

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup
Relations

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP
RELATIONS

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December 13, 2021
Start: 10:12 a. m.
Recess: 11:33 a. m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Jimmy Van Bramer, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Laurie A. Cumbo
Darma V. Diaz,
James F. Gennaro
Mark Gjonaj
Francisco P. Moya

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International
Intergroup Relations

A P P E A R A N C E S

Linda E. Johnson,
President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library

Anthony Marx,
President CEO of the New York Public Library

Dennis M. Walcott,
President and CEO of Queens Public Library

Gonzalo Casals,
Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for New York City

Sheelah Feinberg,
Deputy Commissioner at NYC Department of Cultural
Affairs

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1 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International
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2 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Good morning everyone. My
3 name is Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, and I am
4 proud to be the Chair of the Committee Cultural
5 Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
6 Relations.

7 And, I'd like to thank all of you for joining us
8 this morning for this important and, uh, for me, very
9 personally momentous, uh, hearing.

10 Uh, I want to, uh, recognize, first of all, we've
11 been joined by Council Member Darma Diaz, uh, thank
12 you for joining us.

13 And, there are some other, uh, meetings going on
14 right now, so other council members will be joining
15 us.

16 Uh, this is, if you can believe it, my 125th, uh,
17 convening of this committee. I have chaired...

18 (APPLAUSE)... We... We went back and actually
19 looked at the record, uh, and Jack my Legislative
20 Director, came back and said, "To date, you've
21 chaired 124 Committee Cultural Affairs, Libraries
22 hearings," so this is number 125, and of course my
23 final as the chair.

24 Uh, 12 years ago, I was honored to be appointed
25 to chair this committee. And, I remember the first

hearing ever, uh, was with Libraries, and that's why I wanted to end with Libraries; although, as a special treat, our Commissioner of Cultural Affairs is joining here as well, uhm, to speak.

Uhm, it was in chambers, and after having worked for the Queens Public Library for 11 years and having attended every meeting on the Committee Cultural Affairs, Libraries as a staffer, to have, uh, stood in this position, as the chair of the committee, was a dream come true.

And, uh, today, we end this part of the journey. And, so, it's very, very fitting that we're here together with the three Presidents and CEOs of our three great library systems in the City of New York.

Over the last 12 years, we've accomplished a lot of great things for our libraries. I'm particularly proud of the new libraries that have been constructed and all of the existing libraries that have been improved renovated, and needless to say, the incredible levels of funding that we've been able to achieve on behalf of our three public libraries. They all deserve and need even more.

Uh, and it will be up to the next mayor and the speaker, the next chair of Cultural Affairs,

Libraries, and the next council, uh, to make sure that you all have the resources that you need to do the great work.

But, I am proud, uh, not only did we do no harm, we leave it better than we found it. And, that is incredibly important to me.

Uh, a little over one year ago, uh, we gathered virtually, uh, to hold an oversight hearing on our public libraries and the COVID-19 pandemic. And, I am not surprised, of course, because I worked, uh, in this field for so long, but New Yorkers, I am sure continue to be amazed, uh, impressed, and grateful, uh, by the staff and the teams of all of our public libraries who have, through their creativity, uh, and hard work, and courage, reinvented public library service at a time when people were desperately isolated and so incredibly grateful for everything that has been done.

And, to the three of you, who were there at the moment when our public libraries had to close, uhm, in those darkest days, uh, but it is also the three of you, your teams, who are here today, and most importantly the staff, who then came together and, uh, went virtual, went online, uhm, started pick up

service, and ultimately a return to library service
as we know it today.

Uhm, the pandemic only revealed what we know, uh,
which is that there is New York City without our
three public library systems. It is impossible to
imagine a community without your local public
library.

And, uh, I am thrilled that all of you will be
here today, uh, to talk a little bit about where we
are today, uhm, and also the work that we've done
together. But, uh, thank you for what you do for the
people of the City of New York.

Uh, I also want to thank my staff, my Chief of
Staff Matt Wallace, who has been with me for 11 ½ of
the 12 years; there he is over there, and Jack
Bernatovicz, who is here remotely, uh, from
Sunnyside, my Legislative Director, of course Cristy
Dwyer, uhm, here Aliya Ali, and Brenda McKinney who,
uh, taking care of two incredibly beautiful new
arrivals in the world, and so can't be with us today,
uh, personally, uh, but the staff of the committee
and the teams.

So, uh, I'll say a few more words, without
getting too choked up, uh, later, but with that, I
will invite all of you to begin your testimony.

LINDA JOHNSON: This is indeed a momentous
occasion. I am Linda Johnson, I am the President and
CEO As president and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library.

Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for giving us the
opportunity to testify, but mostly for the
extraordinary work that as you point out has been
accomplished during your tenure. I hope that noticed
that, at the outset, when you announced that we have
been doing this for many years as we have, uh, we all
clapped, real claps, not just the finger click that
you will normally get. So, uhm, we're all, uh, well,
it's bitter sweet. We're all thrilled to be here to
be testifying this morning with you.

You know, we are of course grateful for your
unmatched library enthusiasm, and that's not
hyperbole -- I'm sure it's unmatched --and unflagging
leadership and support over the course of the past 12
years, and so, uhm, it's great to be back in person
in chambers, uhm, for our last meeting with you at
the helm.

Two weeks ago... Two weeks ago, Brooklyn Public Library kicked off its 125th Birthday. On November 30th, 1896, The Brooklyn Common Council passed a resolution to establish Brooklyn Public Library. And, the first branch opened soon after in a former public school building.

I've been thinking about how rare it is to create a legacy that has a meaningful impact on the lives of four, five, even six future generations -- people whose reality's we can't fully imagine.

I am convinced that your library legacy has had a profound impact on our city, and will continue to touch the lives of New Yorkers for generations to come.

From the beginning, you understood the democratic versatile power of public libraries. And, along the way, you have brought so many in to that understanding. Thank you for so eloquently and persuasively advocating for our systems, for the 8 million New Yorkers we currently serve and for generations to come.

Since we testified last November, the way our libraries served New Yorkers has changed dramatically. In the winter of 2020, Brooklyn Public

Library was offering grab-and-go lobby service and producing thousands of virtual programs. In the spring and summer of 2021, we began to gradually reopen our branches for book browsing and computer use.

With a partnership of The Department of Transportation, we also created outdoor library spaces where Brooklynites could read and use our free WIFI, listen to multilingual story time, or reconnect with their neighbors.

