

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL  
INTERGROUP RELATIONS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON  
IMMIGRATION 1

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP  
RELATIONS JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON  
IMMIGRATION

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January 12, 2023  
Start: 10:09 a.m.  
Recess: 1:16 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Chi A. Osse, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shahana Hanif, Chair  
Eric Dinowitz  
Amanda Farias  
Crystal Hudson  
Rita C. Joseph  
Farah N. Louis  
Francisco P. Moya  
Sandra Ung  
Carmen N. De La Rosa  
Shekar Krishnan  
Pierina Ana Sanchez

A P P E A R A N C E S

George Xu, President of Chinese Business  
Association of New York

Ah Lin Lim

Raymond Tsang, President of Chinese Consolidated  
Benevolent Association

Chi Yeung

Yi Andy Chen

George Li

Denny Chen, President of Hotel Chinese  
Association

Alex Farman

Lola Byrd

Anderson Deng

Thomas Ong

Jane Li, Coordinator of Programs and Engagement  
for Brooklyn Children's Museum

Sami Abu Shumays, Deputy Director Flushing Town  
Hall

Lisa Alpert, Green-Wood Cemetery

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

Lisa Alpert, Executive Director of the Asian  
American Arts Alliance

Nikiesha Hamilton, Founder and CEO of Afeni  
Creative Studios

Leticia Cortez-Ortiz, People's Theatre Project

Chris Whittaker, music director and founder of  
the Washington Heights Chamber Orchestra

Elizabeth Koch, Producer of Brooklyn Book  
Festival

Lucy Sexton, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Eleni DeSiervo, Senior Director of Government  
Relations at Lincoln Center for the Performing  
Arts

Reshma Patel, Dance NYC

Francine Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera  
Company

Potri Ranka Manis Queano Nur, Kinding Sindaw

Candice Anderson, Executive Director of Cool  
Culture

Cheryl Warfield, Founder of ADVANCE MORE Opera

Harley Judd Spiller, Ken Dewey Director of  
Franklin Furnace Archive

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

Ya-Yun Teng, Program Officer Immigrant Artist  
Resource Center at the New York Foundation for  
the Arts

Maeve Montalvo, Director of Education at the  
Museum of the City of New York

Caron Atlas, director of Arts and Democracy in  
the Citywide Alliance at NOCD-NY

Milena Luna, interim Executive Director for Dance  
NYC

Carlye Eckert, Community Engagement Director for  
Dance Parade

Mafor Mambo Tse, Executive Director of Siren -  
Protectors of the Rainforest

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SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning. Today's hearing is on Cultural Affairs and Immigration. Today's date is January 12, 2023. The location is in the Chambers and is recorded by Walter Lewis.

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

Please silence all cell phones and electronics.

If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: [GAVEL] Good morning or should I say da jia hao. I am Council Member Chi Osse. Yeah, we can give a round of applause for that. I am City Council Member Chi Osse, Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. My pronouns are he/him/his, and welcome to our joint hearing with the Committee on Immigration Chaired by Council Member Shahana Hanif.

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2 Today's oversight hearing is on New York  
3 City's immigrant communities and the arts. At this  
4 hearing, the Committee on Cultural Affairs will also  
5 be hearing two pieces of legislation which are  
6 unrelated to this oversight topic but are also very  
7 important, Resolution 331-A co-sponsored by Council  
8 Members Christopher Marte and Crystal Hudson  
9 recognizing Lunar New Year as an annual school  
10 holiday and as an official holiday in the City of New  
11 York and Resolution 424 sponsored by Council Member  
12 Sandra Ung calling on the United States Congress to  
13 pass and the President to sign the Lunar New Year Day  
14 Act, HR 6525.

15 I'm excited to hold a hearing on these  
16 two resolutions today. Many New Yorkers celebrate the  
17 Lunar New Year with areas like Sunset Park, Flushing,  
18 and, of course, Chinatown and Manhattan hosting large  
19 and extravagant festivals and celebrations full of  
20 confetti, dragon, and lion dances, and lots of food  
21 to wish good fortune and luck for the new year. I may  
22 not look like I am, but as a Chinese American, my  
23 grandmother is from Hong Kong, Lunar New Year is a  
24 holiday near and dear to my heart and to my family.  
25 Every year, my family and I gather at my

1  
2 grandmother's to ring in the new year with a dinner  
3 and an exchange of hongbao or red envelopes. As we  
4 approach the Year of the Rabbit, I'm excited to know  
5 that we here on the Council are pushing to make Lunar  
6 New Year an official holiday in New York City and the  
7 country as a whole. I welcome my Colleagues, Council  
8 Member Marte and Council Member Ung, who have joined  
9 us today to provide brief remarks on their  
10 legislation. Council Member Marte.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you. First of  
12 all, I want to thank Chair Osse for organizing this  
13 hearing. You can hear the passion of his heritage in  
14 making this an official holiday so thank you so much  
15 and thank you for giving us this opportunity.

16 I want to thank my staff, Ian Wang, and  
17 Steven Song, and Central Staff Regina Paul for making  
18 this Resolution possible. I also want to thank the  
19 over 100 family associations who are in support of  
20 this Resolution and the over 50 individuals from my  
21 community, from Sunset Park, from Flushing who are  
22 here today to testify in support of making Lunar New  
23 Year an official holiday, not only in New York City  
24 but also in our schools. Resolution 331 calls this  
25 administration to recognize Lunar New Year as an

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1  
2 annual school holiday and official in the City of New  
3 York. Lunar New Year is one of the most important  
4 annual celebrations in many East and Southeast Asian  
5 Cultures, and every year almost 1.5 million residents  
6 from across New York City celebrate to honor their  
7 Asian heritage. Across the City, Asian American  
8 communities host grand events to welcome Lunar New  
9 Year, and I welcome everyone to Manhattan's Chinatown  
10 fairly soon to visit our small businesses, come to  
11 our parades, see our lion dances, see our fireworks  
12 and our street fairs. These events attract New  
13 Yorkers from all racial, ethnic, and religious  
14 backgrounds to enjoy the festival and the  
15 enlightenment, promoting and understanding Asian  
16 cultures and benefiting, of course, local small  
17 businesses. Although former Mayor de Blasio  
18 designated Lunar New Year as a public school holiday  
19 in 2015, the New York City DOE did not designate the  
20 Lunar New Year which is on Sunday, January 22nd, as a  
21 holiday in the '22-'23 school calendar nor did DOE  
22 designate the following Monday as a make-up holiday,  
23 and we have to correct this. This caused widespread  
24 frustration and confusion among residents and  
25 students. Therefore, I hope this Council can



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2 expeditiously pass this Resolution to clear up the  
3 confusion and recognize Lunar New Year not just as a  
4 school holiday but official holiday for the City of  
5 New York.

6           Also, I want to thank everyone who's been  
7 supportive as well as Council Member Hudson who is  
8 not here and also Council Member Sandra Ung who I  
9 know this is really important in her community as  
10 well.

11           CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Council  
12 Member Marte. Your constituents and this city are  
13 very lucky to have you in office. I do want to turn  
14 over to Council Member Ung for some brief remarks as  
15 well.

16           COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Good morning and  
17 thank you to Chairs Osse and Hanif for hosting this  
18 joint Committee meeting and allowing me the time to  
19 speak about Resolution 424, which calls the City  
20 Council to support HR 6525, a piece of legislation  
21 introduced by Congresswoman Grace Meng to designate  
22 Lunar New Year as a federally recognized holiday. In  
23 Asian societies across the globe, Lunar New Year is  
24 the most important holiday on the calendar, including  
25 the Asian American community here in the United

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2 States and New York City where we are the fastest-  
3 growing ethnic group. Designating Lunar New Year as a  
4 federal holiday would be an important recognition of  
5 the contributions of Asian Americans in this country  
6 and a show of solidarity at a time when hate crimes  
7 against the community are increasing at alarming  
8 rates. Adding Lunar New Year to the list of federally  
9 recognized holidays would also be a powerful sign of  
10 awareness of our country's cultural diversity.  
11 Working toward the recognition of Lunar New Year has  
12 been a long fight. I worked in the office of then-  
13 Assemblymember Jimmy Meng, and I helped draft the  
14 original State Bill that paved the way for the  
15 designation of Lunar New Year as a school holiday in  
16 New York City and was observed the first time in  
17 2016. However, when the Department of Education  
18 released the calendar for the 2022 to 2023 school  
19 year, the Lunar New Year holiday was not included  
20 because it falls on a Sunday so this year would not  
21 be recognized by DOE with a symbolic day of school.  
22 Many Asian Americans including myself honestly felt  
23 that this hard-fought recognition of our culture was  
24 being disregarded. It is time that Lunar New Year is  
25 recognized on par with other major holidays

1  
2 throughout the year regardless of the day of the week  
3 that it falls on. It would not only be an important  
4 acknowledgement of the positive contributions Asian  
5 Americans to this country but also allow members of  
6 the community to fully celebrate this 4,000-year-old  
7 tradition by providing them the opportunity to spend  
8 time with family and friends just as holidays are  
9 celebrated in Asian communities in other parts of the  
10 world, and the only way for this to be accomplished  
11 is to designate Lunar New Year as a holiday at the  
12 federal level. This is why I call my Colleagues to  
13 adopt Resolution 424 and urge Congress to pass and  
14 the President to sign HR 6525.

15 I also want to welcome everybody from the  
16 community, from Chinatown, Sunset Park, from my home,  
17 Flushing, to come out here and support these  
18 resolutions. Thank you so much.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Council  
20 Member Ung. Your constituents and this city are also  
21 lucky to have you. Before I continue, I do want to  
22 acknowledge the students from the Avenues School who  
23 are here. It is so important to have young people  
24 engaged in our civic process. As the youngest member  
25 of this City Council, I'm so thankful to see you up

1  
2 there. I still am holding a grudge. I went to Friends  
3 Seminary, and you guys kicked our butts in sports  
4 every single year but thank you for being here today.

5           Now, let me start with our oversight  
6 hearing on New York City's immigrant communities and  
7 the arts by providing a little background. The  
8 Department of Cultural Affairs, or DCLA, is both the  
9 country's largest municipal funder of art and culture  
10 and the city agency responsible for supporting arts  
11 and cultural organizations in our five boroughs. One  
12 important part of DCLA's work is to provide  
13 operational support to organizations in the form of  
14 grants known as the Cultural Development Fund, or  
15 CDF. DCLA just announced last month that it will be  
16 providing over 58 million dollars to 1,070 cultural  
17 organizations through this year's CDF grant process,  
18 a historic amount. Many of these grantees come from  
19 and/or serve the past and present immigrant  
20 communities that make up New York City. For example,  
21 this funding will support projects by the Oye Group,  
22 a community of black and LatinX kids and adults made  
23 up of both immigrants and native New Yorkers who will  
24 use the funding to teach kids in Brooklyn about  
25 Shakespeare. In the process, they also teach young

1  
2 people about the value of their creative work and the  
3 responsibility of being a professional artist. Annie  
4 Polland, President of the Tenement Museum, explained  
5 that her museum's CDF grant will enable it to honor  
6 and share stories of historic immigrant, migrant, and  
7 refugee families in order to build learning, empathy,  
8 and connection in the world today. In a statement  
9 about the grant release, Mayor Adams noted that the  
10 more grants were rewarded this year to "the smaller,  
11 local, and more diverse groups that reflect the  
12 histories of all New Yorkers and that no matter in  
13 what borough New Yorkers can learn about some of the  
14 unique cultures and their own backgrounds." This  
15 Committee celebrates all of these cultures that make  
16 up our city today and applauds this kind of grant-  
17 making by DCLA.

18                   Now, a bit of history. At least since the  
19 development of DCLA's CreateNYC, the comprehensive  
20 cultural plan for New York City which was published  
21 in 2017 after engaging over 188,000 New Yorkers in  
22 its drafting process, the importance of serving New  
23 York City's communities of immigrants, and the art  
24 and cultural sector have been officially recognized.  
25 One of the original objectives of CreateNYC was to

1 support arts and culture and science organizations as  
2 inclusive spaces for New Yorkers of all immigration  
3 status. When translated into DCLA's action plan in  
4 2019, that objective became to improve cultural  
5 access for historically marginalized groups of  
6 artists, audiences, and cultural workers. One of the  
7 groups named specifically in the action plan was  
8 immigrants. Since then, the financial commitment to  
9 New York City's immigrant population from DCLA and  
10 from the City Council through the City Council's  
11 Cultural Immigrant Initiative has been clear. To  
12 their great credit, New York City's art and cultural  
13 institutions have in recent years welcomed immigrant  
14 artists, provided support for newly arrived  
15 immigrants as well as for those who identify with  
16 their immigrant heritage, celebrated the cultures of  
17 past and present immigrant communities, and taken a  
18 stand to advocate for immigrants and immigrant  
19 artists. Examples of such support would include the  
20 work of El Museo Del Barrio, the Guggenheim Museum,  
21 the Ukrainian Museum, the People's Theatre Project,  
22 Immigrant Research, and Performing Arts Center, and  
23 the Queens Museum not to mention many, many smaller  
24 immigrant-led organizations often based in  
25

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2 neighborhoods that are home to many immigrant  
3 families. These smaller organizations, in spite of  
4 the considerable expense of operating in New York  
5 City and the language and logistical difficulties of  
6 reaching out to immigrant communities contribute  
7 profoundly to New York City life every day. It cannot  
8 be denied that New York City is a tapestry of  
9 immigrant stories. I am grateful that we are here to  
10 highlight the important work the City, the art and  
11 cultural communities, and our immigrant organizations  
12 do and for the opportunity to do so jointly with my  
13 Colleague, Chair Hanif, and the Immigration  
14 Committee.

15           At today's hearing, I am eager to learn  
16 more about the breadth and depth of the arts and  
17 cultural community's response both to serving  
18 immigrant communities as audiences including our most  
19 recent asylum seekers and to putting the arts and  
20 cultures on exhibit for all New Yorkers to  
21 appreciate. Our Committees want to understand how the  
22 City Council can best support the kinds of efforts  
23 that have already been mounted and initiate new ones  
24 where needed.

2           Before I move on to Chair Hanif for her  
3 opening statement, I want to acknowledge my  
4 Colleagues on the Committee who are present, Council  
5 Member Ung, of course, Council Member Dinowitz,  
6 Council Member Louis, Council Member Marte, and  
7 Council Member Joseph, and Council Member De La Rosa.  
8 I would also like to thank my Staff and the Committee  
9 Staff for their work in preparing today's hearing,  
10 also Council Member Moya and Council Member Sanchez,  
11 my apologies. I want to thank my Chief-of-Staff Naomi  
12 Hopkins, my Policy and Budget Director May  
13 Vutrapongvatana, the Committee's Senior Legislative  
14 Counsel Brenda McKinney, the Committee's Legislative  
15 Policy Analyst Regina Paul, and the Committee's  
16 Financial Analyst Sandra Gray.

17           Now, I would like to invite Chair Hanif  
18 to give her opening statement.

19           CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.  
20 Shoutout to all the young people here. We love to see  
21 it, and, if the educator/teacher could raise their  
22 hand, want to give them a shoutout. Okay, I see you,  
23 I see you all. Thank you. Thank you for encouraging  
24 participation in hearings. They're not most the  
25 sexiest nor glamorous but important for the work that



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2 we do in the City Council and for all young people to  
3 recognize where power lies and it's all local, it's  
4 all municipal, and really excited to see where your  
5 journeys take you.

6 I'm Council Member Shahana Hanif, Chair  
7 of the Immigration Committee and a proud Member of  
8 the Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International  
9 Intergroup Relations. I want to thank Council Member  
10 Osee, Chair of this Committee for today's joint  
11 oversight hearing on New York City's immigrant  
12 communities and the arts. I want to thank my Council  
13 Colleagues, representatives from the administration,  
14 and public for being here and to members of the  
15 public participating remotely.

16 I am a proud co-sponsor of both pieces of  
17 legislation being heard today, and I'm especially  
18 proud and deeply appreciative of the work that Asian  
19 communities across our various ethnic backgrounds  
20 have done together to ensure that Asian and South  
21 Asian holidays are on the calendar, that we have days  
22 off including eves so the work is more powerful when  
23 we are coming together as the broader Asian, South  
24 Asian community in our City. This is such a timely  
25 hearing, especially as we continue to welcome asylum

1  
2 seekers, as we continue to call for expanding mental  
3 health services and other medical and health  
4 interventions and guaranteed and safe housing, we  
5 cannot forget about the power of the arts as a tool  
6 for inclusion in our democracy. As an urgent part of  
7 our joy and healing, as an opportunity to understand  
8 our stories and migration paths and histories and the  
9 forthcoming and ongoing organizing and activism that  
10 must integrate the arts in all its forms to continue  
11 to galvanize our communities. It is not secret that  
12 immigrants are an influential part of life here in  
13 New York City. This city is home to almost 3 million  
14 immigrants, 40 percent of our city's population, and  
15 60 percent of New Yorkers, myself included are  
16 children of immigrants or immigrants. We pride  
17 ourselves of the diversity of our city and value the  
18 contributions that the newest immigrants arriving can  
19 make to the tapestry of New York. It is not an  
20 exaggeration to say that immigrants are an essential  
21 part of the fabric of our communities. They  
22 contribute not only to our economic prosperity but  
23 also provide integral contributions to a renowned  
24 artistic and cultural life. Now, as our city is  
25 welcoming an influx of immigrants, our cultural

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2 institutions have an opportunity and an obligation to  
3 both serve and showcase the arts and culture of these  
4 immigrant New Yorkers while also supporting the  
5 artists who have arrived too, and this includes our  
6 future artists who are in classrooms across New York  
7 City. We must create supportive career pathways for  
8 artists. No child should be told not to pursue the  
9 arts. Arts and cultural programs not only provide  
10 immigrants with an avenue of expression and a way to  
11 tell their stories, these programs and institutions  
12 also create bridges between the under-represented  
13 immigrant communities and non-immigrant residents of  
14 the city. These experiences are an important way to  
15 foster understanding and create dialogue that  
16 transcends linguistic, cultural, and geographical  
17 barriers. These experiences are part and parcel of  
18 what makes New Yorkers, immigrant and non-immigrant,  
19 part of a community.

20 I look forward to learning more about the  
21 administration's efforts to promote this sense of  
22 community and support current and future New York  
23 City immigrants including women, undocumented,  
24 disabled, queer, trans, and black immigrants. I am  
25 also excited to hear more about how the arts and

1  
2 cultural organizations of our city anticipate serving  
3 and working with our growing immigrant population as  
4 well as the Council's role in furthering these  
5 initiatives. I'm especially interested in learning  
6 about this administration's approach to arts in  
7 activism and supporting the groups' organizing and  
8 aiding their capacity with arts funding.

9 I want to thank all the Committee Staff  
10 for their work on this issue including Jayasri  
11 Ganapathy, our Senior Legislative Counsel; Rebecca  
12 Barilla, Policy Analyst; and Florentine Kabore,  
13 Finance Analyst.

14 I would also like to thank my staff,  
15 Chief-of-Staff Nora Brickner, Legislative Director  
16 Alex Liao, Communications Director Michael  
17 Whitesides, and everyone working in the background to  
18 make this hybrid hearing run smoothly.

