

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP ORGANIZATIONS
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP ORGANIZATIONS

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November 20, 2025
Start: 10:22 a.m.
Recess: 1:00 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 2

B E F O R E: Erik D. Bottcher, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis
Chi A. Ossé
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Gale A. Brewer

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs

Lance Polivy, General Counsel for the New York
City Department of Cultural Affairs

Lynn Nottage, Fall of Freedom

Annie Dorsen, Fall of Freedom

Elizabeth Larison, Director of the Arts and
Culture Advocacy Program at the National
Coalition Against Censorship

Frances Bates, Basileus of the Eta Nu Sigma
chapter of the Brooklyn Alumni Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated

Kim O'Neal, member of the Executive Board of the
Brooklyn Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated

Shevonne Catherine-Bascom, First Anti-Basileus of
the Beta Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated

Angela Guyton-Cyril, member of Kappa Sigma
chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated

Jennine Hunt, Xi Omicron Sigma chapter of Sigma
Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated

Monique Chandler-Waterman, Assemblywoman for New
York State Assembly District 58

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

Lucy Sexton, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Francine Garber-Cohen, President of the Regina
Opera Company

Briana Dixon (Aridy Nox), Co-Executive Director
of Musical Theatre Factory

George Emilio Sanchez, founding member of the
First Amendment Culture Team

Lisa Gold, Executive Director of the Asian
American Arts Alliance

DJ McDonald, Dance Parade in New York

Mahadya Mary, Co-Founder of the Haitian Day
Parade, Incorporated

Harry Abil Homme, Haiti Cultural Exchange

Mimi Pierre Johnson, Haitian Day Parade,
Incorporated

Nancy Vedrine, Haitian Day Parade, Incorporated

James Kaplan, Co-Founder and Director of the New
York Coalition to Save the SS United States

Dan McSweeney, New York Coalition to Save the SS
United States

Eric Breen, self

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

David Di Gregorio, New York Coalition to Save the
SS United States

James Gerazi, student

James Michael Maloney, self

John Quadrozzi, Jr., New York Coalition to Save
the SS United States

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Alida Camp, self

Melissa West, Director and Senior Curator of the
Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug
Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden

Laurence Maslon, self

Miranda Moore, International Board of Directors'
International First Vice President Responsible
for Global Membership for Sigma Gamma Rho

Rosalyn Barnes, Northeastern Region Area 4
Coordinator for Sigma Gamma Rho

Marica Harris, International President of Sigma
Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated

Carleo Tran Casayuran, New York Coalition to Save
the SS United States

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SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone
check for the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations,
located on Hearing Room 2, recorded on November 20,
2025, by Nazly Paytuvi.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and
welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Intergroup Relations.

At this time, please silence all
electronic devices.

If you would like to testify, you must
fill out a witness slip with one of the Sergeants-at-
Arms. You can also submit testimony at
testimony@council.nyc.gov.

At this time, please silence all
electronic devices.

No one may approach the dais at any time
during this hearing.

Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Good morning. I am
Council Member Erik Bottcher, Chair of the Committee
on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
Intergroup Organizations. Welcome to today's

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oversight hearing, Censorship in the Arts and
Cultural Sector. In addition to our oversight topic,
the Committee will hear three resolutions. First, we
have Resolution Number 649-2024, sponsored by Council
Member Gale Brewer, calling on the United States
Congress to pass and the President to sign
legislation declaring the ocean liner, the SS United
States, a historic location, allocating funds for the
ocean liner's restoration and its relocation to the
City of New York. We will invite Council Member
Brewer to speak when she arrives.

Next, we have two resolutions, sponsored
by Council Member Rita Joseph, Resolution Number 987-
2025, declaring July 26 as Haitian Konpa Day annually
to celebrate the legacy of Haitian music and dance in
the cultural landscape of New York City, and
Resolution No. 1063-2025, designating November 12 as
Sigma Gamma Rho Day in the City of New York to
recognize the sorority's commitment to sisterhood,
scholarship, and service to positive community
impact. Let me invite Council Member Joseph to speak
about her resolutions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair
Bottcher and Members of the Committee on Cultural

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Affairs, Libraries International Intergroup
Organization.

I am thrilled that my resolutions are
being heard today. Resolution Number 987, declaring
July 26 as Haitian Konpa Day annually to celebrate
the legacy of Haitian music and the dance in the
cultural landscape of New York City. Haitian culture
has been part of this rich, diverse fabric of our
city, from our food and dance to our music, whether
in local bars or iconic Labor Day parade on Eastern
Parkway. Haitian contributions are everywhere. It's
time to formally recognize and celebrate Haitian
Konpa music. This resolution designates July 26 as
Haitian Konpa Day, an annual celebration of the
legacy of Haitian music and the dance within the New
York City cultural landscape.

My next resolution, Resolution Number
1063, designating November 12 annually as Sigma Gamma
Rho Day in New York City to recognize the sorority's
commitment to sisterhood, scholarship, and service
and to positive community impact. This resolution
recognizes Sigma Gamma Rho Incorporated's unwavering
commitment to sisterhood, scholarship, service, and
its positive impact on community across the city and

the country and beyond. Sigma Gamma Rho Incorporated is a non-for-profit Black Greek letter organization of college-educated women committed to sisterhood, scholarship, service, and dedicated to realizing positive community impact as expressed in its slogan, greater service, greater progress. And its mission is clear, to enhance the quality of life for women and their families. I'm an incredibly proud Haitian American and a member of the Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated.

I also want to take a moment to congratulate the Haitian National Soccer Team for qualifying for 2026 FIFA World Cup.

So, I'm inviting all my Colleagues to support this resolution and I look forward to hearing testimony from the City agency reps today and also my Colleagues. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you, Council Member Joseph.

Now back to our oversight topic. In recent months, the Trump Administration has initiated sweeping changes to federal arts funding that equate to censorship, discrimination, and threaten the future of creative freedom. Shortly after President

Trump took office for his second term, the Administration issued a series of executive orders directing federal agencies, including the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for Humanities, and Institute of Museum and Library Services to align funding with his priorities. In response to these orders, for example, the NEA began requiring that any artists who had received NEA grants need to confirm that they were not operating any programs promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion and were not promoting gender ideology. Lawsuits have been filed by arts and cultural organizations, and judgments have even been delivered in their favor. But the fight goes on and the unsure futures of hundreds of New York City's arts and cultural organizations hang in the balance as they face losing grants from all three federal agencies, the very grants that have made it possible to provide broadly accessible arts and cultural programming for New Yorkers across our city. Who will speak for these organizations, especially for those who fear retaliation from the Administration if they speak too loudly for themselves? And I'll note that we heard from a number of organizations who would have liked

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to have testified today, but they truly felt that
testifying today would potentially jeopardize the
future of their organizations and that is just
shameful. For one, the National Coalition Against
Censorship, founded in 1974, representing over 60
national education, civil rights, publishing, and
arts organizations, continues to play a leading role
today in combating censorship. The National Coalition
Against Censorship provides direct support and
resources to students, artists, teachers, curators,
librarians, and leaders of cultural institutions
facing censorship concerns. Another, the First
Amendment Culture Team, or FACT, a coalition of
creatives, and thank you FACT for being here today,
creatives, cultural workers, and organizers raising
awareness about the First Amendment by educating and
empowering the arts community to understand their
rights and defend free expression.

We're here today because creative freedom
in the United States is under attack. Across the
country, the federal government is slashing arts
funding, banning books, bullying cultural
institutions, and using words like wokeness, gender
ideology, and DEI as weapons to silence voices they

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do not like. This is not subtle. This is coordinated.
It's a national attempt to control what people see,
what they learn, and whose stories get told. New York
City has always been a refuge for artists. For 400
years, our stages, our galleries, our libraries, and
our museums have given the world groundbreaking work
that challenges power and expands our understanding
of each other. But even here, the chill is real.
Federal threats to funding and the public
intimidation campaigns are forcing artists to second-
guess themselves, and that is exactly what the
censors want. So let me be clear. Art is not our
problem. Art is the antidote. It's how societies push
forward, confront injustice, and imagine better
futures. When you tell artists to stay quiet, you're
telling communities to stay invisible. So today,
we'll hear directly from the people on the front
lines of this fight. Their message is simple. New
York City, we must stand with them. We must support
their work, protect their freedom to create, and
refuse to let censorship take root in the cultural
capital of the world. This Committee looks forward to
discussing with the Adams Administration today how
censorship undermines DCLA's mission and what DCLA

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will do to uphold artistic independence. We also seek an understanding of what the City Council can do to support DCLA and to support local arts and cultural groups in their fight against censorship. We're pleased to have representatives of these local groups as well as acclaimed individual artists here today to give us their important perspective on this continuing crisis.

I want to acknowledge my Colleagues who are present. We have Council Member Sandra Ung, we have Council Member Ossé, and we're still waiting for Council Member Brewer, who will speak when she arrives.

I want to thank the Committee Staff who put together today's hearing, Christina Yellamaty, the Committee's Counsel; Regina Paul, the Committee's Senior Policy Analyst, and Sandra Gray, the Committee's Financial Analyst. And I'd like to thank my staff in Council District 3, including my Chief-of-Staff Carl Wilson; Laurie Hardjowirogo.

I want to remind everyone who wishes to testify today that you must fill out a white appearance card, which is located at the desk of the Sergeant-at-Arms at the back of the room. Even if

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you've already registered in advance, you've got to
fill out a card if you're testifying in person.

And a reminder to all our witnesses,
please state your name prior to your testimony for
the record.

I'll now turn to the Committee Counsel to
swear in the Administration.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Hi. Good
morning. Please raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
questions?

Lori Cumbo.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Lance
Polivy.

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you.
You may begin.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. Good
morning. And I'm so pleased that Chair Bottcher has
brought this incredible, important topic before us
today. Congratulations on your appointment as Chair

of the Department, well, not yet, the Chair on the
Committee of Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations, and I'm so proud
of Council Member Rita Joseph. You have a bit of a
twofer going on today, celebrating your Sigma Gamma
Rho and your Haitian culture all in one day, and so
well supported. Happy to see all of the support that
you have here today. And I'm also proud, it was an
incredible surprise to be joined by my forever
colleague, the Honorable Diana Reyna. So very happy
to have all of you here today.

And I will begin my remarks. Good
morning, Chair Bottcher, and Members of the
Committee. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New
York City Department of Cultural Affairs, here to
testify regarding today's topic, censorship in the
arts and cultural sector.

Creative free expression is foundational
to our city and who we are as New Yorkers. We are a
city of artists, creators, thinkers, strivers, and
dreamers. The artforms that were born here and went
on to reshape the world, the performances that have
attracted audiences since the earliest days of our
city, the arts education that enriches young people's

lives, the cultural hubs that are pillars of our economy and our communities. This all relies on a fundamental belief in the right to creative freedom and free expression. The world's first children's museum was established right here in Brooklyn. Hip-hop was born in the Bronx. Countless art movements have developed in the arts districts of Manhattan. Queens and Staten Island both incubate artists and movements from all over the world. Any threat to this is a threat to what makes our city great. So we thank you, Chair Bottcher, for inviting us to speak on this very urgent topic.

For nearly 50 years, the Department of Cultural Affairs has played a crucial role in supporting our city's vast, vibrant, creative life. At present, the agency provides nearly 300 million dollars in expense funding to more than 1,100 cultural not-for-profits across the city. This is the largest ever City allocation for DCLA, supporting the full breadth of creative expression found in our communities and is a testament to the Mayor's and the City's Council's recognition of the pivotal role that art and culture play. One defining characteristic of DCLA's support for culture is our deep institutional

respect for the free curatorial programmatic
decision-making of the private not-for-profits we
fund. For our Cultural Development Fund,
organizations propose public programming in their
application materials, which are reviewed by peer
panels. Panels review applications with an eye to
public service, to organization accountability, and
the quality of the project. Panels don't consider
content, and the agency never reviews, shapes, or
censors the content of funded programs. For the
Cultural Institutions Group, we provide annual
subsidies, but similarly have no role in determining
their curatorial or programmatic choices.

