

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL

CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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Wednesday, February 15, 2023

Start: 1:25 P. M

Recess: 1:43 P. M.

HELD AT: Committee Room, 14th Floor

B E F O R E: Hon. Chi A. Ossé, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

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

Other Council Members Attending: Williams

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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

ROBERT CURRIE,
New York City Resident; Community and
Labor Organizer

THOMAS GOGAN

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon, and welcome to
3 today's New York City Council hearing for The
4 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
5 International Intergroup Relations.

6 At this time, we ask that you silence cell phones
7 and electronic devices to minimize disruptions
8 throughout the hearing.

9 If you have testimony you wish to submit for the
10 record, you may do so via email at

11 testimony@council.nyc.gov, once again, that is
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

13 We thank you for your cooperation, Chair, we are
14 ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ:

16 [GAVELING IN] [GAVEL SOUND]

17 Good afternoon, everyone, I am New York City
18 Council Member Chi Ossé, Chair of the Committee on
19 Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International
20 Intergroup Relations. Wow, that is always a mouthful
21 to say.

22 Uh, today the committee will hear four pieces of
23 legislation: Resolution 421, sponsored by Council
24 Member Julie Menin, a Resolution recognizing April
25 6th annually as Tartan Day in the City of New York;

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2 Resolution 474, cosponsored by Council Members Amada
3 Farías and Shahana Hanif, a Resolution recognizing
4 February 21st as Mother Language Day in the City of
5 New York to honor the importance of the
6 Bengali/Bangla language to Bangladeshis everywhere
7 and to promote the acceptance of linguistic and
8 cultural diversity in our communities; and Resolution
9 486, sponsored by Council Member Althea Stevens, a
10 Resolution recognizing the accomplishments of and
11 issues faced by Black women by designating February
12 15th annually as Black Girl Magic Day in the City of
13 New York; and Resolution 488, sponsored by Council
14 Member Nantasha Williams and Council Member Selvena
15 Brooks-Powers, a Resolution recognizing the
16 contributions of Delta Sigma Theta to public service
17 by designating March 3rd annually as Delta Day in the
18 City of New York.

19 We are going to keep this opening statement brief
20 today, but I would like to recognize and welcome two
21 of the resolution sponsors who are present today and
22 invite them to provide remarks on their legislation -
23 - or I guess one of them -- and that would be Council
24 Member Williams.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, I am
3 going to read an opening remark actually first on
4 behalf of Council Member Stevens, uh, for her
5 resolution.

6 So, Resolution 486 will be recognizing the
7 accomplishments of and issues faced by Black women by
8 designating February 15th annually as Black Girl
9 Magic Day in the City of New York.

10 For too long our stories have been overlooked
11 even when Black women exemplified the capability of
12 excellence in all facets of life, especially in
13 spaces that were once imagined without us. We have
14 birthed nations; saved this country from itself time
15 and time again, and we have shared our magic love
16 with the world. And that is where the real magic
17 resides -- in our passion, our poise, our love, our
18 dedication of fuel and fire of our presence every
19 day. To all the past generations of Black girls,
20 thank you. For without you, there would be no us.
21 To all my fellow Black girls, remember you are the
22 definition of true strength, and our magic will
23 forever be unmatched.

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2 And, now, I am going to read my opening remarks
3 for my resolution. So, am so thrilled to join with
4 you today, thank you, Chair, for this bill hearing.

5 Resolution 488, a Resolution recognizing the
6 contributions of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,
7 Incorporated to public service by designating March
8 3rd annually as Delta Day in the City of New York --
9 with the support, and along side of Majority Whip
10 Brooks-Powers, as well as support from Council Member
11 Riley, Council Member Fariás, and Council Member
12 Krishnan.

13 Over the past century, Black Greek organizations
14 have fostered safe spaces for Black collegiates in
15 their undergraduate years, as well as graduate and
16 professional careers. Those who sought community,
17 friendship, academic support, interpersonal skills,
18 and lifelong memories and relationships joined these
19 organizations and obtained all of the aforementioned,
20 while also creating a sense of sisterhood and/or
21 brotherhood.

22 United through service and community, Black Greek
23 organizations strengthened relationships as they
24 paved the way for members alike to connect.

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2 These organizations provided us sense of identity
3 and unity in a time where Black people were not
4 deemed equal, nor were they able to join other social
5 or academic clubs. As an example, the first Greek
6 Letter organization Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated,
7 was created because Black people -- Black male
8 students at Cornell University were unable to join
9 Greek organizations there.

