



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**Jumaane D. Williams**

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**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS  
JUNE 22, 2020**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chairman Jimmy Van Bramer and the members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations for holding this very important hearing on the impact of COVID-19 on our City's cultural organizations. In the current climate we are living in, with New York being the epicenter of a global pandemic and the civil unrest across the country due to police brutality and racism, we need to support our cultural organizations, public libraries, theater groups, performing artists, fine arts programs, and international community now more than ever.

New York City's arts and culture community is an integral part of our social and emotional wellbeing, as well as a major economic driving force. Therefore, we need to protect our creative sector at all costs. In March, the New York Community Trust began administering the NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund, to which organizations could apply for funding support for services outside of normal operations required with social distancing, technology to support remote work, and PPE. This funding, in addition to the grants available through the federal CARES Act, are important in keeping our cultural organizations afloat during the current shelter-in-place order. But these funding sources only go so far.

We have to remember that performance venues are small businesses too. It is our duty as City legislators to put forth the same effort to help these businesses as we are doing with establishments in other industries. We need to suspend commercial rent payments and work with State representatives to provide long-term rent stabilization during this pause. State bill S8125A would suspend all rent payments for small business commercial tenants for 90 days. But these businesses need more than 90 days, as this unexpected public health crisis has fundamentally shaken their financial stability. Last month, Shelter Studios and Theater in Manhattan closed its doors permanently after 30 years. The Secret Theater in Queens also announced it will not reopen after more than a decade. These theaters are not the size of the ones on Broadway; they likely have under 100 seats. They, along with the nontraditional venues, account for a majority of the live performances in New York City each year.

Theater organizations and performance venue spaces have been in touch with my Office about the commercial rent issue, and I want to ensure that no other theater has to permanently close its doors.

In addition to addressing commercial rent, we need a plan for when restrictions are lifted and our creative sector is running again. It is our responsibility to ensure that the cultural organizations, museums, libraries, and performing art venues can operate while adhering to social distancing and have a sufficient amount of PPE in their stockpiles. I look forward to seeing the Department of Cultural Affairs' plan to guide our creative sector towards a safe and healthy reopening.

# NYBG

**NYBG Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations on Monday, June 22, 2020, regarding "Oversight: DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City."**

**Given by Angel Hernandez, Director of Government Relations for The New York Botanical Garden, Virtual Zoom-Webinar.**

Good morning Chairman Van Bramer and Members of the Committee. My name is Angel Hernandez and I am Director of Government Relations for the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG.) Chairman Van Bramer, I first want to thank you for letting me speak this morning and for always being the cultural community's champion in the council. I also want to thank NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson, and your colleagues for the ongoing support for our city's cultural institutions.

Before the onset of the Covid-19 virus outbreak, The New York Botanical Garden, as any other cultural institution in this city, was in full operation. We just celebrated Black History Month with a well-attended awards dinner in late February. In early March, the momentum for our much-anticipated exhibition *Kusama: Cosmic Nature* began to intensify, with grand plans to offer over 100k free tickets to local and underserved populations. The months of April, May, and June, an important time for botanical gardens to secure earned income, were of less merriment however. With our efforts to "slow the spread," and all public events cancelled or postponed for the remainder of FY20, earned income, which is 35% of our annual revenue, has all but vanished. Our total estimated financial impact of all COVID-19 loss through July 1st, is close to \$15 million dollars.

Our school programs were in full effect as well. One of them was the Edible Academy School Partnership Program. A state-of-the-art educational complex that features a 5,300 square foot classroom building outfitted with demonstration kitchens, Hi-tech classroom, a teaching greenhouse, pavilions, and more, the Edible Academy is where students are taught the essentials of plant science and healthier eating, while learning the core values of leadership, responsibility, and teamwork. At the on-set of the virus outbreak, the Edible Academy was hosting ten public schools, with an attendance of over one thousand students.



Staff members at the Edible Academy prepare for a school lunch program donation. These lunch grab-bags contain an assortment of vegetables, recipes, and cleaning instructions.

When NYC schools finally closed in mid-March, our staff at the Edible Academy was left with a fast-growing harvest but no attending students to demonstrate for. Avoiding at all costs any waste to our produce, we first gained a designation from the governor's office to allow some staff on our grounds to continue their work as essential. Seeing a growing trend in food

distribution hubs as the crisis worsened, the idea to start donating produce to our partnering organizations in the Bronx community was one that warranted little to no debate. By mid-April, our staff at the Edible Academy began dropping off multiple pounds of fresh kale and collards to our friends at POTS (Part of the Solution) who are known to do great charity work throughout the borough. The following week, our staff dropped off another significant amount of kale, spinach, and cilantro to the Bronx Veterans Hospital, which feed over 70 patients in one day alone. This week we donated to the Children's Aid Society and some of the partnering schools that operate a grab-and-go meal program during the summer.



City councilmember Rafael Salamanca (left with red shirt) looks on as his son Aiden pulls the harvest with fellow staff member Devan Harris. City councilmember Andy Cohen plants seeds in the foreground.

Just recently our friends in the city council got a first-hand experience on how produce at the Edible Academy is grown and harvested for donations. They were also shown the 6,000 seedling plants we plan to donate to community gardens throughout the Bronx, in part of an ongoing partnership under the Bronx Green-Up program – an endeavor that started in 1988

which supports the volunteer efforts of residents that were beginning to clean-up and beautify vacant lots in the Bronx. These seeds will help community gardens become food hubs so that they can continue to serve their communities throughout the crisis. All these efforts to serve the Bronx community during crisis is nothing new for us. During World War II, we planted Victory Gardens for Bronx residents and donated much of that produce to neighboring hospitals and charity organizations. As we plan to continue that service with our multi-layered approach to address food insecurity in our neighboring communities during this current crisis, we wholeheartedly ask that the City Council hold the line on additional cuts to DCLA.



Far right: NYBG Edible Academy director Toby Adams points out to City councilmember Vanessa Gibson some of the seedling plants planned for donation.

Thank you.

Angel Hernandez  
Director of Government Relations  
The New York Botanical Garden  
[ahernandez@nybg.org](mailto:ahernandez@nybg.org)



**The New 42nd Street**  
**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**  
**Hearing Date - June 22, 2020**

The New 42nd Street appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the New Victory Theater's extensive performing arts programming for kids, families and students. New 42 believes access to the performing arts is an essential right for all.

We know from our own research that the performing arts help young people empathize with others, collaborate with their peers, and importantly, imagine a more optimistic future for themselves. Although the New Victory Theater is closed due to COVID-19, we are committed to ensuring young New Yorkers still receive the multitudes of benefits the performing arts imbue.

We launched a weekly digital program, New Victory Arts Break, that takes kids on guided video explorations of an artform such as puppetry, percussion and song writing, and gives kids the tools they need to flex their own creative muscles. Arts Break has been a huge success, garnering more than 450,000 video views, and helping the Theater reach thousands of new people across the City.

New Victory is one of New York City's largest providers of live performing arts and classroom arts education programming, reaching 40,000 students in all grades annually. We have shared Arts Break with our 500+ partner classroom teachers, many of whom have successfully incorporated our content into their virtual classrooms.

For the 2020-21 season, New Victory is creating an array of interactive digital performing arts programs that will be enjoyed by kids, families and students at no charge, ensuring the unique thrill of the performing arts is accessible to everyone.

We fervently believe New 42 will be part of New York City's recovery, and that expanding access to the arts to all children will help us move toward a more equitable and just society. With the City Council's help, and continued funding of arts initiatives, New 42 will bring the performing arts into an ever-expanding number of homes, classrooms and schools across the City.

To whom it may concern,

I am a Brooklyn-based dancer for three companies, all non-profits, as well as a freelance dancer and choreographer. I consistently work for a site-specific dance theater company based in Manhattan, a dance theater company based in Brooklyn, and a contemporary company based in Queens. On the side I pick up projects to dance for, and choreograph for. I get paid (as do all my dance friends who dance for companies, and who freelance) per hour per rehearsal, as well as per performance. Since March 13, I have missed out on at least 20 hours of rehearsal a week, which is how I was paying for my rent. I have also had multiple show weeks cancelled or postponed indefinitely. I am lucky that I have a day job that I can do remotely, but I am barely scraping by, and don't know how much longer I can afford to stay in the city for. I have been creating and showing work in the city in various public and private venues and events for the past four years. I am an active member of the arts community in NYC and I make it a point to collaborate with artists of other mediums. A large portion of both my dance colleagues and my musician and visual art collaborators have had to leave the city for financial reasons for the foreseeable future.

I'm concerned about many issues, some of which are:

When will it be truly safe to have rehearsals for the type of dance I do? We partner each other a lot, sweat a lot, and touch the floor and then our faces a lot, so there's a lot of germs being passed from person to person as well as surface to person.

When will it be truly safe to have large gatherings of people in the same space for performances? (And, when will people feel comfortable doing that, even after it is safe?)

Another worry is traveling. One of my companies has tours set up in the fall and winter on the West Coast and out of the country. Additionally, the summertime for the dance community is a popular time to travel abroad and train, collaborate, and network with international artists. Can we all still come together and sweat, partner, and move the way we need to (often with every surface of our body making contact with the floor at some point, including faces and hands) for our jobs?

One more thing! How will this affect grants that non-profit dance companies rely on to pay their dancers? Many grants are contingent upon work being performed by a certain time in a certain place. Will this money be lost, postponed? Will dates be adjusted?

Can something more sustainable be set up by our local government to support its local artists that contribute so vitally to the culture and expression of these boroughs we all call home? Can we be funded in a better way so that artists can continue to make work during these times?

Sincerely,  
Therese Ronco



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[www.DramaLeague.org](http://www.DramaLeague.org)

The Drama League advances the American theater by providing a life-long artistic home for directors and a platform for dialogue with, and between, audiences. Now on the brink of our 105th year, The Drama League remains one of the nation's oldest continuously-operating, not-for-profit arts advocacy and education organizations. Over 3,000 local and national artists and 15,000 audience members in New York City participate in our events and programs each season.

As one of the nation's oldest not-for-profit arts advocacy and education organizations, The Drama League has witnessed how major events can impact the theatre community and put directors' futures in jeopardy. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, The Drama League's initiatives that support the careers of stage directors are more critical than ever and will play a key role in restarting the theatrical community.

#### Effects Stemming from COVID-19 Response Efforts:

In response to the creative vacuum this global crisis creates for an increasingly affected community, we are accelerating all efforts to grow our impact digitally, to reach a national audience, and to help support the artists in our community that do not meet common criteria to qualify for current financial relief funds.

Going Digital: All workshops and series have expanded to an online format, but require new tools and expertise to do so. Education initiatives include our Digital Series, a discussion of the art and careers of leading theater-makers; New Visions/New Voices after-school enrichment program for high school students; and a revised digital version of the canceled 86th Annual Drama League Awards, which streamed live on April 30. In Conversation and #Collaboration are the first programs to make this transition with an expanded goal to be responsive, of-the-moment, and increase accessibility by producing programming for multiple platforms with digital video, podcast audio, and transcribed text. The online conversion of our education programming, outreach initiatives, and industry support to a digital space will allow for flexibility as new opportunities arise in response to the devastation for our community during this crisis. This expansion requires the purchase of critical new technology to live broadcast, edit, film, record, distribute, and maintain secure digital storage.

Responding to Crisis: The Drama League introduced the Stage Directors COVID-19 Impact Survey to expand our understanding, track the effects, and develop additional resources for stage directors as the crisis continues. We will utilize this information to inform the philanthropic community and develop expanded resources for stage directors. To date, DERF has distributed \$500 unrestricted stipends to 76 directors impacted by the crisis. The number of recipients is only limited by funding, and The Drama League will continue to disburse grants on a rolling basis as funds become available. Drama League fundraising efforts will continue to shift to meet the realities facing the theatrical community and to support the survival of a workforce dominated by freelance artists. We are also reminded of the increasing impacts of climate change and the threat of natural disasters with hurricane season approaching. Now in the midst of another crisis resulting in global protests against systemic racism and police brutality, we see that our work in this area has only just begun. That is why we are making a commitment to codify DERF as a part of our annual programming. Our goal is to expand DERF to address "force

majeure” needs of those impacted by large scale crises that are beyond the artist’s control, but make their work impossible.

**Financial Impact:**The Drama League’s pandemic contingency plan has reduced our core budget to 70% of normal operating expenses, focusing on the elimination of consultants, canceled services, and reducing program costs. We had already initiated a plan to shift to a more mobile-friendly working environment prior to the pandemic, but the conversion was incomplete and we have a number of immediate needs to boost our capabilities and adjust in-person services to a digital platform. All public-facing operations and membership benefits are stalled for the foreseeable future, requiring reinvention of our sustainable programming. The Drama League has applied for emergency support from the NEA CARES Act and NYCT Response & Impact Fund grants, as well as assistance with a PPP business loan. The most impactful program on our community is the nationally recognized Directors Project.

Founded in 1984, the Drama League’s Directors Project brings extraordinary early-career stage directors into an extended program of creative advancement, industry-focused development, professional assistantships, and open rehearsal or public presentation initiative. Participants are talented young directors, identified by The Drama League through a rigorous selection process in consultation with outside theater luminaries. The Project’s Fellowships are designed to nurture artistry, open doors, and usher in a maturation of skills and talent, preparing a director to work professionally at the highest levels the field can offer. The Residency programs create opportunities for theater directors and their collaborators to develop new plays, musicals, performance pieces, and hybrid works. The Drama League supports each Directors Project Fellowship recipient with a stipend, mentorship, networking opportunities, rehearsal space, produciorial support, administrative resources, marketing assistance, and community engagement. Our investment in these early career stage directors provides them with the skills, experiences, and contacts they need to bridge the gap between academic training and professional success.

Demand for our services increases every year. In 2020 we received 593 applications for the 2020–21 Fellowships and Residencies, a 48% increase in applications from the previous year. We predict this number will increase exponentially and so will the need from our partner theaters in 2021-2022 because the Directors Project tackles very specific needs in our community, needs that are exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

The most pressing need our program addresses is that of the need for risk to pursue innovation in the theater. The high cost of theater productions deters most artistic leaders from risking the success of their productions on early-career directors with limited professional experience, and the Directors Project has set out to take on those risks by offering stipends, hands-on instruction, mentorship, opportunities to create new theater, produciorial support, and work experience with established professionals. As we look to a post-pandemic world we see a future where there is even less willingness to take risks.

In April 2020 we surveyed our community of stage directors and aside from financial worries and a great need for health care and mental health support, the anecdotal evidence gathered in the survey showed that directors have serious concerns about their career development. Concerns that their careers may lose momentum were particularly prevalent among early- and mid-career professionals. Under normal circumstances, the high cost of theatre production deters some artistic leaders and commercial producers from entrusting their productions to directors with less professional experience than their more established counterparts. As theaters recover from the pandemic, survey respondents fear that risk aversion may result in fewer opportunities, or none at all. Of particular concern is the potential evaporation of new play development, experimental/avant-garde work, and opportunities for directors to obtain their first engagements with companies that are new to them.

From the survey responses: “I think in regards to my work as an emerging director, I am concerned that many smaller theaters and pipelines into the industry are going to be severed in the economic fallout from this, so a generation of emerging directors who were watching their careers begin to bloom will be cut off entirely for many years to come, especially those without familiar support, furthering economic inequality within the arts.” Feedback from the survey included numerous suggestions on how to ease the burden on directors, such as increased government investment in theaters; grants that are not tied to a particular project; student loan forgiveness; making union insurance eligibility criteria more inclusive; stronger protections for freelance workers; and learning resources for those venturing into online work. As we develop this coming year’s career development curriculum for the Directors Project we will take in to account all of the new realities for these emerging directors and build resources to support them as well as provide them much needed income and opportunities to network and work within theaters as paid fellows. Currently, these paid fellowships are overwhelmingly the only paid work they have scheduled in their field.

Reopening Theaters: At The Drama League, our core values guide our service to the theater. First and foremost, we position creativity as a powerful engine for change—embracing artistic risk-taking, innovation, and surprise. We actively foster and advance an equitable, inclusive, and diverse environment in our programs and on our team. Through service, we create opportunities for our community to engage, learn, and grow. Cultural exchange is critical to the strength of our work, as we believe all artists and audiences benefit from art created with exposure to diverse contacts, methodologies, and perspectives.

The Drama League advances the development of emerging artists exploring their identities and community through the nationally recognized Directors Project. We offer an ambitious suite of programming that includes targeted fellowships and residencies; international artistic exchanges; education programs for high school students at no cost to the participants; a membership program; classes, panels, and the oldest theatrical awards in the United States. Together, these activities serve to bridge the gap between theater artists’ academic training and professional success and provide audiences with a deeper connection to the creative process.

As we look to increase our artistic services, our goal is to expand the Directors Project in light of artistic evolution and particularly to address issues of diversity, access, and equity in our programming and community. Our Directors Project will play a critical role in the coming reopening of the theater community in New York and we are grateful to be a service to the New York City community.

For questions please contact Bevin Ross, Executive Director of The Drama League at [bevin@dramaleague.org](mailto:bevin@dramaleague.org).

**CITY COUNCIL OF NEW YORK CITY TESTIMONY - June 22, 2020**

Thank you Speaker Johnson, Chairman Van Bramer, and Members of the Cultural Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Hello. My name is Jennifer Wright Cook and I am the Executive Director of The Field, a small but nimble 34 year old arts service organization based in lower Manhattan, helping 1,200 artists a year, in all five boroughs. I am also Co-Chair of NY4CA. I am a resident of Prospect Heights, a mom, an alto and a retired dance artist.

It was through my dance career that I learned about my whiteness and about racism. As two speakers said earlier, the arts saved me and they fully transformed my life.

After 5 hours on this meeting I must reference the NYC logo that comes up before each speaker. I've never fully seen it. Now I've seen it hundreds of times. It features a deeply racist image of an indigenous person happily alongside a Pilgrim/colonist-looking person. I encourage all of us to see it and to advocate for a new logo for our city.

I want to add my support of Melody Capote's powerful testimony and advocacy for a Black Lives Matter Initiative and ArtsGoBlack. Thank you Melody for giving The Field a shout out. CCCADI has changed my life and my work.

**If New York is going to recover from the COVID pandemic and the pandemic of systemic racism, the city must invest in artists. Artists are the key to the health and resilience of our neighborhoods. Artists are the key to our seniors' vitality, to our kids' education. Artists are the key to our joy, and to the fight against white supremacy.**

As you know, BEFORE COVID artists were barely surviving in NYC. Particularly Black and Brown artists.

**BEFORE COVID:**

- New York artists were under-paid.
- They were housing insecure.
- Many of them had no health insurance.
- 1,100 artists across the country told us that they had no emergency savings and no real financial plan for the future (The Field, *Artists Prospering!*)

**AFTER COVID:**

- 95% of all artists have lost income (Americans for the Arts).

- at The Field, the 200+ artists who fundraise with us will lose about \$6-12 million total in grants and income.
- For artists who survive on \$30k a year or less, this is crushing. They won't survive.

**EDISA WEEKS**, is a Bed Stuy, Brooklyn based choreographer and educator. She was in the midst of residencies and touring when COVID hit. Her next premiere at 651 Arts is rescheduled till 2022, but she has lost income from touring and teaching. Her dancers have lost income, and two had to leave the city. A long-term artist at The Field, Edisa turned to us to help her secure a much-needed grant from the Black Arts Future Fund.

**Cultural Producer CLAUDIA NORMAN:** Jackson Heights, Queens resident is the Founder and Producer of *Mexico Now* - NYC's only festival dedicated to contemporary Mexico. Claudia's work is a platform that launches hundreds of artists, and employs hundreds of technicians, designers, and stage managers. She told us:

- "all of my work was cancelled - \$80,000 in lost income"
- 400 artists and seasonal workers lost gigs
- all of these workers have families who depend on this income
- She told us, "Now I must re-invent our Festivals. Suddenly I must become a TV producer - which takes time, costs money and new equipment."

Claudia told us "We are working class New Yorkers getting hit by a health crisis and an economic crisis. **I am not sure we will survive.**" Claudia turns to The Field for key fundraising advice to get through these crises.

**ANABELLA LENZU**, residing in District 34, is a [choreographer](#), dance teacher and dance writer. Her work reflects her experience as a Latina/European artist living in New York and comes from a deep examination of her motivations as a woman, mother, and immigrant. She told us, "The Field has transformed my life! Twenty years ago I came to The Field to learn how to be an artist in NYC and The Field taught me everything I needed to know: from writing grants to budgeting to improving my English. My art work is my main source of income. And now during COVID nearly all of it is gone. The Field's free consultations helped me find new ways to make money from my art so my family would be ok." Anabella launched a new mentorship program for artists; The Field's online payment system helps Anabella easily and securely process funds.

Anabella also told us " **The Field is vital to helping artists survive: short-term and long-term.**"

### **How is The Field helping thousands of NY artists like Edisa and Claudia?**

Since COVID's shelter-in-place began, we have increased our services to help artists survive.

- free membership and fundraising services to our artists who need it - 58 artists to date!
- free consultations on making and monetizing digital work, fundraising and more;
- free webinars on housing insecurity and job loss;
- advocating for sector-wide response via our work as Co-Chair of NY4CA.

I urge the City Council to ensure that artists are prioritized in recovery. I urge the City Council to ensure that all DCLA grantees are paying livable wages to artists for all labor, including intellectual and emotional labor.

I urge the City Council to support key Initiatives like Immigrant Arts, CASA and Su-Casa that employ artists and Initiatives like CTC that support theaters of color.

I urge you to increase artists' regrants through the Borough Arts Councils.

I urge you to support vital service organizations like The Field who help artists thrive.

On behalf of the New York artists who were crushed by the COVID closures, and who will be vital to reopening and rebuilding this City **I join my colleagues in asking the City to hold Culture funding harmless for FY21 including initiative funding.**

In closing, The Field is one of many cultural organizations coming together to join the Movement for Black Lives to demand reparations. We acknowledge that the City's newly formed Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission is an important first step; however this Commission must focus on action not symbolic gestures.

***We look forward to partnering with you to help NYC recover by helping artists recover.***

Thank you, Members of the Committee, for continuing to advocate for Culture.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Wright Cook, she/her  
Executive Director

### **More on The Field Online**

- [Our Vision for the future](#)
- [Artists Prospering!](#)

## History and Impact

Over our 34 years we have served more than 200,000 artists and cultural workers - it is with this tenure, expertise and experience that we use our voice and our platform today to speak for artists' needs to you today.

Founded in 1986, The Field is a non-profit organization providing critical business services to performing and media artists in NYC and beyond. In 2019, under our stewardship, our 1,200 artists produced 4,105 new shows for ½ a million people around the world. Our ambitious artists include both big names and up-and-comers. They perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and in church basements. They receive prestigious grants from the MAP Fund and self-produce shows with budgets under \$1,000. From fundraising to producing, from budgeting to contracts, The Field is a vital solution to artists' business needs. Last year alone, Field artists raised \$2.45 million for their work with our personalized advice and support.

From Broadway choreographer Camille A. Brown to Broadway Director Rachel Chavkin, from Comedic Artist Maysoon Zahid to Grammy-winners Imani Winds, The Field has incubated and bolstered the careers of most of the ambitious artists who call NYC home.

Yet the vast majority of The Field's artists are gig economy workers who make this city the thriving cultural capital it is. In 2018 artists generated \$118 billion for the State of New York. But most artists see NONE of that impact in their own bank accounts or lives.



Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as the managing leader of New Georges, a strategically small, downtown theater who has served adventurous women+ and tgnc artists for nearly 30 years. Over the years we have produced all over New York City while maintaining our office in the Financial District and managing The Room, our workspace for over 25 years, in midtown Manhattan. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I look to leaders at these organizations to hold other arts institutions accountable; I am inspired by their leadership, their programmatic decisions and strategic ways of serving their communities and artists. Mia Katigbak of National Asian American Theatre Company; Ralph Peña of Ma-Yi Theatre Company; Jonathan McCorry of National Black Theatre; have all had a direct impact on my thinking and how I work to support the theatre community and the field-at-large.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jaynie Saunders Tiller".

Jaynie Saunders Tiller  
Managing Director/Producer  
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# UrbanGlass

## CITY COUNCIL OF NEW YORK CITY TESTIMONY - June 22, 2020

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Thank you Chairman Van Bramer, and Members of the Cultural Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

UrbanGlass seeks your support to ensure the arts remain a vital part of the fabric of New York City, and that the millions served by New York's cultural organizations can continue to rely on those services at a time when our community is in need of deep healing. For more than 40 years UrbanGlass has provided community, artistic engagement, education, and has been an economic engine for New York City. Continued funding from the Department of Cultural Affairs in an existential question for many like UrbanGlass in the cultural community, and we hope you will ensure DCA's budget remains unchanged to ensure the continuation of these important services.

Established in 1977, in the midst of an explosion of experimentation and creativity in New York City, our founders designed a communal space in which the costly equipment needed to work with glass would be accessible outside of university art programs and factories. Our founding made glass available to a wide range of artists in New York City for the first time. Due to the incredibly expensive equipment, real estate costs and expertise required to build and maintain a professional glass studio, public-access studios like UrbanGlass remain incredibly important around the globe.

UrbanGlass is the only non-profit, public-access glass organization in New York's five boroughs and the largest in the world. Our entrepreneurial programming serves nearly 500 professional and emerging artists each year, who seek out the organization for its unparalleled blend of professional work space and equipment, accompanied by the technical expertise necessary to create in glass. These artists run their small businesses from our studios, engaging with clients from galleries, museums, design firms, and retail enterprises from across the world; networking with colleagues in the field; and participating in free professional development programming offered by the organization covering topics from establishing your LLC to creating a website. **Over the past 43 years, UrbanGlass has been an economic engine for the City, and supported thousands of artists as they launched their small businesses, built their networks, and grown the City's creative economy.**

Maintaining this programming following the revenue loss from our COVID-19 closure is critical for the professional artists who depend on our studios to create work and make a living. The PAUSE order has left hundreds of New York City artists and designers without the means to generate income due to our studio's closure. Support from DCA and the City Council is critical to ensuring this programming can continue.