In a democratic society built on the core
value of free creative expression, we believe this
time-tested balance of public support without
government interference in creative decisions
represents the best way forward for our arts
community. The enormous variety of programs and
groups we fund attest to our commitment to supporting
cultural expression in all of the many diverse forms
it takes across our city. We support the Drag Queen
Storytime Hour. We support theaters that put on
cutting-edge work from around the world, like the

public's presentation of *The Ally* last year, a play that explored the Israel-Palestine conflict, police brutality, and more in deeply personal ways. We also support children's museums, arts education, and public art in all five boroughs. We recently expanded the city's Cultural Institutions Group to include new organizations like Pregones/Puerto Rican Traveling Theater, and cut the ribbon on the new home for the Studio Museum in Harlem just last week. We work with the Council to fund the Cultural Immigrant Initiative and the Coalition of Theaters of Color. The 1,100 groups we support lift up voices, history, and cultures of New Yorkers from every discipline, belief, and background. And crucially, we don't endorse, control, or censor the content of any of this. We strive to be impartial supporters of cultural dialogue, public access, and excellence in programming. It is this approach that has helped make our city the cultural capital of the world.

While we're proud of this work and this record, we understand that our cultural sector is facing tremendous challenges right now. Trends in individual giving, philanthropic support, and audience habits are upending non-profit business

models. Shifts in federal priorities are putting millions of dollars in cultural support at risk for the city. According to a recent report from the City's Independent Budget Office, federal funds from the NEA, NEH, and IMLS to New York City arts groups totaled 32 million dollars awarded in 2024. This is a huge amount of support that groups can't afford to lose right now. We will continue to monitor this situation closely.

With so many mixed and confusing signals coming from the federal administration, we have seen that many groups feel pressure to self-censor to avoid risking their federal support. This is deeply troubling, and we will continue to monitor the situation and listen to the needs of our cultural constituents closely. The most important thing we can do is to reaffirm our support for cultural programming in its full diversity.

We also have witnessed many instances of groups struggling to navigate challenging issues, most notably the conflict between Israel and Palestine. One organization may have to navigate conflicting calls from different constituencies with boards, staff, audiences, or funders falling on one

side of an issue or another. These are difficult issues to navigate, and there's something that groups have to do thoughtfully and with great care. But we're here to support our grantees as they work to provide irreplaceable spaces for dialogue, connections, and inspiration.

It's somewhat of a paradox. The times we need our artists and cultural organizations are also the times that test and strain our ability to create space for civic dialogue. It won't be easy, but we're confident in our sector's ability to continue to do their work, and we'll be with them every step of the way.

Federal policy regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion is another issue groups are struggling to navigate. While we're proud of our City's strides in making cultural funding and access more equitable than ever before, DEI programs have been in the crosshairs of the federal government. In a city like New York, which is home to the most diverse communities on the globe, focusing on diversity is not optional. If you want to engage with, reflect, and employ our city's residents, by definition, that means you must foster diverse staff,

leadership, and audiences. In New York, diversity is not just a moral imperative, it's good business. I have been dealing with these issues on a very personal level for decades. When I was the Executive Director of MOCADA, we put on an exhibition with artwork by an artist by the name of Dred Scott. The piece tackled police brutality head-on in a very visceral way. One of the police unions came out against the exhibition, and local press helped to create a major controversy for a small arts organization. At the time, I invited Eric Adams, then our police captain, to see the show. He didn't agree with the content, but he defended our right to present the work and provide space for dialogue. So as Commissioner, I see and understand what our groups are going through, and how much it means to have support for putting on daring work.

We're committed to working with the Council to rise to this moment and continue supporting the ability of our cultural community to take the risks necessary to foster a vibrant, engaged, creative life for our city. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you have. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you so much,
Commissioner. I want to thank you for your leadership
on this, and so many issues, including your great
support of the cultural organizations in my Council
District. I appreciate it so much.

We've been joined by Council Member
Crystal Hudson and Council Member Gale Brewer, and I
want to give Council Member Brewer an opportunity to
speak about Resolution 649, calling on the U.S.
Congress to pass and the President to sign
legislation declaring the ocean liner, SS United
States, a historic location, allocating funds for the
ocean liner's restoration and its relocation to the
City of New York. Let me invite Council Member Brewer
to speak about her resolution.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's Gale Brewer.
I'll be very brief. This particular ship has a long-
storied history, and the individuals here in New York
as around the country really wanted to save it. I'll
be very honest, it is a challenge. Hail Mary is what
it was called in terms of trying to make sure that it
stays in its current condition, but I'm glad, and I
really appreciate the opportunity. I know there are
others here in the room who feel the same way, to be

able to make a statement that this is an example of how you should not treat ships that have been such a long history in our country. So, I am ecstatic that we will, at least in New York City, make a comment that although this particular ship is not necessarily destined to be whole for its future, we here in New York will make sure that we made a statement that the SS United States should have been continued as a museum or as a ship that could be repurposed in a different way. So, I appreciate more than I can say, because I know there are so many people who feel the same way and have worked incredibly hard to continue its life. So, I appreciate it and I look forward to its passage, even though, as we suggested, it's a very challenging project. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you, Council Member Brewer.

Commissioner Cumbo, thank you for your testimony.

What specifically does the DCLA do to provide financial assistance to the very organizations that have lost funding due to these federal priorities, including the NEA, the NEH, and

the IMLS grants? What is the City doing to help fill that gap for these organizations?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much for that question. The Department of Cultural Affairs can never be a backdrop for filling in financial gaps that are caused by the federal government, but what we can do is to continue to advocate for and to bring more resources to our cultural community. So, this year marks the largest increase to our baseline budget of 45 million dollars, and this was an issue that has been going on for more than a decade, how do we increase the baseline for our Department of Cultural Affairs, and we were proud to work with the City Council in order to advocate an additional 30 million dollars, which really helped us on so many levels to make sure that the art and cultural community has the resources to help navigate these challenging times. But again, without federal funding, organizations are still struggling.

Something else that we wanted to do, we increased our local arts council's budgets by 15 percent, so this is a large and substantial increase for our arts councils because that is the arm through which the Department of Cultural Affairs and the City

can fund artists, as well as small arts organizations. So we wanted to make sure that those organizations, those artists had support, that they so much needed and deserved, but the inspiration and the fight to do that was not as a result of the loss of federal funding. It was simply because that is what the arts and cultural community deserved.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: If an organization has seen their federal funding cut for any reason, including because of the content of their art, is that considered as a factor when they're applying for City funding?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It is not considered a factor when applying for City funding. We only make decisions about funding through our cultural development fund, which is a panel review process where peers from the field who are experienced in art and culture and environmental issues make decisions about which organizations get funded. But it's based off of the content, the quality of the program, a history of doing this sort of work, and we don't make decisions based off of a loss of federal funding. That perhaps would be something that they could do in applying to their City Council Members who have the

ability to make discretionary funds available, but on the side of the Department of Cultural Affairs, it's merely by the quality of the work.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: I would imagine, though, if an organization went to the panel and said, we just got zeroed out by the feds, that perhaps that would factor into it in some their amount that they were received by the panel.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That would be nice, but it doesn't work that way.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: What does the DCLA do now to provide legal advice or assistance to local arts and cultural organizations that have faced the loss of federal funding due to the federal administration's priorities?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are very proud that we have created within our agency, inspired by London and many other cities, they've created a culture at risk office. We've created a Create in Place Office that's led by Anne del Castillo, and it's an incredible opportunity for organizations who may have lost federal funding, but not specifically for that purpose. It's for organizations who are addressing space issues, that are having legal

challenges, whether created by the federal government or not, but it's an office that has been utilized in order to help organizations connect to resources outside of our agency, and that can be legal, accounting, or otherwise, but it's proven to be a very valuable resource. And since its creation, we've helped over 60 different organizations that have visited our portal to assist, to try to connect, and to help organizations do exactly that, create in place.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's great. I could see it's a popular program. I see a silent applause coming from some of the organizations.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I love that.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's always a good sign.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That means that people are utilizing this resource, which is really great.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: And one thing you may want to do is share that with my Colleagues and I, social media assets that we can share publicly to let our local organizations know about it, put in our newsletters. We'd be very happy to do that.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We'll certainly do
that.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: What does the DCLA
do now to provide public relations or marketing
advice to local arts and cultural organizations that
may have faced a loss of funding?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Our agency at this
time doesn't have the capacity to help with marketing
organizations, but what we do as an agency, we
promote different cultural heritage months. For
example, if it's a Juneteenth celebration, we're
going to create an e-newsletter and social media post
that's going to celebrate that. If it's Hispanic
Heritage Month, we are going to reach out to the
entire 1,100 organizations that we fund and support
and say, please give us an opportunity to promote the
work that you're doing. We have done this every year.
It's something that's very popular. For example, with
the Nutcracker, we do an annual e-newsletter and
social media post promoting all of the Nutcrackers
across the City of New York so that families can
understand what's happening.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: How many are there?
I'm just curious.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: There's got to be at least 30.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Wow.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I've tried to, in these four years, attend all of them, but my son is a little Nutcrackered out, but he did ask, when are we going to go to the Nutcrackers this year? The one that I love the most is the one that we do on free cultural programming. It gives us an opportunity to promote all the free cultural programs that are happening throughout the city. It's a huge success. We're able to market that as well. The news programs, ABC, Eyewitness News ABC, we're able to do it on Channel 11, PIX11. It's really popular where they want to know what are we doing every year for free programming in New York City. One that I would like to tout is a program that we just unveiled with the American Museum of Natural History. It's a program where if you are a SNAP beneficiary, you have an opportunity to attend the American Museum of Natural History for free and see what would typically be paid ticketed exhibitions. You're able to see those for free as a result of this program. Those are the types of events that we're really proud of. It's called the

Discoverer Membership. It's really designed to allow families... oftentimes children come to the museum for school trips, but not the parents, so this is for the kids to come home and say, hey, I had a great opportunity, we can now go visit this museum for free if we are a SNAP beneficiary holder. That's one of the things that we're really proud of.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's great.
That's probably another example of something that we could help promote and spread the word about.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right. We're going to get all that out to you. Sometimes we get a little siloed in some of the work that we're doing, but I would love for you all to pump that out because we would have greater opportunity to reach more audiences.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's great. I want to give my Colleagues an opportunity to ask any questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair.
Thank you, Commissioner. Always happy to see you.

Just wanted to know, has DCLA changed the CDF guidelines for Fiscal 2027 as a result of the Trump Administration's new priorities?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We have not changed our funding guidelines and our goals and objectives as a result of anything that is coming out of the White House. We have remained true to the work that we're doing. As stated in the testimony, we are the most diverse city in the world. This is something that's very valuable to the educational, spiritual, social, and financial well-being of New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you for that. That was the only question I had, but thank you. Use us if you need to get information. You have 51 Members. We can get that information out to communities. The Council does something similar with our NYCHA residents as well called Discovery Day, where they get to go to American Museum of Natural History.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I remember those days.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. Congratulations on your participation in New York Stars Dance.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yes. Thank you. The secret is out. I was dancing on Friday.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: I'm going to have
to check that out.

I'm curious about the awards and the
criteria that are used with the awards. The loss of
federal funding is not a factor in the awards. Is
that a legal requirement that you're not allowed to
consider a loss of federal funding when the panels
are determining how much an organization is awarded?

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: In some ways,
it's a legal determination in that we have a rule
that now governs our Cultural Development Fund
process. Loss of federal funding isn't a
consideration in our rule because our rule predated
everything that's now going on in the federal
administration. I do think that our agency at this
time, as the Commissioner has said more than once,
wants to double down on our commitment to our values.
And we are very proud of the impartial system that we
have set up for the Cultural Development Fund in
which the only things that matter are the public
service that you're doing, the organizational
accountability of the group, and the quality of the
project that's being put on for the community. And so
we have our panels stay very focused only on those

three factors. The criteria are public, so everyone can see exactly what they'll be judged on. And right now, we're getting ready to announce our FY26 awards and then to move into launching our FY27 application. And these have very long lead times, so it's very difficult to change the application, to update the guidelines before the next session. We've been extraordinarily lucky to partner with this City Council to work on speeding up the timeline and getting awards out faster and, by sticking with what we currently have, we look forward to doing that again and making up even more time with the FY27 awards.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: What was the genesis of the rule? Why was the rule put in place? What's the thinking behind why it's needed?

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: It was so that everything about our cultural development fund process could receive public scrutiny, that there could be notice and comment on the ideas that our agency had, and that we could meaningfully engage with the public to come up with what that process looks like. When you are distributing this much funding to groups in New York City, you have a deep

responsibility to serve the public. And it was ultimately our determination that the public ought to have a voice in that, and it shouldn't be something that was only decided by our agency alone.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: So, was it just this one rule that was issued, or was it a series of rules?

