

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES &
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES &
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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Monday, March 20, 2023

Start: 11:07 a.m.

Recess: 4:26 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Chi 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:

Gale Brewer

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES &
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Linda Johnson
President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library

Tony Marx
President of The New York Public Library [NPL]

Dennis Walcott
President and CEO of The Queens Public Library

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

Alton Murray
Deputy Commissioner at the New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs

Michael Krevet
Chief of Staff at the New York City Department
of Cultural Affairs

Eyitami Oyarijivbie
Teen Center Coordinator at the Queens Public
Library Far Rockaway Teen Library

Amaryllis Greene
Student and Library Advocate

Lauren Bradley
Testifying on behalf of the Board of Directors
for Urban Librarians Unite

Nurys Pimentel
Brooklyn Public Library, Red Hook Branch

Selina Sharman
Programming and Outreach Librarian at Queens
Public Library's Central Library

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

Deborah Allman

Head Children's Librarian-Bronx Library Center
(New York Public Library); President of The New
York Public Library Guild Local 1930, DC 37

John Hyslop

Queens Library Guild, President Local 1321 DC 37

Ronaldo Barber

Brooklyn Public Library Guild, President Local
1482 DC 37

Lyman Clayborn

Coordinator of Services for Older Adults at
Brooklyn Public Library

Michaeline Von Drathen;

President of the Queens Public Library's Friends
of Ridgewood Library

Tammy Reed

Queens Public Library Patron and Advocate

Alaina Mauro

New Yorker residing in Brooklyn supporter of
#CareNotCuts and a #PeoplesBudget

Coco Killingsworth

Chair of the Cultural Institution's Group and
Vice President of Creative Social Impact at
Brooklyn Academy of Music

Adrian Benepe

President & CEO at Brooklyn Botanic Garden

David Freudenthal

Government Affairs Director of Government
Relations at Carnegie Hall and Chair of
Government Relations of Cultural Institution's
Group (CIG)

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

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

Lucy Sexton
Executive Director New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Lisa Gold
Executive Director of The Asian American Arts
Alliance

Angel Hernandez
Director of Government Relations for the New York
Botanic Garden

Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham,
Executive Director of Museum Hue

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

Melody Capote
Executive Director of Caribbean Cultural Center
African Diaspora Institute

Tamia Blackman-Santana
Chief Engagement & Inclusion Officer at Ballet
Hispánico

Anais Reyes
Senior Exhibitions Associate at The Climate
Museum

Jolene Noelle
Senior Manager of Institutional Giving at The New
42nd Street and The New Victory Theater

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

Elizabeth Venditto,
Director of Institutional Giving of The Museum of
Jewish Heritage

Kate Madigan
Government Affairs Coordinator for The Public
Theater

Kimberly Olsen,
Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education
Roundtable

Molly Nolan
Move the Money NYC Coalition, The promotor of
Resolution 423

Jane Tara Currie
Move the Money NYC Coalition

Lacey Tauber
Legislative Director for Brooklyn Borough
President Antonio Reynoso

Lauren Comito
Library Manger in New York City and Executive
Director at Urban Librarians Unite

Candace Thompson-Zachery,
Director of Programming and Justice
Initiatives at Dance/NYC

Risa Shoup
Co-Executive Director at The Alliance of Resident
Theatres/New York [ART/New York]

Sarah Mercanti
Director of Government Relations at
Roundabout Theater Company

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

Giulietta Fiore
The Historic House Trust of New York City

Madaha Kinsey-Lamb
President/Founder of Mind-Builders Creative Arts
Center

Jordana De La Cruz
Co-Director of JACK

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3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, everyone, and
4 welcome today's New York City Council Hearing for The
5 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
6 International Intergroup Relations.

7 At this time, we ask that you please place all
8 cell phones and electronic devices to vibrate or
9 silent mode to minimize disruptions throughout the
10 hearing.

11 If you wish to testify today, please fill out a
12 witness slip and the Sergeant At Arms' desk located
13 in the rear of the room.

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

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ:

17 [GAVELING IN] [GAVEL SOUND]

18 Good morning, and welcome to the hearing for The
19 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
20 International Intergroup Relations. I am Council
21 Member Chi Ossé, chair of this committee. Today we
22 will begin with a hearing on the City's three Library
23 Systems, followed by a hearing on Cultural Affairs.

24 First, I would like to thank all the presidents
25 for attending the roundtable and sharing your views
and concerns regarding the Library's Budget. I, too,

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was very disappointed to see a reduction to the
Operations Subsidy of the systems in the November
plan.

Reductions totaled \$13.6 million in Fiscal Year
2023 and \$20.5 million in Fiscal Year 2024 to 2026.
This council calls on the administration to support
the Library Systems by increasing their expense in
Capital Budgets to meet all shortfalls the systems
have.

This morning, we will be discussing the Fiscal
2024 Preliminary Expense and Capital Budget for the
systems.

For Fiscal Year 2024, the admin is proposing a
\$411.2 million subsidy for the systems. The Fiscal
Year 2024 Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan
includes \$936.6 million, which covers Fiscal Years
2023 to 2027 for the Library Systems.

The Preliminary Ten Year Capital Strategy that is
released every two years, includes \$1.3 billion in
Fiscal Year 2024 to 2033 for capital construction and
reconstruction projects for the systems.

The Libraries continue to make strides since the
challenges presented post-pandemic. All three
Library Systems are regaining attendance as local

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libraries continue to open and get back to normal
operations.

Capital projects are coming to fruition, as once
closed branches become new vital and vibrant
operations for the communities. With all of the work
that the libraries do, the Fiscal Year 2024
Preliminary Plan does not adequately fund the City's
library systems. Additional funds are needed to
support the libraries, so that they can manage the
year over year increase in programming and
circulation expenses and cover the rise in costs of
materials, staff, and operating expenses. Funds also
allow the systems to maintain physical spaces and
cover repairs and upkeep that are not capitally
eligible. Additional funds will help the systems to
embark on new and exciting projects, plan for future
projects beyond addressing emergencies, make
buildings fully accessible to all, and reconfigure
branches for how New Yorkers use libraries today with
increased programming, educational, and community
space.

I want to ensure that the Fiscal Year 2024
Preliminary Plan adequately funds the City's library
systems and they continue providing services to the

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neighborhoods throughout the City. It is essential that the budget we adopt this year is transparent, accountable, and reflective of the priorities and interests of the Council and the people we represent.

I look forward to an active engagement with the administration over the next few months to ensure that Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Budget meets the goals the Council has set up.

I want to recognize the members of this committee who are present, uh, Council Member Ung, Council Member Louis, Council Member Dinowitz, and online, we have Council Member Moya.

I would also like to thank my staff for organizing today's hearing: Naomi Hopkins, my Chief of Staff; May Vutrapongvatana, my Director of Policy & Budget, and I would like to thank committee staff, including, Committee's Counsel, Brenda McKinney; Legislative Policy Analyst, Regina Paul, and Finance Analyst, Sandra Gray.

Now I want to pass it off to Brenda McKinney for housekeeping items.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair, and good morning, everyone. Uh, again, we will just start with a housekeeping items.

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We do not need to administer an oath for the Libraries this morning. But, we wanted to remind everyone that the public portion for public testimony at today's hearings will begin at 2:00 p.m. We also have Cultural Affairs testimony scheduled to begin at 12:30 p.m. if anyone is here early for that.

Again, later this afternoon, for the public portion, we will have a two minute clock, and for all hearings today, we will have a five minute clock for council members.

As the sergeant said at the beginning of the hearing, witness slips can be submitted to the sergeants in the back of the room. And, just a reminder, that if you preregistered, you still should submit a witness slip if you are here to testify in person.

Finally, this is just a reminder that written testimony can also be submitted up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing. Testimony can be submitted to: Testimony@council.nyc.gov . Thank you very much, and I will now go to the Libraries and you may begin your testimony when ready.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good afternoon I am Linda Johnson, President and CEO of Brooklyn Public

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2 Library. Thank you Speaker Adams, Chair Ossé, Finance
3 Chair Brannan, our Brooklyn delegation, and the
4 entire City Council for supporting New York City's
5 libraries.

6 For the first time in my tenure, libraries are
7 facing significant cuts to our baseline operating
8 funding. In total 436.2 million of essential
9 operating funding was not carried through in Fiscal
10 Year 2024 Preliminary Budget.

11 Today, I ask for your continued support, and urge
12 you to reject the Administration's proposal to cut
13 \$20.5 million from libraries. It is equally important
14 that the Council restores its Libraries Initiative,
15 which you funded last year at \$15.7 million.

16 While our top priority is to defend ourselves
17 from budget cuts and maintain adequate service for
18 all, we are also requesting an urgently needed
19 capital allocation of \$80 million per library system,
20 a total of \$240 million.

21 Our public libraries have been a cornerstone of
22 New York City's social infrastructure for *more than*
23 *125 years*. We provide a safe, dignified, and
24 absolutely free library space to every New Yorker in
25 every neighborhood. Our beloved staff, some of whom

you were hear from later today, have been dedicated to serving their communities with resources and programs that make the library, the most trusted, the most democratic, and the most far reaching institution in our city.

We play a critical role, not only in the educational, cultural, and civic lives of New Yorkers, but also in their health and safety. As we are reminded in last weeks, New York Times article addressing the budget cuts and describing our beautiful new branches, "it's a question of recognizing value."

We know that investment in our libraries yields exponential returns in the well-being and vibrancy of our communities. Now more than ever, we should be increasing not cutting this investment.

Over the last several years, libraries have been asked to absorb midyear reductions. In order to meet the City's PEG targets, vacancies have gone unfilled and staffing shortages are resulting in frequent disruptions to service and programming. These deficits persist while our staffing needs grow.

In the coming months, we will debut a new library, focused on arts and cultural in Brooklyn's

cultural district, and open branches in Brower Park, East Flatbush, and Sunset Park, as well as a Center for Brooklyn History. Together this will require 40 new staff positions -- that we are now facing a potential loss of \$36.2 million in operating funds, over \$10 million Brooklyn Public Library alone, is devastating.

A loss of funding of this magnitude would result in a permanent reduction of staffing and harm our ability to deliver service and programming across the system, including in these new branches. It would threaten the progress that we have made with our programs to attract talent and diversify through our library staff, like the Pathways to Leadership program which offers our non-librarian staff, from historically underrepresented groups, scholarships for master's degrees in Library and Information Sciences [MLIS], or our Librarian Trainee program, which recruits and provides mentorship for people with diverse backgrounds and varied educational experience.

One of our recent Librarian Trainees started their career as a custodian at Central Library. Soon after being accepted into the Pathways to Leadership

program, they were promoted to the Librarian Trainee at Brighton Beach Library, where they now create innovative Young Adult programming for the community. We should be in a position to foster these success stories, instead we will be forced to permanently eliminate vacant positions.

If these cuts are implemented, we will be forced to shorten hours, or have Saturday closures, even though the number of library visits continues to rise, and we issued a record 143,000 new library cards last year. Demand is high enough that we are on track to issue 170,000 more cards this year. We will be forced to cut our collection spending at a time when checkouts are on pace to be higher than ever, projected to hit 7.5 million with the more expensive digital checkouts making up half of that number.

If these cuts proceed, we will be forced to make agonizing choices about cutting programs and rolling back critical community services. Our patrons rely on Brooklyn Public Library for a diverse range of civic, social, and educational services -- there is far too much at stake to risk program cuts.

Brooklyn Public Library's Books Unbanned program has loaned over 88,000 titles to teens who have been

denied access to banned books, and its stellar team won a Library Journal's Librarian of The Year and two Anthem Awards.

Our Intellectual Freedom Teen Council helps students across the country protect their right to read whatever they choose. This work even caught the attention of former President Obama, who highlighted the library's efforts to come back censorship in a tweet from his official account.

Our Bookmobiles travel over 2000 miles last year, and they continue to bring books, computers, and library cards to community centers, places of worship, shelters, and parks all over Brooklyn.

We are providing information and services to the thousands of asylees arriving in New York city each month.

The Library's Laptop and Hotspot Loan Program provides relief to thousands of patrons and serves students who lack crucial internet access or the devices they need to connect to classrooms.

Our new hotline and digital navigator program helps patrons access federal broadband subsidies and low cost a free internet services.

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Last year summer reading program gave out 20,000 books for kids and more than 4500 people participated in Brainy Babies an interactive series for early literacy.

We opened a new Teen Tech Center at the Crown Heights Library, offering a wide range of tech instruction including web, video game, and graphic design, programming, podcasting, and robotics. We will open three more Teen Tech Centers this summer at Saratoga, Adams Street, and Bay Ridge Libraries. BookMatch Teen volunteers provided over 400 handpicked personalize reading lists.

And one of our most exciting programs -- "Teen Take Overs" are being hosted monthly throughout the borough. Recently, teens took over libraries in Crown Heights, Brooklyn Heights, and Canarsie, from 6 to 8 p.m. to play video games, board games, enter raffles, play music, use the PA system and annihilate some pizza. Attendance has been brisk an enthusiastic. In fact, much anticipated Team Takeover karaoke night will take place this evening at Midwood Library.

The three library systems in collaboration with New York's fine cultural institutions have been offering free passes with a library card, and the

program reached 200,000 active reservations last month through our Culture Pass program.

And finally, our exciting new programs and collections continue to represent the diverse history and culture of Brooklyn. For example, we are proud to partner with Queens Public Library, The Institute of Museum and Library Studies, and over 40 cultural institutions across the country to honor, promote, and continue the legacy of Hip-Hop, born 50 years ago right here in New York City.

To celebrate this golden anniversary, libraries across Brooklyn will highlight contributions by Brooklyn artist programs on learning to DJ, graffiti art, breakdancing, spoken word, poetry, fashion, movies, and most of all, the music.

The proposed cuts for our operating budget would impede Brooklyn Public Library's ability to host the vibrant and vital programming the community expects from us. While protecting the library's operational funding is my highest concern, providing reliable service and exceptional programming requires branches that are cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It requires elevators that work and roofs that don't

leak. And it requires additional capital funding this year to advance our critical infrastructure projects.

We are facing overwhelming shortfalls in capital funding. Currently, Brooklyn Public Library has over \$340 million in unfunded Capital needs. One-third of these are emergency needs like roofs, HVACs, or fire, safety, and accessible upgrades.

Every year, we spend precious operating dollars maintaining old boilers, replacing dilapidated furniture, and funding, temporary heating and cooling fixes while we wait for long overdue capital projects to be completed.

In our last fiscal year, we lost more than 2,000 hours to unplanned closures or infrastructural issues at 47 of our 61 branches.

Just last week, Cortelyou and Sunset Park Libraries closed unexpectedly because of heating failures and Macon Library the week before.

We have multiple projects waiting to begin construction, or delayed in the planning stages, because we are saddled with \$36 million worth of shortfall some projects scheduled for this year. We are requesting \$80 million in capital funds for FY 24

to help us cover shortfalls and move forward with our critical infrastructure projects.

Chair Ossé, members of the Committee, I'm sure you agree that the cities' libraries are, as the New York Times recently called us "the beating heart of our communities," but the health of our institution, and therefore the community, is under threat.

Cutting our funding is shortsighted. Though we are a small part of the City Budget, only 0.4%, we have an outsized impact on the well-being and vibrancy of the entire city.

You have shown that you recognize the value of our public libraries. You can help make this budget a reflection of your priorities by ensuring the Administration's proposed \$20.5 million cut to libraries is reversed; by restoring the Council's Library Initiative of \$15.7 million; and by advocating for each of our library systems to be awarded \$80 million in capital funds.

The future of our libraries depends on your leadership and support, thank you.

PRESIDENT MARX: Good morning, My name is Tony Marx, I am the President of the New York Public Library.

You have my written testimony, I am going to summarize here.

I want to start by, of course, thanking Speaker Adams, Chair Ossé, and all of the members of the committee for inviting us to testify and for your amazing support of the libraries, but importantly for our communities, for the citizens who depend on the libraries. That's what is at stake here.

We know that the libraries, as we have all heard eloquently from other speakers outside, and now from Linda and I'm sure from Dennis, that we offer vital support to all regardless of background, income, birthplace, or beliefs. Libraries are indeed for everyone -- which is why they are the most trusted civic institution in this town.

Now we see a greater urgency for the work of the libraries as we attempt our best to more equitably rebuild this city and where its heading.

We have responded to challenges on so many fronts -- focusing our efforts more than ever on those underserved communities and finding more recourses and more opportunities for those who need them most.

The City's proposed cut of \$36.2 million seriously hamstrings our ability to even continue

with this agenda, which we have all worked so hard to build the momentum of over the last years.

The scale and magnitude of these cuts would impact our operations across the board, our capacity to open new branches -- just after we have invested huge amounts of capital in them -- to keep our current hours, to maintain our collections, to offer the extensive educational and other programs.

Today, I want to quickly summarize for you not just what the library does, but what the City and the citizens stand to lose from this level of cuts.

We will start with the basics -- our collections, we provide crucial access to reading materials, especially in neighborhoods where there simply aren't books at home. We are that collection of information and make it accessible.

We have done everything we can to go further. We eliminated late fines, absorbed that cost. We gave away -- at the NYPL -- 500,000 books as part of a \$2.8 million special investment in kids' reading this summer. It is why we are investing \$1 million -- on top -- of our collections budget, so that we can make sure that the collections in then neighborhoods

reflect the people of that neighborhood -- the power and the diversity of the citizenry.

We also need to get our collections out to educators and partner with the public schools, so we have created a center for educators and schools to do just that: workshops, fellowships, providing lesson plans, primary documents, making the teaching even more exciting for our students.

And, then, there are all of our education programs, that, again, we have together been building and changing what a library means, so that it can be relied on as the proactive education centers and service centers in our neighborhoods, including our least recourse neighborhoods, where there often are no other resources.

So, we need to target all ages. We have our early literary efforts with story time, and I think in FY22 we have 131,000 attendees there. Our after schools are now at 31 sites. Our new Teen 360 Initiative is expanding. We know that we have to get the kids, the teens into the libraries. We need to offer them the latest technology, the latest programs, that's what brings the teens in. And we know that that works from our flagship teen center at

the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library in midtown.

Teens are coming from all over the city to use that

music studio, that maker space. And in partnership

with the mayor, and with private funders, Google,

Best Buy, the Joly Family Foundation, we have 20 teen

centers in libraries in the lowest income

neighborhoods in the city. And we need to keep

building that not reducing that commitment.

Asylum seekers, you have heard as well, of

course, because we are the most trusted, most

welcoming, we are everywhere in the city, in every

neighborhood across five boroughs, so naturally, the

asylum seekers come to us. They know they can trust

us, because their family and friends say they can.

They are already coming for the largest English

language instruction offerings for free in the city.

So, now we have got, as Dennis said this morning, we

have got folks seeking help lining the block around

the Bronx Library Center and so many other of our

locations. We are providing 5,000 "Welcome Kits".

We are trying to get library cards directly to

everyone, working with the Humanitarian and Emergency

Response and Relief Centers. All of that to ensure

that New York's -- not just tradition -- but its

obligation -- the source of, the power of this city,
is its availability to attract diversity and talent.
It always has been. Here is the latest wave, we are
standing up to be the welcome for that. We cannot
reduce that investment without risking our reputation
as the city that is the city of immigrants, and that
is why it is the most powerful city on the face of
the planet. We cannot give up at that.

Civic engagement, we need our teens, we need all
of our citizens feeling like democracy can work for
them. Again, because we are the most trusted,
because we have already been involved in
participatory budgeting, we have said what else can
do? How can we take the teens who come in for the
technology and for the programs, and say, let's
create some paid positions to get teens involved in
topics. Let's explore, and we are doing this now,
how we can use our trust and the patrons who are
ready there to engage in local efforts to redress
issues, so that people can see -- the people in the
neighborhoods -- can see that democracy can actually
deliver for them. And we continue all of that
proactively, and at the same time, we understand in
this moment, in this national climate of a rash of

book bans and protests of Drag Story Hours, that we have to stand by as an institution -- that is part of our civic engagement to say we are committed to the mission of everyone having the access to the materials, and the programs, and the opportunities that they seek.

Lastly, I will just say on the capital front, you have already heard, if we don't have great inspiring spaces that are not leaking, we cannot do any of the other things that people rely on us to do.

We have, together with the City, made great strides, and we know that when we bring renovations to a close, it has serious effect on uptick in terms of usage. In Washington Heights, the neighborhood I grew up in, after our renovation was done, we saw a 105% increase in attendance.

We have other major recent renovations, Roosevelt Island, New Amsterdam, Bloomingdale. We currently have projects underway in five major Carnegies. And also know that we... And we have major renovations at six locations that are expected to conclude during the fiscal year, including, again, in the neighborhood I grew up in, Inwood, a project that is

adding 177 fully affordable housing units on top of
the library -- as well as a community center.

Our current capital needs are based not only on
the basic necessities, like heating and cooling, but
also reflect given neighborhoods' income levels.
Together our total needs are \$536 million, and that
includes the much needs major renovations we week to
do, Tompkins Square, Seward Park, Francis Martin,
Spuyten Duyvil, Hudson Park branches, amongst others.

We know that the City has been working at the
capital process reform through its taskforce. We
continue to look for success there, so that we can
have an even more effective partnership with the
City, and in particular with DDC, to get projects
done on budget and on time. We know that it is
essential that be part of the Ten Year Capital Plan,
and we look to you to advocate for that.

Let me conclude, for years, public libraries have
been stretching our limited resources to meet the
growing needs of New Yorkers. We have in effect done
and are doing much more with basically the same level
of funding. We have done that in partnership with
you, it is only possible because of the support of
the City Council and the Administration, that we can

1 continue to do it. And we have stepped up because we
2 have to. Because the City needs more, and because
3 there is no one else so readily available. As the
4 mayor likes to say, "we are the Swiss army knife of
5 meeting the citizens' needs" because we are ready and
6 flexible and able, because of our amazing staff, to
7 do these kinds of initiatives -- our Teen Centers,
8 our English Language, creating these beautiful new
9 branches. All of that is potentially at risk with
10 this budget.
11

12 Now, I am not proposing, we are not at the place
13 to say what will stop or what needs to stop, we are
14 simply trying to give a sense of the scale of what
15 this level of proposed cuts... this is not something
16 we can simply absorb. This is going to hit us and;
17 therefore, hit the citizens of New York. And it just
18 seems like that would be a terrible shame and a
19 reverse of all that we have all worked on together
20 with the Administration, with its investments, to get
21 this done. We should not be at this painful place
22 given what the library does and how we all feel about
23 it. It is a great shame to think or even imagine
24 that our services would be disrupted, that our
25 openings of branches would be postponed. Those kinds

of cuts, none of us, including the mayor, want to see that happen. And we have to work together to make sure that we have the budget fully restored so that that won't happen. Thank you for your time, Mr. Chair.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Good morning. It is a pleasure to greet you, I am Dennis Walcott, President & CEO of Queens Public Library (QPL, Library). It is a pleasure to be here today, Chair Ossé, Speaker Adams, and the members of this esteemed Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on our budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

I also want to add that it is nice to be on this side of this of the table and not the other side of the table as in the past, so it is a pleasure to be here with my esteemed colleagues as well, uh, Linda and Tony.

I am going to give a summary of the summary of the presentation that was given earlier, because you have heard it all, you are going to hear it -- not as much from me, but also what you will hear today is just the uniqueness of our three systems. And that we are all alike a lot, we also have our unique ways of doing business based on our communities as well.

And it is really an honor to be a part of this three system approach, because it really serves the community.

So, what you will hear from me, basically, is just a quick summary of some of our unique programs at Queens. But, more importantly, trying to just reinforce the message that both Linda and Tony indicated earlier.

Our libraries champion needs of young people, QPL's -- Queens Public Libraries -- Kickoff to Kindergarten program develops early literacy skills through guided activities and story times for children ages three to five and promotes at-home literacy and conflict analysis strategies for adults.

For our new caregivers, we started QPL Baby: New Mamas Virtual Support Group, to bring resources and support directly to caregivers with infants from zero to twelve months old.

Families depend on their local branches for extracurricular activities and afterschool support. Our Stacks program is our premier after school enrichment program, which gives children in kindergarten through fifth grade the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom in a safe environment.

This past summer, for the first time since the pandemic, we resumed hosting free summer meals for children and teens in our libraries in collaboration with The New York City Department of Education. At the same time, through summer reading, our young customers enjoyed our thoughtfully curated book lists, discussed the latest young adult novels at book clubs, and competed in our reading challenge which logged 488,000 minutes among 1,100 participants.

We are thankful to the mayor for recognizing the critical roles libraries play in the lives of teenagers who need our support now more than ever before. Under the Mayor's teen initiative, we are expanding our successful Youth Justice Corp, giving more people leadership opportunities and providing communities with alternative responses to youth crime. We are helping young adults get their GEDs, providing resources like case management, loanable laptops, and career workshops. We are engaging teens in podcasting, robotics -- which a matter of fact, took place this weekend and our libraries, with a rousing competition that took place -- coding as well, songwriting, an upcoming series of programs

focused on mental health -- which we know is particularly crucial for adolescents right now.

Building on the model of our Far Rockaway teen librarian, QPL is upgrading teen centers at Central, Cambria Heights, and Flushing libraries and establishing a new teen center at the Long Island City Library as well. With guidance from our dedicated staff, even more teens are able to develop creative and technological skills and receive counseling and resources to navigate the college application process, identify post-secondary pathways, and learn firsthand about the impact of community service and civic engagement.

Throughout 2022, QPL launched several groundbreaking initiatives to meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve. To combat rising prices and food insecurity, in partnership The Food Bank of New York City, we hosted 18 food pantry events at Laurelton, St. Albans, and Rochdale Village libraries benefitting nearly 12,000 people in 2,860 households.

In an effort to preserve and remember the borough's history, our Queens Memory Project launched Queens Name Explorer an interactive map that uses

crowdsourcing to collect and share the stories behind
the names of our local parks, streets, and schools.

And now we have LanguageLine: A live, phone-based
interpretation service with the ability to interpret
240 languages available at every public service
location, improving our access to our resources.

