative practice. One project to grow from this unique program was The People's Bus, created by Yazmany Arboleda when he was embedded with the Civic Engagement Commission last year. I was overjoyed to see Chair Ossé and several other committee members earlier this month as the bus rolled into its new home at The Clemente on the Lower East Side. I also recently joined artist Sophia Dawson at the Brownsville Houses to unveil a mural project she developed as artist-in-residence with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. And one of the current PAIRs, sTo Len, recently launched the Office of In Visibility at the Department of Sanitation. At DSNY, Len aims to get New Yorkers to consider their relationship with the waste they generate and the city agency that processes it for them – interrogating the notion of “out of sight, out of mind.” Visit officeofinvisibility.com to participate in this thought provoking project. Together, these PAIR projects drive home the power artists have for re-framing and reimagining the world around us, and the awesome things we can do when city government embraces their creative energy.

- I'm excited to report that things are once again popping over at Materials for the Arts. Our one-of-a-kind creative reuse facility in Long Island City fully reopened last November. While the committed team at MFTA never stopped serving our cultural community with free supplies, their members have embraced the chance to return to in person shopping. Thousands of MFTA members have visited the warehouse since it reopened, receiving nearly \$3 million worth of supplies that fuel arts and education programming around the city. The Great Dance Shoe Giveaway that kicked off in February has so far delivered more than 10,000 pairs of dance shoes to students and dancers across the city. In early June, we will host the Sustainable Art Show, looking back at MFTA's pioneering artist residency program. We invite the Council and everyone else to join us – visit nyc.gov/mfta and click on “events” for more info.
- Last month, our partners at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and Department of Social Services launched a renewal campaign for the IDNYC program. As you know, IDNYC is a powerful tool that connects so many New Yorkers – including our undocumented neighbors – with services many of us take for granted, like opening a bank account. Working with over three dozen organization partners, we've also made sure it's a tool for expanding access to our city's amazing cultural assets. From the Bronx Zoo, to MoMA PS1, to Pregones, Film Forum, and many more – your IDNYC card gets you free memberships to cultural groups in all five boroughs. We encourage all New Yorkers to get or renew their IDNYC today at nyc.gov/idnyc!
- As the weather gets warmer, another sign of hope I'm thrilled to see around New York is the return of our summer cultural festivals and events. Chair Ossé, I've seen you at a number of these already. I loved what you wore at the Met Gala. And we haven't even seen our cultural partners get started yet. The 10th annual NYC by Design festival is happening now, and art fairs are being held all month long. BRIC's Celebrate Brooklyn is coming back to the Lena Horne Bandshell in Prospect Park. Governors Island will host a season full of festivals, exhibitions, and other programs, and LMCC is bringing back River to River. Next month, Casita Maria is putting on the South Bronx Culture Festival. And around the city, the Festival of New York is coordinating programming far and wide. When we say that culture is going to drive our city's recovery, these summer festivals that are bringing communities together are the perfect example.

As you all know from having your ear to the ground in your districts, this doesn't even scratch the surface of cultural activity that brings neighborhoods to life and communities together in every corner of our city. As New York continues to reopen and recover, this Administration believes in the power of art and culture to bring us together and drive us forward. This deep commitment is reflected in our investments in and support for the artists and organizations who do this important work.

Having served on the City Council myself, I know how critical the partnership between the Council and this agency is for investing in and supporting our cultural community. I want to build on work and accomplishments from recent years – which in turn built on the advocacy of activists stretching back generations. Collectively, we've taken major steps toward making our cultural sector more open, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming to all New Yorkers. But there's still so much more we need to accomplish.

DCLA is working with the members of the CIG – who together employ thousands of New Yorkers and attract millions of visitors each year – to implement their diversity plans. With this year's CDF, we're rolling out new reforms to make the application process simpler and more accessible, and building greater equity into the review and awards process. Internal DEI work at DCLA is ensuring that these external facing initiatives are deeply rooted in the agency's culture and values.

New Yorkers from all backgrounds need to understand that working in the arts is a powerful form of public service. In turn, we need to take steps to make sure that working in the arts is something everyone sees as a pathway open to them. Another DCLA program I admire is the CUNY Cultural Corps, which provides paid internships for CUNY students at cultural groups across the city. DCLA is also encouraging cultural organizations to serve as host sites for the Summer Youth Employment Program, giving youth paid opportunities to work in our cultural community. I had my own powerful experience as a summer youth intern in the cultural sector – starting at the Met Museum when I was 15, and later working at Brooklyn Children's Museum and Brooklyn Museum. We need to see our summer youth and CUNY students as the future cultural leaders they are, and invest in their professional growth. That means making the most of existing opportunities, and fighting for more.

As the budget process moves ahead, I look forward to working with you toward realizing this shared vision for a more vibrant, inclusive, and equitable cultural sector. I am happy to answer any questions you have at this time. Thank you.