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: One rule.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Got it.

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Yeah. We were operating blind, where there was no law, no rule, nothing governing how we were administering our process. And now, by putting it all on paper and showing the public exactly what it is we're doing and how we're considering these applications, they not only got insight into how we were thinking about this, but they got to then come to a hearing, raise their voices, and provide written comments that we had to respond to in issuing the final rule, and that all benefited the ultimate outcome.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Some organizations did not feel comfortable testifying today because they feared retaliation from the federal government. I spoke to some organizations who said, Erik, we're

not going to be there, and it's not that we don't agree with the spirit of the hearing and it's not that we don't think what is happening is horrible, it is horrible, but we don't want to risk retaliation, we depend on our federal grants to survive. And that is just shameful, I think. It goes against everything our country stands for, that organizations would not feel comfortable speaking out and being honest about the challenges that they face because of this retaliation from the federal government. Do you feel that fear is justified? And how are you there to support them in the face of that?

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: It's really difficult for our agency to be able to tell any organization whether that fear is justified. We have no control over what the federal administration is doing. And we very much empathize and understand with these groups about why they're so scared. Because their funding has been pulled. IBO put out a report on federal funding in New York City that indicated that 34 million dollars have been pulled from New York City based arts and culture groups. That's a very scary number, and so we would never downplay the fear of loss of federal funding. Instead, what we did

was partner with the City Council for a 45-million-dollar baseline increase, the first baseline increase since 2008. We're so proud of that work. We advocated together to get 30 million added at adoption on top of that. And so that 30 million doesn't quite match all of the dollars that left New York City, but it comes close. And while it's not compensating for the loss of federal funding, it's only speaking to our core values of supporting arts and culture, it's us doing just a little bit of our part to show how much we care and to try and provide as much funding as we can to these institutions.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Council Member Brewer, do you have any questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No. See, the commissioner knows what I care about. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are actively working on arts and education and making sure that we, as well as Council Member Joseph and the whole Council, making sure that we are doing all that we can, and we are very pleased in this Administration that we've been able to support afterschool programming and universal afterschool as part of the initiatives of this Administration to make sure we

delve deeper into the arts and education world. And we're going to make sure, Council Member Brewer, that Paul Thompson of the arts and education department is having the rollout of his arts and ed report, and we're going to make sure that you are on the list to be invited for the rollout of that.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you for your testimony.

We're now going to open the hearing for public testimony.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I just wanted to thank you for the opportunity to testify today and to be here at City Hall. And I'm just going to paraphrase, as an African American woman, my guiding north star in terms of how I approach the work that I do is paraphrasing a quote of Malcolm X, when he said, as Black people, you're so concerned and worried about catching hell but you've already caught hell. You've lost your name. You've lost your religion. You've lost your language. You can't catch any more hell than you've already caught. So don't be fearful. Move forward and be strong in who you are. Because there's no more hell that you can catch than the hell that you've caught already. So that guides

me in the work that I do in terms of why it's so important to be fearless in many ways during these really challenging times because it is important to be who you are because we fought too hard as a country to be who we are to retreat now.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Damn right.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you, Commissioner.

We're now going to open the hearing for public testimony.

I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-

at-Arms if you've not already done so and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you'll have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic, Censorship in the Arts and Cultural Sector.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms.

I will now call the first panel. We have Lynn Nottage, Annie Dorsen, and Elizabeth Larison.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Begin? Do we push the button?

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Yes.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Hi. Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the significant impact that federal funding has had on the arts community. My name is Lynn Nottage. I am a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, I'm a professor at Columbia University School of Arts, and I'm also one of the initiators of Fall of Freedom, which is a nationwide movement of artists united in opposition to censorship and authoritarianism. I also have been personally impacted by censorship, having been a contributing writer to the groundbreaking 1619, as

well as Well-Read Black Girl. I also recently had a show that was slated for the Kennedy Center next year, which was withdrawn so I speak from a place of passion and urgency. In February, the National Endowment for the Arts implemented two executive orders issued by Donald Trump. These new guidelines sought to ban funding for arts organizations that engaged in so-called illegal DEI programs, as well as projects which promote so-called gender ideology. Then in May, the NEA canceled a grant cycle at the request of DOJ. Even though the withdrawn grants impacted only one grant cycle and the revised guidelines were either struck down by the courts or had only dubious legal force to begin with, the damage was profound. Many artists and institutions now perceive the NEA as fatally compromised. In other words, the message being sent by the Administration has been received. Uncertainty surrounds the future enforcement of new guidelines and the potential consequences of not following this remains unclear. As a result, many artists like myself and organizations are choosing not to apply for NEA funding, and those who are self-censoring often are avoiding so because they have projects that feature

transgender artists or focus on racial justice.

Because arts organizations are uncertain about the

potential repercussions of violating Trump's

disgraceful and damaging executive orders, the

chilling effect is real and immediate. Now fear is

shaping how critical decisions are being made. I urge

the City Council to work with the Department of

Cultural Affairs to establish an emergency funding

mechanism that would specifically support artistic

projects that have local funding due to federal cuts

or have been discouraged by executive orders,

especially those that center marginalized voices and

those that are promoting diversity, equity, and

inclusion. Local and vocal support from the City can

serve as a powerful rebuttal to the federal efforts

at suppression. By clearly communicating that New

York City stands behind every artist's voice, the

City would send a strong message of solidarity to

both the artists and institutions that champion them.

And I just want to end by saying art matters and that

courage is contagious so thank you.

ANNIE DORSEN: Hello, and good morning to

Chair Bottcher and Committee Members. My name is

Annie Dorsen. I'm a theater artist, I'm a Guest

Curator of Art and Technology at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and I'm one of the organizers of Fall of Freedom. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about some of the non-economic effects of Trump Administration actions. Legal scholar Jonathan Penny has demonstrated that chilling effects are strongly influenced by social norms. Faced with uncertainty about possible legal or financial consequences for their speech, people quote, seek guidance in the norms of others, following others in how they speak or act in the circumstances. Penny notes that what he calls these conforming effects can be even more salient than traditional chill. To avoid risk, institutions are postponing authors talks, pausing long-standing program, taking their diversity statements off their website. Institutional leaders take their cues from each other and from nervous board members and try to stay out of the fray. It's not exactly anticipatory compliance. It's more like anticipatory silence. Non-citizen artists face an even more precarious landscape. Visa uncertainties, potential immigration enforcement, and unpredictable work permit requirements lead many institutions to simply opt out, quietly cutting back on programming

non-citizen or international artists. A trans artist from Brazil, a Palestinian filmmaker on an academic exchange, or a performance artist from Nigeria might find themselves effectively erased from cultural discourse, not through explicit prohibition, but through administrative risk aversion. The Council and this Committee in particular can act. Let artists and arts institutions know that the City has our back, that art matters, even art or especially art by disfavored groups or art that speaks uncomfortable truths. Because chilling and conforming effects are socially transmitted, making clear and explicit statements of public support can be an effective counter. As the Fall of Freedom slogan goes, and which Lynn also mentioned, courage is contagious. Thank you.

ELIZABETH LARISON: Hello, and thank you for the invitation to be here. My name is Elizabeth Larison. I work within the National Coalition Against Censorship. There, I direct the Arts and Culture Advocacy Program, which is the only project of its kind solely dedicated to defending artistic freedom within the United States, which we have done for the past 25 years. NCAC receives direct complaints from

censored artists and curators. We also work with cultural institutions to understand the pressures of censorship and analyze current trends in legal developments. As we've heard, this year the federal government has used every tool it has to impose its preferred ideology on our cultural landscape, and we have witnessed a wave of unprecedented institutional self-censorship in response to evident political pressures. Cultural institutions are faced with balancing their economic viability with their roles and their responsibilities as keepers of culture. Some are canceling projects that they will fear will draw scrutiny. Many adjust language and grant proposals and marketing materials in hopes of flying under the radar as they continue their programs as intended, while others are declining to apply for municipal, state, and federal funding, even declining to accept their awards if given. Many are forced to seek alternative fiscal models outside the grip of government surveillance and oversight. In this time of crisis, those opposed to the propagandizing of the cultural sector can do the following. At the funding level, public arts funding should be distributed with as few strings attached as possible. Funders, both

private and public, should adopt internal processes of grant review that are viewpoint neutral, and I was happy to hear that that seems to be in place at DCLA.

At the institutional level, no single individual should have veto power over a slated cultural project. Cultural institutions should be encouraged to adopt policies in support of artistic freedom, and they should be encouraged to issue a permanent disclaimer that no artwork, nor any presenting artist, represents the views of the institution.

New York City can help blunt this moment of federal censorship and propaganda by robustly funding the arts with minimal reporting requirements, and can be a model for how governments can nurture a truly independent and free cultural sector. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you so much.

Ms. Nottage, you had indicated that you had a Kennedy Center piece scheduled.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Can you tell us a little bit about that piece?

LYNN NOTTAGE: I can tell you a little bit about it, since it wasn't formally announced, but it was a musical that I'm writing with John Legend, and it was slated to go in the Kennedy Center in January, and after everything that happened, we decided that we were going to withdraw the piece.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's a shame, a real shame. By the way, I love the Sound of Music. I have nothing against the Sound of Music. I did the Sound of Music tour in Salzburg. The country should be seeing that piece.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Well, I hope that the country will see this piece. It just has put us back one year, which is unfortunate, but I'm not alone. I think that a number of really great pieces that were slated to go into the Kennedy Center and other spaces are not going to happen this year and perhaps next year.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Good. So you'll have another venue.

LYNN NOTTAGE: We do.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Oh, good. Well, we want to see it.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Here in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Okay. So when you're ready, you let us know, and we'll spread the word about that. We'll all go together.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Yeah, please.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: We'll do a Council field trip to go see it.

So you had mentioned, Ms. Nottage, you had mentioned the idea of an emergency fund for the City. Have you heard of other cities doing this? It's a really interesting idea.

LYNN NOTTAGE: I don't know. Have you heard of other?

ANNIE DORSEN: No. I think we were discussing our testimony beforehand. So, what we had in mind was something kind of analogous to what the City did during COVID, is a short-term sort of directed funding mechanism to speak to a particular crisis. And I think that would maybe assuage some of the concerns that Commissioner Laurie Cumbo had about what precedent would be set by incorporating new considerations into grant giving.

LYNN NOTTAGE: Yeah. And if I may add is that cities don't necessarily have this, but a lot of organizations like the Writers Guild and Dramatists

Guild have emergency funds for artists who either
lose grants or are in jeopardy.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: It's a great idea.

Ms. Dorsen, there's actions happening to
push back about what's happening and you're planning
nationwide actions to push back. Could you tell us a
little bit about this and how the public can take
part in those?

ANNIE DORSEN: Well, I'm so glad you asked
because Fall of Freedom is a nationwide effort to
create a wave of creative resistance to
authoritarianism and to censorship in the arts. So,
there is no barrier to entry. In fact, it's coming up
tomorrow and Saturday will be the two days of this
initiative, and our intention was to make it open to
all. No gesture is too big. No gesture is too small.
It's interdisciplinary. It is for high school
students who want to read a play. It is also for John
Legend, speaking of whom, and other sort of boldface
names and major artists who are participating.
Everything in between. I believe as of this morning
or yesterday, we were up to 700 cultural events
taking place in over 42 or 43 states so it's really
caught on, and I think it's testament not only to the

extraordinary efforts of Lynn and Dred Scott and
Laura Rykovich and many of the other New York-based
artists who have been spearheading this, but also to
the need that artists feel to take action and to
stand up for creative expression.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's great. Well,
we'd love to spread the word about that.

ANNIE DORSEN: Please. Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: I think my
Colleagues and I would be happy to spread the word,
share social media assets, and put things in our
newsletter.

ANNIE DORSEN: We've got lots of them. And
there's over 60 events in New York in the five
boroughs over the next two days so, if you're free
tomorrow or Saturday, you will find many treats and
delights.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: That's great.
Wonderful.

Ms. Larison, you're working on this
nationwide. Are there other things that other
municipalities or states are doing that you think we
could be doing here in New York?