By this July, all three library systems had full reopened our collective 217 branches to the public with the exception of those under construction.

In Brooklyn we have already welcomed more than 900,000 patrons, of all ages, back to their neighborhood library to enjoy safe, clean, dignified space, browse our collection, use a computer or printer, and enlist the help of our librarians.

We have reopened several refurbished library spaces including Rugby, Windsor Terrace, and Cortelyou; our newly renovated flagship central library has a new Welcome Center, named after Brooklyn's Librarian of Congress, Major Owens; a Civic Commons for community engagement, a new and

noteworthy book gallery and contemporary business and
career center.

We have also opened a first new branch in nearly
four decades, the Adam Street Library serves the
communities of DUMBO, Farragut, and Vinegar Hill and
serves as an accessible and inspiring mode for 21st
century libraries.

Throughout the borough, our dedicated staff have
worked diligently and creatively to restore library
services to our communities.

In all of our branches, we have implemented
safety guidelines in order to gradually restore in
person programming.

Brooklyn Public Library librarians and staff have
simultaneously continued to produce thousands of
virtual programs from English Conversant groups to
cooking classes, to personalize resume help.

Of course, we are keenly aware of the hundreds of
thousands of Brooklynites without access to
affordable broadband, and have been doing everything
in our power to bridge the digital divide -- a divide
which has only grown more extreme during the
pandemic.

When we realized, for example, that our adult Basic Education students could no longer attend virtual classes towards the end of the month when their cell phone data plans ran out. We teamed up with two organizations, No One Left Offline (NOLO), and Devices for Students, to lend mobile hotspots. No one should be barred from improving their reading skills because they can't afford broadband.

The Emergency Broadband Benefit, which the FCC implemented this spring, offers new subsidies to qualifying households. And, the new federal infrastructure bill includes a permanent subsidy. This is meaningful progress toward digital equity only if people successfully enroll in and receive the subsidies. So, Brooklyn Public Librarians created a Broadband Benefit Guide, and are now helping patrons navigate the government applicant -- a powerful example of how public libraries can connect New Yorkers to impactful benefits.

To date, we have installed rooftop antennas at 50 branches amplifying free, reliable WIFI 300 feet in every direction. And, at select outdoor library spaces, we offer laptop loans for patrons without devices to log on.

Seeking to fully activate our outdoor spaces, we also created several outdoor exhibitions including Brooklyn Resists at the new Center for Brooklyn History.

In October 2020, Brooklyn Public Library merged with the former Brooklyn Historical Society to create Brooklyn's first research library and the largest archive of Brooklyn history in the world.

Brooklyn Resists introduced patrons to the power of that collection with photographs, documents, and ephemera that tell the story of how generations of Black Brooklynites have risen up against racial injustice.

Whether it's democratizing Brooklyn's archives or amplifying WIFI from our rooftops, Brooklyn Public Library strives to remove barriers to access. That's why with our partners in Queens and New York Public Libraries, we have permanently eliminated late fines this fall. Now patrons are only charged for lost materials more than four weeks overdue -- charges which are removed as soon as the materials are returned. In other words, as long as you return your books, you will always be able to check out more. No one will be prevented from using their library

because of unpaid late fees. This is a major milestone in the history of our city's libraries. We have joined several urban library systems across the country in setting a new precedent -- one informed by our ideals of access and equity.

In the wake of the pandemic, Brooklyn Public Library is especially focused on ensuring our city rebuilds a more equitable economy. Our newly renovated Business and Career Center is offering Finance and Marketing workshops for small businesses, and our annual PowerUP! Competition awarded seed money to aspiring entrepreneurs.

This year, 70% of our PowerUP! participants had never before owned a business, 68% were women, and 56% were Black, and all are now better equipped to achieve their dreams and enrich their communities.

If we are to foster equity in our community, we understand we must foster equity within our organization. This fall, Brooklyn Public Library launched a new scholarship program called Pathways to Leadership to support members of our staff from underrepresented groups who wish to earn their Master's in Library Science.

In addition to financial support, participants will receive mentorship and leadership training, and will eventually have the opportunity to become librarians at Brooklyn Public Library. The program is designed to diversify the field of librarianship, which has long been dominated by white women. We're extremely excited to for our inaugural class who will matriculate this January.

There is much to look forward to. Our libraries remain committed to helping the city end the pandemic.

Brooklyn Public Library has continued our partnership with an NYC Test & Trace Corps; we helped older adult patrons make vaccine appointments and hosted vaccine information sessions with partners such as Brooklyn Methodist and the Caribbean Women's Health Association. We are partnering with the city to offer walk-in COVID vaccines to 5 to 11-year-olds, at five of our branches, beginning with Coney Island and New Lots in the coming weeks.

Even if we all managed to vaccinate every last eligible New Yorker, we know our city still faces unprecedented challenges: Learning loss; high unemployment and extreme economic inequity; the

effects of social isolation of trauma. But, libraries are not powerless in the face of these challenges. We have long known how to support students and job seekers and how to create more equitable and more cohesive communities. With the renewed support of this committee and the incoming city council and administration, we know that public libraries can help our city rebuild. No other institution interacts with every neighborhood on a human scale; no other institution is trusted by teens, immigrants, and older adults alike, and offer versatile services to them all. We're grateful to the committee and to the entire city council for recognizing that and consistently championing public libraries as one of our city's most important assets and allies.

Thank you.

ANTHONY MARX: Mr. Chairman, it's an honor to be here. It's a pleasure to be here in person with everyone and with you especially. I'll come back to that before we're done.

Uhm, but, uh, thanks to the entire committee and all of the members of the city council for their extraordinary work and under extraordinary

circumstances, and for their extraordinary support of the library system on behalf of the citizens of New York.

So, I'll be... I will summarize rather than read the testimony if that's alright, Mr. Chairman. You have the testimony, uh, as with Linda and Dennis, Brooklyn and Queens, amazing systems, we have maintained our commitments to the citizens of New York through this difficult period. We pivoted instantly, because we could and we had to, to digital platforms, remote offerings, and partnerships with the city, uh, through the pandemic.

We closed our branches right away, if not in advance of some, uh, back in March 2020, by three months later we had branches open, as Linda described, for grab-and-go, as well as our, uhm, as well as our online opportunities and offerings, which exploded. For instance, e-books, we had a circulation of 10 million lends since March 2020. So, a new world, well-timed, and of course the circumstances pushed us ahead. As well... Not just e-books but TechConnect classes, one on one career counseling, Brainfuse tutoring, all of that, and the Research Library, over 800,000 pages of archives

scanned on demand and sent, together with doubling the size of the research collection available to all New Yorkers, very quietly, by making public the collections of Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton for the first time in history.