19 Now, I will turn it back to Council  
20 Member Osse.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Chair Hanif.  
22 Now, I would like to address some housekeeping items  
23 before we begin with the administration's testimony.  
24 First, as a reminder, today is an in-person hearing  
25 with the option of virtual testimony for the public.

1  
2 The Committees will be accepting registrations for  
3 testimony throughout the hearing. Anyone who is  
4 attending in-person and who wishes to testify in-  
5 person should see the Sergeant-at-Arms to fill out a  
6 witnesses slip even if you registered in advance  
7 online.

8           As usual, we will begin today's hearing  
9 with testimony from the administration followed by  
10 Council Member Q and A and then move to public  
11 testimony. We will limit Council Member Q and A  
12 including comments to five minutes. During the public  
13 testimony of the hearing, witnesses from the public  
14 will be limited to two minutes.

15           As a reminder to all our witnesses,  
16 please state your name prior to your testimony for  
17 the record and please try to keep to those two  
18 minutes. We have a lot of you in the room today.

19           The Committee will also be accepting  
20 written testimony for up to 72 hours after the  
21 hearing.

22           Now, I will turn to our Senior Committee  
23 Counsel who will administer the affirmation to the  
24 witnesses from the administration who may then begin  
25 their testimony. Brenda.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you,  
Chair. If you could please raise your right hand?

Today, we have Commissioner Laurie Cumbo  
from DCLA, Eileen Reyes Arias from MOIA, and Lance  
Polivy from DCLA. Do you swear to tell the truth, the  
whole truth, and nothing but the truth and answer  
Council Member questions honestly before this  
Committee today.

ADMINISTRATION: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you.  
You may begin your testimony when ready. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much.  
Good morning, Chair Osse and Chair Hanif and Members  
of the Committee.

I am Commissioner Laurie Cumbo, here  
today to testify in regards to today's topic, NYC's  
Immigrant Communities and the Arts, and I just want  
to say in my 20 years of testifying as well as being  
a Council Member I've never seen a turnout like this  
for a Department of Cultural Affairs hearing so I  
really give it up to you all. The energy in here is  
incredible. As Chair Hanif has said, the next  
generation of leaders are in the balcony and here on  
the floor, and we're excited to see their pathway,

1  
2 and I'm just thrilled, I almost walked in here and  
3 thought I as in the wrong hearing so I'm super  
4 excited that you have been able to engage the  
5 cultural community in such a profound way.

6 I am joined by a number of my colleagues  
7 from the Department of Cultural Affairs as well as  
8 colleagues from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
9 Affairs, and we are truly excited and honored to be a  
10 part of this hearing today.

11 New York is a city of immigrants. It's  
12 been true for centuries, and the city we all live in  
13 today, its energy, vibrancy, and beauty, we owe to  
14 immigrants both past and present. For so many of us,  
15 the immigrant experience is central to who we are and  
16 where we and our families come from. Any  
17 understanding of our city, its people, and its needs  
18 has to take the immigrant experience into account.  
19 It's fundamental as we are as New Yorkers.

20 Another statement that's just as true as  
21 saying we're a city of immigrants, culture is the  
22 bedrock of New York City's communities. It's a source  
23 of joy, connection, social cohesion, and economic  
24 vibrancy. It's a critical way for us to celebrate,  
25 share, and express who we are. Our immigrant

1 neighbors have always embraced this power. In the  
2 process, they both strengthen their bonds as a  
3 community and make our whole city stronger, and at  
4 the Department of Cultural Affairs, it's our great  
5 honor to support the individuals and organizations  
6 who do the work of organizing, community building,  
7 creating, programming, and bringing people together  
8 to share their singular cultural experiences.  
9

10 As a result of so many diverse artists,  
11 audiences, and disciplines thriving in such close  
12 proximity across disciplines from all corners of the  
13 globe, an incredible cross-pollination happens in our  
14 city, and you are seeing that here today in City  
15 Hall. In other words, New York wouldn't be New York  
16 without the creative energy of immigrants, full stop.

17 Culture also has a role to play in  
18 welcoming the newest arrivals to our city, including  
19 asylum seekers. Little Amal's visit to New York last  
20 fall is one recent, high-profile example of this. For  
21 those who might have missed her whirlwind tour of New  
22 York, Amal is a towering puppet representing a Syrian  
23 refugee who anchored a series of interactive  
24 performances hosted by groups all across the city.  
25 Last September, we joined Chair Hanif, our colleagues



1  
2 at the Civic Engagement Commission, the Mayor's  
3 Office of Immigrant Affairs, and Little Amal to  
4 welcome asylum-seekers arriving at the Port Authority  
5 bus terminal in midtown. The families had been on a  
6 bus all night, and they were exhausted. It was 6  
7 a.m., but they were in good spirits. And once the  
8 younger arrivals warmed up to Little Amal, it was  
9 such a powerful moment. Amal created space for our  
10 children to be just what they are, kids in awe of an  
11 incredibly beautiful 12-foot-tall puppet. For that  
12 moment, the tragedy of their situation was not  
13 defining them. It also provided a potent reminder to  
14 anyone watching of the real people whose lives are  
15 often obscured by the frenzied national headlines,  
16 and that is the power of art.

17           The conversations that Amal catalyzed  
18 around the cultural community's services for asylum  
19 seekers continue to this day, spurring an ongoing  
20 collaboration between DCLA and MOIA around Immigrant  
21 Heritage Week later this year among other exciting  
22 collaborations that we have in the works.

23           At the Department of Cultural Affairs, we  
24 are so proud of our work to support the vibrant  
25 cultural life of our immigrant communities. The

1 diversity of immigrant experiences in our city is  
2 matched by the diversity of the ways these  
3 experiences are reflected in our creative life and  
4 cultural community. As a consequence, there is a  
5 range of ways the City support reaches our immigrant  
6 arts communities, and I'm excited to tell you about  
7 all of those different ways.  
8

9 DCLA's Cultural Development Fund supports  
10 hundreds of immigrant-serving arts groups and  
11 programs across the five boroughs. To highlight just  
12 a few from the most recent grant cycle:

13 In Manhattan, Harlem's Custom  
14 Collaborative, which is a first-time CDF grantee in  
15 Fiscal Year '23, trains, mentors, and advocates for  
16 and with low-income immigrant women to build the  
17 skills necessary to achieve economic success in the  
18 sustainable fashion industry and broader society, and  
19 Create in Chinatown works at the cross-section of  
20 neighborhood engagement, storytelling, and the arts,  
21 amplifying voices of their neighbors, advocating for  
22 equity, and highlighting local histories through oral  
23 history projects, cultural classes, and talks.

24 In Brooklyn, we have the Flanbwayan  
25 Haitian Literacy Project, another first-time CDF

1  
2 recipient, serves English Language, ELL, Haitian  
3 immigrant students in New York City ages 14 to 21,  
4 providing them with the vital cultural and linguistic  
5 services as well as the Coney Island History Project  
6 which records oral histories from residents of their  
7 iconic neighborhood in English, Russian, Chinese,  
8 Spanish, and other languages. Last year, they also  
9 produced two immigrant-themed History Days featuring  
10 live performances.

11           In the Bronx, we support Casita Maria,  
12 New York City's oldest Latino-serving charity. Their  
13 wide range of programming showcases diverse cultures  
14 through events in their art gallery and in  
15 nontraditional venues such as local businesses and  
16 street corners, erasing barriers for local residents  
17 who may not be inclined to visit more mainstream  
18 venues.

19           In Queens, the Bangladesh Institute of  
20 Performing Arts, which also operates in Brooklyn,  
21 promoting Bengali arts & language in New York City's  
22 multicultural communities by offering accessible  
23 classes and platforms for emerging artists and  
24 performers.

2 Of course, in Staten Island, we have the  
3 Universal Temple of the Arts serves as a resource and  
4 platform for artists of color and the community from  
5 a multicultural perspective, and Staten Island Arts  
6 offers programming that explores the cultural  
7 heritage of the ethnic communities that make Staten  
8 Island home.

9 Citywide, the CDF also supports services  
10 for immigrant artists. We work with arts councils in  
11 each of the five boroughs to provide funding for  
12 individual artists, collectives and smaller  
13 organization, a funding partnership we're proud to  
14 continue supporting at historically high levels this  
15 year, and New York Foundation for the Art's Immigrant  
16 Artist Program provides services, individualized  
17 mentoring, and resources that help further artist  
18 careers and gain access to the cultural world while  
19 upholding their distinct identities.

20 As you may know, the Fiscal Year '23  
21 awards announced last month integrated new, far-  
22 reaching equity reforms intended to distribute this  
23 public support more fairly to more organizations.  
24 We're still evaluating the outcomes, but the results  
25 were promising: DCLA awarded the most funding to the

1 largest number of cultural organizations ever. More  
2 than 82 percent of groups led or founded by people of  
3 color saw an increase in their baseline awards. We  
4 doubled the minimum grant from 5,000 dollars to  
5 10,000 dollars, a major benefit for smaller groups  
6 who saw their average baseline awards increase by 67  
7 percent. Successful applications from first-time  
8 applicants also jumped from 47 in the previous  
9 competitive cycle to 125 new organizations receiving  
10 CDF funding. The CDF application doesn't ask  
11 specifically about immigrant-serving missions or  
12 programs, but we know that our most immigrant-rich  
13 neighborhoods tend to be served by smaller POC-led  
14 groups, categories which benefitted tremendously from  
15 the reforms.  
16

17           The CDF also includes the Language Access  
18 Fund, which grew from the CreateNYC cultural plan and  
19 its strategies for engaging New Yorkers more  
20 equitably. This year, 55 groups received 550,000  
21 dollars support for programming that increases access  
22 to arts and culture for those whose primary language  
23 is not English. The Fiscal Year '23 grantees serve  
24 populations that speak a range of languages including  
25 Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), ASL,

Arabic, Bangla, Bosnian, Georgian, Japanese, Quechua,  
Russian, Uzbek, Tagalog, and Yiddish. These groups  
include:

Sundog Theatre on Staten Island, which  
links theater skills with language mastery for ELLs.

In Brooklyn, Fort Greene Park Conservancy  
and Rooftop Films have partnered for a Chinese and  
Spanish Language Film Festival that will happen later  
this spring. I personally can't wait for that. It  
will feature four films aimed at engaging local  
Chinese- and Spanish-speaking populations.

In the Bronx, ID Studio Theater's  
Bilingual Community Theater Programming includes the  
production and performance of ID Studio's repertoire,  
new and existing, in theaters and community spaces  
throughout the Bronx. Their DCLA grant will allow  
them to present these plays to their diverse  
community through collaborations with mission-aligned  
organizations developed through their Bilingual  
Healing Arts Initiative.

A partnership I'm incredibly proud of is  
the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. As a Council  
Member, I helped to create this new pool of funding  
with the former Council Chair of the Committee, Jimmy

1  
2 Van Bramer. I'm so thrilled that this Council has  
3 embraced the initiative. It's so important to call  
4 out the things we see value in, to both name them and  
5 invest in them with real dollars. Last year, the  
6 Immigrant Initiative allocated more than 6 million  
7 dollars to over 180 organizations delivering services  
8 in every community across the city. From the Asian  
9 American Writers' Workshop to the Dominican  
10 Collectives Dance Ensemble, the groups getting  
11 support from this initiative are doing the work in  
12 every single Council district.

13           The Coalition of Theatres of Color, which  
14 I'm also particularly proud of, another collaboration  
15 between Council and DCLA, also provides major support  
16 to dozens of organizations serving and uplifting  
17 immigrant communities. I fought to expand this  
18 initiative from covering just eight organizations to  
19 more than 50 during my time in the Council. Last  
20 year, it provided more than 5 million to more than 60  
21 groups citywide, and I'm so pleased that this Council  
22 has expanded the Coalition of Theatres of Color  
23 because it is just that way that we get resources  
24 into the hands of our immigrant community groups,  
25 including Ma-Yi Filipino Theater Ensemble, Pan Asian

Repertory Theater, Thalia Spanish Theater, Vibe Theater Experience, Amerinda, and more.

The members of the Cultural Institutions Group, which occupy public property and have a mandate to serve all New Yorkers, also do an incredible job of engaging our immigrant communities such as Flushing Town Hall. Beyond its own diverse programming, Flushing Town Hall provides a hub for immigrants across Queens. Groups like CDF grantee Tong Xiao Ling Chinese Opera Ensemble use FTH as their performance hub. The FTH stage will have a jazz performance one evening and a Chinese opera the next, capturing the amazing diversity of the borough itself.

Bronx County Historical Society runs Garifuna Cultural and Heritage Initiative, which focuses on documenting the Bronx Garifuna community, the largest such community outside of Honduras, by recording oral histories, collecting archival material, and celebrating Garifuna art and culture through public events.

Queens Theatre presents theatrical work exploring the immigrant experience and offers a program for English Language Learners in elementary



and middle school, where teaching artists use theater games to support students acquiring English as a new language.

El Museo del Barrio, which is deeply rooted in our city's Puerto Rican and Latino communities, provides a wealth of education programs in multiple languages and cultural celebrations. Just last week, I was thrilled to participate in their 46th annual Three Kings Day celebration, which is an important holiday throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

Lincoln Center, as part of their American Songbook series "A World of Voices," last fall showcased nine performers whose diverse global artistic heritage deeply informed their creative expression. These musicians hailed from Honduras, Mexico, India, Guinea, China, Sudan, Venezuela, Tunisia, and Guatemala. The series sought to broaden exposure for artists and remove financial boundaries for audiences through a pilot of Choose What You Pay with tickets offered as low as 5 dollars.

Staten Island Museum offers Spanish language guides and programming.

Jamaica Center for Art and Learning  
centers immigrant artists in their work and produces  
concerts exploring music of the Diaspora,  
particularly directed toward the Caribbean immigrant  
communities of Queens.

Brooklyn Museum's Adult Literacy Programs  
include partnerships with CUNY's Language Immersion  
Program at Queensborough Community College, where  
museum staff works with college-bound immigrant  
students on socially relevant art-making projects  
while further developing their English skills.

Under Mayor Adams, we're also investing  
capital dollars in cultural groups that serve  
immigrant communities, helping to ensure they have  
the long-term stability and top-notch facilities they  
need to serve audiences. At adoption last year, the  
City added 11 million dollars for a new home for the  
Afro-Latin Jazz Alliance in East Harlem, including 7  
million dollars from Mayor Adams. This year, we also  
made new capital investments in the Hispanic Society  
of America and Caribbean Cultural Center African  
Diaspora Institute, whose home is in a former  
firehouse they received from the City. Other recent  
capital investments by the City include 10 million

1  
2 dollars for a new home for the Pregones/Puerto Rican  
3 Traveling Theater in the Bronx, support for a major  
4 renovation to the Tenement Museum, which is dedicated  
5 to preserving and sharing New York City's immigrant  
6 heritage, and funding to secure a permanent home for  
7 the Museum of Chinese in America, and that's just a  
8 small sampling of the incredible work that we're  
9 doing.

10 Another investment we're proud of is in  
11 the future home of the People's Theater Project in  
12 Inwood. Last May, Mayor Adams announced that the  
13 People's Theater Project, an immigrant- and women-led  
14 nonprofit, will own and operate a first-of-its-kind  
15 Immigrant Research and Performing Arts Center,  
16 lovingly known as IRPAC. The center will amplify the  
17 voices of New York's vibrant immigrant communities  
18 and cultivate work by local artists and arts groups.  
19 The City will invest 15 million to help People's  
20 Theater Project acquire a newly constructed cultural  
21 center that will deliver a theater that is more  
22 equitable and representative of immigrants and people  
23 of color. Working with EDC and the Mayor's Office,  
24 DCLA helped select this incredible organization to  
25 anchor this facility dedicated to exploring,

1 celebrating, uplifting, and understanding the  
2 immigrants that have called New York home, now and  
3 across generations.  
4

5 Another critical City program for which  
6 culture is critical is IDNYC. IDNYC is designed to  
7 give undocumented residents and other people without  
8 formal ID access to a range of essential services,  
9 but to be successful, it needed to be broadly adopted  
10 by New Yorkers. To achieve this and to build cultural  
11 access into the DNA program, cultural groups stepped  
12 up from the very start to offer free memberships and  
13 other perks to IDNYC card holders. We're incredibly  
14 grateful to the more than 40 cultural groups who are  
15 currently IDNYC partners and to all of those who have  
16 been partners before. Cultural participation is and  
17 should be a birthright for all New Yorkers, and this  
18 program helps make that a reality for so many.

19 New York is full of amazing public art,  
20 including temporary and permanent works that pay  
21 tribute to our immigrant heritage. Mark Saldana's  
22 "Somos Uno," currently installed by the New York City  
23 Parks Department in Travers Park, Queens, is inspired  
24 by the traditional practices of the many cultures  
25 that make up the surrounding community, especially

1 the contributions of immigrants. Again, in  
2 partnership with the Parks Department, our public art  
3 unit at DCLA has been working to commission a  
4 permanent public artwork honoring the historic Little  
5 Syria community that once flourished in Lower  
6 Manhattan. At PS 152 in Brooklyn, artist Arlan  
7 Huang's "American Origins" presents historical and  
8 contemporary educational material in subtle and  
9 surprising ways, focusing on the immigrant experience  
10 and the collective hope represented by our school  
11 system as so many people came to this country with  
12 hopes of attaining the best education and  
13 opportunities they could for their children. Not to  
14 mention one of the most famous sculptures in the  
15 world, located in our harbor as an enduring reminder  
16 of New York's open arms and embrace of people who  
17 have arrived here from all over the world. My son  
18 loves the Statue of Liberty.

19  
20 Cultural groups have also stepped up to  
21 meet their neighbors' most urgent needs, and I have  
22 seen so many of you on the frontlines of this. In the  
23 pandemic, cultural groups became vaccination sites,  
24 food pantries, whatever their neighbors needed.  
25 During the ongoing influx of asylum seekers, cultural

1  
2 groups have organized donation drives across the  
3 city, The Whitney, BAM, LXNY, El Museo, and others  
4 have all collected donated goods. Chair Hanif, I know  
5 you've been working with the People's Theater  
6 Project, Lincoln Center, and others to organize an  
7 upcoming welcome event for asylum-seekers, and we  
8 look forward to partnering with you. The list of  
9 essential services our cultural are providing for all  
10 New Yorkers in need, including immigrants, goes on  
11 and on. Another inspiring service cultural groups  
12 offer is education support and ceremonies for those  
13 seeking naturalization. I don't know if many of you  
14 know, but the The Tenement Museum, Lincoln Center,  
15 and the New York Historical Society, just to name  
16 just a few, have provided such ceremonies, where  
17 immigrants become U.S. citizens right within our  
18 cultural institutions. In New York, culture is  
19 community.

20           Finally, the CreateNYC cultural plan,  
21 which has influenced so much of DCLA's work, included  
22 a range of recommendations specific to immigrant  
23 communities, and directly led to the creation of the  
24 Language Access Fund I described earlier in  
25 testimony. CreateNYC also laid out an ambitious

1  
2 vision for fostering a more diverse, equitable, and  
3 inclusive cultural community, and to create a  
4 cultural sector that looks like and serves New York,  
5 that's got to include immigrants, so we're proud of  
6 all the programs and work described in testimony  
7 today that offer immigrants meaningful ways to  
8 participate in and contribute to our city's rich  
9 cultural life. If you can believe this, this is our  
10 abbreviated testimony.

