

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP
RELATIONS

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OCTOBER 26, 2022

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HELD AT: Council Chambers, City Hall

B E F O R E: Chi A. Ossé, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Eric Dinowitz
- Amanda Farías
- Shahana K. Hanif
- Crystal Hudson
- Rita C. Joseph
- Farah N. Louis
- Francisco P. Moya
- Sandra Ung
- Carlina Rivera

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

Laurie Cumbo
Commissioner
NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

Shirley Levy
Senior Advisor
NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

Lance Polivy
General Counsel
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Sheila Lewandowski
Executive Director
Chocolate Factory Theatre

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Executive Director
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Candace Anderson
Executive Director
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Robin Schatell
Co-Founder/Director
Mov!ng Culture Projects

Kate Madigan
New York Shakespeare Festival

Marianna Mott Newirth
Co-Founder
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Francine Garber-Cohen
President
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Cheryl Warfield
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Sainabou Njai
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African Peach Arts Coalition

Ariel Herrera
Research and Advocacy Manager
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1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

5

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Good morning. I am
3 Councilmember Chi Ossé, Chair on the committee on
4 cultural...

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Hold on a sec. Hold on a sec.

6 COUNSEL: Just a second while we get some
7 equipment (inaudible).

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Welcome to
9 today's New York City Council meeting Cultural
10 Affairs, Libraries, And International Intergroup
11 Relations. At this time, please place electronic
12 devices on silent or on vibrate mode. If you want to
13 submit testimony concert to Sergeant At Arms desk and
14 fill out one of these witness slips. On the Zoom, if
15 you want to submit testimony you may do so at
16 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you Chair you may
18 begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, part two.
20 Good morning. I'm councilmember Chi Ossé Chair on
21 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
22 International Intergroup Relations. Welcome to
23 today's oversight hearing on CreateNYC, the New York
24 City Comprehensive Cultural Plan. At this hearing,
25 the Committee will also be hearing Introduction

2 number 590, co-sponsored by Carlina Rivera and
3 myself, and referred to as Open Culture 2.0, but
4 which will require the city to re-establish the Open
5 Cultural Program, allowing the city to issue a permit
6 to eligible art and cultural institutions to use
7 outdoor space for cultural performances.

8 As Chair of the Committee I acknowledge how
9 important this program was to our cultural community,
10 providing artists and organizations with space to
11 share their work with the greater community during a
12 time when we need the arts the most. I look forward
13 to hearing from the cultural community later on in
14 this hearing on their thoughts about this bill.

15 Let me start by talking for a moment about
16 CreateNYC. As I'm sure everyone here knows the
17 Comprehensive Cultural Plan was developed after
18 extensive and impressive public outreach involving
19 almost 200,000 New Yorkers who gave us their views,
20 insight and feedback in all kinds of forms about the
21 most important art and cultural priorities for the
22 city's next 10 years. The 20 objectives and 96
23 recommendations that were part of CreateNYC, when the
24 plan was launched in July 2017, were streamlined by
25 the Department of Cultural Affairs, DCLA, into five

2 objectives, 25 matching strategies, and 40 specific
3 actions within those strategies in the 2019 Action
4 Plan. That Action Plan also represented the first
5 two-year progress report required by Local Law 46.
6 Since then, DCLA has submitted a second two-year
7 progress report, data for which was made available by
8 DCLA in 2021.

9 We know where we are with regard to receiving
10 these reports. However, there are a few things I aim
11 to accomplish today. First, understanding what
12 progress we've achieved with CreateNYC, what's
13 happened and where we are. Second, I would like to
14 learn more about DCLA's transparency with the larger
15 cultural community on their progress in meeting
16 CreateNYC goals. Third, I would like to learn about
17 the Citizen Advisory Committee or CAC, the process
18 that DCLA undertook in supporting the implementation
19 of the plan, including how this relates to promoting
20 equity and expanding accessibility in New York City.
21 Lastly, I would like to discuss the future of
22 CreateNYC and what we are doing from now until 2027,
23 including with regard to budget.

24 I also want to be clear that I'm particularly
25 concerned about outreach to my office regarding two

2 priorities identified in the original CreateNYC plan
3 that were not sufficiently addressed in the Action
4 Plan or in the subsequent actions being undertaken by
5 DCLA and its partner city agencies. One priority is
6 expanding diversity and inclusion in the cultural
7 workforce, especially when it comes to financial and
8 other support for our smaller arts and cultural
9 organizations based in serving or celebrating
10 communities of color. The other priority is cultural
11 access for people with disabilities and disability
12 arts, a critical part of the fabric of our city. How
13 effective have the city's efforts been in focusing on
14 these two priorities and how much progress has been
15 made, and what remains to be done. I also look
16 forward to hearing the testimony of The
17 Administration as well as of the members of the arts
18 and cultural community who have come today to talk
19 about the open culture bill and what that would bring
20 to the people of New York.

21 Before I move on, I want to acknowledge my
22 colleagues on the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
23 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations who
24 are present here this morning. Thank you for joining
25 us Councilmember Louis and Councilmember Dinowitz.

2 And I would also like to thank my staff and the
3 Committee staff for their work and preparing today's
4 hearing, Naomi Hopkins, my chief of staff _____, my
5 policy and budget director, Brenda McKinney of course
6 the Committee senior legislative council, and Regina
7 Paul, the Committee's legislative policy analyst, and
8 Sandra Gray, the Committee's financial analyst.

9 And finally, I would like to address some
10 housekeeping items before we begin with
11 administration's testimony. I would like to remind
12 everyone He wishes to testify in person today that
13 you must fill out a witness slip, which is located on
14 the desk of the Sergeant at Arms near the entrance of
15 this room. Please fill out the slip even if you have
16 already registered in advance that you will be
17 testifying in person today. To allow as many people
18 as possible to testify, testimony will be limited to
19 two minutes per person, whether you are testifying in
20 person or on Zoom.

21 I am also as going to ask my colleagues to limit
22 their questions and comments to five minutes. Please
23 note that witnesses who are here in person will
24 testify before those who are signed into the Zoom
25 webinar.

2 As a reminder to all of our witnesses, please
3 state your name prior to your testimony for the
4 record.

5 Now I will turn to our senior committee counsel
6 who will administer the affirmation to the witness
7 from the mayoral administration, who may then begin
8 testimony. Brenda?

9 COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair. Just for the
10 record. I'll read the names and then ask you to
11 raise your right hand for the oath. So today,
12 providing testimony is DCLA Commissioner Laurie
13 Cumbo. And on hand for Q&A, we have Shirley Levy,
14 Senior Advisor for DCLA, Lance Polivy, DCLA General
15 Counsel, and Dawn Tolson, CECM Executive Director,
16 who will potentially also testify.

17 If you can please raise your right hand. Do you
18 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
19 but the truth before this Committee and to respond
20 honestly, to Councilmember questions today?

21 ALL ABOVE: We do.

22 COUNSEL: Thank you. Okay. And with that
23 administration, you may begin your testimony. Thank
24 you.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much. I am so
3 excited to be here this morning. My name is Laurie
4 Cumbo. I'm the Commissioner of the New York City
5 Department of Cultural Affairs. And so happy to see
6 so many of my Council colleagues here today. I was
7 excited to see Councilmember Dinowitz in the Bronx at
8 Wave Hill. I was recently joined by Councilmembers
9 Ossé and Louis at the I Will Graduate Performing Arts
10 Venue, and was proud to see Councilmember Hanif at
11 the Port Authority welcoming our asylum seekers with
12 Little Amal.

13 So we have been doing quite a bit of work
14 together collaboratively, and I look forward to the
15 future.

16 Today we are going to testify regarding today's
17 topic: Oversight of the CreateNYC cultural plan. I
18 am joined today by a number of colleagues from DCLA,
19 and other partner city agencies, and I really want to
20 thank all those that are coming here to testify.
21 Whether online or in person, your input continues to
22 be invaluable in strengthening New York City's
23 cultural sector.

24 I understand that this is the first City Council
25 hearing to assess the reach and impact of the

2 CreateNYC cultural plan since it was adopted more
3 than five years ago. Thank you for the opportunity
4 both to offer testimony on behalf of the Department
5 of Cultural Affairs, the lead city agency that drove
6 the creation of the cultural plan, and to hear from
7 the public and constituents about the plan.

8 CreateNYC was rooted in public feedback and
9 engagement from the start, so a continued dialogue
10 around its effectiveness and how we can together
11 better serve its goals is critical. I'll begin
12 testimony with a bit of background and history on
13 CreateNYC. Law 46 of 2015, which as a Councilmember
14 I co-sponsored along with Councilmember Jimmy van
15 Bramer and Councilmember Steve Leven, required the
16 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs to
17 submit New York City's first ever Comprehensive
18 Cultural Plan by July 2017, just over two years from
19 the date the bill was signed. The bill laid out the
20 framework for creating the plan mandating a robust
21 community outreach process, and boy was it.
22 Establishing the Citizens Advisory Committee to
23 advise on the plan, and spelling out a few specific
24 issues the plan had to investigate, such as

2 affordability, arts education, the distribution of
3 arts resources throughout the city, and more.

4 In October 2016 DCLA officially kicked off the
5 public engagement process. For the next six months
6 working with partners across the cultural sector, the
7 agency lead an all-hands-on-deck effort to solicit
8 New York's feedback on issues large and small in
9 order to shape a collective vision for what our
10 city's cultural community could and should be. It
11 was such an exciting process with so many partners
12 all across the city.

13 This feedback came in many forms. The agency
14 hosted major public workshops in each of the five
15 boroughs, as well as over 50 targeted focus groups
16 that investigated what specific groups wanted to see
17 in the plan. NYCHA residents, LGBTQI, veteran and
18 immigrant communities to name just a few. Across all
19 live and virtual spaces, more than 188,000 points of
20 engagement occurred. As someone who participated in
21 several of these feedback sessions and engagement
22 events, I appreciated that this did not feel like a
23 typical top-down input process, where you simply
24 submit your carefully considered feedback on a card,
25 never to be seen again. These events felt lively and

2 real, a testament to what can happen when power is
3 truly shared with members of the community in shaping
4 an agenda and a strategy.

5 A number of groups and coalition's submitted
6 formal proposals and research, including the NYC
7 Artists Coalition, Dance/NYC, the Disability Arts New
8 York Task Force, and the Cultural Equity Group. Over
9 40 events led by community partners provided input as
10 well, including a diverse set of cultural coalitions
11 from Staten Island to Jamaica, to East New York to
12 the Lower East Side, thanks to funding from the New
13 York City cultural agenda fund in the New York
14 Community Trust. This was cultural democracy in
15 action and showed the power of public and private
16 partnerships.

17 DCLA also commissioned a survey from the Sienna
18 College Research Institute, helping to ensure that
19 the plan was broadly aligned with public opinion.
20 Among other things, the survey found that an
21 astonishing 97% of residents believe that arts and
22 culture are important to the overall quality of life
23 in New York City. It's hard to get people to agree
24 on much in New York City, but the fact that so many
25 people agree that art and culture is critical to our

2 everyday life stresses and also was noteworthy and
3 inspiring. Whatever our different priorities may
4 have been, we could all work from this shared
5 understanding that arts and culture are a critical
6 part of our everyday lives.

7 CreateNYC was released in July 2017. Across
8 nearly 200 pages, it laid out 92 recommendations
9 covering the nine issue areas required by the bill.
10 It pointed to both strengths, weaknesses, and
11 opportunities with short, medium, and long term
12 goals. It was at times big and bold and at other
13 times wonky, but by and large, the constituencies who
14 showed up to engage in the planning process saw
15 themselves reflected in its far reaching
16 recommendations and embraced it as a visionary
17 roadmap.

18 But as we know, a plan is only as good as the
19 action to back it up. CreateNYC built in part on
20 recent work and research conducted by the agency
21 itself. For instance, DCLA's Diversity, Equity and
22 Inclusion study released in 2016 led to new efforts
23 to foster greater diversity in the city's cultural
24 workforce, such as the CUNY Cultural Corps, our
25 pipeline program that's still going strong.

2 CreateNYC provided another opportunity to harness
3 this energy and consensus behind the need for greater
4 equity and inclusion, and so the new requirement for
5 the 33 members of the Cultural Institutions Group to
6 formally adopt DEI plans, among the first such plans
7 in the cultural sector in the nation, which we are
8 particularly proud of, was announced along with the
9 Cultural Plan in 2017. We continue to work with the
10 CIG to track progress on these far-reaching plans.
11 To pick just one example The Public Theater set
12 specific benchmarks for increasing the proportion of
13 staff members of color, as well as ambitious pay
14 equity goals. Across the CIG membership. The plans
15 helped spur similar efforts to codify and accelerate
16 work that in many cases had already begun.

17 In early 2017, social impact of the Arts Project
18 issued a report showing how the presence of cultural
19 assets correlates with stronger, healthier
20 communities. This too, was a major influence on the
21 plan and its outcomes. These are just a couple of
22 ways in which the cultural plan helped to focus and
23 drive forward work that was already being done by the
24 agency and throughout the sector. CreateNYC didn't
25 invent equity. Advocates and activists have been

2 calling for more cultural equity in this city for
3 decades. In earlier generations, these bold
4 visionaries created institutions like the Studio
5 Museum in Harlem and El Museo del Barrio. In the
6 years before the cultural plan was released, I was
7 lucky to work alongside modern day visionaries like
8 Bill Aguado, Dr. Martha Medina Vega, Bob Lee, Diane
9 Freyr, and Bolsa Rivers, just to name a few with whom
10 I co-founded the cultural equity group when I was the
11 leader of the Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora
12 and Art, MoCADA. But what CreateNYC did was fully
13 embraced these calls into the mainstream. Suddenly,
14 those of us calling for equity could see our message
15 reflected in a plan adopted at the highest levels of
16 city government, an invigorating affirmation of our
17 collective work. It's important to see the plans
18 placed on this continuum of so much work that came
19 before and after, and to understand how CreateNYC
20 served as a major milestone on our path toward
21 creating a more vibrant, equitable cultural sector
22 for all New Yorkers.

23 At the same time, CreateNYC fostered several
24 entirely new funding programs that took direct aim at
25 its major findings. The Mayor's Grant For Cultural

2 Impact, responding to the plans call for more
3 coordination between city agencies and the cultural
4 sector. This program supported a range of exciting
5 new partnerships. To name just one Claremont
6 Illuminated was a partnership between the Mayor's
7 Office of Criminal Justice and Bronx Documentary
8 Center that created a festival around site-specific
9 light based artworks. The artwork by local youth was
10 projected onto exterior walls, literally lighting up
11 a formerly dark and derelict step in the South Bronx
12 with the creative energy of community members.

13 The CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund launched in
14 2018. The DFF supported new and ongoing efforts to
15 engage people with disabilities as artists, cultural
16 workers and audience members. From residencies for
17 disabled dance artists to career development
18 opportunities for cultural workers with disabilities
19 to plays performed an ASL, the Disability forward
20 fund represented a major push toward the goal of
21 greater cultural equity for the disability community,
22 which is a through line for CreateNYC. The CreateNYC
23 Language Access Fund was established to support
24 cultural organizations' efforts to increase access
25 for audiences whose primary language is not English.

2 In its first round of grants, the Language Access
3 Fund awarded 36 nonprofits support for programs,
4 representing 12 languages, including Spanish,
5 Chinese, Korean, Russian, and American Sign Language.
6 Both DFF and Language Access Fund are still provided
7 to organizations working in these areas through
8 DCLA's Cultural Development Fund, which we are all
9 particularly proud of.

10 The CreateNYC Leadership Accelerator was a
11 professional development program designed to promote
12 diversity and equity in the cultural workforce,
13 through a curriculum developed by CUNY School of
14 Professional Studies and Creative Arts team. The
15 program helped mid-level cultural workers strengthen
16 the management skills that are integral to career
17 growth and mobility and to build a diverse network of
18 peers who could rely on each other for mutual
19 support. Participants examine systemic challenges
20 that exist in the workplace, and exchange ideas for
21 promoting equity in the cultural workforce. In some
22 ways the Leadership Accelerator work paralleled to
23 the CUNY Cultural Corps which DCLA helped establish
24 in 2016.

2 Following the release of a major demographic
3 survey of the city's cultural workforce, the Cultural
4 Corps was designed to address what some considered
5 the pipeline problem: By providing CUNY's diverse
6 student body with paid opportunities to get work
7 experience at cultural institutions. To date, over
8 500 students have been placed in paid positions with
9 over 60 cultural not-for-profits, but DCLA's
10 demographic surveys also showed that mid-career
11 cultural workers faced a hump, as cultural leadership
12 remained overwhelmingly white and organizations got
13 more diverse as you went down the organizational
14 ladder. A 2019 followup to DCLA's demographic survey
15 found that cultural boards and executive leadership
16 were 70% and 68% white, non Hispanic, respectively.
17 This in a city where two thirds of residents identify
18 as people of color. So while the Cultural Corps got
19 more diverse talent into entry level opportunities,
20 the Leadership Accelerator was intended to help
21 diverse mid-career cultural workers advance into
22 leadership positions.