We expanded our data bases, our research books, like as with our partners, and academic e-books. We focused vital resources on health and wellness, food security, and housing and tenant rights, all obviously essential issues, for which New Yorkers need and deserve their information from a trusted source. Which is why they come to the library.

The pandemic also saw some milestones that we've been working on together in partnership, uhm, obviously the, uh, the opening of our central branch library the Niarchos Foundation Library with huge thanks to the city for its partnership to make that possible. Uh, we also opened our Treasures Exhibit in the main building, uh, so 125 years later, we have amazing, amazing collections that mostly sat in the safe and nobody got to see them. We're now keeping them safe, but making them available for everyone in the public to see, and we're super excited about that.

We've had close to 60,000 visitors despite the pandemic in the first two months or three months in which Treasures has been open.

Let's see, we, uhm, as I said we had grab-and-go, we restored full service back in July 2021 at all locations, uhm, as well as expanding through bookmobile, outreach in to the communities. Uh, we, of course, came out of the pandemic understanding that the rifts in New York society, the lack of security for people who are doing essential work, but do not have security of jobs, of housing, of health, of education -- which are essentials -- that we needed to double down, because those communities had been explicitly hit by the pandemic in ways that the wealthy communities simply have not.

And, so really for the first time in our history, we've said we're not going to reduce our investment across the system, but we're going to invest additional resources in the neighborhoods of the greatest need. And, we have some of the poorest neighborhoods, in fact legally the poorest neighborhoods, uh, in the country, uh, within our three boroughs.

So, whether that's Summer Reading or ,you know, whatever we can do, and as Linda said, the late fines, eliminating of late fines was a pretty clear statement of that value, but that's just part of what we need to do to get people back in and get people using the library who haven't been using the library. That is an essential issue at this point.

We have moved forward with our capital agenda. Grateful to you and for the city for making that possible.

We have seen renovations in Carnegie branches like Melrose, Fort Washington, 125th St, Hunts Point, and Port Richmond. Our new Inwood Library, the neighborhood I grew up in, uh, has broken ground and it will be bigger, better, connected to a community center, a STEM center, uhm, various community activities, and have a 177 (100%) affordable housing units above it. And, that I think is an important precedent for how libraries can use space on top of it. I know my colleagues have been, uh, creative in those ways as well.

We're seeing the completion of New Amsterdam, Bloomingdale, and Roosevelt Island earlier this year. We're continuing the construction for a brand-new

2 Charleston branch, and we hope to get to much more --
3 Stapleton, Washington Heights, Van Cortlandt. And, a
4 big shout out here to Iris Weinshall and her team for
5 really extraordinary capital work, uh, and working
6 with you all in partnership.

7 We retained our focus on civic engagement whether
8 it's supporting national voting and local census
9 efforts, uhm, voter engagement initiatives. We've
10 collaborated with the City as Brooklyn and Queens
11 have also, whether it's COVID testing sights, cooling
12 centers, learning labs. And, we know that there are
13 major challenges ahead.

14 We need to reconnect with people in person, which
15 we are doing. But, we also need to reach to people
16 who are not using us. We are the most used, most
17 trusted, most respected, and yet we know in the
18 poorest neighborhoods people are still not borrowing
19 as many books as in the middle-class neighborhoods.
20 We have to get at that. So, we know that. We know
21 we can't reduce our digital investment. That is
22 clearly an important part of the future, and we are
23 on it.

24 Uhm, I'll just say, this creates a challenge. We
25 are, all of us, trying to do more, we have additional

support, again huge thanks to you, but just think about it, we're running larger physical ,you know, offerings; we've massively increased our educational programs, that's... And, the budget has increased. But, we're also running a digital library, in many ways, not just for New York but for the world, because New York is the leader of the world -- we should -- we must. And, we're trying to add additional resources to target the poorer neighborhoods. That's like trying two and a half or three things on one budget. And, the truth is that's what my colleagues are doing. And, it is extraordinary, an extraordinary accomplishment.

We will continue. We must continue. But, we can only do that with your help.

Let me conclude by saying, in the end, for all these accompaniments -- the buildings, the programs, the books -- it all comes down to people. It comes down the amazing colleague that I work with, many of whom are here; it comes down the staff of the libraries -- who are there every day -- even at risk -- to meet the needs of the community -- to learn. What could be more powerful than that? It depends on donors, but depends essentially on the partnership

with The City. This is a unique public/private partnership that has created the most trusted civic institutions in town -- the most used -- with a balance of public and private support that has gotten us to new heights, though there are challenges ahead. That only works because of you. Because of your understanding what we do and how central it is, even if it isn't always as flashy as other things that might happen, it's the steady powerful force, foundational force, and again that is only possible because of this partnership. And, this partnership is only possible because of your leadership.

And, today, I just want to say in particular, during this decade, my experience here, Jimmy, your partnership, your passion, your commitment, your persistence, and your delivery has made a difference for the lives of millions of people who rely on these libraries -- in addition to everything else you've done -- and that, that is an amazing accomplishment, for which everyone is incredibly grateful. Thank you.

DENNIS WALCOTT: First, let me say, good morning to all of you, Council Members, pleasure, Chair. And to all the hardworking team members that are part of

the Chair's staff, thank you for your constant support and your leadership.

Uh, I will not really go in to my testimony, because Linda and Tony really captured a lot of what we did as a team. But, I will start by saying, uh, my first contact with The Chair, is prior to his role as a City Council Member. It was at the Saint Albans Library where the Chair was then working for the Queens Public Library. And, he was with the Friend of the Saint Albans Library, and in particular Rita Robinson and a variety of people there, her sister, and it was the first time I really got a chance to see his advocacy about libraries and the importance of libraries. And, Saint Albans, for those who may not know, while that particular building, is my home library when I was growing up as a child. So, it was a nice symmetry to see The Chair there in his Queens Public Library hat and that relationship has continued over the years.

So, before I go in to any type of testimony that I'll read, I wanted to personally say thank you for everything that you've done over the years. It has been a commitment both of the public side of your life and the city council side, but even prior to

that, in overall commitment as an individual, a human being, and the commitment to what libraries represent to all of the people that Linda and Tony have talked about.