ELIZABETH LARISON: Thank you for the question. I'm not immediately aware of specific things that other municipalities are doing, but I can tell you about an initiative that we launched at the National Coalition Against Censorship and partner with the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, which is based out of the New School here in New York. It's an initiative called Cultural Freedom Demands Collective Courage. It started with a meeting that we had with cultural leaders in New York this May at a time when we were trying to understand what different institutions were seeing, how they were responding, and what sort of needs were evident at that time, and there was a resounding desire for a mechanism through which not just individuals working across the cultural sector, but institutions as well could unite together in resistance to the evident policies and desires coming from the federal government. So, in August, we launched this campaign, which we shorthand called Collective Courage. It is a statement of values for art and culture. It's about recognizing that free culture is part of a democracy, and the moment that we start to limit that, we limit our own freedom to access and discover different things

through the arts. To this date, we have over 275 cultural institutions from across the United States that have signed on to this statement of values, as well as over 880 individuals working across the cultural sector, from artists to performers, curators, board members, and patrons. So, I think it's important to, much with Fall of Freedom, look for these modes of resistance that are emerging throughout the cultural sector. I know that we have other colleagues as well in the room from another great initiative called First Amendment Cultural Team, but there are many different movements across the field which are worth paying attention to right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Wonderful. I want to open it up to any of my Colleagues who might want to ask questions.

We've been joined by Council Member Farrah Louis as well.

Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I, obviously, just like Council Member Bottcher, have many, many Upper West Side cultural institutions, and I am finding a silver lining in

1 some strange way, which is screw you, Kennedy Center,
2 because we are getting the benefits. Really, screw
3 you. So, I can tell you, and I don't know if this is
4 worth mentioning in a positive way, which is so many
5 people have left, moved to New York, and of course
6 you talked about the change in venue for your
7 production. Others are the same. So, I just think we
8 should say that, like screw you. New York is
9 benefiting, and I think the New Yorkers should know,
10 however you want to make that clear. There's been no
11 study of it, I don't think, but it's really our
12 benefit. And so I just want to say, make it clear
13 that I have seen this over and over again at
14 different institutions, and you can do your lousy
15 work in Washington, but we are the beneficiaries. I
16 just want to make that very clear.

18 CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: I want to thank you
19 for everything you're doing. The Trump Administration
20 is calling your art un-American. They're suggesting
21 that you are un-American, but the truth is that what
22 you're doing, by speaking truth to power, by
23 celebrating the First Amendment, and by expressing
24 art, and pushing the boundaries of artistic
25 expression, that's the most American thing there is,

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and we are here to stand with you every step of the
way and fight alongside you, but thank you for your
testimony today.

The next panel, Frances Bates, Kim
O'Neal, Jennine Hunt, Angela Guyton-Cyril, Monique
Chandler-Waterman, Shevonne Catherine-Bascom.

You may begin.

FRANCES BATES: Hello. Good morning. Good
morning, Council Member Bottcher, and good morning,
Council Members. First, let me just say this. I love
working with your team. I am behind LinkNYC providing
your messaging and your community outreach in the
District so I just want to let you know who the face
is behind all of that.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: There is no poop
fairy.

FRANCES BATES: I love the poop fairy.

Okay. My name is Frances Bates. I have
the honor of being the Basileus, which is the
president of the Eta Nu Sigma chapter of the Brooklyn
Alumni Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated. I was
inducted into the organization in spring of 1991 as
an undergraduate member at Stony Brook University
under Lambda Tau chapter. Sigma Gamma Rho was founded

on November 12, 1922, by seven visionary educators who believed deeply in service, sisterhood, and the transformative power of education. Today, more than a century later, our Brooklyn chapter continues to advocate that legacy, meeting the evolving needs of our communities with innovation, compassion, and unwavering commitment. As Basileus, I have witnessed tremendous growth, not only in our chapter, but in myself as a leader. This role has strengthened my commitment to strategic service, sharpened my ability to mobilize resources, and deepened my understanding of the unique needs of our Brooklyn communities. It has been an honor to grow alongside a sisterhood of powerful, dedicated women who serve with purpose and excellence. In Brooklyn Eta Nu Sigmas, we service a wide and diverse audience, women, families, youth, seniors, immigrant communities, and those who are often overlooked or underserved. We do this through impactful programming, such as youth mentoring through our Rhoer Club and Rosebud Club, empowering young girls with leadership, academic support, and personal development; Project Cradle Care, offering maternal health education and resources to expectant and new mothers, with a special focus on reducing

Black maternal health disparities; Swim 1922, promoting water safety and addressing disparities in swim access and drowning prevention; Economic Empowerment Workshops, voter education initiatives, school partnerships, and year-round service projects supporting families across Brooklyn.

Through these efforts, our chapter touches thousands of lives each year. We show up where we are needed, whether in schools, shelters, community centers, health fairs, or neighborhood events, ensuring that our motto, greater service, greater progress, is more than words. It's our daily mission. Recognizing November 12th as Sigma Gamma Rho Day honors our founders and acknowledges the deep impact that generations of Sorors continue to make across New York City. Thank you for your time, and I respectfully urge the Council to adopt Resolution 1063. Thank you.

KIM O'NEAL: Good afternoon, Chair Bottcher, Council Members, and Staff. My name is Kim O'Neal, and I'm a member of the Executive Board of the Brooklyn Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated. I became a member in the fall of 1991 through the Mu Kappa Chapter at Brown

University in Providence, Rhode Island, and Sigma Gamma Rho was founded in 1922 by seven educators committed to serving women, children, and communities. Our sorority has had an active chapter in New York City since the 1930s. In Brooklyn, we support the community through programs like Swim 1922, partnering with the Madison Boys and Girls Club and the Bedford YMCA to bring life-saving swim education to underserved neighborhoods. Our chapter has hosted our Youth Symposium for over 20 years at public schools in East Flatbush, Crown Heights, and Canarsie, providing students with workshops that strengthen academic, social, and emotional development. Additional service includes conducting maternal health programs in Brownsville and partnering with Downstate's NICU to support families and newborns in critical need. We also consistently support the Coalition for the Homeless, helping meet immediate needs for vulnerable families, and we collaborate with New York State Senators, Assembly Members, and City Council Members to expand resources and support for families across the borough.

Sigma Gamma Rho has strengthened my leadership skills, and I proudly served as the

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immediate past president of the Brooklyn Alumnae
Chapter. Our work aligns directly with New York
City's equity goals, expanding educational access,
improving health outcomes, and strengthening support
networks for children and families. I respectfully
urge the Council to adopt Resolution 1063,
recognizing November 12th as Sigma Gamma Rho Day.
Thank you.

SHEVONNE CATHERINE-BASCOM: Good morning,
Chair Bottcher, Council Members, and Staff. My name
is Shevonne Catherine-Bascom, and I'm a member of the
new Beta Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority
Incorporated, where I serve as First Anti-Basileus. I
was inducted spring 2005 through the Kappa Sigma
Chapter, which I'm proud to say is the oldest
continually active chapter in New York City. Sigma
Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated was founded November
12th, 1922, by seven educators committed to serving
women, children, and their communities. For more than
100 years, our sorority has lived out that mission
across New York City. In Queens, where I'm a proud
resident, our Sorers support the community through
many programs. Three notable programs are annual Swim
1922 workshop, where we offer free swim classes to

children and adults, and also give out scholarships so that they can continue that swim education. We also address food insecurity through our Nourishing Our Neighbors program, where we fill local community refrigerators, and where we just packed boxes for those in need for Thanksgiving, and sent a barrel to Jamaica to help them with their most recent disaster. We also encourage the youth to learn about STEM and entrepreneurship in a fun way through our Youth Business Pitch, where we give seed money to those youth, and also just through our youth symposium with fun programs. Sigma Gamma Rho has allowed me to serve the community alongside phenomenal women that you see here today speaking, who are dedicated to making the world greater, and I'm proud to represent the sisterhood today.

Recognizing November 12th as Sigma Gamma Rho honors our founders, acknowledges the positive impact of our members make in the neighborhoods across the city. I thank you for your time, and I respectfully urge the Council to adopt Resolution 1063.

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ANGELA GUYTON-CYRIL: Good day, Chair
Bottcher, Council Members, Staff... oh, you can't hear
me? Oh, sorry. Any other time, I'm pretty loud.

Good day, Chair Bottcher, Council
Members, Staff, and the ladies of Sigma Gamma Rho
behind me. My name is Angela Guyton-Cyril. I am a
proud member of Kappa Sigma chapter of Sigma Gamma
Rho Sorority Incorporated. I was inducted in spring
of '23 through Kappa Sigma, which as you've already
heard is the oldest here in New York. Sigma Gamma Rho
was founded on November 12, 1922 by seven educators
committed to serving women, children, and communities
for more than 100 years. Our sorority has lived out
that mission across New York City and other states.
In Harlem, where we're located, our Sorers support
communities through Cradle Care, which is one of our
essential programs that support maternal and infant
health outcomes. Sigma Gamma Rho has collaborated
with March of Dimes, which is just one of many
organizations, and we have raised over 15 million
dollars nationally - it kind of hits home a little
bit for me, so please forgive me - million dollars on
the national level. Our founders believed that our
children were our future, not just Whitney Houston.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Took my joke before
I could say it.

ANGELA GUYTON-CYRIL: Sigma Gamma Rho has
personally strengthened me through sisterhood. When I
had a major death last year, they came to me and they
gathered around me and made me believe again in
sisterhood. These young ladies that sat here at this
table and behind me gathered around me. They were
there and never left my side, and they definitely
made me believe once again I am my sister's keeper.
They lived up to that, and I am honored to sit here
today and tell you and represent this sisterhood
today and forever and to ask you to recognize
November 12th as Sigma Gamma Rho Day to honor our
founders and acknowledge the positive impact on our
members and the impact that they make on our
neighborhood across this city and throughout these
states and throughout this country. And as a veteran,
I'm also asking you that. Thank you for your time,
and I respectfully urge you, the Council, to adopt
Resolution 1063 today, please. I'm sorry.

JENNINE HUNT: Can you hear me? A hard act
to follow. I know. I was going to say I was around

when Sara Guyton became a member, so to hear her
speak is very touching.

My name is Jennine Hunt, and I am
actually a member of one of the newest chapters of
Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated in Manhattan.
We are the Xi Omicron Sigma Chapter. We represent
Midtown and Downtown Manhattan. I became a member of
Sigma Gamma Rho in the winter of 1999, a very long
time ago, in the Phi Sigma Chapter in Washington,
D.C. I was going to grad school, so I became a member
then. We became, you know, Sigma Gamma Rho was
founded on November 12th, 1922 by Seven Educated. We
were committed to serving women, children, and our
communities. For more than 100 years, our sorority
has lived out that mission across New York City. In
Manhattan, our Sorers support the community through
partnerships with Real Dads Network and Mount Sinai
Hospital, where we donated 75 turkeys to needy
families within the community, in addition to health
screening and nutritional education. Sigma Gamma Rho
has personally created a network for me and my
daughter with the New York City community, and I am
proud to represent the sisterhood today.

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Recognizing November 12th as Sigma Gamma
Rho Day honors our founders and acknowledges the
positive impact our members make in neighborhoods
across the city. I thank you for your time, and I
respectfully urge the Council to adopt Resolution
1063, recognizing November 12th as Sigma Gamma Rho
Day. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Thank
you, Chair Bottcher. Nice seeing you again, and thank
you to all the Council Members and the Staff. I'm
proud to, like, have y'all as friends and colleagues.
My name is Assemblymember Monique Chandler-Waterman.
I proudly represent Assembly District 58, which is in
Brooklyn, East Flatbush, parts of Canarsie,
Brownsville, and Crown Heights. I am the first woman,
first Black woman, first Black Caribbean woman here
from Barbados and Jamaica to represent that area. So,
I'm also newly inducted as a member at a new Sigma
Chapter, Brooklyn Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated, and I have joined this
sisterhood in spring of 2025, along with all my
sisters, especially my line sister over there,
Council Member Rita Joseph. We cause a lot of trouble
in Brooklyn, don't worry. And all my Sorers.

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Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated was founded on November 12th, 1922, as you heard from all my Sorers here by seven educators like myself and my Sorer, Rita Joseph, as well, and is deeply in the power of service, scholarship, and community uplift. For more than a century, our Sorority has remained committed to improving the lives of women, children, and families, work that continues every day here in New York City. In Brooklyn, our Sorers serve the community through our youth program, dealing with food insecurities, anti-violence initiatives, maternal health initiatives, community partnership, youth mentoring, and school program, voter education, voter drives, as well as economic empowerment and more. This work has grown our principle of greater service, greater progress, a value that aligns closely with my work as a legislator. Although I'm newly inducted, Sigma Gamma Rho has already strengthened my leadership, my patience, expanded my service platform, connecting me to a powerful network of servant leaders, and keeping me grounded in sisterhood and love, and I just want to say thank you to all of you. Even when you think you can't grow anymore, thank you for always standing the gap,

especially at a time like this. So with all that's
being said in the Assembly, when we hear the bell, we
have to stop, so thank you for your gracious time.