23 This also highlights the complex nature of
24 defining what programs grew explicitly from
25 CreateNYC. The plan both launched new efforts as

2 well as recommended expanding or reforming existing
3 programs.

4 It's important to emphasize that CreateNYC was
5 not just a plan for DCLA. The agency may have
6 spearheaded it, but its goals and strategies reach
7 beyond Cultural Affairs. In fact, the indicators and
8 metrics in the plan often explicitly point to actions
9 required by a range of partner agencies and
10 organizations to move the needle. The call to create
11 an office of nightlife, for instance, was embraced by
12 the plan. This office, a critical link between local
13 government and our nightlife and DIY arts community
14 is now part of the Mayor's Office Of Media and
15 Entertainment, MONE. The Department of Education is
16 obviously a key partner and seeing through the plans
17 ambitious arts education recommendations. Housing,
18 affordability, and economic development all are
19 substantially represented in the plan, which all
20 speaks to how tightly woven culture is throughout the
21 fabric of our city. It's impossible to talk about it
22 as an isolated thing. It's part of who we are as New
23 Yorkers and becoming more of an artful city.

24 I want to point out how important a partner the
25 City Council has historically been for promoting

2 cultural equity too, because this is certainly a
3 partnership. In my time as a Councilmember, we
4 expanded the coalition of theaters of color
5 initiative from just \$700,000 for eight theaters to
6 over \$3.7 million for more than 50 theaters,
7 encompassing a wide range of communities of color,
8 like Thalia Spanish theater, Chinese Theater Works,
9 and Amarenda. This was really personally one of the
10 things I'm most excited about as a Councilmember.
11 Council's funding of Casa and Soup Casa provided wide
12 access to cultural after-school programming and arts
13 programming for older New Yorkers. When I entered
14 the council, each Councilmember only received five
15 casas, but now we're up to over 17 per each
16 Councilmember. We created the Utility Relief Program
17 to cover energy costs for a diverse group of
18 institutions on city-owned property, and I was
19 particularly proud to spearhead that effort along
20 with adding Weeksville Heritage Center to the CIG
21 list to save it from the brink of closure, the first
22 new CIG in over 20 years.

23 All of these achievements align with the values
24 and goals of CreateNYC, and none of them could have

2 happened without a close partnership with the City
3 Council.

4 The private sector also has a major role to play.

5 In fact, culture is one of the great public-private
6 partnerships that has shaped our city. Starting in
7 the 19th century, the city's leaders saw an important
8 relationship between the public realm and the arts.

9 The Met Museum and Natural History Museum were-

10 established on city property, with a mandate to serve

11 all residents. Like with CreateNYC that was just a

12 starting place. We've since expanded the city

13 partnership with culture that started with those two

14 groups to encompass communities in every corner of

15 New York, thanks to decades of work by people

16 advocating both inside and outside of local

17 government.

18 As we consider paths laid out to the cultural

19 plan today, it's important to recall these earliest

20 strategies for making our cultural community stronger

21 and more representative of the city's incredible

22 diversity. For the first biennial update of

23 CreateNYC as required by the legislation, DCLA

24 streamlined and simplified it's sprawling 92

25 recommendations into the CreateNYC Action Plan. This

2 tied nearly every recommendation from the original
3 plan into five broad objectives with 25 supporting
4 strategies and a range of indicators to track each
5 one. If you visit nyc.gov/CreateNYC, you'll find
6 this all provided in an easily searchable format.
7 Each of the 25 strategies includes a list of
8 references. If you click on each reference, it links
9 you back to the relevant recommendation from the
10 original plan. Each strategy in turn includes a list
11 of associated actions which you can filter by year.
12 So DCLA has taken many efforts to ensure that the
13 public can track the progress on the plan and see
14 exactly how the streamline Action Plan relates back
15 to the original plan.

16 Several months after the Action Plan was
17 released, COVID hit our city and changed everything.
18 But far from sweeping the plan aside as some might
19 expect, the damage that the pandemic brought on our
20 communities actually validated much of what was in
21 CreateNYC. We saw underserved communities
22 disproportionately impacted by COVID, not for any
23 medical reasons, but due to long term underinvestment
24 driven by systemic racism. These are the various
25 economic and racial disparities the plan took direct

2 aim at. And because the cultural plan had helped
3 foster a broad understanding of cultural value both
4 economically and socially, investing relief funding
5 in our arts community became a top priority for New
6 York City policymakers. Programs like the city
7 artists corps were created with federal COVID relief
8 funding as a result, and culture was front and center
9 in Mayor Adams economic recovery blueprint released
10 earlier this year. Even DCLA's record-setting
11 expense budget in the current fiscal year attests to
12 the recognition by this administration and our
13 partners throughout city government, including the
14 council, that art and culture are essential for our
15 city's recovery in so many ways. The legacy of
16 CreateNYC can be seen in this broad consensus.

17 The agency and our partners continue to build on
18 the platform provided by the cultural plan. Through
19 the Cultural Development Fund, we're instituting new
20 equity measures to ensure this funding gets to groups
21 far and wide. The CIG continues to implement changes
22 based on the DEI plans required, with regular
23 progress reports. We're ensuring that our capital
24 funding portfolio also reflects our city's great
25 diversity. In this year's capital budget we directed

2 new investments to build in cultural infrastructure
3 that reflects our city's diversity. New homes for
4 the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance and the Universal Hip
5 Hop Museum, renovations at the Leslie Lohman new
6 museum and Noguchi Museum, show how the values of the
7 cultural plan can infuse all of our work. With just
8 over half of the plan's intended 10-year window
9 behind us, there's still so much more to do. We look
10 forward to working with you, our partners and city
11 council, our cultural community, and all New Yorkers
12 to continue working toward his broad ambitious
13 vision.

14 Regarding the proposed legislation, Intro 590 of
15 2022, which would renew the Open Cultural Program was
16 an appropriate bill to be included in an oversight
17 hearing for the cultural plan, bringing culture to
18 our open spaces, coordination among city agencies in
19 support of the arts, and expanding opportunities for
20 artists to work at NYC. These are all echoed in the
21 cultural plan and were accompanied by the innovative
22 Open Culture Program. During some of the most trying
23 times of the pandemic. I co-sponsored the
24 legislation that created the original program. My
25 colleagues and I in The Administration look forward

2 to working with you to continue to meet the needs of
3 our cultural community as the city continues its
4 recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and expands
5 opportunities for all New Yorkers to experience arts
6 right in their neighborhoods.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

8 I'm happy to answer any questions you may have, and I
9 am absolutely thrilled that this council is excited,
10 interested, and focused on realizing the full
11 potential of New York City's cultural plan. And I'm
12 so excited that you all have brought this legislation
13 forward as well.

14 Thank you so much, and I will be happy to answer
15 any questions that this Committee may have.

16 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much,
17 Commissioner. And I also do want to recognize some
18 more of my colleagues that are on this Committee that
19 have joined us today. Thank you for coming
20 Councilmember Ung, Councilmember Joseph,
21 Councilmember Hanif, and Councilmember Hudson, and we
22 also do have Councilmember Moya on Zoom. Just a
23 reminder to Councilmembers that are on Zoom, if you
24 have any questions, please use the raise your hand
25 feature.

2 And also just a reminder to everyone that came to
3 testify in person, even if you did register online
4 prior, please do fill out a slip right here at the
5 Sergeant At Arms table. And thank you so much for
6 being here this morning.

7 Now we'll move on to some questions after that
8 testimony from The Administration. And the first one
9 that I want to start off with, commissioner, you
10 know, as commissioner, and you've been a commissioner
11 for about 10 months now, what is your perspective of
12 CreateNYC and the state that it's in at this very
13 moment?

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think that while I stated
15 in my testimony that COVID-19 obviously stopped some
16 of the progress that we wanted to make, but it also
17 highlighted the importance of the progress and the
18 work that needs to be done.

19 I believe that currently right now, the cultural
20 plan is in an exciting, ever-evolving space. I feel
21 that COVID illuminated the need for the cultural plan
22 more than ever. But I also feel in this new
23 administration, Mayor Eric Adams was very adamant
24 about realizing the goals of the cultural plan. And
25 by doing that, he wanted to make sure that we passed

2 the largest cultural budget in New York City's
3 history, and we were able to do that in partnership
4 with each of you.

5 And I just want to quote the numbers here in
6 terms of looking at our budget, we had \$237 million
7 in expense, as well as \$220 million in capital. This
8 represents the largest budget in our city's history
9 as it pertains to culture. It also allowed us the
10 opportunity to continue incredible programs that came
11 about as a result of the cultural plan, such as the
12 Disability Fund, as well as the Language Access Fund.
13 And these were critical as a result of this level of
14 funding and input. But also implementation of the
15 Office of Nightlife which I spoke about in my
16 testimony. This was a huge opportunity. And we also
17 were able to... It's about the funding, but it's
18 also about how we restructure the funding, how we get
19 funding into the outer boroughs, and through this CDF
20 process, we were able to through our grant-making
21 application process to change the entire landscape of
22 how we fund organizations. We are now going to have
23 smaller and mid-sized organizations receiving more
24 funding than ever before. We're going to make sure
25 that there's more funding in the outer boroughs. And

2 as far as capital, as I spoke about, you're going to
3 see in the next few years some really exciting
4 projects in terms of the studio museum's new building
5 will be coming online. The Hip Hop Museum in the
6 Bronx will all also be opening quite soon along with
7 the first ever building for the Bronx Children's
8 Museum, which is coming up this month, you're going
9 to see the Louis Armstrong House open in Queens.
10 These are opportunities for many organizations to
11 either expand or to have their first permanent home,
12 like the Afro jazz Alliance... the Afro Latin Jazz
13 Alliance. These are many organizations that
14 systemically were not part of the capital process,
15 but are now going to have world-class state-of-the-
16 art institutions.

17 So the cultural plan is alive and well. It's
18 evolving. But I want to stress in this hearing, the
19 cultural plan will really only be as successful as
20 our joint partnership. So some of the initiatives
21 that I mentioned in terms of either its creation or
22 expansion also complemented the goals of the cultural
23 plan as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And would you say that the
25 cultural plan as it is, is efficient?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Is the cultural plan
3 efficient in terms of managing the expectations of
4 the cultural sector of New York City?

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes.

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, there are over 92
7 recommendations. And if we went out into the
8 cultural sector, we probably could come away with
9 about 1000 more. So there are so many more goals
10 that people want to see reflected in the city of New
11 York. But the cultural plan, again, is an ever-
12 evolving document. It's always going to change.
13 Diversity is not a place that you land at. It's ever
14 evolving. And it's something that we always have to
15 remain committed to. We always have to be doing the
16 work. We always have to figure out new ways of
17 reaching audiences that are underserved. We always
18 have to figure out how we can utilize more public and
19 private partnerships to reach those organizations and
20 communities that have been underserved.

21 So this is really an ever-evolving process that
22 we all can do collaboratively and together. Again,
23 the partnership between the council and The
24 Administration has proven over the last decade or so
25 to be the most effective way to push the needle in

2 terms of the progress that we want to see in this
3 cultural sphere.

4 But can we be doing more? Can we utilize more
5 resources? Can we have more partnerships to get us
6 there? Absolutely. All the time. And I really look
7 forward to working with everyone to figure out how we
8 can bring greater diversity, equity inclusion
9 throughout our cultural sector throughout the entire
10 city. Because we are really the... We are really the
11 global leader on so many levels in terms of the work
12 that we do, the Language Access Grant, the ability to
13 have a disability funding stream. These are
14 revolutionary in New York City. The Su Casa Senior
15 Program: These are programs that have set the set
16 the stage for so many agencies across New York City,
17 but also in the world, in terms of the work that
18 we're doing here.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And is the agency working off
20 the 2017 CreateNYC Plan, or the streamlined 2019
21 Action Plan?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The 2019 streamline plan is
23 really based off of the 2017 goals and
24 recommendations. So we've streamlined them. But
25 while we've streamlined them, it doesn't mean that

2 we've eliminated them. We've more so categorized
3 them so that we can better track and we can better
4 view and we can better see, but also so that we can
5 be more purposeful in its implementation. So there's
6 not an elimination. There's more just a consolidation
7 and a grouping so that we can more effectively see
8 the recommendations.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: So then you would say that...
10 you would say that the agency is keeping the
11 strategies from the 2017 plan that have not been
12 achieved as well within the more streamlined
13 combination of both of them?

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Certainly. I mean, this
15 is... The plan was created really as a 10-year plan.
16 This was something that we had a 10-year timeline in
17 order to implement. Of course, things have changed
18 and shifted during the pandemic. But the goal was
19 always for this to be a 10-year timeline, in terms
20 of... not necessarily achieving but also reviewing
21 and also altering because the diversity of New York
22 City continues to change. The needs of New York City
23 continues to change. How we look at ourselves, and
24 how we look at the world continues to change. So we
25 want to be ever amorphous with it. We want to

2 continue to evolve with it. We want to make sure
3 that we are keeping pace with the cultural diversity
4 and movements of the city. So 2017 is really only an
5 indicator of what the original foundation of the
6 plan was. But in 2019, it's more streamlined so that
7 people can follow more closely. And we can also
8 deliver on those deliverables.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And can you maybe go more in
10 depth in describing the process by which the agency
11 created the 2019 Action Plan? Like how were the...
12 How were the 14 indicators chosen? Or how did you
13 decide which of the 96 strategies from CreateNYC
14 would be referenced in the Action Plan?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, I'm actually going to
16 turn that over to Shirley Levy, who was actually...

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right, right.

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: ...in the Department of
19 Cultural Affairs at that time. I've been here now
20 for about eight months, but I wanted to turn it over
21 to Shirley, who could more adequately answer that
22 question.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

24 MS. LEVY: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you,
25 Council.

2 It was a relatively simple process internally.
3 As the Commissioner said, we didn't eliminate any...
4 any of the recommendations. But when it was time to
5 develop a report for council, we realized that there
6 were a lot of redundancies in the language. There
7 were redundancies and some of the recommendations and
8 in order to report more effectively, not just to the
9 council body, but to the sector at large, it just
10 made more sense to consolidate them and organize them
11 into sections.

12 So if you look carefully at the Action Plan,
13 you'll see that, you know, that we do cross reference
14 them. So anyone who's concerned about a
15 recommendation from 2017 is being eliminated, can
16 actually see the thread of how it arrived at 2019.
17 So it was just a matter of reorganization and
18 streamlining, but nothing was eliminated.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And you said that it was more
20 of an internal process. And was that... was the CAC
21 or the Citizens Advisory Committee, the Committee
22 responsible for providing feedback and
23 recommendations on the 2017 CreateNYC plan consulted
24 during the formation of the 2019 Action Plan?

2 MS. LEVY: Yes. Absolutely, yes. And I believe
3 they endorsed the Action Plan, they provided a letter
4 of support, and they've been with us the entire time.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Wonderful, thank you.

6 Another question that I have is which of the
7 objectives and strategies do you think DCLA and its
8 partners have been most successful in accomplishing,
9 and why?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, I could go on all day.
11 There's so many things that I'm particularly proud
12 of. I'm particularly proud of the Office of
13 Nightlife. And the creation of the Office of
14 Nightlife was so critical. Because what we saw
15 during the pandemic was that so many of our nightlife
16 industries that were not as protected prior to, now
17 had an advocate, and now had an office to be able to
18 go to in order to understand how to get federal
19 support, how to manage lease negotiations with
20 landlords who wanted to kick them out, how to make
21 sure that they were protected during this time. So
22 the Office Of Nightlife was extremely critical and
23 its creation during this pandemic.

24 I'm extremely proud of the capital budget, in
25 particular, because the capital budget is going to

2 reach so many communities, particularly in the outer
3 boroughs. The Bronx was one of the boroughs in this
4 budget cycle that really benefited from the capital
5 process in a very instrumental and major way. And we
6 wanted to make sure that Councilmember Dinowitz was
7 happy that the Bronx is getting some capital love
8 and, and making sure that they are going to have
9 world-class institutions. I'm so looking forward to
10 this month, going to the ribbon cutting for the Bronx
11 Children's Museum. That's a huge infrastructure
12 change that's going to change the way people visit,
13 see, and navigate their experience through the Bronx.
14 We want to make sure that those underserved
15 communities that have been plagued with issues of gun
16 violence and all of these issues are able to turn the
17 page in terms of making sure that children are
18 growing up in communities where they feel loved, and
19 they feel supported. I was very happy to be with you
20 Councilmember Ossé, at the Brooklyn children's
21 museum, where we just opened the new theater, world-
22 class state of the art theater, you skipped out on
23 the Minions marathon movie, but it was an incredible
24 opportunity to be able to see that our children are
25 going to be able to go to world-class institutions

2 right in their own neighborhood in Crown Heights, and
3 Bedford Stuyvesant. I mean, this was essentially
4 unheard of when I was growing up, that we would have
5 these world-class institutions in our own
6 communities. The CDF process: I just want to read
7 you some really exciting information about the CDF
8 process, and how we've... how we've changed the
9 infrastructure of it in a major way.