So, like my colleagues, we shut down and we reopened through our virtual world. And, our team at The Queens Public Library did a masterful job just like the teams Brooklyn and New York as well. And, I really want to thank them and our trustees for their leadership in allowing us to really reach that point of serving the public virtually.

As you know, Queens was the epicenter of the nation's coronavirus outbreak, Elmhurst in particular, but throughout the borough, and our libraries responded in kind.

We set up our virtual world rather quickly and a matter of fact, a number of the programs that we put in to place, they were really transferred to the virtual world in a way that even outpaced at times some of the onsite, on ground programs.

Now, at Queens we started and had a 24-hour Black Health Summit. And, it was a huge success, and I'm not sure if I had said this before at a hearing, but the crazy person that I am, I was up at three at

o'clock in the morning to watch the insomnia session
-- at *why the heck I should be up at three o'clock*
watching it? -- but we wanted to really reach in to
the community. And, the beauty of this particular
summit, it reached beyond the borough of Queens. It
was able to reach people nationally, and we even had
some folks from South Africa looking in.

So, our Black Health and Healing virtual summit
really was something that addressed the mental
health, health equity, parenting, civil rights, and
racism, and disproportionate effects of the virus on
different communities. Over 7,000 people viewed the
event on a live basis or in real-time, with many more
viewing it when the recordings became available as
well.

Our STACKS after school program, we shifted that
into a virtual world as well. And, then that was
able to grow and operate 13 enrichment sites, 11
homework centers through our library, and the staff
was able to modify the program to fit a virtual model
-- offering STEM workshops, art projects, and more
children in kindergarten through 5th grade received
the services.

For our adult learners, we transitioned classes for our customers to take remotely, such as our Basic Education High School Equivalency, our Citizenship Classes, as well as our Case Management sessions as well.

In fiscal year 2020, our Adult Learning Program hosted more than 760 sessions, totaling 2,700 instructional hours, with an attendance of nearly 8,000, all in a virtual setting.

Since implementing the virtual program, we have hosted over 25,600 virtual programs, and with 423,000 live attendees.

Our Archive virtual programs have one million views, as those who could not tune in live watched the content when their schedules permitted.

We added over 86,000 items to our digital collections in order to meet the demand of our customers in the virtual world.

And, from July of 2020 to June of 2021, we circulated over 1.4 million e-books and e-magazines, a more than 68% increase when compared to the same period from the previous year.

As we continue moving forward towards our full pre-pandemic operations, Queens Public Library will

continue to offer a highbred of in person and virtual programs, as well as continue to enhance our e-content and digital resources to ensure our customers can safely secure what they need in our branches via the digital platforms.

The pandemic, has highlighted, as indicated by both Linda and Tony, the inequities in our society. Inequalities that we knew about, but now that's even more pronounced as a result of the pandemic.

And, what we've seen in the issue that Linda talked about and what Brooklyn and New York have done so well, is how we increased our broadband access to make sure we reach the public as well. In Queens we've done some of the same, and also we've examined what some of the needs are to the public, and try to work in partnership with others to make sure we expand our broadband reach.

Working to narrow the digital divided, Queens Public Library loaned 475 mobile hotspots systems in 2020 through our ongoing collaboration with the New York City Department of Education.

In October, we announced an initiative funded by Sterling National Bank, National Grid, and the Thomas and Jeanne Elmezzi Private Foundation to provide over

250 hotspots and laptops to loan to the public specifically at Lefrak City, South Jamaica, Astoria and Long Island City Libraries.

All of our locations provide free WIFI access to individuals even when our buildings are closed. And, in 20 locations, we currently have enhanced WIFI capabilities where the signal is available up to 150 yards beyond our physical walls.

From July 2020 through June 2021, over 500,000 New Yorkers accessed Queens Public Library's WIFI network -- an 11% increase from the same period the previous year.

In the response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many other Black people, and the national reckoning around race, the systematic racism in our society, we established a working group at the library called "The President's Council on Racial Equity."

In the beginning, we had 55 of our members from staff, through a variety of different partners who've been involved in it, we've divided up in to subcommittees. With a steering committee, we were able to receive a grant to support it as well. And, the mission of PCRE is to identify racial barriers in

policy, procedure, practice, and history that may have a negative impact on Black employees and customers and to identify solutions to create a more equitable workplace.

PCRE members, who total over 50 dedicated employees, are reviewing QPL's recruiting, hiring, and promotion practices, its culture, its learning and growth opportunities, governance, programs, services, collections, and other opportunities on rectifying issues of racial inequity, and taking a look at outreach and marketing strategies, which will culminate in a comprehensive plan for lasting change at our institution.

Throughout the pandemic, we collaborated with New York State and New York City on a variety of initiatives. Our Lefferts, Kew Gardens Hills, and Windsor Park branches served as COVID-19 testing sites. Our Flushing branch served as a vaccination site, and our Ozone Park branch continues to serve as a vaccination site.

Additionally, QPL has hosted many mobile testing/ vaccination pop-up events at our libraries including one just last week at our East Elmhurst branch. Moreover, we are collaborating with the city to

assist in the effort to vaccinate as many children possible age five through 11. Thirteen of our sites served as polling locations similar to my colleagues' as well.

I'm not going to read the rest at the time of testimony, but I do want concentrate on a couple of things that Tony and Linda both said.

One, we are there for The City. Plain and Simple. We are there in so many different ways. And, in addition to the shout-out to Iris and the capital people at Linda's shop and what they've done, our team at QPL continues to expand as well capitally. New branches are opening, renovated branches are being addressed, and as a result of additional money from the city council, the executive side, we continue to make sure we improve it. But, what we are seeing is that a balancing act is taking place right now where a lot of our Lindsay (sp?) boxes, which were 7,500 square feet, are now being moved to roughly 13,000 - 18,000 square feet, and that puts a pressure on us that we've never experienced before. Because, it's nice to say, "Oh, we're expanding from 7,500 to 15,000 - 18,000", but it requires staffing to do that as well.

So, that's part of the balancing act, as well as what Tony indicated in his testimony, addressing the issue of the virtual world with the real world and making sure we have onsite services. And, we're doing all of that as well as meeting the needs of today's society.

We are there for the public. And, as a result of your leadership, Chair, the members of the committee, as well as The Speaker, and The Mayor's Office, we continue to expand. But, that expansion and the support will only be successful if we have that ongoing support from The City.