11           As always, we believe that the best way  
12 we in City government can serve the needs of our  
13 cultural community is by working in close  
14 partnership. The Cultural Immigrant Initiative is  
15 just one of the most salient examples of the great  
16 ways we can partner together to serve our immigrant  
17 neighbors and all New Yorkers when we work together.  
18 I applaud the many incredible ways that our cultural  
19 community engages with New Yorkers from around the  
20 world and stand ready to support their work however  
21 we can.

22           Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
23 today. I'm happy to answer any questions that you  
24 have at this time, and I thank you all so much for  
25

1  
2 being here, and we are excited to answer your  
3 questions.

4                   CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you,  
5 Commissioner, and thank you to the entire DCLA staff.  
6 You guys are amazing, and that was a very in-depth  
7 testimony about all of the wonderful that DCLA does  
8 in terms of how we interact with immigrant  
9 communities.

10                   I do want to dive into some of the  
11 rolling activities that you did highlight in your  
12 testimony but just to go more in-depth and get more  
13 answers to questions on the record. DCLA has a lot of  
14 communities that it is mandated through Create NYC to  
15 serve including people of color, people with  
16 disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.  
17 With all of these demands, what priority does DCLA  
18 place on providing art access to immigrant  
19 communities and on celebrating the arts in cultures  
20 of these communities?

21                   COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are so excited  
22 that there are so many diverse cultural communities  
23 here in New York City, ranging from the LGBTQ  
24 community as well as so many of our immigrant and our  
25 disability communities, but we see all of them in the



1 same way. We don't see them in terms of competing,  
2 but we certainly see them as how do we grow the  
3 funding pool so that we can serve all of our  
4 audiences better, more equitably, and with robust  
5 resources. I'm really proud of the investments we've  
6 made, 500,000 dollars for the language access. We  
7 also expanded the Coalition of the Theatres of Color  
8 which you all made possible which is so incredible,  
9 and I hope that that Coalition continues to build. We  
10 also helped create the Cultural Immigrant Fund in the  
11 City Council, and you all have taken that initiative  
12 and also expanded on that, and we're so proud of our  
13 capital investments in organizations similarly that I  
14 read within the testimony, but we absolutely make  
15 sure that throughout all of our funding initiatives  
16 that we reach out to the immigrant community because  
17 the immigrant community is a part of the fiber of  
18 every single thing that we do and so it's important  
19 that we recognize that we continue to partner and we  
20 make sure that those programs and initiatives that  
21 were created in the Council as well as the funding  
22 that the Mayor has allocated towards language access  
23 and the Cultural Equity Fund continue.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Before my next question, I also do want to acknowledge my Colleague, Council Member Farias, who is also a Member on this Committee. Thank you for joining us.

There is no question that our cultural organizations and spaces play a huge role in supporting our families and youth, but access to these spaces can be difficult due to lack of funds for tickets or lack of transit to travel to these places. With more immigrant families and youth coming to our city, we are expecting these same barriers. There have been city programs such as IDNYC which was included in your testimony and the Library Systems Culture Pass as well as groups like Cool Culture that work to expand access to the cultural institutions. How is DCLA working to expand access to our cultural institutions for immigrant families and youth?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Your question has so many of the answers written right within in it, and I'm so proud of those programs. Each of the initiatives that you outlined from IDNYC to the Culture Pass Program such as funding for organizations that are doing work such as the Cultural Immigration Fund, these are all outlets and

1  
2 opportunities for us to expand outlets and access to  
3 our cultural institutions, but we can always do more  
4 with more. Continuing to expand those initiatives to  
5 continue to expand IDNYC, these are the ways that we  
6 continue to create access, so I feel like we have the  
7 right vehicles, we have the right pathways, we have  
8 the ability to create the access, we just have to  
9 continue to more robustly fund those programs so  
10 that they can reach even greater audiences,  
11 particularly as our population and our immigrant  
12 populations are growing so rapidly. Increased funding  
13 would help us to increase the ability to have that  
14 access.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Absolutely. I'm glad to  
16 hear that response, and I do want to follow up that  
17 our libraries are serving as hubs to enroll people  
18 into IDNYC. Will DCLA work with our cultural  
19 institutions to do this as well?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Certainly. That's  
21 always certainly that we're looking to do is to  
22 expand IDNYC and the outlets in which people can sign  
23 up for IDNYC. The libraries have proven to be a great  
24 partner, and we're certainly looking for more  
25 partners now that we're in this particular

1  
2 administration. We can really more robustly expand on  
3 IDNYC because it was on pause during some of the time  
4 of the previous federal administration, but I would  
5 say that moving forward more organizations are open  
6 to expanding IDNYC. Speaking of funding and language  
7 access, on the Culture at 3 calls, which is a weekly  
8 call that brings together representatives from so  
9 many of our cultural organizations, there's a huge  
10 concern about increasing accessibility in the  
11 cultural space, whether that is through multilingual  
12 grant applications or funding for interpreters and  
13 translators. Does DCLA currently have any  
14 multilingual resources and services offered to  
15 immigrant-led/immigrant-serving cultural  
16 organizations and artists, particularly multilingual  
17 grant applications?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much for  
19 that question. That is a very important that came up  
20 in the Create NYC, and we wanted to make sure as part  
21 of the Cultural Plan that that was certainly  
22 something as part of the reforms that we moved in  
23 that direction so as part of the cultural equity  
24 reforms and as part of the reforms that we've done  
25 within the Department of Cultural Affairs. We

1  
2 certainly see language access to our programs as a  
3 priority, and so we do a number of workshops prior to  
4 our CDF application for organizations that have  
5 received capital funding. We are also doing  
6 workshops, and we have opportunities there where  
7 we're able to learn if people need help or assistance  
8 with language access and to be able to help and  
9 support pre the application actually happening or  
10 coming online so those are some of the programs that  
11 we do, but to offer the level of robust accessibility  
12 in terms of applications and panels in different  
13 languages we have not graduated to that level yet as  
14 the reforms that we've initiated are quite new, but  
15 it's certainly that is a goal of ours because we  
16 believe that it's important for us to have as many  
17 entryways to the Department of Cultural Affairs as  
18 possible. It's certainly a goal and with more money  
19 and with more resources that is something that could  
20 become a reality if we're able to receive that level  
21 of support.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you and do you  
23 know how many languages as is are offered to those  
24 that apply through the grant process?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It's not offered in different languages, but in partnership with MOIA, if an individual or an organization needs help and support in filling out the application, we can get them those services.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay. In addition to the CDF grants that DCLA has just made, do you have additional plans, perhaps citywide efforts, to serve our established and/or brand new immigrant populations? If so, what funding do you need to accomplish these plans?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Through our Language Access Program, that is the number one way as well as the Cultural Immigration Fund, those are the major two vehicles that we have in terms of supporting that level of access and support so that's one of the ways, but we also want to make sure that in the next cycles that we're able to continue to advocate for more resources and more funding as more asylum-seekers are coming to New York City, we certainly want to make them welcomed. As I stated in my testimony, we have a number of partnerships that we are working on with MOIA, and I'm really excited about those partnerships because as asylum-seekers

1  
2 are coming to New York City the most effective way  
3 for people to feel welcomed here in New York is to  
4 see themselves and to see their culture here in New  
5 York City, to reconnect with people from the  
6 countries that they have come from and travelled  
7 from, and so we certainly recognize that that is a  
8 priority of this administration for people to feel  
9 welcome, to understand that their culture is here and  
10 we want to do more in terms of partnership with the  
11 Department of Cultural Affairs and MOIA, but, again,  
12 a lot of that work, frankly, we leave to the hands of  
13 the cultural institutions because they really have  
14 the ability to get on the ground to meet people where  
15 they're at. They are in these communities in all five  
16 boroughs, and we as a funding agency, our role is  
17 primarily to provide them with the resources to do  
18 the level of programming. I've met with many of our  
19 LatinX cultural consortium members, with the Asian  
20 American consortium members, with Theatres of Color  
21 members, and they are all strategizing currently on  
22 ways that they can meet our asylum-seekers right  
23 where they're at.

24

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. I want to  
3 turn over to Chair Hanif for questions pertaining to  
4 the role in activities of DCLA in this matter.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. I'd  
6 like to just build on the questions about IDNYC and  
7 particularly expanding IDNYC. What efforts are being  
8 made and perhaps MOIA could jump in too, good to see  
9 you, Eileen, what proactive efforts are being made to  
10 expand IDNYC and its coverage? I know you've  
11 mentioned 40 cultural institutions or a little bit  
12 more accept it as a form of a real ID. What's  
13 preventing more or other institutions to accept it or  
14 what are some of the hurdles in expanding the  
15 programming?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Please feel free to  
17 elaborate as well, when IDNYC was first rolled out,  
18 the demand was so incredible where so many people, so  
19 many individuals throughout New York City signed up  
20 so rapidly for the program and really what IDNYC  
21 allowed was for organizations to offer memberships  
22 primarily to their cultural institutions and so some  
23 organizations had difficulty with keeping up with the  
24 pace and offering free memberships to IDNYC members,  
25 and these memberships were usually pay-based



1  
2 memberships but they were now offered for free and so  
3 some organizations had difficulty keeping up with the  
4 demand, but the demand is actually a really great and  
5 good problem to have. Many of the organizations with  
6 increase capacity, with increased investment within  
7 their institutions are then able to keep pace with  
8 the level of membership that then comes into their  
9 institutions because membership provides often free  
10 access, discounted tickets in the gift shop,  
11 membership opportunities, special events and  
12 programs, but it is an incredible and an enormous  
13 amount of work for organizations to keep track of, to  
14 keep demand and pace with the membership levels, the  
15 things that are promised as a result of the  
16 membership so we are, during this time as the city is  
17 reopening, the thing that Mayor Eric Adams wanted to  
18 do is that he wanted to create the greatest  
19 investment in New York City's cultural community  
20 ever, and that investment then allows organizations  
21 to ramp up through programs such as our Cultural  
22 Equity Fund where organizations are going to get  
23 additional resources and funds. We cannot mandate  
24 that they become a cultural partner with the IDNYC  
25 program, but it's that level of investment into their

1  
2 infrastructure and their staffing and their  
3 sustainability that allows them to become a  
4 membership, but there's also going to be increased  
5 opportunities for a push, marketing campaign to  
6 really encourage other organizations to participate.

7           DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: I'll just add, I  
8 want to acknowledge our Colleagues at Department of  
9 Social Services because they are the ones that manage  
10 the program on the ground, but we go through a  
11 process every year in partnership with DCLA, in  
12 partnership with the Department of Social Services to  
13 think through how we can expand the program and add  
14 additional cultural partners, whether to provide  
15 membership or discounts, and so every year we go  
16 through that process. We're actually in the middle of  
17 that process now. We receive inquiries, but we also  
18 sort of brainstorm about the kinds of organizations  
19 that we want to invite to become part of the program  
20 and they have an option of either becoming membership  
21 partners where they're offering free memberships for  
22 one year or providing a level of discount to  
23 performances so it really varies and it depends on  
24 how open organizations are and whether they can  
25 financially support the discounts and membership

offerings and so we go through this process every year, and we will continue to do that. Once we have more news about who those new members are, we'll make sure to include the Council in those communications.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, that's really wonderful to hear that there will be proactive outreach and engagement to expand cultural institutions that accept IDNYC, and I really look forward to seeing what kind of art will be used to expand IDNYC and hope that the cultural institutions or art organizations are involved in that process. As we've seen with various campaigns, for example through the Commission on Human Rights, and local artists have really amplified the legislation we've passed around anti-discrimination practices in our city.

I'd like to know like in the last year how many institutions were added that accept IDNYC. Has it grown? What has been the gradual growth or has it always been this sort of 40 cohort institutions?

DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: It varies, but it stays between 40 and 45, and it really just depends, right, because it depends on what the status of

1 different organizations are in that moment in time  
2 when we're asking them to renew their offerings...

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So there's a renewal  
5 process that's happening annually?

6 DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: We engage with all  
7 of our cultural partners every year to make sure that  
8 they're okay to continue to participate in the  
9 program and also invite new members so right now  
10 we're in that process, and we hope to have an  
11 announcement in the coming months about who those new  
12 members are, about the offerings, and how to access  
13 those.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really  
15 wonderful.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I just wanted to add.  
17 Originally, the program started with 33  
18 organizations, and now it is 40+...

19 DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: Sorry. If I can  
20 just add quickly. It's not just cultural museums or  
21 institutions. We have the botanical gardens, but we  
22 also have the theatres, we have a number of other  
23 historical societies and other types of venues that  
24 provide discounts, and we've been able to grow the  
25 list from year to year. It's just because of the

1  
2 influx with COVID and everything else, the numbers  
3 have changed, but we have been able to stick between  
4 40 and 45 members, and the goal is to continue to add  
5 new members, to create new interest in the program,  
6 both from all New Yorkers, especially our newest New  
7 Yorkers which we're helping in a variety of ways with  
8 our Navigation Center and other locations to enroll  
9 in IDNYC.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. Do we know how  
11 many IDNYC holders are visiting cultural  
12 institutions, museums, the gardens? Is there data  
13 that's tracking?

14 DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: We have membership  
15 numbers, but we'd have to get back to you on the  
16 specifics of that.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That would be great. I  
18 had one other question that, Eileen, as you were  
19 talking, came up, but I have now forgotten what that  
20 is. Would love to know how MOIA is working with DCLA  
21 and immigrant advocacy organizations that promote the  
22 work of immigrant artist advocates?

23 DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: We work in  
24 partnership with DCLA on a number of fronts, not just  
25 IDNYC but with partnerships that are funded through

1  
2 DCLA. We actually did a summit in 2018 at BRIC in  
3 partnership with Artspace Sanctuary and No Longer  
4 Empty to sort of talk about the different ways in  
5 which activist-led arts organizations can create  
6 public welcoming spaces for immigrant communities. We  
7 were able to highlight a number of organizations to  
8 talk about how their activism really engages  
9 immigrant communities, and those included  
10 organizations like PEN America and Arts and  
11 Democracy, Project Luz, CultureStrike, and Witness,  
12 and that was a collaboration that we did in tandem  
13 with the Department of Cultural Affairs. It was a  
14 really great way for us to also share the different  
15 types of legal services that are available to the  
16 immigrant community and how immigrant organizations  
17 can further share that information and resources with  
18 immigrants, and we also were able to talk a little  
19 bit about the city services that are provided to  
20 immigrants regardless of immigration status. In  
21 addition, there are so many other ways in which we  
22 partner with DCLA. We work really closely with a  
23 number of community-based organizations, arts and  
24 cultural groups that are funded through the Grant for  
25 Cultural Impact, and we've been able to have a number

1  
2 of funded programs. Since I've been at the Mayor's  
3 Office of Immigrant Affairs, I've led a number of  
4 projects which I'm really proud of, all with the  
5 funding and support and guidance from DCLA. I came  
6 from El Museo Del Barrio previous to working here at  
7 the administration so art and culture is something  
8 that I really love and sort of bring into everything  
9 that I do at the administration so we've done a  
10 number of projects. We've worked with Cuban artist  
11 Tania Bruguera to work with a group of Spanish-  
12 speaking undocumented women in Queens to develop a  
13 program called CycleNews where they ran around on  
14 bicycles across all of Queens sharing information on  
15 the city's resources from trusted community voices so  
16 they went around and we created pictograms, we did a  
17 whole focus group, and we issued pictograms in  
18 Spanish and then translated those into other  
19 languages in order to be able to reach other people  
20 about IDNYC, about ActionNYc, or free legal services  
21 program, and about We Speak NYC or English  
22 Conversation Classes. We've also funded projects at  
23 the People's Theatre Project who I know is in the  
24 audience over the course of two years to work with  
25 immigrant youth ages 14 to 24 both newly arrived

1  
2 undocumented and DACA youth, and they created two  
3 sets of plays that really talked about the immigrant  
4 experience and coming here to New York City and the  
5 challenges they face and how some of the city's  
6 programs like IDNYC were really able to open doors  
7 for them. Additionally, we worked with National Queer  
8 Theater and Dixon Place to present the Second Annual  
9 National Criminal Queerness Festival where we were  
10 able to focus and promote criminalized LGBTQIA  
11 artists from Venezuela, Syria, and Lebanon, and the  
12 list goes on. We've worked really closely with DCLA  
13 on a number of projects, both on the project and arts  
14 side, on the IDNYC side, on the language access side,  
15 and we're proud to continue that work moving forward.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I just want to add  
17 the project that you were referring to, I Still  
18 Believe In Our City, that citywide campaign that  
19 really grew out of the unfortunate onslaught of  
20 attacks on the Asian community grew out of a  
21 partnership with MOIA and the Department of Cultural  
22 Affairs and the Commission on Human Rights. We have a  
23 program called PAIR, Public Artists in Residence,  
24 where we take actual artists and they are placed in  
25 city agencies to help those agencies address systemic



1  
2 issues that they are facing in their agency through  
3 the lens of an artist, and that particular commission  
4 that you saw came out of a partnership with DCLA as  
5 well as MOIA to create that citywide campaign that  
6 you saw all across the city.

7           CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really  
8 wonderful to hear and know that you all are in  
9 coordination with something so public that all New  
10 Yorkers have gotten to see and really understand the  
11 impacts of hate violence and discrimination in our  
12 city and how arts is a real unifier and to know that  
13 the artist behind that work is an Asian woman is also  
14 really incredibly important and urgent so it's really  
15 wonderful to know the thoughtfulness behind what  
16 you've just described, and, Eileen, the brevity and  
17 work and partnership that DCLA and MOIA are doing is  
18 great to know too. Are there policy goals of MOIA in  
19 relation to supporting the arts in immigrant  
20 communities or immigrant artists? I know that MOIA  
21 has really asserted itself as a policy-oriented  
22 office and doesn't provide the same services as other  
23 agencies so would love to know an answer to that.

24           DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: We work in tandem  
25 with a number of agencies across the city in how best

1  
2 we can better serve immigrant communities. Part of  
3 that work is not necessarily policy-specific but a  
4 lot of that policy work is ongoing and developing,  
5 especially as we have been welcoming our newest New  
6 Yorkers these last couple of months so we'll have  
7 more to share at some point, but with regards to arts  
8 and culture specifically, a lot of what we do  
9 throughout the year, both during Immigrant Heritage  
10 Week in April and Immigrant Heritage Month in June,  
11 is an ability to partner with a number of cultural  
12 organizations to both promote and share the work that  
13 they're doing and the resources they're providing to  
14 immigrant communities, and we work with DCLA to both  
15 identify organizations who we might want to work with  
16 that we haven't worked with, particularly to engage  
17 them in the branding for Immigrant Heritage Week.  
18 We've always used an immigrant artist for the most  
19 part to develop the image and branding for both  
20 celebrations throughout the year, and that's come  
21 with guidance and support from DCLA, and they've also  
22 helped us identify individuals, organizations that we  
23 should be spotlighting during that time period. We  
24 also work with culturals all across the city, both  
25 CIGs and outside of the CIG system, to be able to

1  
2 promote and share the work that they're doing. We do  
3 online promotions. Before COVID, we used to do hard  
4 copy brochures. They were distributed all across the  
5 city, showing out what all the organizations across  
6 the city were doing in celebration, in support, in  
7 providing crucial resources to immigrant New Yorkers.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. I just  
9 remembered my other IDNYC question. How many of our  
10 newest New Yorkers, asylum-seekers, have applied for  
11 IDNYC and is that application process only at the  
12 Navigation Center?