10 So on this, we now have, which I'm particularly
11 proud of... We were able to double the minimum grant
12 award from \$5,000 to \$10,000. So many of you... We
13 all know the level of paperwork that these grants
14 require. But we wanted to make sure that
15 organizations that were applying for funding, we're
16 not going to just walk away with \$5,000. We set the
17 stage so that the new floor is \$10,000. So any
18 organization applying to the Department of Cultural
19 Affairs is now going to receive a \$10,000 grant,
20 should they qualify and meet the guidelines of our
21 panel review process. We also increased the ability
22 to have more panelists from all throughout the
23 diversity of the New York City. Panelists were paid
24 \$480 for two days of work to review panels. So in
25 the upcoming review and panel process, we want you as

2 Councilmembers to recommend people from your
3 community. This is so critical that you recommend
4 people from your community that should be a part of
5 this panel review process. We also over 10 weeks
6 this summer, our staff and 260 panelists reviewed
7 1250 applications in 52 panels. This was an amazing
8 accomplishment.

9 But I also want to add that we focus very much on
10 small to mid-sized organizations in this panel review
11 process. We wanted to make sure that we got funding
12 to the outer boroughs, but also to communities that
13 systemically did not receive funding in the past.

14 I'm also super proud about... I mean, because
15 you've asked... I'm also super proud, and then I'll
16 end here, because I could go on and on. The Language
17 Access Grant is huge. That's an incredible component
18 to this. To be able to intentionally send a message
19 to the field that we want to see more language
20 accessibility in our cultural institutions. And
21 that's what that streamline of funding will do. It
22 will send a message to cultural institutions that
23 there is funding available for you to provide
24 language access throughout your institution, as well
25 as the Disability... the Disability Fund, this is

2 critical also to send a message to the sector that we
3 want our institutions throughout New York City to be
4 fully accessible for all New Yorkers and visitors to
5 New York City.

6 And finally, I'll just add with the CUNY Cultural
7 Corps. This is so important, and it's a program that
8 I certainly want to see expanded. We have to create
9 the pipeline, which this program does, in order to
10 make sure that we're not just talking about
11 diversity, but we are actually creating the pipeline
12 to create the diversity. So we have to have
13 individuals that are coming out of our educational
14 institutions with internship opportunities, with the
15 ability to learn, with hands-on mentors, but also the
16 ability to be able to work in those institutions will
17 create a pipeline so that we can have more diverse
18 staff, that we can have those diverse board members,
19 we can have the ability to have our programs and
20 exhibitions more reflective of the city of New York,
21 when we educate our workforce about the critical
22 components of cultural work, and the ability to have
23 a sustainable internship provides that opportunity.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Commissioner. And
3 I think you did reference the Language Access Fund,
4 correct?

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I think the Language Access
7 Fund you referenced in testimony stopped in 2019.
8 And I wanted to ask, are there plans to reestablish
9 the Language Access Fund? Or is this part of the
10 CDF? What is the status of that fund and the
11 CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund?

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It is actually a part of the
13 CDF fund.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So organizations have an
16 opportunity when they apply for their grant, to be
17 able to select and to provide a description of the
18 work that they're doing in their application. And I
19 also wanted to add that as well that our applications
20 are all online now, which was something that was not
21 done before. So the language access is a part of the
22 CDF process as well as the disability fund.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And I also... We touched on
24 COVID and its impact on the cultural community as
25 well as CreateNYC. And as we all know, COVID

2 severely impacted the cultural community, and
3 additional programs and initiatives were created to
4 address the issues, artists and organizations faced
5 during the pandemic. Does DCLA see these COVID era
6 programs and initiatives as part of the CreateNYC
7 plan? Or are they separate initiatives that will be
8 incorporated in a revision of the CreateNYC plan?

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can you... read the... Can
10 you reread this question section of the question?

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes. Does the CLA see these
12 COVID era programs and initiatives as part of the
13 CreateNYC plan? Or are they separate initiatives
14 that will be incorporated in a revision of the
15 CreateNYC plan?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So the way we really look at
17 the CreateNYC plan is: The CreateNYC plan is not a
18 siloed plan or program within the agency. We are
19 fully committed in terms of diversity, equity
20 inclusion, which the cultural plan is based upon, in
21 every single thing that we do... in everything that
22 we do. So it's not as if we look at certain aspects
23 or certain programs as part of the CreateNYC program,
24 and others are not. They're all a part of this
25 dynamic, where we want to see cultural diversity in

2 every aspect of everything that we do. So language
3 access, the Disability Fund, putting more dollars
4 into our capital fund, expanding the cultural
5 institution groups to include Weeksville. These are
6 all interwoven together. And the programs that also
7 the City Council does is a huge part of that. When
8 you vote for programs such as the Theaters Of Color
9 and the expansion of Su Casa and the expansion of the
10 CASA program: Those we consider are all a part of
11 the Cultural Plan and CreateNYC. Your ability to
12 recommend panelists to be a part of the CDF process.
13 All of that is interwoven, and we certainly don't
14 consider them to be siloed.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And which of the
16 objectives and strategies... I know we talked a lot
17 about many of the different things that you guys have
18 been doing, that have been wonderful, you know, but
19 what strategies and objectives do you think DCLA and
20 its partners have been least successful in
21 accomplishing?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Least successful?

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm not accustomed to
25 answering those kinds of questions.

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I would say the area that I
3 strive to do more of... that I would like to see more
4 of: I would like to see more public-private
5 partnerships.

6 I feel that the area where we could use more
7 improvement, or the area in which we could be more
8 successful, or to really like, you know, fully
9 loaded, you know, everything's moving on all
10 cylinders would be to see if we could have... we
11 could tap more into the industries that are
12 successful here in New York City, and to create more
13 of those partnerships, because government can only
14 take us but so far. We need to have more
15 partnerships with our corporate sectors, with our
16 foundations, to be able to move the needle on many of
17 the aspects of the cultural plan.

18 So that I would say is the area where we want to
19 focus more on, where we want to push the needle more
20 on. And I feel that as my role as a commissioner...
21 my role as a commissioner is to facilitate more of
22 those partnerships so that we can fully achieve many
23 of the intentions of the cultural plan.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And what is DCLA's plan for
25 creating those partnerships?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I don't want to give away
3 all of my ideas just yet. From running a not-for-
4 profit museum, I just participated in the Grantmakers
5 For The Arts Conference. It was an incredible
6 opportunity to meet with grantmakers from all over
7 the country, and I was able to meet with Dr. Maria
8 Rosario Jackson, who is the NEA Chair, and I was also
9 able to meet with many of the grantmakers throughout
10 the nation to talk about how can we create
11 collaborations with foundations and corporations in
12 order to move the needle forward on many of these
13 objectives.

14 So what that would look like and many ways in
15 terms of how we could make it work, as well as with
16 our corporations -- because there are a lot of
17 corporations that are doing business in New York City
18 -- we need to look at different initiatives. Could
19 we look at the CASA program? And could those costs
20 of programs be matched? We need to look at programs
21 such as -- that I've been looking at very closely --
22 the Theaters Of Color Initiative, how can we look at
23 the Theaters Of Color Initiative and that approximate
24 \$3.7 million and have a corporation or foundation
25 match that funding each year with what the council

2 puts forward and have it matched by a foundation or a
3 corporation, in order to provide more funding.

4 Imagine we move the needle from \$3.7 to like \$7
5 million, and we're able to increase the amount of
6 theatre organizations from 54 to maybe 70 or 80, and
7 to reach more communities.

8 So it's really critical that we identify those
9 foundations and corporations, and that we not see
10 other sectors in the city, such as our corporation so
11 much as the bad guys, or folks that we don't
12 necessarily have relationships with. But we have to
13 understand how resources are coming into New York
14 City, and how we can partner to make people more
15 equitable, and understanding that everyone that's
16 here in New York City has a role and a responsibility
17 to contribute to the cultural sector in some way. We
18 can't just allow foundations and corporations and
19 development to happen in New York City without having
20 a very honest and very real commitment to investing
21 into the city of New York.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And I do want to
23 continue conversations about these partnerships, and
24 how the council can engage on moving the needle. I
25 do want to acknowledge Councilmember Rivera, who has

2 joined us. But with regard to the budget, our office
3 has also heard from many organizations that have
4 suggested asking the new administration to adopt the
5 1% of the city's budget for culture and the arts. Is
6 this something that Adams Administration is or has
7 also considered?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: This was a huge conversation
9 that we were having in the City Council, and one that
10 I was so much in the forefront of. In my
11 conversations during the negotiations with Mayor Eric
12 Adams, while we were not able to achieve the 1% in
13 terms of moving the needle in that way, what we did
14 commit to was the largest expense of capital budget
15 in the city's history. So while we didn't make the
16 1% mark, we moved the needle in a major way in terms
17 of passing this budget. And with each budget cycle,
18 we hope to get closer and closer to achieving more
19 investment in the city of New York. But it's always
20 going to be a negotiation. It's always going to be
21 looking at the different dynamics throughout the city
22 of New York. But I believe with this last budget,
23 this administration has demonstrated its commitment
24 to seeing a larger, more robust budget throughout the
25 city.

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. I do want to
3 acknowledge Councilmember Farias.

4 And then an additional question that I want to
5 ask in regards to the budget is, you know, we're
6 hearing a lot about PEGs coming in in the future
7 budgets, and through the conversations happening
8 around the country as well as within this council, we
9 are expensive expecting a budget shortfall within
10 this next budget.

11 From your perspective, how do you perceive these
12 potential cuts, and how they're going to impact the
13 cultural community, and CreateNYC and everything that
14 falls under its umbrella?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Every agency throughout the
16 City of New York right now is looking at cost saving
17 measures in order to make sure that we can preserve
18 the viability of New York City. Our agency is not
19 exempt from that process. We are looking at how to
20 create cost saving measures that are not going to
21 impact the cultural sector in an adverse or negative
22 way. We want to make sure that we look at this from
23 a very strategic standpoint in terms of how can we
24 support and keep our organizations as whole as
25 possible, but also instructing them that they should

2 start to also look within their organizations for
3 cost-saving measures. What are things that they can
4 do in order to better prepare for the future? So we
5 haven't come up with a strategy as of yet. We're in
6 negotiations with OMB. We're fleshing out ideas to
7 see how we can protect the sector, while also
8 recognizing that this cost saving exercise is needed
9 for the viability of New York City moving forward.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And I know you
11 will, but please keep us all in the loop on what
12 that's going to look like you know, myself, the
13 Committee, and the entire cultural community of what
14 these potential... what these cuts will look like,
15 where they will hit.

16 I know we talked a lot about money, but other
17 than funding, which is always needed, what support
18 would improve DCLA's implementation of the actions
19 and strategies of CreateNYC and some of the work that
20 you were doing. For example, it does not take money
21 to streamline or rethink the CDF application
22 logistics and requirements, as well as what you have
23 done in terms of bringing... bringing that
24 application portal online.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think the... the number
3 one thing that we can do, which we are already doing,
4 is to work very closely as Commissioner of the
5 Cultural Affairs, with you, Chair of the Cultural
6 Committee, Chi Ossé. The closer we work together,
7 the more effective we will be able to be in terms of
8 protecting the sector and moving forward. Also, the
9 ability to work collaboratively to create those
10 public-private partnerships will be really key and
11 critical to realizing the goals of the cultural plan.
12 And I'm really looking forward to being able to do
13 that, to expanding that invitation and that desire to
14 work together to the entire Committee. Our ability
15 to work together to identify priorities and needs in
16 the communities that are most underserved, will be
17 the most effective way to do that. Because we all
18 have ideas. We all have ways to move the sector
19 forward. And the more collaboratively we can do
20 that, the better we will be.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much. And I do
22 want to segue into CreateNYC's benchmarks in terms of
23 tracking progress, and understanding... and again
24 tracking the progress you're discussing: Is the
25 agency using benchmarks to know how you're doing

2 compared to other years? Do you tie to the
3 indicators and numbers in CreateNYC to benchmarks
4 internally.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We don't necessarily look at
6 the... the cultural plan as so much of a facts and
7 figures and numbers and spreadsheets and bar and pie
8 graphs and that sort of thing. There is an element
9 to that, because you do want to have accountability.
10 But it's also more of an intentionality.

11 I'll give you an example. So for our cultural
12 institution groups, for the first time ever in this
13 nation, the cultural institution groups had to put
14 forward a diversity, equity, and inclusion plan for
15 their boards as well as their staffs. We also put
16 forward a policy that makes it so that on a very
17 regular basis, they have to come back to us and
18 report on the intentionality and of the goals and
19 objectives have their diversity, equity, and
20 inclusion plan.

21 So for example, the Museum of Natural History has
22 now moved that needle in a very robust way sense that
23 the diversity and equity... equity inclusion plan has
24 been implemented. And now their... their staff has
25 increased and their board improvement has now 30%

2 People of Color, part of that aspect of their board
3 process. So each organization, like we mentioned,
4 the Public Theater and others are expanding their
5 diversity, equity, and inclusion program. And we
6 have benchmarks to check in with them to see how
7 those Action Plans are being implemented.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much. I am going
9 to I have another Committee right over there that I
10 have to vote on really quickly, but we're going to...
11 I'm going to give questions to Eric Dinowitz...
12 Councilmember Dinowitz, and I'll be right back.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Okay.

14 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you, Councilmember
16 Dinowitz.

17 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Good morning. Thanks
18 for giving Wave Hill a shout out, and thank you for
19 visiting.

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, it was wonderful.

21 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: It's probably one of the
22 best in the city. I can say that publicly, in the
23 Bronx, and good to see you, Lance. It's always...
24 It's... I'm getting used to this flipped around
25 thing.

2 So I really love what you're saying about
3 language access, access for people with disabilities
4 that we spoke about at that at the last hearing. My
5 first question is about the CUNY Cultural Corps,
6 because I think we all understand how important that
7 program is to diversifying the boards... not just
8 having a plan for the... to do it, but providing that
9 pipeline, and it's an incredible opportunity. I
10 think, you know, again, it's paid opportunities...

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

12 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: ...for... for
13 students... paid internships. But you testified that
14 there were 500... you placed 500 people since 2017,
15 or 16? I think 16 is what you testified.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: 2016. Yes.

17 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: So... So my question is
18 over six years, that's about... 40 per semester...
19 like 40 students per semester, right? And for such
20 an important program, that has such an impact on the
21 on the on the lives of our students, and also, you
22 know, I guess provides for the opportunity for our
23 CIGs to really diversify their workforce in their
24 boards, what efforts are being made to increase the
25 number of slots for the CUNY cultural corps?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I am so glad that you asked
3 that question, and with such enthusiasm and a want-
4 to-get-it-done kind of attitude, because that's
5 really something that we can work on collaboratively.
6 In the council, you have the ability in that way to
7 financially expand the...

8 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: A-ha. It's money.
9 But... no, the question is: Is it a matter of... of
10 funding?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Because they're paid
12 internships.

13 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And so because they're paid
15 internships: Sure, we would... you know, for as many
16 thousands of students there are within the CUNY
17 system, we would love to have thousands of young
18 people be a part of that program. But as you know,
19 as in here in the City Council, and all across the
20 city of New York, we have moved away from free
21 internships. And so now because they are a paid
22 program... I would say when I was in the council, I
23 remember we passed in our budget, the ability for
24 students, I believe, with a B average, to get a
25 scholarship that was founded by former Councilmember

2 and speaker Peter Malone, we were able to take that
3 as a foundation to pass a scholarship program. I
4 believe students would get a partial scholarship to
5 attend CUNY if they have a B-plus average.

6 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes. Yes. But I guess
7 there is... there is funding for the arts. And when
8 you get down it, The Administration decides where the
9 funding goes. So are there efforts to shift the
10 balance more towards programs like CUNY Cultural
11 Corps, and the I forgot what you said... the
12 Leadership Accelerator... to provide those again,
13 opportunities for students to get paid to...
14 essentially jobs...

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right.

16 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: But also to provide that
17 pipeline so that we have a more diverse workforce and
18 more diverse boards? Is The Administration able to
19 shift funds to those programs to increase the number
20 of slots at CUNY? Regardless of what we fund in the
21 council, right?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We could do it
23 collaboratively. I would say that's going to be the
24 most effective way is for us to... the council and
25 the Administration sit with CUNY and to figure out

2 how we can expand this program, utilizing funding
3 from both branches of government, as well as
4 resources that CUNY may have in order to be able to
5 expand the program, and also to reach out to the
6 private sector to see what we could do to expand this
7 program. And also the partnering organizations in
8 terms of their ability to match some level of the
9 internship program in that way. So there are many
10 different ways that we could look at it but it
11 certainly would be a collaborative approach. But it
12 is the most effective way as we folk about in order
13 to create the diversity that we have written about in
14 the cultural plan, and ways that we want to see that
15 move forward.