With the influx, as Tony and Linda indicated,
asylum seekers coming through our doors, LanguageLine
has been incredibly useful. In addition, these newly
arrived individuals who visit our Central Library
each day to apply for an IDNYC card, and a cadre of
library staff volunteer their time to provide
interpretation services to assist with the
application process. We have also conducted outreach
in shelters, providing asylum seekers with books,
games, school supplies, and gloves, as well as
information on free library services such as our New
Americans Program. The Americans Program has been
assisting our newest residents as they adjust to life
in America while celebrating their cultures in the
most diverse place in the country.

Our Mail-a-Book service, which operates from the
Queens Village Library, helps homebound customers of
all ages receive library materials delivered directly

to their doors. In Fiscal Year 2022, user activity increased by 34%, with service to over 23,700 customers who received some form of Mail-a-Book service.

As part of our "See You on the Outside" program, staff prepared individuals for reentry from incarceration by helping create professional resumes and providing resources tailored to their work experience and skills. Through our Technology Reentry Program, we equip people released on parole with smartphones that connect to online resources and services, including QPL programming, and we provide technology assistance and job training to support their reentry goals as well.

Last month, as indicated, QPL along with Brooklyn Public Library and New York Public Library, and other cultural institutions -- which also earned me mad props -- officially launched our commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Hip-Hop. QPL's inaugural event -- and this is where the mad props come in -- was with legendary rapper, author and producer, Chuck D. So, I now have a picture with me and Chuck D, and our Uncle Ralph who is our fulltime Hip-Hop coordinator, Ralph McDaniels, talking about the importance of Hip-Hop

and what it has meant over the last 50 years. All associated programs will be recorded and catalogued in QPL's digital Hip-Hop archive, preserving these innovative recourses so that they are readily available for all in the future.

In 2022, our combined in-person and virtual programming attendance doubled from the previous year to roughly 628,000. Now a bit more than halfway through the current fiscal year, our total attendance has surpassed that. And what you really hear from all of us is that libraries are here; we are serving the public; we continue to grow; we continue to innovate, and we are here to make sure that people are able to benefit.

I am not going to go on, because you have our testimony, but what I do want to stress is a point that Tony and Linda mentioned as well, is that our capital needs are tremendous -- just like our program needs. And our capital needs provide our communities, your communities, with high quality buildings. We cannot afford to close because of leaks. We cannot afford to close because we don't have heat. We cannot afford to close because there is a breakdown, and then using our expense money

1 instead of capital money. Our need is for more
2 capital dollars, and then there is a direct
3 correlation between the capital and the personal
4 size. Because, as you have heard me talk about
5 before, and us before, in that a lot of us had 7500
6 square feet Lindsay (sp?) Boxes. Those Lindsay Boxes
7 are going by the wayside now, and we are growing our
8 7,500 square feet buildings to roughly 15,000 -
9 18,000 square feet. And when you grow a building,
10 then you need additional personnel as well. And we
11 cannot afford to cut our personnel. We have to
12 maintain our staffing and grow our staffing to meet
13 these demands. And there is a direct link between
14 the capital and the expense side of what we do.
15 Because, as I indicated outside, we are for free. We
16 are here to serve the public. Our goal is to make
17 sure we continue to innovate as well as provide
18 diverse collections, both in-person collections with
19 books and materials, as well as the e-materials as
20 well. We are here to serve you. We are here to
21 serve the public. But most importantly, we are here
22 in partnership as a part of the city that we love.
23 Thank you very much.
24
25

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you to the three
presidents of our wonderful systems.

I do want to acknowledge Council Member Hudson
who has joined us.

I will aim not to ask many of the questions that
you all have answered throughout your thorough
testimonies. And we do have written copies. But, I
apologize in advance if I am asking questions that
you have already answered.

But, for Fiscal Year 2024, the Admin has
proposing a \$411.2 million subsidiary for the
systems. This is a reduction in the subsidy of \$42
million from the fiscal 2023 Adopted Budget. In all
three of your testimonies, you mentioned that these
cuts will be detrimental to libraries, particularly
to staffing and operations. How would a restoration
of these cuts and allocation of the Library's
Initiative help support our libraries?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I will start.

The issue really becomes how much we sustain in
terms of reduction of positions and reduction of
collections -- the two sort of buckets that we have
to pull from. And if we receive the level of cuts
that are being proposed at this stage of the budget

cycle, we are in jeopardy of losing 78 positions at a time when we actually are desperately in need of increasing over 40 positions in order to staff some of the new libraries that are coming online.

PRESIDENT MARX: Similarly, uh, so if you take the PEG that has been proposed, \$9 million to New York Public Library, some of that we would have to look to reduce the Library Material Budget, which seems like a great tragedy, given that people are eager to read this material and often have no other access to it. But, the largest, as with Brooklyn, we would not be able to avoid reductions in our positions -- roughly 85 vacant positions we -- as guestimate -- would have to be reduced. And ,you know, we just want to put that into... You know we don't know exactly how we are going to do this, so we very much hope we will all agree not to do this. But, we are trying just to level set with a sense of the scale of that kind of cut. A 10% cut to our basic ,you know, to our baseline funding is the equivalent to 10 fewer branches in our system at a moment when we are reopening six. I mean, again, it is sort of crazy to imagine that we would invest this kind of money to create these wonderful new branches, which these

neighborhoods desperately need, and then find that we don't have the money to reopen those, or we don't have the money to open all of them or to lose a day a week or six hours per week systemwide. Again, I want to very clear, those are not our plans. That is just to give you a sense of the scale of what this cut would do to our ability to deliver on what New York depends on us for.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I just want to add one point, and one point is that, we are a lean operation, plain and simple to start out with. I mean, all three systems, we are extremely lean. And we are effective for really being that lean. And any further cuts to the system really go beyond effectiveness and being lean. It is counterproductive to what we would be facing. And, like Tony and Linda indicated, we are looking at a variety of options and how we are going to handle any proposed cuts. And it may impact staffing. It may impact hours of operation. It may impact a variety of a number of things, and as we get closer, we are doing deeper analysis. But, just with your permission, Mr. Chair, just take one example, since I only see one Queens member here, and, so, I want to just do a quick story for a

second, because the council member who is here, as she indicated outside, Flushing is part of her ecosystem basically.

One year the City called on Libraries to open up its doors because of a tremendous heatwave on the 4th of July. And I will never forget that. And we got maybe a couple of days' notice. We turned it around, we opened it up, just like that. And, at Flushing, without maybe two days notification, we had God knows how many people came through that door... close to 5,000 people came through the door on that one 4th of July.

If we don't have the staff in place to do that, to turn that around, then it puts the City at risk. And that is why I think what you are talking about with potential cuts and what it means to us, it will impact us in ways that people just take us for granted for. And we cannot be taken for granted, because we are there providing services -- cooling centers, you name it -- we have talked about it before. Vaccine sites, we are just there. We are always just there serving the public in so many ways. And then to correlate it to what Tony said about ,you know, and Linda, the new branches it is just totally

counterproductive. I mean, we are going to opening up Far Rockaway at some point, uh, this calendar year. It is going to be a brand new library out there. And maintaining our teen library in Far Rockaway at the same time. We are about to make some tough decisions as far as how we manage that type of growth, because it is going to be a bigger, more beautiful library, and at the same time, we have the burden of making sure that it stays open. These cuts make that type of decision making more difficult.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, I will just add something, uhm, Chair Ossé, outside, said "We are beyond cutting to the bone, we are cutting to the marrow." And, it is not only about sort of what our operating schedules are, but when you are running as leanly as all of us are right now, you risk emergency closures, because somebody gets sick or calls out. And, so, you have... And, in our case, we have, I think, 2,000 hours of emergency closings over the past year, which means that the community that counts on you to be open when you say you are going to be open, which is the fundamental tenet of librarianship, is actually disappointed, and in some ways in a way that definitely impacts their daily

lives. And we work hard to ensure that we are open when we say we will be open, but when you are as thinly staffed as we are, it doesn't work. And it has been going on for too long.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

We want to return to staffing. I am going to ask one more question before turning it over to Council Member Hudson.

But, I also want to ask about the impact right-wing, homophobic and transphobic harassment on the three systems that are happening here in our city.

And I would like to point out that the Mayor is cutting funding from our public libraries at the exact moment that they are under attack from right-wing groups -- most especially whenever a library hosts Drag Queen Story Hour.

We should be lifting up and supporting public libraries right now, not pulling their funding, and defunding them in that the way that we are seeing within the November plan and this coming budget.

And, I wanted to ask you, because this has been on my mind a lot recently, but how are library systems navigating this current threat?

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES &
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Let me start. We have been hosting Drag Story Time for a number of years. And when the former chair of Finance was the council member Jackson Heights, again another mad prop, you know, this online video of Council Member Dromm and I with the Drag presenter reading to the children. And that was four of five years ago. So, we have been doing it for a good while. And the contrast of the demonstrations that took place in Jackson Heights in the streets around a month and a half, maybe even two months ago, compared to what was going on in libraries is just totally different. In that, chaos on the streets, but at the same time, quiet and productivity inside the libraries. It is a direct correlation to the professionalism of our staff being able to sort all of that out. But, at the same time, libraries should not be put that position at all. And we have a responsibility to make sure that we are both providing our core services and making sure we have the reading programs and offering diversity to our population, and we are fully committed to doing that. In April we have several more Drag Story Times on the books that we are going to be doing both in Elmhurst and Jackson Heights. And, then, we have

also now created a new way of doing it as well, in that we have given some of the library managers the ability to opt in if they want to do it, and we will self-fund it at this particular point. And that is solely based on the correlation of the money from that local council member. So, we believe in it fully, and we believe in protecting our staff. And, the other thing is, when we talk about staffing, we also, for us at least, we are talking about security as well. And we have to make sure that our staff are protected, and not just around Drag Story Time and all of the issues the challenging issues connected to that, but just what happens sometimes with the public, because the other thing that we face, is a public that is wanting and needing, and a lot of them, unfortunately, sadly have a lot of emotional issues as well. And we have a responsibility to do that, and the cuts in funding make us take a look at how we address that as well. So, all of that is connected to making sure that we open for Drag Story Hour, blocking out the noise outside, protecting our staff, allowing the diversity of who we are as a system in the democracy that we believe in to make

sure it takes place fully and protected in the library.

PRESIDENT MARX: Dennis has been really eloquent, I will simply add that it is our responsibility, it is our mission, it is our basic DNA that we offer the diversity of views and books and material from the most wonderful to the most horrifying, so that people have a choice of what... because we believe in a democracy, people have that choice of what they want to read, what kind of programs they want to go to or take their kids to. Our responsibility is to guarantee that choice. And when the cultural wars turn on the libraries and try to say, no, we should not offer that choice, that is a dark day. All citizens have a right to protest. We have a right to manage that protest so that we can continue to offer the choice of programs that we people decide they want to go.

I will just say, at a moment when are seeing book banning around the world, where we are seeing disputes around Drag Story Time or our other programs, I just want to be careful, if the arguments around the culture wars, if we let ourselves sort of get distracted, we will... the culture wars will

win. Because, fundamentally, if the culture wars arguments keep us from being focused on the budget threats to the library, then the most fundamental form of banning or of limiting access will actually take place -- which is the libraries won't be there to do our work. You know, we will continue to provide the array of options. And we will protect New Yorkers rights to have those choices. And we all need to protect the choice of everyone to have a library that is open, that has the books they're looking for, and the services, and the great librarians. That is also at stake here.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Not much more to add here. But, I will say that ,you know, we have in some ways in New York City, the luxury of living in a place where books are not being banned or challenged in the way that that they are elsewhere in the country. But, we don't have the luxury of saying that this doesn't affect us, and, therefore; we won't pay attention to it. Because it is the very inattention to the issues, I believe, that is creating these issues around the country -- not the people necessarily ,you know, in our nation want to see censorship, but that are not paying close enough

attention, and it is being very well orchestrated.

And, we, in Brooklyn, feel strongly enough about this to be trying to make a difference across the country -- with private money -- but, also, that when we do have events in Brooklyn where we are concerned, we are definitely beefing up public safety. We just had a Drag Queen Story Hour last week, which was charming, at the Central Library, but we made sure that we had increased police presence. And that's a sad thing. I will say it kind of hurts my heart to be reporting this. But, like my colleagues and counterparts in Queens and New York Public Library, we are really committed to this work. Our very purpose of being here is to be sure that we continue to be the most democratic institution in our society, and that we will protect everybody's right to read what they choose.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Can I add just one more point to this, because, as you know, our former Chair of Libraries, Jimmy Van Bramer, is a true believer in making sure we had the diversity... And also what Drag Story Hour represented, and I think back to when the chair was here, and we were out at Broadway and other libraries, the drama that is taking place now,

1 did not exits, quite frankly, like that then. And
2 what is happening now is the politics are using us to
3 really focus on what you are talking about with the
4 culture wars, and we cannot allow that to happen. I
5 just feel so strongly about that. And we have a
6 responsibility... What Linda is doing around her
7 national work, is just tremendous. And, we have a
8 responsibility to, either here locally or nationally,
9 to be the leaders in making sure we draw that line.
10 Because we are a library system, we are truly an open
11 democratic institution. And we cannot allow our
12 staff, we cannot allow the people who come to us as
13 customers, to be impacted and affected by the culture
14 wars that are taking place outside our buildings. And
15 that is what funding, believe or not, does, because
16 it allows us to have... Imagine, as Linda indicated,
17 if we had to shut the doors because of lack of
18 funding or the lack of staff, and that particular
19 community is not getting the service they need
20 because of that? That is unacceptable. And our role
21 and responsibility is to make sure our doors open, we
22 are staffed well, and all things diversity, including
23 Drag Story Hour, to make sure that the public gets
24 that full opportunity.
25

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right. And history shows that it is never a good sign when a civilization starts banning books and defunding its libraries.

Council Member Hudson?

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much, and thank to the chair for accommodating me. I have to leave in just a moment, so I appreciate the time.

First, I just want to say on the record, and ,you know, this is just reiterating what you have all said, but obviously our libraries are so much to so many people, from our youngest neighbors to our oldest neighbors, the fact that libraries are free and are welcoming to absolutely everyone, I think, uh, how we invest in our libraries and what we do with our libraries speaks to how we value our people and New Yorkers in particular.

So, with that, I have one question, and that I kind of my thing that I am always... Because, I think libraries should be open for longer than they are, and there should be consistent hours every day, so that everybody knows, same hours, no matter which library systems that happen to go to. But, obviously funding doesn't allow for that to happen. So, I am just curious to know from each of you, what is needed

from a fiscal perspective in order to be open consistently, let's say for example, I will use my local branch, which is the Central branch of the Brooklyn system, as an example, which is ,you know, Monday through Thursday, 9:00 to 8:00, and then Friday and Saturday 9:00 to 5:00 or 6:00, and then Sundays from 1:00 to 5:00. So, in order to get Monday through Sunday 9:00 to 8:00 p.m., what would be needed from an investment perspective? And similarly for your other systems, what is needed to just have consistent hours every single day of the week?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for picking up the mantle of Gale Brewer. We have been asked this question many times over the years, and we all would like to be open ,you know, seven days a week, eight hours a day. We also would like the ability to tailor those hours so that they make sense in the communities, because not every community has the same pattern of usage. It doesn't make sense to keep the library open early in the morning if no one is going to show up. But, basically, the challenge with this question is always, uh, the fact that Sundays are now voluntary, and getting to full staffing on Sundays is

a challenge, and it involves a union negotiation, which we are not adverse to by any stretch, but we would need... Before we even start talking about what it takes to be open seven days a week, we need to make sure that we get our funding just so that we can maintain the hours that we have now. And those are the numbers that we have been talking about today. To then go beyond those numbers, we need to deal with the union, and we need hundreds of thousands of dollars more in order to be open a seventh day.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MARX: I think Linda captured it. You know, we have worked hard over the years, and obviously the pandemic a spanner for a time, but to increase our hours and to make sure that they are consistent, they vary sometimes by neighborhood to neighborhood, because needs vary, but we need to be open as much as possible, and people need to be sure that we are open. And the risks of the sort of short sighted cuts, that means we don't have enough staff to ensure that its open, or have capital issues arise that require to close because they haven't been handled in a proactive sort of systemwide planned

way. You know, those are all serious impediments. Once the customers... Once our patrons lose the confidence that we are open when they believe us to be open consistently, that's a problem for us. We need to be clear to our patrons that we are there. We would love to go to seven days a week. We would love to fulfill the contract signed between the City and Andrew Carnegie about the hours involved. We understand that there is a reality of the budget. So, we are simply saying don't reduce what we can do at this point, and anything more we can find funding for, as Linda said, requires a discussion not only with the City and the budget, but with our key partners at DC 37, so that it can work in terms of the rules.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: What is the total number of employees at each of the systems?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: For Brooklyn it is just under... It is 1,266. And then also part-time people, about 200 part-time people, and about 2,000 volunteers.

PRESIDENT MARX: We are at currently fulltime salaried staff of 2,081, part-time salaried staff at

45, and I am proud to say that our hourly staff is up to 654, which is a restoration of the page program and an expansion of it. We are using it as a key workforce development effort for, not just for the library but for the City. And we are training our amazing pages, not just in library work but in the work of our finance department or communications. Again, we already... 25% of the frontline workers at the New York Public Library started as pages. We love that tradition. We are so glad to be back at it. But, we want it also to be a model of workforce development for the teen community of the City.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Thank you, Tony.

We have 1,453 staff, uh, fulltime 979, part-time 474, uh, roughly 88 to 90% are union staff.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how many vacancies does each system have?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We currently have at Queens 131 fulltime open positions that are unfilled at this moment.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Right now in Brooklyn, we are sustaining 46 vacancies, and if we sustain this cut that is currently being proposed, it will result in another 64 vacancies. So, we have been hiring even

with the looming cuts, because we were so thinly staffed because of the great resignation. And we are actually at that point now where we are able to hire faster than we are losing staff, which is hugely helpful. But, we have, through this process, learned that we are able to attract. We are not having a problem hiring any more. We need to continue the momentum going forward.

PRESIDENT MARX: We are at roughly 100, I think it is actually at 105 staff that we are currently actively recruiting for. I will say, good news, that there is... Our annual turnover rate is starting to come down. It had gone up obviously with the pandemic, for all of the reasons we all know, and that has started to turn around. Again, we just cannot lose the momentum of this hiring, and if we do, because of the budget, it will have all kinds of systemic effects.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just because I find it interesting, maybe you will as well, but in the last six months, we have hired 150 people, and it represents 10% of our total headcount. And that is just in a six month period. So, after really struggling to be able to maintain staffing levels, we

are finally beginning to fill some of these
vacancies.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And the same here.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, President Johnson, you
answered part of this question, but I would love to
hear from all three of the systems, how many
employees did you have to lay off after the November
plan, and how many would you expect to layoff if
these cuts were made?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, you know, we haven't had
to lay off anybody, because we have has these
vacancies that occurred during the pandemic. So, the
way we have managed the PEG was to make sure that we
were keeping vacancies open rather than actually
eliminating people's work opportunity.

PRESIDENT MARX: I will just say the same and
proudly so. In the height of the pandemic our
commitment was not to lay off ,you know, not to reach
for that horrifying instrument of laying off the
folks that make the library what it is. Then you're
making up for negative momentum rather than riding
the positive. And we were proud of that. It speaks
to our values. But, it also speaks to our
understanding of what makes the library the essential

institution that is, which is our staff, and we cannot be laying off folks. We need to be adding folks for that to work.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I just want to reinforce that point. The values that we have for our staff are just so high, so we definitely did not lay off any staff at all, nor was the word layoff used at all. Through [INAUDIBLE] we took the PEG. And, then, also, and I am not sure about with Linda and Tony, but I know with Queens, we have also faced a challenge of having longevity of staff as well. And, so, a lot of our staff started retiring. And they said... It's part of the great resignation. They said it's time. And, so we are faced with the uniqueness of having staff who have been with us for a long period time doing great work, and they are saying ,you know, I just want to step down at this point. So we had that. And, then, the uncertainty of what will be happening in the future, and now we are starting to turn that corner, and that is why it is important to maintain the level of funding, because we are starting to see, especially with May approaching and graduations coming and hopefully new people coming into our systems, uhm, that allow us to

1 start to really have the increase in the number of
2 personnel versus a decrease in the number of
3 personnel.
4

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I would just like to add that
6 ,you know, we are grateful to the support that we got
7 from city council and the administration during the
8 pandemic. It allowed us to be one of the very first
9 institutions to reopen so that ,you know, we closed
10 in March like everybody did, but that July, we
11 started opening again -- and carefully, obviously to
12 make sure that we were protecting everyone's health
13 and well-being, operating with two teams so that if
14 somebody got sick on one team, the other team could
15 swing in to play, so that the library didn't close
16 again. So, we... We were careful not to lay off
17 anybody, but we didn't sick back and take advantage
18 of that by any stretch. Instead we just stepped up
19 everything that we were doing.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I do want to acknowledge that
21 Council Member Joseph is here as well.

22 I am happy to hear that no layoffs have been made
23 due to the November plan. But, I do want to hear,
24 would we expect there to be layoffs if these cuts
25 came into fruition after this next budget?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I think the issue that we will have to manage our level of staffing. And, uh, should we ever get to the situation where we have enough people that we would actually need lay off, of course we would have to. Right now, we are managing it by maintaining vacancies.

PRESIDENT MARX: Just to reiterate, I think we all agree that would be the last thing we would reach for. And , we will do everything, as we have in the past to avoid that, because of the dislocation it produces ongoing, and it makes it... it stops us from being able to do what we do, because it keeps us from having who are and the people who make us who we are.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And just to add to that, I think the complexity... I give our chief librarian and the team a ton of credit in the managing of schedules. And we have such requirements in how we manage our staffing patterns to meet the hours that even the council member referred to. And the type of domino effect that would have on bumping and what it means, it is not part of our conversation at all. And while, unfortunately, we have [INAUDIBLE] we have the ability though to absorb what we did with our PEG

through that. But, beyond the point of where we are at now, it is going to be totally counterproductive to the systems.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

As asylum seekers continue to use the libraries for recourse and services, it is critical that our libraries have enough bilingual staff. How many bilingual staff members does each of the systems have, and how much more bilingual staff are needed to meet the demands?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We are all looking to the back... I don't believe we have that number, so I am going to give you, with my colleagues' permission, just to say a lot.

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

We represent the communities where we are located. And, so, I don't know if we have a breakdown of that, but as I indicated also in my testimony, when we don't have staff who speak the language, then we have LanguageLine as well, which helps tremendously. But, we have a lot... Linda, do you want to...

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, I don't have specific numbers, I will say that we are providing services in

over 30... I tend to exaggerate, so I am being
careful not to, my gut tells me it's close to...

(CROSS-TALK)

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I think you're underselling
yourself...

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Exactly, it's like 80
languages that we are offering services. And when we
don't have library staff who are able to offer
English as a second language, for example, in a
specific language, we bring in volunteers do that.

PRESIDENT MARX: We do incredibly, we will get you
the numbers...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MARX: The simple fact is that we would
like to do more. We want more diversity, and more...
We need more of those language skills. And I will
just reiterate, it is not just the... It is crucial
that our staff of the librarians can do that. It
also, for instance, remember I mentioned multi...
You know, a million dollar investment in making sure
that our collections continue to be diverse -- in
addition -- and ,you know, the collections are
remarkable in terms of the language array, and that

is in the branches as well as, obviously, in the research library. So that is ,you know, both in terms of staff, but also in terms of the material and the collections. We are recommitting, and we are committed to that kind of diversity. We have to be, because that is what our patrons require of us.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Are the systems at this time still experiencing any shortfalls as a result of the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic? And, if so, how do these cuts exacerbate these existing fiscal issues?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm not sure I understand what you mean by shortfalls. I mean, we are ,you know, still, uhm... We have learned a lot from COVID-19, in terms of how to manage people and social distancing, and ,you know, how to sort of fill in when somebody is sick, and we have testing and protocols. And protocols are what happens when you actually test positive. And I think we will forever be operating a little more cautiously than we did before the pandemic. But, in terms of shortfalls, I don't know, it sounds like a financial question, and we, as I said, have not laid off anybody since the pandemic, we have just taken a lot of hits because of

the high, high levels of vacancies that have
experienced because of people resigning.

PRESIDENT MARX: We have certainly been gaining
momentum since the pandemic in terms of filling
vacancies. [BACKGROUND NOISE] [NO MICROPHONE]
[INAUDIBLE] the cuts, it is getting harder for us to
do that, right? [INAUDIBLE] sort of use those
vacancies to fill a hole and during [INAUDIBLE]
you're in an unhappy cycle at that point. And ,you
know, that is what we are trying to avoid here.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yes, basically the same thing.
I mean, when I heard the word shortfall, we used a
lot of the special monies that were allocated in the
beginning of the pandemic to buy masks and everything
else, and, so, you know, we have stock piles still of
some of those items, so we will be able to draw on
that. But, as Linda indicated ,you know, we are
always very careful in how we are doing business.
And I think the other piece of what we do is making
sure that we reinforce with staff, still, are the
proper protocols that we have in place, so we don't
take it for granted. I mean, even though I see like
the positivity rate in New York City is at 3%, and we
see a direct correlation as far as where the City

positivity rate is and what is happening with us, we have been able to now have more of our staff, in having updated protocols as far as where we are with the pandemic at this particular point in time. And, so, from a shortfall point of view, you know, the shortfall is based on a PEG more than anything else.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: The libraries have been a hub for our asylum seekers, I believe the number is over 60,000 new New Yorkers, as you all testified at our December hearing, you have seen an uptick in library attendance. For example, President Walcott, you have noted that there are lines outside of the Jamaica branch for New York City ID support. Why are libraries critical partners for our city in responding to large scale crises, in events like COVID-19, and the arrival of new asylum seekers?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I guess that single word answer to that question was... is trust, that we are such a highly trusted institution, that people understand from family and friends that when you come to this country, the library is the place that you should go, that not only can you get everything that you need, but also you can do it without fear. And, so, we have seen an enormous number of people since

the asylees began, in Sunset Park in particular in our case, but there are demands for the services that you mentioned , the, uh, IDNYC cards, we are filling up backpacks and taking them to shelters so that kids have books, and we are trying to make sure that they are feeling welcome in the communities that they are now calling home.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Word of mouth is a powerful tool. And positive word of mouth is even more powerful. And the positive word of mouth is tremendous when it comes to our libraries as far as people knowing that they can get trusted services. And Linda said something I think outside, and I just want to reinforce this point as well, we are not just a stationary building, we have our mobile libraries out there on a regular basis as well. And, so, our mobile libraries are going out to shelters and to other communities just to make sure that they are getting the services. And a lot of times people just are not aware that what we are offering in our buildings, our mobile libraries also offer out in the streets as well. And that gets to the people directly. But, again, I think the transferability of what they get in our buildings, we find them now

1 taking advantage of the other services at the library
2 as well. So, their initial point of entry may be the
3 word of mouth for asylum seeking and [INAUDIBLE]
4 benefit with IDNYC, but then there's a beneficial
5 impact as far as them being true patrons of the
6 library and getting the full array of library
7 services.
8

9 PRESIDENT MARX: Your story of the public is the
10 same, uh, certainly lines around the block at the
11 Bronx Library Center and IDNYC is a crucial part of
12 that. Various partnerships, I'd be happy to send
13 you... We have many that, as we all come together
14 around this crisis, I am happy to share that with
15 you, Mr. Chair.