13 DIRECTOR REYES ARIAS: I don't have the  
14 numbers, but we know that we have been able to enroll  
15 a good amount of people at the Navigation Center, but  
16 that's not the only place where individuals can go.  
17 There are multiple locations across the city where  
18 folks can go and enroll. The Navigation Center is  
19 sort of a one-stop shop so we include IDNYC as part  
20 of the other screenings that are done on site, and  
21 there have been Saturday hours made available for New  
22 Yorkers who are able to go during the weekend to  
23 enroll so there are multiple touchpoints all across  
24 the city for newly arrived New Yorkers, and our  
25 satellite locations which we just announced last year

1 will also be able to help people enroll in the  
2 program at least at the application stage and then  
3 facilitate appointment-making.  
4

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, that would be  
6 really critical for us to know in terms of ensuring  
7 that everyone coming in that a dignified welcome  
8 means access to this ID and then the hub of cultural  
9 institutions that are part of their welcome to New  
10 York City so I look forward to that number and would  
11 love to know from you, Commissioner Cumbo, how did  
12 you, in terms of the mandate to reach out to our  
13 newly arrived asylum-seekers, what specifically do  
14 you believe is DCLA's mandate? Would love to know any  
15 upcoming campaigns or ideas that have come about as a  
16 result of over 40,000 asylum-seekers who are here and  
17 I was really grateful to spend time with you and  
18 Eileen and the rest of the MOIA team with Amal at  
19 Port Authority and several other locations with Amal  
20 and just see the ways in which all of the young  
21 people really gravitated towards Amal but really just  
22 the interruption of the violence that they've  
23 experienced through really horrifying terrain and to  
24 have this moment of peace and calm and joy. I mean to  
25 see the smiles which we got to see the way in which

1 they gravitated, and I was skeptical at first because  
2 I think most of us were just like they need food,  
3 they need this, they need that, and then completely  
4 forgot about the sort of artistic component so would  
5 love to know what else is sort of in the works and  
6 your kind of vision moving forward.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I just want to back  
9 up to a question you asked before and then get to  
10 that question. I think in terms of the IDNYC program,  
11 I think if our offices could collaborate to get your  
12 offices and the City Council the touchpoints where  
13 people can sign up for IDNYC so that you can get it  
14 to your constituents in a newsletter or other forms  
15 of communication would probably be very helpful to  
16 your community so that they know where that  
17 information lies so that they can sign up so we  
18 should work together to absolutely collaborate on  
19 that to get that into your hands. I would also add as  
20 well that we've had communications and meetings with  
21 MOIA in terms of events and programs that we're going  
22 to do as agencies together in partnership. One will  
23 be during National Immigration Heritage week that  
24 will be coming up but then also during that month of  
25 programming as well, but the main thing that we do as

1  
2 an agency is really to fund organizations to do that  
3 work so I have met, and they are going to testify  
4 here today, I've met with LatinX Cultural Coalitions  
5 who are on the ground doing that work. We were able  
6 through the CDF fund to provide funding to those  
7 organizations, and it's really for them who know how  
8 to do the partnerships, who know their audiences, who  
9 know their communities, how to get in there and do  
10 that type of programming. I would say that the  
11 organizations are most equipped to do that. As an  
12 agency, we really don't have the cultural talent  
13 within our agency to do it ourselves, although  
14 sometimes I try, but we definitely empower our  
15 cultural organizations to really do that work. It's a  
16 different time now where we recognize that the  
17 cultural community has to have that freedom of  
18 expression in order to tackle the issues that are  
19 greatly challenging the city today.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that. I  
21 want to pass it to my other Colleagues. I have  
22 several more questions but also just thank you for  
23 giving a shoutout to the Bangladesh Institute of  
24 Performing Arts. I personally like to take credit  
25 because Annie Ferdous who was the Executive

1  
2 Director/Founder is from Kensington in my District so  
3 a real incredible that they're doing to preserve  
4 Bangladeshi language, our culture, heritage, but also  
5 creating and breaking the stigma around pursuing the  
6 arts as a career path and so just really wonderful  
7 work and grateful to know that the agency is  
8 supporting them.

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Definitely.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Chair Hanif,  
11 and thank you, Commissioner. I do want to acknowledge  
12 one of my Colleagues who is joining us virtually,  
13 Council Member Hudson, and I know that we have a  
14 question from Council Member Louis.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs  
16 Osse and Hanif, for this very important hearing. So  
17 happy to see you, Committee.

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You as well.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Two quick questions  
20 because I think your opening statement answered a lot  
21 of things. Thank you for that. Two quick questions.  
22 The first one is in the CDF grantees that you've  
23 mentioned that's expanded through your agency, I  
24 wanted to know how are they supporting new arrivals  
25 to address suicide, to basically support suicide

1  
2 prevention efforts as well as human trafficking  
3 efforts to make sure that we're managing the process  
4 so I wanted to know how those CDF grantees were  
5 supporting those because I know we've all seen the  
6 same information in the news about what's happening  
7 to those families. The second question was in regards  
8 to our new arrivals who are public school students  
9 and initiatives that you created when you were a  
10 Council Member under CASA and Culture Immigrant  
11 Initiative, how much more funding do you think is  
12 needed for the citywide initiatives in order for us  
13 to expand the program so that they can also  
14 experience what other students experience through  
15 those grants? Thanks.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Just speaking  
17 frankly, and my team's probably going to kick me  
18 under the table about it, but just to speak perfectly  
19 frankly about how this works. As an agency, we cannot  
20 dictate what a cultural organization should apply for  
21 funding for so I have as a Commissioner I have big  
22 ideas of what I think that the cultural community  
23 should be doing, but I cannot impose my social  
24 justice or my goals or my objectives or to look at  
25 the breadth of what the City is currently facing and



1 say because you know I tried to go in there and do  
2 that and to say the city, its cultural institutions  
3 need to be addressing these issues whether it's  
4 issues facing our transgender community, suicide,  
5 domestic violence, the pandemic, COVID, each cultural  
6 organization has the freedom to be able to address  
7 the issues or the cultural desires of their  
8 particular organization and so we don't have the  
9 ability to mandate that, but through hearings such as  
10 this where you're asking those questions and we're  
11 having this discussion and the cultural institutions  
12 are hearing about the issues of the day, you would  
13 hope that many of them would say, you know what, I  
14 think this is an area we should focus in, I'm going  
15 to write a grant on that particular issue. I mean I  
16 remember when I was a cultural leader. We didn't  
17 necessarily have the freedom to think that there are  
18 social justice issues such as Black Lives Matters,  
19 police brutality, gun violence. We didn't believe we  
20 were empowered to write those types of grants and to  
21 do that type of programming because of how it might  
22 impact government and the decisions they make, but we  
23 have moved in leaps and bounds as a society and, for  
24 myself as Commissioner of this agency, I really want  
25

1  
2 organizations to feel empowered if you want to  
3 address or tackles those issues, this is not an  
4 agency that's going to shy away from it and so we  
5 hope that many organizations will, but we also have  
6 to look at many of the asylum-seekers came during  
7 this particular budget cycle so for the next budget  
8 cycle I'm sure and confident we're going to see many  
9 organizations who are going to apply to the  
10 Department of Cultural Affairs to address suicide  
11 prevention, the issues with the pandemic, the issues  
12 many of the asylum-seekers are facing right now.  
13 These are going to be the issues that when our  
14 applications open up in February that we will see  
15 more organizations applying for.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: That's my hope.  
17 That's why I brought it up. I was also going to ask  
18 if that didn't happen and if you didn't have the  
19 capacity, is there opportunity for an RFP to be put  
20 out to the organizations in order to ask their  
21 support in order to provide those services, and the  
22 second one was in regards to the funding, like how  
23 much funding do you think is needed in order to  
24 expand CASA or Cultural Immigrant Initiative in the

25

1  
2 next fiscal budget in order to support our new  
3 arrivals who are public school students?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Excellent question.  
5 The first one in regards to, say it again.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Regarding the RFP  
7 process.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes, okay. Our agency  
9 does not issue RFPs, but if you're talking about  
10 issues like suicide prevention many of the other  
11 social service agencies of the City of New York do  
12 that work. We do a panel review process. It's an  
13 application. We have panels that meet in May and June  
14 who review those proposals and then we issue funding  
15 in that way, but we don't issue RFPs to handle many  
16 of the larger social issues, but it is certainly  
17 something to consider and think of because the issues  
18 that we're facing are so unprecedented that it may  
19 call for unprecedented solutions, but as this agency  
20 currently stands, we don't RFP out. We do a panel  
21 review process.

22 And the second part of your question?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: CASA and the  
24 Culture Immigrant Initiative.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: From my time on that  
3 side of the table, CASA and SU-CASA and Theatres of  
4 Color, those are initiatives that the Council has to  
5 negotiate with the Mayor for increased funding on  
6 your side. We, on our side as DCLA, we cannot  
7 increase CASA funding, but when you get in those  
8 borough delegations and you all start to decide if  
9 it's going to be 17 CASAs or 20 CASAs which means  
10 that maybe something else might not get funded,  
11 that's a decision solely that the Council has to  
12 make. Thank goodness I don't have to make those  
13 decisions anymore, but that certainly lies in your  
14 power, and I look forward to working with the  
15 cultural institutions and your CASA program.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Council  
17 Member Louis. I'm going to go on to some more  
18 questions. You mentioned two Council initiatives that  
19 our immigrant artists and organizations benefit from,  
20 the Cultural Immigrant Initiative and the Coalition  
21 of the Theatres of Color. The two biggest concerns  
22 that I have heard from organizations about the  
23 Council discretionary funding process is 1) the  
24 intricate application and 2) the speed of the  
25 contracting process and how it slows down the

1 reimbursement of the funds so I would love to know  
2 first while the process is a Council process how is  
3 DCLA working to support and provide resources to  
4 organizations, especially smaller organizations which  
5 are often immigrant-led organizations, that do not  
6 have grant writers or the bandwidth to fill out the  
7 Council application and then secondly, and I can  
8 repeat these questions again, how is DCLA working to  
9 speed up the contracting process?  
10

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Excellent questions.  
12 Ones that we grapple with. You can kick me under the  
13 table again, Lance. The process in which the  
14 applications are coming out is going to be  
15 revolutionized this year. We have a new computer  
16 system called Salesforce. We're creating a more  
17 streamlined process. Last year was the first year  
18 that we just, no more paper, it's now a paperless  
19 process, and for those of you who are in this  
20 audience and I've seen some of you at the post office  
21 at midnight trying to get your application stamped  
22 before the deadline when you're cutting the line and  
23 you don't care because it has to be in by 12, we've  
24 ended that process. We've done it online this year,  
25 but now the process is going to be even more

2 streamlined so that we don't have to go through that  
3 type of process that has been so cumbersome. As part  
4 of the reforms, we raised the reforms from 5,000 to  
5 10,000 dollars so organizations that were applying  
6 for 5,000 dollars, it really wasn't worth it for them  
7 economically so we've changed that to 10,000 dollars.  
8 We do a series of seminars before each application  
9 comes online. It's so critical for organizations to  
10 participate. Sometimes some groups are like we're  
11 going to wait until the last minute or I don't need  
12 that level of help, every organization that applies  
13 to the Department of Cultural Affairs, big or small,  
14 you should participate in this workshop because the  
15 application changes from year to year, and you want  
16 to put forward a more competitive application so  
17 we're also going to get it out earlier. Because of  
18 the pandemic, because it was a new administration,  
19 everything was happening in a very new way and so  
20 things got delayed a bit this year, but it's going to  
21 be done more effectively this year. For the  
22 initiatives, I have been advocating for a very long  
23 time that the Council and the administration, we need  
24 to get the initiatives in by the close of the budget,  
25 June 30th. Oftentimes on the Council side, we have

1 always had extended time to put in our initiatives.  
2  
3 If we put them in, the sooner the Council and the  
4 administration can work together to get those  
5 initiatives in such as CASA, SU-CASA, Cultural  
6 Immigration Fund, we can get the funding into the  
7 hands of the cultural organizations quicker because,  
8 if we delay the process, it delays the process for  
9 the entire initiative. If everyone gets theirs in  
10 before June 30th, we can get that money out the door  
11 quicker, and that would be a huge lift to the  
12 cultural community, and I really hope to work with  
13 you on that.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Absolutely. Please,  
15 feel free to tap into our office, and we want to move  
16 in tandem in terms of making sure that that gets  
17 done. We know that DCLA has fared better than most  
18 agencies in the current budget process thanks to you  
19 and to Mayor Adams. That is that there is no  
20 substantial effect of any PEG on DCLA-supported  
21 efforts. What has this reprieve enabled DCLA to do?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The Department of  
23 Cultural Affairs did not technically receive a PEG,  
24 but inflation happens each and every year so not  
25 receiving a PEG or a cut to our budget does not mean

1  
2 that we had a surplus. It means that we were able to  
3 fund many organizations. As I said, we were able to  
4 fund 125 new organizations that had not received  
5 funding in the last budget cycle so what that  
6 opportunity of not being subjected to the PEG did was  
7 allow us to get organizations who were receiving zero  
8 dollars some dollars in order to be able to do  
9 additional programming, but the City of New York has  
10 tasked the cultural community with bringing us back  
11 after this COVID pandemic. The cultural community is  
12 responsible for attracting tourists to the City of  
13 New York, for putting people in hotels, for getting  
14 them to shop in our clothing stores, to getting them  
15 into restaurants, to being in our cabs, the cultural  
16 community has that task and taken on gladly of  
17 bringing back the economy of the City of New York so  
18 to not invest in that community adequately would  
19 create a situation where the city's recovery would  
20 slow down and so the investment that we received as  
21 well as not being subjected to the PEG is not in a  
22 way to favor our industry or advance our particular  
23 agency over others, but we have a huge task of being  
24 a major part of the recovery, and I'm so glad that  
25 the Council as well as the Mayor recognized the



1 importance of making sure that we need to adequately  
2 invest in our cultural community in order to bring  
3 back the city because without a tourism industry here  
4 in New York City, we fail, and so that is why that  
5 level of funding and support was so critical.

6  
7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. In the just  
8 finished CDF grant-making from DCLA to arts and  
9 cultural organizations across the city, how well do  
10 you feel DCLA was able to serve our immigrant  
11 communities? For example, was there sufficient money  
12 to fund the efforts of immigrant-led organizations  
13 and of organizations dedicated to serving immigrant  
14 communities and also what percentage of funded  
15 organizations were directly related to serving  
16 immigrants?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: As I said in my  
18 testimony, we do not ask specifically will an  
19 organization or does an organization specifically  
20 serve immigrant communities, but what I will say is  
21 DCLA awarded the most funding to the largest number  
22 of cultural organizations ever. More than 82 percent  
23 of groups led or founded by people of color saw an  
24 increase in their baseline awards. We doubled the  
25 minimum grant from 5,000 to 10,000 dollars as I said,

1 a major benefit for smaller groups who saw their  
2 average baseline awards increase by 67 percent.  
3 Successful applications from first-time applicants  
4 also jumped from 47 in the previous competitive cycle  
5 to 125 organizations, and just to add as well we know  
6 that most of our immigrant-rich neighborhoods tend to  
7 be served by smaller POC-led groups, and that's the  
8 category which benefited tremendously from the  
9 reforms so this reform process is really what helped  
10 and bolstered our immigrant community and POC-led  
11 organizations for receiving more funding than they  
12 ever have before. If you think about it, 47  
13 organizations in the last competitive cycle, which  
14 was three years ago, were funded. This year, it was  
15 125, and you know that 125 are smaller POC-led  
16 groups. This was really a way to advance the sector  
17 on so many levels, particularly for our organizations  
18 of color.  
19

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. That is my  
21 final question. We're going to move on to final  
22 questions from Chair Hanif and then we're going to  
23 move on to in-person public testimony because I do  
24 know that a lot of you folks want to be heard and you  
25 should be. Chair Hanif.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.  
3 First, I'd just like to acknowledge the students and  
4 the young people here. I don't know what the  
5 assignment is but would love a followup if there was  
6 some assignments and also feel free to tag both  
7 Council Member Chi Osse and myself, I'm on Instagram  
8 @ShahanafromBK, he's @Chiosse if you've learned  
9 anything from today's question and answer portion of  
10 this hearing, and I hope you're sticking around for  
11 the public testimony.

12 Would love to know about why is access to  
13 the arts so important given that asylum-seekers are  
14 in our city and they need everything from food to  
15 housing to clothing to education. Could you just  
16 speak about the importance of ensuring that we keep  
17 art in that bucket too?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's probably my  
19 favorite question. Individuals, people, we need food,  
20 we need shelter, we need clothing, we need to be able  
21 to provide for our families, we need health, as you  
22 saw so many of the families needed healthcare, they  
23 needed all of those resources, but what art and  
24 culture does most profoundly is it feeds the soul and  
25 if you don't feed your soul, I don't even know what

1  
2 that makes you, and so it's important that we not  
3 only feed people in terms of food and resources but  
4 we have to get to the intrinsic value of a human  
5 being. Culture brings people to life. Without the  
6 experiences of culture, so many people during the  
7 pandemic experienced extreme levels of depression,  
8 they were cut off from socialization, they were cut  
9 off from being able to go to a museum, a theater  
10 performance. Imagine a world where you're not able to  
11 watch a film, you're not able to listen to music,  
12 you're not able to eat the foods of your community,  
13 you're not able to do the dances of your culture like  
14 what would you really be doing with yourself if you  
15 couldn't turn on a radio and hear a symphony or your  
16 favorite hip hop artist, like if you're not able to  
17 do those things you're not really living life and so  
18 it's important for us to make sure that our asylum-  
19 seekers, immigrants that are new to our country, are  
20 coming here but are welcomed but are also welcomed  
21 with their intrinsic right of cultural rights. You  
22 have a right to experience your culture, you have a  
23 right to experience your heritage, and that's really  
24 what this country is based on in terms of moving  
25 forward. Our diversity is our greatest asset, and if

1  
2 we don't benefit from all the cultural assets that  
3 all of the great communities are bringing to our  
4 community, we're really missing out as a country and  
5 so I'm proud to work with Mayor Eric Adams. Let me  
6 tell you in previous administrations historically  
7 whenever budget times are tough, the first thing to  
8 go is arts and culture. When a school has to make  
9 significant cuts, the first thing they cut is art and  
10 culture, but this administration decided we are not  
11 cutting art and culture, we are doubling down on art  
12 and culture, we are making the largest investment in  
13 art and culture, and that's a very revolutionary  
14 concept to think that we are in a time and an  
15 administration where they are pushing forward art and  
16 culture in unprecedented ways, and this I hope  
17 vibrates throughout the rest of this country that we  
18 have to put art and culture not only in this  
19 situation but it has to be in every school, it has to  
20 be in every afterschool program, it has to be in  
21 everything from transportation to solutions as  
22 Council Member Farah Louis talked about, it has to be  
23 part of the solution for public safety, for domestic  
24 violence, for suicide, art has to be a part of the

2 toolkit of every social issue that we are facing in  
3 the City of New York.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.  
5 With that, I wrap up my questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I'll turn it over to  
7 Brenda McKinney to move on to public testimony.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: This is the  
10 administration's testimony. Thank you.