In addition to supporting artist-entrepreneurs who come to UrbanGlass with a background in the material, we offer many educational opportunities for artists, students and members of the public to build their expertise, and find a supportive community in which to learn and participate. Since 1997 UrbanGlass' Bead Project has served more than 400 economically disadvantaged, New York area women, with a free curriculum in entrepreneurship and jewelry design. At the end of 10 weeks and 40 hours of instruction, Bead Project participants graduate from the program with a newly formed small business, armed with strategies to grow their business and a supportive community of fellow graduates and program alumni to grow with. The Department of Cultural

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For the past five years, UrbanGlass has been the proud recipient of City Council Initiative Funding. SU-CASA and CASA programs have enabled the organization to bring the arts to members of our community who derive incredible benefit from creativity, but would not have the opportunity to experience UrbanGlass on their own. We have served nearly 500 seniors with a curriculum of mosaics in their local senior centers; several of whom have become regular visitors and participants in our free public programs.

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We look forward to partnering with you to help NYC recover by helping artists recover.

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UrbanGlass is a proud anchor of the Brooklyn Cultural District, providing state-of-the-art facilities and educators for everything from glassblowing to neon tube-bending, and is the go-to resource for artists seeking to advance their craft. Our comprehensive, open-access studio addresses a critical need in the New York City creative community by providing material and technical resources coupled with professional support and learning expertise. In our 43-year history, artists including Kiki Smith, Robert Rauschenberg, Maya Lin, Tony Oursler, Doug Johnston, Tauba Auerbach, and Titus Kaphar have come through our doors to study this medium and incorporate it into their practice.

Forty years after our founding, the costs of operating an independent glass studio in New York have only risen, making the need for our programs more urgent than ever. Annually, our studio and education programs serve more than 4,000 working artists and students, including eight artist fellows and residents. In a typical year, our studios are open to artists six days a week, 51 weeks a year, from 10 AM to 9 PM. Since March 2020, our necessary closure due to COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on UrbanGlass' ability to provide in-person programs. While we have had to suspend the majority of our studio-based programs in 2020, we are looking forward to offering these programs again in 2021.

Onsite, K-12 and University students from across New York City partake in hands-on learning through our studios and exhibition programs. Our Bead Project is a transformative scholarship program for low-income area women to learn the art of glass jewelry making, with parallel coursework in entrepreneurship to develop a small business plan. UrbanGlass provides public education opportunities to people of all ages and skill levels through our extensive, year-round workshop program; including more than 200 classes in our studios. While, offsite partnerships with veterans services, senior centers, and public schools engage our neighbors.

Public engagement and discourse is offered through our year-round, free public programs, and magazine GLASS Quarterly. Free exhibitions, artist talks, performances, and Open Studios, serve a broad cross-section of our New York City neighbors. We are a destination for family-friendly activities as well as master level artists seeking in-depth engagement platforms. UrbanGlass' facilities are ADA compliant.

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## CITY COUNCIL OF NEW YORK CITY TESTIMONY - June 22, 2020

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**Testimony to the Committee on  
Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Daisy Rodriguez, Director, Government & Community Affairs  
Christopher Durosinmi, Assistant Director, Government & Community Affairs  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
June 22, 2020**

Thank you Chairman Van Bramer and the members of the Cultural Affairs Committee. Our names are Daisy Rodriguez & Christopher Durosinmi, Director and Assistant Director of Government and Community Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society.

We recognize that the City of New York is experiencing a tumultuous time, and we greatly appreciate your leadership as we navigate through these unprecedented and difficult waters. Since the start of the pandemic, WCS, along with our CIG colleagues have been providing support and resources to the greater cultural community through daily Zoom calls that has famously been dubbed "Culture @3pm". What has started as 34 institutions collaborating on how to move forward has evolved into a consortium of over 200 city cultural organizations coming together to organize data that encapsulates the social and economic impact of culture in the countless communities we serve, using that data to illustrate and advocate on the federal level to ensure we can weather this storm and move forward, and more.

As you know, WCS has the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks that include the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and Queens Zoo. With a combined collection of over 20,000 animals, our parks connect with more than 4 million visitors, including over 400,000 school children. We provide thousands of teachers and school administrators with the training and support needed to develop STEM learning opportunities for all of their students. In addition to the education and enrichment that our facilities provide, we also serve as a viable economic engine for the City. WCS employs over 3,500 employees across 50 countries, including more than 1,000 full-time staff working in New York City. As one of the largest employers of youth in the Bronx and one of the largest youth development programs in the City, WCS employs and supports over 1,400 youth ages 14-24 in a myriad of opportunities that create life sustaining change in our surrounding communities.

WCS takes seriously its commitment to the neighborhoods it resides in. Our work with these communities has been holistic, addressing the full spectrum of needs for youth and young adults. Our educational programming is spread across multiple departments within the four boroughs, creating seismic shifts in our organizational culture and common best practices for youth. Prior to this pandemic, WCS has provided essential services through programming and partnerships that has positively impacted youth and families in underserved communities throughout the city. Through our Community Access Program (CAP), we provide thousands of seniors, youth, individuals with special needs, and community based organizations with complimentary access to our parks. Additionally, WCS has held long partnerships with City agencies such as the Department of Homeless Services and the Administration for Children's

Services to provide educational opportunities and experiences to thousands of children and families.

In an effort to support communities through positive youth development programming and high quality science education, WCS is working hard to maintain our programmatic staff and shift most of our public engagement and youth development programming to digital platforms for the foreseeable future. We've launched the virtual zoo and aquarium on our website that incorporates a multitude of free resources for our community including exhibit cameras where visitors can view webcams of exhibits, follow ongoing animal stories created by our keepers, and engage in family fun activities that incorporate art, science, and nature, science curriculum for teachers, and virtual field trips for schools.

In response to this crisis, we launched Wildlife School Online in April 2020. In these virtual field trips, students learn standards-based science content in fun and interactive ways that incorporate our animals and exhibits. At the schools request, all lessons were recorded and then shared out with the broader school community. This led to reaching a larger audience that previously anticipated due to the nature of moving this online. Next year, we plan to offer either in person programs, synchronous sessions, and pre-recorded sessions to students in active science learning. We will work with teachers and administrators to meet the needs of the students and respond and adapt accordingly. We conducted 200 programs for students in local Title 1 schools this spring and through this pilot phase have refined our programming to meet the needs of all students for the upcoming school year. We are excited to offer this virtual field trip and NYC teachers are appreciative of the quality and care that goes into making it a success.

Additionally, we have made the decision to transition our youth volunteer and internship program to online engagement. This will provide the vital programming that 1,400 young people so desperately need during this time of unrest. We remain committed to disrupting the viewpoint of who can engage in a particular science or conservation providing diverse audiences with opportunities to connect with nature, build their scientific literacy, and engage in conservation action through a social justice lens.

Through our STEM Career Pipeline, youth ages 14-24 from historically disenfranchised communities receive the training, ongoing support, and network access that allows the youth to turn their first job or internship into a future career. Within the last year, 621 youth worked in part-time, seasonal roles across all five parks, 1,331 youth received expanded professional development, career & college readiness resources, participated in extended leadership training programs and more. Transitioning to a fully virtual program this spring, this innovative program now involves the use of multiple modes of digital communication such as virtual training, one-on-one office hours, group projects, science research projects, and virtual camp counselor support opportunities. Moving forward, our youth will seamlessly integrate their voice into the life of our digital programs and we will provide them the necessary supports to be successful not only during this time, but in the future. This youth development program is becoming a model for other cultural institutions and one we are committed to seeing through during this difficult time.

Therefore, as the Council determines its budget priorities for FY 2021, please know that WCS stands at the ready to continue our enhanced, high-quality programming should funding be available. As youth are facing the uncertainty of what this city will look like in the future and the social inequities that many of them are being exposed to, the programs being offered by the cultural community, including our organization, remain pivotal and relevant to nurturing and fostering leaders for generations to come. By retaining funding for programming you will equip

us to continue our robust offerings, survive this pandemic, maintain our trusted and invaluable role as important contributors to the City's economy, and most importantly develop the next generation of conservation stewards in a new and exciting way. We thank you for this opportunity to testify today, and for your leadership on behalf of the City of New York during this crisis.

# WHITNEY

**Whitney Museum of American Art Testimony  
NYC Council Cultural Affairs Committee Hearing:  
DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City, June 22, 2020**

The Whitney Museum of American Art is a contemporary art museum located in lower Manhattan. As the preeminent institution devoted to the art of the United States, the Whitney presents the full range of twentieth-century and contemporary American art, with a special focus on work by living artists. The Museum collects, exhibits, preserves, researches, and interprets art of the United States in the broadest global, historical, and interdisciplinary contexts. As the foremost advocate for American art, the Museum fosters the work of living artists at critical moments in their careers, often before their work has achieved general acceptance, and educates its diverse public through direct interaction with these artists.

The Whitney has always been a thoroughly New York institution. The Museum was founded in Greenwich Village in 1930 by New York resident and artist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, a member of the artist community in lower Manhattan. Throughout its history, whether through the collaborations the Museum fosters, the artwork it collects and presents or through its educational programs and events, the Whitney has served the City of New York by unswervingly engaging with the many artists who are part of its family. Before the COVID-19 crisis, the Whitney served over a million visitors—of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds—per year. New Yorkers account for more than a third of the Museum’s annual visitation and represent the majority of participants in its Education events and programs.

The pandemic has caused a medical, social, and economic crisis unlike any the world has confronted before. On March 14, the Whitney Museum temporarily closed its doors to the public to reduce the spread of COVID-19 for the well-being of its visitors, volunteers, and staff. Recognizing a need for its public to continue engaging with art during these uncertain times, the Museum worked quickly to reconceptualize its entire range of programs and events, pivoting to online offerings.

Soon after temporarily closing, the Museum relaunched its website to unveil ‘Whitney From Home.’ The Museum’s updated homepage foregrounds the many ways audiences can explore current and past exhibitions and their related content. Among our offerings is *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945*, the exhibition currently on view that examines the profound impact Diego Rivera and other Mexican muralists had on their contemporaries from the U.S. Online visitors can view works from the show, access interpretative materials, including essays, in both Spanish and English languages, and discover additional audio and video content. From March 14 through June 9, over 66,600 New Yorkers have logged onto the Museum’s website to access these offerings.

The Museum has served NYC public schools free of charge since 1983. The Education team was early to identify the distinct need for and growing gap in arts education for K-12 students across the city. In response the team moved its free school-tours program online. By the end of June, the Whitney will have conducted 180 online classes with 71 different K-12 public schools across NYC, serving approximately 4,403 students. After participating in a program, many teachers have requested

to continue working with the Museum. Teachers have expressed appreciation for the ongoing collaboration and have been energized by the ways in which the classes are tailored to their needs. This response has reinforced for the Museum the value and importance of this new type of online school program.

In addition to the Museum's free school programs the Whitney has launched several series of free online events using Zoom and Instagram Live to serve diverse audiences. These include 'Artmaking From Home,' a live program on Saturdays for all ages to experiment with artmaking in creative ways using ordinary materials, and 'Art History From Home,' a series of thirty-minute talks offered weekly to illuminate critical topics in American art. Participants are encouraged to interact through a moderated chat. 'Whitney Wednesdays' brings together diverse voices from the Museum's community to discuss art, life and all-things-Whitney. The 'Whitney Kids Art Challenge' offers a project each month inspired by a work from the collection for children and adults to do together. As of early June, over 1,300 New Yorkers attended the programs listed above on Zoom.

The Whitney has created ways to foreground virtual access to its collection. The collection, which has been online for several years, is available for browsing on the Whitney's website. In addition, the Museum's Digital Media team collaborated with the Curatorial department to launch the series 'Whitney Screens,' a Friday evening screening of a video work in the collection, emphasizing works by emerging artists. Nearly 7,500 New York State residents have logged in to watch since this program launched.

The Whitney's staff members have worked throughout this crisis to find ways to support their neighbors and city. In March the Museum gathered the facemasks, shields, over 80,000 pairs of nitrile gloves, Tyvek suits, and shoe covers that were on hand to donate to Columbia Medical Center. The Whitney responded to the city's call to the cultural community for donations and contributed over 2,000 ponchos. Individual staff members continue to work for and contribute to their communities, further reflecting the Whitney's commitment to its city.

Looking ahead, the Whitney recognizes the growing challenge for K-12 students to gain access to arts education and cultural programming, particularly for areas hard hit by COVID-19. As an early adopter of online programs in this crisis, the Whitney—with expert staff and museum educators, a long history of offering programs for high need populations, a robust network of school contacts, and support from the NYC Department of Education (DOE)—is committed to expanding its programs to meet this new and critical need. To reach school audiences across New York City in the 2020-2021 academic year, especially Title 1 students who come from traditionally underserved communities, the Whitney will expand its arts education programming through online channels. Serving schools from all five boroughs, the Whitney expects to conduct approximately 1,050 classes (with 15,570 students across 275 schools), of which at least forty-eight percent (500 classes) will serve high need schools/districts. The Whitney's Education department plans to do outreach through its existing network of 5,600 teachers and administrators as well as with the DOE to target schools in high poverty areas that are most in need and most underserved.

In addition, this fall the Whitney will complete the installation of *Day's End*, a 325-foot-long and 52-foot-high public artwork by artist David Hammons. The work will stand majestically on the shore of the Hudson River in Hudson River Park at Gansevoort Peninsula, directly across from the Museum. Hammons, one of the greatest living artists and a long time resident of New York City, has envisioned a historic public artwork that Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, has stated "will be one of the first monuments of this century that will reflect the views of a living artist and the built environment [of and in New York City]."

Though *Day's End* was conceived before the pandemic, its message resonates now more than ever. Hammons's work is a metaphor for loss: the erasure of what once existed, and for hope: the possibility of what can be. *Day's End* will hark to the site's communal history, as a thriving pre-1600s

indigenous fishing settlement, a bustling port and produce market in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a home to the gay community in the 1970s and more. The work will rise from the river as the city reawakens, heals, and rebuilds from the pandemic. This major public art installation will be available for the public to enjoy up close and from afar, at their convenience seven days a week without tickets or time constraints. There is plenty of space to view the outdoor sculpture while maintaining social distancing guidelines. It will be a place to gather and reflect, a symbol celebrating New York City's tenacity, and a commitment to creativity and the rebirth of our civic and economic life.

The Whitney Museum is unwavering in its commitment to serve the City of New York and remains grateful for the ongoing support it receives from Speaker Johnson, Cultural Affairs Chair Council Member Van Bramer and their colleagues in the City Council, as well as to the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and Manhattan Borough President Brewer. The city's support has enabled us to continue our work celebrating American art and offering educational opportunities to New Yorkers during our temporary closure and once we reopen.

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For more information contact:

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301-775-9956 (mobile)

# ARTS & DEMOCRACY

June 25, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Hello. My name is Aamnah Khan and I'm a youth organizer for Arts & Democracy.

When I think of this pandemic, I think of the pain. I think of those who lost loved ones or risked their lives to provide essential services, struggled to make ends meet or keep their local mom and pop shops in business, stayed in abusive situations, protested racial injustice, or deferred milestone celebrations. I think about the government's failure to act fast or how the mutual aid group I help coordinate is fulfilling those missing links.

I also think about the compassion fatigue and how unfazed I became as I learned of yet another loss. Despite my obsession with the status quo being unhealthy, I couldn't take a break because I didn't know how to cope. In quarantine, as I stayed at home to protect my at-risk parents, I felt helpless.

But I learned I could navigate multiple realities which didn't have to contradict each other. I could grieve and still find joy. And, as a youth organizer, I found joy in my work at Arts & Democracy, which is funded by the City Council's Cultural Immigrant Initiative and a critical source of support in our community and across the city. We urge you to continue this important program.

Despite the pandemic forcing us to cancel our in-person open mic, we didn't stop there. As the saying goes, "The show must go on." As we piloted a virtual open mic series called ReGeneration, we tackled social issues such as integration and paid homage to Spring and community healing to return to our roots and nourish the soul. We spent the evenings immersed in visual art, video, prayer, song, and spoken word. At our annual community iftar, we witnessed Muslim feminists lift the virtual veil to reclaim their space and affirm their existence as resistance. And, just this past weekend, as we launched the second volume of our writing workshop series, we saw South Asian youth—both in the States and abroad—reflect upon the concept of home. This pandemic had to break us apart to build each other back up. You see, culture hasn't closed during this time period. Culture isn't simply the attire, food, or language, but the traditions we continue or create. We believe that all people and communities have a right to their creativity and traditions, and that transformation happens when people bring their full selves to their activism.

As someone who was born, raised, and continues to reside and work in Kensington, Brooklyn, I am very invested in my community. But I've been in too many conversations about the community without the community. Or, because of the multiple tutorials on each block or high intake of domestic violence cases per Sakhi's statistics, it has been difficult to break free from the "model minority" mentality and the internalized oppression. At Arts & Democracy, we pride ourselves in amplifying the voices of immigrant women and youth like myself to have autonomy over future programming.

We recognize our neighborhood is underserved. Kensington has limited access to Broadband Internet, a low average median household income, and is among the most park deprived. Our residential zip code was a COVID-19 hotspot and communities of color like our own were disproportionately impacted. Many essential workers such as taxicab drivers were being tested positive for the virus or had already passed. At our neighboring Muslim funeral services home, we averaged about 15 deaths per day. In our local Kensington-Windsor Terrace mutual aid efforts, we affirmed—as Mariame Kaba notes—our work was “solidarity not charity.” Though there are a lot of well-intentioned folks, there needs to be engagement with immigrants and communities of color. Due to issues of digital literacy or language barrier, for example, we created a resource bank to uplift existing community-based infrastructure. Arts & Democracy is listed as one of our resources.

Arts & Democracy is intentional about creating a safe space and providing materials for self-expression and healing. In our collaboration with DC-based Bangladeshi artist Monica Jahan Bose's "Storytelling with Saris" project, we used saris as a medium to bridge the generational gap to better understand the diaspora and challenge patriarchy. In English and Bangla, we explored the sari as a symbol of a climate-conscious future by using techniques such as woodblock. We combined the cultural clothing with other forms of expression (oral histories, photography, writing, etc.) and highlighted stories of survival and resilience.

We thank the Cultural Immigrant Initiative for allowing us build local leadership and giving otherwise fractured communities a unified voice. In these past five years, we have hosted our annual Immigrant Heritage Concert, summer public plaza series (henna, painting, gardening, etc.), and participatory budgeting workshop, and much more. Please help us and communities like ours in securing the necessary funding to continue to be the protagonists of our stories and to preserve our institutional memory.

Thank you.

Yours Truly,

Aamnah Khan

My name is Cynthia Flowers. I am the Executive Director of Soho Rep. – the theater that first produced Jackie Sibblies Drury’s Pulitzer Prize winning play FAIRVIEW. I am not here to testify on behalf of Soho Rep, but to ask you to maintain and prioritize funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, arts leaders have been repeatedly told by City officials that police funding would take priority over culture. The last time I heard this was four days before a Soho Rep. staff member was attacked by NYPD at Cadman Plaza. During that same week that I was reminded that the National Black Theater brought community members together in conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement five years ago – a natural extension of the thoughtful talks they host after every production. Later, as scenic designers finished the Black Lives Matter mural in front of the Billie Holiday Theater, I was reminded that every time I see a show at that 200-seat theater, it is packed with Black audiences of all ages. Then, as the Times ran an article bemoaning that an extraordinary season of Asian American work was cut short due to COVID, I was reminded that Ma Yi has been launching the careers of playwrights and NAATCO has been providing roles for some of the greatest actors in our City for decades.

The companies I have mentioned are just 4 of 42 theaters that make up the Coalition of Theaters of Color and are led by Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian people. These are the incredible organizations that will help the communities most impacted by both COVID-19 and police violence to heal, grieve, and recover. We need their power and purpose in our City. The entire CTC budget of 3.7M is just .07% of the proposed NYPD budget.

Thank you to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for years. I call upon your colleagues to join you in this call for budget justice and to prioritize and maintain funding for the CTCs.

Kinsey Keck  
Roundtable Coordinator, NYC Arts in Education Roundtable  
Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
June 22, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Kinsey Keck, and I work at the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable, as well as a Teaching Artist for multiple organizations in all NYC boroughs.

The mission of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable is to serve the community of arts education practitioners of NYC by sharing information, providing professional development, and communicating with the public to promote our work in schools and beyond.

As a freelance Teaching Artist, my mission is to bring theatre arts to the young people of NYC. The benefits of arts education and arts access for young people are infinite. I aim to instill my theatre students with confidence, help them exercise their imaginations, tap into their creativity, and find their own voices. Theatre helps students with public speaking, but more importantly, it helps students connect with their emotions and express themselves, while also learning how to work in an ensemble setting. Arts exposure helps students process trauma, and it builds their capacity for empathy. In short, it makes us better people. In addition, building connections between young people and the art world ensures that they will be patrons of the arts in their adult life. This great city depends on that relationship to be made, as it is a city built on arts, entertainment, and culture consumption. The future of New York City depends on arts education access for its young people NOW.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Kinsey Keck

## ADVANCE | MORE OPERA

The Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment  
Manhattan Opera Repertory Ensemble  
Ansonia Station Box 231152, New York, NY 10023

Testimony to the New York City Council  
Cultural Affairs Hearing Oversight:  
DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City.

Submitted by  
Cheryl Warfield  
Performing and Teaching Artist, Producer and Founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera

Monday June 22, 2020

Greetings. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo and Members of City Council for reading my testimony. I am writing to urge the Council to renew full funding for arts and culture in the FY 2021 budget including funding for arts education for young and old alike through DCLA and initiative funding. New York needs to "keep culture whole" for the health and welfare of all our communities and citizens.

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Cheryl Warfield. I am a professional opera singer, and a long-standing member of SAG-AFTRA, Actor's Equity and my parent union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). In New York City, I have performed at the Metropolitan Opera and on Broadway, and I am a producer of innovative arts programming and the founder the Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment (ADVANCE), a 501(c) 3 non-profit and the director of MORE Opera.

ADVANCE/MORE Opera showcases outstanding and diverse talent while providing outreach and educational programming to youth and seniors in underserved communities. As an African American performer and arts administrator, I am determined to contribute to the musical education of young people, showcase black themes, and highlight the diversity of what is often inaccurately considered as an "elitist" or European art form. As a producer of color, I strive to spotlight outstanding professional talent from all backgrounds who otherwise may be overlooked or ostracized. For 20 years in New York City, ADVANCE/MORE Opera has mounted dozens of public performances and conducted educational workshops and no-cost community choral training to hundreds of young people and adults.

I became a teaching artist 20 years ago, working with children of color in schools surrounding the area of St. George Terminal on Staten Island, in Crown Heights and East New York Brooklyn, and in the South Bronx, University Heights and Castle Hill areas of the Bronx. I consider my work as a teaching artist through DOE, DYCD and DLCA initiatives to be some of my greatest artistic accomplishments because I have witnessed first-hand the benefits to the participants these discretionary and initiative funds have provided.

While things may look downward financially in 2020, the time is now to get our priorities straight about arts funding. I was in NYC during 9/11, the financial crisis of 2008, Superstorm Sandy in 2012 and other economic downturns placing arts and culture at the precipice of collapse. I am writing to tell you that culture did not stop back then and will not be stopped now. My nonprofit has geared up virtually with the communities we serve to connect in ways we never imagined, finding innovative and sometimes more cost-effective means to stay connected online with remote rehearsals and lessons, creating new videos to showcase our activities on Facebook and YouTube, and live-streaming a new concert via Zoom every month during stay-at-home.

Cheryl Warfield  
June 22, 2020  
Page 2 of 2

For the last two years, I have had the honor and privilege to work with over two dozen senior citizens as chorus director at the JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Center in the Bronx thanks to a Su Casa grant administered by the Bronx Opera. When all activities were cancelled due to COVID-19 effective March 13, I explored ways to help the seniors learn Zoom and Microsoft Teams, assisting them with getting online by the first week of April and vowing to continue to work with them regardless of whether or not the FY 2020 grant would be paid because we artists know how important art is for students to stay connected, and for emotional support and continued growth. The seniors' response at the first virtual rehearsal was simply joy for being able to see one another again while in isolation, but quickly turned to empowerment once they learned sufficient tech skills to perform their music and be creative again.

One senior wrote in early April "In these unfortunate times, where what we use to do, we can no longer do, it is such a comfort to bring some "normalcy" into our lives. I appreciate the time we shared as a group. Seeing [everyone] for that short time today will do wonders for all our immune systems. Connectivity..."

This week, the JASA Van Cortlandt Virtual Chorus will present their Su Casa grant required culminating public performance on Thursday June 25 at 7:30 PM via Zoom. Meeting ID: 859 1979 6615; Password JASA. The group is extremely excited to present new skills they have learned and demonstrate their growth and empowerment during this transitory period. I implore the Council to continue this vital funding to the communities that rely on it so heavily. Please fund fairly and appropriately the Department of Education, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the Department of Cultural Affairs for a better future for all NYC. With City Council's appropriate action, the JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Chorus may once again be connected in FY2021.

I want to thank my colleagues at Culture@3 for including small organizations like MORE Opera in its advocacy work. We at MORE Opera are here, ready willing and able to support them in understanding and heeding the urgency of Majority Leader Campo's call to action for the Black Lives Matter movement through the arts and to help cultural organizations find positive solutions to move New York City forward in its commitment to work with communities severely and adversely impacted by COVID-19 and the economic crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Warfield  
Singer, Educator, Producer  
Founder, ADVANCE/MORE Opera  
255 West 75<sup>th</sup> Street, #3-I  
New York, NY 10023  
212-595-7084

[www.moreopera.com](http://www.moreopera.com)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW2yGc7iTkg>

## DONNIE WELCH POETRY

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

5/27/2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Donnie Welch and I am a poet and teaching artist working with special education students in schools all over Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.

The mission of DONNIE WELCH POETRY and my work is to use poetry as a means of practicing and promoting self-advocacy for youth with autism and developmental disabilities.