16 Again, I think the basic answer is, as my
17 colleagues have said, we are trusted, because people
18 see our values and they see that we are consistent
19 with them in ensuring access and opportunity... they
20 know that we are consistent in our doing that, in
21 being open to doing that, and the libraries have
22 always been the first port of call for the immigrant
23 communities, going back ,you know, to our founding
24 over a 100 years ago -- for all of those reasons.
25 So, it is not surprising that in this latest wave,

uhm, that we would be that port of call that people come to, because they trust us. It is just an indication of why it is essential to keep investing in us, because these issues are continually coming at us. We have to be here and have the capacity to respond so that ,you know, otherwise no one else will. Because we are where folks come in this city first.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how would a restoration of these cuts, as well as an allocation from the Libraries Initiative, better help you in the work that you are doing when it comes to these asylum seekers?

PRESIDENT MARX: Well, to start with that means our doors would be open, and we will be fully staffed ,you know, to be able to address these additional needs from us.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And also to be able to implement programs that are specifically tailored to the new needs of these new Americans.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: In that same vein, how is the demand for library services changes since the influx of asylum seekers, and since New Yorkers have gone

back to work and school after quarantine? If you can provide numbers from your perspective...(CROSS-TALK)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, I think that the biggest change that we have noticed in Brooklyn is the need for more one to one types of delivery of services opposed to programs that deal with larger groups with people. And it has just been an adjustment since we have reopened or slowly, gradually ,you know, got to full complement. For example, helping people connect to programs that are affordable but give them internet access. And it is a complicated process and it requires somebody to see... one person -- one staff person -- one librarian sits down with one patron to get that accomplished. And, so, we are seeing a shift in that way, which, of course, is not quite as efficient in terms of a delivery service, but it is critical to make sure that we are successful. And this goes back to the staffing issue. This is... We are in a very labor intensive business, and to do it well, we need to be adequately staffed, and to do it well these days takes more staffing than ever if you combine the type of service we are doing and the fact that we are all expanding our footprint.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I think that the change that we have seen, believe it or not, is the need for more chairs, quite frankly, because you have people coming through the door, who may not get an immediate service right away, and, so, the waiting time and getting, say, IDNYC, requires people to stay longer, and then they are taking advantage of other services as well.

So, we see more communities engaged in a variety of different ways. And I think the level of engagement that Linda talked about with staff being so both empathetic as well as sympathetic to the populations that are coming through our door. And them coming out and working with folks on a variety of their needs, and not just the initial point of entry of why they are coming through our doors. And that [INAUDIBLE] say more chairs, because you have people who are sitting there longer, people who are bringing their children in, especially their young children, and it has puts more types of demands on our staff. And to have fewer staff then to respond to that, then again, it is counterproductive as far as what the overall goal of the library is.

PRESIDENT MARX: The... I think we have reacted in part by trying to provide a baseline of help. So, our 5,000 "Welcome Kits" for instance is meant to provide sort of a baseline. Then we know we need to sort of do more than that, so we are reaching out and going into shelters, going to say to folks, "That's what we are here for," right? I mean, the... And, then as Dennis just said, it... One of the things the library can do, because we are in every neighborhood, that is the key, is give people the bespoke help. You know, people have their own questions, their own fears. It is beautiful that they come to us. And it is even more beautiful when we are open, and have the funding, and have this amazing staff who can help people. There is no other way we can... The City can put that best face forward. And, again, you have heard from us, and I know you believe as strongly as we all do, in the essentialness of New York continuing to welcome that diversity, under any circumstances, to ensure our continued energy and centrality.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I just want to add a point to that, in that it's not just the asylum seekers... I mean, the City knows our doors are open. And, so,

then want to, and rightfully so, take full advantage of our doors being open, and having one stop shopping basically. Whether it's the Fire Department or MOIA, or whether it's the services through the Human Rights Commission, they can take full advantage of reaching a high volume of people as the result of the rightful role of the city of New York in providing access at a very local level. And if you shrink the hours or shrink the staffing capacity, then you are going to deny the overall goal of the interconnectedness of the City to its communities using the library. Because, a lot of us are very clear, we are not the initial... We are not the provider of the service a lot of the time, we are the glue for those services - to allow services to come in our door, and that's where community partnerships are about.

So, again, there is a direct connection between the multiplicity of responsibilities that we have as a library and the multiple contacts of City agencies and community based organizations that take rightful advantage of us.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Are you all able to provide numbers or percentages in terms of the increase in

attendance that you have been seeing this past year
or the past two years since the pandemic?

PRESIDENT MARX: Sure, we'll get you some.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

A question that I have asked the three of you
before... Uh, Council Member Joseph, do you have any
questions? I'll pass it on to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair, and
thank you for what you do. You know, I always say
that. You guys were the lifeline during the pandemic,
as I was teaching and running for City Council at the
same time. So, thank you for all that you do.

My question is, your partnership with New York
City public schools, how is the budget cut going to
impact that programming?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: As we said earlier, we have
not exactly formulated how... where and how we will
make cuts. We know that we will need to. And we
know that it will have the most significant impact on
our staffing levels. And that, of course, translates
to a reduction in a number of programs that we can
offer and the number of hours that we have to offer
those programs. So, you know, I always say that
there is nothing like a situation where you have a

library that's in close proximity to a school with a great principal. It just... You know, everything sings. And we count on that, and, uhm, I hope that are able to continue that.

PRESIDENT MARX: Dennis, in particular, can obviously can be very eloquent on this subject as he should be. I think we have increasingly acknowledged and stepped up as proactive partners. I remember when I got to the library and the man to my left was the chancellor, and we negotiated what is now a five borough system of my libraries, NYC, I think it serves close to 500 schools, sending out, like, 5,000 kits and book sets really when the students don't have access to anything else. Now, we are stepping up again and saying, we need to help teachers with lesson plans and primary material ,you know, and help them grapple with the hard issues that kids are grappling with, but have the material to do that. That is why we have launched a whole new center for educators and schools. We want to be more proactive in that partnership. Funding cuts simply make that ,you know, put that on the list of horrible choices we might have to think about reducing. And we don't

want to do that and the City doesn't really want us
to do that... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: As the Chair of Education,
how can I give support... Always. And the adult
programming, do budget cuts also impact that, because
I know you provide ESL for the adults, your GED
program, can you go into details with that?

PRESIDENT MARX: If we have to close branches or
reduce hours, that in itself reduces access to our
programs. We are the largest providers of free
English language instruction in this town -- after
the schools in CUNY. We are the largest computer
skills, and job skills, and job placement, and all of
the things that folks need, uh, the public schools
and elsewhere. And if we don't have... If we get
this kind of scale of cut, we simply will have to
make choices you don't want us to make about what we
won't be able to do. And that seems a great shame
given what we mean.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I mean, even at the most
fundamental level, if a student cannot come to the
library after school to take advantage of the free
Wi-Fi, that affects ,you know, that student's ability
to do their homework. And that is the most

fundamental. And it just continues to increase with every level of sophistication of the programming that we do offer. And, so, it gets down to this allocation of resource issue. And ,you know, these are choices that nobody wants to have to make.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Absolutely not.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Every library is local. And, part of being that local is developing the relationships with the relationships with your local school and the local district itself and the parent coordinators and having that type of partnership. And if we don't have as many hours or if we don't have as many staff, than that definitely impacts that. And, then, Linda basically said what I wanted to say as well as far as... It gets down to ,you know, drive by a library at three o'clock in the afternoon, and you will see the hub of activity at that library, because the students know where to go. And some of them are going for the right reasons, some of them may not be going for the right reasons, but we still want them there. And if we deny them that opportunity of knowing whether it's open or whether there is the ability of having a teen librarian there or whatever the case may be, then you

are denying those students that opportunity and access. We are working with several of our districts to really be even more comprehensive at getting a library card in the hand of every student in a particular district. And that is our goal, but it requires staff to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Absolutely.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: It requires the outreach; it requires our mobile libraries going to a particular school if that school isn't... And that is all part of the partnership. And, then, broadening it beyond schools to what we are doing now [TIMER CHIMES] and what the City is doing with its UPK program [Universal PreKindergarten] and how you broaden to the UPK at making sure that the early childhood providers are taking full advantage as well. And that is a labor intensive activity that we all pride ourselves in, but that can potentially be denied as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. And the libraries are a safe space for young people, thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Council Member.

And as we all heard outside at the rally from some personal accounts, libraries provide a safe haven for our neighbors and even current council members. I am particularly excited for the opening of the Brower Park Library and the teen center....

(CROSS-TALK)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Me, too...

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: That will provide the use of my district with a new safe community space to gather in. As the City continues to talk about public safety and how we can reduce violence in our communities. I want to highlight and affirm the role our libraries play in promoting public safety.

In your own words, why is investment in our libraries a significant and crucial investment in public safety for our city?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, I think part of the effort that we have all been making with the Administration's support on the Teen Initiatives is probably most illustrative. And that is, we know that the longer the kids are staying in our libraries and using the libraries, I don't think there is a bad reason to come to a library.

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

However we get them in there, we'll take them.

But, the longer they are staying in the libraries and

the more interesting programs that we are offering

that attract teenagers, the better off they will be.

Uh, there are a lot of shiny things that are out on

the streets, and our objective is to keep teenagers

in our branches throughout their high school career,

so that they can prepare for college and the

standardized tests and everything else that allows

them to take the next step in their educational

career. It is all connected. It makes for safer

communities, better educated communities, more vital

and interesting spaces. We love libraries where

people of all generations are rubbing shoulders,

where they are seeing their neighbors whatever age

they might be. And, so, you know, sort of, success

in one area begets success in others.

PRESIDENT MARX: I'll just ,you know, in order to

achieve the level of public safety that we want, we

cannot just be investing in policing. We need to be

investing how to prevent the kinds of public safety

concerns that then feed the debate about policing.

And that means we need to be, as everyone has said,

open and providing opportunities and programs, and demonstrating that our democracy and our economy can work for our teens, for our citizens. And that is what the library is about. And it is pretty fundamental to public safety I would say.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

Uh, how many capital projects... We are almost done with the questions... But, how many capital projects are still outstanding for the three systems?

PRESIDENT MARX: Outstanding, meaning currently active, or what is it you would like?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Currently active, awaiting to be completed.

PRESIDENT MARX: We have 43 projects totaling \$364.9 million that are currently active projects. But, we also have some amazing ones recently completed -- Saint George, Jefferson Market, Charleston, uh, Mount Haven, and some that are scheduled to come online in FY24. Happy to give you that list. Uh, we are making incredible progress, but as you have heard from our testimony, it still leaves us in the hole in terms of what our capital needs are. And ,you know, and I just want to stress again the Ten Year Capital Plan is so essential for

Libraries, which have almost never been included in it. We need to be in the Ten Year Capital Plan, so that we can plan and deliver for the City on the investment it is making in capital in the way we are so good at. We have an amazing team, Iris and her colleagues do amazing work, but we have to have the resources to be able to do it -- rather than, as Dennis is about to say, stealing them from our spending budget... our expense budget.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I would say spending budget or expense budget, whatever you feel is appropriate.

So, we at Queens have 33 active projects, and 10 in another... Another 10 in the DDC front end planning. But, I don't even know if that does fair justice, because ,you know, just, again, even though the council member is no longer here, talking about Flushing as an example, that is such a complex project. I mean, we are working at night to make sure we keep the library open during the day. And we have side by side work taking place with a variety of projects taking place in Flushing, because Flushing is so massive. So, that in itself, while viewed as one capital project, is a multiple number of projects going in to one project itself. So, uh, we are

extremely busy with our capital work. But, again, we need more money, because ,you know, there is always going to be... Going back to the word that you used earlier, Chair, there are always going to be shortfalls. And the shortfalls that take place because of the rising economy, the, uh, the delays of products coming over from overseas. And, so, it is a very difficult challenge right now.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn, we have 70 projects that are active, and that is the easy answer. We can give you a breakdown of who is managing what, where they are, what stages, and perhaps most significantly, uh, how much money is involved. And we will get all of the data to you. But, it is a total of 70.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, President Marx, you hinted on this, but what are the barriers to completing some of the projects -- if there are any?

PRESIDENT MARX: Well, funding for one thing, and a steady source of funding, which is why the Ten Year Capital Plan, and ,you know, we know the Administration's been working at trying to reform the capital construction process. We applaud and encourage those reforms, and would like to see more

1 of them. We have all talked about this, we all value
2 our colleagues at DDC, but we also have to
3 acknowledge the reality that when we work projects
4 through DDC, they take twice as long and cost twice
5 as much, and that means that the citizens of New York
6 are getting half of what they should. We cannot
7 simply fund all of the projects ourselves. We depend
8 on the City. We are contractually connected to the
9 City for its capital. But, we need more funds, and
10 we need a process that enables us to get the jobs
11 done effectively and on budget, which we are very
12 capable of, and which the citizens and the government
13 deserve.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how many capital projects
16 are new projects, and how many projects are
17 maintenance projects?

18 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We will get you a whole list
19 with a breakdown of exactly where they are in the
20 process and how much money is being allocated to each
21 one. Is that...

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: That's... yes.

23 The last question that I do have is, again,
24 President Marx, you brought this up, the library's
25 preliminary Ten Year Capital strategy is frontloaded

and does not necessarily reflect when the funds will be used. Do the systems work with OMB to come up with the strategies?

PRESIDENT MARX: Absolutely, we work very closely with OMB, and they understand ,you know, our interests and are very responsive to it. You know, again, they have to make choices, it is our job to encourage them to make the choice in the direction of ensuring the kind of funding that means we can provide the kind of libraries the people deserve, and ,you know, a process that will continue to ensure that going forward across the board.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And I just want to reinforce that point, because OMB is so key in the process, and we have close working relationships with OMB and are always trying to analyze and make sure the funding is there. Sometimes the funding is there -- sometimes it may not be there, and it is our job to try to make sure that we get the funding. But, again, as Tony indicated earlier, we still need the allocation of capital dollars to increase in order to meet the current needs that we have.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I do have on last question before turning it over to Council Member Brewer -- if she has any questions.

But, what do the libraries need in terms of funding to ensure that buildings and infrastructure are maintained?

And you may not have that number available right now, but if I...

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I can tell you this, you know, forget new projects, which... I don't forget them, but just generally, uh, we have about \$340 million of differed maintenance across over 1.1 million square feet of real estate, in 61 buildings with 61 roofs, boilers, HVAC systems. It is a big, physical footprint that requires adequate funding. It would be great if we could be funded enough so that we could do work preventively instead of just reacting to emergencies.

PRESIDENT MARX: Mr. Chair, we calculate the NYPL's today systemwide capital needs to be \$536 million, obviously the vast majority of that \$507 million -- four branches. Uh, you know, we need to get from here to there in order to ensure the outcomes that you all want.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We approximately [INAUDIBLE]
\$165 million over a 10-year period of time. But,
constantly reviewing and assessing based on the
current needs. And going back to something you asked
earlier ,you know, we will get the specifics around,
say new library buildings verses HVAC and other types
of maintenance types of things, but also that fall
under DDC.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Uh,
one question is, uh, one question is, and I hope...
I'm next door with Police, so I apologize that I
wasn't here earlier, but DDC costs too much. I told
them that. Do you find that they cost too much? And
what would be the hope of them going away and you
doing your libraries yourselves? And what would be
the cost savings?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: They cost too much. We can all
agree on that... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, I told them that.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah.

Uhm, and in terms of them going away, that is a
complicated question. We have in Brooklyn have done,

and I think my colleagues to the same, is that we manage certain projects ourselves, specifically the ones that are larger, that have an aesthetic quality to them, and that we can do so much less expensively, and also so much more quickly, and so that we don't take libraries offline from our community for as long a period.

The problem is that if we were to make DDC go away, we would end up becoming a development company that is taking care of all of our roofs, and our boilers, and our HVAC systems. And we don't really want to do that. And what we need to figure out is how to... how to get that work done in an efficient way cost effective and timely way.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And, so that needs attention. Anybody else what to add to that?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, I mean, everything that Linda has said, in addition, it is not that it costs too much, it takes too long. And, I think those...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Time is money usually, thought, right?

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yeah, yeah. [INAUDIBLE] all, and I just think that it is important to highlight

1 that as well, because there's a direct detriment to
2 the system if it is going to take five years --
3 making up a number, but maybe not -- of replacing a
4 boiler at "x" price. And that just cannot be done.
5 And, so, we took it on ourselves to do it, because we
6 knew we could do it, one, cheaper, and then obviously
7 in a shorter period of time. As we didn't want to
8 have a library without a boiler during the winter
9 season.
10

11 So, I mean, all of those factors go into DDC, but
12 also on the flip side, DDC is working hard, and I
13 know the Administration is working hard to try to
14 reform it. And I don't know how it going away would
15 really help. I think the help is making it more
16 efficient and less bureaucratic, and allow us... not
17 just DCC, but the whole review process itself, which
18 involves other city agencies to be a part of that
19 process, because DDC gets the heat. But, at the same
20 time, it is more than a DDC issue. It is a number of
21 agencies that are impacted as a result of that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

23 Next issue is technology, which I know quite a
24 bit about. So, I wanted to know if you have budgets
25 for that for the future? And ,you know, things have

maybe... maybe five-year... three-year shelf time,
and then you have to start all over, because you have
such great usage. So, what is your technology
budget? And, also, I think you still get e-rate, and
I know you are trying to, in some cases to make it
more available, uh, to the community. I didn't know
where FCC was on that or if you are still focusing on
that?

[ALL SPEAKING]...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Iris knows everything, so
I am [INAUDIBLE]... (CROSS-TALK)

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yes, Iris spoke so we all
listened, yes...

PRESIDENT MARX: So, our current new technology
needs as budgeted are \$52.6 million. I can go
through how that works, but we provide... because we
have 5,600 desktops, 5,000 laptops, 1,250 Wi-Fi
access points, all of which need constant
refreshment. The funding source you are describing is
[BACKGROUND NOISE] [INAUDIBLE] reducing and the needs
of people in this area are increasing. We have not
solved the digital divide...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

PRESIDENT MARX: in the city that is the center of world communications there is some number, 1.5 million - two million, we don't even know folks who don't have broadband at home. They rely on the library. We also need to help the solve that problem. We need to be an advocate, and we are working at that. You shouldn't just... You shouldn't have to come in to the library... New Yorkers should have that kind of digital access as a baseline... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Over \$52.6 million is what you will need for need is what you will need for technology for the future, is what you are saying?

PRESIDENT MARX: That is our current submission to OMB.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, all right. The other libraires?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Our budget is \$10 million. I am trying to figure out how come it is so small...

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

[INAUDIBLE] I going to have to beef that up.

But, you know, the issue really is trying to stay ahead of the curve. So, for example, taking desktops offline. We are migrating to laptop lending and

greater use of laptops and the footprint of technology... [TIMER CHIMES] uh, you know, is ever decreasing, which is a positive thing. Really, as Tony so eloquently stated, the issue is being on the wrong side of the digital divide. So many of, uh, people who are come and depend on the libraries' free Wi-Fi and also all of the tech training that we do that goes with it. Of course, the pandemic shined a light on just how egregious the situation is, and all of the libraries stepped up during the pandemic by making sure that our Wi-Fi was accessible even if you had to sit outside to get it.

PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We will get you an exact breakdown of our numbers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

And, then, finally, you're going to get me... Someone is going to get me what it would be for a seven day a week budget? Right? I haven't forgotten.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I just want to say, Council Member Brewer... (CROSS-TALK)

PRESIDENT MARX: Linda invoked your name...

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: that... Yes, I invoked your name...

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

because you are doing a good job training your
new protégés. Crystal Hudson was here earlier and
asked that question... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, good...

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Gale's absence, uhm, she
chimed in with the question... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Good, okay, all right.
Then I will get it from her. Thank you very much,
Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you to you three for
being here today. And thank you to all of your staff
as well...

[LIBRARIES]: Thank you...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: for showing up.
Brenda?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: thank you so much, that
concludes the Libraries' portion of this hearing. We
will now be moving to the Cultural Affairs portion.
We will just take several minutes to coordinate
switching witnesses. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: All right, good afternoon, and
welcome to this hearing for The Committee on Cultural
Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup

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Relations. I am Council Member Chi Ossé, Chair of
this committee.

Before we get into the discussion regarding the
Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget, I wanted to reiterate
that it was my pleasure to sit at a roundtable with
the Cultural community and hear firsthand, your
concerns and your ideas regarding CDF process
transparency, DCLA staff and capacity, equity and
funding across boroughs and neighborhoods, baselining
of additional Cultural funding, and the need for
continued post COVID recovery support for the
Cultural community.

I will begin to advocate for all of this and more
as we move through the different cycles of budget
towards adoption.

This afternoon, we will be discussing the Fiscal
2024 Preliminary Expense Budget for DCLA, which
stands at \$149.8 million, and the Fiscal 2024
Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan, which includes
\$1.2 billion in Fiscal 2023 to 2027, and a Ten Year
Capital Strategy, which includes \$1.5 billion in
Fiscal Year 2024 to 2033 for the department.

The agency has a robust capital program that is
currently funding more than 413 capital projects on

behalf of approximately 214 art organizations,
representing a Cultural capital investment of \$1.5
billion.

At the urging of the Council, the Administration
added \$40 million in additional funding at adoption
of the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. This funding
provided much needed support to both the Cultural
Institution Group and Cultural Development Fund
recipients. The Council is disappointed that the
funding is not included in the Fiscal 2024
Preliminary Plan; it is imperative that this funding
be baselined to meet the needs of the Cultural
community.

In the Fiscal 2024 budget, the Council will
continue prioritize Cultural funding with our
numerous initiatives, such as Cultural After School
Adventures (CASA) Initiative, the Cultural Immigrant
Initiative, Cultural Coalition of Theaters of Color,
Art A Catalyst for Change Initiative, and the SU-CASA
Creative Aging Program.

It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that
the City's budget is fair, transparent, and
accountable to New Yorkers. Hence, as the Chair of
the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and

International Intergroup Relations, I will continue to push for accountability and accuracy and ensure that the budget reflects the needs and interests of the City.

It is essential that the budget that we adopt this year is transparent, accountable, and reflective of the priorities and interests of the Council and the people we represent.

This hearing is a vital part of this process, and I expect that DCLA will be responsive to the questions and concerns of council members. I look forward to an active engagement with the Administration over the next few months to ensure the Fiscal 2024 adopted budget meets the goals that the Council has set out.

I would like to recognize the members of the Committee who are present: Council Member Brewer and Council Member Moya who is online. I would also like to thank my staff for organizing today's hearing, Naomi Hopkins, my Chief of Staff, May Vutrapongvatana, my Director of Policy and Budget, and I would also like to thank Committee staff including Committee Counsel, Brenda McKinney;

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Legislative Policy Analyst, Regina Paul; and Finance
Analyst, Sandra Gray.

Brenda?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much,
Chair. Before we move to the oath today and
Administration testimony, we are just going to do a
few housekeeping items.

Just as a reminder, the public portion of this
hearing will begin at 2:00 p.m., this is the Cultural
Affairs portion. If there are questions for the
Administration, council members will be limited to
five minutes, and the Public clock will be two
minutes for the next portion.

If members of the public are here to testify at
two o'clock, just a reminder that even if you have
registered in advance, it would be helpful if you
please see the sergeant and fill out a witness slip
in advance.

In addition, the Council will be accepting
written testimony for up to 72 hours after the close
of this hearing, which can be submitted to
testimony@council.nyc.gov.

So, at this point, we will move to the oath, and
then we will move to the Administration's testimony.

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Today we have Commissioner Laurie Cumbo from DCLA -- the Honorable Laurie Combo -- Deputy Commissioner Alton Murray, and Chief of Staff Mike Krevet.

If you can please raise your right hand, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and to answer council member questions honestly before this committee today?

[ADMINISTRATION AFFIRMS]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. And, at this point, Commissioner, you may begin your testimony when ready.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Good morning, Chair Ossé -- and also a Happy Belated Birthday to you -- and members of the committee. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, here to testify in regards to the agency's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget. I am joined today by a number of my colleagues from the agency.

I'll begin today's testimony with a review of the budget numbers. The Mayor's proposed Preliminary Budget allocates a total of \$149.5 million for DCLA. This includes \$28.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund; \$111.1 million for the Cultural

Institutions Group; \$6.8 million for Agency Operations; and \$3.2 for other agency initiatives such as the energy funding for cultural groups on DCLA property.

I want to point out that at this same point in the budget process last year, DCLA had \$145.2 million in the proposed Preliminary Budget. These figures are exclusive of any one time additions to the agency's budget, including Council funding, which is added at budget adoption later in the year. Our budget currently stands at \$238.1 million for the Fiscal Year 2023, an all-time record for City funding. This mayor and this council both stepped up to invest in our amazing, remarkable, unbeatable, cultural sector. And we're committed to continuing to provide robust support to this essential part of what makes our city thrive.

Now I'd like to provide a few updates from the agency, and show you how we put our funding to work for our cultural community and all New Yorkers.