16 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, you have my
17 commitment to work with you on that.

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I look to it.

19 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Because it's such... I
20 think we all recognize how important that program is.

21 My second question is about DEI. I'm just going
22 to kind of spit it out as quickly as possible. You
23 know, the DEI doesn't just include diversifying the
24 workforce, diversifying the boards, but I think the
25 training that employees get... I wasn't sure if that

2 was... it wasn't clear to me that that was part of
3 the program that... the DEI training. But I think
4 since 2017, we've seen a significant uptick in anti-
5 Asian violence, anti-Asian rhetoric. And I think
6 anyone who's watched has owns a screen has seen the
7 uptick in anti-Jewish rhetoric, particularly from a
8 music artists who's in the culture. And so does your
9 agency, one, for DEI trainings, should they exist?
10 Is that a continually evolving process? To be
11 proactive, but also to be responsive to the to the
12 changing nature of what's going on with diversity and
13 violence and hate? And are you incentivizing or
14 working with the cultural institutions to sort of
15 address the, you know, the issues that we're seeing
16 again, you know, with... with everyone, of course,
17 but particularly, when we're seeing upticks in anti-
18 Asian and anti-Jewish sentiment? Are... are there
19 any efforts being made or work being done to sort of
20 expand like the Jewish and Asian culture so that
21 we're, I guess, getting to know each other, learn...
22 learn about each other's cultures, and address...
23 addresses issues through an artistic and educational
24 lens?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I really thank you for that
3 question. It's something that I think about quite
4 often. And I'm also going to turn it over to a
5 Shirley levy to also address this question. And I
6 want to get a clarity question from you: In terms
7 of... Is your question focused on: Do the
8 organizations that the Department of Cultural Affairs
9 fund? Do they have a mandate or an... or a policy
10 that we're asking organizations to implement in terms
11 of: How do your organizations address issues of
12 hate? How do our organizations utilize curriculum,
13 or school tours, or things to address issues around
14 anti violence amongst specific ethnic groups? Or is
15 your question focused on... Or can you better
16 clarify the question in terms of the staff? What...

17 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: It's... It's both,
18 right?. Are staff being trained? And then... And
19 is that constantly evolving, as you know, things in
20 going on in the world change? And also, are you
21 working with them? Are they addressing those issues
22 in terms of their programming, and as you mentioned,
23 curriculum, school trips. So it's both the staff,
24 and the... the actual work that is being done.
25 And... and you know, you mentioned in your testimony,

2 things like violence, right, gun violence, these are,
3 they're all connected. And so it is both.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that specific
5 organizations are doing work as it makes sense, given
6 their mission statement. So organizations, for
7 example, like the Jewish Children's Museum, have been
8 a longstanding partner and working with clergy,
9 working with the police department, working with our
10 schools, in order to be a center for the discussion
11 of the elimination of hatred towards the Jewish
12 community, or addressing situations where hate comes
13 forward in that way. But I also want to bring our
14 attention to Shirley Levy, who is one of the founding
15 members of our PARE, artists and residency program,
16 and there was an incredible program that was done out
17 of that, and Shirley can talk about it, that also
18 addresses how this city responded to the hatred that
19 was happening and reflected upon our Asian community,
20 and what the arts community and our agencies did.
21 But there are many programs through the PARE program
22 that have also addressed that.

23 MS. LEVY: Thank you. So first, I guess I don't
24 have to say this, but I will be for the benefit of
25 everyone that the best way to address issues of hate

2 and violence is to engage with culture. And I think
3 we have the most dynamic, most exciting cultural
4 sector in this country. And so every organization
5 that we support participates in that understanding
6 and sort of collective healing. So everything that
7 we do at cultural affairs in support of those
8 organizations is a step in that direction.

9 More specifically, though, about training: As
10 part of the cultural plan and something that we
11 continue to support. We know that the cultural
12 institutions groups were required to develop their
13 own DEI plans. And as part of those plans, many of
14 the CIG's did provide anti-bias training and other
15 kinds of trainings to their staff during... during
16 the development of those plans.

17 We also know that specifically, during the time
18 of the pandemic, a lot of organizations came
19 together... or the staffs within organizations came
20 together to develop affinity groups or support groups
21 to talk about a lot of the, you know, feelings that
22 they were... or, you know, experiences that they were
23 having, and how to, again, collectively heal and talk
24 about those and address them through an
25 organizational structure.

2 So all of that is happening and all of that we
3 continue to support.

4 With respect to the specific program that the
5 commissioner mentioned, something very close to my
6 heart, the Public Artists In Residence Program, which
7 we continue to offer every year, including this year
8 -- we're about to announce our partners this year.

9 During COVID, we had an incredible artist Amanda
10 Phingbodhipakkiya work with the Commission on Human
11 Rights. And through her work with the agency created
12 an incredible campaign called I Still Believe in New
13 York City... or I Still Believe In The City. And I
14 hope that you've seen some of her work which started
15 as a... you know, a subway installation at the
16 Barclays Arena, thank you then grew to billboards on
17 the outside of Barclays, and the Long Island... the
18 Long Island transit station, then moved to Times
19 Square, then to all the DOT kiosks... incredible
20 images actually merging both statements around anti-
21 Asian hate as well as Black Lives Matter, which
22 became kind of a rallying cry that not only started
23 to appear here in New York City, but then that
24 message she was able to carry actually to... to a
25 global platform. So something that originated here

2 in New York addressing very real challenges here with
3 enduring COVID has becomes a visual symbol that now
4 people are seeing across the across the world.

5 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Thank you,
6 Chair.

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you for your question.
8 But I look forward to further dialogue and
9 conversation around this, because our cultural
10 community is empowered and has the unique placement
11 to address so many of the issues that we are facing
12 from the Black Lives Matter movement, to the
13 sentiments around hatred of our Asian and Jewish
14 community, and so many others that continue to evolve
15 throughout the city, particularly heightened by the
16 pandemic. So we look forward to continuing those
17 conversations and finding real long term strategies,
18 and how to utilize our institutions as that vehicle
19 to bring people together in safe spaces, and
20 utilizing the medium of the arts to have that level
21 of understanding, and exchange, and dialogue that
22 essentially eliminates hate, which is based so much
23 in ignorance of the other.

24 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much.

3 Councilmember Dinowitz. Councilmember Rivera?

4 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: How is it? Okay. Oh,
5 Hello there.

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Hello, there.

7 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: So nice to see you.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You as well.

9 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: A wonderful panel of
10 people. And thank you for bringing up arts and
11 culture as a part of public and community safety
12 strategy. I think that's really, really important.
13 And something I know that my office and this council
14 is doing. And of course, I've always said and I know
15 you agree, it's so important to our holistic well-
16 being, especially when we look at a just recovering.

17 So with that, you know, open culture, you were a
18 great advocate for it. I know you mentioned in your
19 testimony, and it was something where we, you know,
20 allowed our arts and culture institutions to sort of
21 spill out into the street and repurpose these spaces,
22 and bring us some of the best live music and
23 performances that we... that we desperately needed.

24 So I will just ask you a few quick questions
25 about the bill. You said you're glad that we are

2 hearing the bill today. Is your... is The
3 Administration in support?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, let me just first say
5 this, I am so excited that you have reintroduced
6 this, and there were so many different bills,
7 legislation, funding priorities that we put forward
8 in the last council that we were like, "I hope the
9 next council takes these on." So it's really an
10 honor, and I'm so excited that you are excited about
11 the open culture program. This was something that I
12 championed at the height of the pandemic, because we
13 wanted to bring art and culture to every corner of
14 New York City, in every neighborhood so that people
15 could enjoy art in their own backyard wherever they
16 are in their neighborhood to be able to experience
17 it. So this is something that The Administration
18 supports as well in terms of the idea that every
19 community should be able to experience art outdoors,
20 in their home, in their community. And we certainly
21 want to work with you and we want to work with the
22 council to realize the vision of having art in all of
23 our communities, and for it to be accessible, and for
24 organizations to recognize that they have to bring
25 art and culture outside out of their beautiful state

2 of the art, spacious spaces, we've got to bring it in
3 both places. It's got to be indoors, it's got to be
4 outdoors, and it's got to be everywhere throughout
5 the city. So we are excited. We look forward to
6 working with you. And we are looking to experience
7 art and culture with you in your neighborhood.

8 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Yeah, I agree. I... I
9 found when we opened our streets that people... we
10 learned they could be our stages, community centers,
11 they turned out to be our restaurants, our
12 playgrounds, classrooms. And so I know we've learned
13 a lot of lessons since then, in trying to create a
14 permanent version of this, and I'm excited to work
15 with your office on it.

16 Under the temporary legislation, arts and culture
17 institutions, entertainment venues, they could apply
18 for an open culture permit from the street activity
19 permit office for just \$20 to host an event at one of
20 the 200 locations city wide. So does The
21 Administration have data that estimates how many New
22 Yorkers have participated in the open culture program
23 to date is that quantifiable?

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We're going to call someone
3 forward who's going to be able to answer that
4 question more specifically.

5 MS. TOLSON: Good morning, everyone. I'm Dawn
6 Tolson, I'm the executive director of Citywide Events
7 and SAPO. And yes, we do have that information.
8 There were 136 applications that came through...
9 applicants, sorry, that apply for the program. Of
10 that we had 325 actual applications, 251 were
11 actually processed. So we... And that translated
12 into about 489 events.

13 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Okay, wonderful. What
14 were some of the greatest challenges that The
15 Administration encountered when operating the program
16 while it was temporary? And what improvements or
17 changes do you recommend?

18 MS. TOLSON: Okay, so Well, it's always a
19 resource situation. Obviously, the... the deadline
20 for the application was 14... 15 days. And we had
21 only five days. So the concern was that the
22 community itself didn't get a chance to comment on
23 what was happening within their community. And so
24 that was the hardest challenge to... Because
25 usually, and normally, we have a longer period of

2 time in order for the surrounding communities and the
3 individuals that live on those blocks to comment on
4 the activity that's happening and engage with it.

5 And so that basically, from our standpoint, was a was
6 a larger challenge, because we... that window did not
7 exist.

8 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: And I know I've spoken
9 with a lot of the organizations in my district. I
10 have this fabulous coalition as well called Fourth
11 Arts Block, and they certainly want to see themselves
12 as a steward... a way that will be helpful to your
13 organization in whatever capacity that's appropriate.
14 So will we sort of support... Well, will we notify
15 community boards of the program and designated
16 streets in their district? How do you foresee that
17 process going forward?

18 MS. TOLSON: I do want to comment... make the
19 comment that even though the program has sunsetted,
20 and it did sunset, that we have been able to
21 accommodate these types of cultural requests. DOT
22 has an open streets program, which would actually
23 allow potentially more events and activities to take
24 place than what did under the Open Culture Program.
25 We also have our civic events application for which

2 people can apply for any street in any location --
3 they're not restricted -- for multiple times. So we
4 do, or are actually already fulfilling that need. We
5 found ways to ensure, and we've actually put this
6 more prominently on our website. It's basically
7 things that we were doing... some of the things that
8 we were doing previously, but kind of were not
9 explained fully or are made easily accessible. We've
10 made it a lot more accessible for these cultural
11 organizations to do that. We've also encouraged them
12 to partner with entities and institutions that are
13 already within those neighborhoods, because that's
14 key for us to make sure that even as these are
15 happening, that they're a part of the neighborhood,
16 and they fit into that community.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA: Well, thank you. I want
18 to just thank all the advocates who are here and
19 special shout out to NEON and all the other great
20 partners in the room. And I'm very proud to be, you
21 know, as a sponsor of this legislation, along with
22 such a champion in the Chair, Chair Ossé.

23 Thank you, Commissioner, Council, all of you.
24 Thank you so much. Looking forward to seeing you out
25 there in the streets.

2 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you. Councilmember
3 Louis?

4 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair. I'm very
5 happy to see you, commissioner.

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You as well.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Nice to see you, Lance.
8 I'm going to keep it short, because a lot of the
9 questions that I had were asked already, but I'll go
10 in another direction.

11 I wanted to know how many groups were funded
12 under the Cultural Development Fund between FY 22 and
13 FY 23. If you guys have those numbers.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We're going to actually
15 announce... I don't want to ruin our exciting press
16 release and press conference that we're going to put
17 out. But, um, the CDF organizations, I would...
18 without giving away the tagline, I'll say it's over
19 1000. We had more people apply than ever before in
20 our city's history. And so our goal in many ways was
21 to... is to fund as many... Okay.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: It's going to be released
23 soon?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It's going to be released
25 soon.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Alright.

3 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So it's coming soon. It's
4 coming soon.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Alright. I wanted to see
6 what those numbers look like. But we'll see it, and
7 I'm pretty sure it will be an astronomical amount
8 compared to what we've received in years past.

9 I also wanted to ask has DCLA thought about how
10 CreateNYC programs will support new New Yorkers
11 seeking to get acclimated and how we do culture in
12 New York City?

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's a phenomenal
14 question, because as we all know that that's a very
15 real issue for New York City right now, especially
16 with our asylum seekers, and many people that are
17 coming to New York City for the first time. I'll
18 actually turn it over to Shirley, to talk a bit about
19 the cultural plan and how it related to our immigrant
20 communities all across New York City that are new to
21 New York City, and how they navigate. Of course, our
22 Language Access Program is the most obvious go to as
23 well as the Cultural Immigration Fund that the City
24 Council is supportive of. But I'll turn it over to
25 Shirley for a little bit more in depth there.

2 MS. LEVY: Thank you, Commissioner. I was also
3 going to mention the Cultural Immigrant Initiative on
4 the council side is critical to that objective. I
5 would also add that IDNYC -- which is a major
6 administration... was a major administration priority
7 in the past admin, but one that we continue to
8 support -- is essential to this effort, because as we
9 know, IDNYC is open to anyone regardless of their
10 immigration status. And we have a very strong
11 partnership with... between IDNYC and the cultural
12 sector to offer membership benefits or other, you
13 know, cultural benefits that anyone who comes to New
14 York City can also feel like they belong at and that
15 the cultural institutions belong to them. And so
16 that's something that we care deeply about, and
17 something that, you know, again, upholds the tenants
18 of the Cultural Plan. And then I guess I just want
19 to also say that a lot of our cultural institutions
20 do this work already. And what we do through CDF by
21 funding these organizations is to support programs
22 that support immigrant populations and communities,
23 including new New Yorkers.

24 So for example, if you take Little Amal at the
25 St. Ann's Warehouse, right?, it was a huge

2 organizational push for this organization, but also
3 was a huge collaboration with the city and not just
4 cultural affairs, but with a lot of other agencies,
5 including yours, that had to get behind this effort.
6 And so, you know, our I think our goal and we do
7 this, we do this specific job well, when we support
8 the organizations to do the work that they do.

9 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: Thank you for that. And I
10 think the issue is -- and I'll speak specifically
11 about my district -- if we ask IDNYC to be deployed
12 over to the shelters in our district, they sign them
13 up, but they don't really go over what benefits and
14 resources comes with the IDNYC card. So I think
15 that's something that we will all work on together.
16 But I'll speak specifically to my district in my
17 analysis, and what I seen, that hasn't really been
18 shared.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: No, I appreciate that
20 suggestion. That's an incredible idea. And we'll
21 certainly take it back to the agency and see how we
22 can work collaboratively with you to help make that
23 happen.

24 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: This is my last question,
25 because I see the Chair looking my way. Okay. Okay.

2 I would be remiss if I didn't ask this question. I
3 wanted to know: Does CreateNYC Language Access
4 include French Creole, French/Haitian Creole. So I
5 see you got 36 nonprofits, I see that there's 12
6 languages. But I wanted to know if French/Haitian
7 Creole is one of those languages that was implemented
8 in this particular program, and if these 36
9 nonprofits actually service folks that speak those
10 languages.

11 MS. LEVY: We would have to get back to you
12 with... on that. We really do look to the
13 organizations to propose their own programs that then
14 we support. I'm assuming that many organizations do
15 support French Creole, but we can get you the
16 specifics.

17 COUNCILMEMBER LOUIS: So while there's been an
18 influx of migrants coming in from Texas, I know a
19 large portion came in the latter part of 2021, from
20 Texas that were of Haitian descent that we don't talk
21 about in the press and the media. But I know some of
22 those folks are here in New York City. So hopefully
23 we can get that information. Thank you. Thank you
24 so much, Commissioner.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We will definitely let you
3 know which organizations and which institutions have
4 utilized their language access funding in order to be
5 able to provide French Creole speaking programming,
6 and hopefully much of it is happening in your
7 district as well. So we will let you know.