So, I want to take this opportunity to personally thank you for everything that you have done in helping us transform our libraries in to modern day facilities that continue to serve the public's needs.

And, we are there to serve The City, the respond to The City, address the emergency needs of The City, but that also requires us to have the ongoing support of The City.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your leadership over the years, we truly appreciate it. And, I think we want to do something, right? Before any question and answer take place? So, hold on one second, let

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2 Security know we're not storming the front of the

3 (LAUGHTER)... We're not storming the front...

4 (INAUDIBLE CONVERSATIONS 00:38:53) If you wanted a

5 picture go right here. You want a picture? Thank

6 you. (INAUDIBLE)

7 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Not until after this

8 hearing, but thank you very much for...

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: We just want to say a big thank

10 you for everything that you've done. (LOST

11 CONNECTION 00:39:10) (APPLAUSE 00:39:39)

12 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: So, uh, first of all, let me

13 say, thank you very much. Uh, I was not prepared for

14 that. Did not know that was coming.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DARMA DIAZ: (INAUDIBLE 00:40:23)

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, Council

17 Member Diaz.

18 Uhm, so just a few thoughts, uhm, and I see

19 Commissioner Casals has joined us, uhm, you know

20 where I'm coming from, and I am of you and the people

21 behind you. UH, YOU know, no institution does more

22 to address the issues of equity and access and

23 inclusion that everyone is rightfully talking about.

24 Uhm, and libraries always say, yes. Right? They

25 always say, yes, to the folks that we serve, uh, the

communities, but you also always say yes to The City of New York. Right? When The City of New York says, "We need your help to do this," whether it's IDNYC, right, whether it's testing, whether it's vaccinations in the middle of the pandemic. Uh, Dennis knows well that I got tested several times at The Queens Library's facilities, and then just by chance, I was assigned to get my first two vaccine shots at the Flushing Library, and it was just so perfect that I would go to the Flushing Library to get my first two shots. Uhm, and you always are there. You always say, yes. And, so, The City of New York, uh, always needs to say to you, "What more could we be doing to allow you to reach even more people to do the work that you do?" We know how important you are, because we always come to in times of need. We always rely and lean on our Public Library systems to do more, and you always say, yes, you always come through for the City of New York.

So, I am really proud that we did our part. You know, that when I was on the budget negotiating team and libraries came up, when we were meeting in this room or downstairs, all of the members would turn to me, uhm, and say, "Okay, what is Jimmy gonna say

about libraries?" Uh, and I fought and sometimes like an animal, uh, to make sure that libraries were protected.

So, it's been a great privilege and honor. When I first walked in to that chamber, working for The Queens Library, uh, the late Reverend and Council Member Wendell Foster, was the chair of this committee, uh, but that also included Parks if you could believe or not. It was Cultural Affairs, Libraries, Parks, and International Intergroup Relations. Uh, and I drafted these testimonies for 11 years. So, I want the staff to know that I read them. I absolutely read the work that's done.

And, uh, and of course, uh, the three of you, were not there at that time, Martine Gomez was The President of Brooklyn Public Library, and Gary Strong, of course at Queens, and Paula Claire at NYPL. But, each of you have, uh, in your own ways, transformed the public library systems that you now lead, uh, and I'm so grateful to all of you.

I think, uh, Tony, you're a great leader. I've enjoyed your testimony, uhm, I'm sure that George has a hard time sometimes getting you to say what's exactly on the piece of paper in front of you, uhm ,

but your eloquent when talking about this. It's so
passionate and so passion driven.

And, you know, Linda, you have brought a
stability and a real strength to the Brooklyn Public
Library. You know, that was not always there. And,
you know, we often were very proud of how our Queens
delegation would come through, uh, when I both worked
at the Queens Library and of course here. And, you
all have built a great deal of strength in Brooklyn,
so that there is that kind of support from your own
home borough. And, I think that's really an
incredible testament to your leadership and obviously
your team as well.

And, Dennis, I want to say, I don't know if I've
ever told you this, but when your appointment was
announced, another, uh, former Queens council member
came to me ,you know, and said, "Thank God, because
now we have a President and CEO that is worthy of the
institution." Right? Someone who is prominent;
someone who is accomplished; someone who is so, so
respected. And, Queens Public Library, uh, and its
staff, and its people always deserved that. So,
thank you very much.

Uhm, I don't know if you have anything to say,
Council Member Diaz, but I'm about to cry, so please
say something.

COUNCIL MEMBER DARMA DIAZ: (INAUDIBLE 00:45:52)
you mentioned (INAUDIBLE 00:46:00) who crossed paths
many times. So, definitely... Definitely, uhm, as
The Chair stated, it was great to see your elevated
to where you are today. As a parent back then, I
knew that our system was in a much better place,
better educator, someone that brought to the table
what was much needed within this system.

To the rest of you, thank you. Thank you for what
you've done throughout the pandemic.

My local library, Arlington Library the 37th,
definitely felt the love and the encouragement from
staff. It was a pleasure to see staff in the local
park trying to outreach the parents, and be that
community partner that we definitely needed,
especially, as it was stated early, in communities
like mine, that don't know the library to be a safe
haven, and do not often engage in the library.

So, thank you also for seeking this opportunity
to engage again communities like mine that are not
used to coming to the library whether it's to get a

book or immigration conversation and advocacy. So, thank you. Thank you for your service. And, many of us don't know in New York City how lucky we are to have people such as yourselves at the top.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER DARMA DIAZ: Thank you, thank you for all your service.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: You just saved my life, thank you, Council Member Diaz. Thank you for, uh, thank you for those words. And, I know that our Cultural Affairs Commissioner, Gonzalo Casals is here. And, uh, and folks should know, and I think the three President/CEOs appreciate this, uh, Commissioner Casals was appointed The Commissioner just as COVID hit. Uh, and he has never testified as The Commissioner inside City Hall. So, it was particularly, uh, important to me, uh, to invite The Commissioner here today so he would have the experience, uh, at least once of testifying inside City Hall as a citywide commissioner. Uhm, and, so we're grateful to be able to do that, uhm, this is, uh, ostensibly about libraries, of course the, the convergence and the synergies between libraries, culture, the arts and programming is deep. It's one

of the things that I have loved about chairing this committee so much. Uh, and, I will just say that when I became chair of this committee, and, you know, this is what asked for when Christine Quin was The Speaker, uh, and I had just been elected, and she said, what would you like to chair? And, I said, the only thing I'm asking for is to be Chair of Cultural Affairs and Libraries. Uh, she said, you know, that's a very popular committee, they're a lot of folks who would like it. And, I said, I know that, uhm, but I still want it. (LAUGHTER) And, I got it. And, when I did, uh, because I worked at the Queens Public Library for 11 years, I felt like I needed to also signal to the Cultural Affairs, uh, part of the committee and the cultural sector, that I'm going to fight for you and love you just as much as you know I love libraries. And I think we have done that. Uhm, but I will always be a library person.