As commissioner, I am not allowed to have a favorite part of the agency but if I were, Materials for the Arts might be it. For those who may not know, MFTA, is a DCLA program devoted to diverting

hundreds of tons of items from the waste stream to cultural nonprofits, City agencies, and public schools, which have access to a huge range of donated items from furniture, to buttons, fabric, beads, markers, plants, costumes, and so much more the thousands of MFTA members who visit this 35,000 square-foot wonderland of reuse, education, and creative energy shares my enthusiasm. And for any council members who have not been there, we look forward to welcoming you. The Team there, led by MFTA Executive Director, Tara Sansone, are up to amazing things in support of our cultural community and public school educators. Their artist residency is thriving, with an amazing show on display now by artist Sui Park, and Obie award winning artist set designer, Machine Dazzle started as a new MFTA artist in residence -- you have to check it out. The MFTA team also recently worked with ACS to provide items donated by Kate Spade to 350 young people in the foster care system. The City's film and TV sector also continues to make major donations to MFTA members. In just the last few months, 12 television shows have donated to MFTA, including HBO's The Time, Travelers Wife, Showtime's City on a Hill, Disney+,

Wu-Tang: An American Saga, FX's American Horror
Story, and Amazon Prime's The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.
This is an incredible partnership.

Through MFTA, the huge variety of materials
they've donated are going to theater companies,
public schools, homeless shelters, asylum-seekers,
and other MFTA members who are doing incredible work
for our communities in all five boroughs. And,
again, if you have not been, please check out MFTA
and encourage all of your schools to do the same....

(CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: [INAUDIBLE]

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I know you've been there.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I have?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You haven't been to MFTA yet?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: No.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: What! We've got to get you
out there. I know Gale Brewer has definitely been,
probably many times this time. So, we are going to
make an appointment to make sure that you get there
and to bring your entire team.

DCLA's Capital Unit is focused on the next round
of applications. We've already received dozens of
applications for FY24 capital support, and nearly 400

representatives from cultural organizations attended our lively, meme-filled capital webinars. City capital funding for cultural projects continues to be one of our best long-term investments we can make for our city. I am so proud that last year, working with Mayor Adams, the city council and borough presidents, we provided over \$220 million in new funding for cultural capital projects in all five boroughs --from Snug Harbor on Staten Island to the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance in East Harlem; from Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, to the Noguchi Museum in Queens, and Universal Hip-Hop Museum in the Bronx -- these capital projects will define our cultural landscape for generations to come, and we're so proud of the City's role and making them happen.

We're looking forward to a number of major new facilities coming online that the City is proud to partner on, such as the American Museum of Natural History's incredible new Gilder Center. The message and all of this is clear -- New York City is back, our cultural community is thriving, our ongoing recovery and the City is a critical partner to our cultural community in shaping and driving these wide ranging projects.

Our Programs Unit has also been working hard to roll out the next round of the Cultural Development Fund. We will be launching the Fiscal Year CDF application in the next coming weeks. We are very excited for some of the first this year's application will include, and we're confident that anyone who has filled out a CDF application before will be excited, too. There will be a new, user-friendly platform; a single online application that will replace the old multi-part application process that many organizations experienced difficulty with. We have expanded character limits for narrative questions; and the ability for multiple users to work on applications simultaneously -- this is really game changing. The amount of work that goes into these seemingly simple, but critical update is immense, and I thank my team for pushing them forward. These upgrades have been many years in the making. The customer experience will be a simpler, more modern one, we promise.

And beyond these technical upgrades, our CDF process will continue to build on major reforms we implemented last year. These reforms marked a major step toward making this critical source of funding

for NYC's cultural community more equitable and accessible.

As the first competitive grant cycle since the onset of the pandemic, we weren't sure what the response would be to the new reforms. But, we had a record number of applications -- around 1,400 -- and a record number of grantees: 1,070. And 73% of these grantees received more funding thanks mainly to increases in minimum award sizes.

All groups are now eligible for multi-year awards, a source of stable funding that was previously available only to large organizations.

The average baseline awards for small groups with budgets under \$250,000 increased by 67% by BIPOC led groups also saw major benefits: more than 82% of groups that identify as being led by or founded by people of color saw an increase in their baseline awards.

There was also an increase in the number of awards for first time applicants, with 125 groups in this category receiving funding, versus just 47 in the previous competitive grant cycle.

The reform process is ongoing, and the FY24 CDF grant cycle will build on these far reaching efforts.

I thank my amazing Programs Unit for their commitment to this process. I also want to shout out Helene Bleiberg, outgoing Assistant Commissioner, who has led our Programs Unit through these challenging times. We are grateful for her service to the City, and we will continue the work she started.

Our Public Art Team is bringing incredible artwork to public spaces and institutions around the City. The public artist in residency or PAIR program currently has artist embedded with a number of City agencies. One of these artist, Modesto Flako Jimenez, is in residence with NYC Health + Hospitals where he is focused on the problem of gun violence among our city's youth. And, earlier this month, Flako won an Obie Award for his show Taxilandia based on conversations he had while driving on a New York City taxi.

The City Canvas Program is empowering groups around the City to transform unsightly construction sheds and fences into platforms for community driven art installations. I hope you all have seen a more vibrant New York City as a result of these incredible installations.

ArtBridge, the primary nonprofit partner for City Canvas, has installed dozens of installations at NYCHA facilities around the City as part of their Bridging the Divide Program. I have visited a number of these installations myself, and seeing the pride an active engagement that partnering artists with residents can foster is truly inspiring. I can't wait to see more of these powerful projects firsthand in the months ahead.

The Percent for Art Program currently has 133 art projects in process for public spaces citywide from libraries to parks to plazas to schools. I have to say that number again -- 133 art projects! This is an incredible way to revitalize New York City.

I'm particularly excited every time a new public art project comes online in one of our public schools, where they will spark the imaginations of our cities youth for generations to come. Eleven new school projects have been installed and just the last year, including artist, Mark, Dion's, "The Threshold of Knowledge" at PS 131 in Queens. This whimsical installation consists of six mysterious doors of varying shapes, size, colors, styles, and materials installed along the lobby wall. And artist Natalia

Nakazawa's "The Bronx Through Time" is a site specific artwork that examines and celebrates the Bronx River at a new school in that community.

And earlier this month, we were so happy to celebrate with so many of you, for International Women's Day on March 8, our public art team worked with the Public Design Commission and the Mayor's office to bring artist Elena del Rivero's: "Home Address" to the Rotunda of City Hall. This thought-provoking installation is just the start of a new initiative to bring art to city buildings across all five boroughs.

Culture is at the heart of so much of what makes our city great. It brings communities together and puts New Yorkers to work. In 2019, New York City arts entertainment and recreation sector generated \$7.4 billion in total wages according to the New York State Comptroller's Office. And according to Americans for the Arts, over 117,000 jobs are generated by the Arts in the metropolitan area. And our sector has a \$5.6 billion impact on the economy of the metropolitan area. Tourism, which cultural, is essential to, employed 283,200 people in 2019, when New York was the most visited city in the western

hemisphere with 67 million visitors. We had 56 million visitors last year, up 70% from 2021.

City funding for cultural nonprofits is a *huge* part of the success story. And critically, groups supported by DCLA have a mandate to create cultural programming for the public, and to ensure that all New Yorkers can share in the creative, social, and economic uplift of the Arts. To this end, many DCLA supported programs are focused on workforce development and training working toward more equitable employment in the cultural sector. We believe that culture is an essential part of who we are as New Yorkers, and we need to make sure all New Yorkers have the opportunity to participate in our City's rich, cultural life.

For example, the Alpha Workshop Studio School in Manhattan provides classes in the Decorative Arts to people with disabilities. In preparation to reenter the workforce, students are encouraged to strengthen core employment skills and learn about their legal rights relating to disabilities and disclosure; how to launch a job search, and the best search resources in the decorative arts field; résumé and cover letter writing; and interviewing skills.

In Brooklyn, Hook Arts Media offers digital media production training to dozens of underserved young people, through community-based, out of school education that engages them in critical issues and supports them through their transition to adulthood.

This year, they're providing 80 Brooklyn youth with a rigorous foundation and digital media production while their Workforce Development Program of divide filmmaking and workforce readiness training for up to eight film fellows. And at Roundabout Theater, their Theatrical Workforce Development Program is a pioneering, public, private workforce program developed in partnership with key labor, industry, workforce, development, and youth development in organizations. It provides technical theater training and design to put participants in full-time employment in the theater industry at the end of the three-year training cycle. The Arts are certainly the foundation of any great Workforce Development Program.

We have committed to the connecting NYC's young people to opportunities to learn and grow in cultural careers, even earlier in their lives. That's why we continue to support the CUNY Cultural Corps -- whoop

whoop! -- providing paid work experience at cultural institutions for CUNY students. This is an incredible program!

We also work closely with the Department Of Youth And Community Development to encourage cultural groups to participate as Summer Youth Employment program worksites. From Bronx River Art Center to the Museum of the Moving Image, more than 90 cultural groups citywide joined in last year as part of Mayor Adams' and Speaker Adams' historic effort to give 100,000 New York City youth access to meaningful work experiences. At the same time, cultural groups get a new connections to the limitless talent of our city's young people. Applications are currently open to the whole site for this summer through May 26 -- we encourage everyone to apply! So we encourage cultural groups visit [Nyc.gov/HIRENYCYouth](https://nyc.gov/HIRENYCYouth) today to participate. I will say that once more: Visit [Nyc.gov/HIRENYCYouth](https://nyc.gov/HIRENYCYouth) today to participate.

I look forward to continuing discussions with you and your colleagues from the City Council in the months ahead as we work toward adopting a budget that serves all New Yorkers.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, so much, Commissioner and team, we really appreciate your diligence in ,you know, our office certainly loves working alongside you all.

I want to start off by obviously acknowledging that last year DCLA received a historic allocation of \$40 million. The Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget for DCLA stands at \$149.8 million, and this addition of \$40 million is not included in the Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget. This funding was historic for DCLA and the cultural community as a whole, and I want to ask, how has this allocation helped DCLA the cultural community and continue to meet the benchmarks as outlined in CreateNYC?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much for that question, Chair.

We are really thrilled with that \$40 million application to the field. It obviously helped us support more organizations than ever before, particularly with the CDF Program as we discussed. We were able to raise the grant award from \$5,000.00

1 to \$10,000.00. We were also able to provide funding
2 for more than 125 new organizations, and that level
3 of support was extremely critical in allowing us to
4 make that level of expansion. It allowed us the
5 opportunity to continue our PAIR Program as well as
6 the incredible Public Art Program that you see --
7 those 130+ public art design projects that are
8 currently in view or in a process of being actually
9 realized -- That is a huge part of what that allowed
10 us to do -- as well as to provide funding for our
11 Cultural Institute Groups, which we are the steward
12 and landlord for. We wanted to make sure that all of
13 our organizations in the city of New York,
14 particularly those smaller organizations, were able
15 to receive funding, especially coming out of the
16 recovery of the pandemic.

17
18 So, that was a huge part of what that funding
19 enable us to do, along with the Cultural Initiatives
20 that the Council has supported. It has given us an
21 opportunity to do so much more throughout, uh, our
22 ability as The Department of Cultural Affairs.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, and you acknowledge
24 in your testimony that the New York City Arts
25 Entertainment and Recreation sector generated \$7.4

1 billion in total wages. That's a lot of money...

2 (CROSS-TALK)

3 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's a lot of money!

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And in addition to that, our
5 sector, or the Cultural sector, has \$5.6 billion
6 impact on the economy of the metropolitan area. I
7 know that the investments in our cultural
8 institutions is a small fraction of that. And during
9 a roundtable that we had with the cultural community,
10 we have heard for calls from cultural organizations
11 to baseline this \$40 million. Starting in January,
12 cultural organizations are starting at a deficit.
13 Will the Administration consider baselining this
14 funding.
15

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We can always do more with
17 more funding. We can always expand more programming
18 and to support more cultural institutions. But, we
19 are also really proud of the record breaking
20 historical gains that were made with the level of
21 funding that Mayor Eric Adams was able to allocate to
22 The Department of Cultural Affairs. When you look at
23 our budget, \$237 million in programmatic funding;
24 \$220 million collectively in capital funding. These
25 are historic gains that were never made before. And

I also want to add with this, Mayor Eric Adams was able to do this without the additional funding that came in previous years of federal funding that also allowed for a more expansive budget. He was able to do that and to double down on that level of funding. And, of course, we can always do more with more. But, at the same time, we have to collectively and collaboratively grow the budget. And you know at this time we are also dealing with major budget constraints and issues impacting our economy. But, I would say, if you look historically, any time there have been, historically, any challenges in the economy the Arts are always the first to go.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right? So, not only did this administration say, we're not cutting the Arts, we're not keeping the Arts flat, we are actually going to double down and increase the amount funding that this agency distributes to so many organization. Because this administration understands so clearly that an investment in the Arts is going to benefit the City's economy, it is going to benefit our children and our school system, and it is going to benefit so many

organizations through the city of New York. And, so we are really proud of the allocation at this time.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm.

The allocation was wonderful, and, uh, again, not every single agency has the economic output like DCLA or like our Culturals provide within our City.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right? But, every single budget year, uh, you know, it can turn out to be difficult for a lot of our cultural institutions and organizations to start organizing and continuing to make ,you know, an ask that they have been used to asking for every single budget cycle. Baselining would ,you know, provide them with an ease, you know, and time to plan for future budgets to come so that they can continue adding to the economy in New York City like you have stated in your testimony.

Has there been any conversation between DCLA and Mayor Eric Adams about baselining because of how impactful it would be on this economic engine that exists here in our city?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: This is a conversation that continues to unfold during budget negotiations. It is always a topic of conversation coming, uhm, and

1 driven particularly by the sector in terms of having
2 that level of support and having that level of
3 consistency. We understand, we get it. The Mayor
4 clearly understand the important of art and culture.
5 I would say at this time, we are in the budget
6 negotiation process, but working collaboratively with
7 the City Council and continuing to work hand in hand,
8 I am confident that we can continue to grow the
9 sector, we can continue to grow the budget. The
10 baseline conversation still is one that has been
11 around for quite a long time, and it is something
12 that we thoroughly understand. We also have to, at
13 the same time, manage a lot of budget, uh,
14 constraints. And the local economy right now is a
15 challenging one, but despite that, it doesn't
16 mean that we are not having that conversation. It
17 doesn't mean that it is not being pushed, but we also
18 have to be mindful of the direction in which this
19 economy is heading in at this time.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Absolutely, and, of course, we
22 are in agreement that this Cultural sector is a
23 reason that our economy is still standing on its two
24 feet. Right?

Another question that I do want to ask, and ,you know, I am sure baselining would support your agency, uh, how would baselining help DCLA expand their support and recourses for the Cultural community as a whole?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Again, we can always do more with more. With the baseline, again, it would add more consistency and confidence within the sector, essentially, at the same time, it is also the baseline ask is typically the same amount that also comes from the one time additions like the one that you spoke of, the \$40 million that we were able to negotiate, again, which is the largest contribution from this agency, for this agency by the Mayor. So, what we are continuing do to is continuing to work on working collaboratively with the City Council, and with our partners, and with the initiatives and to make sure that we move forward in a collaborative spirit. But, we certainly recognize that with more funding we could do more. But, we are excited about the place that we are at right now. We are excited about the programs that we are able to do. We are excited about the initiatives that are able to carry through that Council allocates to The Department of

Cultural Affairs. So, we are going to continue to work in collaboration.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I really am hammering in on this, because baseline is the headline. But, I do want to ask, how can the Council and the Cultural community help with the advocacy in pushing for baselining?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Could you repeat that once more? I apologize.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: How can we as the Council, and how can the Cultural community help in terms of our advocacy in pushing for baselining, so that the Administration considers baselining even more than they already potentially are?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think you're doing that right now.

[BOTH LAUGH]

I would say in all seriousness, I think that it is a worthy conversation to have. It's a worthy request. I think you all should continue to ask those challenging questions, particularly during this particularly economic downturn that we are experiencing. Arts and Culture should not be left out of the conversation. So, we are not running from

1 that conversation. It is not that we do not want to
2 have that conversation. We are open to the
3 conversation. We have always continue to have open
4 dialogue. And, let me tell you, right there behind
5 me, we have some incredible advocates in Cultural
6 leaders, particularly on the Culture at 3 Club, who
7 are asking those same challenging questions that are
8 asking. And, so, I think it is important to continue
9 the conversation. We do not run away from the
10 conversation, we recognize the importance of the
11 conversation.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great.

14 When people think of New York City, the first
15 thing that comes to mind is our Culturals, whether
16 that is our museums or performing arts centers.
17 Because of this, there is no doubt about the economic
18 impact of Culturals -- providing revenue for the City
19 through admissions; creating jobs for local New
20 Yorkers; and boosting businesses for other adjacent
21 businesses. However, the Cultural sector was greatly
22 impacted by during COVID-19 costing the industry and
23 the City as a whole, a huge decline in revenue. In
24 your testimony, you mentioned that according to the
25 latest data from the state comptroller, again, the

Cultural sector has a \$5.6 billion impact on the economy of the New York City metropolitan area, and our tourism is increasing by 70% from last year.

Could you describe the Cultural sector's role in boosting the City's economy has a whole?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say when you look at New York City and how it has recovered, so much of that is directly... directed towards the Cultural community. We have seen, on so many levels, CIG visitorship was up in Fiscal Year 2022 over Fiscal Year 2021 -- 16.2 million visitors in Fiscal Year 2022 versus fewer than a 11 million in Fiscal Year 2021 still below pre-pandemic peak of around 23 million. When you hear that New York City is back, when you hear that our hotels are at almost 90% occupancy levels of returning, when you understand that our small businesses, our restaurants, our shops, our stores, our local merchants, artisans, when they are reopening with more confidence, we understand very clearly that this is related to the Art and Cultural community. Hotels would not be back without Cultural vibrancy in the city of New York. There Arts community is responsible for bringing back our young people and bringing them back to life by

providing educational programming, by giving after school and art programs and Saturday classes all throughout the city of New York. The art community is directly related to those numbers that we just saw. People come here for so many different reasons, but culture is the number one reason. And we have an incredible opportunity and responsibility throughout the city of New York to make sure that our economic recovery happens. And, so, we are proud that we have invested in our cultural communities, in financial opportunities and numbers that we have never seen before, through our CDF process, through our cultural institution groups, and many other artists and arts organizations, our entire Arts Council Initiative and programming that we give to the local arts councils has expanded with larger numbers than ever before in terms of the level of funding that our local arts councils received this year. And that funding goes directly to the arts community. We are so proud of the work that so many of our arts councils have done by keeping our local artists here in New York City and providing critical recourses and funding. But, again, we can always do more with more.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how has this administration
and council's \$40 million allocation helped DCLA
sustain the Cultural sector post-COVID-19?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say when we were
having, uh, those negotiations with the mayor about
Cultural funding, we again recognized that we would
not cut, we could not keep flat, but we had to
increase that level of funding. By increasing the
award amounts on the CDF process from \$5,000.00 to
\$10,000.00, made applying to the Department of
Cultural Affairs so much more beneficial for so many
organizations, because you and I know that for many
small organizations, it is difficult to or was
previously, it is going to be easier this year, to
actually apply for a grant. So, we are going to be
going forward with that same model of raising the
floor from \$5,000.00 to \$10,000.00, creating an open
policy for new organizations to apply. Previously
for many years, many organizations felt, well, if I
am not being considered by The Department of Cultural
Affairs, if I have never gotten a grant before, it is
not going to be to my benefit to apply. But, new
organizations are understanding that The Department
of Cultural Affairs is absolutely open to reviewing

new applications and new organizations. So, we want to make sure that that \$40 million that you spoke of, we want arts organizations to know that they absolutely have an opportunity to apply with The Department of Cultural Affairs.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how did this allocation helped DCLA foster that economic growth of the Cultural sector and its financial contribution to the City?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Ask me that once more?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: How is this historic allocation helped DCLA foster the economic growth of the Cultural sector in its financial contributions to the City?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, again, once organizations have those resources, they are able to do the type programming that serves New York City residents, but also attracts New York City tourists to the City, so that they can experience the incredible art and culture that is all throughout the city of New York. So, this major investment allows to do more with more. But, what I also will say is that we have done a lot in the way of webinars in terms of educating Arts organizations -- how to apply

to The Department of Cultural Affairs, we have done an incredible amount of information in terms of organizations that want to compete for our capital funding, to understand what that process is. And we have done a lot to educate the sector about how to apply for funding. And I would say that through many of the programs, you know, so many of this organizations have such robust promotions and communications abilities to be able to share their work out in ways that were never done before, that we are able to, in a very organic way, are able to promote the sector and the vibrancy of New York City.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And as New Yorkers return to the workplace and more cultural institutions are continuing to open for the public, are local workers returning to their jobs?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: In the Arts sector, certainly! We have seen a very, I want to quote that for you as well, we have seen a lot of organizations throughout the city of New York are reporting incredible numbers as it pertains to our workforce. I would say... If I can speak for a moment, just about our own agency, which I am really proud of as well, we have actually four positions available in

our own agency, just to give you an opportunity to see how strong it is in terms of cultural leaders coming back to the sector. We have received a 135 applicants for our Assistant Commissioner's position; we have received for the FEMA Specialist, and 16 for Capital Equipment Projects Manager. The Arts sector is alive, and organizations are reporting record numbers in terms of people applying for jobs and opportunities through programs like CUNY Cultural Corp and many others we have created those pathways. Many organizations like NYFA as well have participated. The Arts and Business Council, in terms of training the next generation of leaders, CUNY Cultural Corp, and many others are producing and providing the next generation of cultural leaders. And many organizations throughout the city of New York, as a result of the cultural plan are celebrating, are hiring, and promoting. They want to see more diversity within their institutions. And, so, many organizations have developed diversity, equity, and inclusion plans that have been very successful that we are seeing on the ground where they are hiring more people from the field that reflect the diversity of the city of New York.

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CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: How will increase allocation to
DCLA ensure that artists and other cultural sector
employers kept their jobs and allowed other cultural
organizations to expand their workforce?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that during the
pandemic, one of the things that was very successful
was that federal funding on so many levels allowed
many organizations to be able to sustain their
operations. Many cultural institutions throughout
the city of New York actually did not layoff, uhm,
many of their staff. They made the appropriate
provisions to make sure that they could continue to
hire their staff. There were layoffs, certainly, and
we understand that, but many organizations are hiring
and bringing people back in terms of the pre-pandemic
numbers where we are now are higher than they were
during the pandemic. And I also wanted to point out
to you as well, many of the organizations at this
time are reporting that they are advertising. We are
seeing support from CUNY Cultural Corp, Summer Youth
Employment, and other workforce development programs
to expand diversity, uh, as well as expand workforce
pipelines. And we are seeing that all across the city
of New York. But, I also want to just bring to your

attention, within the Cultural sector, and this speaks to the health of the cultural community, we had 1,200 eligible applications, and we were able to fund 1,070 of those organizations. So, what that is showing and demonstrating, is that many organizations are confident. They are moving forward. They are applying for funding. Yes, we recognize and we are working to assist those organizations just like what you and I are doing with Magnolia Tree Earth Center, we are trying to build up those organizations that have had challenges during the pandemic. But, at the same time, we do still see a vibrant, healthy cultural sector just by the number of applications that were submitted of organizations that are viable, that are healthy, and that are working towards the future.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

The new labor agreements are having a major impact on cultural institutions at a time when they are still running deficits in addition to inflation.

What is the City planning to do to support these institutions to cover these increased costs?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That is one of the challenges that we are experiencing as a sector right now in

terms of labor agreements. And as those agreements are taking place, we are not privy to the negotiations, uh, because these are internal contract negotiations, but we understand that the result of these labor negotiations and contract negotiations are going to dictate, in many ways, what our future is going to be moving forward in terms of the City's responsibility to our cultural institutions. So, once finalized, we will revisit, but again, those particular dynamics are internal. We are not privy to those. But, once those decisions are made internally, we are going to have to sit, discuss, and understand how those negotiations and the outcomes are going impact our city's budget.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, historically, when new labor contracts were enacted, the City provided support to cultural organizations that had collectively bargained employees of the respective unions. Can the City confirm that the cultural institutions with these collectively bargained employees will receive payment for the one-time signing bonus retro of the annual 3%, and incremental increases for the life of the new contract?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We will not know the answer to those questions until those negotiation decisions have finalized and we have a greater understanding of understanding how the City's budget will have to adjust to those contract negotiations.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay, noted.

DCLA implemented many reforms to the CDF process this year, reforms that are intended to increase equity amongst the Cultural community. The CDF grants are considered lifeline and a necessity for many of our small organizations as we all know.

What is the CDF budget for Fiscal Year 2023?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Give me one minute.

It is currently \$28.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how many multi-year recipients got renewed funding in Fiscal Year 2023?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would have to get back to you in terms of understanding the amount of organizations that got a renewal. But, it was certainly substantial.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

And what was the average award size for small and large organizations last year?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Give me a moment.

I will start off with this element of it while we pull up the remainder of that question. Uhm, in the Development Fund where equity reforms gave [INAUDIBLE] led by and serving people of color a major lift. More than 82% of groups that identify as being led by or founded by people of color, saw an increase in their baseline award -- 125 new organizations were funded, which shows the effect of our outreach and reforms to the application process. In terms of the average grant amount, I will have to get back to you on the average grant amount.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

And does the agency have reporting on the budget and spends for diversity, equity, inclusion?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Say that for me once more?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Does the agency have reporting on the budget and spends for diversity, equity, and inclusion?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Could you re-ask the question?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes.