As of now, I'm continuing to provide public school teachers I worked with over the school year with access to my poetry curriculum and resources despite our partnerships being discontinued. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Donnie Welch



**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
June 22, 2020**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education. **My name is Stacie Lorraine, and I am the Assistant Principal at Yorkville Community School, P.S.151M where we have a long-standing partnership with the 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY21, my request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development.**

I have seen firsthand the profoundly positive effects that high-quality arts education experiences have on children and young adults across NYC through my work with 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership, which receives support from these agencies to serve **16,000+ students and their teachers annually at 70+ public schools throughout all five boroughs, 80% of which are Title I.**

92Y is steadfast in its commitment to helping students discover their artistic and intellectual passions as they learn about the world they live in through joyful experiences with the arts. I have seen this commitment in action through my work with 92Y over the past 3 years. Our school has partnered with the 92Y for dance, music and digital design programs. Through the teaching artists' work with our students I have seen students make deeper connections to the curriculum, show courage and perseverance in trying new things, and generally have a part of their day that they look forward to and enjoy. The joy of watching first graders take what they have learned from working with a teaching artist who is an expert in her field, paired with the experience of attending a dance performance at a world-class institution and then performing their own dances and treated like their artistic decisions are just as important, just as powerful as the professional group they saw on stage is an experience that cannot be taken away. Our 4th graders learn about how to use ipads and computers as tools to create digital worlds and then use that knowledge to create the digital world of Colonial America in order to strengthen their understanding of the Social Studies content they are learning. In 3rd grade as the students study cultures from around the world they are treated to performances of musical groups from around the world and a deeper understanding of the unique aspects of world music and how it connects to time and place. While there are many ways to make connections to art and content in school, without the support of knowledgeable teaching artists with extensive training in their field, coupled with the opportunity to see great performances this would not be as rich or as deep. This is what we get from our partnership with the 92Y

Despite reduced resources and increased challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, 92Y's staff and Teaching Artists have been doing tremendous work to create and sustain programs for thousands of NYC public school students that offer a sense of normalcy and joy during these difficult and unsettling times. Immediately in March upon announcement that the NYCDOE would be transitioning to remote learning, 92Y began surveying principals about their needs and developing innovative ways to continue providing students at their many high-need partner schools with impactful arts learning. 92Y staff swiftly trained their Teaching Artists in remote instruction and developed remote programming for schools. Throughout remote learning the 92Y has been strongly committed to making sure our students were not missing any of these important learning experiences. The high quality and commitment of the teaching artists was evident in the remote learning video instruction that was shared with our students and staff.

**Deep budget cuts to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development would be disastrous for arts education, the cultural community that is part of this city's fabric and a key driver of its economy, and most of all to the young people whose lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. In allocating cuts and resources, City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.**

**We urge you to continue to support NYC's cultural community and its youth by restoring critical funding to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development in FY21.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacie Lorraine".

Stacie Lorraine

Assistant Principal

Yorkville Community School

135 Ashland Place #15B  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel: 646 326 7376  
Email: sarahbenson@sohorep.org

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a theater artist who has directed award winning plays across the city seen by thousands of New Yorkers. Most recently I directed FAIRVIEW by Jackie Sibblies Drury for which she won the Pulitzer. Other recent projects have received recognition from the OBIE awards and Drama Desks. I am also one of the leaders of the not-for-profit theater Soho Rep which serves thousands of New Yorkers a year as audience members and employs hundreds of people. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I can attest to the incredible work I have seen at National Black Theater, The Classical Theater of Harlem, NAATCO and the Billie Holliday Theater. The artistry and power of community that I have felt sitting in shows by these companies is profound. And the impact of their work reverberates far beyond the walls of their theaters. These theaters are a force of inspiration, especially for young BIPOC theater makers who see themselves not only on stage and behind the scenes, but in positions of power running these companies.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon

your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Benson

Soho Repertory Theater.  
Director, Artistic

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## TESTIMONY TO NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

June 22, 2020

My name is Jaime Hastings and I am the Executive Director of the Arthur Miller Foundation, a non-profit organization that honors the legacy of the great American playwright, Arthur Miller, and his NYC public school education, which was founded by Arthur's daughter, writer and filmmaker, Rebecca Miller. AMF provides increased equity and access to quality theater education for public school students. On behalf of Rebecca and AMF we would like to convey our sincere appreciation for the value you place on arts education as a crucial component of a core educational experience for our 1.1 million New York City public school students. We know that together we can foster the students of today to become the forward-thinking, creative problem-solvers of tomorrow.

We are proud that 60 NYC DOE theater teachers are part of the Arthur Miller Foundation Fellows Program, in partnership with Office of Arts and Special Projects. **Over the last 5 years, the Arthur Miller Foundation has contributed approximately \$1.5M to our theater education program.** Program participants--theater teachers named "Arthur Miller Fellows"--receive \$25,000 in dedicated support to build sustainable theater programs at their schools through professional mentorship, cultural partner residencies, teaching resources, classroom materials, Broadway tickets for students, and ongoing professional development. The program has now impacted over 30,000 public school students across all 5 boroughs of NYC.

Each of our Fellows are extraordinary, as they belong to one in about 20% of NYC DOE schools with a certified theater teacher. That is about 200 theater teachers out of 1800 schools. As the NYC DOE faces inevitable budget cuts, we fear those reductions will have lasting negative impacts on theater education, reversing the progress that has been made to this point. We hope that our Fellows will see no change in their employment status for the coming year. **I am here to request that any budget cuts we face do not affect the 200 theater teachers in our public schools and the in-school theater programming they provide, as budget reductions could disproportionately affect the arts teachers who are already severely underrepresented throughout NYC.**

At this time, perhaps more than any other, we must continue giving a voice to all of our young people--particularly our Black and Brown students; they deserve the access to theater which is rightfully theirs.

As we all prepare for the new normal, whatever it may be, a dedicated theater teacher is a great asset for NYC students and other school faculty members: an arts professional who creates a safe space where students can be their authentic selves; someone who provides consistency and cultivates a sense of community. A thoughtful theater education program also supports the crucial [Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks](#) outlined by the New York State Education Department, which are activated through the theater process: building trust and empowering students by integrating their mind, body, and voice. These skills will be key in providing our students with trauma-informed care as they transition back to school.

**We believe it is time to deem arts education an essential component of a core academic education for our youth.** Evidence reveals that theater class gives students an outlet to funnel anxiety and stress through creative expression by providing them with a constructive way to channel those emotions, particularly in the midst of this pandemic that is disproportionately affecting New York City and our students of color. AMF continued to support our Fellows in reaching all of their students throughout remote learning this year and will continue to do so.

As we look to the future together, we are here, and we are prepared to continue providing the support the DOE needs for our theater teachers and students. After all, that is what a theater community is for. But in order to do our part, we must ensure that the Office of Arts & Special Projects and the arts education infrastructure--especially arts teachers--are not lost and that the DOE is able to continue hiring certified arts teachers.

**Thank you for recognizing that arts education is a right, not a privilege.**

# CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2021

June 22, 2020

## Oversight Hearing: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

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Chairman Van Bramer and Members of the Council Committee on Cultural Affairs:

My name is David Freudenthal, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall. Thanks for the opportunity to testify about how New York City's arts and culture community is responding to the COVID-19 crisis. We are grateful to Chair Van Bramer and his colleagues for the support and guidance they've offered our sector to help us weather this extraordinarily difficult period.

Even when faced with indefinite closure of our physical spaces and drastically reduced revenue, culture never closed. As you heard from my colleagues testifying from throughout the five boroughs, the Culture@3 calls occurring daily since mid-March have been a tremendous source of strength and resilience for our sector. Carnegie Hall has been glad to support this initiative along with the Wildlife Conservation Society, sharing information and shaping strategy on federal stimulus and advocacy before the NY Congressional Delegation for NYC culture priorities. In addition to our coalition work, Carnegie Hall continues to serve New Yorkers through these extreme circumstances—especially some of our City's most vulnerable populations—by adapting our vast scope of educational and social impact programming to fully digital platforms.

Carnegie Hall's newly launched online series—*Learn with Carnegie Hall*—includes a wide range of interactive musical activities for families:

- Continued support to our local **Musical Explorers** and **Link Up** teachers and schools and filming “at-home” versions of the planned spring concerts for on-demand virtual classroom use in.
- The **Lullaby Project** has transitioned a virtual format and is working with all our local partners to make Lullaby sessions available to mothers in healthcare settings, homeless shelters, high schools, foster care, and correctional facilities as much as possible. Lullaby Project teaching artists are checking in with mothers we have worked with in recent months. This spring, we are making Lullaby writing sessions available to the general public via video conferencing for the first time.
- The Council-supported **Future Music Project** classes are happening online, continuing our service to the more than 60 teens enrolled this school year. Each of these four different classes meets once a week, creating original music in response to this challenging time. We developed new digital music education modules for secure tablet-based technology approved for correctional facilities—enabling students to continue ongoing music instruction in Future Music Project workshops serving youth in NYC secure detention and placement facilities.

### NeON Arts



**David Freudenthal**

Director of Government Relations

Tel: 212-903-9660

881 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019

dfreudenthal@carnegiehall.org

I'm glad to report the continuation of another Council-supported initiative, **NeON Arts**. In partnership with the Department of Probation and in response to NYC restrictions on public assembly, the program has shifted to a fully digital (and hugely successful) programming model and continues its critical service in reaching young residents in the seven NeON neighborhoods, which are now disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

This cycle, young people can elect online weekly workshops on literacy and creative writing, the culinary arts (participants get meal boxes shipped to their homes), industrial design, virtual reality, theatre, digital music production, and the visual arts (participants will design virtual murals to be painted on neighborhood walls once safe).

Earlier this month, the Administration announced **NeON Summer**, a new initiative that will enroll 2,700 youth in six weeks of online instruction that will help build skills, focus career goals, and express creativity. Young people will receive a stipend and could earn up to \$1,200. NeON Arts will provide online creative workshops through NeON Summer in the wide variety of artistic disciplines typically available in-person. NeON Summer has been wildly popular and there is significantly more demand than the program's capacity based on available funding.

NeON Arts will be more essential than ever in the days ahead in serving residents who are most severely impacted by the crisis, especially given the challenges facing our city's young people this summer due to the Administration's proposed cuts to youth programs. NeON Arts supports their mental, physical, and emotional well-being by keeping youth healthy and safe indoors while creatively and constructively engaged online.

All New Yorkers have the right to high-quality artistic experiences, and NeON Arts is an expression of that vision. For Carnegie Hall, our belief is that all young people, regardless of their circumstances, should have opportunities to be creative, explore their talents, and develop skill sets that help them grow and overcome challenges. The issue of arts access is especially critical for system-involved young people, an area in which Carnegie Hall has invested deeply. Since 2013, the Hall has worked with Commissioner Bermúdez and her fantastic team at the Department of Probation to include NeON Arts within the agency's suite of solutions to forge pathways for clients and help them succeed. In our work together, we have shown the power of arts and culture to engage young people, strengthen our communities, and collaborate with community leaders and local artists and organizations to make our city a better place.

Speaker Johnson and Council Member Powers in his capacity as Chairman of the Criminal Justice Committee have recognized the value of the arts and creative experiences as key to the City's holistic efforts in the justice system, as have Council Members Gibson, Ampry-Samuel, Powers, Van Bramer, Cornegy, and Majority Leader Cumbo in supporting these efforts.

NeON Arts is a prime example of a robust, public-private endeavor that is taking a new approach to addressing some of our city's most pressing issues. Based on the success we have seen in NYC it is our hope that NeON Arts can serve as a model for other agencies with justice-involved clients across the country. Young people participating in this program feel not only a great sense of pride in sharing their original work, but also a sense of responsibility to give back to their communities by sharing the opportunities and resources they have accessed through NeON Arts with their peers and neighbors. The Council's FY20 \$200,000 investment was vital for supporting these communities throughout the year, and we urge continuation of the program.

We thank the Committee for their interest in these programs, and we encourage the Council to continue supporting NeON Arts and the Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative. More than ever these resources are essential to addressing the needs of some of our city's most vulnerable and over-policed communities. We believe programs like

these can help to mitigate the damage done by systemic prejudices engrained in our law enforcement and justice systems. To ensure that these essential services for our city's youth to continue, we respectfully request the expressed support of the Committee to the Speaker regarding Carnegie Hall's \$200,000 renewal request for NeON Arts in FY21.

Thank you for your support for and consideration of our requests, and thanks to DOP, artists and arts organizations, stakeholders, and the talented young people involved in these programs for being a part of truly transformational changes.

Guy Yedwab  
Board of Directors  
League of Independent Theater  
June 8th, 2020

Testimony to City Council on the Urgent, Critical Need to #CancelRent to Save Arts Venues

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am on the board of directors of the League of Independent Theater, an advocacy organization representing the interests of those who create theater performances in or run 99 seat or less theaters, and non-traditional theater. Our members are the grassroots, creating new theater across all five boroughs, from every cultural community of this city. We estimate roughly 60,000 theatermakers work in theater in New York, and virtually every single one passes through the small, independent venues.

Almost half of the seats for theaters are in independent theater venues.<sup>1</sup> 84% of independent theaters rent their performance space.<sup>2</sup> In other words, when you venture out beyond the largest institutions, theater largely depends on renting commercial space. Whether open or closed, these performance venues continue either pay rent – or, more likely, fail to pay the rent, accruing piles and piles of debt.

The New York Times surveyed 511 epidemiologists, asking how long it would be until they would be personally willing to attend a play. 64% said that they would wait one year or more before returning.<sup>3</sup> Our own informal surveys of audience members have been equally bleak. Regardless of the timeline and plans put forward

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<sup>1</sup> THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT, ALL NEW YORK'S A STAGE: NEW YORK CITY SMALL THEATER INDUSTRY CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY (2019).

<sup>2</sup> NEW YORK INNOVATIVE THEATRE FOUNDATION, STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF OFF-OFF-BROADWAY BUDGETS (2008).

<sup>3</sup> Quoc Trung Bui, Claire Cain Miller, and Margot Sanger-Katz, *When 511 Epidemiologists Expect to Fly, Hug, and Do 18 Other Everyday Activities Again*, NEW YORK TIMES, June 8, 2020.

Guy Yedwab  
Board of Directors  
League of Independent Theater  
June 8th, 2020

by the Mayor's reopening taskforce, which has no representation of independent cultural venues, it's clear that we won't see gatherings in our spaces for quite some time. Even when we do, it is likely to be restricted to a fraction of capacity, meaning it will likely not be profitable – or even sustainable – to produce work.

One year of no profits means twelve months of rents due.

One year of no profits and rents due means paying rent out of thin reserves, personal savings, or loans that will one day hopefully be repaid.

One year of no profits and rents due means that many spaces won't reopen.

We've already seen this. Shetler Studios closed its doors after 30 years in business. It's impossible to describe the impact on the entire independent theater community when rehearsal space that housed literally thousands of companies and artists developing their work.<sup>4</sup> The Secret Theater, one of the few performance venues in Western Queens, shut its doors in Long Island City after a decade in the community.<sup>5</sup> The Artist Co-Op, a shared workspace for the artistic community and another vital piece of independent arts infrastructure, won't reopen. Spaceworks, founded in 2011 to address issues of space affordability for artists in New York City, shut down permanently in June 2020.

This is only three months into what may be another twelve months of crisis. And venues do not yet know what the costs of reopening will be – architects to

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<sup>4</sup> Olivia Clement, *NYC's Shetler Studios Closes Its Doors After 30 Years*, PLAYBILL, May 6, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Olivia Clement, *The Secret Theatre Closes Its Doors After 10 Years*, PLAYBILL, May 7, 2020.

Guy Yedwab  
Board of Directors  
League of Independent Theater  
June 8th, 2020

reconfigure space, budgeting for PPE and disinfectant, staff for managing audience social distancing. More venues will fail to reopen.

Eviction moratoriums only delay the inevitable. Small business loans only delay the inevitable. So long as the rent comes due each month, interminably, those who try to open spaces for gathering and performance will continue to face the threat of financial ruin with little road to recovery visible.

City Council can and must act. You have the legal authority to suspend rents for commercial tenants impacted by the pandemic.<sup>6</sup> A government that has the capacity to force businesses closed can also use its power to ease their suffering. The pain of small landlords is real, and can be addressed through a fund for small landlords impacted or by some other benefit City Council can be constructed.

But the longer City Council does not act, the deeper into a sea of red ink our independent cultural community will sink.

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<sup>6</sup> Paula Z. Segal, Cheryl Walker, Catherine Humphreville, *#ClosedByCOVID: The City's Power to Save Our Small Businesses*, NEW YORK LAW JOURNAL, May 15, 2020.

**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**  
**June 22, 2020**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education. **My name is Leticia Carr Creese, and I am a NYCDOE high school student at Celia Cruz Bronx High School Of Music enrolled in arts programs produced by the 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY21, my request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development.**

I have seen firsthand the profoundly positive effects that high-quality arts education experiences have on children and young adults across NYC through my work with 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership, which receives support from these agencies to serve **16,000+ students and their teachers annually at 70+ public schools throughout all five boroughs, 80% of which are Title I.**

92Y is steadfast in its commitment to helping students discover their artistic and intellectual passions as they learn about the world they live in through joyful experiences with the arts. I have seen this commitment in action through my work with 92Y over the past year. While working with 92Y I've got to experience multiple skills that will benefit me later in life. Through the arts program I have been able to run events that involved other DOE students. By running an event I've learned how to send business emails, broadcast and publicize an event, as well as planning ahead for all possible outcomes of an event and creating multiple backup plans. Having that experience means a lot to me because I want to be able to host events when I'm older for my family and friends. It's important this program continues so other students will be able to have the same experience and learn skills that are required at most jobs.

Despite reduced resources and increased challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, 92Y's staff and Teaching Artists have been doing tremendous work to create and sustain programs for thousands of NYC public school students that offer a sense of normalcy and joy during these difficult and unsettling times. Immediately in March upon announcement that the NYCDOE would be transitioning to remote learning, 92Y began surveying principals about their needs and developing innovative ways to continue providing students at their many high-need partner schools with impactful arts learning. 92Y staff swiftly trained their Teaching Artists in remote instruction and developed remote programming for schools.

**Deep budget cuts to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development would be disastrous for arts education, the cultural community that is part of this city's fabric and a key driver of its economy, and most of all to the young people whose lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. In allocating cuts and resources, City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.**

**We urge you to continue to support NYC's cultural community and its youth by restoring critical funding to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development in FY21.**

Sincerely,

Leticia Carr Creese



**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
June 22, 2020**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education. **My name is Carolina Monterrosas, and I am a NYCDOE high school student at Mott Hall V enrolled in arts programs produced by the 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY21, my request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development.**

I have seen firsthand the profoundly positive effects that high-quality arts education experiences have on children and young adults across NYC through my work with 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership, which receives support from these agencies to serve **16,000+ students and their teachers annually at 70+ public schools throughout all five boroughs, 80% of which are Title I.**

92Y is steadfast in its commitment to helping students discover their artistic and intellectual passions as they learn about the world they live in through joyful experiences with the arts. I have seen this commitment in action through my work with 92Y over the past year. My experience working at 92Y has been nothing short of amazing. It gives me something to look forward to doing after school and helps me stay occupied and out of trouble. With all honesty, I enjoy working at 92Y because I was placed with an excellent mentor there and I have learned new skills there such as using excel and I even took a metalwork and jewelry class where I got exposed to the process of making things with metals. If 92Y's budget gets cut short then many kids will be left without access to programs in the arts which must be protected at all costs to keep creativity and talent flowing. Despite reduced resources and increased challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, 92Y's staff and Teaching Artists have been doing tremendous work to create and sustain programs for thousands of NYC public school students that offer a sense of normalcy and joy during these difficult and unsettling times. Immediately in March upon announcement that the NYCDOE would be transitioning to remote learning, 92Y began surveying principals about their needs and developing innovative ways to continue providing students at their many high-need partner schools with impactful arts learning. 92Y staff swiftly trained their Teaching Artists in remote instruction and developed remote programming for schools.

**Deep budget cuts to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development would be disastrous for arts education, the cultural community that is part of this city's fabric and a key driver of its economy, and most of all to the young people whose lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. In allocating cuts and resources, City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.**

**We urge you to continue to support NYC's cultural community and its youth by restoring critical funding to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development in FY21.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carolina'.

Carolina Monterrosas



**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
June 22, 2020**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education. **My name is Erica Rand Silverman, and I am the PTA Co-President at PS 116 elementary school, which is lucky enough to collaborate with 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY21, my request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development.**

I have seen firsthand the profoundly positive effects that high-quality arts education experiences have on children and young adults across NYC through my work with 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership, which receives support from these agencies to serve **16,000+ students and their teachers annually at 70+ public schools throughout all five boroughs, 80% of which are Title I.**

92Y is steadfast in its commitment to helping students discover their artistic and intellectual passions as they learn about the world they live in through joyful experiences with the arts. I have seen this commitment in action through my work with 92Y over the past two years.

When our art teacher retired, we didn't have enough money in the budget to hire a new one. 92Y stepped up and helped us to create a plan that would enable our children to have access to a highly engaging and thoughtfully planned visual arts and dance education. The liaisons at 92Y are incredibly responsive and organized and wove themselves into the fabric of our school community. It is truly impressive to work with them.

Being able to provide multiple forms of art was vital to the spirit of our students. We watched as little kids found confidence through movement and learned about the impact of music and dance on their own histories and communities. All the children had an opportunity to explore materials and engage in the art of making with the guidance of true artists. The older students even had access to use technology to explore the digital arts.

The learning continued long into remote learning even with students having access to dance classes and check-ins with teaching artists. 92Y is a partner in bringing joy, and creativity to our students. It is a relationship that we were hoping was just beginning. We can only imagine how much more integral to our school they would become after more time together.

Despite reduced resources and increased challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, 92Y's staff and Teaching Artists have been doing tremendous work to create and sustain programs for thousands of NYC public school students that offer a sense of normalcy and joy during these difficult and unsettling times. Immediately in March upon announcement that the NYCDOE would be transitioning to remote learning, 92Y began surveying principals about their needs and developing innovative ways to continue providing students at their many high-need partner schools with impactful arts learning. 92Y staff swiftly trained their Teaching Artists in remote instruction and developed remote programming for schools.

**Deep budget cuts to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development would be disastrous for arts education, the cultural community that is part of this city's fabric and a key driver of its economy, and most of all to the young people whose lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. In allocating cuts and resources, City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.**

**We urge you to continue to support NYC's cultural community and its youth by restoring critical funding to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development in FY21.**

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
9840898924271  
Erica Rand Silverman



**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
June 22, 2020**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education. **My name is Dr. Mona Silfen and I am the principal of a school that works closely in partnership with the 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY21, my request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development.**

I have seen firsthand the profoundly positive effects that high-quality arts education experiences have on children and young adults across NYC through my work with 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership, which receives support from these agencies to serve **16,000+ students and their teachers annually at 70+ public schools throughout all five boroughs, 80% of which are Title I.**

92Y is steadfast in its commitment to helping students discover their artistic and intellectual passions as they learn about the world they live in through joyful experiences with the arts. I have seen this commitment in action through my work with 92Y over the past 20 years. I have seen the tremendous impact that the 92Y has had on our students. The many different arts programs they have provided to our students have helped our students to gain knowledge and experiences in various ways. Our students attend concert performances at the 92Y and learn about different cultures through the arts. In addition, our students have participated in musical theater performances, dance and so much more. The 92Y has become part of our school community and our families count on the collaboration to provide their children this incredible exposure to the arts through various lenses.

Despite reduced resources and increased challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, 92Y's staff and Teaching Artists have been doing tremendous work to create and sustain programs for thousands of NYC public school students that offer a sense of normalcy and joy during these difficult and unsettling times. Immediately in March upon announcement that the NYCDOE would be transitioning to remote learning, 92Y began surveying principals about their needs and developing innovative ways to continue providing students at their many high-need partner schools with impactful arts learning. 92Y staff swiftly trained their Teaching Artists in remote instruction and developed remote programming for schools.

**Deep budget cuts to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development would be disastrous for arts education, the cultural community that is part of this city's fabric and a key driver of its economy, and most of all to the young people whose lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. In allocating cuts and resources, the City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.**

**We urge you to continue to support NYC's cultural community and its youth by restoring critical funding to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development in FY21.**

Sincerely,

Dr. Mona Silfen

**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**  
**June 22, 2020**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education. **My name is Sandy M Curiel and I am a NYCDOE high school student at Mott Hall V enrolled in arts programs produced by the 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY21, my request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development.**

I have seen firsthand the profoundly positive effects that high-quality arts education experiences have on children and young adults across NYC through my work with 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership, which receives support from these agencies to serve **16,000+ students and their teachers annually at 70+ public schools throughout all five boroughs, 80% of which are Title I.**

92Y is steadfast in its commitment to helping students discover their artistic and intellectual passions as they learn about the world they live in through joyful experiences with the arts. I have seen this commitment in action through my work with 92Y over the past year. Throughout interning at the 92Y, I have gotten an immense amount of opportunities to learn more about myself regarding college and being able to learn about art itself. This internship has done nothing but help me with learning more about the impact art has on people, politics, and society itself. This internship has helped me find my voice, it has helped me advocate for myself more than I would have alone. Experiencing this change upon me is beneficial for me, this benefit can be brought upon other teens as well if they are given the opportunities of being in art programs like the programs 92Y's Center for Arts Learning & Leadership offers. Those art programs help teens find their true calling, enjoy the experiences the arts can offer, and many other things. Cutting the funding on those programs would deprive many teens of opportunities that can guide them to their path which can harm them. After all, teens are the future, the help we get right now is what will make a better future. An improved future will need the help of art programs, if they are taken away it would make things much harder for us to succeed in improving it. I beseech you to not cut the funding for art programs.

Despite reduced resources and increased challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, 92Y's staff and Teaching Artists have been doing tremendous work to create and sustain programs for thousands of NYC public school students that offer a sense of normalcy and joy during these difficult and unsettling times. Immediately in March upon announcement that the NYCDOE would be transitioning to remote learning, 92Y began surveying principals about their needs and developing innovative ways to continue providing students at their many high-need partner schools with impactful arts learning. 92Y staff swiftly trained their Teaching Artists in remote instruction and developed remote programming for schools.

**Deep budget cuts to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development would be disastrous for arts education, the cultural community that is part of this city's fabric and a key driver of its economy, and most of all to the young people whose lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. In allocating cuts and resources, City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.**

**We urge you to continue to support NYC's cultural community and its youth by restoring critical funding to the Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, and Department of Youth & Community Development in FY21.**

Sincerely,

Sandy Michelle Curiel



**Remarks by Jack Kliger**  
**New York City Council**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, & International Intergroup Relations**  
**Monday, June 22, 2020**

Thank you all for the opportunity to speak today. I represent the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, where I serve as President & CEO.

Located in Battery Park City, we're the third-largest Holocaust museum in the world and the primary resource for teaching and learning about antisemitism in New York. We normally educate more than 200,000 visitors per year, including more than 60,000 New York schoolchildren, about the history and lessons of the holocaust.

Our work is grounded in the conviction that teaching the evils of the past to the next generation will help build a more tolerant world. That goal is more important than ever before, with antisemitic hate crimes and racism against other minority communities in New York rising sharply over the last several years, and particularly during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Museum is rising to the challenges presented by the pandemic by creating new online resources and educational experiences focused on teaching what hate can do, as well as weekly professional development seminars for New York educators, online classes for New York students, and public programs for people across the country.