Uh, so thank you all very, very much. Thank you for being here.

(APPLAUSE)

(INAUDIBLE CONVERSATIONS)

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Alright, as we say good-bye to our three public library systems, we are going to

uh, move forward with, uh, as I... The
aforementioned, uh, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs
for The City of New York, uh, Gonzalo Casals, and I
believe Deputy Commissioner Feinberg is also joining
us for this portion of the testimony. And, I think
we'll start with the formalities, and, uh, pass it
over to Cristy Dwyer for the oath of office.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY ANALYST: Hi, good morning, and
thank you for joining us. Would you raise your right
hand, please, while I administer the oath to Deputy
Commissioner, Sheelah Feinberg, and Commissioner
Gonzalo Casals from the Department of Cultural
Affairs?

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth,
and nothing by the truth, in your testimony before
this committee, and to respond honestly to council
member questions?

COMMISSIONER CASALS: I do.

LEGISLATIVE POLICY ANALYST: Thank you so much.
You may begin when ready.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you, uh, fist let me
just say, a couple of words. Uhm, as I mentioned
before, uh, when I first became the chair of this
committee, uhm, our cultural sector invited me to a

2 gathering at the Public Theater, uhm, and I felt it
3 was very important at that meeting to remind everyone
4 that I would... I would take the Cultural Affairs
5 portions of my title just as seriously as the
6 libraries, uh, and... And, I believe we have done
7 that, uh, to an extremely successful degree.

8 And, Commissioner Casals, you know, tenure here
9 has been, uhm, under the most challenging of
10 circumstances, uh, but you have made a difference,
11 and, uh, in this city, uhm, very trying
12 circumstances. And, we have had you testify from
13 your apartment in Jackson Heights, uhm, many times.
14 Uh, but, I felt it only appropriate and very
15 meaningful, you know, because you have been the
16 commissioner. Uh, you've done great work. You've
17 made a big difference. But, uh, this building is
18 very significant, uhm, in many ways and, uh, very
19 important that you have the opportunity to testify at
20 least once here in this building, and particularly,
21 with myself chairing, uh, the committee.

22 So, thank you, and with that, I'll ask you to
23 begin your testimony.

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Before I start my testimony,
25 uhm, I want to thank you for the opportunity, and I

want to thank you for your leadership, your
partnership, and your friendship throughout, you
know, not only these 22 months that I was
Commissioner, but throughout the (INAUDIBLE 00:58:10)
years in which you were helping us, you know, make a
case for arts and culture. And, without getting too
personal, almost two years ago, when I sick of COVID
and I was in the hospital, the nurses were making
sure that under the... They wore double masked, they
were wearing goggles, and every time they would
engage us, they would make sure that they knew they
were smiling behind their masks. Right? Just to give
us some comfort. I just want to make sure you know
that I've been smiling behind this mask, because how
meaningful this moment is for me, so, thank you.

Good morning, Chair Van Bramer and members of the
committee. Thank you for the opportunities to
testify today.

Having only to present testimony virtually up
until now. Much like cultural programming, there is
no substitute for life experience. So I'm very
excited to be here.

Well the past two years having many ways felt
like an eternity; I want to begin my update on the

cultural community's COVID-19 recovery by looking
back even further to the beginning of this
administration.

Much of the groundwork for our collective
response to the pandemic I was laid during this time,
both within the agency and throughout the cultural
sector.

When my predecessor, Tom Finkelpearl, joined with
hundreds of cultural leaders at the Ford Foundation
in 2015 to launch our agency's diversity, equity, and
inclusionary initiative, let's be honest: it caused a
lot of anxiety.

While many advocates have been calling for
greater racial equity, demographic diversity, and
inclusive practices for generations - many more
people weren't comfortable speaking about these
issues. In part, this came back from a lack of
understanding of how we could address the profound,
systemic problems we faced. But to fix a problem, you
need to understand it and talk openly about
solutions. At that time, I was still working at one
of the nonprofits represented in it in that room.
And, agencies work is one of the factors that

propelled the systematic shift in the tone and
attitude towards DEI work that we've seen around us.

When the Black Lives Matter movement gained
mainstream momentum last year, New York's cultural
community was better prepared to understand where the
anguish and calls for change were coming from and to
respond meaningfully.

While these conversations reverberated throughout
the cultural community, here at the agency we
launched new programs to address problems.

We started with a landmark study that backed up
with data what so many of us already observed: the
cultural workforce was far less diverse than the city
itself.

So with programs like the CUNY Cultural Course,
the Leadership Accelerator, and new funding for
diversity programs across the sector, DCLA made this
work a top priority for the agency in the early years
of the ministration.

As we'd come to see, we were also laying the
foundations for greater equity in our funding and,
ultimately, a pandemic response that focused on
getting relief fund to the hardest hit communities.

Then came to the CreateNYC Cultural Plan, thanks to legislation sponsored by you, Chair Van Bramer and your colleagues, the agency embarked on the tremendous task of developing New York's first ever a comprehensive cultural plan strategy.

At that time, I worked with a consultant for the plan, and I saw firsthand the amazing energy residence brought to the public engagement process across the city. Following months of intensive public input, the plan released in 2017, built on the equity work started in the preceding years, and laid out a vision for where it would go next.

While DCLA is so much more than a funder, providing financial support to cultural organizations is one of our core functions. As a result, many of our efforts to foster equity focus on greater equity in funding.

For the members of the cultural institutions group, CreateNYC resulted in a requirement for them to adopt DEI plans - among the first anywhere in the country for cultural sector.

We also worked out a deal with the Met Museum, where funds raised through a mandatory admission fee for non-New Yorkers was reinvested in a smaller group

and more underserved areas around the city. These investments drew on the work of the social impact for the arts project, whose research found a powerful correlation between cultural assets and public health, education, and safety. Based on these findings, we've continued to increase investment steadily and systematically oppressed communities - a strategy we'd come to build in the wake of COVID-19 with its disproportionate impacts on communities of color.