Does the agency have any reporting on the budget and spend for diversity, equity, and inclusion?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: For the field?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, we don't actually have a budget for diversity, equity, and inclusion in terms of... We don't necessarily have a budget to provide funding specifically for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that came out of... or the initiatives that came out of the cultural plan, were really more setting benchmarks for the field to follow or to review or to look at. It was more a guiding factor. It was more of a guidance in terms of, this is how the city of New York looks and this how this how we need to Cultural community to reflect how the city of New York operates and looks, and that we should have people that reflect the city of New York within our cultural institutions. But, we never have a specific budget line to say, this is how we are actually going to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion. And we wanted to make sure that organizations had the mandate and understood the direction that City is headed towards, so that they would understand how their programs, their board of trustees, their staff, uhm, and their programming -- how it should actually

look in terms of being more reflective and more inclusive. And many organizations have picked up that mantra and are working towards that level of diversity that you're really seeing all across the City. I think what has been exciting about the recovery process, is that many organizations have done a reset and you are seeing a lot of that being implemented throughout the city of New York.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Could you please describe any change in the CDF application process in fiscal 2023 and 2024 that the agency has implemented?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm sorry, could you ask that once more?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Could you describe any changed in the CDF application process in fiscal years 2023 and 2024 that your agency has implemented?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, we are actually a new software program that many in the sector are looking forward to. I think one of the things that was really instrumental that we heard from the field from the field, is that we had a two part application process. And, so what we found was that some organizations would complete the first half of that application and think that they're done. And, then, the second part

of the application would come due, and they were not aware, or maybe they've moved on to something else, but we found a bit of a drop off in the part two part of the application process. So, we changed that, certainly, so that now moving forward, that two part application process, we have done away with it. It is going to be a one-step application process, where you can upload all of the information in one sitting -- well, not one sitting, but with one application.

The other aspect is that multiple people from your particular organization can work on the application together. So, if you have remote workers, and you have workers who are in the office, or you have people that are working remotely in other countries, that they would be able to work on the application at the same time, which is going to be revolutionary. So, it is not one of those, "Alright, I'm gonna work on the grant from 12 noon to four o'clock; I'm going to send it over to you, and then you can look at it." That is not going to be the case. You will all be able to look at it and to do different sections collaboratively together to assist you with moving forward. There is going to be opportunities for you to put more information so that

the word counts are not so prohibitive. You will have an opportunity to explain the full depth of your application in terms of the programs and the work that you are doing. So, we are really excited about that, uh, aspect of it. The process is going to be more streamlined, and we are really excited that this is going to provide more equity in terms of smaller organizations versus larger organizations. The smaller organizations who typically did have more challenges with that two part process, that is now going to be eliminated. And that is something that, coming in to this role, I wanted to make sure of, uh, that we didn't have that drop off of people who did not know or could not manage the second part of the application.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how has the \$40 million allocation been helpful in ensuring equity in this process?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, again, like I stated, that we had... 82% of our funding to BIPOC led organizations, and we were able to get more funding out the door than ever before. And, so, I think that that was the main aspect that we were able to do with that level of funding.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And could you describe the process in terms of how that happened, in terms of how there were more allocations made to BIPOC organizations?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say the main thing, and I am sure many of you understand this part of the process, is that in order to receive funding through a grant or panel review process, you have to have more people that look just like the people that are serving these particular communities. So, what we wanted to do is that we wanted to open up the application panel review process. So, the panelists came right from the community. The Arts community recommended those individuals who were going to serve on the panels, and that was really a game changer. We had over 250 panelist, that were able to assist and read each of these applications. We had 52 panels in actuality, so there were more panels. And, for those of you, and Council Member Brewer, you might remember, we would have, like previously, these panels that could last all day -- like from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 in the evening, where panelists would have to read multiple applications. We have streamlined that process so that it is not an all-day process in that

way, that you have more panelists -- you have more panelists reviewing fewer applications. So, that way it is not... panelist don't suffer from panel review fatigue. And that was a big part of what we were seeing, is that the enthusiasm that many panelists might have at 9:00 a.m., might dwindle come four or 5:00 p.m. after they have been sitting around a table. We have also made the panel review process more democratic, so that the panels are actually online now, which makes it assessable to more people that may not be able to come in for that level of panel.

So, these are things that we have done, but I would say the number reason that you are able to get more funding to more organizations of color and BIPOC led organizations, is by having the actual panel review process reflect the city of New York, and to have those recommendations for panelists coming directly from the field.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. One just, note, I mean I happen to like the outdoor restaurants if they are well maintained, but I am in

the minority, so it looks to me like a lot of these restaurants are going to have to come down.

And, so, I want to make sure that Materials for the Arts, because there are a lot of fabulous, in my opinion, artistic emphasis, gets the material is they want them. So, I will call them, but I just want to put it out there, that it is something to preserve. And I have a feeling that they and others will figure out great ways to reuse some of these materials.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That is an incredible suggestion! I will certainly take it upon myself to make the call on your behalf. And, I appreciate that, because Materials for the Arts is looking for ways to secure additional donations from unlikely sources or unlikely venues. And that certainly would be one.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and I am trying to get into the legislation that it would be mandated, but just FYI.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Of course you are! (LAUGHING)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

Number two, (LAUGHING)... Number two, now this is my ignorance, so that \$28.5 for the CDF, that is what it was, would that include the \$40 million? Is

that what number... Or is that not inclusive of the
20... I am just confused. Does the \$40 million...
Just to help me understand how much is going to the
CDF?

CHIEF KREVET: I think the \$28.5 number was the
proposed number for FY24.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That was 24? Because, I
don't think... Because the \$40 million is not in the
budget. So, I would assume...

CHIEF KREVET: for Fiscal Year 2023, it was \$58
million.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It was what?

CHIEF KREVET: \$58 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so, in other words,
it would have to be added to... for the future.
That is what we are all hoping. Okay.

The other question I have is, I don't think you
mentioned it, but maybe I missed it: I am a big
believer, as you are, in arts in schools. Otherwise,
we don't build audiences, and we don't have kids who
understand the arts and all of the reasons.

So, there used to be to, through the blueprint,
to figure out the funding and to figure out whether
these teachers, uh, my opinion, it used to be the law

that a certain percentage had to go to the arts.

Now, of course, people are focused on literacy and math for the obvious reasons that they have to make those scores. But, do you do any analysis either through budget analysis or arts analysis of what is going to -- what I would call either... We all have CASA, but I am talking about in school?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That is an excellent question, and something that would be more of an appropriate for the Department of Education as well as with The Comptroller's Office. Because, I remember and recall that the comptroller would do those annual audits, and I feel like that audit that the comptroller did, uh, of Department of Education and other sister agencies, really have an understanding of how art and cultural spending is happening in our schools. How art and cultural spending impact on our schools, is not within the purview of our agency. But, it is certainly something that we care about. It is certainly something that we want to see. And our best ability at being able to influence that has been through implementing the CASA program so that there is

1
2 afterschool programming, but recognize that more can
3 be done.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I mean, in the
5 past, uh, Cultural Affairs did [INAUDIBLE] on the
6 blueprint, which was as mandated... that the schools
7 had to give you what they are doing for the arts.
8 That was pulled by Bloomberg. So, I am letting you
9 know, I thought it was a good idea. I think it is a
10 bad idea not to have that information. Because,
11 obviously the comptroller can do ,you know, an audit,
12 but that is different than a blueprint. So, I want
13 to bring that up.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Duly noted. We will
15 definitely bring that back.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

17 Now, in terms of the organizations that are City
18 property that are not CIGS, I mean there are quite a
19 few of them, South Street Seaport being one, always
20 being told there is no way in hell you are going to
21 be a CIG (Cultural Institution Group). But, everybody
22 wants to be one for obvious reasons, which is the
23 utility grants. So, I want to know how many
24 organizations are on City property that are not CIGS.
25 And is there any way that those could become CIGS?

Obviously nobody wants it if you have... Because, it costs money, but those organizations need to be maintained for the rest of our natural lives. So, do you have those numbers?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I believe, don't quote me on this number, we're going to look at, I believe there are about 12 organizations that are part of the utility relief program, and the utility relief program is a program that I was instrumental in spearheading in my time in the city council, making sure that those organizations that would be potentially considered for a CIG designating received a level of funding and support for their utility costs, which have helped many of those organizations move forward. The conversation in terms of implementing and expanding the cultural institution groups, is always one that we are looking at. But, again, each budget cycle continues to pose its own challenges and the ability to have another organization become part of the CIG designation is something that has to fit within the budget requirements of the City, because ultimately an organization becoming a CIG extends into the baseline of the City. Uhm...

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Which is a good thing, in my opinion. I am just letting you know. But, how many... Do we know, other than South Street Seaport, do we know how many others are on City property? And...

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I believe it's about 12...
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You think it's 12...

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: But, don't quote on that...
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, you think it's 12...

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: number, but I believe it's about 12... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, they get... They get relief, but they don't get the full complement...
(CROSS-TALK)

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It's 14 actually...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 14? Okay, so, they... They don't get the full complement on utility relief? Okay.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: But, I would say, in 2019 I was really very proud to lead the effort for Weeksville to be added in to the Cultural Institution groups, so I am one that is understanding. I am

certainly not tone deaf to the conversation. I am open to the conversation similar to the baseline conversation. These are important... More than conversations, these are more... These are important issues to be discussed, and I continue to look forward to discussing them with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and, then, just finally, and just in terms of maybe working with NYC and Co, even though things are doing better... Tourism, better... The audiences, or at least in Manhattan are still not there. And, so the question is are there any allocation of funding, maybe through you or through NYC & Co, to try to get more audiences. We need to do, I think, more of what I call local -- Connecticut, New Jersey, blah, blah, blah. Because the Asian community, which provided a lot of the audience is not here... Not coming for a while, if at ever. So, my question is what are we doing as a city and with NY & Company to try to get more people in the... fannies in the seats as they say?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that we... As you mentioned, the Asian community coming back it's undefinable that they are a huge part of our tourism

sector. They are a huge part of getting those fannies back in the seats. They are an instrumental partner in our tourism calculations. And when we have had conversations with NYC & Company, they have continued to express that. Of course, we can always do more with more, but you are asking those ,you know, very critical and important questions, and we want to continue to look at how we can bring more people back into the City -- recognizing that, uhm, as the Asian markets slowly open back up, we are going to have to continue to find solutions to address the fact that they're not back where they were previously. But, we are going to keep working towards it. All we can do is continue to push forward and move ahead and to use our creativity, our ingenuity, uh, to bring people back to New York City. And we are seeing progress. There hasn't been any setbacks in terms of numbers and people coming back to New York City, and we just have to keep forging ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, so there's no money allocated in Cultural Affairs to try to get more people... more audiences?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That type of funding would go directly to NYC & Company as we are a granting agency to cultural organizations who have done a tremendous job at attracting visitors back to New York City through their communications departments, their marketing departments, and of course, at its foundation, the cultural generousness of our cultural and artistic communities.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right, thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Council Member.

The City Council supports DCLA through a number of initiatives as ,you know, Commissioner, including the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, Coalition of the Theaters of Color, CASA and SuCasa, in your words, why are initiatives critical for the cultural community?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, I've created some of those initiatives, so I would like to see them live on. But, I would say it really shows an incredible level of partnership between the City Council as well as The Department of Cultural Affairs. You know your communities very intimately. And many of the City Council members know their communities. They know

1 their senior centers. They know their cultural
2 immigration communities, they know those areas better
3 than any citywide agency could, because you're
4 living, sleeping, eating, and breathing your
5 community all day. And, it is really important for
6 you to be able to make those types of designations
7 throughout your community, because you know your
8 community best. You're visiting them. You are
9 supporting them. You are awarding them. You have
10 that really on the ground experience, and it really
11 is an incredible way to utilize and to exercise what
12 you know to be great about your community.

14 When I was in the City Council, along with
15 Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, we were proud to
16 expand the CASA program from five grants to 17. I
17 was proud to work with him to create the Cultural
18 Immigration Fund. Responding to the gun violence in
19 our community, I was able to create the Art a
20 Catalyst for Change Initiative, as well as the
21 Theaters of Color Initiative, which was really huge.
22 When I came into the city council, there were eight
23 organizations receiving a Theater of Color grant, and
24 by the time I left, there were approximately 54
25 organizations receiving Theaters of Color funding.

So, this is really the power of The City Council on so many ways to direct the cultural community of the city of New York, in a way that you know, that nobody on a citywide level could know as intricately as you do.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Many of our culturals depend on City funding to sustain their work and are often bogged down and frustrated by the many barriers and delays presented by the procurement process, does the Agency need additional headcount to effectively distribute the funding in a timely manner, or additional funding to streamline these process?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are actually really proud on the City level that our budgeted headcount is 57, and we actually have four vacancies. So, that is really very remarkable at this particular time that have only four vacancies. Our agency, as I said, has produced record amounts of grantees and awards to organizations more than ever before. As I said, a 125 new organizations, a 133 public art programs that are about to be realized. We have had an opportunity to place four PAIR artists throughout our agency and throughout the City's agencies. We have really had an incredible robust year. We have been proud to

1 implement the SuCasa and the CASA grants and the
2 Theaters of Color, and Art a Catalysis for Change,
3 and The Cultural Immigration Fund. We have been
4 doing an extraordinary job on all of those levels,
5 uh, as well as the procurement process. Those
6 additions to our headcount are really going to be
7 what the field has called for in terms of that we
8 have been able to expand the headcount in our Capital
9 Unit -- making sure that we are able to have
10 organizations have the level of support that they
11 need in order to go through the application process.
12 We also have administered a new process within the
13 Capital Unit where we are allowing smaller
14 organizations -- mid-sized organizations -- who are
15 thinking about a capital process for the very first
16 time, are given an opportunity to have a review by
17 our Capital Unit, so that they can determine if a
18 capital project is right for them at that time. And
19 we want to make sure that we can help organizations
20 understand the procurement process -- about the
21 dynamics of self-managing a project. We want them to
22 understand what all of the options are, so that they
23 can deliver a better project. I know myself,
24 speaking personally, as a former director of The
25

1 MoCADA Museum, I was so excited about the art and
2 culture and the history of the African Diaspora and
3 bringing that to Brooklyn New York, but I knew very
4 little about the procurement process. So, it is
5 really important to make sure that organizations are
6 educated, uh, have an opportunity to understand that
7 it is actually going to cost; what is the timeline
8 that it costs to deliver a project; what are the
9 delays are that can happen; what are all of the
10 change orders that could impact your budget? It is
11 really important for organizations to be well-
12 educated on what it is going to take to actually
13 deliver a project.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, although the \$40 million
16 allocation was historic, I know that our cultural
17 organizations still need more support. I was
18 informed by our Staten Island Culturals that the \$40
19 million allocation was not enough to support their
20 work and programming, and there is still a need for
21 borough equity -- especially for our outer boroughs.

22 How do you ensure equity in funding across
23 boroughs and neighborhoods?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are working very
25 collaboratively; I have had meetings with our Staten

Island Council Members, we are having a scheduled meeting with our borough president in Staten Island as well. And we are making sure that in all funding cycles, that we have an opportunity to make sure that there is budget equity throughout all of our boroughs. This was something that we paid very close attention to in this budget cycle. But, again, we funded approximately 80% of the organizations that applied to funding. Those organizations that might have seen a reduction, or might have not received as much funding as they received previously in the past, or organizations that did not receive a grant altogether, we are looking forward in the future to see how we can be helpful. But, again, we don't fund 100% of the organizations that apply 100% of the time. We recognize that in this process of trying to level the playing field, which funding a 125 new organizations, and raising the floor from \$5,000.00 to \$10,000.00 is definitely a movement towards leveling the playing field, that is going to feel very uncomfortable. And, so, for many organizations that were accustomed to receiving a certain amount of funding, as they may have traditionally done, uhm, leveling the playing field and implementing more

opportunities for smaller and midsize organizations to apply, does impact the budget and the amount of funding that organizations do receive. But, we are working collaboratively to make sure... This was a pilot, this first CDF, and we are receiving feedback from many organizations. We just had a meeting with the Latinx Cultural Arts Consortium, who spoke very eloquently and passionately about how the CDF reforms impacted their bottom line? So, we are looking, we are meeting, we are talking, and we are shaping the CDF process as we speak.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for that.

The Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Plan includes an increase of \$849,000.00 in Fiscal 2023 in direct administrative costs for the Wildlife Conservation Society. How will this funding be used?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Ask me that question once more?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes. The Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Plan includes an increase of \$849,000.00 in Fiscal 2023 in direct administrative costs for the Wildlife Conservation Society. How will this funding be used?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I can't speak to that at this time. Uh, perhaps someone on my team could give me additional information on it, or I will have to get back to on that.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay, thank you.

Council Member Hudson, do you have any questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: No.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: How many active projects capital projects does the agency currently have?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Give me one moment.

We have... We are proud to invest in capital projects in all five boroughs. Our current Capital Plan has over \$1 billion for more than 400 projects, at 200+ organizations. Many different ways to look at capital funding. Whole, \$1 billion portfolio versus new adds by fiscal year, or number of projects versus dollar amounts. For Fiscal Year 2023, \$222 million from the Mayor, Council, and BP's added for over 70 organizations citywide. I am happy to follow up and provide specific data that you are interested in. But, I would say for capital projects, it is really difficult to look at capital projects only by borough, because many organizations will have... everything is included in a capital project. So,

1 someone might want to expand their theater, while
2 someone may want to build an entirely new museum for
3 the very first time. So, while some boroughs may
4 have [INAUDIBLE] projects, it is very difficult to
5 compare the projects, because some of are like
6 computer or technological upgrades, and some are
7 major construction projects, some are renovations.
8 They all have a different character to them that
9 makes it difficult to just say, Queens might have 15,
10 and the Bronx might have 20. And, you may try to
11 say, like, oh, the Bronx has 20, and Queens have 15,
12 who is getting more? But, you can't really look at
13 them in that way, because each project could be very
14 different depending on the size and the scale and
15 actually what they are doing.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And does DCLA work to ensure
18 its capital spending is spread across the City in an
19 equitable way? I know it's hard to break it down by
20 borough, but is there a level of... I'm hoping for
21 equity that's spread across, most especially the
22 outer boroughs when it comes to these capital funded
23 projects.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It is a merit based program,
25 that's one, and, two, the other aspect of that is

that organizations apply, and we review all of the applications, and so, if one borough happens to apply, because they have so many cultural institutions in their particular borough that are merit based, we have to review them from that lens. Some boroughs may not request the level of funding, of you're just looking at it by borough, so they may not have the same amount of organizations applying for the same level of capital dollars.

So, we try to make sure that when those allocations are made, that we are looking by borough, but we are also looking first at merit, looking at borough, looking at consistency in terms of what the organization is asking for, how they have applied for funding to The Department of Cultural Affairs, and trying to make sure that we are realizing the vision, uhm , particularly of many communities that had been underserved for so very long. So, we are very proud of the fact that we just opened up the first ever building for The Bronx Children's Museum, because the Bronx had not had a brick and mortar project for a children's museum ever. And, so, we wanted to make sure... you know, I am a mom who grew up in Brooklyn New York, and I loved taking my son to the Brooklyn

Children's Museum. Now we've moved to Staten Island, and I love taking him to the Staten Island Museum. We want to make sure that the Bronx, that they can take their children to the Bronx Children's Museum, and my son and I have also been there, too. But, I am saying, we have to make sure that there is equity across the board, so that we can create that level of equity and transparency that's so important.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: When you went to the Staten Island Children's Museum, did you do the bowling?

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

The giant bowling? It's really fun.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We might have missed the bowling, and we spend a lot of time at the fire truck.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yeah, I did, too.

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

I know that you brought up that there are four staff vacancies, what are those positions that have yet to be hired in?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm sorry, can you ask that question again?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Yes, there are four... I think that you brought up that there are four staff

vacancies within DCLA, I was wondering what positions those are in particular?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You're not happy as Chair of Cultures and City Council? I'm just teasing...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: (LAUGHING) I am!

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: All right, we have the FEMA Document Management Specialist; we have the Capital Equipment Project Manager; we have the Assistant Committee on in the Programs Unit; and we have the IT Projects Specialist. And, so, those are the four positions that we have. These are, at this time, noncompetitive, so we are certainly looking forward to individuals applying for these four positions. That would complete our headcount. These are critical positions, and we are certainly looking forward to people submitting applications for this particular role.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: The one that really, uh, sticks with me is the position to hire an additional staffer for capital needs. Because, I'm sure that that would help DCLA move projects. Uh, what has been the trouble in hiring, if you don't mind me asking?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that we have not had any trouble in hiring, we have just had some

really great applicants come in, and we have been doing several rounds of interviews. So, it is not at all an issue in terms of hiring, we want to make sure that we are hiring the best individuals to work within our unit. And, so, we have some really great applicants that we are looking at right now.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how does the department to prioritize the capital needs?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Ask me the question once more?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how does the department to prioritize the capital needs? I guess it's...

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, certainly we look at in terms of many organizations may have issues around HVAC issues, boiler issues, sustainability issues, accessibility issues, so there are some organizations that have really critical issues that are impacting their bottom line -- that I am sure you are very aware of in your own district. And, so, we certainly prioritize those organizations that are having what I would consider critical issues to the maintenance of their building as well as the organization. We also look at... internally it is really a very important part of the process in terms of how we review

1 applications, we want to make sure, as we spoke of
2 earlier, that there is a strong level of borough
3 equity. We want to make sure that the organization
4 that are applying are receiving that level of equity.
5 We also understand that many organizations are a part
6 of a multiyear process, so that they, each year, uh,
7 have already started a project that might need
8 additional funds in order to continue and manage and
9 maintain, uh, that particular project that is already
10 started. So, we do look very favorably in terms of
11 organizations that are applying, that have previously
12 applied, they're in the pipeline of having their
13 project realized, they started work and construction.
14 We want to get them across the finish line. And we
15 want to work collaboratively with The City Council as
16 well as the borough presidents to make sure that
17 organizations are fully funded and ready to go, and
18 that those organizations can bring their project to
19 reality very quickly.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: My last question for you all
22 is, does the agency have any stated plans on how they
23 are going to address last year's ongoing projects and
24 balance them with this year's projects?

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COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, again, I think that --
if I didn't make it really clear -- one of the things
that we are doing is to make sure that when an
organization who has already applied for capital
funding is in the... I don't want to say the middle,
but they are at certain stages of their project, we
want to make sure that we support those
organizations, so that they can continue. Something
that we are doing, uhm, very differently this year,
as well, we are meeting with the borough presidents
of each of five boroughs. We have met with the
Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. We have meetings
scheduled with Staten Island as well as Queens to
make sure that we understand the borough priorities
of the borough president, uh, along with our agency
to make sure that we are addressing the needs of
equity within each of the boroughs. We really want
to understand what the borough presidents are very
passionate about. And, so, we are looking forward to
having more collaboration, because the more
collaboration you have, the ability you have to
realize projects quickly, effectively, because a
fully funded project, is a project that can be more
streamlined and can operate and function closer to

the timeline in which an organization would like to see.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Any recommendation on which Cultural I should go to next?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's an awesome question. I am going to take you to Materials for the Arts first. That's not the question, but I want to make sure that I take you to Materials for the Arts first to make sure that you can see that. I would say you have already been to the Staten Island Children's Museum. I am going to just rollout a wild card in that way, I have so many children that I can't pick just one, but I would strongly encourage you to do a tour of Snug Harbor, and to really do the whole tour. And If you haven't see The Noble Maritime Museum, you have to see... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I did a big Staten Island Day.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, you did! Okay, wonderful, all right. So, it's hard to take the Cultural Affairs Chair someplace he hasn't been. So, I am definitely going to start with Materials for the Arts, and if you haven't been to The Museum of the Moving Image...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I think I'm going this weekend.

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COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, man, I mean, it's...

It's really difficult!

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

We went and it was fabulous, but it was, uhm, I recommend it, because it's right next door to Materials for the Arts. So, when you do Materials for the Arts, you can go to The Museum of the Moving Image.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: That's good to know. Thank you, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Brenda?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Great, and that concludes this portion of the hearing. So, thank you so much to the Administration. We will be moving to the public testimony portion of the hearing in just one moment, thank you.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, so we are just going to name the individuals on the first panel. Again, if you can come to the table, please?

And, Eyitami "Tammy" Oyarijivbie, again, apologies, From Far Rockaway Teen Library, Amaryllis

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Greene, Lauren Bradley, Nurys Pimentel, and Selina
Sharman, thank you.

Okay, thank you so much, everyone, so we will now
begin the public testimony portion of today's hearing
on The Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Intergroup Relations.

We will be beginning with public panel number
one. Just starting with a few housekeeping items.
As reminder, we do have a clock today, it is two
minutes. The clock is on the wall, so when you begin
your testimony, the clock will begin. Council Members
will be limited to five minutes. And, just a
reminder that there is anything that you don't say in
testimony, if you would like to submit anything in
additional, or you did not testify orally today, the
Council does meticulously review all written
testimony and accepts written testimony for up to 72
hours after the close of the hearing, which can be
submitted to: Testimony@council.nyc.gov.

So, at this point, we will begin with our first
public panel. And, our first witness today,
apologies again in advance, uh, Eyitami "Tammy"
Oyarivbie, apologies, The Teen Center Site
Coordinator from Far Rockaway Teen Library. okay,

thank you, and you may begin your testimony when
ready.

MS. EYITAMI OYARIJIVBIE: Thank you, good
afternoon, My name is Eyitami Oyarijivbie, and I am
the Teen Center Coordinator at Queens Public Library;
Far Rockaway Teen Library.

Thank you, Chair Ossé and members of this
Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak.

As the Teen Center Coordinator, I curate fun and
academic afterschool activities for teens.

Programming can range from chess clubs, arts and
crafts, mindfulness hours, and digital literacy
workshops to name a few. Ultimately, teens come to
the library because it is a safe space for them to
learn, engage, and relax with their peers.

Recently, a young gentleman returned to the Teen
Library, he expressed the great the role the library
played in his life while he was in middle and high
school, and how he had wished he had participated
more in our workshops. He complimented the library's
recent makeover and currently pushing his community
to utilize the Teen Library while they are still of
age.

We also recently received a card from a parent of one of our teens, he and his 14-year-old daughter migrated to the United States, since regularly attending the Teen Library, his daughter's English speaking skills have improved and she has started making new friends. The card was his show of appreciation for the positive impact the library has made in his daughter's life.

A decrease in service would not only affect the teens but the parents as well. The community is in need of safe spaces for our youth. The pandemic has really affected young adults and their social skills. Reducing library services affects the next generation just as the pandemic has.