All our programs are free, and their content is aligned with the urgent calls for racial justice and an end to police violence being made by so many members of our community.

Since the pandemic forced us to close our doors on March 15, we've created online educational programming that has reached more than 80,000 people. We've been treating the pandemic not only as a threat to our old way of doing things, but also as an opportunity to do things a new way – to make progress towards our goal of going “beyond the walls” of the Museum and reaching people in their homes and communities.

Even amidst the successes we've had in going “beyond the walls” and reaching so many people with our educational content, the pandemic is presenting the Museum with an existential crisis. It has reduced all our revenue streams, required us to cancel our in-person events through at least December, and forced us to lay off more than 40% of our staff, including much of our Education Department. Our budget for the fiscal year ahead is approximately half the size of last year's.

We will do our best to pursue our essential mission as a New York educational and cultural institution over the months ahead. But this work will be extremely challenging with our reduced staff, and even more so if we do not receive funding at expected levels from New York City. I know my colleagues at the city's other museums and cultural institutions are grappling with the same issues.

As the President & CEO of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, I ask the city to prioritize funding for institutions like ours – because combatting antisemitism and racism cannot wait until the pandemic is over. Thank you.

**New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations  
June 22, 2020 - DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City**

I'm Taryn Sacramone, Executive Director of Queens Theatre and Vice Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group.

The last time I had the opportunity to address this committee was in early March. That day, I shared that a respondent to a survey had said that, growing up in New York, cultural institutions were 'places of hope' that were always available to them. Places of hope.

That has taken new meaning over the last three months, as New York has confronted and grappled with the crises of a global pandemic, job losses, and the pain of systemic racism.

In these three months, I have seen New York's cultural leaders come together from organizations of all scales and disciplines, across all 5 boroughs, sharing resources and supporting each other. I've seen our institutions prove that we are places of hope, even when our doors are closed.

At Queens Theatre, our motto became "Queens Theatre is more than a building." We worked with our Su CASA partners - Queens senior centers - and set up weekly calls - with teaching artists performing, and the seniors themselves sharing original poems, songs, and jokes. We moved our CASA programs online, working with teachers to incorporate them in their plans. We shared videos of Queens families at home, playing music together, and held weekly Digital Storycircles - at one storycircle, a participant said that it was the first time they'd spoken to anyone in a week. After the murder of George Floyd, we created an affinity space for Black women, trans, and nonbinary community members to breathe and find joy together. We continued our Theatre For All initiative to advance the inclusion of disabled people in the performing arts - a project that has been funded, in part, by the Disability Forward Fund - and are planning events in recognition of the 30th anniversary of the ADA.

As conversations turn to reopening and to the City coming back from this, people say that New Yorkers are resilient. As someone who was not raised here, but who has chosen to raise a family here, I urge you: don't underestimate the role that the richness and diversity of our cultural sector plays in making New Yorkers resilient. We are places of hope. Even, as it turns out, when our doors are closed.

TESTIMONY BY MICHAEL PRESSER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSIDE BROADWAY  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEARING  
JUNE 19, 2020

Good morning members of the Committee. I am Michael Presser, Executive Director of Inside Broadway, an arts and education program that works in the city's schools and senior centers. I am here this morning to urge continued funding for the highly successful and popular Council initiatives of CASA, SU CASA and CII (Cultural Immigration Initiative) programs.

These initiatives have been extremely successful in bringing sustained arts enrichment activities to students and seniors throughout the city. CASA especially has been very successful in bringing arts and education into every council district by providing creative activities they would not normally afford.

COVID-19 and the resulting closure of NYC schools and senior centers has forced us to immediately rethink the manner in which we operate these programs. Moving to video and digital programming has enabled us to continue providing these important services to schools and senior centers.

Fortunately at the shutdown many of our CASA programs had started last fall and we have been able to complete most of them. For the remainder of our programs we have transitioned to video and digital programming. While arts instruction is best live in person, this was a viable alternative. Hopefully, when schools and senior centers reopen in the fall we will be able to send our instructors back on location, but if unable to be there live, I want to assure you that we are ready to continue our work through modern technology.

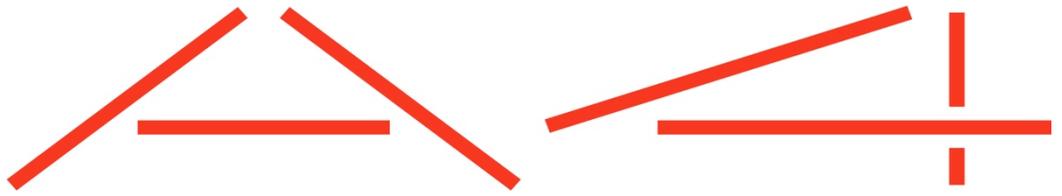
I want to finish by thanking the Council for your continued support of arts programming. With all of the uncertainty facing the next school year, and the likelihood that DOE will eliminate most, if not all, of its funded arts programs, continued CASA funding is critical. I am seriously concerned that next year CASA may be the only arts that most of our children will receive.

The CASA, SU CASA and CII initiatives have been very successful and are some of the most popular services provide to our children and seniors. Let's not let them down.

Please continue to support them in the next budget and thank you for your time this morning.

20 Jay Street, Ste 740  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

(212) 941-9208  
aaartsalliance.org



Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Monday, June 22, 2020

My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance (henceforth referred to as A4). We are a 37-year-old, Brooklyn-based organization dedicated to ensuring greater representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian American artists and arts organizations as well as providing a critical voice for this community.

And right now, our community is hurting. Yet hopeful and resilient.

Our constituents, primarily Asian American artists of all disciplines, have been uniquely impacted by COVID-19. Of course the entire the cultural community has been affected by closings and cancellations, losing opportunities and income, yet the A4 community faces the added weight of anti-Asian racism, harassment, and attacks due to the framing of the origins of the coronavirus.

We have been working overtime to ensure that our community feels safe, connected, and cared for. In mid-March, we surveyed our constituents and subsequently adjusted our programs and services based on their responses. We created a comprehensive list of financial, professional, self-care, as well as COVID- and APA-specific resources that have been widely shared throughout our community. We've developed new events such as the *Resilience & Response to Anti-Asian Racism: Strategies Beyond COVID-19* workshop which has garnered more than 5,700 views on Facebook. We are presenting a series of play readings of works by immigrant playwrights to uplift the varied, important, yet too often unheard voices of this city. And we will continue to bring together our community and share their powerful work through events like next month's Town Hall, featuring artists in solidarity with justice movements.

Asian Americans represent nearly 15% of the city's population and contribute so much to culture and composition of every borough of this city. And, according Comptroller Scott Stringer's report<sup>1</sup> on New York's creative economy, the creative sector spurs \$110 billion in economic activity and employs nearly 300,000 New Yorkers. From theater to film to visual arts, dance, literature, comedy and more, Asian Americans need to be recognized and supported for their role in this building city's creative economy.

**ASIAN  
AMERICAN  
ARTS  
ALLIANCE**

The Department of Cultural Affairs' own cultural action plan<sup>2</sup>, *CREATE NYC*, cited increasing the City's funding for cultural organizations, especially those in historically underserved neighborhood, as its FIRST objective. I ask you today to honor that commitment not only to the Asian American community, but to all underserved communities throughout the city.

We need the support of Department of Cultural Affairs to ensure that our community, the creative workforce, and this city as a whole can recover fully — economically, emotionally, culturally. A study<sup>3</sup> by the World Health Organization (Fancort & Finn, 2019) offers strong evidence of the arts in improving health and well being, showing that attending or participating in cultural activities has greater protective effects against cognitive decline and depression than exercise. For this city to heal, we need a robust creative workforce and cultural community. I ask that arts, especially in underserved communities, continue to receive the Council's support and that you ensure this budget reflects the values of the city in promoting equity and racial justice.

Thank you.

---

1. New York City Comptroller. (2019). *The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City*. [<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>]

2. New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. (2019). *CREATE NYC: A Cultural Plan for All New Yorkers*. [<https://createnyc.cityofnewyork.us/the-action-plan/>]

3. Fancort, D. and Finn, S. (2019). *What is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being?*  
[<https://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/what-is-the-evidence-on-the-role-of-the-arts-in-improving-health-and-well-being-a-scoping-review-2019>]

June 22, 2020 @ 10am

Testimony to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and  
International Intergroup Relations



**RE: Oversight: DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City.**

Thank you for taking the time to be here today. Today I present an urgent plea to the DCLA on behalf of POC (people of color)-led arts organizations and artists throughout New York City.

My name is Kat Bloomfield, and I am the CEO of Arts Business Collaborative (ABC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for communities and artists of color. I have been living in Queens, New York for eight years, and currently rent a space in the Living Artist Organization in Woodside, Queens, District 26. We are also a participant of the Culture@3 calls, representing very small POC-led and -serving arts organizations.

I created ABC because I wanted to see more people of color, **especially women of color**, succeed in the creative economy and greater workforce. ABC combats the subtle structures in place that prevent communities and artists of color from surviving and thriving by providing technical assistance, entrepreneurship support, research, community organizing, and fiscal sponsorship. We are fiscal sponsors of groups such as The Okra Project, For The Gworlds, and Black Trans Femmes in the Arts, three groups at the forefront of serving black transgender communities.

I do not need to tell you how COVID-19 has devastated our city and livelihoods; ABC lost 50% of our revenue in March of this year.

Due to COVID-19, many POC-led small businesses and nonprofit organizations saw their revenues decimated, especially as a large portion of revenue comes from commissions, classes, and space rentals.

With the help of the Howard Gilman Foundation, Dance NYC, and the Hillman Family Foundations, we were able to step in to serve over 100 POC-led organizations, individual artists, and creative economy small business owners throughout NYC. One of our clients was LEIMAY, located in Council District 33, is a nonprofit artist collective that stimulates dialogue on contemporary performance and installation art and offers studio and performing space for emerging and established artists.

In the past, all of LEIMAY's revenue came from performances and other earned revenue opportunities. When LEIMAY sought to make up for lost revenue, there was already a historic distrust of government and lack of connection to foundations, similar to many other POC artists. When combined with requirements for previous foundation, city, and state funding; limited access to capital and networks to help make up lost revenue; and overwhelmingly complicated application processes, to name a few,

these factors **effectively barred LEIMAY from receiving foundation, corporate, or government funding.** They attempted to help their artists get individual emergency grants, but these grant funds would run out within minutes of their announcement because of first come first served policies, which disproportionately **advantaged white communities who knew the funders or were included in their network.**

We have called upon foundation program officers to modify their emergency funding procedures; provided nearly 400 hours of one-on-one grant writing and strategy sessions, office hours, and workshops; collected and analyzed data around POC-led small businesses and nonprofits; and reached out to independent artists and activists to help track their impact on and access for communities of color.

**However, we need the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs to fiscally recognize the contributions of artists of color to the cultural fabric of this city. White-led, -governed, and -staffed organizations receive the overwhelming majority of discretionary, CII, and CASA funds.**

**Discretionary funds are given to community arts organizations at the recommendation of NYC public school principals, the majority of whom (85%) are white, despite having an 83% POC student body.**

We call upon the city council to mandate that nonprofits seeking DCLA funds must have at least  $\frac{1}{3}$  of their nonprofits' boards of directors be people of color, such that the communities of color served in nonprofit programs are proportionally represented and have a say in the governance of the organizations meant to serve them. Although the DCLA already requires  $\frac{1}{3}$  of executive boards to be POC, there is a stipulation that allows for organizations to only have a plan to instate POC, allowing for POC to continuously be excluded from senior leadership positions. Finally, we call for culturally competent, capacity building support for POC-led groups applying for government funds. To Majority Leader Cumbo's point, we need to address issues of systemic inequitable funding, and at this moment, we have an opportunity to redirect funding specifically for this purpose. **In this way, communities of color are no longer shut out of government funding and can access the skill building necessary to flourish on the same level as white-led institutions.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In solidarity,

Kat Bloomfield  
CEO, Arts Business Collaborative

# ARTS FUNDING DISPARITIES REPORT

Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer | District 26



## THE LANDSCAPE

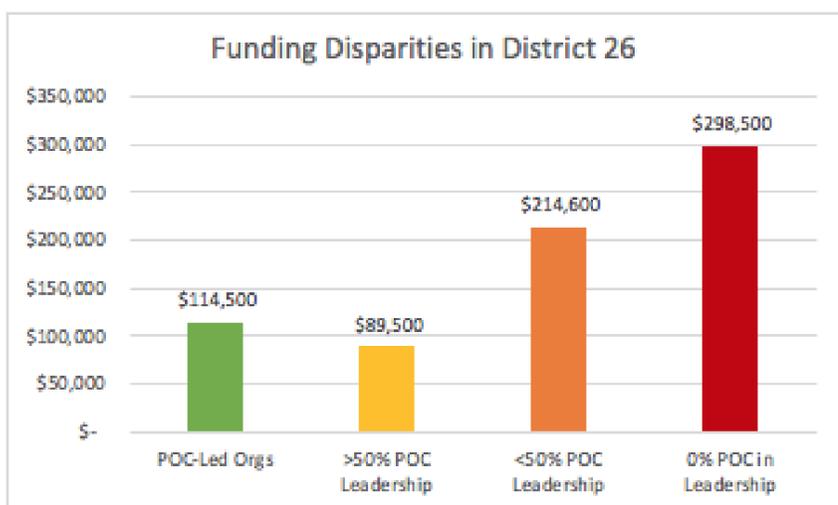
Over 2/3 of nonprofits have budgets less than \$1M\*. Nonprofits led by people of color (POC) have even smaller budgets.

POC-led institutions' growth and service to their communities are severely limited by factors beyond their control: access to capital, access to networks, and access to technical assistance.

## THE STATISTICS

Council Members often take the recommendations of the principals in their districts for allocation of CASA, CII, and discretionary funds for school-based arts education programming. When 84% of principals are white\*\*, and 85% of students are POC\*\*\*, it is critical that the programming partner reflects students' lived experiences in both programming and organizational culture.

This was unfortunately not the case in District 26 in FY20\*\*\*\*:



\* Fraily, Kirsten. What Does the Nonprofit Sector Really Look Like? (Jan. 6, 2017). Retrieved Feb 19, 2020 from <https://tinyurl.com/tupnnrh>.

\*\*Anderson, Melinda, D. *Where Are All the Principals of Color?*. (June 21, 2016). Retrieved Feb 19, 2020 from <https://tinyurl.com/sc47gfs>.

\*\*\* DOE at a Glance. (n.d.). Retrieved Feb 19, 2020, from <https://tinyurl.com/y7oevkr6>

\*\*\*\*Fiscal Year 2020. (n.d.) Retrieved Feb 19, 2020, from <https://tinyurl.com/vjaffn>

## A DEEPER DIVE

In the 2020 budget for District 26:

- The majority of funds (50%) went to organizations (orgs) with no POC in leadership positions.
- In comparison to POC-led orgs, white-led orgs with no POC leadership received 2.5x more funding.
- Only 19% of funding went to POC-led orgs, and only 21% of orgs funded were POC-led.

### ARTS BUSINESS COLLABORATIVE:

- Sponsors a POC & immigrant artist-focused community center in Woodside, Queens with over 6,000 visitors & 200 events/year
- Raised over \$12M for arts & STEM orgs over 10 years
- Affected over 15,000 people & households of color

We provide access to:



SUBSIDIZED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO NAVIGATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING & INCREASE COMMUNITY IMPACT



CAPITAL THROUGH FISCAL SPONSORSHIP FOR UNINCORPORATED GROUPS & INDEPENDENT ARTISTS



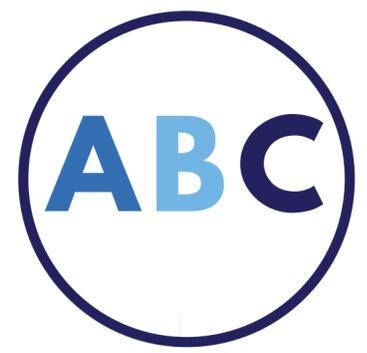
CRITICAL RESEARCH TRACKING FUNDING & POWER IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR



NETWORKS OF CONSULTANTS OF COLOR IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

# ARTS FUNDING DISPARITIES REPORT

Council Member Fernando Cabrera | District 14



## THE LANDSCAPE

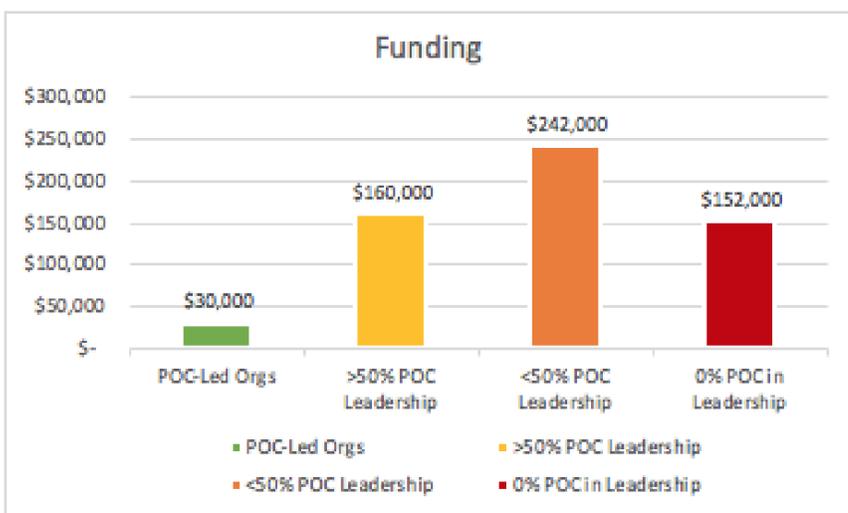
Over 2/3 of nonprofits have budgets less than \$1M\*. Nonprofits led by people of color (POC) have even smaller budgets.

POC-led institutions' growth and service to their communities are severely limited by factors beyond their control: access to capital, access to networks, and access to technical assistance.

## THE STATISTICS

Council Members often take the recommendations of the principals in their districts for allocation of CASA, CII, and discretionary funds for school-based arts education programming. When 84% of principals are white\*\*, and 85% of students are POC\*\*\*, it is critical that the programming partner reflects students' lived experiences in both programming and organizational culture.

This was unfortunately not the case in District 14 in FY20\*\*\*\*:



\* Fraily, Kirsten. What Does the Nonprofit Sector Really Look Like? (Jan. 6, 2017). Retrieved Feb 19, 2020 from <https://tinyurl.com/tupnrrh>.

\*\*Anderson, Melinda, D. *Where Are All the Principals of Color?*. (June 21, 2016). Retrieved Feb 19, 2020 from <https://tinyurl.com/sc47gfs>.

\*\*\* DOE at a Glance. (n.d.). Retrieved Feb 19, 2020, from <https://tinyurl.com/y7oevkr6>

\*\*\*\*Fiscal Year 2020. (n.d.) Retrieved Feb 19, 2020, from <https://tinyurl.com/vjaffn>

## A DEEPER DIVE

In the 2020 budget for District 14:

- The majority of funds (46%) went to organizations (orgs) with an average of only 20% POC in leadership positions.
- In comparison to orgs that are POC-led, white led orgs with no POC leadership receive 5x more funding.
- Only 5% of funding went to POC-led orgs, and only 13% of orgs funded were POC-led.

### ARTS BUSINESS COLLABORATIVE:

- Sponsors a POC & immigrant artist-focused community center in Woodside, Queens with over 6,000 visitors & 200 events/year
- Raised over \$12M for arts & STEM orgs over 10 years
- Affected over 15,000 people & households of color

We provide access to:



SUBSIDIZED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO NAVIGATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING & INCREASE COMMUNITY IMPACT



CAPITAL THROUGH FISCAL SPONSORSHIP FOR UNINCORPORATED GROUPS & INDEPENDENT ARTISTS



CRITICAL RESEARCH TRACKING FUNDING & POWER IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR



NETWORKS OF CONSULTANTS OF COLOR IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

**AH New York @ the Pillars**  
289 St. Nicholas Ave  
New York, NY 10039  
telephone (212) 268-7219  
fax (212) 947-9418



### Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

**Arts Horizons**  
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fax (201) 567-5312

toll-free (888) 522-ARTS  
info@artshorizons.org  
www.artshorizons.org

*transforming lives*

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Kenetta Bailey Hayes  
*Member*

**Founder**

John R. Devol

**Executive Director**

Allison J. Davis

**In Memoriam**

Celeste Holm  
LeRoy Neiman

A Non-Profit  
Arts-in-Education  
Organization

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. We would like to introduce ourselves as Allison Davis and Dena Isles, and we are the Executive Director and the Director of NYC Residencies and Special Populations, respectively, for Arts Horizons New York (AHNY) located in Harlem.

The mission of AHNY is to enhance the lives of people of all ages and abilities by creating equitable opportunities to engage in the arts. AHNY has impacted the lives of innumerable children and adults in schools, hospitals, senior centers, community centers, and other community-based settings through the power of the arts. We are committed to making the performing, visual, literary and media arts and artistic expression equitable and accessible to diverse people of all ages and abilities. Each year we serve approximately 130,000 students, teachers, artists, families, and seniors each year in the NYC metropolitan area.

Since mid-March, AHNY has experienced a significant loss of income and work due to COVID-19 restrictions. In an effort to maintain some of our existing programs and partnerships, we have developed and launched Arts Horizons Distance Learning with several pilot virtual programs at some of our partnering NYC DOE schools using Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city.

Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Further budget cuts to these critical departments would adversely impact our ability to sustain our organization, compensate our teaching artists and staff, and to continue our mission of providing high-quality arts education experiences in NYC. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first. Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Allison Davis in black ink.

**Allison Davis**  
*Executive Director, Arts Horizons*

Handwritten signature of Dena Isles in black ink.

**Dena Isles**  
*Program Director, Arts Horizons*



**DCLA, COVID-19, and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs Hearing  
Afro Latin Jazz Alliance Testimony**

The Afro Latin Jazz Alliance performs, educates about, and preserves the music of all the Américas, emanating from African and indigenous roots, through the entry point of jazz. Over the past 13 year, ALJA has been providing vital educational, preservation and cultural services to the people of the City of New York. ALJA's programs span the five New York City boroughs, with performances in venues throughout the city and with education programs serving school children throughout New York. ALJA has produced over 45 concerts as part of its annual New York Season showcasing the full range of Afro Latin jazz from all over the world.

Throughout ALJA's history, our in-school residence program has provided culturally sensitive music training in over 20 schools, serving over 15,000 schoolchildren, and our pre-professional training program has helped hundreds of aspiring musicians follow their dreams, several of whom have gone on into the nation's most rigorous training programs. Our preservation work maintains a library of music scores, parts, and memorabilia that span the history of Afro Latino musicians in New York, and we commission new art in the knowledge that this then becomes a part of that tradition and history. Lastly, our cultural work consists of performances featuring the Grammy winning Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, The Afro Latin Jazz Octet, The FatCats (our student groups) and many other artists.

When the Covid-19 crisis hit the city of New York we didn't flinch. Within days our staff mobilized and found a way in which we could continue to serve the people of New York. Our school residencies became virtual, and our masters continued to "visit" New York schoolchildren in hand crafted, lovingly designed on-line classes that were made freely available to those schools with which we had brick and mortar relationships. In addition, we offered master classes on-line to students throughout the world, and brought world class New York City Afro Latin culture to people who are now aware of our cultural riches.

Our preservation work continues in the creation of a digital village, in which we document the offerings of our Latin music collective, Ori-gen. This is a historic group of accomplished musicians from throughout the planet who've made New York their home and for the first time ever have, we created a NY based, musician led, musician curated festival which has begun by presenting weekly podcasts, performances and discussions about Afro Latino culture and its expression in New York.

Further, the performance work of the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra has continued with a self-produced virtual nightclub performance called "Virtual Birdland" which is conceived, produced and streamed on a weekly basis. Literally thousands of people from throughout the planet celebrate this music, this culture, in what is a quintessentially New York creation.

This is in addition to a regular series of performances that we either co-present or produce ourselves. Our co-presenters are found throughout the planet.

The center piece of our virtual response to the horrors of the pandemic is our Afro Latin Jazz Alliance Emergency Fund. Shortly after the stay at home orders were issued, within days, the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance established an Emergency Artists Fund. Using individual donations, we initially raised \$30,000 dollars. The money was used to support hundreds of self-employed free-lance artists and community who all of a sudden found their livings decimated. These are the folks who make all of our lives worth living, they dance, sing, play an instrument, tell jokes in short, all the things that make New York, New York. They are also the ones who have no guaranteed paycheck, can't apply for unemployment and sometimes are caught in mid artist visa issues in a political era in which our president tells us that they are not welcome.

We have raised over \$50,000 to date, and set a new goal of \$100,000. We have given out hundreds of grants that help these free-lance artists pay their rent or put food on their table. While other grants may be cumbersome and have strict eligibility rules, ALJA provides a simple application that only requires proof of New York area residence and dependence on free-lance performance to make a living, and offers help freely based on these criteria.

This is how the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance serves the Afro Latin Community and the greater New York Community during this horrific pandemic and brutal and violent moment we are all suffering through.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Arturo O'Farrill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Arturo O'Farrill, founder, artistic director



**DCLA, COVID-19, and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs Hearing  
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This is how the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance serves the Afro Latin Community and the greater New York Community during this horrific pandemic and brutal and violent moment we are all suffering through.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Arturo O'Farrill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Arturo" and last name "O'Farrill" clearly legible.