11 Thank you to the administration. We will  
12 now move to the public testimony portion of this  
13 hearing. If you'll just give us one moment, we will  
14 call the first panel. We'll just be transitioning.  
15 We'll begin again in one minute. Thank you.

16 I'm going to begin by reading the names  
17 of the first witnesses on the first panel. If you  
18 hear your name, please come to the dais. If these  
19 individuals are not present, I will read additional  
20 names. The first panel will be George Xu, Raymond  
21 Tsang, Timothy Wong (phonetic), and Ah Lin Lim  
22 (phonetic). Just one moment.

23 Okay, so I'll read the names again, and  
24 then I'm going to read four additional names. For the

1 record, we'd like to recognize that Council Member  
2 Krishnan has joined us at the hearing.

3  
4 The names again are George Xu, Raymond  
5 Tsang, Timothy Wong, and Ah Lin Lim. I'm going to  
6 call additional names. Chi Yeung, Wallace H. Zhang,  
7 Peter Wong, Yi Andy Chen, and William Su.

8 Okay, I'm going to call additional names.  
9 George Li (phonetic), Xu Cheng (phonetic), Raug Bau,  
10 Denny Chen.

11 Okay. Apologies. We've had some  
12 transitions so we're going to call the names of the  
13 individuals for the first panel again. We'll just  
14 wait one moment.

15 If you are present and hear your name,  
16 you may come to the dais to testify. George Xu,  
17 Raymond Tsang, Timothy Wong, Ah Lin Lim.

18 One moment, please. Okay, I'm just going  
19 to read the names of the panelists for the first  
20 panel again. George Xu, Raymond Tsang, Timothy Wong,  
21 Ah Lin Lim.

22 We will be beginning the public testimony  
23 portion of this hearing. We will be starting with in-  
24 person testimony. We have several panels of in-person  
25 testimony and then we'll move to remote testimony.

2 Just as a reminder, the Committees will also accept  
3 written testimony for up to 72 hours after the end of  
4 the hearing. You can submit it to  
5 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

6 We'll begin with the first panel. We'll  
7 be calling panelists one at a time by name. There is  
8 a two-minute clock, and there's a clock on the wall  
9 so you may begin your testimony when the Sergeant  
10 calls the clock after we've called your name.

11 The first panelist is George Xu. You may  
12 begin when ready. Thank you.

13 GEORGE XU: Good morning. My name is  
14 George Xu. I'm the President of Chinese Business  
15 Association of New York. I'm speaking in support of  
16 the two resolutions which will make Lunar New Year  
17 Day an official holiday in our city and on a federal  
18 level. The resolutions will allow a make-up day if  
19 the Lunar New Year Day lands on a weekend. I want to  
20 thank Christopher Marte and Council Member Sandra Ung  
21 and the other Council Members on this Committee and  
22 their Staff for the tremendous effort of making the  
23 resolutions possible. Hopefully, Mayor's Office,  
24 everybody can support this and then eventually put on  
25 a vote. I'm an immigrant 37 years ago. I went through



1  
2 my high school years in Canada, and I had to take a  
3 day off for the New Year's Day if it's a weekday and  
4 I wish that I didn't have to so I didn't have to miss  
5 any classes so it's been a long time, and we're  
6 getting closer and hopefully it's going to be  
7 absolutely official and even on weekends we have a  
8 make-up day. Thank you so much. Thank you, everyone,  
9 for coming out to support this. Have a great day.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
11 your testimony. The next witness is Ah Lin Lim. You  
12 may begin your testimony when the Sergeant starts the  
13 clock and when you're ready. Thank you.

14 AH LIN LIM: Hi, everyone. Thank you all  
15 for coming to support these resolutions. My name is  
16 Amy Lim Cuchir (phonetic). I'm the office manager of  
17 two law offices in Chinatown. I live in Chinatown,  
18 and I work in Chinatown. I'm from Malaysia, and I  
19 think the tradition of the Chinese New Year being a  
20 public holiday is very important, and I think this is  
21 not only the public holiday is important but it's  
22 also respecting our culture. Being a public holiday  
23 is respecting our culture, and I hope everyone  
24 supports this resolution. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
your testimony. The next witness will be Raymond  
Tsang. You may begin when ready.

RAYMOND TSANG: Hi. Good morning,  
Honorable Council Chairs Osse and Hanif and other  
Council Members. I'm the current President of the  
Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. We're  
going on 140 years serving Chinatown, and I am  
honored to be here speaking today as someone who grew  
up in New York City, attended New York City public  
schools, and I also have two children that are  
currently in public schools that were fortunate  
enough to have Lunar New Year recognized up until  
this year. They are 9 and 10, and they've had Lunar  
New Year as a holiday, and they were wondering this  
year, it's like, dad, what happened, how come we're  
not recognizing Lunar New Year this year, and it's  
very hard to explain to them the reasons why because  
there's just too much going on, and I don't want to  
give them an answer that doesn't make sense or they  
can go and google and find out that I'm lying to them  
so I hope that next year they'll be able to celebrate  
and get Lunar New Year recognized. I do hope that  
everyone here supports the resolutions being pushed

2 by Council Members Marte as well as Sandra Ung, and  
3 we hope that Lunar New Year will be recognized. The  
4 Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, we've  
5 been serving Chinatown for, like I said, 140 years,  
6 and Lunar New Year is definitely a very important  
7 holiday to not just Chinese communities but all Asian  
8 communities, and being one of the largest overseas  
9 cities with Asian population I believe it is very  
10 important for New York as well as the entire country  
11 to recognize Lunar New Year as a celebrated holiday  
12 so thank you for your time.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
14 much to the first panel. We'll now move to the second  
15 panel of witnesses. I will call the names of all the  
16 witnesses on the panel. If you can please come to the  
17 dais, to the table. Chi Yeung, Wallace H. Zhang, Yi  
18 Andy Chen, Peter Wong, and William Su.

19 I'll repeat them again. Chi Yeung,  
20 Wallace Zhang, Peter Wong, Yi Andy Chen, William Su.

21 We can also come back to anyone we  
22 missed. Okay, Chi Yeung, we'll begin with your  
23 testimony next, and you may begin your testimony when  
24 the clock begins and when you're ready. Thank you.

1  
2 CHI YEUNG: Good morning. My name is Chi  
3 Yeung, and I'm real happy to come for this meeting  
4 today. I think it's very important we have the  
5 Chinese New Year Day for our culture every year  
6 because every Chinese people, it's a very big day for  
7 us to celebrate our new year, and we like to have a  
8 holiday to have that day so we can have all our kids  
9 and family go together to celebrate our important  
10 day. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
12 your testimony. The next witness, is it Wallace  
13 Zhang? Peter Wong?

14 YI ANDY CHEN: Andy.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: You're Yi  
16 Andy Chen?

17 YI ANDY CHEN: Yeah.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Okay. Mr.  
19 Chen, you may begin your testimony when ready.

20 YI ANDY CHEN: First of all, I'd like to  
21 thank Committee Chair Osse and all the Council  
22 Members on this Committee for this hearing, and I  
23 think this resolution is long overdue. I've been in  
24 New York City for 20 years. I'm a product of New York  
25 City public schools, and I didn't get a day off. Who

1  
2 doesn't like a day off, but more importantly it's not  
3 just a day off, it's a day to be able to be somewhere  
4 that we have the rights and the freedom to practice  
5 our culture and continue to practice our religions.  
6 For myself, as advisor for (INAUDIBLE) Community  
7 Center that we focus on really motivating and  
8 inspiring a lot of youth development. It is very  
9 important work we are going to pass along to our  
10 young generations to come. It is our culture and  
11 religions and do not forget about where we come from.  
12 Also, I think this resolution is all about equality,  
13 inclusion, and diversity, and also we often say Asian  
14 American history is part of our American history, I  
15 think we should start to say it is American history,  
16 period. I think this resolution is also creating the  
17 image and understanding and respect we need for each  
18 other, and we (INAUDIBLE) differentiate ourselves by  
19 having different cultures. Instead, we should be  
20 using it as a path where we're bringing each other  
21 together by learning each other for the uniqueness,  
22 not the differences. Also, I think as an immigrant  
23 here in New York City or anywhere continuing to  
24 practice our culture and religion is a fundamental  
25 and human right so we can feel at home here and raise

1  
2 our generations to come. I'd like to shout out to our  
3 Council Member Christopher Marte what he did last  
4 year is he did (INAUDIBLE) also keeping the bilingual  
5 street signs in Chinatown Manhattan but also  
6 expanding the bilingual street signs. I think this is  
7 a sign of something, respecting our culture, telling  
8 our community that all the Council Members here with  
9 us, that this is what New York City means for...  
10 Lastly, I would like to bring a little challenge to  
11 all the Council Members, of course all the Council  
12 Members from New York City that in the next few weeks  
13 we have a lot of Lunar New Year celebrations coming  
14 up. We'd like to invite you to join one of our Lunar  
15 New Year events. If you can, post on social media. I  
16 think this is something that we have to do in New  
17 York City as one of the most diverse cities in the  
18 whole world. Thank you for having us here today. This  
19 is very important. This is the time that we're  
20 getting to organize the (INAUDIBLE) in the whole  
21 world. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. Also, Chi,  
23 you have a really great name.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Can I just make a  
25 comment? Thank you so much for that challenge. I will

1  
2 actually be in Philly during Lunar New Year weekend,  
3 and I'm going to be eating good food, but a lot of  
4 the residents there and the businesses there are  
5 organizing to push back against the arena that is  
6 being proposed that would take away the bustling,  
7 vibrant Chinatown so everything you said, yes, and  
8 then, of course, the organizing that's happening to  
9 preserve and push back against big real estate and  
10 any entities that would move our communities away,  
11 displace us, so thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
13 much to the members of this panel. We'll now call the  
14 members of the next panel. If there's anyone that we  
15 have inadvertently missed or if you missed your name,  
16 we will call the witnesses that have submitted slips  
17 again before moving to remote testimony. The next  
18 witnesses in the next panel will be George Li  
19 (phonetic), Xu Zhang (phonetic), Roug Bau, and Denny  
20 Chen. Again, it's George Li, Xu Zhang, Roug Bau, and  
21 Denny Chen.

22 We'll just wait one moment. I know that  
23 there are some students that wanted to testify.  
24 You're on the next panel. If you want to wait and  
25

2 testify, you'll be on the next panel. We'll just wait  
3 one moment for transition.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Guys, do me a favor,  
5 just quiet down while you make exit.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Okay, we'll  
7 now move to the next panel. George Li. Okay, George  
8 Li, Xu Zhang. Okay, you may begin your testimony when  
9 ready. The clock is on the wall. Thank you so much.

10 GEORGE LI: Good morning, ladies and  
11 gentlemen. As the Assistant Principal of New York  
12 Community Center in Flushing, the largest community  
13 center in New York City. I'm so excited to be here  
14 today to speak for thousands of Asian American kids  
15 and their parents who we serve day-to-day in our  
16 community. Also, as the President of Chinese  
17 (INAUDIBLE) Business Association and the NYC Small  
18 Business Advisory Committee Member appointed by Mayor  
19 Eric Adams, I'd like to voice up for thousands of our  
20 fellow Asian business owners who are also Asian  
21 American parents across New York City. In the past  
22 years, we, including myself, have joined together in  
23 attending Lunar New Year parades and other Lunar New  
24 Year celebration events. Many times each year, we saw  
25 family and friends, which took place in Manhattan,



1  
2 Flushing, Brooklyn where tens of thousands of fellow  
3 New Yorkers participated and enjoyed in each event.  
4 The number keeps increasing every year. However,  
5 until today, it is still not an official holiday for  
6 us in the city, the greatest city for all. I urge the  
7 city under the current administration of Mayor Eric  
8 Adams to step forward and set a day as an official  
9 holiday. This will mean a lot for the Asian American  
10 community to feel included in the city. Thanks, all  
11 City Council Members, for your consideration, and  
12 thanks all for your strong support today.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
14 your testimony. The next witness is Denny Chen. Mr.  
15 Chen, you may begin your testimony when ready and the  
16 clock is on the wall. Thank you.

17 DENNY CHEN: Good morning, all the Council  
18 Members and all the people coming to support this  
19 resolution, good morning. My name is Danny Chen. I'm  
20 the Hotel Chinese Association President. Our  
21 organization has been serving our hotel Chinese  
22 workers since 2007. We are capable to helping them to  
23 achieve the goal in the different kind of hotel work.  
24 Now, I am honored to be here to voice out for them.  
25 Chinese Lunar New Year is such an important day for

1  
2 us, for our family. We can use the day to celebrate,  
3 get together, and extend our culture and making them  
4 more understand our culture in the future. That's not  
5 only in our family, in New York City also. Every  
6 year, Lunar New Year is such a big thing for New York  
7 City. It be said around the world. Every time we have  
8 that time coming, without a holiday in place we kind  
9 of struggle. We would like to (INAUDIBLE) the Council  
10 Member giving us the opportunity to extend our  
11 culture and make New York City greater again. That's  
12 what we'd like to see. Now, I appreciate what Chris  
13 Marte and Sandra Ung put on the board so hopefully we  
14 could make that happen, might be (INAUDIBLE) next  
15 year that could be okay too. Thank you very much.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you to  
17 this panel and for your testimony. I'll now read the  
18 names of the next witnesses on the next panel. One  
19 more time, we will read the names of everyone that  
20 submitted a witness slip who might have missed their  
21 name or wasn't present just to make sure we don't  
22 inadvertently miss anyone. The next panel will be  
23 Alex Farman from Avenues School, Lola Byrd from  
24 Avenues School, Anderson Deng, and Thomas Ong.

I'll read the names one more time. Thomas  
Ong, Anderson Deng, Lola Byrd, Alex Farman. If your  
name was called, please come to the table.

ALEX FARMAN: Good morning, Honorable  
Council. Thank you to the Chair..

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: I'm sorry.  
Just one moment. Just so we have your name for the  
record. Thank you so much. Just to check, you are Mr.  
...

ALEX FARMAN: Sure. I'm Alex Farman.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Alex Farman.  
Okay. You may begin your testimony when ready. Thank  
you so much.

ALEX FARMAN: Good morning, Honorable  
Council. Thank you to the Chair and Associates for  
organizing this hearing. This issue is certainly an  
important cultural matter which I am excited to see  
come to the floor. I represent the Avenues School  
Model UN Team and the Avenues School Law Review. Both  
institutions are vocal supporters of the recognition  
of the Lunar New Year as a holiday by the City  
Council. As a student at an international school such  
as Avenues, we see a diverse population of students,  
especially in the realm of nationality. Jewish and

1  
2 Christian holidays are recognized, many of which are  
3 celebrated by far fewer people than the Lunar New  
4 Year. The recognition of it would be an important  
5 step towards greater understanding of international  
6 culture citywide. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
8 your testimony. The next witness, are you Mr. Thomas  
9 Ung? We'll go to Anderson Deng. Okay, Mr. Deng, you  
10 may begin your testimony when ready. Thank you.

11 ANDERSON DENG: Good afternoon. Perfect  
12 time to be here. I'm here to support the City Council  
13 resolution by Chris Marte for the Lunar New Year to  
14 recognize the holiday in the school and New York  
15 City. This year is the Year of the Rabbit,  
16 specifically the Water Rabbit, which symbolizes  
17 longevity, peace, and prosperity. It's very important  
18 to be healthy and united all together so this holiday  
19 is celebrated and I recognize it as an immigrant, as  
20 a resident here for many, many years so this holiday  
21 we do celebrate it for all the Asian people together  
22 so the key is the family all together, one, is good  
23 for the economy, second, it's good for all culture  
24 sensitivity, and, three, it really fits into our New  
25 York City culture, the melting pot, and diversify the

1 culture of people all here so I'm here really  
2 strongly supporting the resolution here. Thank you.

3  
4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
5 much for your testimony. The next witness is Lola  
6 Byrd. You may begin when ready.

7 LOLA BYRD: Hello, Honorable Council. My  
8 name is Lola Byrd. I've been taking Chinese for eight  
9 years, and, in that time, I've learned so much about  
10 the Lunar New Year from my amazing teachers at  
11 Avenues. Learning about the Lunar New Year has  
12 brought me closer to the Chinese culture. It's such a  
13 beautiful and special holiday, and I love learning  
14 about the history and traditions that come with the  
15 celebration. For these reasons, I believe that it  
16 needs to be recognized as a holiday. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
18 much for your testimony. The last witness on this  
19 panel is Mr. Thomas Ong. You may begin when ready.

20 THOMAS ONG: Council, thank you for giving  
21 me the opportunity to speak. I put on the appearance  
22 slip that I represent myself because I have diverse  
23 hats. I'm a 70-year-old American of Asian descent so  
24 many years behind me I can talk about. I won't make  
25 it a filibuster talking all day, but I'm a product of

1  
2 New York City, born and raised in Astoria, New York  
3 in the back of a Chinese laundry, and I'm proud of  
4 that. I'm not ashamed at all. My father is a World  
5 War II veteran, served in the United States Army  
6 during World War II at which time he became a citizen  
7 back then when after you serve you become a citizen.  
8 He went back to China, married his girlfriend,  
9 assigned bride back then, and they came. They came  
10 and they gave birth to me in the early '50s in the  
11 back of a, not in the back, that was in a hospital  
12 actually, I'm not that old, they lived in the back of  
13 a laundry. I was born and raised in Astoria, went to  
14 PS 5, PS 10, nice public school system back in the  
15 '50s and '60s, was wonderful. I had a great  
16 experience, 14 years old, I hit eighth grade, and I  
17 was told as any good American of Chinese descent, you  
18 must go to Brooklyn Tech so I had to try out for a  
19 specialized high school, got in, had to shift from  
20 Astoria down to Chinatown apartment to take a train  
21 one stop over to Brooklyn Tech rather than 12 stops,  
22 100 stops from Astoria. Did my four years, came out,  
23 and pursued an engineering degree, it was open  
24 enrollment, but I got an RTC scholarship for a  
25 private college at the University of Akron so I went

1  
2 out there. The next year, they had a draft lottery. I  
3 couldn't even win that one. Number two, number two in  
4 the draft lottery. I wound up in the Army, and I  
5 served three years in the Army, and they wanted me to  
6 do other things and become an officer and go directly  
7 into combat as soon as I graduate. Being a good New  
8 York smart kid, I go why are there openings so I  
9 declined, and they made me a military policeman. I  
10 survived obviously, and I came back to the States.  
11 Military policeman for three years. I came back, and  
12 I joined the New York Police Department. That's my  
13 civilian qualification, did 25 years in police world,  
14 and I retired as a second grade detective. Went on to  
15 an insurance company as a manager, blah, blah, blah.  
16 The reason I give a little background is when I was  
17 in the police department I was the number 10 police  
18 officer in 1979 of Chinese descent. Now, we have  
19 2,000, and we had three of us in the Academy, so  
20 there was a mass influx of Asians into the police  
21 department so we formed the Asian Jade Society in  
22 1980 with 12 members. Now, we're up to 2,000+ so I'm  
23 really happy to have been part of the root and the  
24 founding spirit back in 1980 and also along the way  
25 as a veteran, my father was in the American Legion, I

1  
2 proudly serve now as the Vice Commander of the  
3 Chinatown Post which has to be just location, it's  
4 part of the National American Legion Structure so we  
5 just happen to be the post in Chinatown. We try to  
6 promote events for the other leaders. We do a color  
7 guard for the parade as soldiers, as veterans, we  
8 wear our uniforms when we're needed, and we're very  
9 proud to be Americans. Now, that we're talking about  
10 recognizing our culture as part of the mainstream  
11 American life. I've spent my whole life trying to be  
12 American. I know I'm an American, but everybody else  
13 in society, in Astoria, in high school, in Akron,  
14 Ohio, didn't see me as an American when I went to  
15 college. They didn't see me as an American. They  
16 always saw me as a foreigner so I think, as other  
17 groups, and our city's very diversified now, and  
18 we're trying to be inclusive. We're recognizing other  
19 groups, ethnic, social, religious as Americans so I  
20 think by passing this resolution, it's our time now  
21 that you can vote on saying yes, the Chinese are  
22 Americans. We just have to take off of school, one  
23 absence a year, to stay home with my parents and  
24 celebrate the Chinese New Year so I think it's about  
25



1  
2 time we cut the cord and make America include the  
3 Chinese as Americans. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you to  
5 the members of this panel. We'll now move to the next  
6 panel.