So, we want to recognize November 12th as
Sigma Gamma Rho Day, honor our founders, and
acknowledge the meaningful contribution our members
continue to make in every corner of the city, from
our schools and our neighborhood to legislative
halls. Thank you for your time and consideration.
Respectfully, I urge you to the Council to adopt
Resolution 1063. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you so much.

Any questions from my Colleagues?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: No, I don't have
any questions. They were great. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you so much.
Really appreciate it. Thank you for all you do.
Extraordinary. Thank you.

We're now going to hear from Francine
Garber-Cohen, Briana Dixon, George Emilio Sanchez, DJ
McDonald, Lucy Sexton, and Lisa Gold.

Who would like to go first?

LUCY SEXTON: Thank you, Chair Bottcher
and the Committee for holding this urgent hearing.

One thing I will say for authoritarians, they make the case very clearly that art is powerful, and that's why they seek to shut it down and control it. You may remember that early on they canceled a kid's show at the Kennedy Center called Fin, I think. It was about a shark who liked to wear sparkles, and you were tempted to think, oh that's really silly. It's not. They know that it has the power to change kids' minds and lives. It does and it should. As the Chair referenced, federal censorship has already reached New York City. As groups grapple with the NEA requirements, they can either take the money and risk legal action for their programming, or turn down the grant, which also results in a silencing of that work, because defunding is another form of censorship. If you want to know the numbers, the Independent Budget Office reports that in '24, New York City cultural groups received 38 million dollars from NEA, NEH, and IMLS. All of that funding is gone or at risk. And make no mistake, that defunding is targeted. The Administration intends to erase the heritage and culture of Black, Indigenous, and immigrant Americans. And it's not just federal funding. A local cultural group was recently told by

a private foundation that their funding would be cut if any of their employees expressed political viewpoints the foundation disagreed with. Censorship from the top trickles down and the chilling effect is widespread. On yesterday's Culture at Three call, Hungarian dance artists joined us from Budapest to talk about their oppression and depression under the regime of Viktor Orban, an autocrat much admired by our President. They said that cultural organizations have been systematically defunded to the point where there are few performances and many thousands of artists have fled the country. We must act now to prevent this from happening in New York City. So our asks for the Council are be loud in your support of the rights of artists and cultural groups and all New Yorkers to the free expression of ideas. Be strong in your fiscal support of New York City's culture field with a particular focus on increased support for the Black, Brown, and trans cultural groups under attack. Stand with the First Amendment Culture Team on December 15th, which is the anniversary of the signing of the Bill of Rights and its First Amendment. That was actually drafted a few blocks away at Federal Hall, and we will be doing a public

event in which we invite you to as we say together
that the First Amendment was born in our city and we
won't let it die here. Thank you for hearing my
testimony.

Go Fran.

FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: My name is Fran
Garber-Cohen, and I'm the President of the Regina
Opera Company, which you can see on my shirt that I
wear proudly. We are located in Sunset Park, which is
an underserved community, although I live in the
Kensington section. I just wanted to summarize my
personal opposition to censorship. It undermines the
democratic principles. A free society should not
tolerate a censor dictating what is accessible or
not. We were once denied funding recently because we
were thinking of putting on Puccini's Turandot, which
was called misogynistic and unacceptable, although
it's put on by the Metropolitan Opera all the time.
This is Puccini. This is Turandot. Censorship
diminishes the public trust resulting in the loss of
support and trust for organizations such as
libraries, museums, and even of the press. Censorship
stifles artistic expressions. It pressures artists
and companies like Regina Opera to create sanitized

work that avoids controversial topics, hinders our ability to challenge viewers and address important social issues. So, censorship prevents the arts from serving as a means to discuss sensitive subjects such as sexual violence or international political conflicts. It creates a dangerous precedent.

Restricting funding or removing art based on politics sets a precedent that can be applied at the whims of politicians, for instance, the National Endowment for the Arts. Artistic freedom, however, promotes free expression and debate and independent thought, which is important for a healthy society. It also allows for representation and understanding. It ensures that diverse viewpoints are represented, which is essential for audiences, especially children, the underserved and unrepresented people who need to see themselves reflected in arts and culture. Thank you.

BRIANA DIXON: Good morning to the Council. I am Briana Dixon. I go by Aridy Nox, and I'm Co-Executive Director of an organization entitled Musical Theatre Factory, which is empowering musical storytellers of marginalized experience to get their stories out there and to be uplifted within our beautiful city, primarily in New York City.

I'm here today to mostly recenter that this conversation about censorship goes to the most base levels of protecting the most marginalized of us in this country and in this city. Our artists are doing cultural artistic work specifically to liberate themselves and their communities to protect their lives. I want to say that the federal government is doing a very specific type of censorship. They're doing the kind of censorship that broadcasts the messages that non-binary people, people of color, people who are interested in justice and freedom do not belong in this country, even though our country is built on the ideals of freedom, on the ideals of difference, on the ideals of strength through difference. So, the censorship does not only take away our right to artistic freedom, but it also limits the imaginations of our entire country to be inclusive of a variety of people. We don't allow artists of any experiences, but especially artists of marginalized experience to create freely, we limit the kind of world that we can live in, the kind of world that we can imagine. So, I urge the Council to support these artists, to support us in our deep time of need, not only so we can do our work as artistic

laborers, but so that we can continue to create a world that is freer and that is more inclusive. Thank you.

GEORGE EMILIO SANCHEZ: Good morning and thank you, Chair Bottcher and Committee and everybody who's here, and thank you all for your service. As an artist, as a person of color, and as a founding member of the First Amendment Culture Team, censorship is a key adversary to the core principles and rights afforded to all of us by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and these foundational rights that are right here in this pocketbook, I can hand them out later if you want, these foundational rights, freedom of religion, of the press, of speech, the right to assemble peaceably, and the freedom to dissent are so important to our people, to everyone. To paraphrase Frederick Douglass, liberty is meaningless where the right to utter one's thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist. That, of all rights, is the dread of tyrants, which we are witnessing now. Equally clear is the right to hear. To suppress free speech violates the rights of the listeners as those of the speakers. Why do I care so passionately about the

First Amendment as a person of color, as an indigenous member of this country? Why? Because one of the aspirational values of the U.S. Constitution is it allows every one of us the evolution of consciousness that permits us to redefine who is included when we pronounce we the people, and the First Amendment makes that evolution of consciousness possible. The Department of Cultural Affairs is the main artery to the existence and life of arts and culture in New York City, and it is paramount that our City Council keep their eyes on the prize of the First Amendment. This city has witnessed the claws of censorship where it's disdainful head in our institutions in the recent past. From Mayor Giuliani threatening to withdraw City funding to the Brooklyn Museum for exhibiting Chris Ofili's The Holy Virgin Mary in 1999, to the Whitney Museum suspending its independent study program when confronted over censorship of a pro-Palestinian event earlier this year. When the debates get hot, when the atmosphere gets toxic and divisive, the representatives of this Council need to stand up, be strong, and embrace the fact that all points of view and expressions of free speech must be visible, present in our public spaces

and institutions. It is paramount that the City Council clarify boycotts are protective speech. Institutions should not be penalized for accepting or rejecting calls to boycott. The City Council must protect the rights of workers to hold political positions outside of the workplace and cannot be fired. And most importantly, the attacks on our First Amendment rights most deeply impacts who? Our communities of color, indigenous folk, and the LGBTQ members of our city. Because why? Our collective stories are essential to our collective identity as a free nation.

LISA GOLD: Okay. Thank you, Chair Bottcher and Council Member Joseph, Council Member Brewer. Thank you for holding this hearing today. My name is Lisa Gold, and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance. We're a 43-year-old non-profit that supports the Asian American community who represent 18 percent of New York City's population, but have yet to be mentioned here today. So as my colleagues have said, you know, the withdrawal of federal funding has had a huge impact on the community. And it is, I'm actually going to go off script here, because the Asian American, the

BIPOC community at large is already disproportionately funded, right, and so with the lack of these funds, it creates a domino effect, right, so they're pulling funds, so the wealthier, more established organizations that can hire grant writers are going to foundations and other organizations, the State, and that is drawing important funds away from the small BIPOC organizations that rely disproportionately on government support. So, you know, we're worried about funding, we're worried about our community. I've had constituents reach out to us and ask us to change how they are represented on our website. We spend an inordinate amount of time, like, do we even announce people's names or organizations that we fund for fear of retribution? It shouldn't be this way. So I actually have one solution that came to mind today. So there is a fund, the Communities of Color Non-profit Stabilization Fund, which is an initiative of the Council. There are categories there. Why not add a legal services category there so organizations like ours can get funding and get support without creating a whole new mechanism? So that's just one idea that I have. Sorry. So thank you all. I just want you to

say, you know, stand up for us. The word equity is in our mission statement. We have a target on our back. So I just need to know that I have the Council's support. Thank you.

DJ MCDONALD: Good morning, Council Chair Bottcher, other Council Members, and Members and Staff. My name is DJ McDonald. I represent the Dance Parade in New York, which will be celebrating its 20th parade on May 16th this year. We'll have a big display in Times Square on November 27th. The parade was formed in response to a ruling by a New York State Supreme Court Justice that social dancing would not be protected under the First Amendment because it did not constitute an expressive art. The result is that we put 10,000 dancers in the street, every year, to say you don't think this is expressive, we'll show you expressive. Arts and culture in this society are as vital as science and medicine in forming the basis for creativity. New York City, I'm proud to be not a native New Yorker but from the age of one, I have grown up in an atmosphere in which creativity was all around me, and I watch it happen. This is the birthplace of hip-hop. This has become the first city of jazz in the United States. Not the primary city,

but the first city. There are so many things that I see every day in working with our communities through our community engagement program, where I'm watching children develop skills that will be of use to them in every area in which they endeavor to advance in their adult lives. I have some specific asks for the Council, but how can you help us? We appreciate what the City does for us every year in terms of funding, in terms of support. We could, and these are suggestions, require cultural institutions receiving City funding to publicly report any instances of content restrictions, program cancellations, artist disinvestments based on political pressure. We could establish a censorship incident database maintained by the Department of Cultural Affairs to track patterns. We could create firewalls between donor board influence and artistic programming decisions, similar to editorial independence standards in journalism. Mandate that institutions receiving City funding have written policies protecting curatorial artistic independence. We've already talked about establishing an emergency fund and a legal defense fund. Thank you very much for listening to us today, and we look forward to your continued support.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you. As with the events happening this weekend, I'd love for my Colleagues and I just to be able to share opportunities for people to support your work, public and private events that people can be part of.

LUCY SEXTON: I sent an email to your office today inviting you, and I invite all of you for our December 13th event on the anniversary of the Bill of Rights. I will be in touch with all of you. It would be great to get some attention around it, that we were the birthplace of the First Amendment. We should protect it.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you. Thank you all.

Next panel is Nancy Vedrine, Mimi Pierre Johnson, Mahadya Mary, Harry Abil Homme.

Okay. Thank you.

MAHADYA MARY: Good morning, and thank you, Chair Bottcher, for the invitation here. I would like to say good morning to the honorable Council Members, community leaders, and esteemed guests that are also here today. My name is Mahadya Mary, and I am the Co-Founder of the Haitian Day Parade, Inc., who our mission and vision is to educate, preserve,

and teach the Haitian heritage and culture to the world. I am also the great niece of Webert Sicot, one of the founding fathers of Konpa Music, so this is extremely special to me. Today, I stand in strong support of Resolution 987, declaring July 26th as Haitian Konpa Day, and a day to honor the greatest cultural gifts to the world of Konpa Music. By officially recognizing Haitian Konpa Day, this council not only honors a musical legacy but also affirms the value of the Haitian community. On behalf of myself, my family, and the community, we thank you and respectfully urge you to adopt Resolution 987.

(SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) Thank you.