Arturo O'Farrill, founder, artistic director

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an OBIE and Lortel award-winning freelance theater director who has, for the past 25 years, worked on Broadway and extensively Off-Broadway. My work has been seen on stages both downtown and uptown and I have cultivated a deep and enduring relationship with theaters, practitioners and audiences. For the past three years, I have been the Artistic Director of New York City Center's Encores! Off-Center season, whose doors open to 2500 people per performance. I have been in New York City for nearly 30 years having inhabited a few boroughs and currently residing on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

**As a deeply dedicated and concerned citizen and artist:**

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

I came to this city in the early 90s pursuing the dream of participating in a rich and complex theatrical landscape. As a director, I have had the honor and privilege to work with MaYi, and as an Artistic Director, I have had the honor and privilege to forge meaningful relationships with the National Black Theater and the New Heritage Theatre Group. The artistic leaders of these organizations are visionaries for how artistic excellence and civic duty are one and the same. It is crucial that these temples of thought are sufficiently supported, for without them, the theatrical eco-system in New York City is severely compromised and is in danger of being permanently damaged. New York City is the capital of cultural exchange, diversity and understanding and

its theater is the beacon for the values and commitment we as citizens strive for. It is the place where we can come together and discuss how to move our mutual enterprises forward.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Kauffman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anne Kauffman

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a cultural worker and arts leader in Manhattan and Brooklyn. I co-lead two organizations that live at the intersection of the arts and civic engagement. I am the co-founder of Radical Evolution, a multiethnic performance collective that unearths the little-known histories of POC and immigrant communities and celebrates their contributions to this nation. I am also one of the directors of Soho Rep, a critically acclaimed Off-Broadway theatre known for socially engaged work that pushes artistic boundaries, and which recently produced *Fairview*, winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I have participated in a wonderful residency at Pregones Theater in The Bronx, seen many impactful theatre works at the National Black Theatre in Harlem, and have enjoyed visits to the Billie Holiday Theatre in Brooklyn. During my time at Pregones Theater with my collective, Radical Evolution, we were given space and resources to explore the little-known story of Irish and Mexican solidarity at the US/Mexico border during the Mexican American War of 1846- 48. After a week-long workshop, audiences from Radical Evolution and Pregones' audience base enjoyed a staged presentation of the work. Pregones also invited Irish Arts Center to co-host one of the presentations, and many of their constituents attended the presentations on a specific evening. This wonderful example of cross-cultural collaboration and affinity that was present onstage was also present in the work of cultural organizations and constituents coming together to celebrate the rich tapestry of converging cultures that is New York City.

Additionally, I have personally attended several powerful productions at National Black Theatre (NBT) - one of the few theatres in New York City that serves a predominantly Black audience base. In addition to presenting boundary-pushing theatre that directly addresses the cultural and social moment we are in such as James Ijames' *Kill Move Paradise* and Amiri Baraka's classic *Dutchman*, NBT has been a community gathering place and a space for celebration and healing for decades. Likewise, the Billie Holiday Theatre in Bedford Stuyvesant presents critically acclaimed theatre works such as Dael Orlandersmith's *Yellowman* while serving as a crucial hub for Brooklyn's Black community.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in redirecting funding from the NYPD budget, and in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Meropi Peponides  
Co-Founder, Radical Evolution  
Director, Artistic Development and Producing, Soho Rep.

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a theater artist and audience member. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Brooklyn and the General Manager of a non-profit theater company in Manhattan.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the arts, and especially the Coalition of Theatres of Color, in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, artists are the backbone of NYC culture.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. Theaters are spaces for healing of all kinds.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Pamela

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Pamela Reichen  
General Manager  
The Acting Company  
630 Ninth Avenue, Suite 803B  
New York, NY 10036  
212-258-3111 office

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a freelance theater director, an adjunct professor at the School of Visual Arts and a New Yorker since 2009. I am one of the thousands of arts professionals making their living in the non-profit sector through freelance work, teaching, and consulting. I live in Brooklyn and work in all 5 boroughs. I am raising a child here and part of why I am intent on staying in New York is the wealth of art and culture available to us, particularly theater and storytelling, created by those from different backgrounds from my family.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

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Sincerely,  
Christina Roussos

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Christina Roussos, she/her  
978.726.9111 / christinaroussos.com  
Listen to The Faith Exam on the Family Ghosts Podcast  
[Spotify](#) / [Apple Podcasts](#) / [FG Website](#)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a playwright, theater artist, and Artistic Director of Third Ear Theater Company, an independent experimental theater company based in Brooklyn. I've been making theater in New York for nearly a decade now, and my work has been produced and developed at such major institutions as Playwrights Horizons, Clubbed Thumb, Abrons Arts Center, Dixon Place, Vineyard Theater, New York Theater Workshop, and Page 73. I am an active member of the theater community, engaged with a large network of fellow artists and makers, seeing (in non-COVID times) theater most nights of the week, and working to improve the health of this artistic community. All of which is to say, I care about the state of theater in New York, and speak from within its ranks.

I am also writing to you in my capacity as an ordinary New Yorker, a resident of Flatbush.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I can say it is these theaters - run by, and for the many particular communities of the city - that are the often unnoticed, often unappreciated lifeblood of the theater scene as a whole. These are the theaters where many artists of color I know and respect have found their artistic homes (several of my favorite writers are devoted members of Mi-Yi's writer's group, for instance), and I have heard them often talk at length at how vital these spaces are to their artistic livelihood and upbringing. The fact is, if we lose these institutions, we lose a whole generation of brilliant artists, and the city loses much of what makes it such a special place to live.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Jerry Lieblich  
Third Ear Theater Co.  
Brooklyn, NY 11226

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a young theater artist who recently became a resident of New York City. I have felt a draw to the city for my entire life because of its incredible and vibrant art scene, its profound cultural influence and scope, and its diverse confluence of creators and change-makers. I work as an actor, educator, arts administrator and writer, as well as am a large consumer of theater and arts. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Bushwick Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Talia Meri

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Talia Frank-Stempel  
*BFA Theater Education and Performance*, Emerson College '19  
*National Theater Institute*, Eugene O'Neill Theater '18  
*Artistic Director*, Kidding Around, Theater Company for Young Audiences  
*Associate Producer*, Emerson Green Gala  
*Director and Playwright*, Phoenix, RareWorks Theater Company



NYC Council Hearing Testimony - DCLA, COVID-19, and NYC Cultural Organizations

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an actor (member of AEA and SAG-AFTRA), an emerging playwright (resident artist at Ars Nova), and an enthusiastic audience member of a broad range of theaters across the boroughs, and a resident of Hamilton Heights (10031), where I've lived for 6 years.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Serena Berman

--

Serena Berman  
she / her / hers

[www.serenaberman.com](http://www.serenaberman.com)

Dear Council Members, Deputy Mayor Been, and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a theater producer who has employed hundreds of artists in New York City's great creative economy over nearly twenty years. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I have had some of the most powerful and transformative artistic experiences of my life at the Classical Theatre of Harlem and the National Black Theater, which have informed me deeply as a citizen and a resident of New York City.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Sarah A. McLellan

--

SMcL  
781-330-1683

Dear Members of the City Council,

I am reaching out as an arts administrator who has dedicated the past 10 years to growing and strengthening the arts organizations of this city. Each year I speak with thousands of arts lovers in and around this city who support the unparalleled cultural sector here in New York. I serve on the board of one organization, and I am an audience member to all of them. The arts are what brought me to this city, keep me here, and I will continue to serve this important piece of the New York economic and cultural landscape for as long as I can. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, and who works full time in Manhattan.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I have regularly been stunned by the groundbreaking work Ma-Yi Theatre Company regularly creates. It is often well beyond anything the company I work for puts together. Same too, the National Black Theatre has been instrumental in cultivating some of the most important voices of our current moment, and they will continue to do so long beyond now.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Ben Lasser



June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020

To whom it may concern,

*The Artist community has long played an important role in telling stories of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and we urge the Council to take action by “holding harmless” funding for DCLA’s Coalition of Theatres of Color, who are essential to ensuring a just and equitable NYC.*

*My name is Rachel Berger. I am the founder and Executive Director of The Artist Co-op, a coworking space and community for artists located in Hell’s Kitchen. As of June 30<sup>th</sup>, we will no longer have access to our space due to the high cost of rent and operations.*

*Our organization has transferred coworking online. We offer daily cowork sprints, check-ins, skill shares, panels.*

*I hope that DCLA and City Council funding will be considered for small nonprofit arts organizations who have a huge impact on the local community.*

*I am available to talk further about my situation at [Rachel@theartistco-op.com](mailto:Rachel@theartistco-op.com) or my cell is (859) 492 8478.*

*Thank you for listening.*

*Sincerely,  
Rachel*

Good morning. I'm Benjamin Spierman, General Director of the Bronx Opera. I'm here this morning to discuss the way in which Arts Funding in general, and City Council initiatives in particular, allow arts organizations to contribute to the education, mental health, and well-being of the people of our city. I'll talk about this in the context of Bronx Opera, but it becomes clearer and clearer every day that this is not just about our particular organization, or about us as individuals.

Over the years, Bronx Opera has participated in three City Council initiatives: CASA, SUCASA, and the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. We have also received Cultural Development Funds for our performances and for our arts education work. These funds have allowed us to partner with schools, parent groups, community centers and senior centers as we work to enhance the lives of people in our community by connecting people as only the arts can. Even during COVID, we've been able to continue enriching the lives of people in our community through our (now distance-learning-based) choral programs for seniors, and dance classes for special needs children. This work has allowed people to remain connected to each other, through shared learning and artistic work.

Like each organization you'll hear from, we feel that our work is important and deserves support. We've been privileged to count several current councilmembers as our supporters, and we thank Councilmembers Cohen, Gjonaj, Cabrera and Cumbo for what you have been able to do, as well as continuing to marvel at the work of Councilmember Van Bramer. The support you all give to us as arts organizations is critical to our work, and to our ability to be part of the changes we hope to see in New York City if the reality of defunding the police comes into focus. If money that is now devoted to policing moves into more intelligently targeted community work, the work that artists and arts organizations do to engage and educate the community will only become more important.

We know speaking to this committee is preaching to the choir, an idiom that is particularly poignant given that the dangers of COVID make it likely that singing will be the last of the arts to return fully to live venues. The thought that I have today, and that I need to express, is that the arts are both an end and a means. We create performances, others create exhibitions, still others create works of literature. Those are ends, and they matter. But it's the ability of the arts to educate that I'm emphasizing today, as well as in art's ability to enrich the lives of those who create it, those who witness it, and those who do both at the same time.

We know that everyone is experiencing fiscal pain. We know that money will not be plentiful. We, as an organization and as a sector, ask for our fair share. We know that the people of the city will get back more than they give.

## **THE BLM ARTS AND CULTURE INITIATIVE**

submitted by Melody Capote, Executive Director  
Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute  
June 23, 2020

Recognizing the unique role that arts and culture plays in society to document, to analyze, to exemplify, to artistically depict, to demonstratively perform and, in one word, to “heal,” the worst mistake of a civilized society is the diminution of arts and culture in time of crisis. History has taught us that crisis coupled with loss of culture causes nothing but disaster. Examples abound: pilgrims coming to the “new world” to begin a century of genocide; British settlers coming to Australia with a similar result; and others to numerous to state. But no act of “deculturalization” stands out as much as slavery. Natives were removed from their homeland, shackled and moved thousands of miles, made to assume foreign names and removed from all culture. Equally as devastating was the treatment accorded the original citizens of the Americas, the Native Tribes. Not only were they poisoned with alcohol and smallpox but, when they simply refused to die, they were forced to adopt “American” names, speak the “American” language in American schools where Native customs were prohibited. Little wonder that one day, this tree would yield its bitter fruit.

But a dystopian version of white supremacy does not explain the events of 2020. The root of the Black Lives Matter movement finds roots in the resilience of ancestors. It is the grandmother teaching a child to read with a bible by candlelight after brutal hours of picking cotton, tobacco and harvesting rice. It is the emancipated Slave that uses survival skills to wrest an education from an unwilling system producing the likes of Frederick Douglass. It is the stubborn resilience of a people who determined that they would thrive and not just survive. And then, in an ironic turn of events, a millennial generation was born that didn’t see inferiority in color and revolted against the notion that color defined excellence or lack thereof. While this new generation saw no distinction, there still remained a small White minority, two words that are oxymoronic when said together, a minority that still needed to rail against the growing strength of the descendants of Slaves. The homicides of recent vintage are only one of the manifestations of the frustration that boils in the heart of that White minority.

The Black Lives Matter Movement is the tip of the spear for repatriation and reaffirmation of culture. True, it may not be the same culture as that which originated in the Motherland but it is the culture that springs from the blood and toil of ancestors who built America. One can readily see that Blues, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Rap are all indicia of culture brought to life and nurtured by the Black Lives that Mattered more than a century ago.

Now, Black Lives Matter comes to claim its next installment on re-culturalization. And, it is the solemn obligation of a society that has profited and would probably not exist as is but for the free labor effort of Black Lives to render unto Black Lives that which was withheld from forebears.

### **Proposal:**

The Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI) proposes that the City of New York through its Department of Cultural Affairs establish a Black Lives Matter Arts and Culture Fund whose purpose would be to provide capacity building and general operating funds to arts and culture organizations receiving CTC funds and whose budgets are under \$5 Million and who, in consideration for the funds, agree to 50% of their programming for the duration of the grant to issues of racial and social justice. To this end, CCCADI urges a fund in the amount of \$10,000,000 per annum for a period of five years.

###

Testify June 22 - Live 2 minutes

Bonnie Sue Stein - Executive Director, Seven Loaves DBA GOH Productions

[bonnie@gohproductions.org](mailto:bonnie@gohproductions.org) [www.gohproductions.org](http://www.gohproductions.org)

309 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 3B, NY NY 10009, 917 721 6385

Based in the Lower East Side, NY since 1974.

I am an unofficial cultural ambassador, born and braised in Detroit, New Yorker for over 40 years, and have traveled to over 40 countries with cultural programs from solo to large ensembles at festivals. Growing up in Detroit, my family members were involved in numerous black lives matter programs in the 1960s; and on a personal level, I feel like I am watching a rerun of that era; but also grateful and hopeful that these issues are finally on the front page; and let's keep them there.

With multi year support from DCLA and NYSCA, and legions of volunteers, my organization serves over 15,000 kids and low income families; with dance, puppetry, music, and visual arts programs. Many of them Free to NYC.

We are losing spaces and organizations. We need rent relief for all of our studios, theaters and small non-CIG non profit cultural spaces. Our budget of roughly 400,000 will be 30% less next fiscal year.

Since the covid 19 outbreak, the Impact that the New York Culture Community has had on NYC is virtual and local. Bringing people together – online, and serving our communities through online and in community resources, like calling and checking in on neighbors. One of our actors has a great voice on the phone and can uplift lonely folks. Our online storytelling and dance programs have reached people worldwide, some who have never seen our dance, theater storytelling and music events in NYC.

Rent for our spaces and venues. Forget it. This is the bottom line basic issue; which will prevent all of us from returning to "business as usual." There are no pathways to business as usual now. We all have to do things differently. The costs of opening even a small 1,200 sq foot studio such as ours are daunting -- Cleaning supplies, rent, utilities, labor, and more unpredictable expenses.

In 2010, we renovated a decrepit storefront (Carlina Rivera knows it well, and it was done with support from Rosie Mendez, her predecessor). With other cultural leaders, we made a viable dance studio and office, in which we partnered with East Village Dance Project, Movement Research and Moving for Life, non profit leaders in dance.

Our other studio which houses Czechoslovak American Marionette Theatre, a recording studio, and is a rehearsal space for dance, theatre and film projects is in DUMBO, Two Trees district. Our work is vital to the DUMBO community where already many artists were priced out of the neighborhood. There we have created marionette theater works, dance projects, and films that reach city, state and globally. One of our films created by

our member Immigrant artists, was featured at the renowned Cannes Film Festival in France; another was on PBS.

Our artists perform in all boroughs, and globally in Europe, India, Australia, France, the Middle East and around the USA from coast to coast. We have no touring income now or live programming now, which is a lucrative way that helps our earned income and our survival. Our last tour ended on Feb. 10. Now like so many of our studio colleagues, we face imminent closure.

We need the city to match the amount of energy, attention, passion and devotion that we and our fellow non profit arts orgs have shown during the pandemic months. We do not want a budget that exempts the passion that we have been putting into trying to figure out how to move forward. The numbers tell the story. The arts workers are the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> most affected by the pandemic; and there is no clear end to the amount of lost income, both personal and organizational.

Lastly, on a personal note, I grew up in Detroit and was fortunate to be part of the arts CETA training program, full time paid theater company, of diverse artists, over 50% African American. We have a mini kind of Carnegie Hall going out into the communities and striving to support them.

Rent relief is essential for the small orgs like us to survive.

**I am the owner of a once-successful boutique talent agency in mid-town Manhattan, in operation since 2003. My income flows from salaries earned by my 100 actor-clients, who work on TV and in film; on Broadway, Off-Broadway and in regional theatres across the country. In mid-March, my income dropped to zero as all plays and musicals were cancelled, and all TV and film production shut down. Business had been very good, thanks to the proliferation of TV work in NY. And it was good in 2020, up until mid-March. Now all of my clients are out of work, from high earning veterans and Broadway favorites to scrappy beginners. They ask when will the work return. I have no answers for them but try to keep their spirits up. I will likely lose my business when my savings buffer (which I once thought was a comfortable amount of money) is exhausted. I want to keep my employees paid and their insurance covered. I want to keep paying my rent and utilities and all the other vendors I depend upon. If I could get a grant of \$200K, I might be able to hold on until January. I might even be able to pay that back after two years of “normal” business. As things stand, now, though, it looks like I will lose what I have worked so hard to achieve. I know my case is not unique and that there are so many suffering worse than I. But I expect NY will soon see a lot of talent-agency closings if some relief does not appear. Thank you for allowing me to say this.**

*Dianne Busch (owner/agent)  
Leading Artists, Inc., a Talent Agency  
145 W. 45th St #1000  
New York, NY 10036  
212-391-4545  
DCA license # 1142108*

**Charlotte Cohen, Executive Director  
Brooklyn Arts Council  
Testimony for Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries and International Intergroup  
June 22, 2020**

I'm Charlotte Cohen, Executive Director of Brooklyn Arts Council which supports emerging, immigrant, and traditionally underserved artists who work with us in public schools and publicly funded seniors centers that have limited resources.

I appreciate that the Council needs to make hard decisions that respond to the extraordinary financial challenges we face. I speak for the five borough arts councils, and many other organizations, when I say that these decisions will have a ripple effect: if the CASA, SU CASA, Cultural Immigrant, and Theaters of Color initiatives are cut, it means the tens of thousands of children, their families, and the seniors who participate in our programs won't have access to arts activities that literally save their lives.

All of these programs represent complex partnerships with relationships nurtured over years of close collaboration; CASA programs provide safe haven to many children in vulnerable communities; and participation in SU CASA programs are often the only social engagement seniors have for days on end.

At PS 274K, a school where over 76% of students are speakers of another language and 21% of students reside in temporary housing, the principal stated "Arts education gives our students the opportunity to think critically about concepts, it's a form of expression, it instills confidence and gives our students exposure to cultures and spaces beyond their immediate worlds."

These initiatives are essential because they provide employment for hundreds of people from NYC. BAC alone has employed over 300 performers, artists, and educators to

**Charlotte Cohen, Executive Director  
Brooklyn Arts Council  
Testimony for Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries and International Intergroup  
June 22, 2020**

work in schools and senior centers annually. These programs are a critical source of income for these part-time, seasonal workers.

Here's what we're doing now: providing on line training to teaching artists so that they are prepared to teach under all circumstances; collaborating on a COVID-19 relief fund for traditional artists; and holding remote workshops for artists to share their work and approaches to solving issues like food insecurity, wellness and financial challenges.

It is organizations like the five borough arts councils that provide close relationships with our citizens, and it is your arts initiatives that help make that possible.

We know that the pandemic, the economic downturn, and the recent civil rights crises have destabilized the lives of Brooklynites. By supporting CASA and SU-CASA-- at their 2020 budget funding levels—you'll be supporting the development and healing of Brooklyn's communities, aiding vulnerable populations, providing learning opportunities to those in greatest need, and keeping thousands of people employed.

I ask you to keep the cultural initiatives budgets intact and I thank you for your consideration and continued support of the borough arts councils and all of us who participate in these programs that are so important to our communities.

Dear Department of Cultural Affairs,

I am reaching out to urgently ask for your help in encouraging the State of New York to provide Rent Relief to the thousands of not-for-profit theaters and other arts organizations currently facing permanent closure as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic.

My name is Christina Perry and I am the Director of Development for the Chain Theatre, one of the dozens of off-off-Broadway companies located in midtown Manhattan. The building where we rent our space also houses two other not-for-profit theater organizations: The Barrow Group and The Tank.

Because of the government-mandated closure of our spaces, all programming, classes, and productions for the next four months have been cancelled. All our sources of earned income have been eliminated for the foreseeable future, and like the vast majority of New York City arts organizations, the Chain does not have the reserve funds necessary to get it through the unprecedented challenges that our city and our industry are facing.

We have been notified by our landlord that the expectation regarding our rent is “payments as usual.” This is not only unrealistic, it is also unsustainable. We therefore ask for any direction you and your incredible team can provide to strengthen our request and plea to Albany for relief.

New York City is the theatre capital of the world. We aim to keep it that way. But if New York City is to continue to have not-for-profit theatre spaces in the five boroughs, Rent Relief must be granted.

Thank you for your recent work and your support to our organization for the past 10 years.

Respectfully,  
Christina Perry  
Director of Development  
Chain Theatre  
312 W. 36<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10018

## ADVANCE | MORE OPERA

The Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment  
Manhattan Opera Repertory Ensemble  
Ansonia Station Box 231152, New York, NY 10023

Testimony to the New York City Council  
Cultural Affairs Hearing Oversight:  
DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City.

Submitted by  
Cheryl Warfield  
Performing and Teaching Artist, Producer and Founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera

Monday June 22, 2020

Greetings. Thank you, Council Members for reading my testimony. I am writing to urge the Council to renew full funding for arts and culture in the FY 20/21 budget including funding for arts education for young and old alike through DCLA and initiative funding. New York needs to "keep culture whole" for the health and welfare of all our communities and citizens.

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Cheryl Warfield. I am a professional opera singer, and a long-standing member of SAG-AFTRA, Actor's Equity and my parent union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). In New York City, I have performed at the Metropolitan Opera and on Broadway, and I am a producer of innovative arts programming and the founder the Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment (ADVANCE), a 501(c) 3 non-profit and the director of MORE Opera.

ADVANCE/MORE Opera showcases outstanding and diverse talent while providing outreach and educational programming to youth and seniors in underserved communities. As an African American performer and arts administrator, I am determined to contribute to the musical education of young people, showcase black themes, and highlight the diversity of what is often inaccurately considered as an "elitist" or European art form. As a producer of color, I strive to spotlight outstanding professional talent from all backgrounds who otherwise may be overlooked or ostracized. For 20 years in New York City, ADVANCE/MORE Opera has mounted dozens of public performances and conducted educational workshops and no-cost community choral training to hundreds of young people and adults.

I became a teaching artist 20 years ago, working with children of color in schools surrounding the area of St. George Terminal on Staten Island, in Crown Heights and East New York Brooklyn, and in the South Bronx, University Heights and Castle Hill areas of the Bronx. I consider my work as a teaching artist through DOE, DYCD and DLCA initiatives to be some of my greatest artistic accomplishments because I have witnessed first-hand the benefits to the participants these discretionary and initiative funds have provided.

While things may look downward financially in 2020, the time is now to get our priorities straight about arts funding. I was in NYC during 9/11, the financial crisis of 2008, Superstorm Sandy in 2012 and other economic downturns placing arts and culture at the precipice of collapse. I am writing to tell you that culture did not stop back then and will not be stopped now. My nonprofit has geared up virtually with the communities we serve to connect in ways we never imagined, finding innovative and sometimes more cost effective means to stay connected online with remote rehearsals and lessons, creating new videos to showcase our

Cheryl Warfield  
June 22, 2020  
Page 2 of 2

activities on Facebook and YouTube, and live-streaming a new concert via Zoom every month during stay-at-home.

For the last two years, I have had the honor and privilege to work with over two dozen senior citizens as chorus director at the JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Center in the Bronx thanks to a Su Casa grant administered by the Bronx Opera. When all activities were cancelled due to COVID-19 effective March 13, I explored ways to help the seniors learn Zoom and Microsoft Teams, assisting them with getting online by the first week of April and vowing to continue to work with them regardless of whether or not the FY 2020 grant would be paid because we artists know how important art is for students to stay connected, and for emotional support and continued growth. The seniors' response at the first virtual rehearsal was simply joy for being able to see one another again while in isolation, but quickly turned to empowerment once they learned sufficient tech skills to perform their music and be creative again.

One senior wrote in early April "In these unfortunate times, where what we use to do, we can no longer do, it is such a comfort to bring some "normalcy" into our lives. I appreciate the time we shared as a group. Seeing [everyone] for that short time today, will do wonders for all our immune systems. Connectivity..."

This week, the JASA Van Cortlandt Virtual Chorus will present their Su Casa grant required culminating public performance on Thursday June 25 at 7:30 PM via Zoom. Meeting ID: 859 1979 6615; Password JASA. The group is extremely excited to present new skills they have learned and demonstrate their growth and empowerment during this transitory period. I implore the Council to continue this vital funding to the communities that rely on it so heavily. Please fund fairly and appropriately the Department of Education, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the Department of Cultural Affairs for a better future for all NYC. With City Council's appropriate action, the JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Chorus may once again be connected in FY20/21.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Warfield  
Singer, Educator, Producer  
Founder, ADVANCE/MORE Opera  
255 West 75<sup>th</sup> Street, #3-I  
New York, NY 10023  
212-595-7084

[www.moreopera.com](http://www.moreopera.com)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW2yGc7iTkg>

My name is Sheila Lewandowski, Co-Founder and Director of The Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island City, Queens. Thank you Chairs Jimmy Van Bramer, Danny Dromm, Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo and the Committee for this opportunity to testify.

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I do not envy the task before you. You are fighting for the body and soul of this City, for the bodies and souls of all who inhabit this City prioritizing monies collected **from all of us for all of us.**

My Mom told me this week about prioritizing feeding us when we were on food stamps when I was a child. She said she made it work with \$7 a week for food. She also made sure we had music, drawing, dancing, playing, and storytelling, and she volunteered doing arts at the community center in the projects we lived in because a full belly without hopes, dreams, community and learning is not living.

All Mom's want their children to have futures and hopes. Now you have to decide what you want this City to have in its future.