7 We have several more panels for in-person  
8 testimony so I'm first going to check for individuals  
9 that I missed. If you hear your name, please come to  
10 the table. The next witnesses will be Ezra Kahn from  
11 Avenues (phonetic), if Ezra Kahn is here, Roug Bau,  
12 George Li, Wallace Zhang, Peter Wong, William Su,  
13 Timothy Wong, Edward Kuchia (phonetic). Thank you.

14 Okay, so we'll call the name of the  
15 witness. The first witness will be Edward Kuchia. You  
16 may begin your testimony when ready.

17 EDWARD KUCHIA: Thank you. My name is  
18 indeed Edward Kuchia and thank you for calling me. To  
19 the panel, thank you for hosting this event. I'm an  
20 attorney, and I have the great good fortune to not be  
21 ethnically Asian to be married to someone who is  
22 ethnically Asian, and my family has celebrated the  
23 Lunar New Year for many, many years, and it has been  
24 a difficulty that the Lunar New Year is not  
25 respected, and I think that this is what this is all

1  
2 about, respect, and I think that as a non-Asian my  
3 voice maybe carries a bit of weight. I believe that  
4 the Lunar New Year must be celebrated, and I strongly  
5 am in favor of this proposal. The Lunar New Year must  
6 be respected. The Asians among us must be respected,  
7 and those who love the Asians among us must be  
8 respected so yes, please. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you.

10 The next witness will be Ezra Kahn. Mr. Kahn, you may  
11 begin your testimony when ready. Please make sure the  
12 red light is on on the microphone. Thank you.

13 EZRA KAHN: Hi, everyone. My name is Ezra  
14 Kahn. Currently, I'm a student at Avenues The World  
15 School. Avenues is a bilingual school, and I'm  
16 currently learning Chinese there. Currently, my mom  
17 is also a citizen of Hong Kong, and, because of this,  
18 I've been immersed into the rich Chinese culture and  
19 have been to countless Chinese New Year celebrations  
20 celebrating with my mom's closest friends. My own  
21 ethnicity is Jewish, and, because of this, each year  
22 I am able to celebrate my own culture with my friends  
23 and family because we, as Jewish people, get a day  
24 off for the Jewish New Year. Furthermore, I think it  
25 is imperative for Chinese people to be able to

1  
2 celebrate their own culture with their friends and  
3 family during their own Chinese New Year.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you to  
5 this panel. This concludes this panel, and we'll now  
6 move to the next panel of witnesses. I will list all  
7 of the names. If you can please approach the table.  
8 Lisa Alpert from Green-Wood Cemetery, Lisa Gold from  
9 the Asian American Arts Alliance, Sami Abu Shumays,  
10 apologies for any mispronunciations, from Flushing  
11 Town Hall, and Jane Li from the Brooklyn Children's  
12 Museum.

13 Miss Li from the Brooklyn Children's  
14 Museum, you are the first witness, and you may begin  
15 your testimony when ready. The clock is on the wall.  
16 Thank you so much. When you begin your testimony,  
17 just make sure you can see the red light on the  
18 microphone. Thank you.

19 JANE LI: Good afternoon. I'm Jane Li. I  
20 am Coordinator of Programs and Engagement for  
21 Brooklyn Children's Museum, BCM. BCM is a community  
22 museum in Crown Heights and the world's first  
23 children's museum. We serve 300,000 children and  
24 caregivers annually, most of whom hail from our  
25 borough. Over 35 percent of Brooklynites, almost 1

1 million people, are immigrants from another country.  
2 BCM has been serving New York's immigrant community  
3 since its inception in 1899, but in 2016 the Museum  
4 recognized a particular need to make large gathering  
5 spaces for celebrations available to immigrant  
6 communities, create and offer reflective programming,  
7 and create paid opportunities for immigrant artists  
8 and performers. With the support from the New York  
9 City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York  
10 City Council, BCM started to host monthly, sometimes  
11 even more than monthly, cultural festivals that  
12 reflect the diversity of our borough. My job is to  
13 work with community carriers to plan and coordinate  
14 these events. For each festival, we partner with a  
15 community-based organization or artistic partner to  
16 hire visual artists, musicians, dancers, DJs,  
17 storytellers, and food vendors from that community.  
18 BCM provides free space for artisans to sell on our  
19 roof, and we offer free tickets to our partner  
20 organizations to provide for their communities. A few  
21 examples include in April we celebrated Holi with New  
22 York City's (INAUDIBLE) party hosted in partnership  
23 with Ajna Dance, Jiva Dance, DJ Dynamite, and other  
24 several visual artists. Later in the spring, BCM  
25

1 hosted one of Brooklyn's largest family celebrations  
2 for Eid al-Fitr in partnership with Council Member  
3 Shahana Hanif. The event brought together performers  
4 from Bangladesh Institute for the Performing Arts,  
5 the Muslim Community Network, the Culture Tree, and  
6 Turkish Culture Center. Our partners at (INAUDIBLE)  
7 Foods provided 500 free halal meals. In August, BCM  
8 hosted Celebrate the Caribbean in partnership with  
9 the West Indian American Day Carnival Association,  
10 WIADCA, Dancers from CarNYval, Sesame Flyers  
11 International, and steel pan drumming workshops with  
12 Harmony Music Makers. In November, we hosted Dia de  
13 los Muertos, created by Bed-Stuy Brooklyn artist,  
14 Benjamin Rojas. Families learn about traditions  
15 honoring their ancestors with the help from the dance  
16 troupe Cetiliztli Nauhcampa, puppeteer Carina Onifre  
17 (phonetic), and artist (INAUDIBLE). In January, our  
18 Lunar New Year programs will welcome the Year of  
19 Rabbit in partnership with Chinatown Community Young  
20 Lions, the New York Chinese Cultural Center,  
21 Storyteller (INAUDIBLE), and calligraphy artist,  
22 Nelson (INAUDIBLE). I'm very excited about this  
23 year's program since the..  
24  
25

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: If you could wrap it up, we have many more testimonies but really appreciative of your testimony.

JANE LI: This year's Lunar New Year program, we are very excited about that because it's my Zodiac year as well, and I just want to wrap it up and say thank you to the DCLA and the City Council for your support, a special thanks to Council Member Chi Osse, Crystal Hudson, Shahana Hanif, Rita Joseph for their participation at BCM's cultural festivals. I have calendars of BCM's spring cultural festivals with me today. We're delighted to have Council Members join us for any event. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much for your testimony and thank you for everyone's patience today. We do have about 15 panels with remote panels. The next witness will be, I apologize in advance, Sami Abu Shumays.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Before your testimony, Sami, we are going to be pretty strict on the two-minute testimonies today. The Mayor is coming out with his preliminary budget hearing, happens to be right during this so please try to keep it to the two minutes. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
3 much. Sami Abu Shumays, you may begin your testimony  
4 when ready.

5 SAMI ABU SHUMAYS: I'm Sami Abu Shumays,  
6 Deputy Director of Flushing Town Hall. Thank you for  
7 the opportunity to testify. At Flushing Town Hall,  
8 we've been serving the immigrant communities of  
9 Queens with culturally relevant arts programming for  
10 44 years since our founding in 1979 as Flushing  
11 Council on Culture and the Arts with an explicit  
12 mission to promote and present the arts of immigrant  
13 communities and to foster intercultural exchange. I'm  
14 here to speak about the strategies we've used for  
15 these last four and half decades to serve these  
16 communities most effectively.

17 First, programming. We present programs  
18 that reflect the communities around us. We don't  
19 simply present European-American mainstream artforms  
20 to immigrants. We draw upon the cultures of the  
21 communities we serve, and that goes for our school  
22 programming and our programming in senior citizens  
23 and our arts (INAUDIBLE) as well.

24 Second, staffing. Many of our staff come  
25 from the communities we serve and, beyond that, we

1  
2 have staff with expertise in the arts and cultural  
3 forms of these diverse communities. We have education  
4 arts services and community outreach staff with  
5 experience working with diverse groups of people.

6           Third, marketing. We utilize multilingual  
7 marketing, translate our press releases, and work  
8 with local ethnic press, and we have marketing  
9 committee outreach staff who understand the best  
10 sources to go to.

11           Fourth, partnerships. We develop long-  
12 term partnerships with organizations both smaller and  
13 larger than us to deepen our reach. Local groups such  
14 as the Kunqu Chinese Opera Society, the Afri-Garifuna  
15 Jazz Ensemble, or the Matinecock Tribal Nation help  
16 us reach deeply and larger organizations help us as  
17 well.

18           Fifth, we do a lot of cross-cultural  
19 collaboration.

20           Sixth, our proximity to the communities  
21 we serve is very important, a fact backed up by the  
22 Social Impact for the Arts Study, a SIAP project, our  
23 proximity enables local audiences and artists to feel  
24 welcomed, draw staff and artists who have familiarity



1  
2 with the communities around us and keeps us in touch  
3 with those communities.

4                   That's it. Thank you very much. We offer  
5 these strategies because we think that it's really  
6 important that other organizations do this kind of  
7 work as well. Thank you.

8                   COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
9 much. The witness will be Lisa Alpert from Green-Wood  
10 Cemetery. You may begin your testimony when ready.

11                   LISA ALPERT: Hi, Chair Osse, Chair Hanif.  
12 I am representing Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.  
13 Thanks for the opportunity to speak. Really quickly,  
14 here's what we just want you to know. We share your  
15 vision that our city's immigrant communities deserve  
16 arts programming that is original, authentic, and  
17 that offers opportunities for connections to  
18 culture's cultural practices that people are bringing  
19 with them and cultural practices they are coming into  
20 in their new homes. We want Green-Wood to be on your  
21 radar. Great example also, Dia de los Muertos,  
22 (INAUDIBLE) cemetery, seems like a natural. We've  
23 done it for many years. Every November 1st, we have  
24 lots of music and mariachi bands and parents and  
25 community members and amazing tamales. Alexa Aviles

1 brought her entire staff to the event so that's  
2 exciting. It was a great day and a nice celebration  
3 of the Mexican culture in Sunset Park. Beyond Day of  
4 the Dead, our school programs, one of our most  
5 popular school programs is about immigrants who made  
6 their mark in New York City. This is learning that  
7 sticks and programming that effects hearts and minds.  
8 That's just a tiny sliver of what we do. We just want  
9 you to know that you want New York's cultural  
10 institutions to do more to innovate and to make space  
11 for the creative expression of our immigrant  
12 neighbors, and we're here for you and for our newest  
13 New Yorkers throughout the year. Thanks so much.

14  
15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
16 much for your testimony. The final witness on this  
17 panel will be Lisa Gold from the Asian American Arts  
18 Alliance. You may begin when ready. Thank you.

19 LISA GOLD: Thank you. Nice to see you.  
20 Thank you, Chairs Osse and Hanif. My name is Lisa  
21 Gold. I am the daughter of an immigrant and the  
22 Executive Director of the Asian American Arts  
23 Alliance. We are a District 4 based non-profit that  
24 serves to ensure greater representation, equity, and  
25 opportunities for Asian American artists and art

1 workers throughout the city. In addition to  
2 supporting individual artists, I lead a very loose  
3 coalition of Asian American Pacific Islander arts  
4 organizations throughout the city, many of whom are  
5 led by or serve immigrant populations. I want to say  
6 that I really feel that short shrift is paid to the  
7 contributions of immigrants in terms of their  
8 cultural contributions due to a distinct lack of  
9 funding and specifically, as you noted, Council  
10 Member Osse, the lack of language access and  
11 opportunities, and that's one thing that we feel very  
12 strongly about, granting equal access to everyone.  
13 The Cultural Immigrant Initiative is incredibly  
14 important. Full disclosure, we benefit from it as do  
15 our communities, but it is administered, as you  
16 noted, through the Cultural Development Fund, which  
17 is incredibly difficult even for people who English  
18 is their first language but for people whose first  
19 language is not English negotiating that process to  
20 apply through CDF DCLA it's really arduous, and I  
21 heard Committee Cumbo note that translation services  
22 were available to applicants, and I did not know  
23 that. I learned that today, being in this hearing, so  
24 thank you. One of the things that I did want to note  
25

1  
2 that was really valuable was the City Artist Corps  
3 Initiative that happened. A4 was a partner to DCLA,  
4 and we served to help translate that application and  
5 the information into 10 different languages, and we  
6 did that in record time. One of the applicants, a  
7 Chinatown-based applicant, told us that she'd lived  
8 in the city for more than 20 years and she felt like  
9 this was the first time that a grant applied to her  
10 so this is so, so, so important so I just want to say  
11 thank you, push for language access, and keep the  
12 Cultural Immigrant Initiative Alive. Go Year of the  
13 Rabbit.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
15 much. This concludes this panel. We'll now call the  
16 names of the next panelists and the next four  
17 witnesses. When you hear your name, please approach  
18 the table. The next witnesses will be Nikiesha  
19 Hamilton, Laticia Cortez-Ortiz from the People's  
20 Theatre Project, Chris Whittaker, and Elizabeth Koch.  
21 Apologies for any mispronunciations.

22 Okay, thank you very much. We'll begin  
23 with the first witness. Nikiesha Hamilton, you may  
24 begin your testimony when ready.

25

1  
2                    NIKIESHA HAMILTON: Good afternoon,  
3 Honorable Osse and Hanif. Thank you for the  
4 opportunity to testify today. My name is Nikiesha  
5 Hamilton, and I am the Founder and CEO of Afeni  
6 Creative Studios. I am a West Indian American woman  
7 with parents from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. I  
8 came to discuss the importance of investing into  
9 Carnival sector in New York City and its impact on  
10 immigrant communities. Carnival in New York, an  
11 industry created by immigrants, celebrates and  
12 preserves culture while impacting the economy within  
13 a five-day span. It's an opportunity for job and  
14 wealth creation, foreign exchange earnings, tourism,  
15 marketing, and more. Carnival is a channel for the  
16 government to collect extra tax revenue from permits,  
17 transportation, hotels, and airports. According to  
18 past research, New York Carnival generated almost 300  
19 million dollars in revenue per year. Currently, Latin  
20 America and the Caribbean Carnivals generate 125  
21 billion dollars, Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans  
22 generate a billion dollars each year, and Toronto 250  
23 million dollars. Every city that hosts a Carnival  
24 makes at least 100 million dollars, costing them less  
25 than 10 percent of the revenue generated. The city

1 should research, track, and report the progress of  
2 Carnival, make Carnival green, and lead international  
3 trade relations with the Caribbean. New York City is  
4 currently losing its stature in regards to Caribbean  
5 Carnival. Many Carnival bands are leaving, folks  
6 (INAUDIBLE) travel to other cities to spend money and  
7 participate in Carnival. This means that we are  
8 losing revenue. Carnival is underdeveloped and often  
9 unrealized and, as the City and State face budget  
10 cuts, inflation, and grapple with finding new streams  
11 of revenue, let's double down on things that we know  
12 work like Carnival and investing in immigrant  
13 communities. Thank you.

14  
15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
16 much. We'll go to the next witness, Leticia Cortez-  
17 Ortiz. You may begin your testimony when ready.

18 LETICIA CORTEZ-ORTIZ: My name is Leticia  
19 Cortez, representing People's Theatre Project, or  
20 PTP. Thank you to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
21 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and  
22 the Committee on Immigration for having us here  
23 today. Rooted in Washington Heights and Inwood and  
24 serving immigrants across New York City, PTP makes  
25 theatre with and for immigrant communities in order

1  
2 to build a more just and equitable world. Through our  
3 theatre-making process, we give immigrant youth the  
4 tools to tell their own stories, to be empowered by  
5 their identities, to become leaders and champions for  
6 their communities, but our work does not stop there.  
7 We take care of our families by monitoring their  
8 needs in areas such as housing, food insecurity,  
9 legal service, and mental health. As PTP's youth and  
10 family advocate, I support the psychosocial health  
11 and physical needs of our young artists and their  
12 families through trustful relationships, building  
13 systems to assess their needs, and connecting them to  
14 the correct community resources. We believe that art  
15 must go hand-in-hand with holistic care. Data shows  
16 that cultural assets in neighborhoods leads to  
17 increased community safety and better outcomes in  
18 education and mental health. Yet, arts and culture  
19 continue to be underfunded in our communities. New  
20 York City needs immigrant-centered cultural spaces.  
21 Despite Latinos making up 30 percent of New York  
22 City's population, Latino's artists hold less than 5  
23 percent of roles and wrote less than 1 percent of the  
24 plays produced. At PTP, we are honored to be  
25 partnering with the city to build its first immigrant

1 theatre located in Inwood, home to the city's largest  
2 immigrant group. Culturally responsive art is  
3 transformative. Investing in spaces that do this will  
4 make New York City a more welcoming home for new New  
5 Yorkers. Sharing our stories, hearing our languages,  
6 and seeing our community on stage matters, and  
7 representation matters. ART is a human right and must  
8 be accessible for all, and with your leadership we  
9 can achieve this. Thank you.  
10

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
12 your testimony. Just for the record. We just want to  
13 note this is our last in-person panel so we'll move  
14 to remote testimony next.