8 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you. And thank you to
9 my colleagues for asking those questions. I think
10 they were very amazing questions. I'm not surprised.
11 But I do have two followups based off of both
12 Councilmember Louis's question and Councilmember
13 Dinowitz's questions. But I know that you don't want
14 to spoil the press release yet of those that have,
15 you know, will receive funds from the CDF. But would
16 you internally, show us the folks that will be
17 receiving funds from CDF, at least on the council
18 side. We won't launch the information without your
19 press release. But I think we definitely would love
20 to take a look at some of the work that you guys have
21 done in terms of the CDF grantees.

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I will... As this is... As
23 this is my first time being a commissioner and your
24 first time being Chair of the Council, we will have
25 to figure out if that is the most appropriate way for

2 us to deliver that information. I want to be as
3 transparent and as forthcoming as possible, but want
4 to make sure that... I suspect that all of the
5 Councilmembers have access to understanding which
6 organizations have been funded or awarded funding or
7 not. We'll figure out how to make that happen.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay, thank you. And then a
9 follow up from Councilmember Dinowitz's question is:
10 Does DCLA have... have any benchmarks for meeting
11 CreateNYC goals, at least internal benchmarks? For
12 example, how many CUNY students should be placed in
13 paid cultural internships? What are the numbers the
14 agency is shooting for and meeting these goals? What
15 is your target for each indicator? What are you
16 willing to be held accountable for?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that our budget
18 is the greatest reflection of the goals and mission
19 of the CreateNYC Cultural Plan. I would say that if
20 we look at our budget, and we look at how we're
21 spending money, that's really a huge indicator. But
22 we're going to continue to do the check ins. And to
23 continue to review how the program is moving, how it
24 is being assessed. I would say like that one of the
25 greatest indicators that I am particularly proud of,

2 is the fact that we've created the policy for the
3 cultural institution groups to be able to provide
4 regular reports in terms of how their diversity,
5 equity inclusion efforts are being managed and what
6 goals they are achieving. We want to make sure that
7 the CUNY Cultural Corps program, to Councilmember
8 dinner with his suggestion and idea: How can we
9 expand that? We're able to do what we can do with
10 the amount of funding that we have at the current
11 time. We in this budget process fought aggressively
12 to make sure that the language access and the
13 disability program remained in the budget despite the
14 fact that this has been a very challenging a budget
15 time. We've made sure that those programs have been
16 managed and maintained and that those organizations
17 are getting that funding.

18 But again, one of the huge benchmarks is making
19 sure that resources that were not reaching
20 communities of color, that were not reaching
21 communities that had been underserved, are now being
22 realized. Those communities are now being resourced.
23 Those communities are now seeing institutions, brick-
24 and-mortar, state-of-the-art, world-class
25 institutions that reflect their history, their

2 culture, and their contributions to the city of New
3 York.

4 If you look at the People's Theatre Project,
5 that's going to open up in the next year or so,
6 that's another example of the power of the immigrant
7 community, being able to put forward their voice and
8 their ability to say, we need to have a seat at this
9 cultural table. And the best way to do that from
10 being a nomadic organization for years is to have our
11 own permanent home and the ability to be able to
12 express our ideas from our perspective, by us, for us
13 in our own new cultural home.

14 So I think that looking at the cultural landscape
15 and seeing how diverse it's going to be. I mean,
16 when I was a Councilmember, and... or even prior to
17 that running MoCADA, the idea that there could even
18 be a Hip Hop Museum was something unfathomable, that
19 something like hip hop was an underground cultural
20 art form that would never rise to the occasion of
21 being in a pristine world-class state of the art
22 museum. But look at where we are right now. This is
23 going to be one of the premier cultural institutions
24 of New York, celebrating a cultural art form that is
25 global. And I think that those are examples of

2 showing the diversity of the cultural plan. And when
3 you look at the Theaters Of Color Initiative, in
4 terms of organizations that were systemically
5 underfunded, are now receiving funding that will
6 be... that will give them an opportunity to exhibit
7 and to show and perform their history and their
8 culture right in your own backyard. I mean, you're
9 in Bedford Stuyvesant. The fact that people can just
10 walk down the block and go to the Billie Holiday
11 Theater for an incredible program is phenomenal. The
12 fact that in upper Manhattan, you're able to go to
13 Pregones, and in the Bronx, and you're able to see
14 theater programs that are reflective of your history
15 and your culture, that you can go to East Harlem and
16 see Caribbean Cultural Center's brand-new facility in
17 a renovated firehouse. This is really what the
18 dynamics of the cultural plan were really all about.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Absolutely. And you know, the
20 only reason I'm pushing on benchmarks and key
21 indicators...

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: As you should.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: ... of tracking, you know, the
24 progress of you know, where taxpayer dollars is
25 going. And I do acknowledge, you know, that the...

2 the fact that we have a Hip Hop Museum that's going
3 to be opening up, or more money going to our cultural
4 institutions and organizations within the Bronx, are
5 great indicators. But, um, in terms of some of the
6 programs that are funded through CreateNYC, whether
7 it's through CUNY, whether it's the Language Access
8 Fund, we need to actually, you know, track the
9 progression of how well those programs are doing.
10 And, you know, Mayor Eric Adams talks about the city
11 as being, you know, a corporation and within
12 corporations, we have key performance indicators that
13 allow us to track you know, how successful program is
14 doing, and I think the benchmarks or at least
15 internal half-public, half... half-private, you know,
16 benchmarks and goals of how well these programs are
17 doing, would help us and the council and in the
18 cultural community continue to advocate for more
19 money on seeing those programs expanded or not. So
20 just a recommendation. I think it would be
21 definitely something that would be helpful to all of
22 us, in terms of expanding some of the great work that
23 you're doing.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I appreciate that very much.

25 And I think Mayor Adams would be thrilled to know

2 that you are quoting his philosophies on the
3 operations of the city of New York in such a positive
4 manner.

5 I think that what you stated is really critical.
6 I think that when we look at the benchmarks, we have
7 to look at where money is going in terms of what
8 boroughs and what neighborhoods and we should provide
9 that information to you in terms of where the money
10 is going on the Capitol and expense side so that we
11 can see where dollars are being allocated, in terms
12 of funding for the CUNY Cultural Corps program, the
13 ability to be able to say how many interns are
14 happening every year, where they're coming from and
15 what programs they are going off to. So there are
16 certainly more ways that we can go forward with the
17 way of documenting, such as Councilmember Louis's
18 suggestion in terms of, "I want to know where and
19 what organizations have Haitian Creole French
20 speaking applications within their cultural
21 institutions" so that her community could benefit.
22 How are we utilizing the IDNYC program? So the
23 suggestions that you're putting forward in terms of
24 how you want to see that information is helpful to us
25 as an agency. And we're certainly going to take that

2 back in terms of finding and providing more ways to
3 quantify the success of the program that we know is
4 happening. But as you stated, you want to see it
5 more in benchmark format. Some of that is going to
6 be in that format. But also, as I always say,
7 everything that counts can be counted. It's you
8 know, the... the ability to inspire a young person
9 from going on a school trip or going to an after
10 school program, the ability to understand how people
11 are going out into the world after the CUNY Cultural
12 Corps. Some of that can't be documented in that way.
13 Or if someone has a really great experience in terms
14 of being able to navigate a cultural institution,
15 because it was in Spanish or it was in French Creole.
16 We can't always document how that experience impacted
17 that person's life and what they went on to do as a
18 result of feeling so welcomed in that space. But we
19 can provide the type of information in terms of how
20 many students are being served through CUNY Cultural
21 Corps, where is our capital and expense dollars going
22 throughout the city of New York? And for what we can
23 document we will provide.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much for that. I
25 appreciate that.

2 During the launch of CreateNYC former Mayor Bill
3 de Blasio announced an \$18.5 million allocation for
4 initiatives, or funding for the art and cultural
5 sector. How much of this allocation was used towards
6 the goals outlined in CreateNYC?

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Give me a moment on that.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We'll have to get back to
10 you on that specific question. I was trying to avoid
11 that, because I hated that when I was a
12 Councilmember. But we will certainly get back to you
13 on that number and provide the specific information
14 that you requested.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And just to... You can take
16 note of this when getting back to us, but followup
17 questions were: Has the entirety of this funding
18 been spent? And as well as, if not: Where is the
19 rest of the funding being allocated to?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Got it. Thank you so much
21 Councilmember.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: According to the cultural
23 community, they are unaware that this plan is still
24 in effect. What outreach has DCLA done to the
25 cultural community on the CreateNYC plan, and are

2 their conversations with the cultural community to
3 check in about the progress of the CRI NYC plan, and
4 if revisions will be needed in 2027.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say proudly that I'm
6 quite thrilled that as Commissioner, I came in at a
7 time, unlike my predecessor, Commissioner Gonzalo
8 Casals. He was not able to get out into the
9 community in the same way that I was because we were
10 on lockdown. But I've essentially done a five-
11 borough tour throughout New York City, where I've had
12 an opportunity to go to each of the five boroughs to
13 meet with members of the community, to talk about the
14 Cultural Plan, but also our capital and expense
15 investments in their particular community, and
16 celebrating those financial wins that we were able to
17 have. And those budget wins in every borough.
18 That's one.

19 I was also really very proud that I was able to
20 go to just recently in upper Manhattan to celebrate
21 with LMCC, the powerful work of our arts community
22 and our arts councils. So our arts councils are, as
23 part of the cultural plan, a huge part of how we've
24 provided increased funding to our arts councils, such
25 as LMCC, and our borough arts councils to provide

2 more funding for those organizations so that they can
3 provide additional support to our artists' community.
4 And that was a critical part of this particular plan.
5 We wanted to make sure that funding got directly to
6 the artists, and the way to do that was through our
7 local arts councils.

8 But I would say, I've had meetings with many of
9 our communities in terms of... I've met with many of
10 our Asian Alliance organizations, with our Latino-
11 based organizations, African American organizations,
12 the LGBTQ, had a very extensive meeting with the
13 disability community. So there are lots of
14 communities that I've had an opportunity to have
15 roundtable, sit down, personal visits, so that I can
16 understand the... the culture as well as the
17 community, throughout New York City and understanding
18 what are the needs, the wants, the challenges, and to
19 also continue the conversations that the cultural
20 plan began.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Absolutely. And yeah, it
22 would be great to... I know that there's so many
23 cultural organizations and institutions that exist in
24 New York City. And as you know, Culture @ 3 is a
25 great resource for many of our...

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Incredible.

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: ...cultural institutions and
4 organizations. And, you know, we've heard through...
5 through that channel about, I guess, the... not the
6 lack of outreach, but you know, organizations still
7 not knowing about CreateNYC. So anything that you
8 guys are already doing, if you could, you know, work
9 with as many of your cultural partners, and our
10 cultural community partners as possible in getting
11 the word out. That'd be great. Because this is, you
12 know, a wonderful program that I think everyone
13 should utilize.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I definitely will do that.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. From now, until
16 2027, what are some concrete action items DCLA is
17 taking to meet the goals outlined and in 2017 called
18 CreateNYC, and 2019 Action Plan?

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: At this point, what we're
20 really focused on now is the funding. And we're
21 going to continue to focus on providing the funding
22 that we have through our agency, but most importantly
23 we want to make sure that we have the private as well
24 as the public partnerships that we spoke about. So
25 again, our continued partnership, as well as finding

2 the resources to implement so many of the aspects of
3 the cultural plan.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Wonderful. And I have one
5 last question before we move on to public testimony.
6 Can we get a firm commitment from DCLA that all the
7 goals outlined in the plans will be met by 2027?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The cultural plan is an
9 ever-evolving document. So I don't want to at 2027
10 say, "We've achieved diversity!" Because diversity
11 is an ongoing goal. It's an ongoing aspiration.
12 It's an ongoing. It's an ongoing aspiration, that we
13 all have to work every single day to achieve. And
14 the moment that you think you've achieved it, you
15 haven't. It's really important that we recognize
16 that New York City is an ever-evolving city, and that
17 we're going to be constantly doing the work to
18 provide more equitable funding to making sure that
19 our boards and staff are reflective of the city of
20 New York, to make sure that our exhibitions,
21 performances, programs, film media, are reflective of
22 the people of the city of New York. And that's an
23 ongoing issue, as well as making sure that resources
24 and dollars reach every corner of New York City.
25 We'll never be done. We did it on to the next set of

2 business. This is going to be an ever evolving goal
3 that is never going to end.

4 Once the Cultural Plan and 2027 is completed in
5 that time-year frame, that plan will have evolved in
6 order to achieve higher levels of evolution and
7 diversity, and equity, and inclusion. How people
8 define themselves and how people see themselves in
9 this city is going to continue to evolve and change.
10 And the terminologies... The languages that we use
11 to describe ourselves is also going to evolve. So
12 we're going to make sure that we continue to work
13 hand in hand, to make sure that these goals are...
14 that we are committed... that these are lifetime
15 goals for the city of New York.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And while I do agree with
17 that, do you think that there are some goals that are
18 not ever-changing... that are more concrete? For
19 example, you know, some goals could get to, I guess,
20 uh, that you have, could be completed by 2027. And
21 then there could potentially be a new plan created to
22 achieve, I guess, the... whatever has changed in our
23 society for us to strive towards. Does that make
24 sense?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say like if we set a
3 goal to say that we want to have 1000 CUNY Cultural
4 Corps students by the end of 2027... If we made an
5 arbitrary goal like that? Sure, we could make goals
6 like that to say that we want to have this many
7 students impacted by the program. We could make
8 goals in terms of saying we want so many... so much
9 funding by percentage to go to so many different
10 boroughs by X, Y, and Z date. We could do that. But
11 at the same time, we recognize that those benchmarks
12 will continue to evolve and change. Because we... we
13 are always going to want more. And we're always
14 going to require more funding and more resources in
15 order to achieve our goals. But I would certainly
16 say that partnership, again, is really the key to
17 achieving what we want to see in this world, and
18 really documenting and providing information for this
19 Council, as well as the sector in the field on the
20 successes that we've made, and the ways that we have
21 pushed forward, the arts and cultural sector.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much,
23 Commissioner.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. It's an honor to
25 testify before you today. Thank you.

2 COUNSEL: All right. Thank you so much to The
3 Administration. This concludes The Administration
4 portion of the hearing. We will now move to public
5 testimony.

6 We will be starting with in person panels first.
7 So I will read the names on the first panel. If
8 those individuals can come to the dais, we'll just
9 take a couple of minutes to transition. The first
10 panel will be... and apologies for any pronunciation,
11 Catrina Prioleau, Damien Merrick[SP?], Lyndon
12 Sylvester, and Andre Whitehead. Thank you again to
13 the commissioner and to DCLA, and thank you to
14 everyone here.

15 [45 seconds silence]

16 Okay, thank you. So we'll just move in order.
17 So again, starting with testimony from Catrina
18 Prioleau. And as the Chair said, at the beginning of
19 the hearing, there's a two minute clock. The clock
20 is on the wall if you're in the room, and you can
21 submit written testimony afterwards. If you didn't
22 bring written copies or want to change it, you can
23 email it to testimony@council.nyc.gov, up to 72 hours
24 after the hearing. So the first witness is Catrina
25 Prioleau. You may begin your testimony when ready.

2 MS. PRIOLEAU: Thank you. Good morning Chair
3 Ossé and members of the Committee, my name is Catrina
4 Prioleau. I am the director of the New York City
5 Neighborhood Opportunity Network, otherwise known as
6 NeON. I'm here today to speak about the impact that
7 access to the arts and culture has on underserved
8 neighborhoods and its effectiveness as a vehicle of
9 transformation, particularly for justice involved
10 people. I also want to briefly highlight some of The
11 NeON's arts and culture opportunities, including free
12 verse, the made in New York Animation Project, NeON
13 Photography, and NeON Arts. The NeON comprises a
14 network of resource hubs strategically located in
15 seven New York City neighborhoods that have
16 disproportionately impacted by the justice system.
17 Bedford Stuyvesant, East New York, Brownsville,
18 Jamaica, Harlem, the South Bronx, and Northern Staten
19 Island. These neighborhoods are home to large
20 numbers of people on probation, the majority of whom
21 are people of color. Through this nationally
22 recognized model, New York City Probation provides
23 resources, programming, and opportunities in
24 partnership with community residents and
25 organizations. Free verse is a poetry workshop

2 offered in The NeON that turns wait time into
3 creative time. By... by inviting community members,
4 professional writers, and DLP staff to read, write,
5 sing, and perform doing a weekly open mic. The Made
6 in New York Animation Project provides youth across
7 the city with the opportunity to learn professional
8 grade animation software, practice technical 3D
9 animation techniques, and qualify for paid
10 internships in this field. And our Neighborhood
11 Opportunity Network Photography Program also provides
12 professional training in the history of photography,
13 technical skills, and the art of visual storytelling,
14 resulting in paid opportunities. I see I have three
15 seconds left. So...?