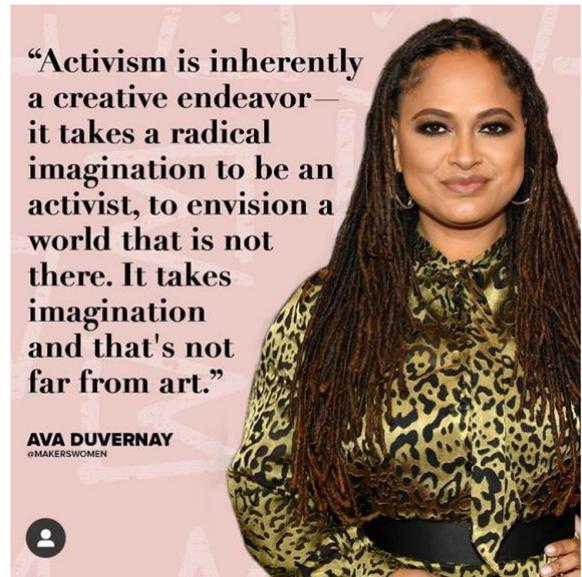
Now is not the time to cut funding for culture and the arts, especially not now and especially not initiative funding specific to organizations run by and serving communities of color and those historically unseen and not heard. We need more ways to elevate the diverse voices, blackness, queerness, immigrants, everyone. We need to come together to build truthful, consistent, lasting equity using culture and the arts. We need greater truth in education told through stories of and by the oppressed and marginalized; told in dance, music, theater, paintings, sculptures, the re-contextualizing of public art and monuments. **These truths if fully supported will help lead the City in its recovery.**

As you prioritize this budget that is a fraction of its prior self, keep in mind that culture will help in economic recovery, too. The world is rising to its feet for truth and will return to and look to NYC if NYC leads the way supporting culture and the arts not just through the COVID19 recovery. But, we cannot be partners if you cut us now and expect us to be here next year. Some of us, including the Artists, may not be here next year anyway if Cancel Rent or some comprehensive rent relief doesn't come through. The eviction extension will not protect us.

The Chocolate Factory continues to **employ** a year-round team and around 50 Artists for 2-6 weeks each year to make and share their work. We continue to work with peer small local businesses to make Queens and NYC vibrant. We are and want to be ready to come back for this City but we need help. We cannot shut down now and just re-open in a year.

***A budget is a frame for a story. What is the story you want for this City? What are your priorities for a just and humane City?***

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The following pages include a version of a letter I sent on April 3 to Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer, Speaker Johnson, the Mayor and the DCLA. Since that time The Chocolate Factory received emergency funds from PPP (working on forgiveness) and New York Community Trust's COVID19 Relief Fund. These funds covered our bills through June 30.

Also included in the following pages is a little background on The Chocolate Factory Theater and on our new building that will be a permanent home for us when renovated.

### **April 3, 2020 – Impact of COVID19 on The Chocolate Factory**

I am reaching out on behalf of The Chocolate Factory Theater, and as part of New York City's cultural community.

I send this letter to you knowing full well that you understand how important art is to living and not just to being alive. I am grateful for you and for all that you have done and continue to do for the City of New York. As much pressure as I have on me, I cannot imagine the pressure you are under and send strength.

Friends are dying and I am scared. I'm scared of dying but I'm more afraid of not living. I want to live but what does that mean? If I'm still alive in nine months what will living be? What will the City or the world look like? That really frightens me. Who and what will be left behind? And, what will living be for them - hopefully for me? If I don't make it, what have I left behind for my nieces and nephews who hopefully do make it?

Am I being selfish for looking forward to going to live performances again? For listening to music? For wanting my nephew to share his art with the world as it cracks open my soul when I see it? For wanting to watch the sea lions play at the zoo? Am I selfish for smiling when I see parents walking their children, keeping a distance from others, when all of a sudden their child breaks into dance and song? For breaking out poetry and weeping as I feel a little less lonely for a moment? I find myself touching the posters and paintings in my home these days as I need to touch and they give; they contain something that gives. There is no humanity without the sharing of culture and the arts. There just isn't.

I'm sitting alone in The Chocolate Factory Theater on the set for a show that was set to open on March 19, 2020 created by Stephanie Acosta. I am the only person allowed in the theater since March 12.

We canceled *Good Day God Dam*. Reading what the creating artist said about the show... it speaks to our current situation.

*Good Day God Damn explores ideas of the cinematic thriller and extraterrestrial hope in an attempt to disassemble, rebuild, and hold onto the very notion of survival in an absurd multi-crisis reality, asking: What does it mean to get through it?*

Costumes are strewn about the set, chairs sit in the audience, lights point to an empty stage where microphones wait for breath and words to enliven them. This was left as it is in the middle of a rehearsal as we shut down suddenly on Thursday, March 12 out of care and concern for the health of artists, audience, and staff. I cannot help but think of the images of Chernobyl when people just walked away. That series is a work of art that connects people to something very real; painful but very real. Stephanie and her collaborators have been working on this show for two years and in one moment they fled. This was to be the world premiere.



We canceled Guadalupe Maravilla's show, *Disease Thrower*, that was to premiere on March 14.

We canceled Jess Pretty's show *dream[e]scapes* that was to premiere April 16. We paid Jess Pretty. (photo of Jess Pretty)

We canceled Ingri Fiksdal's show *Diorama* that was to be outdoors in Hunters' Point South Park free for all. Ingri and her team were to arrive from Norway on April 19. We paid to expedite the visas.

Canceled Antonio Ramos and the Gang Bangers, *El pueblo de los Olvidados (The Village of the Forgotten)* April 23-25.

Canceled Donna Uchizono, *Iron Jane*, May 13-16.

We canceled Taste of Long Island City, June 10 and that was a \$80,000 loss.

We paid every artist commissioning fees and the 2-5 weeks of salaries they would have received; if they rehearsed at the theater; as if the performances all happened.

We pay the rent and utilities for the space. We paid the box office person for canceled shows, we are still paying the cleaning person (as an employee) even though she isn't allowed in the building. Esada is a Serbian Muslim immigrant and most of her other work was cash; was because that work doesn't exist now. We are paying the five full time staff. We reimbursed ticket buyers.

Our deficit will be \$120,000 on a budget of \$700,000. The money owed to us from the City of New York for fiscal year 2020 will not cover this deficit but please, please help us to get the money still owed to us. That will make a tremendous difference.

Should we lay everyone off? Some of the team? What about their major medical insurance? Should we not have honored our contracts with artists? Should the City not honor its contracts with arts groups so that we can't honor our contracts with artists and workers?

I am hanging on but it's tough. Every day the five full-time staff of The Chocolate Factory – Brian, Madeline, Blaze, demetries and me, have video calls. We check in. We forgive appearances and feel guilty for saying, "I'm fine" when none of us really are.

**If we shut down even for a few months, we will be a year behind. If we shut down and can't start back up in a few months the City will lose some of its soul. If that happens Brian, Madeline, Blaze, demetries, me and the artists we are committed to may not remain in New York City. We are here to make sure the City is living so that we are, too. Sometimes, on our calls, I almost say, "Do you have a place to go if the theater shuts down?"**

And, we are just about done with the final plans for the new theater that will be something left to serve the soul of the City forever. I had a meeting with our Capital manager at DCLA just the other day. We are so close to breaking ground. Please help us make sure we don't lose the capital money allocated to build the new theater. The City bought the building for us and we take that responsibility very seriously. We cannot finish without your help.

Please fight for us and for the soul of the City.

Be safe and be well,

Sheila

917-723-1107

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### **About The Chocolate Factory**

The Chocolate Factory Theater is a world-renowned incubator and presenter of experimentation in performance. We have supported the work of artists who have gone on to tour the world including Ridgewood resident choreographer Beth Gill who received 3 Bessie Awards for Dance, for work developed and presented at The Chocolate Factory. Recent artists of renown include Daniel Fish, Director (Oklahoma on Broadway) and David Neuman, Choreographer (Hadestown on Broadway).

In our ten years as a Queens destination we have garnered an ***OBIE Award and nominations for over 10 Bessie Awards (winning a few)***, among others. Our shows are featured regularly in major media like The New York Times, Time Out/NY, New York magazine, The Wall Street Journal and others.

We see ourselves as an important anchor in the arts and local community. When we **opened our doors in 2004** we immediately reached out to the closest restaurants, bars and shops and devised

ways to educate our artists, audience and funders about what's great about Long Island City. We partner on deals, collaborate on events, help our local businesses to organize themselves individually and collectively. Some of those activities seeded the Annual Taste of LIC, which started as a small fundraiser in 2005 at our theater for 200 people. **Taste of LIC is now a major event with over 1400 attendees partnering with over 100 local small businesses.** We play host to meetings for grass-roots groups and help raise money for projects like the local Holiday snowflake lighting with children caroling, cocoa and storytelling.

**We currently employ 3 full-time Queens residents of the 5 full-time year-round exempt staff. We employ (not contract) approximately 50 artists annually and 7 regular year-round tech over hire employees on a part-time project-based basis.** All year-round employees receive at least \$25 per hour, paid time off for vacations, sick-time or family emergencies. Full-time employees are covered by a major medical plan. The top salary at The Chocolate Factory Theater is mine at \$75,000.

### **Permanent Facility**

On July 20, 2017 The Chocolate Factory Theater purchased a 7,500/sf building in Long Island City, 100% funded by the City of New York with major support of Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Queens Borough President Melinda Katz. The acquisition of this property took 2.5 years from initial site visit to transfer of ownership, but the process of identifying the need for the organization to own a permanent facility began 10 years ago, with a feasibility study followed by approximately a dozen failed attempts at partnerships on facilities and/or acquisitions of other properties. This decade long process allowed for many learning opportunities; and enabled the organization's leadership to plan and prepare for long-term growth and the increased responsibilities of property ownership.

The new single story 7,500 square foot building at 38-29 24<sup>th</sup> Street (approximately one mile north of our current venue) presents a unique and important opportunity to serve a neighborhood with little existing access to performing arts activity; to establish strong ties with local residents, small business owners and community leaders (as we have demonstrated in our current Hunters Point neighborhood); and to deepen and expand our support of the NYC, national and international performing arts community. Our new permanent facility is in close proximity to Queensbridge Houses (the largest Public Housing Complex in the United States), Ravenswood Houses, approximately 25 hotels, light manufacturing and other residential buildings.

We had hoped to have cut a ribbon or broken ground by now, but real estate projects are often fraught with delays and that's where we are. I can promise you that we will establish a permanent home in Long Island City and will keep our programming and activities local and of the highest caliber. We will keep fighting to provide our artists with employee recognition for their contributions to our borough's important identity as a place for the arts and innovation.

*May 4, 2020 rendering.*



## Triple Threat Performing Arts Academy, DBA of D Warren Inc.

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

June 17, 2020

I wish to thank Chairman Bramer, Commissioner Casals, Majority Leader Cumbo, Legislative council McKinney and the entire City Council for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. It was my first time having to do something of this nature so I thank you for bearing with me. My name is David Robertson, and I am the CEO of a not-for-profit organization Triple Threat Performing Arts Academy, located in Manhattan.

The mission of TTPAA is to educate children between the ages of 8 and 19 in the culturally enriched and diverse world of the performing arts. Our purpose is to assess and develop talent, while encouraging individual self-expression.

I have been in business since 2004 and have served over 5000 students. I became discouraged during these years to submit for any type of funding for I was always denied. It has been difficult, to say the least, to fund my program yet God has continued to provide. Recently, I worked with Black and Latino students at the El Faro Beacon center located in Harlem. Due to the pandemic I have been unable to offer online classes to my students for the majority of them did not have access to either internet or tablets. It saddens me that these students have not been able to enjoy the classes they had experienced prior to Covid-19.

As we know arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. My teaching artists along with other cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

I was encouraged to see our young people in the streets protesting for Black Lives Matter. Throughout the history of the United States Black bodies have been tortured, policed and marginalized in political, social and the creative space. When I think of dance in "high" forms like ballet and theater, Black dancers and choreographers have had to confront notions of white supremacy that privilege white bodies are beautiful and graceful, while denying such attributes to Black bodies.

Therefore, my organization has been working to produce a documentary entitled "Up in the Air," that uses the life of director/choreographer Louis Johnson, who we lost in March 2020 to Covid-19, to explore this marginalization. This has inspired me to launch an afterschool pilot media program, "Teens on Film." This program will be offered to teenage students throughout the school term. In this program students will write, shoot and by the end of the school term

edit a 2 min short film. This will allow them to process and relay their heartfelt feelings dealing with Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter.

I can put together a package with outline and budget for my program if you would like to see.

Triple Threat Performing Arts Academy's request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences.

Due to the pandemic we already see that summer camps and other outlets might be cut for our youth. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover and need a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills from these outlets that help to shape their future. These young people represent the cultural and economic vitality of our city.

Thank you again for your attention.

Sincerely,

David Robertson  
CEO/Producer/Writer/Choreographer

Good morning,

My name is Lynda Kennedy and I am Vice President of Education & Evaluation at the Intrepid Museum.

On March 16, the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, like many of its institutional peers, closed its doors to the public. Immediately, the Intrepid's team, already versed in virtual learning, took steps to ensure we would still be able to serve our constituents. The Museum's Education Department produced daily, free, live digital programming aimed to support schools and families, and redesigned the programs offered for teacher professional development, teens, veterans and their families, and children and adults with cognitive, developmental and physical disabilities, to be delivered remotely. The Marketing and Exhibitions Departments developed "Experience Intrepid Anywhere," an easy-access landing page for digital resources including virtual tours of the Museum, a video library, oral history collections and more. These efforts were greeted with enthusiasm and incredibly positive feedback by teachers, students, parents and others trying to adapt to a completely new and uncertain situation.

The loss of more than three months of income, along with the anticipated financial insecurity of the coming months, has required the Intrepid Museum to make some difficult choices. Nearly 80% of our team was furloughed. The continued act of designing virtual programs which were originally intended for a Museum setting has been handled by a handful of overstretched individuals.

However, Team Intrepid has lived up to its name. As of mid-June, over 3,000 people have participated in free online education programs aimed at children and families, and 150 teens have participated in online mentoring sessions around STEM careers and a STEM college pathway. Students from the Museum's CASA school partners and Immigrant Initiative school partners have continued to participate in programming, with over 500 students joining in. The Museum's Career Ladder paid interns have continued to work under the supervision of their mentors, and, we have continued programming for veterans, children with autism and their families, and caregivers of older adults with dementia. The Museum developed and just delivered a day-long virtual youth summit featuring civically-involved young people from

around New York City who presented work in arts, science, technology, engineering and social advocacy for nearly 400 of their peers.

Two virtual astronomy public programs transported visitors to worlds beyond Earth. NASA astronauts Mike Massimino and Nicole Stott inspired us—while sheltering in place—through storytelling about how they cope with isolation in space; Garrett Reisman previewed the launch of Demo-2, the first crewed launch with NASA astronauts from U.S. soil since 2011. These timely topics reached more than 12,000 people from all over the world.

All of this has been offered at no cost to participants.

While remote programming has allowed us to connect to audiences around the world, the heart of the Intrepid Museum is right here in New York City. Traditionally the site of Fleet Week and Memorial Day celebrations that draw thousands, this year the Museum continued its tradition with a virtual Memorial Day ceremony featuring wreath layings by the Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, Intrepid Former Crew Member Stu Gelband, and Navy Commander Jay Yelon, who is also a trauma surgeon on the front lines of the COVID-19 fight. We have been working with our partners at the New York City Department of Education, the Department of Homeless Services, the three city library systems and others to provide engaging, inspiring content to our local communities as much as possible. As we look ahead and plan for a time when we can safely reopen our doors, with a current target of August 5<sup>th</sup>, we look forward to carrying out our mission by supporting our great city and providing cultural and educational services to its people. We thank you for and encourage the continued support for the contribution of Museums and cultural organizations to the educational, economic and community fabric of New York City.



## COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS...

Mon 6/22/2020 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Testimony – Studio in a School NYC

Studio in a School Association  
75 West End Avenue  
New York, NY 10023

studioinaschool.org

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Alison Scott-Williams

Hello, my name is Alison Scott-Williams and I am the President of Studio in a School NYC.

- Studio in a School was founded in 1977, another time of drastic budget cuts, when arts education in the public schools was virtually eliminated. Today, we still bring the visual arts to schools where they are needed most. Each year we engage 33,000 students and teachers living and working in 37 out of 51 City Council Districts in all five boroughs – 12 in Brooklyn, 9 in Queens, 8 in the Bronx, 6 in Manhattan, and 2 in Staten Island.
- During this pandemic, the NYC school system closed, but culture never closed. By late March, Studio had launched *Studio in Your Home* online to give children and families rich opportunities to create art together using items in your home.
- Within weeks, Studio was providing our school partners with instructional packets including videos and illustrated lesson plans, and participating in classes via online platforms whenever possible.
- Along with our colleagues in attendance today, Studio provides culture which is key to our local economy. We employ over 100 independent artists who contribute deeply to the health and welfare of our schools and communities. Each year we add private dollars to the support we receive from the city to ensure that no public school child is denied access to a quality arts education.
- Arts Education must not be the victim of disproportionate cuts in any school and the special funding provided by the Council must remain in support of those we serve.
- On June 8<sup>th</sup>, Studio's founder, Agnes Gund, wrote a letter asking all of you to preserve the programs most needed by our city's families. She said: *Proposed cuts to our schools will have a devastating impact on educational equity and civic engagement, and will incur undue losses in access to learning and the cultural participation so crucial to our city. Arts education is a unique aspect of A New York City education. The arts are transformative and healing, important at any time and crucial in a time of such profound loss and trauma. Please work to keep New York City cultural partnerships in our schools. Thank you for standing up for the children and teens who are the future of NYC.*

- Join the cultural community in creating solutions that will have our children tell the story of how our city supported and cared for them during this time of need.
- Our children are watching.



Testimony for COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS.

June 22, 2020

To: New York City Council

From: Arlene Sorkin, MSW, President & CEO, IlluminArt Productions, Staten Island

Thank you Speaker Johnson and City Council Members for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am Arlene Sorkin, President and CEO of IlluminArt Productions, a Staten Island based non-profit. Our mission is to empower students from pre-school to seniors, to utilize the power of the arts to create conversations about critical social issues, facilitating conversations for positive change. We achieve this through 3 programs: arts residencies in schools and senior centers that develop social emotional skills through play-writing, musical theater, dance, puppetry, spoken word, poetry, mural making plus more; a Touring Theater Company of professional actors who perform interactive plays about social issues including bullying, relationship abuse, discrimination, stereotypes, excessive drinking, dangers of prescription drugs and heroin, and immigration, to name a few, that are followed by in-depth discussions; and an Arts Empowerment program for young people impacted by a family member's addiction. Our 30 residencies serve about 900 students a year and our actors reach audiences of over 4,000. We work primarily with students of color, English language learners, students who are over-age and under-credited, have special needs and have histories of substance use in their families. Our students in classrooms and audiences are empowered to use their voices to speak their truth and respond openly because they know we are listening. These populations are particularly vulnerable at this time because of the trauma and stress of the pandemic, social unrest and racial injustice. Our programs help our students face challenges and problem solve which they need more than ever. And because we are problem solvers, we knew we could come up with ways to continue reaching our audience.

When COVID-19 closed down schools and senior centers my staff of 5 full-time administrators and 25 part-time teaching artists and actors made it our mission to continue as many programs as possible. Within 4 days we created a YouTube channel called Imagine with IlluminArt. There are currently 70 video lessons including vocal warm ups, choreography, writing haikus and poetry, drawing, making puppets, some in multiple languages and some specifically for seniors. Only 2 of our residencies were complete when the stay at home orders were put in place, but fortunately, we have been able to connect with all of our schools and senior centers to provide on-line classes & video lessons. A Regional Enrichment Center serving children of essential workers reached out to us and we arranged 6 virtual classes a week. Since our Touring Company cannot perform in person they held Zoom rehearsals and, in line with our mission, created and recorded new work, about the situations we find ourselves in. Our YouTube channel has several series: "I Wanna Be"- initial reactions to the shut down; "So Emotional" – the range of emotions people are experiencing; "Conflict in Isolation" – situations that people are experiencing; and "Legacy Talks, We Listen" – actors interviewed family members to tell their immigration stories. We have increased our social media presence 10 fold during this time. Between FaceBook, Instagram, and YouTube we have over 10,000 views of our videos. We send lists of the new videos weekly to all of our schools and senior centers. In order to reach our middle school students, we created a TicToc with art challenges which have had over 3,500 views.

One of our residencies is at New Ventures Charter School for high school students 16-21. This was our 4<sup>th</sup> year working with their curriculum on the Holocaust and Genocide. Attendance has always been an issue for these students so it was very surprising that Zoon provided a more desirable way for them to participate and attendance was nearly perfect. The 12 session class was conducted completely on Zoom with our Teaching Artists Drew Drake and Jenny Pisani. We received this feedback after their final project last week:

### Teacher Testimonial

*Our students' behaviors changed greatly. They have gained an understanding of self-awareness in a different light. They learned not to judge their peers based off of their personal experiences and to actively listen and accept each other for who they are. Our students' communication skills have grown vastly, from the moment they met Jenny and Drew they were captivated and engaged with their teachers and peers. They were able to build upon existing trust, but on a different level. Our students were able to connect the 10 stages of Genocide, and perspectives of Genocides to their personal experiences that they have encountered. The students felt valued and appreciated. They learned various forms of writing to express themselves and have their voices heard on a different platform.*

*As time went by, our students grew so much to the point that they wanted their stories to be heard! They even felt comfortable enough to have Ms. Jenny and Mr. Drew read their personal stories at times when they were too vulnerable to share. The trust with our students in this class grew to an extent I didn't know was possible. Our students had a very hard time saying goodbye to our IlluminArt teaching artists (Jenny and Drew). They hope to have them both join us again and keep in touch.*

*Thank you Ms. Jenny and Mr. Drew for such a wonderful experience!*

*-Mrs. Guarnera & Ms. Lagana*

Florence J. Guarnera, MEd  
Instructional Coach  
English Teacher  
New Ventures Charter School

### Student Testimonial

*I honestly don't even know where to begin. But I think I should start by saying thank you to all the amazing teachers that gave us the opportunity to really express ourselves in this class. Holocaust and Genocide, was a very unexpected class but one that I've actually learned so much from and can connect to the real world. During our time in this class we learned about 3 different genocides, The Holocaust, The Armenian Genocide, and the Cambodian Genocide. With these three holocausts we've learned that they are incredibly different but have one thing in common, the pain endured by the victims of these genocides. We watch documentaries and even read notes written during these times of pain and anguish that really showed how deep these times were and how they affected people. It took an unexpected turn when we were collaborating with Illuminart, all I can say, it was AMAZING! We all connected with each other, don't get me wrong it took some time to convince us that it was worth getting into but when we did and when my classmates got out of their comfort zone, we created art, something so beautiful, out of our past traumas and sadness. I witnessed something amazing and to see my fellow peers out their walls down was such a blessing. It has taught me so much about how we are ALL humans, we all feel pain, sadness, happiness, anger, we are all flawed and different but that is what makes us beautiful. To top it off we had an amazing open mic session through zoom. It was very groundbreaking and emotional and raw and real, I just can't express it into words. I was a little bit unsure and insecure but after the open mic I spoke with all my teachers and they were praising the open mic and how great and beautiful it was and how we expressed ourselves so beautifully, I felt like the message we were trying to send really resonated with people, I feel like as humans we tend to always look at the negative, we tend to always linger in what's wrong with the world and we rarely take time to evaluate ourselves and how we can better ourselves day to day. During this quarantine we have all been affected greatly. But we used what we had and ran with it, we all grew from the few months of being in online classes and we have seen the pain of the human race from an outside perspective and I feel like I have been awakened to another stage of myself and have been really reflecting a lot and learning, I am far from perfect but I learn from all my mistakes and all my encounters, being in this class and with all the amazing and beautiful and just all around EXTRAORDINARY human beings has taught me so much, I'm graduating soon and my life is starting, this class has given me a confidence to always look at the glass half full, I'm so excited for where the world will take me and the skills I've learned in the class and the people I've met, I will never forget.*

*Thank you Mrs G, Ms Lagana, Mr Drew, and Ms Jenny. Thank you to all the amazing students who have let their walls down and have given this class a chance. I hope you've all seen how amazing you guys are and how much we've grown together.*

*<3 Luv, Danny*

DOE had contracted with us to work with the same population at Wagner High School but it was cancelled when it was 20% completed due to skepticism about the possible success of on-line classes. We have learned we can be as effective virtually as we are in person so it was unfortunate that it was cancelled and worrisome that DOE may not allow contracts for these services moving forward.

IlluminArt Productions' budget encompasses 78% City support including DCLA (CDF), City Council Discretionary, CASA, SU-CASA, Cultural Immigrant, DOVE and Speaker's Initiatives, as well as Language Access, and Opioid Prevention and Recovery funds (DOHMH), all that overwhelmingly support at-risk communities that are most impacted by COVID. Our programs impact the health and well-being of our communities at a time when they need us more than ever to provide a creative outlet, which as you can see, can continue in creative ways until we can all be safely back together again.

I thank you for all of your previous support that has helped IlluminArt to grow exponentially and ask that you consider the consequences of removing creative outlets at a time when they are needed most. Thank you again for allowing me to testify.



HOWL ARTS INC.

N.Y.C.

**Testimony for City Council Hearing  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Regarding Oversight: DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
June 22, 2020**

**Summary**

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to cultural organizations. This impacts not only the organizations but also the millions of New Yorkers who benefit from cultural programs and opportunities provided by non-profits across the city. At the same time, organizations' creative and committed responses to this moment of crisis have highlighted the vital role of art and culture in bringing people together and offering support, hope, and positive change in even the most difficult moments. Howl Arts Inc. is one of the organizations whose continued community engagement, in particular among historically marginalized communities in the East Village and Lower East Side, demonstrates that art and culture are essential to the vitality of NYC. Howl urges City Council to take this into consideration when making budgetary decisions that signal the priorities and values of the city as a whole. Howl calls on City Council to make a commitment to supporting cultural organizations and the agencies that sustain them.

**About Howl Arts Inc.**

*I really love Howl. It's been so nourishing for me as an artist and as a person  
because they help nourish the whole self. The whole artist. All of you.*

—Helixx C. Armageddon, performance artist

Howl Arts Inc. (Howl) is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the culture and social history of New York City's East Village and Lower East Side from the 1950s onward. Rooted in local communities that encompass a unique mix of rock & roll, social justice and community activism, the visual and performative Avant-garde, and LGBTQ culture, Howl tells the stories of NYC's downtown through the artists, activists, and community members who have shaped the neighborhood's history and are building its future.

Howl Arts emerged in part from the Howl! Festival (2003-2014) which brought together thousands of community members, artists, poets and performers to celebrate downtown art and culture in Tompkins Square Park. Howl Arts has carried forward and exponentially expanded the community-based programming that the Festival helped to launch, resulting in deep ties to local and artistic communities.

In a typical year, Howl programs and initiatives engage approximately 10,000 visitors and include the following:

- **Exhibitions:** 6 art exhibitions per year, supported by interpretive materials and public programs in a museum-quality gallery space;
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- **Events:** Over 70 cultural events each year, including film screenings, book launches, poetry nights, panel discussions, writing workshops, explorations of local history, and more;
- **Howl Arts Collection and Archive:** Contains over 3,000 objects, including fine art, rare digital/analog media, and personal archives from the 1960s onward, with a focus on downtown NYC's often-overlooked underground and experimental cultures; and
- **Howl Emergency Life Project (HELP):** Provides emergency funds and social service referrals to local artists in crisis, including assistance with affordable housing and healthcare; administered in partnership with the Actors Fund.