While a great community, Far Rockaway is a long distance from many of the things New York City has to offer teens. The teens often feel forgotten about, and reducing service takes away a vital pillar for youth services in their neighborhoods -- since 2008. It will affect the extra help the library provides to parents [TIMER CHIMES]... to parents, the local schools, and youth. I urge the Mayor and the New York City Council to fully fund libraries in the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget.

Chair Ossé, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: all right, thank you so much for your testimony. And, just a reminder, if the clock goes off, if there is anything that you can't finish, if you could just wrap up, and then we will review all written testify as well. So, thank you so much.

The next witness will be Amaryllis Greene (sp?) All right, thank you.

MS. AMARYLLIS GREENE: Hi, my name is Amaryllis Greene, I hope everyone in this room is well. I am 12 years old, and I am here today with all due respect to speak about keeping libraries open and funded.

Mayor Eric Adams, we cannot [INAUDIBLE] creative minds like who view the world through books, and see other parts of the world through them. I have learned about other cultures, participated in science projects, read many books, even a book on what a credit score is, which is to everyone's life, very vital.

You were transparent about your learning disabilities, so my question to you is, do you

believe it is the right thing to do to choose not to fund libraries or other programs to help the future generations who suffer from their learning disabilities or the ones you have? Not to mention, have you not found yourself at my age in a library or two to feel safe from the bullies in the streets? How will self-published authors be able to have their books placed on library shelves to give someone else the motivation to be the next lawyer, actress, poet, and/or pilot to name a few?

If libraries close because they lack the funding for various programs needed to better peoples' lives, I say, again, Mayor Adams, can't you see we need to fund our libraries? Thank you, Amaryllis Greene.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great job, thank you for testifying.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The next witness will be Lauren Bradley from Urban Libraries Unite.

MS. LAUREN BRADLEY: Thank you, Committee members, and thank you, Chair Ossé. My name is Lauren Bradley and I am here on behalf of the Board of Directors for Urban Librarians Unite.

This morning, the library presidents made a correlation between the need for library spaces and library staff. You cannot have a library without staff.

Our membership are mostly frontline library workers and their supporters. We are the ones who work directly with our patrons who are experiencing a range of issues including homelessness, eviction, opioid addition, food insecurity, learning barriers, and structural oppression. Our members are also involved in community efforts like mutual aid networks, food pantries, harm reduction programs, and open streets, because we see firsthand these services that our communities need.

Right here in New York City, our members have been subject to a number of old challenges that once again are rising in the face of hate and division: Organized protests at library branches against Drag Queen Story Hour; rises a formal and informal book challenges from the community; library services for new migrant populations as they enter our city.

We continue the good work that we have always done while facing chronic understaffing and budget cuts -- which also predate the pandemic.

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Our members are here to serve the public, that is why the entered the profession. But, they need the financial support of The City Council in order to make this work happen. Libraries, unfortunately, excel at doing more with less because we have had to. But, the truth is, we can do more with more. Because of this work, our branches play a key role in reimagining New York City as a more equitable and just city. So, we are asking you, please restore the projected cuts and maybe invest on top of them, so that library workers can expand this vital frontline service. Thank you

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

Our next witness will be Nurys Pimentel from Red Hook Library.

MS. NURYS PIMENTEL: Hello, good afternoon. I want to thank The City Council for the change to speak today. My name is Nurys Pimentel, I work at the Red Hook Branch, and I am going on my 23rd year of checking books in and out, asking our kids, "How was school?" "Did you finish your homework?" asking the parents, "How are you?" -- Never forget the parents -- helping with resumes; GED services;

helping patrons apply for unemployment; SNAP; lease rentals for NYCHA; Medicaid; Medicare renewals, and doctor appointment confirmations -- because everything is digital.

Think about a 75-year-old, elderly Dominican immigrant coming in with her lease renewal, having no idea how to access the site or upload her social security statement -- never used a computer a day in her life. That 75-year-old is my mom, Magdalena Martinez, your mom, someone's grandmother, this is what libraries do on an every day basis. This is why we are essential to the everyday life of a New Yorker. Rolling back these services would be devastating. I have firsthand experience in how service cuts would impact a community. My library closed last week for much needed renovations, even with that we had months of outreach and meetings to listen to resident needs, they're [INAUDIBLE], they're panicked and they are worried about temporarily losing their branch. If budget cuts go through, this is what it will look like at locations that are forced to cut back services and hours. Patrons constantly refer to our branch as a safe haven, a welcoming peaceful environment that they

know they can come to for help. This is what the library means to my community, to Brooklyn, and the rest of the City. Please don't cut the budget for the libraries -- or you're going to hear from my mom.

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

The next person will be Selina Sharman. You may begin your testimony when ready.

MS. SELINA SHARMAN: Good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Selina Sharman, and I am the Programming and Outreach Librarian at Queens Public Library's Central Library. Thank you, Chair Ossé, for allowing me to speak today.

I am here today in support of increased funding for our libraries. Budget cuts for libraries will have a huge impact on children and families, especially immigrant families who use public libraries all the time. The City needs to protect immigrant communities and in an important step in doing so is by preserving Queens Public Library's budget and supporting all public libraries across the City.

My own story [INAUDIBLE] the support that libraries provide to immigrants, Queens Public Library helped me and my family to have a career in my new country. I immigrated from Bangladesh with my husband in 2000. He and I started a clothing business in Lower Manhattan, New York City. After 9/11, we lost everything. My husband then had a stroke, and at that time, Queens Public Library staff were there for me and for my family. It has been twenty plus years since I started working at QPL. At the beginning of my career, I helped in the English classes at a foreign language at Queens Public Library. I knew very little English when I joined as a part time library worker. Later QPL supported me and my family to survive in New York City. I wanted to be a librarian, and they sent me to study Library Sciences at CUNY Queens College, and I become a librarian in 2006. Part of my job is to organize educational and cultural programs in various languages that are spoken in Queens. When I attend community events, I answer different questions and provide library services. I think I have found my niche, and I love my job. Every single day, I encourage people to come inside the library [TIMER

CHIMES]. People who speak Bengali feel empowered because they can communicate in their language at the library.

Since I have been working as a frontline librarian at the Reference Desk, every single day, I help people who speak different languages such as Bengali, Polish, Urdu, and Spanish -- you name it. Since we have started using LanguageLine, a live phone interpretation service in more than 240 languages, we get to help even more new Americans. As our tagline says, "No matter who you are, where you're from, or where you want to go, at Queens Public Library, we speak your language." When immigrants come to the library, they also bring their family. Recently, a father came looking help finding a job. His wife came for English classes, and their sons came to get their GED exam. They all received [TIMER CHIMES]...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I'm so sorry, we are out of time... (CROSS-TALK)

MS. SELINA SHARMAN: what they needed at QPL... Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
testimony. We have over 40 people and more that are
submitting slips. But, again, we will meticulously
review all written testimony, so thank you so much,
everyone.

And we will now move to the next panel. We don't
have any questions?

Okays, so, as a reminder, the next new panel will
be Deborah Allman, New York Public Library Local
President, on behalf all three union presidents and
the three systems.

Miss Allman is joined by John Hyslop, from Queens
Library Guild, President Local 1321 DC 37; and Ronald
Barber, from Brooklyn Public Library Guild, President
Local 1482 DC 37.

And, again, we will be using a two minute clock,
but we do review everything meticulously, and thank
you all for coordinating.

You may begin your testimony when ready.

MS. DEBORAH ALLMAN: Thank you.

Good afternoon, Chair Ossé, and fellow committee
members, thank you for giving my fellow presidents
committee hearing.

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John Haislip, President of Local, 1321 Queens
Public Library, and Ronaldo Barbara, President of
Local 1482 Brooklyn Public Library, and, I, Deborah
Allman, President Local 1930, New York Public
Library, come before you united in our request that
you save our libraries.

Everyone in this room knows the value libraries
play in our neighborhoods in New York City. Everyone
knows the outsized impact we have in our
neighborhoods. Each and every library, in each and
each neighborhood, each and every day, provide free
access to a plethora of books, computers, programs,
and information in a space that is clean, safe, and
secure.

The members of 374, 1321, 1482, and 1930 from
Riverdale to Tottenville, from Brighton Beach to
Greenpoint, from Astoria to Bellerose, who call their
branches home, know how vital our services are to our
friends and neighbors.

Our libraries are not immune to the many factors
affecting our city. With the Mayor's Initiative to
serve teenagers, libraries worked with our members
and dedicated programs and services for teens. The
recent migrants have created [TIMER CHIMES] a surge

in use of Adult Learning classroom computers usage in
library spaces and IDNYC usage...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I'm sorry, that's... that's
time.

MS. DEBORAH ALLMAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: We do have your written
testimony.

MS. DEBORAH ALLMAN: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, and there are no
questions. Thank you so much for your time. And,
due to capacity issues, not everybody can be in the
room until it is time to testify. So, we are
adhering to the clock. And, thank you for your
understanding.

Our next panel will be Lyman Clayborn from
Brooklyn Public Library, apologies one moment...
Michaeline Von Drathen from Ridgewood Library of the
Friend of Ridgewood Library, Tammy Reed from Queens
Public Library Volunteers, and Alaina Mauro from
CareNotCuts.

Thank you so much, and apologies in advance again
for any mispronunciations.

The next person to testify, the first person on public panel three will be Lyman Clayborn, Services for Older Adults and Brooklyn Public Library. You may begin your testimony when ready. Just make sure you can see the red light on the microphone. If you press the button...

MR. LYMAN CLAYBORN: Got it.

My name is Lyman Clayborn, Coordinator of Services for Older Adults at Brooklyn Public Library.

I would like to thank the Committee for the chance to testify and for their past advocacy in keeping our libraries strong.

The library services for Older Adults Department provides inclusive programming and services tailored to patrons over the age of 55 including creative aging art programs, author talks, performances, technology trainings, and educational programs.

Our Books by Mail program services homebound and low-vision patrons with free library materials in many languages. And our Books to Go service provides free library materials to senior sites and centers.

I see and hear firsthand evidence of the benefits libraries make to our community, as older adults can be very vocal -- as you can imagine -- and

usually are appreciative in their opinions of the library's programs.

We have a beloved patron named Faye in her 90's who lost her husband during COVID, who wrote to us saying, "Taking the wonderful courses helped me maintain my sanity, my creativity, and my ability to socialize with others."

On a personal note, as you can tell by my accent, I come from a southern state that grew progressively less progressive towards libraries and democratic institutions. And it is with great happiness that I work for Public Libraries in New York City because of their spaces for expression and creativity. On behalf of our older adults patrons, we believe now is the time to continue investing in New York City libraries. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. We will now move to the next witness, one moment... the next witness is Michaeline Von Drathen from Friends of Ridgewood Library.

MS. MICHAELINE VON DRATHEN: Good afternoon, My name is Michaeline Von Drathen, and I am the President of the Queens Public Library's Friends of Ridgewood Library. Thank you, Chair Ossé, for giving

me the opportunity to testify about how budget cuts to Queens Public Library will be terrible for my community and borough.

Queens Public Library and the Ridgewood Library branch, are extremely important to me and my family. The library has always been there for me at every stage of my life, always ready to help and at times provide comfort.

My family has been going to Ridgewood Library for over 90 years. I have attended numerous arts and cultural programs, workshops, trainings, information sessions, and concerts and have borrowed countless books, movies, and music. Sometimes I just go to the library to escape for a bit. I always leave the library a little wiser and with a better outlook on life. These are just the few of the reasons why I use and love the library.

The library is a priceless and vital resource hub in my community. It is a trusted community institution and a safe space where all are welcome, and have access to information and resources -- all for free -- summer meals, afterschool help, housing recourses, English language classes, health and exercise programs, cooling centers in the summer,

free Wi-Fi, access to computers, tax help, job training, and cultural programs just to name a few.

The library is also a space where people of all ages can gather to socialize -- whether you are a child, older adult, a new parent, unemployed, new to the country or area, a reader, or looking to better yourself, the library is the place to go.

Libraries are where the public funds should be invested, not taken away. To cut the Library's budget is to deny access to numerous resources, information, and programs for all, especially those in communities who are the most vulnerable. I cannot think of a better place that offers a better return on investment. To invest in libraries is to invest in the people and communities they serve. Libraries, the people who work there, the people who visit them are essential to our democracy and to our community. So, please support the Queens Public Library and reverse the proposed cuts.

Chair Ossé and council members, thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

The next witness will be Tammy Reed, and you may begin when ready.

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MS. TAMMY REED: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé, and members of this committee. My name is Tammy Reed, and I am here to give testimony about the proposed budget cuts to Queens Public Library.

For many years, I have relied on the Queens Public Library for my reading entertainment, as well as other services provided by the library. Those services include the use of computers and printers, the Saint Albans Library Book Club, food pantries, special events, and workshops.

As someone who is approaching retirement, at a pace I care not to mention [TIMER CHIMES] currently on a semi-fixed income, and coming up on more of a permanent fixed income, I am beginning, and will become more dependent on the library's services.

The library means the world to me and my community, and to cut their funding would be devastating. And the library is not just about books, it is also about the services that are provided. Without these services, I truly believe that the community would be at a loss.

Imagine our youth searching for a job, but they don't have access to computers. For that matter, they don't even have a clue as to how to put a resume

together, and they have no money to pay someone to assist them. What will they do? I guess one option would be to take the wrong path and earn their money via the streets, but I would rather they have the opportunity to do it the right way. And right now, they can turn to their libraries for assistance free of charge.

What about unemployed people with limited skills seeking employment? What will they do? Right now they can reach out to the library, gain valuable skills to propel them to the next steps -- again, free of charge.

Recently I attended a Zoom meeting about the services the library can provide to those who are recently incarcerated, assisting them with New York City IDs and other services to get them acclimated back into society to become productive citizens of this city. I would rather these individuals have a change to make it in life. And let's not forget the new mothers workshops and immigrant workshops. What a wonderful source the library can be.

I could go on and on [TIMER CHIMES], but I think you get the drift. My community cannot afford any

cutbacks, we so desperately need these services.

Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

And, the last person on this panel will be Alaina Mauro from CareNotCuts. You may begin when ready.

MS. ALAINA MAURO: Hi, thank you, Committee Chair Ossé, and members of the committee.

My name is Alaina Mauro, and I am a New Yorker residing in Brooklyn. I am not really with CareNotCuts, it was just how I found about this hearing today.

I am a person who loves the library, and I oppose the deep cuts and reductions to libraries proposed by Mayor Adams in the Preliminary Budget.

I have been a member of the New York Public Library and Brooklyn Public libraries for almost 20 years. I also work in book publishing, and have seen how important books are across the spectrum.

I am here to talk about cuts to libraries in this fiscal year and going forward. As an active library-goer, I am so upset by this attack on these public institutions that serve so many New Yorkers daily. The libraries provide -- as we have heard today -- access to so much more than books and

resources. There are so few places where you can go as a New Yorker anywhere that is just a safe, free space that you can be warm in the winter and cool in the summer, that can provide a place for people to come together that are both... from our youngest to our oldest.

Last week at my branch of the NYPL, which is the newly renovated Mid-Manhattan Branch, I saw flyers for career service and resume workshops, for a healthy cooking book club, for a teen writing group, and so much more. At the Brooklyn Heights Branch, which is where I live, they have a weekly knitting group and a weekly adult coloring group among other active groups. Both offer a place for older people, or those who are living alone, to meet members of their communities and make connections, which we all know, as we have seen through the pandemic, how important that is for our mental health.

The library offers so many opportunities for both community and connection beyond what we have all been talking about today. There is abundant, well documented research that children who grow up with and around books are more proficient in literacy, numeracy, and using information to communicate with

other people, and to gather and analyze information.

Our local libraries offer all of our city's children a chance to grow up with books that they might not otherwise afford in a nurturing environment. The Mayor is essentially cutting off a lifeline for working class communities.

Lastly, we have seen sweeping book bans and legislation attacking libraries and librarians in many other parts of the United States. [TIMER CHIMES] I was and remain proud that the NYPL and the Brooklyn Public Library took a public stance against these bans. We should be doing all we can as New Yorkers to continue to push back against the attacks on libraries and the books in them. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. And, just to clarify, apologies, the topic was libraries and CareNotCuts, #CareNotCuts.

MS. ALAINA MAURO: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Not the organization. So, thank you so much.

Okay, and we do not have any questions for this panel, so thank you so much, that concludes this panel.

We will now move to three more in-person public panels. And will read the names of all panelists for the next three panels. We understand that not everyone is in the room at the moment, that we have capacity limitations. So, again, we will ready the names of the next three public panels -- public panels four, five, and six:

The next panel, public panel four, will be Coco Killingsworth from the CIG, Adrian Benepe from Brooklyn Botanic Garden, David Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall, and Eleni DeSiervo from Lincoln Center.

Public panel five, the panel after that, will be Lucy Sexton from New Yorkers for Culture & Arts, Lisa Gold from Asian American Art Alliance, Angel Hernandez from the New York Botanical Garden, and Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham from Museum Hue.

Public panel six, the panel following that, will be Ya-Yun Teng, from New York Foundation for the Arts, Melody Capote, Tamia Santana, Anais Reyes, and Jolene Noelle.

So, that is a lot of information, so, again, I will just read the names of those on the following panel: Again, it will be, Coco Killingsworth, from

the Cultural Institutions Group; Adrian Benepe from Brooklyn Botanic Garden, David Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall; and Eleni DeSiervo.

We will let people get settled and begin in one moment.

Okay, so, now we are ready to begin. And we will just move forward in the same order. So, Miss Killingsworth, Coco Killingsworth from the CIG, you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

MS. COCO KILLINGSWORTH: Don't start my time yet.

Okay, good afternoon, Chair Ossé and members of The Committee on Cultural Affairs. My name is Coco Killingsworth, and I am the Chair of the Cultural Institution's Group, and the Vice President of Creative Social Impact at BAM.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your ongoing support of Arts and Cultures in New York.

The CIG is a coalition of 34 cultural institutions that are charged with providing excellent stewardship for many of the most important New York City owned properties throughout the five boroughs.

Our city's culture and neighborhood anchors are members of the CIG and include some of the most vital, cultural, scientific, historical, and artistic institutions in the world. New Yorkers are at home in our buildings, our halls, our classrooms, and on our stages.

In addition to the intrinsic value that our institutions bring to the City, we are also vital economic engines that power tourism, employment and commerce. Collectively, our 34 institutions employ over 11,000 fulltime and parttime staff, including over 5,000 union members. The vast majority of these employees also live in New York City -- contributing back to the local communities.

The cultural community unites in respectfully requesting that the \$40 million added in the adoption in FY23 be restored and baselined. We request that an additional \$10 million to be split evenly between the CIG and our program group partners to help create more stability and equity within the sector. We ask for the full restoration of all Cultural Council Initiatives. Please ensure organizations can develop and maintain their workforces sustainably.

CIGS drive tourism and local business. In 2022, New York City welcomed over 50 million visitors. Visitation is forecasted to grow to 62 million in 2023.

CIGS provide essential services and programming to New Yorkers across the City. In terms of COVID crisis, we have distributed over 450,000 COVID tests [TIMER CHIMES] to date... I knew that was going to happen... CIGS partner with schools, the Staten Island Children's Museum has distributed free Arts Kits to 800 pre-k children last year. CIGS are also vital to seniors across the City. At BAM, one of our vanguard initiatives is to consistently support our highly valued senior programming and provide an artist outlet to our seniors.

There is not a part of this city that CIGS do not impact. From our parks to our schools, to our businesses, every part of our city benefits from the work of the Cultural sector. The return on your investment in our institutions is outstanding and we hope that you will be able to continue your support. Thank you for allowing me to the time to testify and for your leadership.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, and apologies, we do need to keep to the clock, but everything will be part of the record if not within the two minutes. We just know that people are not allowed in the room, so we are trying to facilitate people moving through. Thank you so much.

MS. COCO KILLINGSWORTH: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And apologies in advance, again, for any mispronunciations. The next witness will be Adrian Benepe from Brooklyn Botanic Gardens. You may begin when ready.

MR. ADRIAN BENEPE: Good afternoon, I am Adrian Benepe from Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Thank you, Chair Ossé, and our Council Member Hudson, for procuring us. If you are looking for a place to go, I am the Lorax, I speak for the cherry trees.

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

So, as with all of the cultural organizations we have heard from, we have had to overcome a lot of obstacles from the pandemic and related huge financial challenges. Despite that, things are really turning around for all of us. I will just highlight a few things: Our education programs, which are the cornerstone of our work to return to full in-person

instruction school visits, we expect to have 200,000 children admitted free as usual this year, and we will continue to offer our free community tickets at all times.

Our community Greening Initiatives are back in full, too. We had Making Brooklyn Bloom for the first time in three years. We had our Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest, that is coming back again this summer -- it returned last summer.

And we are having a whole summer-long theme of trees and climate change, The Power of Trees, for this spring and summer.

We are also really looking to deepen our relationships with the community based arts organizations through Cultural programming such as our Art in the Garden series. During this 12-week program, our visitors enjoy music and dance performances by local artists, who reflect the diversity of Brooklyn. These partnerships with Arts organizations artists allow BBG to put money directly back into our creative economy by hiring local performing artists and visual artists who put up temporary artwork.

Not withstanding all of the great things we do, the challenges continue. Foreign tourism continues to be lower than it should be, and we are asking you to bring back the baseline and funding, and bring back that \$40 million and add the \$10 million to have the baseline. This is really important, because with that funding, we can do things like workforce development; we can continue to fund school and youth programs; we can have our free community tickets.

And, I should add that 70% of the employees that we fund in part with that funding, are union members. They're members of the 37. [TIMER CHIMES] Our gardener's security... and, thank you, we respectfully ask you to restore that funding and baseline it. Thank you very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

The next witness will be David Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall.

MR. DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Chairman Ossé and Members of the Committee, I am David Freudenthal from Carnegie Hall, I am the Government Affairs Director, I am also Chair of Government Relations Committee of the CIG and here in that dual capacity.

Thank you, Chair Ossé, Council Member Hudson, and

I am honored to be joined by this panel of fierce advocates for cultural and to say our thanks from us all. We know that we have in all of you, members and staff, passionate advocates, believers in the power of what we do.

I really just want to echo the words you have heard from Coco and Adrian, about the urgent need for meaningful and sustained investment for part of the City for Culture in the year ahead, and the value of Carnegie Hall's own robust partnership in that space in service to our communities.

I will underline the need for the \$40 million in FY23 -- restoration, and the additional \$10 million for the Cultural Community in the year ahead -- and a restoration of all of The Council Initiatives that the Chair spoke with the Commissioner about earlier.

A commitment to funding the Arts and Culture is a compound investment in economic resiliency, growth, and workforce development, community healing, education, and public safety. It's Arts and you know all of the things that culture can do to build a strong and safe community.

Carnegie Hall's own commitment to our neighbors in all five boroughs, many of which are supported by the Council, are summarized in our written testimony, and you will find more information about the breadth and depth of our services, and we all grateful for the support you have shown for this. And we urge -- we urge -- The Council's investment in this key sector [TIMER CHIMES] that gives so much back. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

And, the last member of this panel is Eleni DeSiervo from... apologies again or any mispronunciations, from Lincoln Center.

MS. ELENI DESIERVO: Thank you, Chair Ossé and members of the Committee. My name is Eleni DeSiervo, Senior Director of Governmental Relations for Lincoln Center.

We are home to 11 arts and arts education nonprofits, including the New Yorker Public Library for the Performing Arts, The Vivian Beaumont Theater, the only Broadway theater off Broadway, jazz and film to name a few. The full list is in my written testimony.

Today, I am here with my colleagues urging you...
uh, seeking public support to ensure stability across
our cultural ecosystem and artistic communities. We
request The City Council invests \$50 million towards
cultural stability -- baseline is the headline. We
need that \$40 million to ensure that all of us can
invigorate the New York City economy and make sure
that our city remains vibrant. That, in addition to
the \$10 million for BIPOC accessibility and LGBTQ+
led and serving organizations, and fully restoring
funding for all of our City Council Initiatives.

Today I am urging The City Council to show their
support for the Arts and the Cultural Sector through
the City's budgeting process with baselined funding.

We are here, as I said, in solidarity. Our
sector creates pathways to upper mobility, jobs,
serves as the economic engine, and fosters a sense of
belonging for all New Yorkers. We as an institution,
are part of that ecosystem, supporting artist,
creative workers and educators that are embedded into
the daily life of New Yorkers across the five
boroughs. Serving as both cultural and combination
hubs, the Arts are at the heart of this city,

nurturing the mind, body, and soul of all that live
here and those who visit.

As I said, many of us found ways during the
pandemic, while we were closed to support New Yorkers
-- even when we couldn't put on performances. These
are spaces for vaccine drives, to serve as testing
centers, outdoor graduations for local high schools,
food distributions, and so much more.

And, so a healthy cultural ecosystem helps enrich
our economic resiliency and growth, uplifts the
mental and civic health of communities [TIMER CHIMES]
and lays foundations for an equitable and safe city.

Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Can I ask all four of you to
briefly go down the line and talk about why
baselining would be so important for your
institutions in this next budget -- not only the
baselining, but the investment of an additional \$10
million?

MS. COCO KILLINGSWORTH: I think you heard it
repeatedly, for us what baselining means is
stability. Specifically it is around workforce
development. When we know years ahead, we can plan
around who to hire and who to bring on to be a part

of our institutions to do the work that we mentioned.

But, it is clearly throughout all of our written testimony, but we need that stability. We start, at every point in the budget process, we start essentially looking for that total number to be able to spend energy in advance, really looking at the workforce, and really being able to plan, allows us to be stable. And I think what we have all experienced, right now in the City is it needs stability. We have done our part in bringing the City back, and bringing people back, and supporting local economies, but we also need to be whole and stable to continue to do that. All of that is true, specifically for BAM. That is what we are looking at as right now we are deep in our process of planning for FY24 for our budget, and that includes not just the performance we will hold or the programs we will do, but the staff who will support all of that. We need to know that we have the support of the City to continue to not just grow as an organization, but be here and be an essential part of the ecosystem.