HARRY ABIL HOMME: Good afternoon, and thank you all for being here today. I want to extend a special salute to the officials in the room, especially my Council Member, Ms. Rita Joseph, for her work and her dedication in our community. My name is Harry Abil Homme. I am a visual artist, and as a Haitian, I've been part of the Haiti Cultural Exchange, and I co-work with the Haitian Parade Heritage, Inc., here in Brooklyn. We work a lot in the community, especially to culture, music, literature, dance, and poetry. I stand here deeply

grateful to be part of this historic moment. Konpa is more than music. It's our identity. Through Konpa, we express our grief, our love, our compassion, and pass wisdom to the next generations. Since Nemours Jean-Baptiste and Webert Sicot created this genre, it has continued to evolve across generations, carrying our culture forward with pride. Today, as Konpa is recognized around the world, I stand before you all to honor this legacy and to advocate for the Resolution 987 that July 26th to be officially celebrated as Haitian Konpa Day. In New York, our culture deserves to be seen, recognized, and preserved. Thank you.

MIMI PIERRE JOHNSON: Good afternoon. My name is Mimi Pierre Johnson, and I am privileged to be before the City Council because I live in Elmont, Long Island, and I've often been very jealous of how the Haitian community is so embraced in Brooklyn, and I've always looked from afar. But sitting here with these wonderful people at this table, I am overwhelmed because as a community organizer on Long Island, it is very hard to look at our Haitian folks and know what they're going through, not just here in New York, abroad, but also in Haiti. So we are right

now celebrating because the greatest battle that was done on November 18, 1803, on that same day in 2025, our Haitian soccer team won to be qualified for next year. And so while there were protests in Haiti about the unrest, music, our music, was in the streets celebrating these men that won. And now we have a Miss Universe strutting her pride, possibly going to win. And then you have these youth that are now on their platform, created an AI that could actually help them in Haiti. So there's a momentum of pride for a nation that has always been battling so much. And City Council of New York passing this Resolution 987 is just the cherry on top for the Haitian community that has been battling for so many years. And this would be when I look the youth that are running away from Haiti to be here, when they will look on that calendar, because a Body voted for them to have Konpa Day. I can't imagine how they will feel. So I thank you for the opportunity to come here and share, and I hope that you will pass this resolution for the Haitian community. Thank you.

NANCY VEDRINE: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Speaker, Council Members, and esteemed guests. My name is Nancy Vedrine. I'm here on behalf

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of Haitian Day Parade, Inc., a cultural organization dedicated to celebrating the heritage, resilience, and contributions of the Haitian people throughout New York City. Today, we stand in strong support of Resolution 987 declaring July 26 as Haitian Konpa Day, a day to honor one of Haiti's greatest cultural gifts, Konpa music. Born in 1955, from the genius of Nemours Jean-Baptiste and Webert Sicot, Konpa has been the heartbeat of Haitian celebrations for seven decades. It is more than rhythm and melody. It is a language of unity, love, and national pride. From Port-au-Prince, the streets of NYC, and around the world, Konpa connects generations of Haitian people and the music of the Caribbean. New York City is home of the largest Haitian diaspora in the United States. We are nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, artists, and public servants, and wherever we gather, rest assured, Konpa is there. It is the soundtrack to our lives. By officially recognizing Haitian Konpa Day, this Council not only honors a musical legacy, but it also affirms the value of the Haitian community's contributions to New York's cultural fabric. It says that the rhythm of Haiti is part of the rhythm of the city. On behalf of Haitian Day Parade, Inc., we urge

you to vote in favor of Resolution 987 to make July 26th a day that celebrates Haitian music, dance, and pride, not just for Haitians, but for all New Yorkers. Thank you. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MAHADYA MARY: Chair Bottcher, can I say something? I would be remiss if I didn't say. I don't know if I could do this, but could I also say something in regards to the Sigma Gamma Rho?

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Yeah.

MAHADYA MARY: I am the mother of another D... my son is Omega Psi Phi. That's another organization of the D9 sorority fraternity kind of thing. Their Founders Day is also in November. I'm just kind of learning about all this stuff there, just learning about it. I just thought that day, he comes home, he hops around, he dances. I think he's in parties and stuff like that. Last week, I was invited to a breakfast where he and his brothers was talking about so much things that they do in the community and all over the world, because they're in different countries. I sit here today, I read it, and I know Council Member Rita Joseph is a rock star and all that she does, but then to hear about what the organization is doing and all these beautiful women

and 15 million dollars raised and everything else, I would be remiss not to urge you to adopt the Resolution 1063. I have to look into this more, because it's like, you know, I would be remiss if I didn't say that.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: I see another resolution coming.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You see it coming, right? Chair Bottcher is a great dancer, so when we celebrate Konpa Day, we're going to invite you to come do your two-step with us.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Great. Yes. I'll take it.

Merci beaucoup.

Calling James Gerazi, James Michael Maloney, Eric Breen, James Kaplan, Dan McSweeney, and David Di Gregorio.

We do need that in New York City. Where would it go? Oh, we're going to hear about that in a moment.

You can begin. Just push the button.

JAMES KAPLAN: Okay. My name is James Kaplan. I want to thank Councilman Bottcher and particularly Councilwoman Brewer for sponsoring this

legislation. I'm speaking here as a Co-Founder and
Director of the New York Coalition to Save the SS
United States in support of Councilwoman Brewer's
Resolution 649, urging the federal government to save
the SS United States from imminent destruction off
the coast of Florida. I personally am also the
Chairman of the Board of Lower Manhattan Historical
Association, which has undertaken a number of civic
activities, including on this Saturday, Evacuation
Day, the construction of the Mill Street Synagogue,
the Lower Manhattan July 4th Parade, and the naming
of Francis Perkins Way on West 46th Street. As I see
it, saving the SS United States is the most important
historic economic development project on which I have
worked in the 10 years since the LMHA was founded and
one of the most important economic development
potential projects facing the City of New York,
although I've emphasized the word potential. The SS
United States, whose home port was New York City, was
the largest and most important ocean liner ever built
in the United States and to this day holds the
international speed record for sea voyages from New
York to London. It was considered, when it was built
in the 1950s, the pride of American engineering for

speed, luxury, and safety. After 28 years in Philadelphia, it was in February of this year moved by its owner, which is now Okaloosa County, to a shipyard in Mobile, Alabama, to be prepared for its final destination as an artificial reef off the coast of Florida. This, as I see it, is a great disaster to all Americans and particularly to the City of New York. It is our belief that if renovated and returned to the City of New York, it would be a fantastic tourist attraction (INAUDIBLE) above water. We note that ocean liners such as the Queen Mary in Los Angeles and the Rotterdam in the Netherlands have successfully been repurchased with great benefit to the communities where they are docked. We believe that if we could pull off saving the SS United States and bringing it to New York, this would create thousands of jobs, thousands of visitors and thousands of jobs annually, and create one of Brooklyn's major tourist attractions, reviving the once great Brooklyn waterfront. Since Councilwoman Brewer first introduced this resolution in October of 2024, our last-ditch effort to save the ship, though derided by some, has gained stunning support. More than 20,000 people have signed petitions put forth by

us and other groups urging Okaloosa County to abandon its plan to sink the ship, or alternatively to have the federal government take control of the ship and keep it afloat. Now I have with me today a number of members of our group, including Dan McSweeney to my right, who was previously a leader of the conservancy that owned the ship and sold it to Okaloosa County. John Gerazi, the owner of the Gowanus Pier, is here in the audience. I also have David Di Gregorio, our Education Director, who has done educational programs from Tenafly High School and elsewhere about the ship, and speaking for himself is law professor James Maloney, a leading maritime law expert at SUNY Maritime, who has been helping us on the legal side.

At this point, we believe it is critical to our effort that New York City Council pass Councilwoman Brewer's Resolution 649, supporting the effort to praise the ship. We do not believe it is too late because the ship is still around. I believe this could be one of the most historic preservation actions facing the City of New York in this early 20th century. It was just 200 years ago this month that the City and State completed the construction of the Erie Canal, which was one of the most important

public works projects in American history. It was more than 140 years ago when the Statue of Liberty was about to be sent back to France because wealthy New Yorkers refused to support the construction of the base. The City Council supported newspaperman Joseph Poulos' call for 100,000 ordinary working-class New Yorkers to contribute as little as one penny, and now the statute sits in the harbor. I urge you to follow these precedents, follow this tradition, and pass this very important resolution that Councilwoman Brewer has put forth. I'm going to turn this over back to Dan McSweeney, who has a lot more history with this since he was one of the leaders of the conservancy which owned the ship until it was sold to Okaloosa County in last year.

DAN MCSWEENEY: Thank you, Jim. Chair Bottcher, other Council Members, and Staff, my name is Dan McSweeney. I want to sincerely thank you for making time to hear our testimony today in support of a great American and New York icon. I also want to thank Council Member Gale Brewer for introducing Resolution 649. I know Gale for many years of veterans and community advocacy, and if there's a good cause to support, no matter how unusual or

ambitious, Gale will be there. We appreciate that very much, Gale. I'm going to go off script and just cut to the chase.

There are three reasons that the Council should adopt Resolution 649. The first is New York City has always punched way, way above its weight in terms of cultural contexts, policy, economic development, and other examples. This ship offers us an opportunity to do something striking, memorable, historic, and impactful. It will create jobs. We have a site for the ship in Brooklyn. It will revitalize our efforts to re-energize the New York waterfront, and it will provide so many other cultural opportunities.

The second reason is that although New York is proud of its traditions, we have always been a city of innovation, and for us to take this old ship and repurpose it in an innovative way, which could include all kinds of things from energy generation to job creation, hospitality, hotel, etc., would show that New York still has the ability to innovate on a grand scale.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly at this time, we are a country that is unfortunately

divided, and this ship, with the name United States, represents a symbol of unity for New Yorkers and from Americans from all walks of life. I'm a New Yorker because my father came to this city to work aboard this ship. He met my mother from San Juan in his preparations to sail one day, and that's just one of thousands of stories that surround this vessel, stories of New York and stories across America. It is very notable that during a time that our country was shamefully segregated in the 1950s and '60s, this ship was a proud symbol of integration. It had an integrated crew and integrated passenger lists. So I believe that Resolution 649, although we are in a Hail Mary moment, would send the message that New York City does retain the ability to send a strong message about things that we should do in the 21st century, and this is a great example of it. Thank you so much for your time.

ERIC BREEN: Hello. Okay, hello. Let me say first that I have immense gratitude for Councilwoman Brewer and Chair Bottcher and all the City Council Members involved for putting forth this action to save the ship and for recognizing the cultural aspects of maritime history and the

importance of it. My name is Eric Breen. I'm a marine engineer. I went to the U.S. Marine Academy and have a 40-plus-year career working in and around New York Harbor in a commercial ship and workboat repair sector. I'd like to be a voice for that commercial marine sector with regard to all within it who want this ship preserved in the room. I'm listening to the rest of the panel here. It's absolutely amazing. In the room also with me is Alex Gomez, sitting in the back. He's a member of that New York maritime commercial marine repair community. He owns GMD Shipyard and its large graving box. Alex was also instrumental and was directly involved in the prepping of the Intrepid when she came into New York so we have complete industry support to take possession of the ship and actually repair it. Again, like the other gentlemen said, the impact on the on the workforce would be absolutely incredible. It's in New York. There can't be any more passion that I'm speaking for for my industry in this. With its stacks and mast now removed, it can clear the Brooklyn Bridge and get into the shipyard. So there's a place for it to go when it gets here. Get into the shipyard for its conversion and retrofitting. I'd also like to

identify a clear option, current and uniquely funded, a situation whereby the ship can be evaluated and directly serve New York City and New York Harbor area tourism and assist the commercial marine industry and clearly support New York City's growing ferry system growth and its popularity. The forward-thinking Elizabeth New Jersey Chamber of Commerce and tourism groups are in full support of the idea of using the ship as a ferry terminal on Elizabeth's waterfront and helped initiate this idea. Using the ship as a shoreside transit hub, shopping, hotel, and entertainment venue with a ferry terminal on its waterline level will provide a long-term business case to support the ship for the longer term and provide significant traffic to and from it to be fully enjoyed by the public and many international travelers coming from an international airport. Anyone who has ever visited the very vibrant San Francisco Ferry Terminal and its shops and restaurants, it serves as a transit hub, would be able to see these real possibilities and viability of this unique idea. A funded feasibility study backed by an awarded 5-million-dollar USDOT Raise grant is now getting underway in Elizabeth and utilization of

the ship in this manner would also provide a needed alternative to a waterfront property incumbents issue that so far has hampered all progress from developing important ferry services to and from Newark Airport. This would all need to be explored through, I'm a marine engineer, okay, so it's out of my bailiwick, but this would all need to be explored through official channels but I find myself in a very unique position of knowing both the shipyard availability, having the industry connections, and knowing of the potential Elizabeth Ferry Terminal opportunity and its funding, and I also have a passion for maritime history. Using this funded feasibility study to explore this use for the ship would further make use of existing awarded federal dollars. A defined goal should be to have the Department of the Interior's National Park Service take ownership of the ship, bring it back to New York Harbor for next July's national quincentennial celebration. That was the money sentence. It can begin the conversion process using New York's workforce, creating many, many jobs, and be properly preserved as a namesake for the U.S. maritime industry. To happen, this will need the city of Elizabeth's mayor, the administration there,

agencies like the Port Authority and others in both New York and New Jersey to have an open mind, cooperate, embrace industry efforts, and consider such innovation and move fast. I'm thankful to the City Council's efforts to save the ship as all in our industry would like to. The timing may also be right with recent significant federal initiatives to revitalize the U.S. shipyard and shipyard industry that also apply to New York shipyards.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide these ideas and be able to express our complete industry support for saving the ship. We hope that they can be considered as the Council presents this to the current Administration and passes this resolution. Thank you.