After the release of CreateNYC, we also redirected investments and launched a new funds intended to focus on particular areas of need in our sector. These including The Mayors Grant for Cultural Impact, which supported collaborations between arts groups and city agencies; The Disability Forward Fund expanded opportunity for disability access in artistry; The Language Access Fund opened up new pathways for non-English speakers to connect with our cultural sector.

These funds join the city councils growing number of cultural indicatives, likewise supporting underserved segments of the population. These include The Cultural Immigration Initiative, The Correlation

of Theaters of Color, The Cultural After School
Adventures Program, and SU-Casa.

Together, the administration and the city Council
grew city funding for the arts to record levels, with
a major emphasis on increasing investments for New
Yorkers most often excluded from cultural
opportunities and engagement.

The cultural plan also helped to establish
something that would become critical components of
the cultural community's response to COVID-19:
Culture at 3, a sector lead initiative that's still
going strong - The Museum Reopening Task Force, and
many other collective efforts emerged as an essential
source to mutual aid and resource sharing.

As cultural administrators, we tend to group
ourselves together by discipline, by size, by
location, by audience - all for understandable
reasons. But the true cross sector collaboration
that emerged from spring to 2020, showed that we have
more to gain from working together than we do from
fighting for resources alone. All of the terrible
things to happen in the past two years, this is one
bright spot that I hope we can continue to build on.

In March 2020, we all learned very quickly just how fragile our communities could be. My appointment as Commissioner was announced the very same week that all of New York City was shut down. On a weekly group call with my fellow museum leaders - a call that would eventually be absorbed into Culture at 3 - we thought the reopening might just be days away. As we know now, it would be many months before cultural reopening could begin in earnest.

Successive surveys conducted by DCLA of our constituents showed how profound the damage was: from a billion in lost revenue, to risk of permanent closures, to layoffs and furloughs that affected arts educators and organizations of color far more than their larger, wealthier counterparts - the damage to our culture community has been widespread and massive.

As I mentioned, cultural groups found support in their collective solidarity. Private philanthropy did what they could to stop the hemorrhaging. And at Cultural Affairs, we leaned on everything that we have learned about investing in and uplifting our historically and marginalized communities through the arts to rush support where it was needed the most.

In last year's budget, we set aside over 12 million dollars for COVID relief, and made more targeted investments based on our survey data such as replenishing a relief fund for the hard-hit arts educators' community.

The role culture has played in these past two years goes far beyond economic recovery. The role culture has played in these past two years goes far beyond economic recovery. For example our public arts and residence - or PAIR - with the commission of human rights - Amanda Phingpodhipakkia -, created *I Still Believe in Our Country* in the fall of 2020. As incidents of an anti-Asian bias were on the rise here and across the country, this powerful public art campaign reminded our Asian Pacific Islander neighbors that we were here for them, and called on New Yorkers to stand in solidarity with our Asian communities.

Our Public Artist in Residency with a Civic Engagement Commission - Yazmany Arboleda- led the transformation of decommission corrections bus into a community center on wheels called The Peoples Bus, it was anchored a citywide festival this past summer and continues to drive civic engagement at events around

the city. At a time when New Yorkers were suffering from isolation associated with the lockdown, the artist led effort helped to repair our civic fabric and reconnect residence socially and has resonated powerfully.

Public Artist in Residence, which DCLA created in 2015 - is another example of laying the groundwork for cultural connections and relationships that could be relied on in a moment of crisis. It could be a major challenge to start something totally new under the best circumstances. So, doing this work thoughtfully, and deliberately, and overtime, is work that pays dividends when you need to respond quickly to new challenges, like those created by the pandemic.

Thanks, in part, to this long-term effort to foster a greater understanding of the central role artist play in the life of New York City, we were able to work with The Mayor to create the City Artist Course this year. This \$25 million program, funded by federal relief money, show just how far we've come and helping our civic partners understand the power artists have to heal and to bring people together.

Starting this summer, thousands of artists received an infusion of much-needed money, helping to make sure they could stay in New York and help drive or recovery. At the same time, it filled out open spaces, classrooms, galleries, and other spaces with the creative energy we all miss so dearly, which is a critical ingredient for healthy communities.

Between these programs and the broader reopening that our collective commitment to public health has permitted, we've been overjoyed to see the return of creative programming to New York City. It's been important both as a potent symbol of recovery, and a very real return of the immense value that cultural culture brings to our communities.

The city has worked to support these reopening efforts. For example, our partners in The Mayor's Office created programs like Curtains Up NYC to help groups navigate the federal and state relief funds available to them. And at DCLA, our staff worked tirelessly to provide process changes to grant applications to make sure the City dollars could continue to flow to the cultural community.

Starting in March of this year, Open Cultural NYC, created through legislation sponsored by Chair

van Bramer, thank you for that, was another bright spot for our cultural community. Hundreds of events were permitted since the program began alongside with programs that have brought city streets to life with dining, and performances, open culture gave New Yorkers a chance to engage with arts programming in their neighborhoods; it also gave artists and arts groups the opportunity to earn much-needed revenue.

As administration draws to a close, we are committed to building on and expanding the work began during the pandemic. Just last week, DCLA announced a record high 51.4 million in grants for more than 1,000 cultural groups distributed from The Cultural Development Fund.

Again, we set aside funding for areas of the hardest hit by the pandemic, and for members of the cultural community who are most affected, like arts educators. Working with council to adopt our largest ever budget this year means we are also in a position to include relief funding for all CDF baseline grantees.

Importantly, far from putting it on hold, DCLA staff have use the crisis as an opportunity to advance our ongoing work of fostering greater equity

1 within the sector. For instance, we've expanded a
2 multiyear funding to all CDF grantees, something
3 previously only available for larger groups. We're
4 weaving DEI further into our funding application and
5 review process. And we'll be rolling out additional
6 reforms to our funding process to reduce barriers and
7 enhance equity in the months ahead.
8

9 How we've been able to rely on our equity work to
10 respond to the pandemic shows, to me, that together,
11 we've been on the right path. While we have come so
12 far and struggled so much - there's much more work to
13 do.

14 Thanks again for the opportunity to testify, and
15 I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
17 Commissioner Casals.