10 My sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,
11 Incorporated, was founded in 1913. One of our first
12 public acts was actually marching in the Women's
13 Suffrage March and were actually told not to
14 participate. Today, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority
15 currently has more than 300,000 members and over
16 1,000 collegiate and ILMEA chapters in the United
17 States and other countries around the world.

18 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated programs
19 address the economic development, educational
20 development, international awareness and involvement,
21 physical and mental health, and political awareness
22 and involvement of Black women in Black communities
23 alike.

24 Today, Delta is continuing the legacy of our
25 illustrious founders and paving the way for the new

1 generation by being hands on in our community and
2 throughout government.
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4 Deltas organize communities through a variety of
5 social action activities such as our Delta Days
6 planned in Washington D.C. and our state.

7 Today we are calling on the Council of the City
8 of New York to recognize the contributions of Delta
9 Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and I urge my
10 colleagues to support this when it comes up for a
11 vote. And, thank you so much to Regina, uh, for
12 drafting this Resolution. And I turn it back over to
13 you, Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, Council
15 Member Williams. That was very insightful.

16 I would like to pass this onto Council Member
17 Hanif who would also like to share some brief remarks
18 about her resolution.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you to our esteemed
20 chair, Council Member Ossé.

21 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) Council Member
22 Shahana Hanif. (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 I am so thrilled to move Resolution 474, uh, what
24 I shared in Bangla is that I, uh, our City's first
25 Bengali/Bangla Bangladesh council member in a city

1 that is becoming so renowned with Bangladeshis across
2 all of the five boroughs. We are one of the most
3 visible faces of the working class people. And, in
4 my district, I am the first woman to represent the
5 39th, and I am also our city's first Muslim woman.

6 (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE), which is Mother Language
7 Day, is in honor of the Bangladeshi language movement
8 -- language justice movement. This is a country that
9 fought to instate Bangla in government documents at a
10 time when Urdu was the language of all government
11 resources and documentation. So, the Bangladeshi
12 people decided, at a time when Bangladesh had not
13 gained its independence, that we will pursue this
14 fight to ensure that we can participate in
15 government. And that is a fight that is very similar
16 to the fight we see parallel in our city for language
17 justice. And so, I am so proud that the ancestors
18 and the work that Bangladeshi fighters -- freedom
19 fighters -- led to ensure that Bangla remains
20 preserved, uh, will be acknowledged by New York City
21 at large and this is not simply about the Bangladeshi
22 people; it is about all of our languages requiring
23 representation.
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2 What I also shared in Bangla is that I grew up
3 seeing Bangla in my neighborhood. But, it wasn't
4 until I was diagnosed with Lupus and recognized that
5 because my parents did not understand English, we
6 would have difficulty sharing the pain I was
7 experiencing. I felt the urge and urgency to learn
8 how to speak in Bangla so that my parents understood
9 the pains of Lupus. And, so, that actually took me
10 abroad to Bangladesh for seven months where I learned
11 how to read and write in Bangla, which of course
12 remained a tool for organizing the Bangladeshi people
13 here, but also to get closer with my family.

14 And, so, that is what this work is about, to
15 ensure that we preserve our rich diversity and
16 heritage and culture, but also recognize that our
17 languages are a tool for organizing and a tool for a
18 stronger democracy.

19 And, with that, I will pass it back to Council
20 Member Ossé.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, Council
22 Member Hanif.

23 I do want to acknowledge my colleagues who are
24 members of this committee who are here today: Council
25 Member Ung, Council Member Williams, Council Member

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2 Dinowitz, Council Member Fariás, Council Member
3 Hanif, Council Member Hudson, and online, Council
4 Member Moya.

5 And I want to turn it over to Council Member
6 Fariás to share some brief remarks.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Sure, thank you, Chair.

8 I am super excited for this Resolution 474, one,
9 to have introduced it and to be leading on it, really
10 to be bringing my community's voices to City Hall and
11 to the table.

12 I share the sentiments that Council Member Hanif
13 has expressed, and I am excited to see Mother
14 Language Day being heard at this hearing, but also
15 for an upcoming vote.