MR. ADRIAN BENEPE: Chair, I would add that you have to look at every dollar that the City gives to us, gets a \$4.00 return for private money that we

raise to pay for all of these programs. So, for example, ,you know, when we... when we are working on a workforce development program, we want to sort of diversify the workforce that gets us these very good union gardening jobs. We are going to raise a lot of private money to do that. But, you can look at the... if you look at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens experience, the public support we get is about 20% of our overall budget. That includes some state money. Ten years ago, it was 40%. The money has stayed constant over the last decade, so that all of us have seen a big shrinkage of the public support that we get. That has to be replaced with private dollars. And, as you can see, every time there is an economic sneeze, the private dollars just kind of shrink away like they're going to get sick. So, we are still in very unsettled times now. Being what the public funding represents, it is not giving us much more than what we used to have, it is keeping us from falling further behind. Baselining that keeps us falling further behind to deliver a critical mission, to give those... the free programs that we give to school programs are not free. We are paying people to give those programs. We are thrilled that

1 DC 37 workers finally got a raise three years later
2 after their contract expired. But, that 16% increase
3 is something that we have to pay for. We have to
4 budget for it. So, the City money, the Mayor will
5 not pay for those, but we are glad they got bonuses,
6 but we are going to have to... the bottom line rests
7 with us. So, we see the City money as being a piece
8 of a foundation, certainly not the whole picture. It
9 allows us a little bit of that stability that Coco
10 was talking about, so that we know that we can go out
11 to the private sector and say, please give us so
12 money to four times match this public money that we
13 have gotten.

14
15 MR. DAVID FREUDENTHAL: That is well said, by Coco
16 and Adrian. I will reinforce that the City money
17 pays for union jobs. There is an expectation on our
18 part of... not an expectation of the funding, but we
19 have built... the partnership for Carnegie Hall and
20 for the CIG with the City, is ,you know, it is arts
21 in service to New Yorkers. And the public funding is
22 key to that... the stability associated with that is
23 key to that partnership. As you have just heard,
24 ,you know, we fundraise fiercely from the private
25 sector, from everywhere we can to be able to provide

that service, but it is a core for the CIG as a whole on a commitment to serving New Yorkers. And that public compact is underwritten and supported with that ongoing public commitment. And the stability and the guarantee of that -- nothing is guaranteed, but the City's renewed and commitment to that support is essential.

MS. ELENI DESIERVO: And I would just add that ,you know, having that baseline funding allows us to invest in the operations and the maintenance of our spaces. You know, these are old institutions, and they require constant investment for our Performance and Operations teams. And, so, we need this funding in order to ensure that our spaces can be there when the City needs us most -- during the next crisis, or on an ongoing basis, because we all act, as I said, as community center for our respective neighborhoods.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: That concludes this panel. Thank you so much.

We will now move to our next public panel beginning with Lucy Sexton from New Yorkers for Cultural and the Arts, Lisa Gold from Asian American

Arts Alliance, Angel Hernandez, and Stephanie
Cunningham.

Okay, our first witness will be Lucy Sexton, and
you may begin your testimony when ready.

MS. LUCY SEXTON: Thank you Chair Ossé and members
of the City Council for hearing our testimony.

You are going to hear today from many artists and
cultural groups detailing the extraordinary work they
are doing across our city. The creative economy is
key to making the City work.

Last year's support from the Council resulted in
real wins for our communities. Right? Queens Theatre
hired back staff laid off in the pandemic; Art's
House Schools, one of the only cultural organizations
serving families in Coney Island, was able to expand
classes offered to their kids; and the Bronx Council
on the Arts was able to increase its regranting to
local artists.

Still, there were hundreds of organizations that
did not receive what they needed. And the sector
continues to be unstable, waiting every year to see
what the funding will be and if they'll retain their
staff or cut their programming -- and if they can
continue to support those artists in the Bronx -- who

were not supported when Hip-Hop began 50 years ago,
so those artists had to leave the City or the sector
to make a living.

We are asking that the City do it differently
this time. We need proper investment and stability.
The baseline is the headline.

To put our ask in perspective, let me point to
Museum Hue's devastating research showing underfunded
BIPOC-led organizations actually need an investment
of \$100 million. And in reality, we need New York
City to devote a full 1% of its budget to its
critical culture and arts sector.

As a downpayment toward these goals, I join the
CIG and many other colleagues in calling for a
baselining of the \$40 million that The Council added
last year. Culture's baseline budget has not been
increased in more than a decade.

We are asking for an additional \$10 million to
equitably fund the whole cultural ecosystem -- or to
more equitably fund it -- and that should be split
between the CIG and program groups. And we ask you
restore full funding to the invaluable Council
Initiatives, including the Coalition of Theaters of
Color, CASA, Su Casa, and the Cultural Immigrant

Initiative. The need has increased, and so should the programming to vulnerable communities. Now is the time to make this bold and visionary move to stabilize [TIMER CHIMES] the sector and help us be prepared for the next crisis, so culture will again help the city revive and rebuild. Thanks

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

The next panelist will be Lisa Gold from Asian American Arts Alliance.

MS. LISA GOLD: Thank you, good afternoon, Chair Ossé, nice to see you all.

My name is Lisa Gold, I am the Executive Director of The Asian American Arts Alliance, at 40-year-old nonprofit organization that works to ensure greater representation, equity, and opportunities for AAPI artists and Arts organizations.

If you watched the Academy Awards last week, you might have noticed something a little bit different. The Asian led film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" took home seven Oscars, including Best Actress and Best Supporting Actor. But, can you believe that in 2023, Michelle Yeoh Asian actress to win that award and Ke Huy Quan was only the second Asian American in history, 95 years, to win his category.

That night helped Americans see AAPIs as talented, multifaceted, creative Americans to be admired and respected. And visibility of that kind is what we need to end the xenophobic othering and violence that is directed at our community.

A4 works every day -- my organization -- to elevate the talented actors, painters, and sculptors, and dancers, and musicians in our community. As a matter-of-fact, we presented two of our Oscars nominated musicians who scored "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and Bryant Park last summer for all New Yorkers to enjoy.

And we rely on City funding to support this important work as AAPI organizations are notorious underfunded and overlooked by the philanthropic and corporate communities -- ask me about the 65/9 statistic. In order to ensure that we and our taxpaying community, which makes up almost 18% of the City population, continue to thrive and contribute to the arts ecosystem here that brings so much to the City, I am asking, uh, respectfully requesting that \$40 million be added to adoption in FY23, that it is restored and baselined -- as you have heard so frequently today -- baseline is the request. And we

are also asking for an additional \$10 million, so that the cultural community can create more stability and equity within our sector. And, finally, [TIMER CHIMES] full restoration of all City Council Initiatives... Cultural Initiatives. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: thank you so much for your testimony.

The next witness will be Angel Hernandez from the New York Botanic Garden.

MR. ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Good morning Chair Ossé and Members of the Committee. My name is Angel Hernandez, and I am Director of Government Relations for the New York Botanical Garden. We are also part of the CIG, the Cultural Institutions Group. Thank you for letting me testify this afternoon and for your ongoing support.

Since NYBG re-opened its doors to the public during the first summer of the Covid-19 pandemic two years ago, we were all uncertain about the possibilities. Being one of the few outdoor cultural institutions in the City to open so early in the pandemic, our concerns ranged from worrying for our essential staff to worrying about whether or not our institution would come back.

Well, I am glad to report that we are at pre-pandemic visitation levels, we have a robust workforce including our DC 37 employees, and we are continuing the work in the Bronx despite whatever we get and whatever is on the horizon.

Our school programs are in full effect as well. For example, the Edible Academy School Partnership Program has welcomed back Bronx students at our state-of-the-art learning campus. We continue to fight food insecurity by growing and donating produce from the same location to the VA Hospital and public schools throughout the Bronx. So far, we have donated tens of thousands of tons of produce -- all grown in the Bronx.

In the face of uncertainty, NYBG continued to push to get its doors open to host some of the City's economic driving events in tourism. For example, The annual Holiday Train Show continued throughout the early months of the pandemic, bringing thousands of tourists from all over the world. In 2021, the KUSAMA: Cosmic Nature was the most was the highest attended exhibition in our 130 years of existence. That helped us out as well. And it just shows us and exemplifies [TIMER CHIMES] that we are resilient and

continue despite uncertainty. And this is why I ask on behalf of New York Botanical Garden and the Cultural Committee, respectively requests that the \$40 million, as you have heard many times before, be added to adoption of FY23 to be restored and baselined. We request an additional \$10 million to be split evenly between the CIG and our program groups. And, finally, we ask for full restoration of Cultural Council Initiatives as well. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, Thank you so much for your testimony.

I will now move to our final witness on this panel, which will be Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham from Museum Hue, thank you.

MS. STEPHANIE JOHNSON-CUNNINGHAM: Thank you. Thank you to Chair Ossé... [TIMER CHIMES?] and the rest of the City Council committee.

My name is Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham, I am the Executive Director of Museum Hue, an arts organization dedicated to the advancement of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and all People of Color.

We are a coalition of over 400 arts entities through our HueArts New York Initiative,

representing, again, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian entities across the five boroughs.

I join my colleagues working across the creative disciplines throughout the City in thanking the Committee for your leadership.

One key challenge facing arts entities of color, is that lack of data and funding from the City's Department of Cultural Affairs, specifically in support of arts organizations of color.

Over the last two years, through our HueArts Initiative, we have heard from hundreds of arts leaders who have shared the lack of financial support from the City and a need for greater funding for arts within communities of color.

Arts organizations across the City like Weeksville, The Clemente National Black Theatre, Bronx Academy of Art and Dance, and other community centered organizations are often overlooked and greater favor and funding disproportionately are given to The Cultural Institutions Group and other predominantly white institutions.

In order for the vibrancy that is New York City's arts and culture to be revived, we need long term investment, specifically by the New York City

Council, we need greater dedicated funding for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian and all people of color art spaces. They were impacted way before the COVID-19 pandemic; we believe and implementation and deployment of a new \$40 million funding model will help accomplish the following: Regrant equitable funding to BIPOC arts entities across New York City; Provide professional development opportunities to strengthen BIPOC arts entities; Advocate for greater city/state policies and practices to provide support for BIPOC arts; and Assist BIPOC arts [TIMER CHIMES] entities in gaining long-term spaces to operate and thrive in New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Miss Sexton, Miss Cunningham, and Miss Gold, we heard from some of the CIGS about how beneficial baselining an additional \$10 million would be. I would love to hear how it would benefit some of our non-CIG organizations or Culturals. You can go down the line.

MS. LUCY SEXTON: Yes, I mean, I put it in our written testimony, but it is that thing of every year looking at literally which programs am I going to be able to continue next year, or which I am going to have to cut back on. It doesn't make any sense, it

doesn't make for stable support for our communities to have to be looking every year to say whether... what programs you're going to be able to afford to do and what you are not going to be able to afford to do. And to go through this period, and spend a lot of time where we are trying to get everybody's attention, and the people who can least afford to do what I am doing right now are smaller organizations, organizations of color, organizations who are run by very few people and do not have Governmental Affairs wings, so, it is particularly important for the smaller organizations -- particularly important for the underfunded organizations. And, as you are hearing from my colleagues here, Stephanie and Lisa, ,you know, the movements towards equity last year were a good first step, and there is still large parts of it left undone. Right? So, you need to add that \$10 million as well. Not just because when those equity moves were made, there was some defunding and destabilization in the rest of the sector, but also it needs to go even further, right? It needs to fund those AAPI organizations. It needs to fund those small organizations of color, who are not even in the game yet.

MS. STEPHANIE JOHNSON-CUNNINGHAM: Through the research that we have done through HueArts New York City, we learned that over 60% of Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latinx arts organization operate with budgets less than half a million dollars. Right? And, so, what we know is that there is a need for greater capacity and support for these organizations to operate. And, also, the fact that the work that they do, the community work that they do, is also often overlooked because of the fact that their arts organization does much more than ,you know, exhibitions and such. And, so, we know that a baseline in support for these arts organizations would not only help them in the capacity they need, but also it would significantly help in the community work that they do. You know? So, that is really why we are very much interested in having ,you know, a line item specifically within the budget for Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latinx arts organizations.

MS. LISA GOLD: I just want to build on everything that my colleagues have already said. One thing that is very important to note, uh, about Stephanie's testimony, most of these culturally specific

1 organizations have very small budgets. And as a
2 result, cannot get the funding from private
3 investigation, corporations, foundations. They are
4 often overlooked. I have started to, uh, mention
5 this statistic: Of predominantly white institutions,
6 65% of their funding comes from individuals. In
7 BIPOC led organizations and community specific
8 organizations, 9% of their funding come from
9 individuals. So, they rely... we rely on government
10 funding way more than the CIGs, than the large
11 predominantly white institutions. And, when that
12 funding is not baselined, we don't know if we are
13 going to be able to operate the next year. We don't
14 know if we are going to be able to serve that
15 community. We don't know if we are going to pay
16 those artists. So, it is incredibly important even
17 more so to BIPOC and smaller organizations, which
18 tend to be BIPOC led and serving, that that funding
19 is baselined.
20

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much for those
22 responses. And, Mr. Hernandez, you said that the New
23 York Botanical Garden is seeing an attendance at pre-
24 pandemic levels, what would you attribute to that
25 success?

MR. ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Back in July of 2020, we started the Bronx's Neighbor's program, and it is offering free access for Bronx residents. I think that was one of the major attributes to that. Bronx people especially living in the neighborhood around the garden are learning more about the institution, especially during COVID. Since then, we received almost 50,000 Bronx residents at no cost. So, I think that was a major attribute. And, also, it is the social media, it is the events happening again, Holiday Train Show; we have a new Glow show as well during the holiday season, and also it's the exhibitions, not only KUSAMA, but last year we had around the table, uh, stories of the foods we love. And, it's the first time that we worked with local artists ,you know, in the institutions history. So, there is a lot of hype around what we are doing, the new programs we are offering, and also, it is just the knowledge that is spreading throughout the Bronx community. So, I would like to think those would be the attributes.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much.

That concludes this panel.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES &
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We will now move to our next public panel, and I will read the names of the panelists for the following two panels. This will be the entirety of all of those we have registered for in person testimony. If you are planning to testify and do not hear your name, uh, in the next three panels, please see a sergeant and submit a witness slip.

We have also had to change the order slightly, so, just, uh, the next panel will be public panel six:

Ya-Yun Teng from New York Foundation for the Arts; Melody Capote; Tamia Santana from Ballet Hispánico; Anais Reyes from The Climate Museum.

The panel after that, public panel seven will be: Jolene Noelle The New 42nd Street; Elizabeth Venditto from the Museum of Jewish Heritage; Kate Madigan from The Public Theater.

And, public panel eight will be: Kimberly Olsen from New York City Arts and Education Roundtable; Molly Nolan; and Jane Tara Currie.

So, again the next panel will be public panel six: Ya-Yun Teng, Melody Capote; Tamia Santana, and Anais Reyes. And, that is this next panel, thank you so much.

So, if you are ready, the next panelist is Ya-Yun Teng. Thank you, again, for your patience. And you may begin your testimony when ready.

MS. YA-YUN TENG: Thank you, my name is Ya-Yun Teng, I am the Program Officer at Immigrant Artist Resource Center at the New York Foundation for the Arts, also known as NYFA. We are an arts service organization. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

As a cultural worker who supports immigrant artists and cultural producers living in our city, I couldn't emphasize enough the importance of City level funding to the well-being of our artists community and our neighborhoods.

More than 500 New York City-based immigrant artists, from 76 countries, who were part of NYFA's Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program since 2007 have become an essential fabric of New York City's communities.

Our artists teach in under-resourced public schools, partner with CBOs to do socially engaging works, preserve and promote different cultural heritages for our community, and create new artistic languages to reflect our experiences in the adopted

home. They are the reason for New York City's vibrant culture, and their work improves our communities' mental health, quality of education, public safety, and general well-being.

Thanks to DCLA, we are able to continue providing mentoring support as well as resources such as a monthly newsletter and public events through the newly created Immigrant Artist Resource Center -- serving 10,000 immigrant artists annually.

We are creating a new program which is a free, one on one immigrant artist career consultation in languages other than English.

In order for us to continue our work, we need funding to support artists and to sustain our own operations. We ask you to increase funding to the Council Initiatives such as Cultural Immigrant Initiative, CASA, Su CASA, and Coalition of Theaters of Color. We also ask that the \$40 million The Council added to the Culture Budget last year to be baselined and an additional \$10 million to stabilize our sector. [TIMER CHIMES] Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, and the next witness will be Melody Capote.

MS: MELODY CAPOTE: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé and members of The City Council. My name is Melody Capote, Executive Director of the Caribbean Culture Center African Diaspora Institute. I am today to testify about the budget for DCLA or The Department of Cultural Affairs, and to advocate for The Cultural Equity Fund.

I want you to know that as a leader of an organization of color, who prides itself in addressing racial and social justice within arts and culture at every opportunity, CCCADI as we are known, supports in major part the ask of the Cultural three communities dedicated at aimed at keeping the DCLA \$40 million increase untouched, as we advocate for a Cultural Equity Fund.

A year ago, I asked you to consider establishing a \$10 million Cultural Equity Fund, that would allow organizations of color to engage in the kind of programming that reaffirms and rematriates the cultures taken away from us through systemic racism.

I want to make something very clear, what is happening before you is not an attempt by organizations of color to take funding away from the large cultural institutions that contribute so much

to this city. It is the long overdue recognition of the work of small and mid-sized organizations, many of which service communities of color in our neighborhoods, that I and many of us are talking about. Because arts and culture are such a profit center for the city of New York, we don't ask that the large organizations be funded less, what we do ask is that our organizations be funded more. This means a recalibration of funding. This means a Cultural Equity Fund, that many of us have been talking about for over 20 years -- over 20 years.

While I cannot understand why, I recognize that the Cultural Equity Fund may still take some legislative [TIMER CHIMES] processing and learning, and that it may not make it to this year's budget, again; although, we are requesting to start this fund with only \$10 million.

Meanwhile, there are already existing areas of funding that need your attention and commitment with increases in Fiscal Year 2024, these include: The Coalition of Theaters of Color; The CASA Programs; The Cultural Immigration Programs and so on.

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We ask you to not only baseline DCLA, but
increase these initiatives that are the lifelines to
so many of our organizations. Thank you

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
testimony.

The next witness will be Tamia Santana from
Ballet Hispánico.

MS. TAMIA BLACKMAN-SANTANA: Hi, my name is Tamia
Blackman- Santana, I am the Chief Engagement &
Inclusion Officer at Ballet Hispánico -- most
importantly, I am born and raised in Brooklyn. There
are only a few of us left, so I just wanted to say
that.

Thank you, Chairman Ossé and members of the
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Intergroup Relations, for the
opportunity to speak to you today.

I am here to advocate for the City Council's
expanded support for cultural organizations in Fiscal
Year 2024, in particular organizations led by BIPOC
leaders like Ballet Hispánico - that provide
enriching arts and cultural experiences and education
for all New Yorkers.

Ballet Hispánico was founded 53 years ago in 1970 by our founder, Tina Ramirez, to provide a safe haven for Black and Brown families to learn about their culture. We had a new CEO and Artist Director, 15 years ago, who grew the institution to be the largest Latinx/Latine/Hispanic institution in America. We are one of Ford's Cultural Treasures, and there are only 20 organizations around the country who receive this award.

Ballet Hispánico's virtual and in-person programs engage over 330,000 people annually. In New York City, we know the BIPOC demographics are 70% of the population in our New York City public schools, 41% of all of our children identified as Latinx/Latine/, the next demographic is 24.7% is African American.

We continue to have underrepresentation in pop culture, in performances, and California and Connecticut are the only schools in America to have required Latinx curricula.

Ballet Hispánico is in partnership with our curriculum with Columbia University's Teachers College to go into the City and into our schools teaching children about [TIMER CHIMES] their culture and the African Diaspora. With the DOE requirements,

we go in through the arts, but we also talk about history and cultural relevance and Latinx methodologies and pedagogies. New York Department of Education, Chancellor Banks, and also Eric Adams remarked that children who six or more culturally relevant and cultural experiences have a higher grade point average and report to be happier and have a higher attention.

We are doing a lot to... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Sorry, we...

MS. TAMIA BLACKMAN-SANTANA: heal that... I'm sorry...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: are out of time.

MS. TAMIA BLACKMAN-SANTANA: Sir? What'd you say?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: We are at time. I'm so sorry, thank you.

MS. TAMIA BLACKMAN-SANTANA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much for your testimony. And, again, the Council will review all written testimony meticulously, for the record.

The last person on the panel will be Anais Reyes from The Climate Museum.

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MS. ANAIS REYES: Greetings, Chair Ossé and
members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries, and International Relations. Thank you for
the opportunity to discuss the City Council's
preliminary budget.

My name is Anais Reyes, and I am here as Senior
Exhibitions Associate of the Climate Museum. We are
the first museum in the US to focus on climate
change, and we use arts and cultural programs to
mobilize visitors for civic action on climate.
However, I am also here as a constituent of District
36, so it is great to meet you, Chair Ossé, and thank
you for your activism and your community service.

People all over New York City, of all ages, of
backgrounds, are anxiously asking, what can I do
about climate change? And at The Climate Museum, we
offer an answer to that question. Through
interdisciplinary exhibitions and programs, we use
the power of the arts to get people engaged with
climate change -- to connect people to actionable
solutions and to build resilient communities in the
process.

I have witnessed firsthand the transformation
that occurs and the connection and empowerment that

people feel when experiencing our programs. People have shared with us that because of our Arts programming, they were compelled to reach out to their elected officials for the first time, or the felt hope, and they felt at home in our space, or they were compelled to use the Arts to start dialogues with others.

And, because of the museum, I have also personally experienced a transformation from a siloed Arts admirer and administrator to someone who is an engaged citizen and uses the Arts to engage other citizens all working towards communal improvement.

Climate change is not just a scientific or social justice issue, but a cultural issue, and cultural tools must be used and applied to create the cultural shift that we urgently need.

Support from The City Council and the DCLA have been vital in establishing The Climate Museum, and we look forward to deepening that partnership.

Specifically, we will be circling back to you and Chair Gennaro on a Resolution to support The Climate Museum as we work to establish ourselves further and grow. We also have our first transit accessible popup exhibition located in SoHo, and we would love

to show your around there, and we will be in touch
with invitation. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, and we do
not have any questions, so that concludes this panel.
Thank you so much for your testimony.

Again, the Council will be reviewing all written
testimony, and you can submit testimony up to 72
hours after the close of the hearing at
testimony@council.nyc.gov.

The next public panel will be Jolene Noelle The
New 42nd Street, Elizabeth Venditto from the Museum
of Jewish Heritage, and Kate Madigan from The Public
Theater.

Okay, thank you, and again the address for, uh,
written testimony is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

So, we will not move to public panel 7, and our
first witness will be Jolene Noelle The New 42nd
Street, and you may begin your testimony when you are
ready.

MS JOLENE NOELLE: Thank you, and thank you for
having me here. It is really great to hear so many
amazing institutions in the room today. I am

absolutely going to look up bowling with my kids at
the Staten Island Children's Museum. That sounds fun!

My name is Jolene Noelle, and the Senior Manager
of Institutional Giving at The New 42nd Street and
The New Victory Theater. We are New York City's
premier performing arts organization dedicated to
children and families. So, if you do need a kid show
to go to, we've got a really awesome circus show
coming up.

The New Victory Theater presents a diverse array
of world-class productions from across the globe
designed to engage and educate New Yorkers of all
ages. Our mission is to make extraordinary performing
arts a vital part of everyone's life from the
earliest years onward.

I am going to talk about one of our key programs,
which Council Member Brewer brought up, which is
education in The New Victory Theater Education
Program, which brings dynamic in-classroom arts
education to students citywide with the aim of
instilling confidence, building community, and
empowering students to unleash their creative
potential. City Council funding has been integral to
the success of this impactful program by supporting

deeply-underwritten \$2.00 student tickets to New Victory school matinees, which is the same cost as when the program was established in 1995, and up to 1,000 in-classroom workshops led by New Victory Teaching Artists each year and a digital library of modular activities and instructional videos.

Many of the program's partner schools are returning this year for the first time since the start of the pandemic. As students and educators continue to recover from the isolating and disruptive effects Covid-19, in-classroom arts education provides a unique opportunity to engage in collaborative and creative educational play. As one teacher noted, "Students are empowered by theater and hearing different stories. They communicate with more confidence when theater is in their lives."

In FY24, the New Victory Theater Education Program will partner with up to 150 schools, directly engaging over 25,000 students in all grades. And we really value accessibility as core tenet of our programs, so all of our shows have ASL-interpreted and audio-described [TIMER CHIMES] and sensory-friendly performances. And The City funding has been so helpful in making all of that happen. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony. Again, everyone, all of the Committee does review written testimony if you submit that as well. You can submit additional written testimony if anything else comes up as well at: testimony@council.nyc.gov.

The next witness is Elizabeth Venditto, from The Museum of Jewish Heritage.

MS. ELIZABETH VENDITTO: Thank you, Chair Ossé, and members of the Committee for hosting today's Preliminary Budget hearing.

My name is Elizabeth Venditto, and I am the Director of Institutional Giving at The Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial To The Holocaust.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage educates diverse visitors about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust. We are committed to the crucial mission of teaching about what unchecked hate and bigotry can do; we are dedicated to education and remembrance.

The Museum joins our peers in the cultural community in requesting that the \$40 million, added at adoption in Fiscal Year 2023, be restored and baselined. We request an additional \$10 million

split evenly between the CIG and our program group partners to help create more stability and equity within the sector. Finally, we ask for a full restoration of all Cultural Council Initiatives.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage is an essential resource for combating bigotry and antisemitism in New York City. We provide free admission for New York City public schools, CUNY students, and IDNYC cardholders. Our Holocaust curriculum, developed with support for The Department of Education, is a free and trustworthy resources for teachers. In the fall, we will open our first exhibition for elementary school students.

Council funding has helped us as we rebuild our audience to 2019 levels. Prior to COVID-19, we served nearly 200,000 people per year, and were open six days per week. This year, we are open four days per week, and we intend to have 100,000 visitors.