16 CHAIR OSSÉ: (inaudible)

17 MS. PRIOLEAU: Thank you. Each NeON has a
18 stakeholder group of individuals from local
19 businesses, community, and faith-based organizations,
20 residents, and community leaders that decide what
21 services are needed. In fact, we would love to have
22 you and your staff connect to our Bed-Stuy NeON
23 stakeholder group, Chi Ossé. Part of what makes our
24 NeON arts model our public-private partnership with
25 Carnegie Hall so innovative is that The NeON

2 stakeholder groups select the art and cultural
3 programming for their NeON, but with a much less
4 onerous application process than other arts funding
5 opportunities. This allows hyperlocal culturally
6 competent arts organizations to have access to
7 programming opportunities they are often excluded
8 from doing due to their smaller capacity. We've
9 already awarded over \$3 million in grants to date,
10 the majority going to artists and organizations with
11 annual operating budgets of less than \$250,000.

12 Thank you to the City Council for supporting this
13 program as a part of the speaker's innovation and
14 Criminal Justice Initiative, especially to Criminal
15 Justice Committee Chair Carlina Rivera, the former
16 Chair Keith Powers as well as to Councilmember
17 Stevens and Hanks for your district support, allowing
18 for the increased arts opportunities in the South
19 Bronx and Northern Staten Island respectively.

20 This year, The NeON Arts Finale is on Friday,
21 November 18, at Carnegie Hall and we would be honored
22 if you could join us. I also want to thank Chair
23 Ossé and the DCLA Commissioner Cumbo for championing
24 the impact that arts and culture has had on crime
25 reduction. As you know, the social impact of the art

2 study showed that arts, and access, and cultural
3 opportunities in underserved neighborhoods of New
4 York City using a network approach -- these are their
5 words and not mine -- had an 18% Decrease in serious
6 crime rate. This proves that art and criminal
7 justice are connected, and that holistic community
8 corrections and arts equity strategies must include
9 increased access in the arts for justice-involved
10 people and their communities.

11 Thank you again, Chair Ossé and members of this
12 community for the opportunity to testify about the
13 important and innovative arts and cultural programs
14 offered through The NeON in their role within New
15 York City's cultural landscape.

16 I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

17 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.
18 The next person on the panel will be Damien Merrick.
19 So there's a two minute clock, and just... we have a
20 bunch of panels, if you guys... Thank you so much.

21 MR. MERRICK[SP?]: Good morning everyone. My
22 name is Damien Merrick. I'm the director for the
23 Next STEPS Mentoring Program for at-risk youth in
24 Boulevard Houses. I'm also the co-Chair for NeON
25 Arts in East New York. The NeON program has done

2 wonders for the residents of this community. Let's
3 start by saying NeON Arts has provided the youth the
4 power to select which programs come into their
5 community via a voting process. Those programs
6 selected have allowed the youth to obtain tangible
7 skills that they can utilize through the course of
8 their life, in addition to giving them a sense of
9 pride in their community. The participants of NeON
10 Arts have done amazing things. For example,
11 beautify defaced churches, community centers, and
12 schools, develop personal skills to bring their
13 trauma to life with programs such as Pocket Flicks,
14 Flex Dance, and Changing Perceptions. As Well as
15 learning to monetize their skills by editing and
16 videos, airbrushing, and painting.

17 As I stand before you I can share all NeON Arts
18 have done for our residents. NeON Arts has allowed
19 the participants to have weight lifted off them
20 mentally by telling their stories in these artistic
21 forms, allow participants bragging rights by pointing
22 out things in their community and saying, "I helped
23 beautify that safe space over there." Some
24 participants have come back to discuss how they
25 helped their parents paint the house when prior to

2 the family never had never found time to bond.

3 Through NeON Arts, the East New York community was

4 able to obtain to coach buses to transport them to

5 see The Lion King live on Broadway. As an added

6 surprise and experience, after the show, everyone was

7 given the opportunity to meet the all-black cast, who

8 shared their experiences with obtaining their role

9 and how they never gave up on their dreams when not

10 cast the first time. The cast was also open to

11 answering questions asked.

12 Carnegie Hall along with NeON Arts has given the

13 East New York community a space to showcase their

14 talents throughout the city of New York with big

15 events inside their fame building. [bell rings]

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: You can continue.

17 MR. MERRICK: I only have one more point. The

18 amount of joy NeON brings to the East New York

19 community is unmatched by any other organization in

20 the area. I could go on and on for... about the East

21 New York partnership with NeON. But as you can see,

22 I only have two minutes. Thank you all and have a

23 great day and thanks to NeON arts.

24

25

2 COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The next person on
3 the panel is Lyndon Sylvester. You may begin your
4 testimony when ready.

5 MR. SYLVESTER: Hello, everyone. Good morning.
6 My name is Lyndon Sylvester and I am the Program
7 Outreach and Administrative Support Specialist for
8 The Animation Project. We are grateful to our
9 primary partners at the Mayor's Office of Media and
10 Entertainment and the Neighborhood Opportunity
11 Network which together form the Made In New York
12 Animation Project. The Made In New York Animation
13 Project is a nonprofit art therapy, education, and
14 workforce development program that teaches digital
15 animation skills and provides a career pathway to the
16 animation industry for young people at The NeON
17 locations throughout the five boroughs, and
18 participating schools in The NeON neighborhoods. We
19 have various... various levels of programming, as
20 well as training program for the participants to
21 learn more about the technical aspects of animation.
22 We work with young adults in all five boroughs ages
23 15 to 24, reaching over 1500 Young people per year.
24 Our summer 2022 programming was hugely impactful.
25 Here's a quote from one of the participants.

2 "I had an amazing experience. If I could restart
3 and do this all over again, I 100% would. I learned
4 so much about self-care and how to take better care
5 of myself, and stop putting myself first more often.
6 I've also been able to relate so much to my peers
7 around me, which have made me feel a lot better about
8 some of my bad habits. Knowing that I'm not the only
9 one struggling and trying to get better and be the
10 best version of myself."

11 The Made In New York Animation Project also
12 provides a safe space for young adults to come and
13 share their stories without being judged. During
14 COVID-19, the programming was only offered virtually,
15 but recently began in-person groups again. One
16 previous participant from the South Bronx NeON,
17 Mauricio returned...

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: (inaudible)

19 MR. SYLVESTER: A little. Okay. ...returned and
20 shared how grateful he was to have the Made In New
21 York Animation Project back in his community. He
22 said that he didn't have a space where he could come
23 and share his creative ideas, and how much he values
24 his partnership... this partnership for providing
25 that space. Mauricio is a dedicated attendee for

2 both our South Bronx and Harlem NeON group every
3 week.

4 My journey at TAP began through my local NeON. I
5 excelled through the program, and when the made in
6 New York Animation Project partnership was formed, I
7 was hired by TAP to be their full-time recruiter and
8 eventually promoted to specialist. From designing
9 and implementing new outreach strategies, to
10 recruiting youth across all five boroughs, to
11 testifying at City Council hearings. I now have my
12 dream job and it all began thanks to having access to
13 art and design opportunity in my neighborhood.

14 Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer
15 any questions.

16 COUNSEL: Thank you so much. And now we'll move
17 to the final witness on this panel, Andre Whitehead.
18 You may begin your testimony when ready

19 MR. WHITEHEAD: Good morning Chi Ossé, and members
20 of the Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
21 Intergroup Relations Committee. My name is Andre
22 Whitehead and I am the Assistant Director of The NeON
23 Photography Program. I am here today to briefly
24 share with you my story on how NeON Photography
25 Program and having access to artistic career

2 opportunities have completely changed my life. NeON
3 photography provides professional photography
4 training workshops designed to teach participants the
5 elements in history of photography, a range of
6 technical skills, and the art of visual storytelling.

7 This paid arts and career opportunity is
8 available in the Neighborhood Opportunity Network
9 also known as NeON neighborhoods, Bed Stuy,
10 Brownsville, East New York, South Bronx, Harlem,
11 Jamaica, and Northern Staten Island, as well as
12 online.

13 I was fortunate enough to be one of the first
14 NeON photography participants back in 2018, when the
15 program launched for the people on probation and
16 other community members in NeON neighborhoods. One
17 of the best nights of my life was The NeON
18 photography opening reception where 53 other
19 photographers and myself, who graduated from the
20 workshops, had had our work exhibited for a whole
21 month at the Hunter East Harlem gallery. I will
22 always be honored and thankful that Councilmember
23 Holden was there to celebrate with, us and for his
24 efforts, championing The NeON photography program.

2 Since then, NeON photography has had their work
3 exhibited at Powerhouse Arena, Denise Bibro Fine Arts
4 Gallery, Columbia University, and our eighth opening
5 at the Kente Royal Gallery of Harlem, and more.

6 I will be sure to send you more information on
7 our next exhibit and would be honored if you could
8 attend.

9 After graduating from the workshop, I was hired
10 and receive training to become a NeON photography
11 instructor where I was able to share this incredible
12 opportunity with other new groups of young people in
13 our community. [bell rings]

14 Is it okay if I continue? Okay.

15 Seeing their faces as we discuss the history of
16 photography and hearing the excitement as they
17 contributed to our conversation reminded me of when I
18 sat where they were... they were just a few months
19 before. I had no words to describe the feeling of
20 bringing this opportunity to our young people from
21 our community and leading my... a class of my own.
22 The New York Photography Program, I've not only
23 developed my passion for photography, but I've had
24 numerous paid opportunities that have allowed me to
25 see the... enjoy the world. I've had opportunities

2 like the Design Trust Turnout NYC, New York Fashion
3 Week, IMAX Expo, a booksigning with (inaudible),
4 community events with Charlamagne Tha God, the NBA
5 Taj Gibson Foundation, a paid opportunity... a paid
6 photography trip to Morocco. Earlier this year, I
7 was honored to photograph DCLA Commissioner Cumbo for
8 the Met Gala, including her wedding proposal. I've
9 grown so much and accomplished so much because of
10 this opportunity, which... which why as assistant
11 director of The NeON Photography Program, it is my
12 full job to help bring incredible opportunities to
13 the other people unlimited potential... with
14 unlimited potential throughout the city. Growing up
15 in my neighborhood, I've lost friends to drugs and
16 violence. So earlier this year at my press
17 conference with Mayor Adams, when I held up my camera
18 and I said, "This camera saved my life," that was
19 real talk. That was real talk. I even tattooed my
20 camera on my arm. You understand? It really changed
21 my life. You understand? Thank you, Chi Ossé and
22 members of this community for the opportunity to
23 testify about The NeON Photography Program, and the
24 transformative impact that has had on my life. I'm
25 here to answer anything.

2 [Applause]

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. I hope you can
4 take a picture of me one day.

5 MR. WHITEHEAD: Yeah. Right now. I have my
6 camera with me.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much. Thank you
8 to you four.

9 COUNSEL: That concludes testimony for this
10 panel. So thank you so much. If you have any
11 follow-up questions or any other testimony, please
12 feel free to reach out and submit it. Thank you so
13 much for your testimony.

14 So I'll now read the next panel. There will be
15 four witnesses, Lisa Gold, Sheila Lewandowski, Lucy
16 Sexton, and Candice Anderson.

17 And just for the record, this is an in person
18 panel. So we're just transitioning. Just one
19 minute.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Hey friends.

21 COUNSEL: Okay, so the next witness is Lisa Gold
22 from the Asian American Arts Alliance, and you may
23 begin your testimony when ready. Thank you.

24 MS. GOLD: Thank you. Thank you Chair Ossé. My
25 name is Lisa Gold, and I'm the Executive Director of

2 the Asian American Arts Alliance. We are a 39-year-
3 old, Brooklyn-based, nonprofit service organization
4 that works to ensure greater representation, equity,
5 and opportunities for Asian American and Pacific
6 Islander artists, and arts organizations. And we
7 work across all different disciplines.

8 I just wanted to share a few thoughts about the
9 Cultural Plan, because in 2017 my organization was
10 involved with its development. We led a community
11 convening, and we developed our own survey and
12 distributed that to get feedback around the needs of
13 the API community. And then there were a couple of
14 very broad themes that emerged from that process,
15 namely the desire for more inclusive decision making
16 by DCLA, more inclusive funding from the city, more
17 accessible information and transparency. And for
18 example, I did not know that the Disability Forward
19 Fund or the Language Access Funds were still
20 available. I would like to have that I have plenty
21 of constituents who speak other languages that could
22 really benefit from this. So that's obviously still
23 an issue.

24 So you know, as the leader of an organization
25 that serves the community, which has been just

2 underfunded for decades, I would like to see what
3 Councilmember Dinowitz said. I would like to see
4 explicit and measurable goals from the city around
5 the cultural plan. Just one example: DCLA could
6 capture audience ethnicity, by percent on the CDF
7 application. So just as a starting point, see if
8 they can, you know, share those numbers and ensure
9 that they map to the cities actual demographics.
10 Because right now, Asian-American-led-and-serving
11 organizations receive about 4% of DCLA cultural
12 development fund grants, there are no... we're 18% of
13 the city population, right? There are no API-led or
14 serving CIG's. So that translates to closer to 2% of
15 funding while we're 18% of the of the population. So
16 we need to ensure that those funds are distributed
17 equitably, and they reach the populations that have
18 been underserved for so long. [bell rings]

19 So that's really all I want to say is just ensure
20 that there's transparency and equity in that funding.

21 And one more thing, I cannot leave this... this
22 this testimony today without saying something about
23 the role of the City Council in combating racism and
24 hatred in our city. I was very, very pleased to see
25 Councilmember Dinowitz making a comment about the

2 rise in anti-Asian hate and, and anti-semitism. I'm
3 a Korean Jew. So it hits me hard. But I wanted to
4 say if there's anything that we learned about what
5 happened in LA, we need the City Council to step up
6 against that hatred. And we need you to all to make
7 a stance. So thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And that's done
9 through culture, in terms of how we combat that hate,
10 so thank you.

11 COUNSEL: The next witness will be Sheila
12 Lewandowski. You may begin your testimony when
13 ready.

14 MS. LEWANDOWSKI: Hello, I'm Sheila Lewandowski,
15 Executive Director of the Chocolate Factory Theatre
16 in Long Island City, Queens. I do not have written
17 testimony, but I have lots of notes. And I will make
18 some comments. The first, right on the tail of what
19 Lisa Gold was talking about: A step further. We
20 were, I think a number of us in the culture community
21 are asking the City Council to make a statement about
22 the colorist and racist remarks that were made by
23 peers in Los Angeles. So that there's... there's a
24 verbal, you know, we are taking a stand as a city,
25

2 saying that that was not okay. We are fighting
3 against it through culture.

4 So I have a number of thoughts. I'm going to
5 jump to the Cultural Plan itself to the earlier
6 Chairman Ossé has said: We need 1% of the city
7 budget to culture. We cannot achieve the goals that
8 were outlined in the 2017 plan, and even these
9 increased goals, without increased funding. And we
10 should not be taking it from other sources. We need
11 to dedicate our tax dollars. We want to have a safer
12 city, we want to have a more inclusive city, then we
13 need to put some more funding behind it.

14 I copied down a couple of things that were said.
15 I think we need to stop shoplifting on the cultural
16 community too, to make sure that artists are paid...
17 cultural workers are paid better. Open streets does
18 not solve that. Open culture does not solve that. I
19 think that they're both good programs. But they're
20 very different too. I do not want to conflate the
21 two. Open culture needs funding, because, you know,
22 we participated in it, but we had to use other money
23 that we couldn't even fundraise for in advance in
24 order to make sure artists were paid. I think there
25 needs to be more community engagement in the open

2 culture plan, and more locations. And you know, and
3 it shouldn't be just a designated street. I think
4 people should be able to apply on a rolling basis to
5 use specific locations, and I do think they should
6 have community... community say. Community boards
7 can be a place where, you know, people come maybe if
8 you So in advance or a month in advance to say this
9 is something I'd want to do. Because I'm on my
10 community board as well. [Bell rings] Can I go
11 into... Okay. Quickly.

12 So actionable plan for incorporating the city's
13 participation in the genocide and slavery and
14 oppression into city planning. To me that should be
15 part of the cultural plan, is that we need to
16 recognize the historic oppression of the city, and
17 that can be done through culture. The Monument
18 Project should... has been doing some of that. The
19 street renaming should be doing that. That we walk
20 around and still go make a right on the name of a
21 slave owner, to me is part of continuing to
22 perpetuate not... not facing that history. And I
23 think that to heal, we must acknowledge, and we can
24 do that with culture.

2 Interns: We talked about interns. Organizations
3 need funding to manage those interns. So just
4 because a CUNY intern is paid doesn't mean the
5 organization to do an effective and meaningful work
6 can do it. Most small organizations will not
7 participate because they do not have the capacity.
8 And many of these interns would learn more working in
9 a smaller organization because they get the whole
10 diversity of activities.