DAVID DI GREGORIO: Thank you. I feel a little bit like this is Shark Tank, but I would like to thank Chair Erik Bottcher and also Gale Brewer very much for bringing this forward. I would also like to quote Erik Bottcher, if I may, that art is the antidote. The SS United States is a work of art. It is a oneness of power and grace. It shows us how to put those opposites together. It is a work of beauty that can attract artists. It can attract all

kinds of people, young and old, in New York City,
where we can all enjoy and be on her decks rather
than having just a few see her rotting basically on
the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, which is what we
really do not want to see. I would take this
opportunity, and I think I'll look straight into the
camera, to ask the President of the United States to
please consider saving this national treasure, this
mid-century example of power and art, America at its
finest in the mid-century. Let's reach those heights
again, and let's have our President do something for
all people that we can all agree on. President Trump,
please consider taking possession of this ship,
bringing it back to its home port in New York City,
where all can enjoy, and let's start. This is a blank
slate, not like the Queen Mary. Let's start to build
and envision what we would like to see inside and
what we would like the SS United States to stand for.

Thank you so very much, and I pass the
microphone to a young gentleman, an 11th grader. His
name is James.

JAMES GERAZI: Hello. My name is James
Gerazi. First, I want to thank the Council for
allowing me to speak today and the New York Coalition

for hosting me. Like many of my fellow citizens, I am a firm supporter of saving the SS United States for display in New York City. Like the nearby Intrepid Museum or the RMS Queen Mary in Long Beach, she would make an excellent attraction to our city. Given how the ship is now stripped of any remaining hazardous materials and the inside is virtually a blank canvas, it makes it incredibly conducive to redevelopment. The proposed location of the ship, GBX Gowanus Bay Terminal, would greatly benefit the surrounding area. I recently visited Red Hook and the area unfortunately looked rather run-down. A large, world-class attraction such as the SS United States would greatly benefit the surrounding area. Additionally, it would also benefit the terminal itself as it has sat derelict for decades. Once the area is dredged to accommodate the liner, it will make a fine site for the area and the city as a whole. The redevelopment of the ship, as stated by the Coalition, could be done in phases over a set period of time. Given how port fees will not be an issue like they were at Pier 82, the restoration funds could be exclusively on the ship. Now, it goes without saying that the SS United States is a very historically significant vessel,

being the largest and final ocean liner built in the United States and arguably the best looking, and of course, now the last surviving, and was the winner of the Blue Riband, a title it still holds today. The vessel is an engineering marvel even now, and its loss would be a devastating blow to maritime preservation. Given how the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding is coming up and the SS United States, the former flagship of America, and the record-breaking vessel that carries the name of our country, is now stripped down of all hazardous materials, now is the perfect time to restore the ship as a monument to our country and to celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding. The fact the ship has lived to see a third of our nation's history is an equally historic feat and will make it all the more fitting for restoration for our nation's birthday.

I do hope my words today will be considered by the Council and you choose to pass Resolution 0649 and save America's flagship so it may become a world-class tourist destination and a monument to our nation's history. With great thanks,
James Gerazi.

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JAMES MICHAEL MALONEY: Good afternoon, my name is James Maloney. I am an attorney and I perform legal services for the New York Coalition. I'm not one of its directors or officers and so I'm speaking here today in my personal capacity only in support of Resolution 649. I'm also a graduate of SUNY Maritime College at Fort Schuyler in the Bronx and for the past 10 years I teach there, admiralty and international law, and again I'm speaking here today not as a member of the college's faculty but on my own. I want to tell this Committee primarily about a hope that I've had for that ship for about a year now, I guess, and that is that the ship be taken for public use by the federal sovereign, the people of the United States, and returned here to its home port, New York, to serve as a very important component of the shipbuilding and harbor infrastructure for Prosperity and Security for America Act, long title, better known as the Ships for America Act, which is currently pending before Congress. I'm sure you're all aware of that, that pending legislation that would revitalize United States shipbuilding and commercial maritime industries if it's passed, and I hope it will be. So

how does bringing the SS United States back to New York relate to the Ships for America Act? It's really quite simple. If you're going to revitalize American shipbuilding, you need to grow the next generation of naval architects, marine engineers. If the United States were to be taken for public use, refurbished, brought back here, it would be quite a useful program to host high school students for competitive, federally funded internships where they'd live aboard, they'd see firsthand this work of art, this masterpiece of American naval architecture, and while they're here they'd visit the four schools we have right in the area. My own alma mater, SUNY Maritime College, this gentleman's alma mater, the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, and Stephens Institute of Technology in Hoboken. The Ships for America Act will certainly have an education budget, and so by seeking out talented people nationwide, we'd be recruiting from a pool of future naval architects and marine engineers from all over the country, not just the coastal states, so they may not have even thought about this as a career, but it would be increasing the possibilities of excellence

in our future shipbuilding capacities for generations to come. And this is not an alternative to all the other ideas you've heard, making it a ferry terminal or using it as a national landmark, maritime center. In fact, the internship program can begin right away as this work is going on, and those very students would benefit from seeing it and participating in it.

So I want to close with one thought. The Iroquois Confederation, properly known as the Haudenosaunee Confederation, they had a leadership concept. In English, it's now called the Seventh Generation Principle. The idea is that any decisions we make today should bring a benefit seven generations into the future, and I think bringing the United States back to New York City and doing what I've just talked about would fulfill that. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you to this panel. Thank you for your testimony.

Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want to say thank you to the panel and to say that I want to understand how in the world did the county end up in the leadership in terms of ownership? Can somebody

explain that to me? I'm obviously very supportive.
We'd love to have it here. Your advocacy has been
phenomenal. I know Cynthia Hornig from my office has
been working with you, but how did they end up with
this ownership?

DAN MCSWEENEY: So, Council Member Brewer,
the SS United States Conservancy is a non-profit
organization which purchased the ship through a grant
from a gentleman named Jerry Lenfest. The Conservancy
owned the vessel for a number of years, and at the
end of the day, because a development deal did not
emerge either here in New York or in other cities
that were looked at, the Conservancy, unfortunately,
was forced to sell the ship. It could have either
gone to scrap immediately or it could have been
reefed. They chose the option of reefing, and
Okaloosa County in Florida is the entity that
purchased the ship and is now planning to reef it. We
think this is a Hail Mary pass to see if we can do
something else with it that will create jobs and
honor the history and culture of the ship.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We're obviously
very supportive. Thank you very much.

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CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Well, I support it,
and I support christening it the SS Gale Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: U.S. is much
better. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: John Quadrozzi,
Jr., Alida Camp, Laurence Maslon, Melissa West,
Christopher Leon Johnson.

Mr. Quadrozzi, do you want to go first?

JOHN QUADROZZI, JR.: My name is John
Quadrozzi. I am here speaking on behalf of the
resolution for the SS United States. I guess I didn't
fit on that panel. I don't know if anyone else is
here for that. I hope you're all here for the ship,
but maybe not.

Anyway, my position is very much aligned
with all the gentlemen that are here, and I will not
speak of all the potential uses and so forth for the
ship, but I'm going to speak on behalf of the
terminal that many of them spoke about. We have a
facility in Brooklyn, Gowanus Bay Terminal. It's
actually a historic terminal. It was mentioned here
by one of the gentlemen. It was part of the Erie
Canal. This was at the time in 1920 when they were
revitalizing the canal as a state barge canal. This

1 facility was developed. The facility has a historic
2 content, and we thought that would be of significance
3 for the SS United States, being its importance to the
4 United States. It is a facility that has a berth of
5 1,300 feet. This is a formal berth of the Normandy.
6 I'm going to speak a little about the Normandy in a
7 second. But for example, the SS United States is 990
8 feet long. This berth is 1,300 feet long. The
9 Normandy is just over 1,000 feet as well when it was
10 docked there. I'm a person that has been on the
11 waterfront for some 40 years in Brooklyn in my early
12 20s unloading heavy bulk cargoes and so forth and the
13 like in the industrial segment. I have a vessel of my
14 own that I have operated on the waterfront, so I'm
15 very familiar with what's involved with ships and
16 ship handling and maintaining them and so forth. The
17 task of refurbishing the United States, although an
18 expensive one, is not difficult to people that are in
19 the industry. I think there was somebody here in the
20 back from GM Shipyard, which you may know in the
21 Brooklyn Navy Yard.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

24 JOHN QUADROZZI, JR.: Very significant
25 facility. But some of the work that's been done on

the United States, like removing its stacks and its tower, is something that's customary. It's not the destruction necessarily of the ship.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you. We have to keep going, but if you want to submit in writing, the time is up. If there's anything further, please submit it in writing, and we'd love to read it. Thank you so much.

We're going to keep going down the panel this way. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: All right. Yeah, hello. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson, On The Record. I'm here to show support for both Rita Joseph's Resolutions for Sigma Gamma Rho Day and Haitian Konpa Day. There's some great people in that sorority, especially the State Assembly Member, Monique Chandler-Waterman. I think that she should have got more time because she's elected official, like five minutes instead of two minutes.

Let's make this clear, but I want to talk about the censorship inside the arts in the City of New York. I want to call on the City Council to make it where that Palestine be able to have more of their stuff inside the museums more. Why is Palestine being

censored in all the art institutions in the City of New York? Like I said, I'm not fond of Palestine like that, but they shouldn't be censored at all in the City of New York. I'm calling next year for the next Mayor of New York City, Zohran Mamdani, to allow the City Council to have a ceremony inside City Hall in honor of Palestine. Not only that, we need to have the Bowling Green non-profit to raise the Palestinian flag under Mamdani in 2026. We have to make sure that certain organizations like the ADL, the Anti-Defamation League, which is really ridiculous that they said that Elon Musk showing a Sieg Heil hand was not a Nazi sign. Jessica Tisch, our next Commissioner again, which I think is ridiculous, should not be blocking this going away. That's all I got to say. Like I said, I support her bills, by the way. I love it. I appreciate that. I hope this goes through unanimously. Thank you, and enjoy your day. I got to go. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

ALIDA CAMP: Hi. Good afternoon, Chair Bottcher and Members of the City Council and Staff. Chair Bottcher, we met when you were great at landmarking the Tin Pan Alley, so thank you for that.

Thank you for hearing my testimony. My name is Alida Camp. I'm Chair of the Community Board 8 Manhattan Arts Committee, although I'm speaking on my own for now.

Art is critical to a well-functioning society. Not only does it provide an outlet for creativity and a root into one's emotional expression, but art builds community. It can be transformative, can move one to action or to tears. Censorship has no place in art. There is always the option to turn away, close ears, and leave, but what repels one person may resonate with another. It doesn't matter if the artist is right wing or left wing. Censorship destroys the very purposes of art. CBA presents an art show twice a year. We don't vet on aesthetics. Interestingly, there are crowds around many different types of art, abstract, representational, emotional. Who are we to say what can and should be seen? Art often represents ideas. Ideas are the core of democracy. As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said, the antidote to bad speech is more speech. Respond to offensive art with more art, not to no art. When I was in law school, I published an article on the First Amendment touching

on the chilling effects of government actions
targeting a remote particular expression. The City
should take every action to support all artists to
work against the chilling effects on art and arts
organizations and supporting all artistic expression.
While our democracy is struggling, we need all of the
art we can get, not only to present new ideas or
establish ideas in a different light, but to distract
us when we need it, to focus us, to bring us beauty,
to provoke us, to inspire us, to teach us. Whatever
this Committee could do and the City Council to stop
censorship, it must do. Censor censorship. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

MELISSA WEST: Thank you, Chair Bottcher
and Members of the Committee. My name is Melissa
West, and I am the Director and Senior Curator of the
Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug Harbor
Cultural Center and Botanical Garden on Staten
Island. I am testifying today on the chilling effect
of censorship on our organization and on Staten
Island artists.