15 The next witness is Chris Whittaker, and  
16 you may begin your testimony when ready.

17 CHRIS WHITTAKER: Good afternoon, Chairs  
18 Osse and Hanif. Thank you for taking the time to  
19 consider today's topic and also for your support for  
20 small cultural organizations. My name is Chris  
21 Whittaker, and I'm currently a law student at Fordham  
22 University, but prior to this for the previous seven  
23 years I served as a music director and founder of the  
24 Washington Heights Chamber Orchestra, which performed  
25 over 70 free concerts, increasing access to the arts



1  
2 across the Upper Manhattan cultural divide east and  
3 west of Broadway. I'm also the former music director  
4 at Fort Washington Collegiate Church where I founded  
5 an amateur community choir in Washington Heights  
6 where my wife and I reside. In my choir, both long-  
7 time residents and new New Yorkers don't just make  
8 music but build lasting relationships that connect  
9 them to the city. This sense of belonging is what can  
10 make New York feel like a small town. As we spend so  
11 much time cloistered behind our screens where our  
12 distrust is ever amplified by algorithm, local arts  
13 organizations provide a needed path back to  
14 community. Small cultural organizations especially  
15 play an outsized role in making New York a place  
16 where all people, newcomers and immigrants alike,  
17 thrive. Community-based arts organizations act as a  
18 valuable third space that strengthen bonds between  
19 neighbors. This is why it is essential that they be  
20 preserved, protected, and supported. As local arts  
21 organizations reimagine themselves post-COVID, I want  
22 to highlight two key issues for you to consider  
23 beyond funding, the first related to what we like to  
24 call butts in seats and second related to access to  
25 affordable space. You can help with the first by

1 showing up to the work of small arts organizations in  
2 your district. Your leadership can help to reignite a  
3 culture of going out, which the arts and the city  
4 desperately needs. Second, access to space is a  
5 harder problem. I know so many artists who are doing  
6 amazing work in underserved, predominantly low-income  
7 or immigrant communities who simply need space. Your  
8 direct engagement will plant seeds of collaboration  
9 that can help organizations develop new relationships  
10 that benefit the residents and businesses in your  
11 district. Local arts organizations are essential to  
12 solving today's urgent problems, and immigrants are  
13 an essential part of our fabric. Supporting local  
14 arts organizations is supporting immigrant  
15 communities and vice versa. Our sense of belonging  
16 sparked by joining a choir, a writers group, a  
17 community garden, is the beginning of civic  
18 engagement for a new generation of New Yorkers and  
19 will foster citizens who are invested in their city  
20 and believe in their power to make positive change.  
21 Thank you so much.

22  
23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
24 your testimony. The last witness on this panel is

1 Elizabeth Koch from Brooklyn Book Festival. You may  
2 begin your testimony when ready.

3  
4 ELIZABETH KOCH: I'm Liz Koch with the  
5 Brooklyn Book Festival. I'm the Producer of the  
6 Festival. One of the things I wanted to say right up  
7 front is Brooklyn and New York are obviously a city  
8 and a borough of immigrants. My own parents  
9 immigrated here as Eastern European war refugees.  
10 They landed in Brooklyn before they went to New  
11 Jersey, the promised land, and have throughout their  
12 life until they passed, it was deeply meaningful to  
13 them whenever someone representing the culture of  
14 their homeland came to New York and they were able to  
15 see them. That never stopped being meaningful.  
16 Together with city funding support and I really  
17 wanted to highlight the Cultural Immigrant  
18 Initiative, it's really been possible for the  
19 Brooklyn Book Festival to evolve as a festival that  
20 embraces immigrant communities and also has extensive  
21 programming for different immigrant cultures. Some of  
22 the authors that we have had come, I'm going to jump  
23 to the end because I'm leery of the time here, have  
24 been from Argentina, Mexico, Columbia, Jamaica,  
25 Trinidad, Russia, France, Brazil, India, Cameroon,

1  
2 Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, China, Kenya, Japan,  
3 Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Haiti, Australia, Rwanda,  
4 and dozens of others. We worked together with  
5 different cultural organizations and community-based  
6 organizations throughout the city for them to hear  
7 about the program that we're doing. One of the  
8 reasons the support is so important is that there are  
9 a lot of costs to presenting cultural programming and  
10 the way it's accessible to people, whether it's  
11 through language, interpreters, materials translated,  
12 there are additional costs. I think one of the things  
13 we really learned from COVID, if you have to say what  
14 is the tiny silver lining, is that we do  
15 international programming extensively virtually now.  
16 Thank you for your support. The Cultural Immigrant  
17 Initiative is so important to organizations.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
19 much to this panel for your testimony and thank you  
20 to everyone who was here to testify in person today.  
21 This concludes our in-person testimony.

22 We'll move to remote testimony at this  
23 time. If there's anyone in the room that we  
24 inadvertently missed, if you submitted a witness slip

1 and we maybe missed your name, if you could just let  
2 us know.  
3

4 We'll now move to remote testimony. I  
5 will call the names of the next panelists. Panel 10  
6 will be Lucy Sexton, Eleni DeSiervo from Lincoln  
7 Center, Reshma Patel from Dance NYC, Petra Zanki.

8 The next witness is Lucy Sexton who is  
9 our first remote witness. Miss Sexton, you may begin  
10 your testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time starts now.

12 LUCY SEXTON: Hi, everyone. Sorry to be  
13 testifying remotely. I wanted to be with you in  
14 person. Thank you, Chair Osse, and thank you, City  
15 Council. My name is Lucy Sexton of New Yorkers for  
16 Culture and Arts, a coalition of more than 300  
17 cultural organizations and artists and cultural  
18 workers from across the five boroughs. Thank you for  
19 holding this hearing on the critical role culture  
20 plays in New York City's immigrant communities and  
21 the key role that immigrant art plays in the city's  
22 world-renowned art and culture. The story of New York  
23 City culture has always been deeply informed by its  
24 historic waves of immigrants, and that is still the  
25 case. One need only look at the line-up of the

1  
2 Queensborough Dance Festival, which includes an  
3 amazing array of dance groups based on the many, many  
4 countries represented in our most diverse borough,  
5 from Calpulli Mexican Dance Company to Kinding  
6 Sindaw's indigenous Filipino dance group and more, or  
7 go to any of the Caribbean festivals and worked on by  
8 Tropicalfete with the kids and adults in Crown  
9 Heights and in schools throughout Brooklyn. The list  
10 of examples is truly endless, and New York is rightly  
11 proud of them. The only thing they need is proper  
12 support and more public investment for the work that  
13 they do. Queensborough Dance Festival is still  
14 produced by a single visionary Karesia Batan and a  
15 tiny staff. Let's get her more money.

16           In recent months, we have seen  
17 extraordinary response and service offered by  
18 cultural groups to newly arrived asylum-seekers from  
19 clothing drives at El Museo del Barrio and other  
20 cultural centers to full arts festivals engaging new  
21 immigrants at the Clemente Center in the Lower  
22 Eastside among others. The city's cultural groups  
23 have risen to the occasion. They reach out in  
24 culturally connected and authentic ways to welcome  
25 and support our newest New Yorkers. Again, all they

1 need is more robust support to do this work which  
2 serves the City in times of crisis and beyond. There  
3 is a show opening at St. Ann's Warehouse next month  
4 called The Jungle. I know many of you talked about  
5 Little Amal. Little Amal came out of this show  
6 originally called The Jungle.  
7

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time expired.

9 LUCY SEXTON: My teen daughter actually  
10 visited the refugee camp on which the show is based  
11 several years ago. A group from the UK set up a large  
12 tent in the middle of a sprawling camp of asylum-  
13 seekers waiting for months and years on the border.  
14 The response was incredible as kids began to come to  
15 the tent to draw, to make music, as teens did rap  
16 battles and dance shows for each other, and as grown-  
17 ups gathered to tell stories and connect across their  
18 own cultural barriers. In the words of one of the  
19 participants, in this camp lots of charity groups  
20 think all we need is food and shelter, we also need  
21 this, a place to gather to express ourselves and to  
22 connect, to remember our humanity and to find release  
23 and joy. My co-parent, you're hearing a lot about my  
24 family in my testimony today, thank you for indulging  
25 me, my co-parent works leading the city's B-HEARD

1  
2 program as a social worker responding with EMS to  
3 calls for emotionally disturbed people. She says they  
4 are seeing lots of mental health issues in newly  
5 arrived immigrants housed in hotels and shelters and  
6 among their children as they are thrown into new  
7 schools. We need to invest in getting people cultural  
8 programs in the shelters to help them survive  
9 mentally in the hardest of circumstances and we need  
10 to get culturally appropriate arts in those kids'  
11 schools, in the schools, so they have a place to  
12 connect and process the anxiety they are  
13 experiencing.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I'm so sorry.

15 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you. I'm almost done.

16 The exercise I gave my class, none of whom spoke  
17 English, was to describe the happiest time in their  
18 lives. An elderly man who never said much started  
19 crying as he relayed that he had worked in factories  
20 since he was 14 and that this time, during these  
21 classes in this community, was the happiest time of  
22 his life. As New York faces economic belt-tightening...

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Lucy, I'm so sorry, but  
24 we are over the two minutes. We are losing this room

25



2 at 1 p.m. so I do want to get everyone in for their  
3 testimony.

4 LUCY SEXTON: Thanks so much.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: No worries.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Just a  
7 reminder that the Committees also meticulously review  
8 written testimony and accept written testimony up to  
9 72 hours after the hearing. There is a two-minute  
10 clock and we lose the room at 1 p.m. so we have four  
11 or five more panels left, but if there is anyone that  
12 would like to submit written testimony we can also  
13 answer questions afterwards.

14 The next witness on this panel is, excuse  
15 me in advance for mispronunciations, Eleni DeSiervo  
16 from Lincoln Center. Thank you, and thank you for  
17 your testimony, Miss Sexton.

18 ELENI DESIERVO: Good afternoon, everyone,  
19 Chair Osse, Chair Hanif, and Members of both  
20 Committees. My name is Eleni DeSiervo, Senior  
21 Director of Government Relations at Lincoln Center  
22 for the Performing Arts. In an effort to be cognizant  
23 of time, I will keep my testimony short and submit  
24 the longer version. Lincoln Center was created as a  
25 place where the arts are not for the privileged few

1  
2 but for the many. Our founding mission is placing the  
3 arts at the center of daily life for all New Yorkers.  
4 This mission is inclusive of immigrant communities.  
5 We believe the arts are an essential part of civic  
6 life to reflect and inform the world in a process  
7 that is inherently democratic, valuing freedom and  
8 expression and an opening exchange of ideas.  
9 Commissioner Cumbo spoke to a lot of the work that  
10 we've been doing over the last year with immigrant  
11 communities, uplifting immigrant artists, and some of  
12 the work that we've been doing with asylum-seekers in  
13 partnership with Council Member Hanif's office, and  
14 I'll just mention a few in my testimony. This  
15 summer, as part of the Summer for the City, it  
16 culminated in performances by the Ukrainian Freedom  
17 Orchestra and a Call for Solidarity with the victims  
18 of the war in Ukraine. This was presented in  
19 partnership with the Metropolitan Opera and the  
20 Polish National Opera. They encouraged donations to  
21 organizations supporting the resettlement of  
22 Ukrainians such as welcome.us. This Sunday, we're  
23 presenting Global Fest, which was founded in 2003  
24 with the mission of breaking down cultural and social  
25 barriers by moving international music to the center

1  
2 of the performing arts field. We're doing a takeover  
3 at David Geffen Hall for this effort, and through  
4 strengthening opportunities for artists to reach  
5 broader audiences, the festival facilitates a more  
6 inclusive cultural sector, a healthier society, and  
7 creates more equitable, economic opportunities in the  
8 arts. Additionally, Lincoln Center made strides in  
9 using the campus as a civic hub by creating new  
10 opportunities to offer welcome. Commissioner Cumbo  
11 had stated that we welcomed 300 new citizens  
12 representing 80 different countries to take the oath  
13 to become new Americans, and we were proud to offer  
14 that and extended free tickets to our opening  
15 performances at David Geffen Hall...

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

17 ELENI DESIERVO: Culture is a unifying  
18 force at extending welcome to new residents, breaking  
19 down barriers and offering hope. Over the holidays,  
20 we coordinated with Catholic Charities, Immigrant  
21 ARC, and other community-based partners to offer 500  
22 free tickets to the Big Apple Circus for recently  
23 arrived asylum-seekers. Lincoln Center is a proud  
24 member of the city's 34-organization Cultural  
25 Institutions Group and participant in the IDNYC

1 program. Founded for the purpose of cultivating,  
2 fostering, and...

3  
4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you.

5 ELENI DESIERVO: Lincoln Center is home to  
6 11 arts and arts education non-profits...

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you. If  
8 you can please wrap up.

9 ELENI DESIERVO: Lincoln Center for the  
10 Performing Arts as a primary advocate. We are  
11 committed to doing this work, and we are committed to  
12 partnering with the cultural sector and with MOIA and  
13 DCLA to advance services for the asylum-seeking  
14 community and to support immigrant communities  
15 throughout the city. Thank you for your time, and we  
16 will submit our written testimony.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
18 much for your testimony. The next witness will be  
19 Reshma Patel from Dance NYC.

20 RESHMA PATEL: Good afternoon. Thank you  
21 for this opportunity to speak with you. My name is  
22 Reshma Patel, and I serve on the board of Dance NYC,  
23 a service organization for the dance sector in the  
24 New York City area, but in addition to that I also am  
25 Board Co-Chair of Chhaya Community Development

1 Corporation which serves South Asian and Indo-  
2 Caribbean immigrants in the Queens as well as  
3 Manhattan Community Board 6. Serving in these roles  
4 has given me a unique insight into the needs of  
5 immigrant artists and specifically dance artists in  
6 New York City who are often the most overlooked.  
7 Immigrants account for almost a third of all artists  
8 in New York City, and many of these immigrant artists  
9 face unique struggles. Immigrant artists don't have  
10 access to wealthy donors in their networks, and the  
11 cultural organizations they belong to don't have  
12 access to large endowments. Furthermore, immigrant  
13 communities were hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic,  
14 and many of the immigrant artists could not qualify  
15 for government relief due to their immigration  
16 status. Lack of funding has forced many of these  
17 immigrant artists to abandon their work or to leave  
18 New York City. I ask that you consider increasing  
19 funding for immigrant artists and arts organizations  
20 to give access to more affordable rehearsal and  
21 performance space and to help them with their path to  
22 becoming new Americans. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
25 much for your testimony. The final witness on this

1 panel will be Petra Zanki. Miss Zanki, before your  
2 testimony, I'm going to read the names of the next  
3 panelists so that they know that their testimony is  
4 coming. On the next panel, we have three members. It  
5 will be Francine Garber-Cohen, Potri Ranka Manis  
6 Queano Nur from Kinding Sindaw, and Candice Anderson,  
7 but before that, the last witness on this panel is  
8 Petra Zanki. You may begin your testimony when ready.

9  
10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Apologies. I  
12 don't think the witness is present so we will move to  
13 the next panel. We will also check for anyone that we  
14 inadvertently missed at the end of the hearing. Our  
15 next witness on the next panel, the panel will be  
16 Francine Garber-Cohen, Potri Ranka Manis Queano Nur,  
17 and Candice Anderson. Miss Garber-Cohen, if you are  
18 present, you may begin your testimony when ready.

19 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Good afternoon.

20 I'm Fran Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera  
21 Company which offers ticketed and free fully staged  
22 operas and operetta concerts in Sunset Park, an  
23 underserved and low-income immigrant community of  
24 Asian and LatinX residents and also in Bay Ridge, a  
25 naturally occurring retirement community. Regina

1  
2 Opera also offers online performances for people who  
3 cannot attend live performances. We provide  
4 affordable entertainment at accessible venues for  
5 people, especially immigrants, who may not otherwise  
6 attend large performances. Some audience members lack  
7 the funds to spend on entertainment. Some Asian  
8 community members fear travel to Manhattan by subway.  
9 Some may not feel welcomed attending at the major  
10 opera houses. Others can't spend the time to travel  
11 to Manhattan or can't plan ahead to buy tickets in  
12 advance. We sell a lot of tickets at the door and  
13 never run out of space. Our performance addresses  
14 these issues of the Sunset Park and Bay Ridge  
15 community members. The need for cultural enrichment  
16 is reflected in the fact that a total of over 4,000  
17 people usually attend a combination of our live and  
18 online performances each sister. We, at Regina Opera,  
19 hear from our audience members that they wish there  
20 was additional money for local arts organizations in  
21 New York City that take their needs into account.  
22 Speaking on behalf of the music organizations in New  
23 York City who are dedicated to bringing happiness to  
24 our community members, especially immigrant members,  
25 we are frustrated by the fact that New York City is

1 not doing enough to fund all of our small  
2 organizations for the work that we do. Thank you.

3  
4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
5 much for your testimony. The next witness will be,  
6 and I apologize in advance, Potri Ranka Manis Queano  
7 Nur from Kinding Sindaw. If you are present, you may  
8 begin your testimony when ready.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

10 POTRI RANKA MANIS QUEANO NUR: Good  
11 morning. My name is Potri Ranka Manis, and my  
12 organization is Kinding Sindaw. Lucy Sexton cited our  
13 group as one of the small organizations that  
14 (INAUDIBLE) an art that is almost invisible. I'm an  
15 immigrant nurse. I came to the U.S.A. at the height  
16 of HIV/AIDS to fill in the understaffing and been  
17 working as a nurse and together, being a nurse, I saw  
18 the need of bringing the art that I grew up with  
19 since the art I know can contribute to the healing of  
20 New York and also to make New York community. Kinding  
21 Sindaw is a 30-year-old immigrant New York City-based  
22 non-profit dance theater company that is composed of  
23 immigrant tradition-bearers, artists, and educators  
24 founded by me (INAUDIBLE) as an immigrant nurse in  
25 1992. Kinding Sindaw exists to preserve ritual and



1  
2 recreate the traditions of dance, music, martial  
3 arts, storytelling, and orature of the indigenous  
4 people of Mindanao, Southern Philippines here in  
5 diaspora. Our mission is to educate and enlighten  
6 immigrant communities about the history and culture  
7 of the indigenous people of the Philippines through  
8 the use of indigenous music, dance, and culture art  
9 forms which serve...

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
11 has expired.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you.  
13 Apologies. Just a reminder, if you can submit written  
14 testimony, it is reviewed by meticulously by Staff  
15 and by the Committee so if you submit written  
16 testimony that will also be considered on the record.  
17 The address to send written testimony to is  
18 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

19 The next panelist on this panel is  
20 Candice Anderson from Cool Culture. You may begin  
21 your testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

23 CANDICE ANDERSON: Good afternoon. My name  
24 is Candice Anderson, and I'm the Executive Director  
25 of Cool Culture. Our community consists of 50,000

1 families, 83 percent of our families are BIPOC, 47  
2 percent speak a language other than English, and many  
3 face economic injustices. We partner as well with  
4 thousands of educators at 450 schools and hundreds of  
5 culture workers at 90 cultural institutions. I really  
6 want to thank the Committees, Chair Osse and Chair  
7 Hanif, for holding this hearing today, and I know  
8 that I'm speaking to the choir when I say that  
9 cultural equity and equitable access to the arts is  
10 really essential to thriving communities to healing  
11 and recovering from the intersecting impacts of both  
12 systemic racism and the pandemic. We are also  
13 currently bearing witness to powerful cultural  
14 shifts. These manifest themselves as xenophobia and  
15 cultural narratives and policies that reproduce  
16 inequality and threaten the rights of BIPOC New  
17 Yorkers and new New Yorkers broadly. The city has  
18 adopted sanctuary policies, which under the Adams'  
19 administration include Project Open Arms which plans  
20 to support families seeking asylum including  
21 providing families and children with access to  
22 education, mental health, and social services, and  
23 partnership with multiple agencies, the Mayor's  
24 Office of Immigrant Affairs, Department of Education.  
25

1 This and similar initiatives, however, should be  
2 expanded to include the Department of Cultural  
3 Affairs. I want to say that BIPOC and immigrant  
4 communities are still reeling from the hardships from  
5 the pandemic. The reality is that small organizations  
6 play an incredible role in addressing these  
7 hardships, and these are the same organizations that  
8 are referenced by the Commissioner time and again as  
9 the folks who are on the frontline of reaching out to  
10 new New Yorkers. Unfortunately, we simply do not have  
11 the funds necessary to meet the needs...