11 Community based DOT: People talk about moving
12 open streets to DOT. DOT actually commissions work.
13 Open streets does not. So I'm coming again coming
14 back to needing funding. What is the intention...
15 the intention of open culture now? The intention was
16 so that cultural organizations could continue to
17 operate during the a pandemic. But what is the
18 intention now? That really is to help artists to
19 make, you know, organizations safer, to bring culture
20 out to everyone. Then it needs funding. I'm coming
21 back to funding, funding, funding, funding, funding.

22 And I also want to speak to every neighborhood
23 needing permanent locations. The commissioner said
24 art should be in all of our communities. Yes, art
25 should be in all of our communities, but everyone

2 should be able to walk to some kind of a cultural
3 organization or cultural activity within a community
4 space. That means we need more permanent spaces
5 citywide, not 20-year, you know, giveaways to
6 developers who get permanent increase in their
7 floorplan. We need permanent spaces citywide. I
8 have other things but I will not go on. Thank you.

9 COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. The next
10 witness is Lucy Sexton. You may begin your testimony
11 when ready.

12 MS. SEXTON: Thank you, Councilmember Ossé and
13 City Council. My name is Lucy Sexton. I run a city
14 wide coalition of cultural groups, individual artists
15 and cultural workers, New Yorkers for Culture and
16 Arts. I'm testifying today in support of the
17 reopening of the Open Culture Permitting Program and
18 to reflect on the city's 10-year cultural plan,
19 CreateNYC, at its halfway mark.

20 Open Culture is a program that helped hundreds of
21 independent artists and cultural groups continue
22 programming during the pandemic. Of the many
23 innovations, one of the most important is that it was
24 the first and only permit program that allowed groups
25 to generate income, while allowing free access to the

2 non-paying public as well. It allowed my
3 organization, for instance, to hold an open air
4 fundraiser. So we paid \$20 for the venue. We sold
5 donor tickets for \$100 online and held a street party
6 with stilt walkers, spoken word artists, and dance
7 performances for the entire block, paying and not
8 paying, they could all enjoy it. So Open Culture is
9 a groundbreaking win-win for artists and cultural
10 groups, for the public, and for the entire city. I
11 think they did it geniusly. And I think that we
12 should look to that and hold on to it because it was
13 a way for us to accept money without having to pay
14 for a commercial permit, which is much more money.

15 Streets filled with music, dance and community
16 create safer, happier, healthier neighborhoods. I
17 say all of this to underscore how every needed...
18 sorry. Oh, I also want to refer you to the City Park
19 Foundation's Green Arts Live Program. We did this
20 last year as well. And it was a model program which
21 provide mini-grants and production support for work
22 done in the parks and plazas. And that link is in
23 the testimony which I've emailed to everyone. In the
24 words... in terms of... CreateNYC... in the words of
25 their recently disbanded Citizens Advisory Council,

2 the cultural plan manifests the city's collective
3 cultural commitment to inclusion, equity, access
4 accessibility, compassion, and opportunity. [Bell
5 rings] We call on the city to recommit to these
6 goals and to provide methods by which that progress
7 is measured -- thank you for calling for that --
8 including convening a new citizens committee to
9 measure its progress every other year.

10 I've included the CAC summary recommendations
11 done last spring in my written testimony. I'll
12 simply say that there will be no equity and cultural
13 funding without a dedicated cultural equity fund. I
14 also call for transparency as Lisa Gold did, and
15 reporting from the DCLA on the percentage of funding
16 going to BIPOC-led and serving organizations.
17 Disability justice will not be achieved without
18 dedicated funding, not only for disabled artists and
19 cultural groups, but for small cultural spaces
20 desperate for the resources needed to make their
21 programming truly accessible.

22 Finally, I am echoing Lisa's words, I cannot
23 leave this testimony without saying something about
24 the role of City Council and combating racism and
25 hatred in our city. In learning from the racism

2 exposed in the Los Angeles City Council, we want our
3 City Councilmembers to be vigilant and use their
4 voice to speak out in defense and celebration of
5 every community in all of your work. Thank you so
6 much.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, and I have some
8 questions for you, Lucy. Where do you think DCLA has
9 been most successful in the CreateNYC plan? In
10 addition to that, where do you think UCLA can improve
11 with a plan?

12 MS. SEXTON: First of all, as the Commissioner
13 said, they did increase funding for the borough arts
14 councils, and therefore sent more money towards
15 individual artists. City Artists Core was not an
16 intended part of it. But it did create funding for
17 individual artists, which has now gone away. So I
18 would call for that to come back so that we have
19 individual funding for... sorry, funding for
20 individual artists as we did in the City Artists
21 Core. The failure, I think... one of them... or
22 something we are working towards: For sure, so a
23 victory would be that we have increased funding for
24 the... for cultural in the budget consistently, and
25 in three of the past four years, the council has

2 voted to increase funding for culture. That is
3 fantastic. And that is a real victory. And it is
4 not baselined. Which means that every year we have
5 to come here and fight for it, we can't count on it,
6 we can't depend on it. So if we want to provide
7 longevity and viability for our cultural
8 organizations and artists, we have to have a
9 commitment to increasing baseline funding.

10 And that baseline funding should be... there
11 should be a dedicated part of that baseline to
12 support smaller, . BIPOC-led and serving
13 organizations. We also need dedicated support for
14 disability arts and funds to allow those cultural
15 spaces to invest in their accessibility
16 infrastructure.

17 There was a lot of efforts and a lot of efforts
18 put into the plan by disability justice advocates,
19 and that really has taken a backseat and faded. So I
20 would like to see that recommitted.

21 I would say also that, you know, we as a city, as
22 a culture, over the past several years have had, you
23 know, a real harsh and intense racial reckoning, and
24 the conversation has changed much of it for the
25 better, where we have more understanding. So while

2 the City Council... while the city is... sorry, The
3 Administration, the Commissioner, consistently
4 referred to the benchmarks that the cultural groups
5 have to come up with in being more diverse and more
6 equitable and more inclusive, it's not the other way.
7 And we know now, that being... you know, diversifying
8 the CIG is absolutely critical and necessary. But
9 what will really change things is we... when we
10 change the pipelines of where the funding is going
11 and crease funding pipelines that go towards the
12 artists you had sitting here on the last panel, that
13 are really investing in neighborhoods like East New
14 York and Brownsville, and saying yes, that that's
15 where the cultural funding needs to go. So that we
16 have culture in every in every community, and we have
17 access to culture in every community.

18 And that's a long term goal. It's not something
19 that you can say, "There's no way to have a benchmark
20 about that." Of course there is, right? And by what
21 Lisa suggested, of just even saying, "Where did it go
22 this year?" You know, is there reporting. Of
23 course, it takes many to report data. So DCLA itself
24 needs to be... have increased capacity and increased

2 funding in order to serve this much wider cultural
3 community. Sorry, that was a long answer.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: No. And when, you know, DCLA
5 does release the press release of who's receiving
6 funds from the CDF, we should all look through that
7 together in terms of, you know, we've really been
8 advocating for a diverse pipeline, not just during
9 these past couple of years, but it's definitely been
10 under my guise now for this year. And it would be
11 helpful to work with you all in the cultural
12 community in...

13 MS. SEXTON: Absolutely.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: ...terms of, you know,
15 reviewing that that document and reviewing, you know,
16 how this money is allocated across, you know, our
17 city's cultural organizations and are continuing to
18 tweak and come up with a plan of what that equity
19 looks like for future budgets.

20 MS. SEXTON: Yes. And I will say that the, you
21 know, DCLA did introduce a lot of innovations to make
22 their funding streams more equitable. It would be
23 great to see if that had a good impact, to celebrate
24 that impact and to say, let's rededicate our efforts
25 to that because those moves towards making it easier.

2 application to making more multi-year funding, et
3 cetera, were aimed at doing a accomplishing the goals
4 of the CreateNYC, it'd be great to see if it had some
5 successes.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And I think you may have said
7 this in one of the questions that I asked, or maybe
8 in your testimony: You would find benchmarks or
9 goalposts from DCLA when it comes to CreateNYC as
10 something that would be helpful to the cultural
11 community?

12 MS. SEXTON: 100%. And just, you know, what...
13 what is that? That's really creating a system where
14 it has to be looked at, right?, where somebody that
15 could... whether it's a citizens commission, or
16 whether it's by getting some money so that we can get
17 data out of DCLA, but there has to be a method to
18 just look at it and say, "Are we moving in the right
19 direction?" If you don't want to have it be a
20 specific number: Is there a percentage we're working
21 towards? Do we want to grow towards a percentage of
22 funding that reflects actually the cultural makeup of
23 the city? You know, the... there is, that's...
24 that's what we want as a goal, right? So those... we
25 know those numbers.

2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And I need your clarity on one
3 thing... or at least some of your insight, with
4 experience. You mentioned the CAC, the Citizen
5 Advisory Committee. What is the role of the CAAC, or
6 the Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission? And what's
7 the difference between the two, especially when it
8 comes to how they have advised on CreateNYC? And how
9 they would potentially advise on any future changes
10 that CreateNYC will undergo? Or if... and if they're
11 helpful? I think that's the main question.

12 MS. SEXTON: And maybe my answer is most
13 indicative, which is that as someone who should know
14 everything, I do not know what that commission does.
15 They do not... they are not public. They do not
16 interact with the community. I know some of the
17 names on it. And I know that they're figurehead
18 names. They're fantastic people. They're wonderful.
19 I have no criticism of that. But yeah, I... if there
20 is more meat on those bones, I would love to know it.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

22 COUNSEL: So we'll now move to the last member of
23 this panel, Candice Anderson from Cool Culture.

24 Thank you.

25

2 MS. ANDERSON: Yeah, thank you. My name is
3 Candice Anderson. I'm the Executive Director of Cool
4 Culture, and I'm submitting this testimony on behalf
5 of my organization, and the 50,000 families that
6 connect with arts and cultural experiences through
7 our programming. With almost 20 years of BIPOC
8 leadership, Cool Culture was founded to address how
9 communities, and which communities are able to access
10 cultural resources for their practices. And we work
11 to strengthen family and community well-being.

12 I know that you are making really hard decisions
13 about funding. I also know that you know, as I do,
14 that arts and cultural resources are central to
15 healing and recovery, for the impacts of
16 institutional racism and on the pandemic. I also
17 believe that we all know that culture is necessary to
18 thrive, yet in historically marginalized communities,
19 families and children face the stark reality of
20 underinvestment in arts and culture while more
21 privileged communities benefit from systemic
22 inequities. In the process of creating the first
23 ever New York City Create New York plan tens of
24 thousands of New Yorkers named cultural equity and
25 inclusion as their top priorities, and expressed a

2 desire to access culture within their own
3 neighborhoods. And no wonder, right? Research that
4 focuses on New York City shows that culture is tied
5 to well-being.

6 A Chicago based study commissioned by the
7 MacArthur Foundation also examined the relationship
8 between arts and neighborhood capacity and community
9 life and found that initiatives that are led by small
10 arts organizations connected to local social networks
11 significantly impact the well-being of communities.

12 But the reality is that the hardships faced by BIPOC
13 communities and families must frequently be met by
14 the many creative responses that are generated from
15 our communities, our cultural practices, our artistic
16 traditions, and the networks, organizations, and
17 institutions that we have created. [Bell rings.]

18 But these organizations and institutions lack the
19 adequate funding to fully realize solutions to the
20 challenges faced by BIPOC communities.

21 The research some support for this is clear, as
22 stated by HueArts and also stated by the Doris Duke
23 Charitable Foundation, and the New York Community
24 Trust Commission's report: There is a need for
25 capacity building support for BIPOC organizations

2 that the private sector is often reluctant to
3 provide. At the time of the CreateNYC initiative in
4 2007, the largest 139 cultural groups received 82% of
5 revenue, public and private while 1800 with budgets
6 under \$1 million receive just 6%. In response to the
7 goals of Create New York City, funding allocated to
8 the DCLA in the last three budgets has provided
9 increased funding for individual artists and borough
10 organizations.

11 COUNSEL: (inaudible)

12 MS. ANDERSON: However, the city's antiquated
13 model of funding the arts was established in the
14 1800s and has perpetuated and reinforced racial
15 inequities. Far more bold action is needed to
16 address the extreme disparities... disparities that
17 it has reinforced.

18 And I just want to get to some recommendations
19 off the top.

20 I am... I'm calling on the city to revisit and
21 radically reimagine the existing antiquated funding
22 model. So that DCLA and The Administration can play
23 an active role in redressing historic inequities and
24 government funding and to support BIPOC organizations
25 that play a central roles in their communities. The

2 Department of Cultural Affairs and private
3 philanthropy should immediately amass and distribute
4 a fund of \$100 million to BIPOC organizations. This
5 month funding should also be baselined, as my
6 colleagues have mentioned, for POC arts entities with
7 guaranteed support and the annual budget every year,
8 in the same way that CIG is a baseline budget
9 priority.

10 Also allow applications for multi-year general
11 operating support in addition to program support.
12 This will really support small BIPOC organizations,
13 organizations in the outer boroughs, organizations
14 with under \$250,000 in funding for whom a complex
15 applications are a stretch and reduce delays and
16 funding release, similarly, frees up smaller
17 organizations.

18 And then finally, I'm urging you to invest in
19 capacity. So support BIPOC organizations by ensuring
20 that CUNY Cultural Corps emphasizes placements in
21 BIPOC-led organizations. Historically cuts to this
22 funding for this important program have resulted in
23 preference given to larger cultural institutions with
24 greater resources.

2 And finally, increase DCLA staffing and funding.
3 Smaller organizations, BIPOC organizations really do
4 need support and capacity building that can only be
5 provided if the organization if the agency is staffed
6 up. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

8 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.
9 This concludes this panel. We also have your written
10 testimony and all the details and we'll review it.
11 We really appreciate your time. Thank you.

12 So we'll now move to the next in person panel.
13 I'll read the names of all the witnesses on the
14 panel.

15 Panel three will be Robin Schatell from Mov!ng
16 Culture Projects, Kay Madigan from New York
17 Shakespeare Festival in the Public Theater, and
18 Marianna Mott Newirth. If I mispronounced your name,
19 I apologize. If there's anyone else in the room who
20 is here to testify in and we did not call your name,
21 please submit a witness list to the Sergeant at Arms.
22 Otherwise, this will be our last in person panel
23 before we move to Zoom.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And again, for the sake of
25 time, if you could please keep your testimonies to

2 two minutes, that'd be wonderful. We do collect them
3 as written testimonies, but we do have some folks on
4 line as well. Thank you.

5 COUNSEL: Okay, so the first witness on this
6 panel is Robin Schatell, and you may begin your
7 testimony when ready. There's a clock on the wall.
8 Thank you.

9 You're... Yeah, just look for the red light on
10 the mic. Thank you.

11 MS. CHATEL: Thank you. I may go over two
12 minutes. I'm sorry. I've worked really hard to keep
13 it under... I'll do my best. Thank you Chair Ossé
14 and the council. My name is Robin Schatell, and I'm
15 an independent creative producer. I work with
16 artists and arts groups and communities to produce
17 performing arts events in their public spaces. And
18 I'm here to support Intro 590 and ask the council to
19 re-establish to make permanent the Open Cultural
20 Program that was established by Local Law 8 of 2021.
21 Open Culture provides access to an engagement with
22 the arts at a level never seen before in this city.
23 Last year in every borough, on street after street
24 there have been dance, opera, theatre, comedy,
25 circus, and music performances by independent

2 artists, emerging artists, established artists, small
3 arts organizations, and large cultural institutions,
4 and enthusiastic residents coming out to their homes
5 to experience it. I speak from experience. I
6 started the company last year to help performing arts
7 groups and performers navigate the open culture
8 permit process and mount the work and open culture
9 streets. I call it Open Culture Works. Arts funders
10 pivoted to allow indoor performance grants to be used
11 for open culture performances. City agencies, the
12 DCLA, MONE, DOT, and even the mayor's office were all
13 behind this movement to reshape our city streets
14 through the arts, support the livelihoods of
15 performing artists, and gather people together on a
16 local level. I traveled to all five boroughs to work
17 on performances on dozens of open culture streets:
18 East Third Street in the East Village in Manhattan,
19 East 140th in the South Bronx, Manthorne Street in
20 Staten Island, Hoyt Street in downtown Brooklyn,
21 Woodside Avenue in Queens, to name a few. The
22 neighborhoods are so many I can't even mention them.
23 The Open Culture Program, as Lucy mentioned, even led
24 to the development of other outdoor performing arts
25 programs such as DOT's open boulevards, the City

2 Parks Foundation Green Arts Alive Program, and even
3 City Artist Corps. And I worked on all of those and
4 really the result for me and my... my company, and
5 the people I worked with was, we employed nearly 60
6 cultural workers. We supported, and helped, and
7 booked, and paid over 400 performing artists, and we
8 touched... I don't know how many lives... thousands
9 across the city.

10 Open Culture is a game changer and like open
11 streets and open restaurants, it is an economic
12 driver, an in-person activity to improve New Yorkers
13 health and well being, a program that makes safer
14 streets. It's not a stopgap, there's no going back
15 open culture is expected, anticipated even.