All Howl programs and events are free and open to the public. These programs bring together artists, activists, scholars, longtime community residents, and newcomers, representing diverse backgrounds, ages, and socio-economic statuses. Howl actively engages older adults, low-income community members, LGBTQ communities of color, those impacted by HIV and AIDS, and formerly incarcerated people - as both artists and audience members. Over 12% of Howl's current audience is age 65+ and



roughly 30% is economically disadvantaged. New programs and community outreach launched in 2019-2020 are designed to expand Howl's reach and actively cultivate more diverse audiences.

Howl accomplishes all this and more with a small staff (9 full-time employees) and a modest budget (\$1.2 million), which has historically been sourced primarily from private foundations and individuals. As Howl continues to expand its educational and cultural programs in response to the needs expressed by the local community, reliable funding from government sources, including the Department of Cultural Affairs and City Council Discretionary Funds, is essential.

### **Howl's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Howl is a dynamic hub for experiencing, exploring, and creating art, culture, and counterculture, reaching over 10,000 audience members each year. Howl often functions as a community gathering space -- free admission inspires repeat visitors and a steady cohort of "regulars" who drop in for quick visits to view an art exhibition, connect with staff, and attend events. In this way, Howl inspires visitors to incorporate art and culture into their daily lives as a means to strengthen community bonds, build dialogue and understanding, and engage in creative self-expression. These opportunities are of significant value for all community members, but especially for historically marginalized groups and older adults who are more likely to experience social isolation which, according to the NYC Department of the Aging, "can lead to declines in physical, mental, and cognitive health."

Now, as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Howl has closed its doors and is following state and local guidance on closures. Howl is exercising an abundance of caution around reopening, with plans to open to the public no sooner than September 1, 2020, as its core audience includes immunocompromised and older adults and others considered to be at high risk for COVID-19. Howl has responded to these circumstances by developing creative new ways to continue community engagement online, as outlined below.

#### **1. *Somethin' to Say* Video Submissions**

"There is someplace to go when you can't go anywhere." With this simple phrase, on March 21, 2020 Howl opened the door to community-created programming streaming 24/7 on the homepage of its website ([www.howlarts.org](http://www.howlarts.org)) in response to stay-at-home orders in NYC. Howl called upon members of the community to submit original content in the form of short videos that share their art, experiences, and perspective during this time of crisis. Howl received dozens of submissions, ranging from under one minute to nearly 10 minutes in length. 21 of the submitted videos are currently featured prominently at the top of Howl's website, playing in a loop, with new content added regularly.

Short and sweet, poignant and funny, provocative and dazzling, these videos are a channel to the creativity and resilience of our community. Many of the submitted videos were shot with a smartphone and embrace the experimentalism, self-expression, and do-it-yourself aesthetic that characterizes the art and culture of downtown NYC. These videos offer an opportunity for community members to feel connected in a time of social isolation, whether as contributors, viewers, or both, by offering a glimpse into each other's lives and recognizing the commonalities in the experience of social distancing

*"This is great! Thanks so much, something serious to pay attention to!"*  
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The videos currently featured on Howl's website include a moving story told by performance artist Helixx C. Armageddon, a dance performance by Leyya Mona Tawil with violinist Antonina Pozdnyakova, a tour of the "Corona Cave Painting" murals created by artist Scooter LaForge in his apartment, writer Robert Rosen reading from his latest book and memoir *Bobby in Naziland: A Tale of Flatbush*, a wacky excerpt from *Pandemic Cooking with Wendy* with special guest Tym Moss, an experimental film by writer Armand Ruhlman, a poetry reading by Jeffrey Wright, studio tours with MarcusGlitteris, Ford Crull and Michelangelo Alasa, a musical performance by Robert Petraglia, the poetic experimental film *Exit* by Robert Butcher, a dazzling light show by Luigi Cazzaniga and reading by poet Ilka Scobie, a studio tour with Antagonist movement founder Ethan



Minsker, a performance by contemporary artist Stas Ginzburg dealing directly with social isolation, and a performance by Michael Fontana aka Eileen Dover.

## 2. ***Howl at Home: Creative Art Activities in a Time of Social Isolation***

The new *Howl at Home* activity series was launched in early April as an at-home adaptation of the in-person art education workshops that Howl usually offers in conjunction with each exhibition in its gallery. A new activity is shared every two weeks via e-newsletters and the Howl website. Each activity focuses on an under-recognized artist from downtown NYC, distilling themes and techniques from their work into an activity that anyone can do while quarantined, using simple, low-cost materials that many people already have at home or can easily acquire at essential services locations, such as grocery stores and drugstores. *Howl at Home* activities are designed to be accessible to anyone - no previous art-making experience is needed. Activities are outlined in an easy-to-follow lesson plan format that highlights key themes and ideas, provides examples of the featured artist's work, and in some cases includes short video demonstrations by the artist.

To date, *Howl at Home* has featured five activities:

- Collage Portraits with Antony Zito
- Text-Based Art with Al Diaz
- Self-Portrait Photography with Gail Thacker
- "Spirit Animal" T-shirts with Scooter LaForge
- Poster Art for Pride with Jorge Clar

The activities offer an easy entry point for artists, creatives, and even those with no artistic experience at all, to find inspiration and to express themselves through art, drawing on decades of research and empirical evidence that points to the therapeutic value of art-making in times of crisis.

Participants are encouraged to share pictures of their creations through email and on social media using the hashtags #howlathome and #howl!happening to be featured by Howl. This social sharing builds a sense of community and pride in one's work and inspires others to get involved. With each activity, Howl has received 10-20 responses from people sharing their creations, indicating that total participation is likely even higher. As the series continues, Howl will continue to promote past activities, which remain posted on the Howl website for participants to revisit at any time.

## 3. **"Regularly Scheduled Programming" Goes Digital**

In addition to the special initiatives described above, Howl is adapting to the unique circumstances of the pandemic by reimagining some of its recurring programming, such as the monthly *Full Moon Show* performances, as digital experiences.

Howl's monthly *Full Moon Shows* are a series of short performances honoring the legacy of pioneering and genre-defying performer Tom Murrin. Murrin's work as a first-generation La MaMa playwright, and his improvisational "Trash Theater" performances using found objects, have inspired artists and audiences in downtown NYC and beyond for over 40 years. One of Murrin's longest-running performances was the *Full Moon Show*, held each month on the full moon. Howl's *Full Moon Shows* keep this tradition alive with a unique performance each month. These performances are both an act of preservation and an artistic dialogue through which performers learn about Murrin's methods, collaborate, and present experimental new works that incorporate found objects, improvisation, theater games, comedy, and absurdity. Now, with live performances suspended due to the pandemic, Howl has been partnering with performance artist John Pizza to record a new solo *Full Moon Show* performance each month. Howl prominently features the video on its homepage throughout the day of the full moon; after the day is over, the video remains accessible on the "Howl TV" page on Howl's website, which includes a broad selection of recordings of past performances and events.

Preserving the *Full Moon Shows* in this difficult time ensures that emerging artists such as John Pizza have a unique opportunity to experiment, take risks, adapt, and expand their practice while gaining exposure and receiving a stipend for their work. The resulting shows are funny and moving, directly reflecting and commenting on the moment we are living through. In his April *Full Moon Show* performance, John Pizza asks:

*"The year is ... 2035? It's Monday? Saturday? Thursday? I've been holed-up*



*in an empty art gallery in the abandoned Chelsea Arts District NYC for perhaps eons...  
my stomach in knots, at the end of my rope, writing poetry. How're you?"*

### **Call to Action for City Council**

As the examples above illustrate, cultural organizations in New York City never truly closed. Howl has adapted in response to the challenges of the moment and continues to provide programming that meets the needs of our local communities. Members of the public turn to Howl for opportunities to learn, connect with others, and find enrichment, entertainment, and joy through difficult times. It is our responsibility to continue to meet this need, even in the midst of a pandemic and the financial crises it sparked. Howl remains committed to finding creative solutions to help our communities, and our city, to survive, heal, and rebuild.

But Howl and many other cultural organizations across New York City are at risk. Howl is currently projecting over \$100,000 in lost or delayed income in 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic. The repercussions from COVID-19 are far from over. Cultural organizations need sustained financial support in order to continue to offer the programs and services from which our community members benefit.

With the understanding that budgets serve as moral documents, signaling the values and priorities of the city, Howl Arts Inc. calls upon City Council to **keep culture whole** for the health of our city and our communities.

We call upon City Council to NOT disproportionately cut resources for the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs.

We call upon City Council to reinvest in these agencies and in the future of our city and to recommit to supporting the cultural organizations that are central to the civic fabric of our communities.

Buenos días,

Thank you for the Council for giving me the chance to appear before you. My name is Rafael Sánchez and I represent Repertorio Español, a 50-year-old company that serves Spanish-speaking New Yorkers and Hispanophiles. Returning to live performances will be an extra challenge for our Company as our target audiences, for the most part, have been decimated by the local shutdown. From small business owners to service workers who have been laid off, most have suffered income loss, and going to theatre requires discretionary income.

Repertorio does not anticipate earned revenue to return to normal until there is a cure for Covid19 and the economy has returned to pre-shutdown levels. Yet since March 12th, we are presenting formidable and exciting works online for adults as well as students, preparing relevant new works for the eventual reopening, and are continuing to nurture emerging playwrights. Repertorio anticipates hardship once the emergency funds are spent by the end of 2020. In 2021, the Company's challenges will be to serve audiences, whether online or live; nurture the Latinx artists; and retain an experienced and bilingual staff. Don't abandon us. Gracias for hearing me out!

To: New York City Council

From: Apollo Theater

Re: Cultural Affairs hearing 6/22/20

In March 2020, the Apollo Theater closed its doors as a result of the pandemic, but it has never ceased to serve its community. The *Apollo Digital Stage* has provided 3-4 pieces of artistic content each week since April reaching thousands of New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. Additionally, the organization launched *Apollo Cares* on all of its digital platforms to provide up to date information on Covid related issues, social services available, neighborhood openings and closing and the census as well as other topics of importance to the Harlem community.

Apollo Education Programs engage more than 20,000 youth each year through innovative initiatives like School Day Live performances, High School Internship Program, Oral History Project, in school Arts-based workshops and residencies, and career panels. **These programs continue digitally, and the Apollo has provided online resources for teachers** to enhance remote classroom learning activities. These include videos of past performances, study guides, and a host of other resources.

The Apollo is proud to call Harlem, with its distinct and rich culture, its home and is an important economic driver for the neighborhood. This pandemic, which has had a disparate impact on Black and Brown communities, has also devastated small and independent businesses around the world. To support the needs of the Harlem community, the Apollo has set aside a portion of the funds raised by its June 4 Benefit to give back to local, independent businesses and non-profit organizations in the neighborhood with the **Harlem Entrepreneurial Micro-Grant Initiative**. This will provide micro-grants to small business that help to define the culture and vitality of the community. The Apollo is grateful to our partners at Harlem's 125<sup>th</sup> Street Business Improvement District and the Harlem Commonwealth Council for joining us in this project. This project will have a direct economic impact on the community.

As you know, the arts and culture community is economically fragile but vitally important. That community is **united** in asking that the Council "keep culture whole" including DCLA *and* initiative funding. Without this support, New Yorkers will be robbed of the chance to engage and celebrate all the things that make us human.

Thank you.



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- Howl newsletter subscriber

The videos currently featured on Howl's website include a moving story told by performance artist Helixx C. Armageddon, a dance performance by Leyya Mona Tawil with violinist Antonina Pozdnyakova, a tour of the "Corona Cave Painting" murals created by artist Scooter LaForge in his apartment, writer Robert Rosen reading from his latest book and memoir *Bobby in Naziland: A Tale of Flatbush*, a wacky excerpt from *Pandemic Cooking with Wendy* with special guest Tym Moss, an experimental film by writer Armand Ruhlman, a poetry reading by Jeffrey Wright, studio tours with MarcusGlitteris, Ford Crull and Michelangelo Alasa, a musical performance by Robert Petraglia, the poetic experimental film *Exit* by Robert Butcher, a dazzling light show by Luigi Cazzaniga and reading by poet Ilka Scobie, a studio tour with Antagonist movement founder Ethan



Minsker, a performance by contemporary artist Stas Ginzburg dealing directly with social isolation, and a performance by Michael Fontana aka Eileen Dover.

## 2. ***Howl at Home: Creative Art Activities in a Time of Social Isolation***

The new *Howl at Home* activity series was launched in early April as an at-home adaptation of the in-person art education workshops that Howl usually offers in conjunction with each exhibition in its gallery. A new activity is shared every two weeks via e-newsletters and the Howl website. Each activity focuses on an under-recognized artist from downtown NYC, distilling themes and techniques from their work into an activity that anyone can do while quarantined, using simple, low-cost materials that many people already have at home or can easily acquire at essential services locations, such as grocery stores and drugstores. *Howl at Home* activities are designed to be accessible to anyone - no previous art-making experience is needed. Activities are outlined in an easy-to-follow lesson plan format that highlights key themes and ideas, provides examples of the featured artist's work, and in some cases includes short video demonstrations by the artist.

To date, *Howl at Home* has featured five activities:

- Collage Portraits with Antony Zito
- Text-Based Art with Al Diaz
- Self-Portrait Photography with Gail Thacker
- "Spirit Animal" T-shirts with Scooter LaForge
- Poster Art for Pride with Jorge Clar

The activities offer an easy entry point for artists, creatives, and even those with no artistic experience at all, to find inspiration and to express themselves through art, drawing on decades of research and empirical evidence that points to the therapeutic value of art-making in times of crisis.

Participants are encouraged to share pictures of their creations through email and on social media using the hashtags #howlathome and #howl!happening to be featured by Howl. This social sharing builds a sense of community and pride in one's work and inspires others to get involved. With each activity, Howl has received 10-20 responses from people sharing their creations, indicating that total participation is likely even higher. As the series continues, Howl will continue to promote past activities, which remain posted on the Howl website for participants to revisit at any time.

## 3. **"Regularly Scheduled Programming" Goes Digital**

In addition to the special initiatives described above, Howl is adapting to the unique circumstances of the pandemic by reimagining some of its recurring programming, such as the monthly *Full Moon Show* performances, as digital experiences.

Howl's monthly *Full Moon Shows* are a series of short performances honoring the legacy of pioneering and genre-defying performer Tom Murrin. Murrin's work as a first-generation La MaMa playwright, and his improvisational "Trash Theater" performances using found objects, have inspired artists and audiences in downtown NYC and beyond for over 40 years. One of Murrin's longest-running performances was the *Full Moon Show*, held each month on the full moon. Howl's *Full Moon Shows* keep this tradition alive with a unique performance each month. These performances are both an act of preservation and an artistic dialogue through which performers learn about Murrin's methods, collaborate, and present experimental new works that incorporate found objects, improvisation, theater games, comedy, and absurdity. Now, with live performances suspended due to the pandemic, Howl has been partnering with performance artist John Pizza to record a new solo *Full Moon Show* performance each month. Howl prominently features the video on its homepage throughout the day of the full moon; after the day is over, the video remains accessible on the "Howl TV" page on Howl's website, which includes a broad selection of recordings of past performances and events.

Preserving the *Full Moon Shows* in this difficult time ensures that emerging artists such as John Pizza have a unique opportunity to experiment, take risks, adapt, and expand their practice while gaining exposure and receiving a stipend for their work. The resulting shows are funny and moving, directly reflecting and commenting on the moment we are living through. In his April *Full Moon Show* performance, John Pizza asks:

*"The year is ... 2035? It's Monday? Saturday? Thursday? I've been holed-up*



*in an empty art gallery in the abandoned Chelsea Arts District NYC for perhaps eons...  
my stomach in knots, at the end of my rope, writing poetry. How're you?"*

### **Call to Action for City Council**

As the examples above illustrate, cultural organizations in New York City never truly closed. Howl has adapted in response to the challenges of the moment and continues to provide programming that meets the needs of our local communities. Members of the public turn to Howl for opportunities to learn, connect with others, and find enrichment, entertainment, and joy through difficult times. It is our responsibility to continue to meet this need, even in the midst of a pandemic and the financial crises it sparked. Howl remains committed to finding creative solutions to help our communities, and our city, to survive, heal, and rebuild.

But Howl and many other cultural organizations across New York City are at risk. Howl is currently projecting over \$100,000 in lost or delayed income in 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic. The repercussions from COVID-19 are far from over. Cultural organizations need sustained financial support in order to continue to offer the programs and services from which our community members benefit.

With the understanding that budgets serve as moral documents, signaling the values and priorities of the city, Howl Arts Inc. calls upon City Council to **keep culture whole** for the health of our city and our communities.

We call upon City Council to NOT disproportionately cut resources for the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs.

We call upon City Council to reinvest in these agencies and in the future of our city and to recommit to supporting the cultural organizations that are central to the civic fabric of our communities.

## **NEW YORK FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS – Committee on Cultural Affairs Testimony**

The New York Foundation for the Arts – an arts service organization whose mission is to provide financial, educational, and professional services individual artists and emerging arts organizations.

During the COVID crisis we have been hard at work providing emergency funding to individual artists and arts workers. By the end of our fiscal year on June 30, we will have dispersed over \$4 million in total to individuals and we will continue to focus all of our resources on providing aid to artists and arts workers who are being hit hardest by this crisis.

Our work impacts real human beings and it is critical work to the communities in New York City. There are hundreds of thousands of artists living across the city who are being economically impacted by COVID, not just because of the shutdown of the arts sector, but also because the part-time work they use to supplement their income, such as restaurant work and retail work have also shut down. The desperation we're seeing from our constituents is very real.

In order for us to continue our work, we need funding now more than ever. While we are working to get millions of dollars out to artists, our own operating costs have increased and we have limited funds remaining to continue our own operations. We need discretionary funding to continue and we need core program funding to continue or we will not survive this crisis.

We recognize that city council is facing some very difficult budget decisions and a ballooning budget deficit. All we ask is that you keep in mind that artists and arts workers are real people who rely on the program services and economic support that arts organizations provide. They rely on your support. We also ask that you remember that arts and culture is a huge economic driver, and under normal circumstances accounts for nearly 15% of the city's economic activity.

Here at NYFA, we are doing our part to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the creative community in NYC and beyond. Despite the collective challenges we face, NYFA is committed to continuing to support our constituents in all the ways we can, to ensure that they maintain access to the resources they need to persevere.

On March 13, 2020, NYFA's offices were closed to the public, and we have instituted a work-from-home policy to keep our staff safe. Since that time, our dedicated board and staff have worked swiftly and effectively to adapt all of our programs and services to virtual formats, and we are doing all that we can to meet the current needs of the creative community. Here is what we have accomplished so far:

- NYFA Learning is now offering all professional development programs free-of-charge, or at a reduced price. These programs are continuing to serve as an important platform for participants to connect and receive professional support during the crisis. A list of recent and future activities is below:
  - We launched the FY20 Emerging Leaders Program into an entirely virtual format, and held the first introductory meeting in mid-March. We have adjusted the schedule of the program to accommodate participants' current work-from-home responsibilities, and will be extending the timeline to include in-person sessions, if and when they are possible.
  - We transitioned the Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program (IAP) online, and successfully held the Alumni Mixer event on March 31, 2020. We have agreed to continue the program as the crisis persists, checking in with participants each month, to ensure that our immigrant artist cohort feels supported.
  - To support our IAP Nationwide alumni group, we have been holding virtual round-tables, and are planning to create more of these sessions in the coming months. These have been a great success, and are helping immigrant artists across the nation receive access to critical resources and support.
  - We are working with NY State's EASL (Entertainment, Arts, Sports & Law) pro bono committee to host new sessions in May-June to help immigrant artists with visa and legal concerns.
  - The Doctor's Hours program has successfully transitioned to a virtual platform, and is being provided at a reduced price.
  - Registrations to our Online Learning workshops have doubled in the last month. In response to the demand, we are creating new workshops focused on topics most critical to our constituents, including accessing emergency resources. We are also working to create several workshops to support underserved disciplines and vulnerable individuals, including literary artists and immigrants.
  - We are working to administer some of NYFA Learning's programs, including Online Learning and NYFA Coaching, in other languages, such as Spanish, Mandarin, and Farsi.
  
- We are updating our Emergency Resources Directory regularly with the most current resources, grants, and opportunities available. Since the beginning of March, the average number of monthly users to these pages has increased by over 11,000%. These pages are serving an important role in helping artists access support during the pandemic, and have been recognized by *Forbes*, *NPR*, *The New York Times*, and the *NonProfit Quarterly*, to name a few.
  
- To aid artists and arts professionals who have recently lost income, we have granted advertisers the ability to post for free on the Classifieds listing board—for jobs in

any industry—and we are doing outreach to businesses in other sectors, that are looking to supplement their workforce during this crisis.

- As galleries and museums remain closed, we are opening our social media platforms to our program alumni to help them gain vital exposure for their work. For example, through our [@nyfacurrent](#) Instagram account we are highlighting one Immigrant Artist Program alumni every day, Monday – Friday, to help connect them to our audience of over 13,000 followers.
- We are creating online content for our blog focused on timely topics, including remote hiring, working from home, generating online engagement, and ways of staying connected.
- NYFA is working on the frontline to support the economic and medical needs of the creative community. To date, we've distributed over \$4 million in financial assistance to artists, creatives, and arts professionals. In addition to our ongoing grant programs, recent COVID-related grants include:
  - [Keep NYS Creating Project Grant](#) is distributing over \$40,000 in individual project grants of \$1,000 each to support Upstate New York artist projects. (Currently Open)
  - [Hamptons Arts Network Artist Relief Fund](#) is awarding \$1,000 unrestricted grants to support artists in the New York 119 area code. (Opening for applications end of June)
  - [The Tri-State Relief Fund to Support Non-Salaried Workers in the Visual Arts](#) is distributing \$1.25 million in awards, in individual one-time unrestricted grants of \$2,000 to freelance or non-salaried arts workers in the tri-state area. (Currently Open)
  - [Rauschenberg Medical Emergency Grants](#) provide one-time grants of up to \$5,000 to artists who have experienced unexpected medical emergencies. (Ongoing)
  - [The Maurice Sendak Emergency Relief Fund](#) distributed over \$100,000, in individual unrestricted grants of up to \$2,500 to support children's picture book illustrators and writers. (Concluded)
  - [Anonymous Was a Woman \(AWAW\) Emergency Relief Fund](#) provided female-identifying artists living in the United States with grants of up to \$2,500 for covid-related financial hardship, distributing a total of \$325,000. (Concluded)

As we continue to isolate ourselves to protect our communities, we believe that the arts are more important than ever and will sustain and unite us through these difficult times. It is thanks to our supporters that NYFA will endure the current challenges, and it is through our combined efforts that the arts will grow anew in the future.



Candice Anderson  
Executive Director  
Cool Culture  
canderson@coolculture.org

June 18, 2020

My name is Candice Anderson, Executive Director of Cool Culture. **Each year, Cool Culture offers our target NYC preschool students and their families access to arts and cultural experiences.** We have served millions of families since our 2003 founding via our Citywide Cultural Access (Family Pass) Program that each year gives free admission to **90 partner museums**. Cool Culture activates partnerships with families, the museum field, and more than **440 schools and early learning programs** in Title I school districts throughout New York City and over **50,000 families throughout the five boroughs - more than 150,000 New Yorkers.**

I would like to thank Committee on Cultural Affairs Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, Speaker Corey Johnson, Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo, and members of the NYC Council for the opportunity to provide you with some insight into Cool Culture's work to address the needs of children and families throughout the five boroughs that have been disproportionately affected by the history of systemic oppression, the novel coronavirus pandemic; and to underscore the importance of arts, culture, and equality to a strong and equitable post-Covid recovery.

I know you are facing incredibly difficult choices as you try to address the great and pressing needs of communities devastated by the intersecting impacts of systemic racism and the coronavirus pandemic, and the related mental health, health care, food security and education crises. As members of the Cultural Affairs Committee, we are incredibly grateful to your advocacy on behalf of the NYC Arts and Cultural sector which plays a central role of arts and culture in addressing these needs, as we continue to work with our communities to support creatives, storytellers and truth seekers in the midst of dealing with the pandemic, systemic racism and terrorism against black and brown communities.

### **Systemic Racism and Its Devastating Impacts: An Historic Challenge In Need of Immediate Action**

Current events - particularly Covid-19 and the recent killings of unarmed Black women and men, including Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, have shone a harsh light on the systemic racism to which too many in both NYC and broader American society have become desensitized and complacent.

Covid-19 has had a disproportionate and devastating impact on Black and Latinx families and communities. Due to systemic inequities, many members of these communities live in neighborhoods deprived of a health infrastructure that meets the basic needs of New Yorkers - many of whom are constituents within your districts. Communities of color often have inadequate access to technology, the internet or appropriate hardware. Instead, many families rely on smartphones which, with the sudden advent of remote learning and work, have proved insufficient. We are incredibly grateful for the advocacy of members of the NYC Council to address these issues alongside the efforts of the NYC Department of Education to make laptops and tablets available to all students, but disparities still remain.

These challenges are not new, and are further exacerbated by current events. Learning loss is traditionally associated with the summer months. This challenge has become a year-long reality as a result of school closures and remote learning compromised by the limited capacity of disadvantaged school districts to effectively implement remote instruction, particularly for children in preschool, and digital exclusion. In the coming summer months, many camps, summer programs, and cultural institutions will remain closed or open with limited access - an additional barrier. These issues are compounded by the mental health impact of police killings of Black and brown people which serve as stressors for families and young children. And as communities come together in protest, the use of excessive force against demonstrators further impacts and harms New Yorkers.

**In response, we urge City Council to:**

- Advance a policy addressing the root causes of racial inequities in mental health and health outcomes, by **promulgating a multi-sector response**; the arts and cultural sector, and particularly those organizations located within and run by and for communities of color, can play a vital role in addressing these issues, and we strongly urge the council to continue to **support efforts by the cultural organizations of color and provide the funding necessary to create safe and healing spaces both online and in person**;
- Mitigate summer learning loss with a broad strategy that ensures that students regardless of race attend schools and early learning programs with a full complement of resources, including well-compensated veteran educators, technology to support remote learning. Equally important, providing **young students and their families must have access to learning opportunities that validate home cultures and offer opportunities to discuss our current challenges in developmentally appropriate ways**. Towards this end Cool Culture urges the Council to **find the funding necessary to support the efforts of cultural organizations that have pre-established relationships with their communities and which are run by and for communities of color, and which have historically received inadequate funding from the City**.