Through exhibitions, performances, and
artist residencies, the Newhouse Center provides an
interdisciplinary environment for artists to take

creative risks and explore new dimensions in their work. Last year, we supported 20 projects and 279 local artists, nearly two-thirds of whom self-identify with one or more historically marginalized group. The National Endowment for the Arts awarded funding in 2024 to support the development of New York-based Colombian artist Tatiana Arrocha's exhibition, *Entre la Coca y el Oro*, which explores the relationship of indigenous populations to the environment and the legacy of colonialism through the coca plant. Staten Island is home to a robust community of immigrants from Central and South America, thus this exhibition is timely. The NEA withdrew funding while the work was already underway. Our appeal was unsuccessful, and we've also had impact from the suspension of funding by Humanities New York and USDA and this all further compromises Snug Harbor's ability to perform its programming. These cuts are a direct result of new federal guidelines to disinvest in marginalized communities. Silencing institutions silences artists. The stifling of artists' voices deprives our communities of cultural access and engagement. The arts unify communities, improves academic performance,

strengthens mental health, and sparks creativity and innovation. City Council funding underwrites Snug Harbor's efforts to create a more culturally connected, thriving community in an underserved part of New York City. Our artist services are imperiled by the rise of censorship, threats to our First Amendment-protected freedoms, and devaluing the role of civic life through the arts. We urge the Council to take all necessary steps to protect artists and the institutions that serve them and to aggressively promote the right to free expression. Thank you for your time.

LAURENCE MASLON: Good afternoon. My name is Laurence Maslon. I'm an arts professor at NYU. I'm a theater historian and documentarian. I wrote the Sound of Music companion book, by the way. And thank you for allowing this hearing at 250 Broadway. I want to talk briefly about Broadway, one of the most important lifelines in the city and this community. I was the co-producer and co-writer of a six-part documentary for PBS in 2004 called Broadway, the American Musical, which was seen by millions of people. We decided to do an updated script covering roughly Wicked to In the Heights that was submitted

to the National Endowment for the Humanities. The stories in this documentary included stories about people of color, artists of color, such as Hamilton, queer artists, such as Some Like It Hot, Black and queer artists, in the case of a show called A Strange Loop, and we submitted the grant for a 700,000-dollar application. We had previously been funded for the first series up to a million dollars and were considered to be the crown jewel in the National Endowment for the Humanities documentary series. We submitted our application in August of 2024. It was adjudicated in the early spring of 2025. We were turned down. That is showbiz. But when we asked for our grades, they were five excellents across the board in both cases. We could not have gotten a better score. We were clearly denied money because of the subject matter in the grant, and when we asked for accountability, we received none from the National Endowment of the Humanities under this new Administration. So, I ask you to push whenever possible for clarity, transparency, and accountability when grants of difficult material are denied, and we all know about the lullaby of

Broadway, and we hope that the Trump Administration
does not put this particular one to sleep. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you very
much. Really appreciate your testimony, and thank you
for working in Broadway. One of my favorite Broadway
sayings, if you want to, you may not make a living on
Broadway, but you'll make a killing.

That concludes the in-person portion of
our public testimony.

We'll now move to remote testimony. If
you're testifying remotely, please listen for your
name to be called. Once your name is called, a Member
of our Staff will unmute you. You may then start your
testimony once the Sergeant-at-Arms sets the clock
and cues you to begin.

We're going to begin with Miranda Moore,
followed by Rosalyn Barnes, and then Marica Harris.

Miranda Moore.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

MIRANDA MOORE: Good morning, Chair
Bottcher, Council Members, and Staff. My name is
Miranda Moore. As a 34 continuously active member of
Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated, I was inducted
on October 28th, 1991, at the University of North

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Texas. Currently, I serve on the International Board
of Directors as the International First Vice
President Responsible for Global Membership. Thank
you for this opportunity to speak of Resolution 1063.

I am here not only as a leader in Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated, but as a witness to the
transformative impact our sisterhood has made on
families and communities. For over 103 years, we have
advanced scholarships, uplifted women and girls,
strengthened families, and addressed inequities and
restricted opportunities. In New York City, our
members mentor students, lead STEM programs, provide
school supplies, and champion maternal health and
breast cancer awareness that saves lives. As you
heard from our local leaders, we respond to the
community needs with speed, compassion, and
unwavering commitment. But New York is not only a
place we serve. It is a place that has shaped us. Our
chapters across the boroughs embody the spirit of the
city, resilient, forward-thinking, and relentlessly
dedicated to progress. Through scholarship awards,
youth development programs, and year-round service,
our members are investing in the next generation and

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contributing to the social, economic, and cultural
vitality of this city and beyond.

Designating November 12th as Sigma Gamma
Rho Day is more than symbolic. It is a recognition of
women who have given their time, talent, and treasure
for over a century without expectation of reward. It
affirms that service matters, honors women who have
given over a century of devoted work, and inspires
young girls across New York to lead, achieve, and
excel. I urge you to adopt this Resolution, not for
us, but for the communities we serve today and will
continue to uplift for generations to come. Thank
you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you. Next is
Rosalyn Barnes, followed by Marika Harris.

Rosalyn Barnes.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

ROSALYN BARNES: Good afternoon, Chair
Bottcher, Council Members, and Staff. Thank you for
the opportunity to speak today. My name is Rosalyn
Barnes, and I am a proud member of the Delta Nu Sigma
Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sovereignty
Incorporated, servicing Mount Vernon, New York, and

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Lower Westchester for over 50 years. I was inducted in spring 2000 through the Beta Phi chapter at Cheney University of Pennsylvania, the first historically Black college and university, and I currently serve as the Northeastern Region Area 4 Coordinator under direction of Northeastern Regional Director Dawn S. Stanton, to whom I report. In this role, I support the local chapters located in Downstate New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, and Ghana. For this specific endeavor, I enthusiastically provide guidance and oversight to the Downstate New York chapters in Brooklyn, Westchester, the Bronx, Long Island, Greater Hudson Valley, Rockland, Peekskill, Downtown Midtown Manhattan, Harlem, and Queens. Together, we work together to strengthen chapter operations, leadership development, and community engagement across New York State. Sigma Gamma Rho's mission is to enhance the quality of life for women and their families throughout the United States and globally through community service, civil action, and social action. Our work is dedicated to achieving greater progress in education, health awareness, and leadership development, and we envision communities where all

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women and their families can reach their full
potential and create opportunities for future
generations.

Founded on November 12, 1922, on the
campus of Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana
by seven educators, for 103 years, Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated continues to uphold its legacy
of greater service, greater progress. It is this
legacy that guides the work we do every day in the
communities of New York State. I thank our 26th
International Grand Basileuses and President Marika
T. Harris and our International First Grand Anti-
Basileus Vice President Miranda Moore for their
presence here today and for their outstanding
leadership and support. It means so much for you to
be here as our New York chapters come together under
one Sigma to advocate and activate, to commemorate a
date that marks the inception of our sisterhood under
our seven beloved founders. Chair Bottcher, Council
Members, Staff, and Sorers, thank you for your time
and consideration. I am honored to regionally
represent the sorority and the dedicated chapters of
Downstate New York. I respectfully ask that you adopt
Resolution 1063 to allow November 12th to be forever

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known as Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated Day.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

Next is Marica Harris followed by
Marjorie Theis and Susan Goldbetter.

Start with Marica Harris.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

MARICA HARRIS: Thank you, thank you,
thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Bottcher, Council
Members, Staff, and the members of Sigma Gamma Rho
that are present this afternoon in New York. My name
is Marica Harris, and I am the International
President of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated.
When I was elected as the 26th President of Sigma
Gamma Rho, I was a proud resident of the great state
of New York. I joined this organization in the spring
of 1995 at Wilberforce University. And so today, I
stand before you on behalf of Sigma Gamma Rho
Sorority Incorporated, a sisterhood founded on
November 12th, 1922, by seven visionary educators, a
sisterhood that has shaped New York City for nearly a
century. Our impact in this city is deep, undeniable,
and woven into the very fabric of its progress. New
York City has been home to some of our most

influential members. Sorer Ruth Whitehead Whaley, a graduate of Fordham Law School, became one of the first Black women to practice law in New York in 1925. She broke barriers again in 1945 as the first Black woman to run for New York City Council as a Democrat. And from 1951 to 1973, she served as the Secretary of the New York City Board of Estimate, working alongside City Council to shape policy for this great city. Her leadership is not our past alone. It is our present.

Today, New York City continues to be shaped by members, including Camille Joseph Varlack, Deputy Mayor for Administration and Chief-of-Staff for the City of New York. She stands as a modern example of Sigma women leading at the highest level of public service.

Sigma Gamma Rho has members and affiliates who are public servants in the City of New York. Some are councilwomen, police officers, judges, educators, and small business owners in this city. They provide thousands of hours in service each year to support all New Yorkers in all five boroughs and beyond. They are invested in New York, and we, the ladies of Sigma Gamma Rho, are also invested in New

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York. Our chapters support and serve in Manhattan,
Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, dating back to when
we chartered our first alumnae chapter in New York
City, Kappa Sigma, in 1936, to our newest chapter,
chartered October 11, 2025, Xi Omicron Sigma Chapter,
serving Midtown area of New York City. These chapters
continue to support and serve numerous families in
the five boroughs by hosting our five essential
programs, Operation Big Book Bag, supplying school
supplies, Project Cradle Care, focusing on the impact
of Black maternal health, Annual Youth Symposium,
hosting educational programs for youth, our Swim 1922
program, working to ensure that water safety is a
number one area of concern to prevent drowning, and
Women's Wellness, health and wellness for women and
families in the City of New York.

Because of this legacy, Sigma Gamma Rho
has educated, empowered, and uplifted New Yorkers for
nearly a century. We humbly ask that this Council
adopt Resolution 1063, recognizing November 12th as
Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated Day in the City
of New York. This day would not simply honor an
organization. It would honor a long line of
educators, activists, trailblazers, and public

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servants who made this city stronger. It will
celebrate our ongoing commitment to youth, families,
public service, leadership, and community
advancement, and align with our mission of our
organization to enhance the quality of life for women
and children in the City of New York. I thank you for
this opportunity to be before you and hope that you
consider our request to support Resolution 1063.
Thank you, Councilman, for the opportunity to be here
this afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

Next, we'll hear from Marjorie Diaz
(phonetic), followed by Susan Goldbetter (phonetic),
Matthew Berravini (phonetic), and Carleo Tran
Casayuran.

Marjorie Diaz.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: I'm going to skip
to Carleo Tran Casayuran.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

CARLEO TRAN CASAYURAN: Oh, is this on? Am
I on?

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Yes.

CARLEO TRAN CASAYURAN: Are we just going over our testimonies for our, or what we're representing, right?

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Go ahead.

CARLEO TRAN CASAYURAN: Oh, I'm here for the support the Coalition on the Save the SS United States. I've been with this organization for quite a while, and I've been here in support of them, and hopefully we can continue our work to help preserve American history. I did post a testimony about its effects on the Gulf of Mexico's water, which is it has all these lead paints and all these zinc chromates that, you know, if they do sink the ship, all those hazards and all those materials could pollute the water in a way to where, you know, people who go out there to go collect some fish or to consume aquatic life, they could be, you know, consuming toxic waste that can potentially risk them getting cancers and all types of like, you know, blood clots, like just bad stuff, and I did post that for my testimony, so I just want to make that clear in support to the Coalition. And yeah, I think that is all that I want to say.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: Thank you.

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Calling Shireen (phonetic), Jason Wade
(phonetic), Scott Brar (phonetic), Tiffany Burt
(phonetic), Jorge Anderson-El (phonetic), or Melanie
Capote (phonetic).

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

CHAIRPERSON BOTTCHER: If there's anyone
else present in the room who has not had the
opportunity to testify but wishes to do so, please
raise your hand.

Seeing no one else who wishes to testify,
this hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

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 December 9, 2025