16 And I really think after hearing from the
17 commissioner that it can be funded, and funding is
18 key by CreateNYC. It hits all its marks. It has
19 leveled the playing field. It is inclusive, it
20 provides access, it celebrates diversity, it supports
21 the city's ever widening performing arts footprint,
22 and its culturally diverse range of talent. Again,
23 whether they be emerging artists, new artists,
24 culturally specific community groups, you know,
25 established groups, and more importantly, Open

2 Culture connects people through the magical shared
3 experience of life Performing Arts. In other words,
4 Open Culture works.

5 Now, is the permit process perfect. No. Could
6 use more citywide services and support? Yes. Could
7 it use funding? Yes. Does it cause disruptions?
8 Rarely. And is there an opportunity to create a
9 workforce through it that would that would put people
10 to work producers, stage managers, technicians, CUNY,
11 cultural service students, the city wide Service
12 Corps Students, the Summer Youth Employment Program
13 students? Yes. And all these people could help make
14 this run smoother.

15 Now I know there's talk about possibly an agency
16 taking... taking it on like the DOT. I've worked
17 with the DOT. They do have a public program office.
18 I've always felt that Open Culture from the beginning
19 is not just a permit, but it's a program that needs
20 managers and management. And I think really, it
21 should be a public private partnership. I think arts
22 people should be running this program with city
23 agencies. We are... we know what... we know how to
24 put on shows, and we know how to do that. So really,
25 please give us theater people the opportunity to

2 improve Open Culture to work out its kinks, to iron
3 out its creases, and to turn Open Culture 2.0 --
4 because I'm confident that we can -- into a
5 replicable, made-in-New-York program that other
6 cities would want to emulate. After all, we are the
7 cultural capital of the world. Um, thank you for
8 your time. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

9 COUNSEL: Thank you so much. And just... just to
10 flag. So we have, we might lose the room at 1 pm,
11 and still have the Zoom testimony, which is why we're
12 also watching the clock. So if... if there are any
13 questions, we do have written testimony. If you have
14 anything else, you can always submit written
15 testimony afterwards, and we meticulously review it
16 up to 72 hours after the hearing. So thank you.

17 The next witness will be Kate Madigan from the
18 New York Shakespeare Festival and the Public Theater.

19 MS. MADIGAN: Good afternoon Chair and everyone
20 else. I'm here today to provide testimony on the
21 public's work to support the CreateNYC objectives and
22 our work over the past fiscal year. The public
23 utilized the groundbreaking social impact of the Arts
24 Project study, which underpins the CreateNYC plan to
25 create data-driven strategies to increase attendance

2 for the public theater programming by NYC residents
3 who live in burrows other than Manhattan,
4 particularly in communities of color. This resulted
5 in a significant increase in people of color
6 attending free Shakespeare in the Park programming,
7 and the increase in our mobile unit and Public Works
8 programming, whose audiences and participants better
9 reflect the demographics of New York City. In 2020,
10 inspired by the worldwide mass protests, guided by
11 our BIPOC colleagues, and a movement and theater
12 against anti-blackness and racism, and educated by
13 thinkers and activists, the public reexamined its
14 existing DEI plan and published our cultural
15 transformation plan in May 2021, as mentioned by the
16 commissioner.

17 Following a comprehensive audit of our existing
18 diversity, equity and inclusion practices, and
19 building on the existing DEI plan, the work of
20 enacting this recently just operating framework is a
21 massive undertaking with over 40 action items, which
22 has continued to evolve in response to the needs of
23 our community. Throughout 2021-2022, the public
24 engaged in the hiring process for a new role to
25 oversee our cultural transformation plan in anti-

2 racism efforts. The Senior Director of Anti-Racism,
3 Equity and Belonging will... we project to be staffed
4 by December 2022.

5 Over the course of the of the last few seasons,
6 the public has experienced significant staff changes
7 on our leadership program. The majority of these
8 changes have elevated women BIPOC and LGBTQIA+
9 individuals representing a step forward in how the
10 public realizes our work, and who was involved in
11 crucial pipelines. [Bell rings]

12 Thank you so much, and have a great day.

13 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.
14 Our next witness and the final on this panel is
15 Marianna Mott Newirth.

16 MS. MOTT NEUWIRTH: Hello, thank you Chair Ossé
17 and members of the Committee. My name is Marianna
18 Mott Newirth. I am a librettist, creative producer
19 and co-founder, of Opera Praktikos, which is an
20 inter-abled Opera Company. Today I am representing
21 the New York Opera Alliance, often referred to as
22 NYOA, which is a consortium of 45 independent opera
23 companies currently operating in New York City. Many
24 are DCLA recipients.

2 We are living proof that opera in this town is
3 way more than just the Met up at Lincoln Center. We
4 are arts workers, community-driven, egalitarian,
5 telling the story of this city right now through the
6 medium of opera. Annually, our alliance employs
7 approximately 2000 professional singers, musicians
8 and creatives, artists of color, and artists with
9 disabilities. For over a decade, we have utilized
10 local materials, worked with other small businesses.
11 Opera is a collaborative effort, and it's
12 strengthening our creative economy and heightening
13 the quality of our arts and culture sector.

14 During lockdown, we were at the frontline of
15 culture change making outdoor performances possible,
16 bringing opera to the people in city parks, community
17 gardens and on our streets. And the people
18 responded. There is value in having opera be part of
19 our everyday New York City Life. The open culture
20 program makes performing arts accessible. And I ask
21 you to maintain this program and ever evolving ways
22 to help us as we do our job as independent opera
23 companies making opera accessible to all New Yorkers.
24 Thank you.

2 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

3 So this concludes the in person panels for this
4 hearing. There are no questions for this panel. So
5 we'll now be moving to Zoom. Thank you again, and
6 again we'll be reading written testimony. I
7 appreciate your time.

8 Our next panel will actually be our final panel
9 for this hearing will check for anyone that we
10 inadvertently missed. But the members of that panel
11 will be Francine or Fran Garber, Cheryl Warfield from
12 Advance And More opera, Lisa Alpert from Greenwood
13 Cemetery, Sainabou Njai -- apologies for any
14 mispronunciation --, and Ariel Herrera. So again
15 we'll be moving to zoom, and the next witness will be
16 Francine Garber. Just wait one moment and we'll
17 transition.

18 Okay, we're ready for the next panel. So, Fran
19 Garber, you may begin your testimony when the
20 sergeant calls the clock.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time we'll begin.

22 MS. GARBER: Good afternoon Councilmembers. I'm
23 trying to start my video. Can you allow me to start
24 my video please?

2 COUNSEL: We might be having a technical issue.
3 Fran, we can hear you if it's possible to give oral
4 testimony.

5 MS. GARBER: Certainly. I'm Fran Garber-Cohen,
6 president of Regina Opera Company, which offers fully
7 staged operas with full orchestra and English
8 supertitles in Sunset Park, an underserved and low
9 income community, as well as many free concerts in
10 public accessible spaces in Brooklyn. We provide
11 affordable professional level entertainment in
12 accessible venues for people who may not otherwise
13 attend live performances. Our performances bring
14 people of all ages together and are especially
15 important to senior citizens who make up about 65% of
16 our audiences. The need for this cultural enrichment
17 is reflected in the fact that over 4000 people
18 usually attend our performances each season, and
19 these are live performances. Starting in the spring
20 of 2020, we were able to keep our existing audience
21 and gained new audience members, and bring happiness
22 to fellow Brooklynites by performing six 90-minute
23 free concerts in local streets, thanks to the Open
24 Cultural Program. I saw a really positive reaction
25 from local businesses in Bay Ridge for our outdoor

2 performances. While those in Sunset Park were a
3 little slower to appreciate our efforts, but they
4 eventually understood why we were performing in the
5 street and not in our beautiful, indoor, 500 seat
6 theater.

7 We believe that re-establishing the Open Culture
8 Program, allowing the city to issue permits for
9 cultural performances, and re-establishing the Create
10 New York City program through this legislation would
11 encourage local businesses to be more welcoming to us
12 and help us realize the benefits of cultural events
13 in their areas. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

15 COUNSEL: Moving to the next witness, Cheryl
16 Warfield, you may begin your testimony when the
17 sergeant calls the clock.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

19 MS. WARFIELD: Good afternoon. Thank you to say
20 Councilmembers for hearing my testimony. I am Cheryl
21 Warfield, Founder and Director of Advance More Opera,
22 a 20-year-old nonprofit that presents concerts and
23 educational outreach to youth and families in
24 underserved communities in the Bronx and Manhattan.

2 I also sit on the executive Committee of the New
3 York Opera Alliance, a consortium of mostly level
4 four and five opera companies that bring both
5 contemporary and traditional opera directly to the
6 people in all five boroughs, amplifying new and
7 diverse voices in opera, including those of color and
8 with disabilities. I look forward to DCLA's upcoming
9 grantmaking announcement in hope of seeing more
10 inclusion for smaller minority run organizations like
11 More Opera, and greater investment in historically
12 under-resourced communities.

13 Today I stand in solidarity with Mariana Mott
14 Newirth and colleagues from New Yorkers for Culture
15 and Arts, and Culture @ 3, including Lisa Gold,
16 Sheila Lewandowski, and Lucy Sexton, and defer to
17 their testimony on comments on the Cultural Plan and
18 Open Culture. I want to thank Councilmember Dinowitz
19 for his remarks this morning about hate speech
20 against Asian and Jewish communities, but would be
21 remiss if I did not mention the recent revelation of
22 blatant racist remarks by Los Angeles Councilmembers.
23 All New Yorkers need to denounce hate speech
24 including members of City Council. And yes, arts and
25 culture, properly funded, can and will help combat

2 and dismantle hate. Again, thank you for the
3 opportunity to provide testimony.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

5 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

6 The next witness will be Lisa Alpert. You may begin
7 your testimony when the sergeant calls the clock.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 MS. ALPERT: Hi. Let's see. Hello. I'm going
10 to change my greeting from good morning to good
11 afternoon, Chair Ossé. Mname is Lisa Alpert. I'm
12 coming to you live from Greenwood Cemetery in
13 Brooklyn. Yes, we are a cemetery. We are 478 acres.
14 We produce arts and cultural programming throughout
15 the year. Chair Ossé, I know you have a personal
16 connection to Greenwood, which you shared with me
17 last year. And we still want to get you here during
18 our Memorial Day concert to sing one of your
19 grandfather's songs.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I know. I really want to come
21 soon. I really do.

22 MS. ALPERT: But I will stop pandering to the
23 Chair. But in truth, the legacies of all of those
24 who've gone before us are what inspire us here at
25 Greenwood Cemetery. I have three important really

2 brief points to make that relate to CreateNYC and its
3 goals.

4 One: Tons of people come to Greenwood every
5 year. In 2021, we had 450,000 visitors. That's
6 because we're free to the public, open 365 days a
7 year until 7 p.m. every day, seven days a week,
8 always free.

9 Two: I know the Committee is interested in
10 developing new and unconventional spaces for city
11 cultural programming. Greenwood definitely checks
12 that box. We are in a part of Brooklyn with tons of
13 culture, but relatively few cultural resources. Our
14 arts and culture programming, and our amazing school
15 programming is changing that. Art installations on
16 the grounds, dance performances, artists and
17 residents programs, concerts in our catacombs, and
18 loads more.

19 So point one: Tons of people come here. Point
20 two: We are a huge resource for cultural
21 programming. And point three: Greenwood has not
22 received programmatic support from the council in
23 over 10 years. We really need some council support
24 to be able to afford our really big programs that
25 serve the public at no cost. And these include

2 Juneteenth and Dia De Los Muertos, which is coming up
3 next week, if you'd like to come. It's totally
4 fabulous.

5 I want to end this on a super positive note. We
6 are very excited to partner with this Committee and
7 with the council to support arts and culture in New
8 York City. And we thank you for allowing us to
9 testify at your meeting. Thanks.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

11 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.
12 The next witness -- and apologies again -- is
13 Sainabou Njai. You may begin their testimony when
14 ready.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time start snow.

16 MS. NJAI: Yes hello. Can you hear me?

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we hear you.

18 MS. NJAI: Sainabou Njai is the name. It's okay.
19 People butcher it. Pretty much... I'm here to... my
20 name is Sainabou Njai, and I'm the director of a
21 Brooklyn-based nonprofit, a small nonprofit, the
22 African Peach Arts Coalition. And I pretty much want
23 to testify for the reinstatement of the Open Culture
24 Permit Program. For us as a startup, you know,
25 organization and grassroots programming, this one

2 event that we were able to hold up as a result of
3 having an open culture for me, it allowed us... it
4 catapulted us in a sense. It was a great marketing,
5 and outreach opportunity. And, you know, these are
6 things that, you know, for us small people, it's
7 important to us. So and... We are also organization
8 that is focused on curating incentivize programming.
9 So, you know, we do focus on providing access to the
10 public. But we also want to make sure we're taking
11 the funding that we're getting and opportunities to
12 pay the artists, because we are addressing economic
13 equity and issues with underserved artists who, you
14 know, historically are underserved when it comes to
15 work and gigs and getting paid for their craft. So
16 I'm here to just testify for the reinstatement of
17 that Open Culture Program. We were able to have 20
18 artists... 20 performing artists last year in DUMBO,
19 and we started that event, and it is now an annual
20 event. We just had it again in downtown Brooklyn.
21 So again, thank you to all parties. I'm not sure you
22 know which parties are which, you know. I'm still
23 learning all of that. But thank you to those
24 involved. And I definitely want to, you know, just

2 advocate, advocate, advocate for the reinstatement of
3 that program. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

5 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

6 We're moving to the final witness and we will do a
7 check for anyone that we inadvertently missed at the
8 end. So our final witness on this panel, and the
9 final witness for public testimony is Ariel Herrera,
10 you may begin your testimony when the sergeant calls
11 the clock.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 MR. HERRERA: Good afternoon. My name is Ariel
14 Herrera, and I am the Research and Advocacy Manager
15 for Dance/NYC. Thank you for this opportunity to
16 speak to you today. Dance/NYC is a service
17 organization for the dance industry in the
18 metropolitan New York City area. And it's action-
19 oriented research and advocacy seek to present and
20 advance the interests of the dance sector.

21 Today I join colleague advocates working across
22 creative disciplines to reiterate the value of open
23 culture, begun as a lifeline for New York City
24 artists and cultural organizations and able to
25 continue with their regular in their programming due

2 to the COVID-19 pandemic. Open Culture brought arts,
3 music, and dance from indoors and out into the
4 street. Open Culture has become a popular form of
5 community engagement that has had a profound impact
6 on the way that communities think about the
7 importance of arts and culture in their lives and
8 neighborhoods. I am here today to ask you to pass
9 INT 0590, 2022 to make Open Culture, a permanent city
10 program, and make the following recommendations to
11 make it more sustainable, as well as equitable for
12 art workers and accessible to all communities across
13 the city.

14 One: Expand available locations and set a
15 minimum number of Open Culture streets per community
16 district to increase equitable access for communities
17 in outer boroughs.

18 Two: Expand eligibility criteria beyond the
19 currently limited cultural venues to include fiscally
20 sponsored organizations, and City Artist Corps
21 eligible artists.

22 And last but not least: Require annual
23 evaluation and reporting by the city of the
24 program... excuse me... to address what's working,
25 what's not working, and to ensure that community

2 engagement is an integral part of the open culture
3 programming. Moving forward with the open culture as
4 a permanent...

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

6 MR. HERRERA: ...not only of substantial
7 investment in the resilience and long term recovery
8 of the arts and culture sector, but a forward-looking
9 investment in community building to arts and culture.
10 Thank you.

11 COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.
12 This concludes the public testimony portion of this
13 hearing. We'll just do one final check for anyone
14 that we inadvertently missed either in the room or on
15 Zoom. Please use the raise hand function if we did
16 miss you. We're not seeing anyone on Zoom. There's
17 no one in the room. So this concludes the public
18 testimony portion of this hearing. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, everyone
20 for coming to this hearing to talk about culture.
21 It's something that we care about deeply... or I care
22 about deeply. And I appreciate everyone that spent
23 time out of their weekday to come out both virtually
24 and in person to testify. As a co-prime sponsor on
25 the Open Culture 2.0 Bill, I'm really excited to have

2 this hopefully passed to this council so that we
3 could, you know, really revitalize our cultural
4 community and cultural spaces in New York City as a
5 whole. And thank you to everyone that also bared
6 witness of, you know, critique and the conversation
7 about CreateNYC, because we want to make sure that
8 funding is always equal across our five boroughs when
9 it comes to our cultural organizations and
10 institutions. Thank you Brenda McKinney for sitting
11 by my side for today's hearing and every hearing.
12 And I have no more colleagues in the room anymore,
13 but without further ado, I will close today's hearing

14 [GAVEL]

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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 11/08/2022