16 We... I think what was stated is true in that
17 when we are looking at language access, when we are
18 looking at language justice, when we are looking at
19 even cultures and communities that no longer either
20 have their mother language or have it disappearing
21 day by day, month, by month, you know, due to
22 colonialism or imperialism, this really speaks in
23 resonates with me greatly. And I see the power
24 behind my Bangladeshi community. And, so, I am
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2 excited to be introducing this and to be helping to
3 bring them to the table.

4 And, so, thank you so much for having it heard
5 today. And I look forward to working together on it.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Council Member
7 Farías.

8 Finally, I would like to thank my staff as well
9 as the committee staff and others who worked on
10 preparing this legislation, including Naomi Hopkins,
11 my Chief of Staff; May Vutrapongvatana, my Budget and
12 Policy Director; Brenda McKinney, Senior Counsel to
13 the committee; Regina Paul, Legislative Policy
14 Analyst to the committee, who also drafted these
15 resolutions; and Sandra Gray, our Senior Financial
16 Analyst.

17 Today we are hearing four Resolutions, so the
18 administration is not providing testimony;
19 therefore, we do not need to administer an oath.

20 I will pass it to my committee counsel, Brenda,
21 to call any witnesses who are present for the public
22 testimony portion of the hearing.

23 Brenda?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. At this
25 point, we have no registered witnesses. So, we are

1 just going to check for anyone that we have
2 inadvertently missed online or in person. We will
3 just wait one moment to see if there are any hands.

4 Sir, would you like to testify at today's
5 hearing? We will just wait one moment for one
6 witness. I am also checking for Robert Currie (sp?)?
7 Mr. Currie is present online or in person. Okay, we
8 will just wait one moment for out witness.

9 Okay, you may begin your testimony when the
10 sergeant calls the clock. We use a clock at every
11 hearing. Okay, you may begin when ready, thank you.

12 THOMAS GOGAN: Good afternoon, I want to thank
13 Council Chair Ossé and all of the members of the
14 Council, especially my own Council Member, Shahana
15 Hanif for... And, also Council Member Farías, both
16 of whom are prime sponsors of Resolution 474,
17 correct? I want to speak on the Mother Language Day
18 today. I am a longtime community and labor organizer
19 in the metropolitan area. I learned my first Spanish
20 in the Bronx. And, I, at the home of a Jamaican
21 family, I was a Vista volunteer when I first arrived
22 in New York, and I experienced tremendous hospitality
23 from my host family up there in the Bronx. I later
24 worked on the West Side of Manhattan, and soon came
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2 to recognize the importance of people such as myself,
3 uh, starting to speak the language of so many of the
4 residents of that neighborhood, which were Spanish
5 speaking people from Puerto Rico and the Dominican
6 Republic. Later at as a labor organizer in New
7 Jersey, uh, with what was then the Amalgamated
8 Clothing And Textile Workers' Union, I had the
9 pleasure of being invited into several homes of
10 Bangladeshis in the Patterson Area. And, once again,
11 I experienced tremendous hospitality.

12 So, my basic feeling is that it is so important
13 for New Yorkers of whichever cultural background to
14 open our doors ,you know, metaphorically and
15 actually, to our neighbors who are so readily open
16 mirrors to us.

17 The second point is [TIMER CHIMES] that it is
18 critical for people who speak a language from another
19 country, trying to navigate the complexity of this
20 city, it is utterly crucial that they be able to not
21 only have their language recognized officially, but
22 that it be put into practice in the form of materials
23 that are translated in their language and that in
24 many ways City government needs to open its doors so
25 that those -- whether they are citizens or not --

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2 that their voices be heard. Because they live in
3 this county. They live in this city. They are
4 contributing to this city, and it is very, very
5 important that they be heard.

6 So, that is my basic point. And the last thing I
7 will say, with somebody else, who we are both Irish
8 American heritage, our country was colonized, we
9 are... Our original language was outlawed, and so we
10 now find ourselves speaking English. It was an
11 advantage when we came here; although, there were
12 many other disadvantages. It is so very important
13 for all of us to recognize the amazing diversity of
14 the place that we live in.

15 Thank you very much for your time. And I hope
16 this passes unanimously.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

18 THOMAS GOGAN: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

20 That concludes the panel. We will just check
21 again for any other witnesses who are present in
22 person or online. We are not seeing any hands or
23 anyone in person. So, I will move back to the chair
24 to close the hearing.

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Without further ado, I will
3 close today's committee hearing. Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage and that there is no interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 21, 2023