18 And, uh, you know, when you talk about March of
19 2020 in your testimony, it's, uh, very powerful, uhm,
20 both because of what... what you are experiencing on
21 a personal level and what all of us, uh, were
22 experiencing. And, uhm, you know, culture, our
23 sector, was just devastated and many others were as
24 well, but few devastated in the way that Culture and
25 the Arts were. And, that fact that we are, uh, far

2 from recovered, but as strong as we are, uhm, is in
3 no small part due to your leadership, uhm, and you're
4 serving as Commissioner during this time. I think
5 there are few have the trust that you do in the
6 sector, uhm, and I think that that's been really
7 important. I do think you've been able to get some
8 things out of this administration that, uhm, maybe
9 others might not have been able to, uhm, because of
10 your tenacity and your skills, and your passion,
11 right? And, so, I'm just really grateful that you've
12 been our Commissioner for these last, uh, 22 months.
13 And, uhm, and I know that whatever comes next, you'll
14 be still that trusted partner to our sector, uh, and
15 to artist everywhere.

16 So, I did have just a couple of, uhm, questions.
17 What have you enjoyed the most (LAUGHTER) about being
18 Commissioner? Because you have had a tenure unlike,
19 I hope, any other Commissioner has. Right? I mean,
20 so I hope that there have been moments of joy for you
21 as you were doing this work. Uhm, you know, often
22 times remotely, during a pandemic, that... It has
23 just not been easy.

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: You know, uhm, as you asked
25 me that question, uhm, I'm thinking, you know,

February 2020 when you and I were standing out at the
uh, 7 train station in Jackson Heights one evening
collecting signatures ,you know, for your, uh,
nomination. And, I was like, should I be doing this
or not? You know? I feel like I'm... Everything is
done, there's nothing more to be done, and you were
like, "Are you crazy? You should just go ahead and
do it." So, thank you for that vote of confidence
without even knowing what was coming next.

Uhm, I've been saying that I would not want to be
doing anything else in a moment like this -- for our
city -- for our sector -- than this job. For an
immigrant that came almost 20 years ago to The City,
uh, the Cultural Sector not only gave me my job, my
career, my network, my friends, my life, but it was
an incredible opportunity for me to be able to give
back in a way ,you know, for everything that I have
received from all of you.

Uhm, it was also a tremendous opportunity to be
able to do this job in a moment that we all came
together. Uhm, I seriously, uhm, thank you for the
partnership that we are able to create while it was
very clear that we were doing the work from our own
roles, uhm, we all -- with the sector -- with you --

with the administration -- we all understood what was the priority, what was needed, and we're all working together towards that. And, I appreciate that a lot, and I am very thankful that I... The meaning that an immigrant can be The Commissioner of Arts and Culture of New York City, if you would just take a minute to think about how meaning is that? Right? On the heels of ,you know, the legislation that you passed last week about non-residents being able to participate in democracy, uhm , this is very meaningful for the immigrant community, and we thank you for that.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Absolutely, and, you know, we... I have served in this position with, uh, three different commissioners. Obviously when I came in, uh, as brand new council member and chair, uh, Kate Levin was our commissioner, and of course was very well established, you know, at that point. Uh, and, uh, but we worked well together and did some great things. And, then, of course, I too was one of those who encouraged Tom Finkelpearl to become The Commissioner, uh, and, uh, we worked very closely together. And, so, I also encouraged you to accept, uh, the position, and I hope both you and Tom are not upset with me for encouraging you to take the

positions. But, uhm, you know, you... You and I have worked, uh, very closely together, uhm, and, uh, and it's been a real joy, you know, not just because we, uhm, you know, are friends and care about the sector, but because of... of how meaningful the conversations are. Uhm, and I think, again, I think there are few people in our community that, uh, that just have that universal respect and admiration and trust, right? Which is a very rare word that we use in governmental and politics. Uhm, but, uh, people trust you, uhm, they know where you're coming from, uhm, they know you're not just talking about diversity, equity, inclusive, you're just, uh, mouthing the words, that that's actually your value, uh, system and structure, and that your life and work has been committed to that. So, indeed, you've been the right person at the right time, uh, because we all needed someone that genuine to be in this position at this moment. Uhm, so, I'm just very grateful that you got this opportunities to be The Commissioner. I don't often agree with The Mayor, but I agree with him wholeheartedly on this one. Uh, it was a great choice, uhm that he made, uh, to his

credit. And, you've been a great Commissioner of The
Department of Cultural Affairs.

So, with that, I just wanted to... (Cross-Talk)

COMMISSIONER CASALS: But, Chair, ,you know, I
feel like it's important to, uhm, acknowledge that
there's only so much one can do from this position if
there's no people outside ,you know, putting on
pressure and making us do the work. And, again, I
want to highlight your leadership in bringing the
sector together, you know, behind the right agenda.
So, when the administration, when The Commissioner of
Cultural Affairs needs to make a decision, uhm ,
again, the agenda, the goal, what needs to be done,
is very clear, and the goals of the sector is very
clear. So, I'll thank you for that.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Yeah, no, I, you know, you
just reminded me of something. When I voted against
the budget two Junes ago, uh, and there was a massive
group of folks assembled outside this building...
uhm, ,you know, and often times, people in powerful
positions in government and politics, sort of the
resent the pressure that's being applied to us by
activists. Uhm, and I luckily began as an activist
and someone who did lots of civil disobedience and

got arrested. And, in my speech that night, I talked about uh, Act Up, and how Act Up was often times not convenient, sometimes not polite, because people were dying. And, they... They were forcing and compelling elected officials to be held accountable. And, so I always have welcomed that, right? That is the role of activists/organizers, uh, members of the community, members of the sector, right? It's to push us. And, so, I think we share that, too, uh, which is a healthy respect for the folks that we are accountable to in this work while we are in these positions, uhm, instead of being resentful of those who are continuously pushing us to do more.

So, thank you again to your team. Uh, I appreciate, uhm, the ability to do this with you today, uh, and I want to thank you again, uh, Cristy Dwyer, uhm, Aliya Ali, uh, Brenda, who is, once again, taking care of two adorable little ones, Matt Wallace my Chief of Staff, uh, Jack Bernatovicz who's watching in Sunnyside.

Uhm, and with that, I will gavel out for the very last time as the Chair of Committee Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations --

1 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International 60
Interqroup Relations

2 the longest name of any committee in the New York
3 City Council.

4 Thank you all very much, with that, this hearing
5 is adjourned.

6 **[GAVEL]**

7 (APPLAUSE)

8 Thank you.

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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 January 27, 2022