Council funding provides essential support for our operations and security -- funding which is difficult to get elsewhere. In a growing climate of Holocaust denial and misinformation, education is our first line of defense. The Museum of Jewish Heritage is deeply grateful for the Council's support of our

work, and we urge your continued support for the essential work of the City's entire cultural sector, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And the last witness on this panel will be Kate Madigan from The Public Theater, thank you.

MS. KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon, everybody, my name is Kate Madigan, the Government Affairs Coordinator for The Public Theater, nice to see you all.

The Public is defined by New York City, rooted in founder Joe Papp's first forays touring Shakespeare throughout all five boroughs during the 1950's, this cultural experiment was driven a propulsive need to dismantle the traditional bounds of theater. Ever since then, our aim has to been to create free and accessible theater for each New Yorker and visitor from around the world.

As you know all too well, the entire field of live performing arts continues to suffer the effects of the pandemic, including, but not limited to audiences that are not returning as the same level as they were pre-pandemic; production costs are higher due to extreme inflation and supply issues; lost

revenue due to cancellations and postponement is high; one-time government funding opportunities have gone away -- some of them -- most of them; our commitment to free programming relies donors who are impacted by the current economic environment resulting in significant challenges to our fund raising. The public is part of this reality. What is at stake as we navigate challenges is nothing less than the survival of our organization and the continuation of our programs, such as Free Shakespeare in Central Park; The Public's Downtown Astor Place offerings, our music performances, and Joe' Pub; and countless community engagement and emerging artists programs, including mobile units that tour all five boroughs; our children's Shakespeare Initiative in Hunts Point, which brings free Shakespeare classes to the kids of the South Bronx, where they perform their own renditions of perhaps, Romeo and Juliette, to their peers and also have their first instance of being on stage. And that is amazing, so we want that to continue, of course, with your help. [TIMER CHIMES]... and, thank you so much, I appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
testimony.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: [No Microphone] I want to go
to the circus [INAUDIBLE]

MS. JOLENE NOELLE: [No Microphone] [INAUDIBLE]
it opens on Friday.

[LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, and that concludes this
panel, so thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So, we will now move to our
last in person panel. If there is anyone here in the
room or in the building who wishes to testify in
person, please let the sergeant know that you are
here and fill out a witness slip, so that we know
that you are present.

Our last three witnesses... or last witnesses on
public panel eight, before we move to remote
testimony, will be Kimberly Olsen from New York City
Arts and Education Roundtable; Molly Nolan; and Jane
Tara Currie. We will just wait one moment for people
to get settled, just one moment.

Now moving to public panel eight, our first witness will be Kimberly Olsen from New York City Arts and Education Roundtable.

MS. KIMBERLY OLSEN: Hello, and good afternoon, I've never done this in person, I am so excited to be here!

So, a huge thank you to you, Chair Ossé, as well as your fellow Committee Members and Council staff, we are so grateful for your passion, leadership, and support of arts and culture in New York City.

My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. We work with thousands artists, educators, and cultural workers as well of hundreds of arts and cultural organizations to advance arts education across all five boroughs and foster sustainability in the arts education workforce.

Thriving, vibrant, and colorful communities starts with the arts.

Engagement in the arts provides students with an avenue for learning and career development that simply is not measured by standardized tests.

Instead, the arts create a safe environment for

students to learn important life skills to help them reach their full potential.

Arts and culture, as we have all heard, is a major economic driver here in New York City. Exposure in the arts helps our students support the pathways for employment in creative industries and beyond as well as cultivates generations of New York City arts lovers and patrons.

There is no arts without arts education. Our future cultural leaders, museum goers, graphic designers, actors, audience members, musicians and more are sitting in New York City classrooms waiting for that spark and love of the arts to be ignited -- and one that will simply last a lifetime.

Arts also means jobs. Arts education in particular, is the life blood of almost 5,000 New Yorkers that we estimate to work as teaching artists across the boroughs. This highly specialized workforce supplements their income by teaching in New York City schools and communities. And despite this essential work, teaching artists were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, and are still recovering the economic loss caused by COVID-19. Funding for arts partnerships through the New York City

Department of Education, DCLA, and DYCD supports this arts workforce while expanding opportunities for our city's young people.

To support the City's economic recovery and build a community that supports all New Yorkers, the city and state must baseline that \$40 million [TIMER CHIMES] added at adoption, a full restoration of Arts Initiative funding, continue an increased funding to \$6 million "Support for Arts Instruction", and improve data transparency by providing a school to school breakdown of the state of arts education in public schools. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

And our next witness will be Molly Nolan from Move the Money New York City... (CROSS-TALK)

MS. MOLLY NOLAN: My name is Molly Nolan. I am a retired history professor and an active member of Move the Money NYC, the promotor of Resolution 423, which asks the City Council to urge the federal government to move money from the Pentagon to the needs of our community.

Getting more money for Libraries and Cultural Affairs requires that the Council not only to fight Mayor Adam's disastrous austerity budget, but also to

express its opposition to a federal government budget that wants to give nearly \$1 trillion to the Pentagon. That money needs to be moved to the things that we need for our communities: better schools and libraries, health care, jobs, and housing.

As an educator and as someone who is at the Central Branch of the Brooklyn Public library at least once a week, I can testify to the vital importance of libraries. They provide every sort of book for all interests and needs -- And here in NYC no books are banned. Indeed, the Brooklyn Public Library provides eBook access to those in parts of the country where schools and public libraries are removing books at a frightening rate. But libraries provide more than books. They give computer access and job hunting advice, literacy and citizenship classes. They offer concerts and lectures. They provide study space for school kids of all ages, story hours for preschoolers, and simply a place to be warm and safe for those in need. They are, in the words of the sociologist Eric Klinenberg, "Palaces for the People." Libraries are a vital part of our education system, a necessary adjunct to NYC's public schools and colleges and universities. They are vital

to helping create educated and skilled citizens of the sort our democracy and economy needs. Libraries are a vital part of what our city and country needs to meet the many challenges we face.

Yet, all too many people here in the City and nationwide, think that the only way to safety, security, and prosperity is to spend more on the police and the military and less for everything else. That is clearly not the way to enable people to develop their capacities and contribute to the development of our society, economy, and democracy.

Therefore, we urge the Committee and the Council to oppose Mayor Adams' [TIMER CHIMES] cuts and to support Resolution 423, and have a shift of priorities nationally as well as locally toward the needs of our community. Thank you very much for listening to us.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And I am a co-sponsor on Resolution 423. And I don't know if May reached out from my team about bringing that to a hearing. But we have been supportive of that. No?

MS. MOLLY NOLAN: [NO MICROPHONE] [INAUDIBLE]

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay, great.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, and now we're moving to the final witness this panel. Before we do so, just so people are aware and prepared, we will be moving to remote testimony next. And, I am just going to read the names of those people quickly so that they can prepare and we can transition. It will be Lacey Tauber, Lauren Comito, Candace Thompson-Zachery, and Risa Shoup.

So, apologies... we will now move to our final panelist from public panel eight, Jane Tara Currie from Move the Money, thank you.

MS. JANE TARA CURRIE: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé and committee members. My name is Jane Tara Currie, and I am a native New Yorker residing in Brooklyn and an active member of Move the Money New York City Campaign, which advocates for the passage of Resolution 423. I also support #CareNotCuts and #PeoplesBudget, and I oppose the deep cuts and reductions to libraries and cultural institutions proposed by Mayor Adams in the Preliminary Budget.

Mayor Adams regularly claims that the City is on the edge of a fiscal cliff, that it is facing a tsunami of dept. What he doesn't talk about is why

the largest city in the richest country in the world
has to cut back on vital services.

Most if the income tax dollars that our residents
pay go to the federal government. What do the feds
to with our tax dollars? More than 50% of the
federal discretionary budget is spent on the
military. And that number goes up every year. It is
going to go up in 2024, too. Is our country safer or
stronger if we cannot afford to keep libraries open?

A report by the Government Accountability Office
released on March 7th of this year, states that
although the Department of Defenses' spending makes
up about half of the federal government's
discretionary spending and physical assets more than
70% of the federal governments' physical assets, it
remains the only major agency that has never been
able to accurately account for and report on its
spending or physical assets. Just last week, more
than 60 national and international faith based groups
issued a letter congress saying that the country is
spreading towards a trillion dollar budget for
weapons and war, propping up an expensive and harmful
militarized foreign policy while people struggle to
meet their basic needs. We cannot continue down this

[TIMER CHIMES] morally bankrupt path. Our City leadership should show the way for cities through the United States and be vocal about this misuse. The Mayor won't do it. The City Council needs to do it, and pass Resolution 423. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much for your testimony. That concludes this panel.

And we will now move to remote testimony via Zoom. The names of the next panelists -- and then we will read the names of our final panel -- are Lacey Tauber, Lauren Comito, Candace Thompson-Zachery, and Risa Shoup. Just one moment...

After that, public panel public panel 10 will Sarah Mercanti, Giulietta Fiore, Madaha Kinsey-Lamb, and Jane Wade.

We will have one more panel after that. But, we will read the names after this panel.

So, again, we will now move to our next witness on public panel nine, which is Lacey Tauber. You may begin your testimony when the sergeant calls the time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MS. LACEY TAUBER: Hi, my name is Lacey Tauber, I am representing Brooklyn Borough President Antonio

Reynoso here today. Thank you, Chair Ossé, for holding this hearing today.

My testimony is going to focus on three issues: Libraries, Cultural Development Fund allocations, and The Capital Budget.

So, the Borough President wants to be very clear: the proposed cuts to our city's libraries are unacceptable. While he understands that our financial future is currently precarious, cutting essential services that serve all New Yorkers, including our most vulnerable populations in their communities is not the answer.

In my testimony I have a list of 14 bullet points of services that our Brooklyn Public Library provides other than lending out books -- in addition to lending out books. I won't read them all, because we would be here all day. Some of my favorites are: Live tutoring sessions for our students; Citizenship exam coaching and legal services for immigrants; jail-based services for incarcerated individuals, and connections to re-entry services for the formerly incarcerated individuals. I really do not have time to list them all, yet the Admin wants to cut \$8 million from the BPL's budget over the four years

which their CEO has said would mean, "agonizing choices about shortening hours, cutting programs and collections, and rolling back services." We cannot in good conscience allow this to happen, especially with the NYPD on track to charge our city over \$800 million in overtime in this fiscal year.

The next piece is about the Cultural Development Fund. Last year the [INAUDIBLE] encouraged the agency to develop an equitable methodology that considers both organization size and populations served. Yet we know that even though DCLA has taken steps towards this goal, last year's allocation have left many cultural organizations scrambling.

I see Risa is here from ART NY, uh, that organization [INAUDIBLE] shared some really interesting data with us, I will let them talk about it. But, I will say, it just raised some concerns about whether the reallocation was achieving its goal [TIMER CHIMES]... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MS. LACEY TAUBER: and really hitting... oh, sorry, is that time?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, sorry, that's time. But we will... if you can just wrap up, we also will read written testimony.

MS. LACEY TAUBER: Okay, can I say one thing about the Capital Budget really quickly? It's just that they Borough President has, uhm, stated his intentions to develop an acquisition fund for a nonpartisan organization. And it is very disappointing that DCLA does not facilitate property acquisition with its capital dollars. It is really limiting what our office can do with our Capital Budget. We want to help small nonprofit organizations find permanent space, so that they can focus on their work and not worry about being displaced from their spaces. And we understand that this is really just a resource issue for the agency, and we want to work with the Council to address this so that we can start really helping these groups find permanent spaces. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

Our next panelist will be Lauren Comito. You may begin your testimony when the sergeant calls the clock.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. LAUREN COMITO: There we go, sorry about that.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify and speak to the Committee today, especially remotely, I am out sick today -- you wouldn't want me in the room with you.

My name is Lauren Comito, I am Library Manager in New York City and Executive Director at Urban Librarians Unite, we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Brooklyn that focuses on supporting library workers in cities across the US. I am really excited to introduce our organization to you and its amazing volunteers.

The Council has a long tradition of supporting the public libraries of New York City, and we are really grateful that you are all here on this committee to continue that tradition.

You have already heard the library presidents testify about how important the libraries are to our city, and our neighborhoods, and our neighbors -- and they are. And they also testified about how important staff are to the libraries' functioning, which is also true. Services provided by the libraries are driven by staff. The amount of time it

takes to provide these services is astronomical, and the fact that we are so creative and committed in this city to providing truly excellent library services is a testament to the quality of the people who work for and in our libraries. But, between staffing shortages, right-wing abuse of libraries, and the stress of rebuilding our entire profession post-pandemic, library workers needs your support today more than we have ever before. We need the funding to continue to do that work in a way that is healthy and sustainable for us as workers. We are in a unique position today, uh, in the past I would have asked hyperbolically, like, what would a city with limited libraries look like? But, we now know exactly what that looks like [TIMER CHIMES] it looks like a city where... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

MS. LAUREN COMITO: our neighbors are isolated from each other and kids can't sit still for story times.

So, we hope to maintain a budget that shows the value that we have for libraries of our City. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for wrapping up as well and understanding with the clock, and please submit written testimony, if there is anything else that anyone would like to add.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Get better.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, and please feel better, The Chair says.

And our next witness will be Candace Thompson-Zachery from Dance/NYC.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MS. CANDACE THOMPSON-ZACHERY: Hi, Greetings, Chair Ossé and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Candace Thompson-Zachery. I am the Director of Programming and Justice Initiatives at Dance/NYC a service organization advancing the interest of the dance industry in the metropolitan New York City area. Our diverse constituents include Black, Indigenous, People of Color, immigrants, and disabled dance workers and dance organizations, businesses, projects, and groups. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

The dance industry contributes \$300 million annually to the City's economic activity, not including contributions from fiscally sponsored and

for-profit enterprises, and sole proprietors. And as you have heard today, the creative industry overall contributes 13% to New York's economic activity.

Dance is typically the least funded of the performing arts, and our workers face considerable barriers to be able to do their work despite our contributions to not only dance but also education, social services, tourism, et cetera.

Currently, our research suggests that dance workers maintain an average of five jobs to earn a living and do not have adequate health care or retirement benefits. Thirty-six per cent (36%) of dance making organizations are in weak financial shape and 56% do not hold a reserve or any savings. Furthermore, our COVID impact research shows that 16% of dance workers left the City and 25 dance organizations have closed or shut down, and the smallest organizations, mainly BIPOC led, have been impacted the most with budgets shrinking by as much as 52%.

I want paint this picture, so that we understand the reality of the dance community and to underscore that financial stability is a critical need to allow the dance industry and its workers to remain in the

City, to continue to be a part of the workforce, and keep dance and the arts in classrooms, community centers, on our parkways for New York Urban Carnival, and on Broadway. Studies have shown the significant impact that the arts have on improved outcomes for mental health, safety, and other dimensions of social well-being. I request that you ensure our [TIMER CHIMES] arts and culture funding... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

MS. CANDACE THOMPSON-ZACHERY: by baselining the \$40 million added last year to the Fiscal Year 2023 funding for DCLA, allocating the additionally \$10 million to the \$40 million baseline to ensure equitable funding, and to restore full funding to The Council's Initiatives that do so much for our communities. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

And before we move to the final witness on this panel, uh, just one note to let people know that, uhm, they are coming up next. We will have two more public panels, that are both remote, after this panel, and then that will conclude public testimony. We will check for anyone that we inadvertently missed

before we conclude, both in person and remote, so if we did not call your name, there will be a chance to raise your hand. But, I am just going to read those names before we go to Risa Shoup on this panel.

So, public panel 10, which will be the next one, will be Sarah Mercanti, Giulietta Fiore, Madaha Kinsey-Lamb, and Jane Wade, which will then be followed by public panel 11: Jonathan Silverstein, Jordana De La Cruz... So, it will just be those two.

So, again, uh, we will check for anyone we inadvertently missed, but first we are going to the final witness on this panel, Risa Shoup.

Thank you for your patience, and you may begin your testimony when ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

MS. RISA SHOUP: Thank you, Chair Ossé, and members of the committee, as well as, uh, thank you to everyone here today advocating on behalf of the cultural sector and all of the artists and other workers who carry that forward.

My name is Risa Shoup, I am a co-Executive Director of The Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York, more fondly known as Art/NY. We are a membership organization serving all nonprofit and

nonprofit [INAUDIBLE] theaters throughout the City.

We have over 150 individual practitioner members and over 475 theater company members -- they range in size from theater companies that are unincorporated groups of recent MFA grads to institutions that have testified here today -- like Lincoln Center and The Public Theater.

I join my colleagues today in requesting that the \$40 million that was added to the FY23 budget be baselined for FY24, plus an additional \$10 million, plus full restoration of all Council Initiatives. Thank you so much.

Theater holds a mirror up to nature. Theater gives us an opportunity to build empathy and to develop creative new solutions to problems. We live in an undeniable moment of overlapping, overwhelming national and international crisis, and I truly believe that we need theater as a way to invasion a better way forward to get out of these crises -- And, frankly, also, to bring us joy, which is essential fuel when we are struggling.

ART/NY provides theater makers with cash grants, access to subsidized space, educational recourses, and opportunities for convenings and peer learning.

The work that ART/NY does to provide this essential stabilizing and capacity building support to our members allows those members in turn to create jobs and through the productions that they put on stage as well as the educational programs that they develop, uhm, and it also helps them to... (CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

MS. RISA SHOUP: All right, thank you very much, I will submit written testimony.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right, thank you so much for your testimony. And, again, we will meticulously review written testimony, so we really appreciate that.

Uh, the next panel, and this concludes this panel, we do not have any questions from council members, so we will move to public panel 10.

This is our second to last panel; I will ready the names of the witnesses again. We are going to have a slight change.

Panel 10 will be Sarah Mercanti, Giulietta Fiore, Madaha Kinsey-Lamb, followed by public panel 11, which is and Jane Wade, Jonathan Silverstein, and Jordana De La Cruz.

2 So, uh, Sarah Mercanti is our next witness.

3 Thank you, again, for your patience, and you may
4 begin your testimony when the sergeant calls the
5 clock.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

7 MS. SARAH MERCANTI: Thank you so much, Chair Ossé
8 and esteemed members of this committee for this
9 opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Sarah
10 Mercanti, and I am the Director of Government
11 Relations for The Roundabout Theater Company,
12 represented by City Council members Eric Bottcher and
13 Majority Leader Keith Powers. Thank you all for
14 everything that you have done for the arts in our
15 city -- the cultural epicenter of the world.

16 As the nation's largest nonprofit theater,
17 Roundabout strives to pioneer programming that meets
18 the ever evolving challenges of our industry and
19 community, such as start the Theatrical Workforce
20 Development Program, which provides direct pathways
21 to backstage careers for New York's underemployed
22 youth.

23 Since reopening from COVID two years ago, our
24 audiences on average remain at 50% of pre-COVID
25 numbers. Even with an abridged five-show season, we

are projecting a \$4 million deficit for FY23.

Despite these losses, we remain committed as ever to serving artists, providing arts education initiatives to over 24,000 New Yorkers, and stewarding our physical plan of five historic theaters in Manhattan's Theater District.

The federal relief funding that kept us afloat has gone, our audiences have not fully returned, and we thus remain in a financial crisis. New York City's cultural organizations are united here today in asking for the following for FY24: For the baseline of \$40 million that was added to last year's Culture Budget, for an additional \$10 million to equitably fund the entire cultural ecosystem, uh, without increasing the amount of funding available to all of us nonprofits, organizations, including Roundabout, are at risk. We very gratefully received safety net funding in FY23 from the CDF; however, unfortunately, this isn't guaranteed for FY24, and it should be to stabilize our field. And, finally, for the increase in funding to Council Initiatives, especially CASA. Our programming delivers critical services that will boost students' social-emotional

learning and ensure their long term success. [TIMER
CHIMES] Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
testimony.

The next witness will be Giulietta Fiore. You
may begin your testimony when ready... apologies,
when the sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MS. GIULIETTA FIORE: Hi, there, my name is
Giulietta Fiore, and I'm testifying today on behalf
of the Historic House Trust of New York City, an
organization that works to preserve 23 historic
houses that tell the inclusive stories of those who
have enriched our city's past. These sites flourish
today as historic landmarks, museums, educational
centers, cultural beacons, and public green spaces
thanks to our nonprofit partners and in
collaborations with New York City Parks. Integrated
into communities across all five boroughs, we believe
that these publicly owned historic sites are critical
to a dynamic cityscape. They keep the past alive for
hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, and
provide programs for school children and residents to
address specialized community needs at the

intersection of history, culture, and the arts. From concerts to contemporary art exhibitions, the programs our partners offer are drivers of equity and community in areas that in many cases are underserved by the cultural sector at-large. Every dollar that the City provides in support of this work is an investment in New York City's diverse communities.

Our museum partners, many of which operate with small staffs, budgets, continue to feel the impact of COVID-19. Unable to generate funds from admissions, programs, or events due to extended site closures, these community-based museums lost up to 50% of their annual revenue while at the same time pivoting to provide essential relief and recovery services to their surrounding neighborhoods. During this period, NYC Parks also suffered from budget cuts that hat further endangered these historic house museums despite the increased usage of their gardens and grounds as refuges during the pandemic. Like many other cultural organizations, we are all still feeling from losses in revenue, staff, and programming. With more DCLA support, our partner museums can heal from years of uncertainty and pursue

innovative new tactics for enhancing community
vibrancy in an altered cultural landscape.

Thank you for this opportunity to voice our
needs, and for hearing our call to help sustain the
places that help make New York City unique.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
testimony.

At this point, we will move to last witness on
this panel, Madaha Kinsey-Lamb. And you may begin
your testimony once the sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

MS: MADAHA KINSEY-LAMB: Hello, my name is Madaha
Kinsey-Lamb and I am the President/Founder of Mind-
Builders Creative Arts Center.

Thank you all, each of you, for your dedicated
service and attention to this critical process. We
appreciate the support you give the equips Mind
Builders to help transform the lives of our youth,
families, and communities by nourishing their
realization of how powerful, beautiful and capable
they are.

I started Mind-Builders in 1978 in the Northeast
Bronx. Our state of the art facility houses Mind-
Builder's music, dance, theater, visual arts, martial

arts, a PreK program and community folk culture programs for close to 700 students every week including: audiences in the thousands annually for productions and presentations.

Back in 1984, through their personal loan guarantees, our board at that time of parents and other regular folk like me, purchased what was then a fire-damaged, four story former municipal building for \$20,000 in order to reach the hundreds of students who are on our waiting list. Eventually, Mind-Builders completed a \$9 million renovation in 2015. Our students and families come from every zip code in the Bronx and beyond in our predominantly African America, Caribbean, Latinx, African, and Middle Eastern Youth -- many from the disinvested neighborhoods and housing projects local to our area. Mine-Builders employs over 50 staff members coming from every borough. Each staff member often fulfills the work of two or three positions. I'm testifying today, because our organizations, including the dynamic work of The Coalition Theaters of Color, have not had a increase in baselined funding for over 10 years. We ask the Council baselines the \$40 million that was added to DCLA last year, and add the \$10

million to address the real costs of this work that goes up each year as new and increasing needs require more of us. Full support of DCLA and of all of the Council Initiatives is a serious need. The extraordinary challenges, commitment, and successes of community based cultural organizations and legacy organizations, led by Black and Brown people, need your attention and special support beyond the ordinary. The generations of inequity has been...

(CROSS-TALK)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired...

MS: MADAHA KINSEY-LAMB: and racism continue...
thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony.

We have no questions for this panel, so we will now move to our final panel today. Again, we will check for anyone that we inadvertently missed, and if you have anything else to add, we will meticulously be reviewing all written testimony, so, thank you.

Our final panel will now be two people, we have a brief update, so it will be Jane Wade and Jordana De La Cruz.

So, the next witness is Jane Wade, and you may begin your testimony when the sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

MS. JORDANA DE LA CRUZ: [INAUDIBLE] Hi, sorry for the confusion, I'm... (CROSS-TALK)

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: oh, apologies, I just got a notice about that, okay, yes, apologies. So, I just went through a list of people logged in, so our last witness on this panel will be Jordana De La Cruz. Apologies for the oversight, and thank you, again, for your patience. I know you were here in person, so we really appreciate it.

You may begin your testimony when the sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MS. JORDANA DE LA CRUZ: Hi, thank you for providing an opportunity to testimony at this committee hearing. I am Jordana De La Cruz, and I am the Co-Director of JACK. JACK is performance meets civic space located Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, and our mission is to fuel experiments in art and activism, collaborating with adventurous artists and our neighbors to bring about a more just and vibrant

society. This means that we work with dance, music, and theater artists in collaboration with our neighbors from different backgrounds to come together, create art, and speak their truths.

Equally as important, JACK at [INAUDIBLE] is that we provide mutual aid such as food distribution hub earlier in the pandemic, and as well as right now we are acting as a distribution site for COVID rapid tests and masks. We also hold town hall forums for the majority of our BIPOC neighbors, for giving them a place to speak during the [LOST AUDIO][INAUDIBLE] place of gentrification.

We have lost so many arts organizations during the pandemic, putting an even bigger strain on those of us who are still standing. This means we are taking on more artists, more initiatives than ever before, with less resources. If we are expected to be the great theater capital of the world and to be in these off Broadway incubators for new talent, we need the resources for the for the artists, for the community, and for the staffs to keep it all going.

If the cuts proposed are issues, we are going to be either be forced to cut the number of artists we

work with or keep the artists and cut their fees overall.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, Thank you so much for your testimony.

That is our final witness, so it concludes public testimony for today. We will do one check just to make sure that we have not missed anyone. And I am just going to read the names of individuals who have registered as well to make sure no one is here. If there is anyone in person in the room or in the building, please let us know now if you would like to give testimony.

So, the names of people who have registered are Yunani Rodriguez (sp?), Shazia Choudry (sp?), Emily Drabinski (sp?), Alex Rodebaugh (sp?), Juan Calcutta, Nicholas Sherman, Cheryl Warfield, Tenisha Grant, Tom Angelo, Vladmir Martinez, Nadia Leaf (sp?), Alex Stein, and Jonathan Silverstein.

We are not seeing anyone appearing on Zoom or any additional individuals. So, with this, we will return to the Chair. This concludes the public testimony portion of today's budget hearing.

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Great job, everybody. Have a
4 great evening and rest of your afternoon.

5 [GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]
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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 April 11, 2023