12  
13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
14 has expired.

15 CANDICE ANDERSON: I will submit my full  
16 testimony with more specific policy recommendations  
17 including revisiting the antiquated funding model to  
18 the Committee after the testimony and hearing. Thank  
19 you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
21 much for your testimony and thank you to this panel.  
22 We will now move to the next panel. I'm going to read  
23 the names of the panelists on the next two panels,  
24 which are remote. The next panel will be Cheryl  
25 Warfield from ADVANCE MORE Opera, Harley Judd Spiller

1 from Franklin Furnace Archive, and Ya-Yun Teng from  
2 the New York Foundation for the Arts. After that, the  
3 next panel will be Maeve Montalvo from the Museum of  
4 the City of New York, Caron Atlas, and Milena Luna  
5 from Dance NYC. We'll now move to the next panel. The  
6 first witness is Cheryl Warfield, and you may begin  
7 your testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.  
8 Thank you again for your patience.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

11 CHERYL WARFIELD: Good afternoon, Chair  
12 Osse, Chair Hanif, and Committee Members, and thank  
13 you for hearing my testimony. I am Cheryl Warfield,  
14 Founder of ADVANCE MORE Opera that provides  
15 culturally responsive music training and outreach to  
16 youth and older adults in underserved communities in  
17 the Bronx, Upper Manhattan, and Manhattan Valley.  
18 MORE Opera has been serving elementary school  
19 students and adult English-language learners for  
20 nearly 20 years. I'd like to cite two examples. One,  
21 an opera residency at PS 226 in the Bronx for fourth  
22 graders aged 9 to 10 to perform in the opera Tosca  
23 with full orchestra conducted by renowned maestro  
24 Anton Coppola. Most of the children were Spanish-  
25 speaking. I'll never forget how their faces lit up as

1  
2 they learned to sing in Italian and their realization  
3 of the similarities between Italian and Spanish and  
4 how delighted they were that they understood much of  
5 what they were singing without my translating it. In  
6 Kingsbridge Heights, we presented local music  
7 residencies in conjunction with the Bronx Opera for  
8 grammar and accent reduction that empowered adult  
9 ESOL students and gave them greater confidence in  
10 speaking English using songs like Sinatra's My Way  
11 and This Land is Your Land. Links to videos  
12 demonstrating the impact of these residencies on  
13 participants are included in my written testimony. We  
14 are ready, willing, and able to do more for immigrant  
15 communities, but we need space and funding. I  
16 strongly encourage increased funding for the Cultural  
17 Immigrant Initiative and other initiatives...

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
19 has expired.

20 CHERYL WARFIELD: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
22 much for your testimony. The next witness will be  
23 Harley Judd Spiller. You may begin your testimony  
24 when the Sergeant calls the clock.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

1  
2 HARLEY JUDD SPILLER: Thank you. (Speaking  
3 foreign language) Happy new year. I don't speak any  
4 of those languages, but I learned them in my 40 years  
5 in New York or at least a little foot in the door.  
6 I'm the Ken Dewey Director of Franklin Furnace  
7 Archive, a 46-year-old arts organization that fights  
8 for artists First Amendment's rights. Thank you,  
9 Lucy, for your last story which brought me to tears.  
10 This is personal. My family came here from Ukraine. I  
11 never immigrated, but I started in New York on a  
12 whopping on a second 9,000-dollar salary. I found  
13 myself drawn to Bay Ridge, to Elmhurst. Lo and  
14 behold, these are where new immigrants go. It's where  
15 you can get a toehold. It's where you can get lunch  
16 and dinner for less than some people pay for a cup of  
17 coffee. I didn't want New York. I didn't think I  
18 could make it here, but it's my career and I love it.  
19 New York is a fabulous place and can be even better  
20 to start. It's amazing the culture opportunities for  
21 poor people here. We are financially poor but  
22 culturally rich as can be. We want more. I'm greedy,  
23 and I thank Laurie Cumbo and the City Council for  
24 this opportunity to spill my heart for you. Thank  
25 you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
much for your testimony. The next witness will be Ya-  
Yun Teng from the New York Foundation for the Arts.  
You may begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls  
the clock.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has begun.

YA-YUN TENG: Thank you for the Committee  
Chairs and all of my Colleagues who testified in  
sharing really moving stories. My name is Ya-Yun  
Teng. I'm the Program Officer Immigrant Artist  
Resource Center at the New York Foundation for the  
Arts, also known as NYFA. We are an arts service  
organization. In NYFA, we an immigrant artist  
program. Thanks to DCLA's support, we were able to  
serve 10,000 immigrant artists every year. Our  
immigrant artists mentoring program founded in 2007  
has provided opportunities to more than 500 New York  
City-based artists from 76 countries. Many of them  
became important fabric of New York City's  
communities, telling their stories in art space,  
teaching, and engaging in public activities that  
enrich New Yorkers' lives. One of the examples is our  
mentee and (INAUDIBLE) mentor (INAUDIBLE) who is  
based in Staten Island where Little Amal, many people

1 have mentioned it, visited Staten Island. She was the  
2 artist who designed and implemented the community  
3 participation portion. She also worked with public  
4 schools in five boroughs working with school children  
5 on arts projects and murals. As I said, many mentees  
6 return as mentors and, in addition, our alumni  
7 community benefits from many partnerships that we  
8 have in New York City. One example is Material for  
9 the Arts, also one of the city agencies who arranged  
10 shopping days for alumni to date for about a year,  
11 more than 65 artists have benefited from the  
12 offering. Last year, we launched the Immigrant Artist  
13 Resource Center with the goal of increasing public  
14 access to critical resources and information as well  
15 as aiming to serving those that we are not serving  
16 yet. Our public program on healthcare options,  
17 affordable housing, and visa applications...

18  
19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
20 has expired.

21 YA-YUN TENG: Okay. Thank you. Yeah, I  
22 will submit my testimony. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
24 much. This concludes this panel. We will also be  
25 reading written testimony. Again, if anybody needs to



1  
2 update their testimony or submit written testimony  
3 even if you've already submitted it, you can submit  
4 it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) up to 72 hours after  
5 the hearing.

6           The next panel will be the second to last  
7 so I will read the names of the last panelists on the  
8 next two panels. If there's anyone we have  
9 inadvertently missed, we will check at the end of  
10 these panels. Panel 13, the next panel, will be Maeve  
11 Montalvo from the Museum of the City of New York,  
12 Caron Atlas, and Milena Luna from Dance NYC and then  
13 the final panel is three witnesses, Linda Kennedy,  
14 Carlye Eckert, Mafor Mambo Tse. We'll now move to the  
15 next panel. The first witness is Maeve Montalvo, and  
16 you may begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls  
17 the clock. Miss Montalvo.

18           SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

19           MAEVE MONTALVO: Chairs Hanif and Osse and  
20 Members of the Committee, thank you for the  
21 opportunity to testify today. My name is Maeve  
22 Montalvo, and I'm the Director of Education at the  
23 Museum of the City of New York here today to emphasis  
24 the importance of celebrating cultural heritage and  
25 history in our city and supporting cultural

1 organizations who partner in this work. At the  
2 Museum, we engage hundreds of thousands of visitors  
3 each year in celebrating, documenting, and  
4 interpreting the city's past, present, and future. We  
5 are currently celebrating our 100th anniversary as  
6 New York City's storytellers. We are a proud member  
7 of the Cultural Institutions Group and see inclusion,  
8 diversity, access, and equity as central to our work.  
9 I'd like to share a few examples of our work to  
10 demonstrate how supporting cultural organizations  
11 ensures stories like these can reach all New Yorkers.  
12 Earlier, the Public Art Project I Still Believe in  
13 Our City was mentioned which launched in response to  
14 the rise of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes  
15 in the city. We approached the artist behind that  
16 work, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, and invited her to  
17 find a long-term home for her work at the museum as  
18 part of our exhibition on activism. Now, her art  
19 helps us engage students in building empathy and  
20 countering harmful stereotypes. We co-created the  
21 Hidden Voices Project with the New York City  
22 Department of Education to ensure that the city's  
23 more than 1 million students hear the stories of  
24 diverse but often overlooked individuals who have  
25

1  
2 shaped this city. People like Wong Chin Foo who  
3 founded the Chinese Equal Rights League in the late  
4 19th Century in the face of the U.S. Government's  
5 Chinese Exclusion Act and Dr. Antonia Pantoja who  
6 advocated for Puerto Rican New Yorkers like my family  
7 and was key to ensuring bilingual education in our  
8 schools. I'll share one final anecdote. On Monday, I  
9 had the privilege of listening to a fourth grader  
10 from a New York City public school in Queens who  
11 shared that he is afraid to go outside because he  
12 fears being hurt as an Asian American. When I asked  
13 him what he would like us adults to do, Min Jay  
14 (phonetic) said he'd like more people to know about  
15 Asian American cultures so they do not seem strange  
16 or different. I promised Min Jay I would bring his  
17 story here today to emphasis the importance of making  
18 sure visibility and representation are always  
19 showcased through our cultural organizations and our  
20 policy agendas. Thank you to the Members of the  
21 Committee for receiving this testimony, and at the  
22 Museum we will continue to share the stories and  
23 contributions of the resilience of immigrant  
24 communities as we document the past, present, and  
25 future of all New Yorkers. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
3 your testimony. The next witness will be Caron Atlas.  
4 You may begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls  
5 the clock.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

7 CARON ATLAS: Hello. I'm Caron Atlas. I  
8 direct Arts and Democracy in the Citywide Alliance at  
9 NOCD-NY. Our work in support of immigrant communities  
10 ranges from an annual Community Iftar bilingual  
11 workshops addressing climate justice, virtual open  
12 mics facilitating community healing, and a public art  
13 exhibition honoring immigrant-led mutual aid. I want  
14 to acknowledge our Council Member Shahana Hanif for  
15 her support of our work. Our program director, Hasiba  
16 Haq, writes support from the Cultural Immigrant  
17 Initiative and other city funding not only elevates  
18 the voice of communities that go unheard but helps  
19 build the next generation of leaders. Young Muslim  
20 women have become trailblazers. They've redefined the  
21 importance of public space and women's participation  
22 in it, built safe spaces for queer youth, provided  
23 platforms for young people to celebrate their  
24 artistic skills, and build intergenerational  
25 relationships that bridge cultural divides. We

1  
2 recommend that the City expand the Cultural Immigrant  
3 Initiative, address delayed decision-making in  
4 funding which makes it very hard for small  
5 organizations to work with the City and results in  
6 cashflow challenges and debt, allow small community  
7 immigrant organizations to use fiscal sponsors to  
8 receive city funding, increase cross-sector  
9 opportunities that engage the power of arts and  
10 culture across city agencies, make these  
11 opportunities transparent with realistic timelines  
12 and equitable pay for artists, support the holistic  
13 work of neighborhood cultural centers in support of  
14 immigrant communities, provide technical assistance  
15 and financial support for small plaza partners so  
16 they can succeed such as DOT's Plaza Equity Fund,  
17 ground policy making in stories, culture, and lived  
18 experience and recognize and reward community  
19 knowledge and leadership. There are more details on  
20 these recommendations in our written testimony. Thank  
21 you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
23 much for your testimony. The next witness is Milena  
24 Luna from Dance NYC.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

1  
2 MILENA LUNA: Good afternoon. My name is  
3 Milena Luna, and I am a Columbian immigrant artist  
4 who grew up in Queens, and I'm also the interim  
5 Executive Director for Dance NYC. Thank you all for  
6 this opportunity to speak to you today. Dance NYC is  
7 a service organization for the dance industry in the  
8 metro NYC area, and its research and advocacy seek to  
9 represent and advance the interests of the dance  
10 sector. Today, I join colleague advocates working  
11 across other creative disciplines to acknowledge and  
12 celebrate the important contributions of immigrant  
13 communities to arts and culture in city, and I  
14 reiterate the ways that the artistry of this  
15 community must continue to be supported. Dance NYC  
16 also supports the current resolutions that have been  
17 proposed to recognize the Lunar New Year as a school  
18 and official holiday. Immigrant artists comprise a  
19 growing share of the city's artists, an estimated  
20 50,964 in 2018, a 69 percent increase from 1990.  
21 Dance NYC's study show that the immigrant dance  
22 workforce is ethnically and racially diverse and that  
23 immigrant dance workers are investing in their  
24 communities as leaders, activists, and healers and  
25 are innovating new models, but despite this

1  
2 tremendous output, almost 1/4 of the immigrant dance  
3 workforce does not receive income from dance-related  
4 activities, they feel undervalued in their  
5 contributions to our city, and encounter several  
6 other legal and societal barriers to accomplishing  
7 their work. Dance NYC is committed to advancing  
8 justice, equity, and inclusion in the arts and the  
9 cultural sector, and we offer the following  
10 recommendations for the City to foster inclusion,  
11 integration, and human rights of immigrant dance  
12 artists, cultural workers, and communities. It is  
13 imperative that the City develop immigrant-specific  
14 programs for both arts and project-funding  
15 initiatives, integrate immigrant matters as a funding  
16 priority in existing arts portfolios, and expand  
17 funding to ensure the inclusion of small budget  
18 groups, fiscally sponsor projects...

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
20 has expired.

21 MILENA LUNA: Okay. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
23 much. This concludes this panel. Again, we will be  
24 reviewing written testimony if you submit written  
25 testimony. The next and final panel, we will check

1  
2 for anyone we inadvertently missed, will be Carlye  
3 Eckert and Mafor Mambo Tse. The next panelist and  
4 witness is Carlye Eckert from Dance Parade. You may  
5 begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls the  
6 clock.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8 CARLYE ECKERT: Good day. Thank you to the  
9 Committee Members for hearing my testimony today as a  
10 representative of Dance Parade, Incorporated. My name  
11 is Carlye Eckert, and I'm the Community Engagement  
12 Director for Dance Parade, New York City's largest  
13 dance event and the dance education provider to two  
14 dozen schools and community centers. As our events  
15 are a United Nations of dance, we present and employ  
16 thousands of immigrants who are a cornerstone of the  
17 artists and audiences we serve, which is why we think  
18 today's testimony is so important. This year on May  
19 20th we will hold the 17th Annual Dance Parade and  
20 Festival in NYC. We believe that live performance has  
21 the potential to awake a communal human experience  
22 and helps build a more equitable and vibrant society.  
23 Throughout the year we serve the dance community by  
24 employing scores of teaching and performing artists,  
25 of which 94 percent are POC artists and immigrants,



1  
2 and, through our programs, we reach over 150,000 New  
3 Yorkers each year. Through donor and Board support,  
4 Dance Parade has created a marginalized community  
5 fund to support the increased participation of  
6 immigrant artists and immigrant-led groups in the  
7 Parade and Dance Fest through free registration,  
8 audio rentals, parade floats, festival booths, and  
9 performance stipends. In 2023, Dance Parade's  
10 Community Engagement Programs will work closely with  
11 public schools across the public schools across the  
12 five boroughs to bring dance education programs to K  
13 through 12 students, exposing them to cultural forms  
14 of dance study and giving them the opportunity to  
15 participate on a global stage at the Parade and  
16 Festival. Thanks to the work and partnerships in our  
17 city that we have developed over the last 17 years,  
18 our programming also extends to older adult centers  
19 in immigrant communities such as neighborhoods of  
20 Corona, Bayside, and Queens, and Parkchester Bronx  
21 where we offer joyful, physical activity, honor life  
22 experiences, and strengthen connections between older  
23 Americans, their culture, and the vibrant NYC arts  
24 community. Through continued efforts, we pledge to  
25 continue our work of bringing the joy of dance in all

1  
2 its forms to New Yorkers and to help strengthen the  
3 visible presence of immigrant dance-making and  
4 culture in our city. We're grateful to the City  
5 Council for financial support as well as the New York  
6 State..

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
8 has expired.

9 CARLYE ECKERT: Thank you very much.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you for  
11 your testimony. The last witness is Mafor Mambo Tse  
12 from Protectors of the Rainforest, Inc. You may begin  
13 your testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

15 MAFOR MAMBO TSE: Good afternoon,  
16 everyone. My name is Mafor Mambo Tse. I am the  
17 Executive Director of Siren - Protectors of the  
18 Rainforest, and our mission is to save and protect  
19 the rainforest because it significantly influences  
20 the health of the entire ecosystem, our planet, and  
21 its people. We do this by creating artistic and  
22 educational programs that incorporate the diverse  
23 cultures of Africa using dance as our Siren call to  
24 locally and internationally mobilize support for  
25 changes to existing regulatory framework, which will

1  
2 also tell you why I'm here today. Our goal is to  
3 preserve, promote, and present the knowledge that was  
4 passed down from generations through African arts,  
5 dances, histories, cultures, musical traditions, and  
6 innovations by forming comprehensive and innovative  
7 educational programming using artistic expression, we  
8 enlighten diverse audiences and bring vital context  
9 to today's issues from climate change to food  
10 accessibility to the crisis at the southern border  
11 which is one of the reasons also why we're here  
12 today. For the past two years and past the end of  
13 2024, Siren will be following the theme set by the  
14 United Nations for the International Decade of People  
15 of African Descent which is Recognition, Justice, and  
16 Development. This theme will continue to play a  
17 defining role in all of our programming. We  
18 accomplish our work by presenting African-inspired  
19 performances. Some of you have been blessed to see us  
20 in action. We also do historical programming that  
21 enhances the community's need to connect with Africa  
22 and Africans for the purpose of development. During  
23 the pandemic, we realized that we could do a little  
24 bit more by using technology to connect students that  
25 live in housing projects here to other students that...

1  
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
3 has expired.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so  
5 much for your testimony. If you can submit your  
6 written testimony, we'll ensure that it will be part  
7 of the record, but it also will be reviewed.

8 At this point, that concludes the panel.  
9 That includes the public testimony so we will read  
10 the names of everyone who registered, preregistered,  
11 submitted a witness list but was not present just to  
12 ensure that we have not inadvertently missed anyone.  
13 If there's anyone who is present online who we  
14 inadvertently did not call, please raise your hand in  
15 Zoom or if you're present in the room and we missed  
16 you, please also raise your hand.

17 The witnesses we missed are Linda  
18 Kennedy, Alex Stein, Ebony Hatchet, George Chu,  
19 Timothy Wong, William Su, Peter Wong, Wallace H.  
20 Zhang, George Li, Roug Bau, Nichole Tujen (phonetic)  
21 we have your written testimony, Ryan Ralles  
22 (phonetic) Green, and Francis Escano (phonetic) as  
23 well.

24 We do not see any hands online or in-  
25 person so at this point we will move to the Chair for

1  
2 final remarks. This concludes the public testimony  
3 portion of this hearing.

4                   CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much  
5 for participating, for folks who are here in person  
6 and all who have testified remote. We really  
7 appreciate the work that you're doing and will  
8 continue to do to support the inclusion of immigrant  
9 art, immigrants in art, and we'll do everything in  
10 our power as Council Members to ensure that the  
11 administration really provides the services, the  
12 dollars, and the resources to ensure immigrant-led  
13 organizations and immigrant artists are prioritized.  
14 I learned a lot, and I'm excited that Council Member  
15 Chi Osse and myself were able to do this jointly.  
16 We're deeply appreciative of our staff across our  
17 teams and on our Committees. Thank you all so much,  
18 and I will close us out. [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 January 23, 2023