**Cool Culture's Work: Addressing Issues of Education, Mental Health and Wellbeing**

With families under immense pressure, children home from school, and educators in high-need districts badly in need of support with remote instruction, Cool Culture's programming is focused on supporting our community. **Like many other cultural organizations run by and for communities of color, our work seeks to provide moments of connection, reprieve and joy, alongside the educational and mental health benefits of art and culture to families most impacted by historic inequities**. Community-building—always essential to our work—is critical under these conditions. While Cool Culture has been focused on creating and supporting these ties in person, we are learning quickly how to bring our community together through other means:

- Our staff have created a range of interactive activities for families online. **Our art-making sessions celebrate the traditions of communities of color, open mics, provide opportunities to share stories, and virtual tours of museums and local public artwork provide opportunities to tour NYC while in the relative safety of families' homes**. These are available to over 50,000 Cool Culture Passholder Families and families outside our network, and hundreds of children and families have participated from across NYC;
- Our **We Are All Curators** program, has offered online professional-development sessions for educators. This program **guides school professionals in addressing issues of bias and reflecting on their assumptions, supports their shift to remote instruction**, and is designed to support shifts in practices that support the evolving concerns of families impacted by the dual challenge of the pandemic and serving as NYC's front line workers;

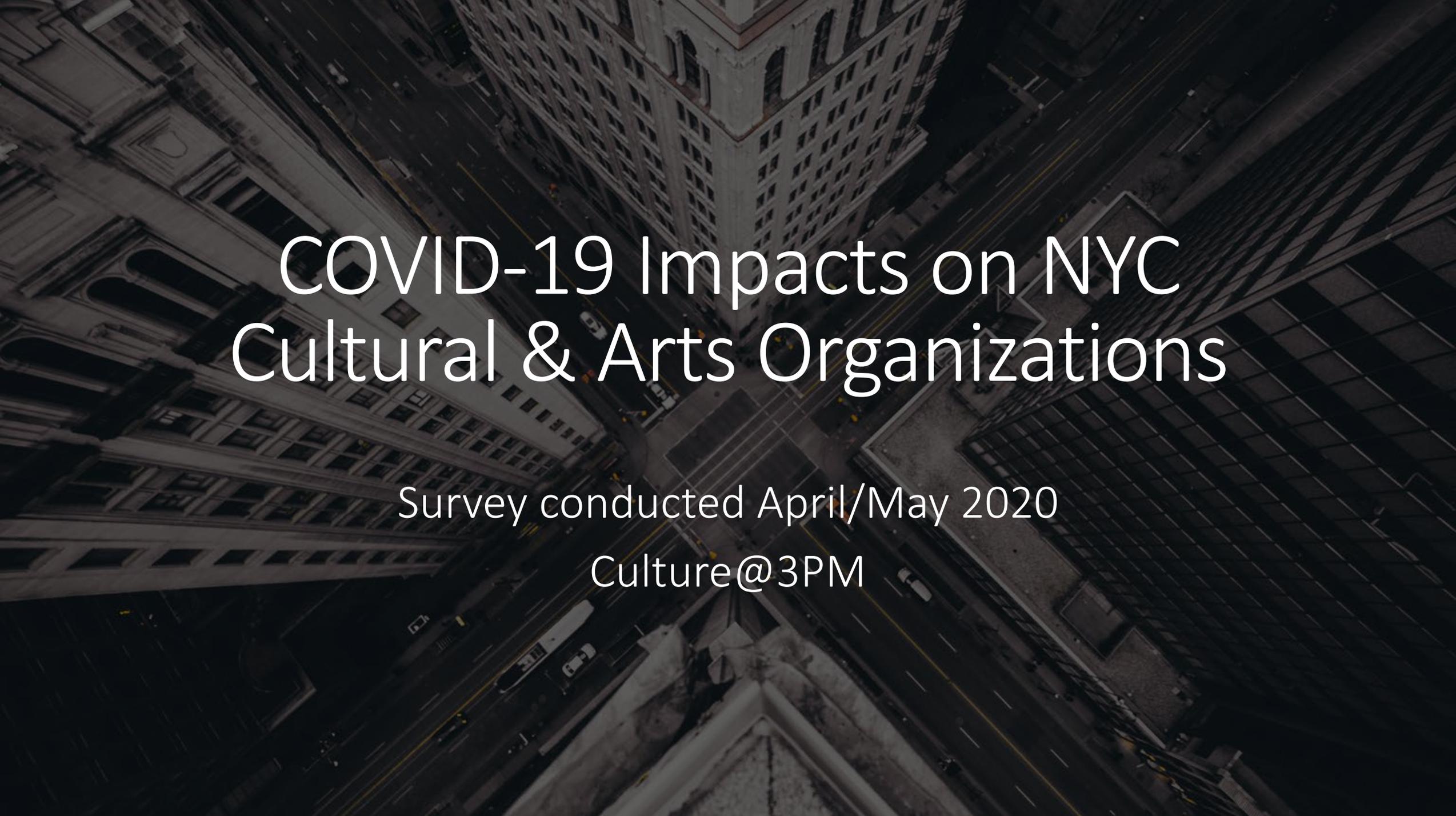
- Throughout June, our new **Wellness Wednesdays series has created a space for community and healing by providing a venue for young children and their families to process and express their feelings through visual arts, dance and movement; while exploring ways to speak with young children in ways that alleviate their fears about their safety in the face of police shootings, and the loss of friends and loved ones to the coronavirus;** and

As a trusted community partner, our work remains critical during a time of renewed awareness of the impact of racist systems revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic.. While Covid-19 is a global threat, its impact is being felt acutely by residents of the same New York City Title I districts where Cool Culture works. Many in these neighborhoods face systemic injustices, and are struggling to find a place in the collective fight for the world to respect the humanity of Black people, in addition to navigating a new normal in the midst of Covid-19. Our community members often cannot work from home, experience food insecurity, and many have lost their primary sources of income. Others are essential workers balancing work obligations while taking on expanded roles in their children's education with limited guidance from schools.

**We strongly urge you to ensure the necessary support for arts and cultural organizations that have a track record and demonstrated commitment working alongside these communities, and to include the priorities of such cultural organizations in New York in any future Covid response legislation.**

This support which will enable Cool Culture and other members of the arts and culture community to continue our work to maintain and strengthen social connections under the stay-at-home policies that have forced closings of our school and museum partners.

Thank you.



# COVID-19 Impacts on NYC Cultural & Arts Organizations

Survey conducted April/May 2020

Culture@3PM

# About the Survey

- Outreach for the survey was conducted through the Culture@3PM coalition.
- This survey represents 144 respondents, equal to 13% of NYC-based nonprofit cultural and arts organizations who apply for and/or receive funding through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, including 33 members of the Cultural Institutions Group.
- The enclosed survey results provide a snapshot in time (April 23-May 9) during the evolving circumstances of COVID-19.
- While this survey only covers projected impacts through June 30, 2020, significant impacts on this “last-to-reopen” sector are expected to continue through the remainder of 2020 and beyond.

# Summary Findings

## Financial

- Total FY20 operating budgets: \$2.22 billion
- Total Projected revenue losses through June 30: \$489 million

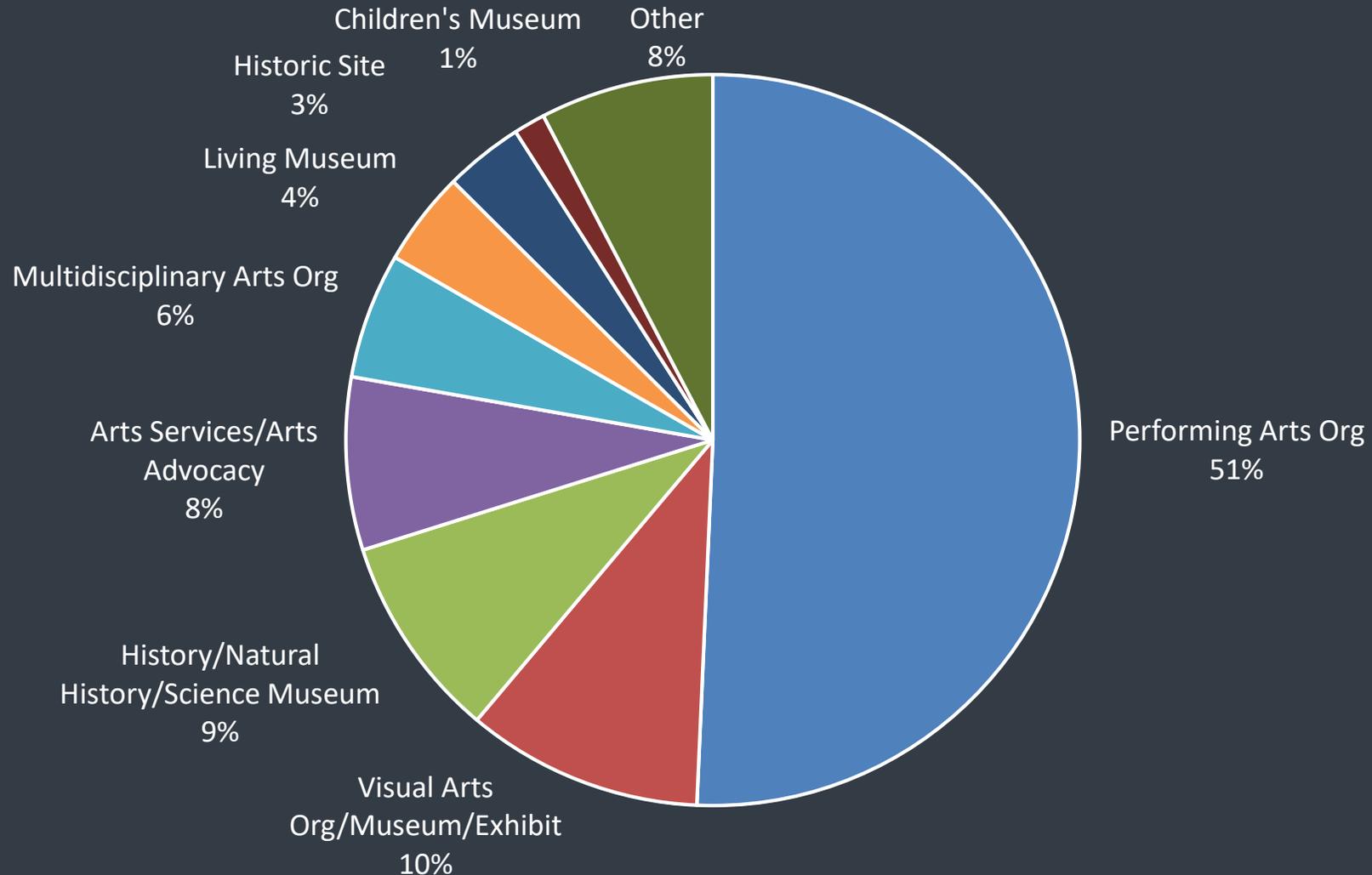
## Workers

- 21,817 total workers pre-COVID (FT/PT/seasonal)
  - 7,189 furloughed (79% PT/seasonal)
  - 3,280 laid off (90% PT/seasonal)
- 10,296 volunteers

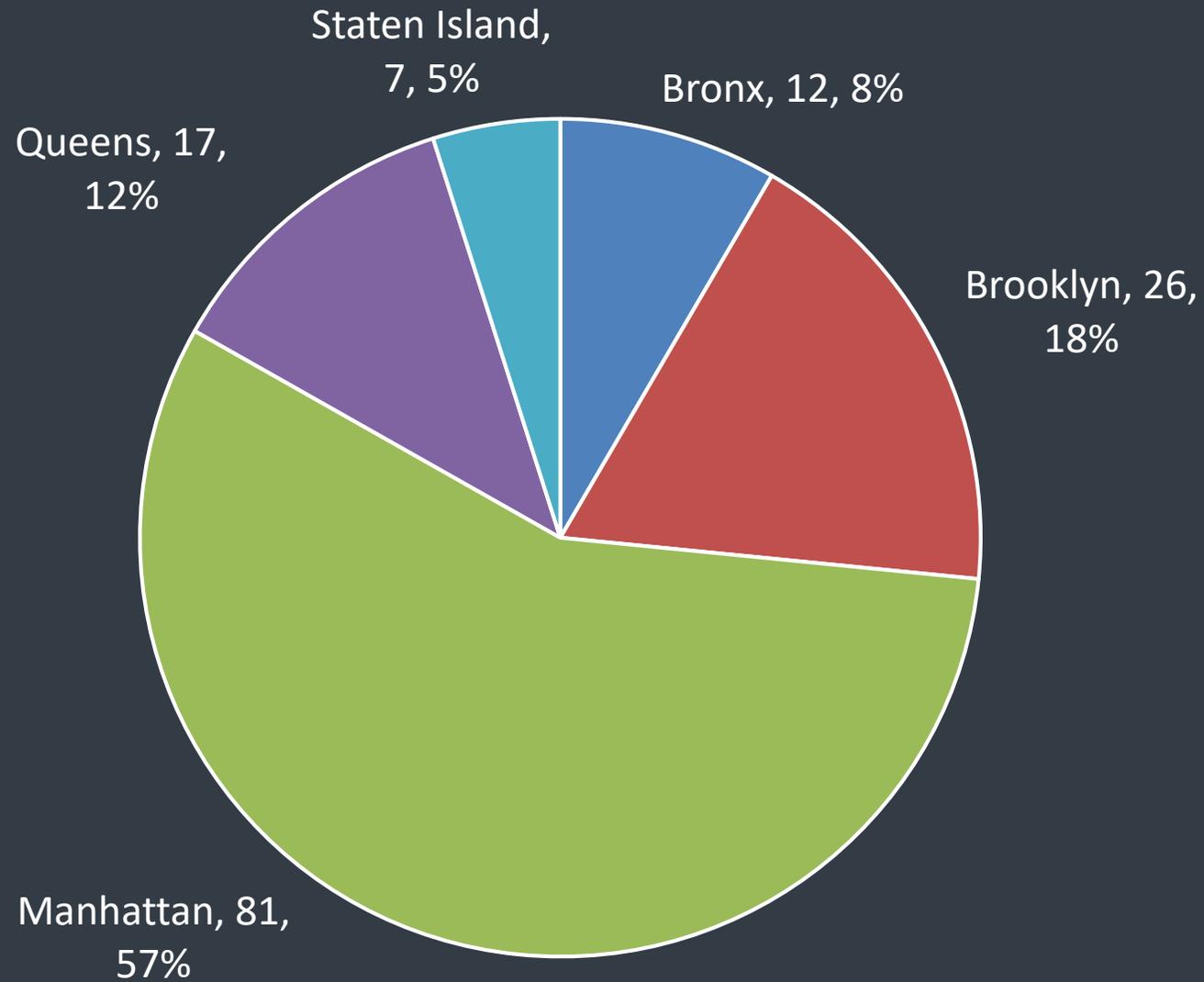
## Visitors

- Total visitors 29,554,522
- Free Visits 5,503,074
- K-12 Students 1,976,862
- 61% of respondents have increased virtual educational programming during COVID-19

# Type of Organization

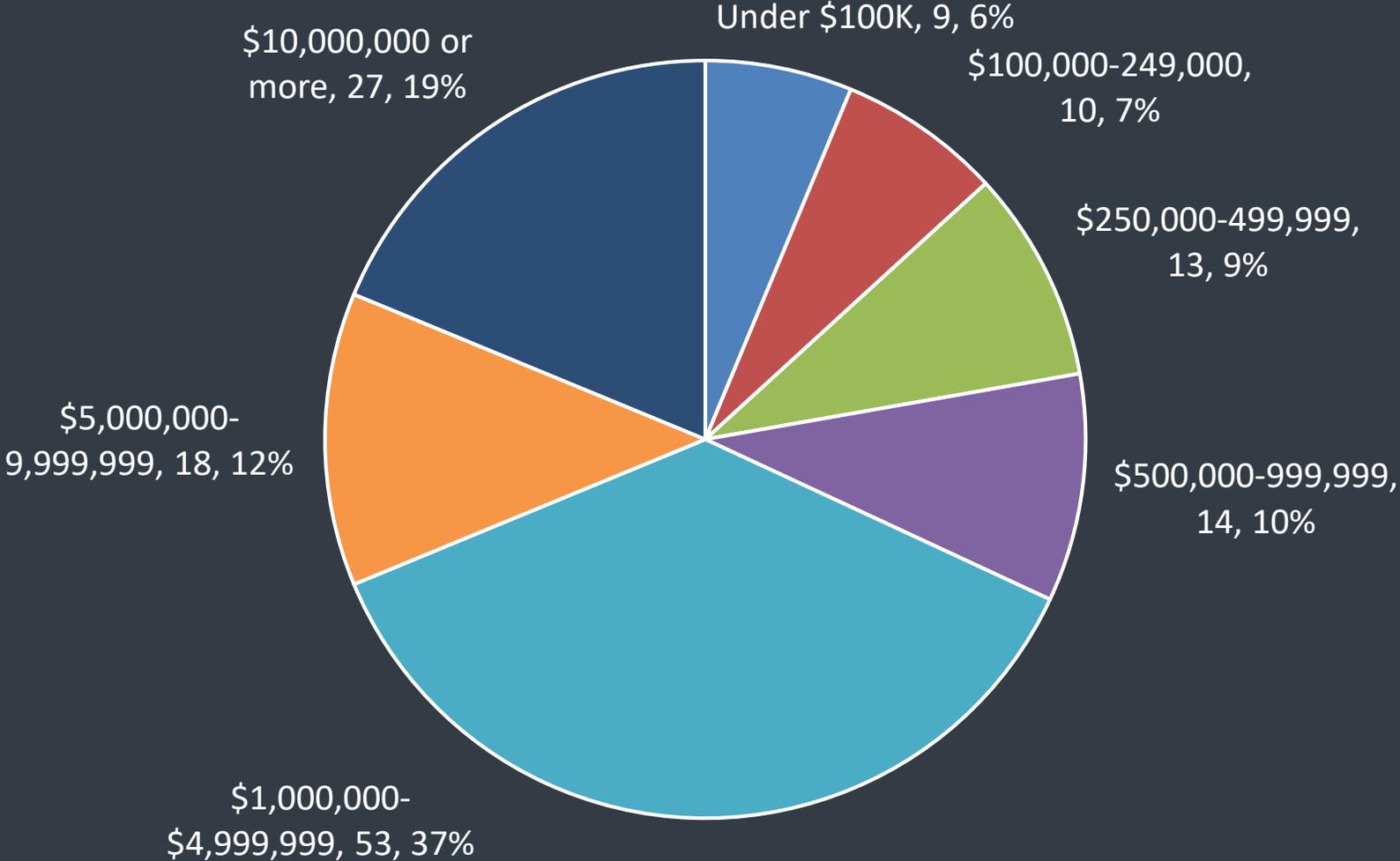


# Location

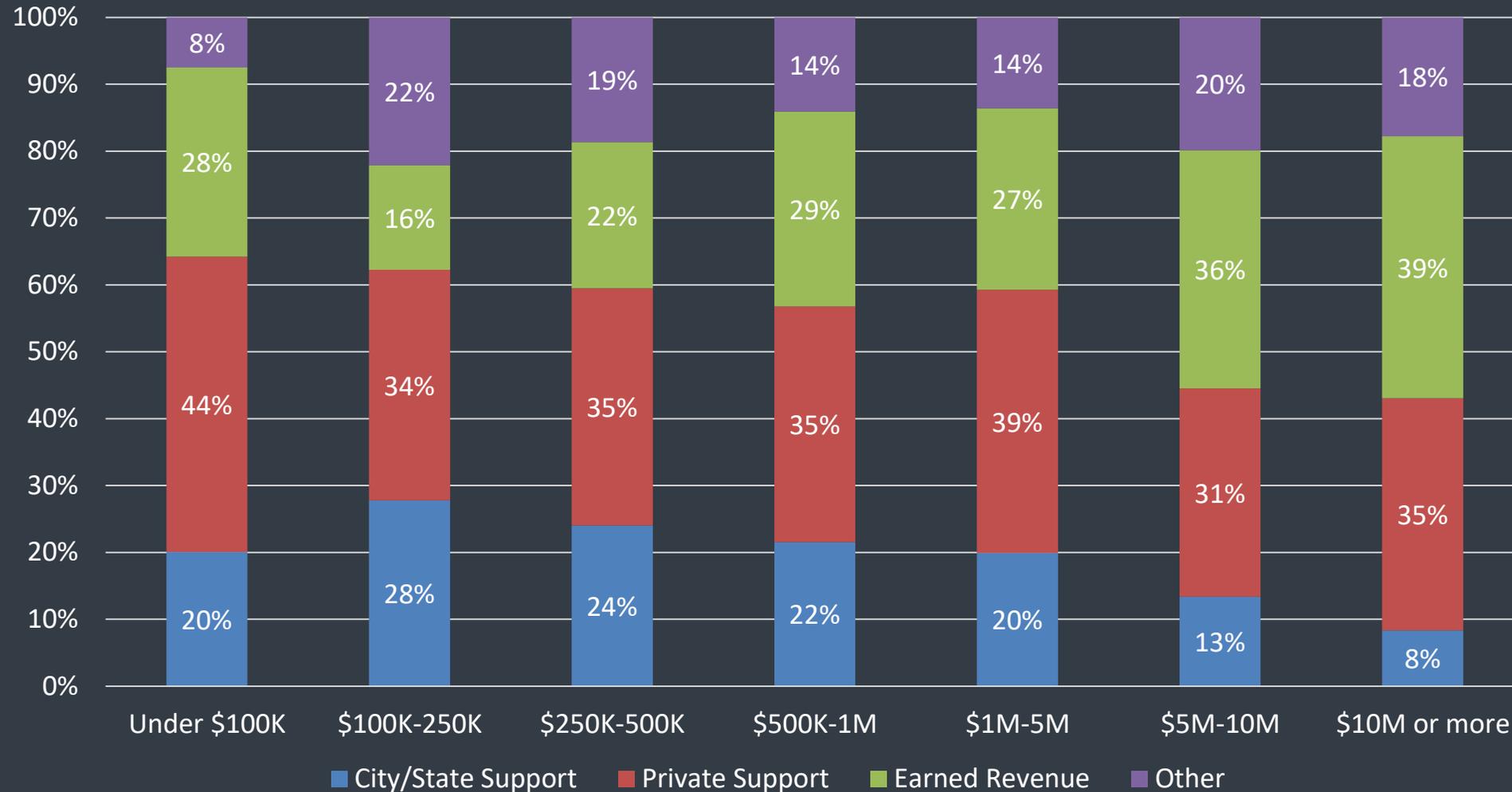


# FY19 Visitorship

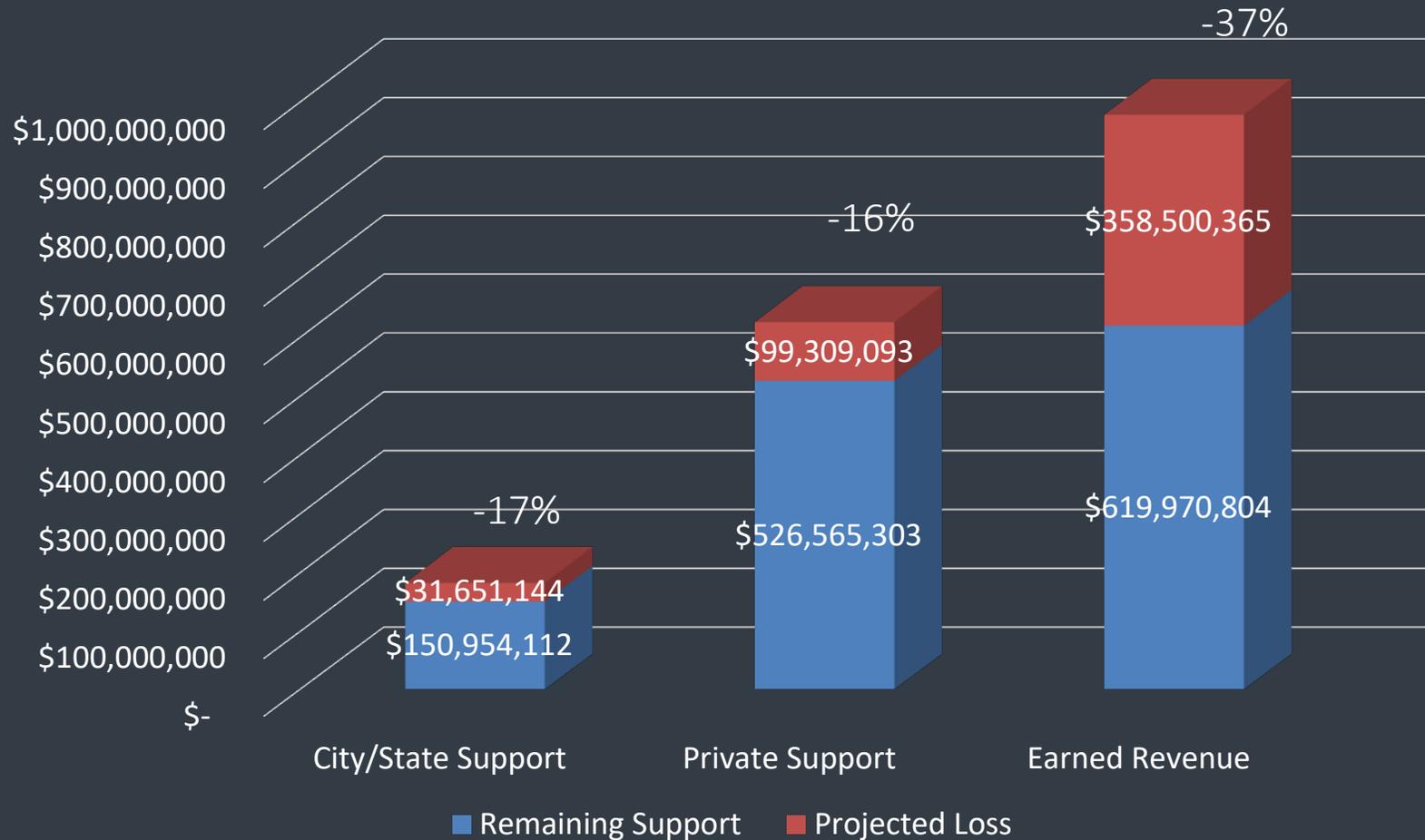
# Organization Size



# Revenue Sources by Organization Size

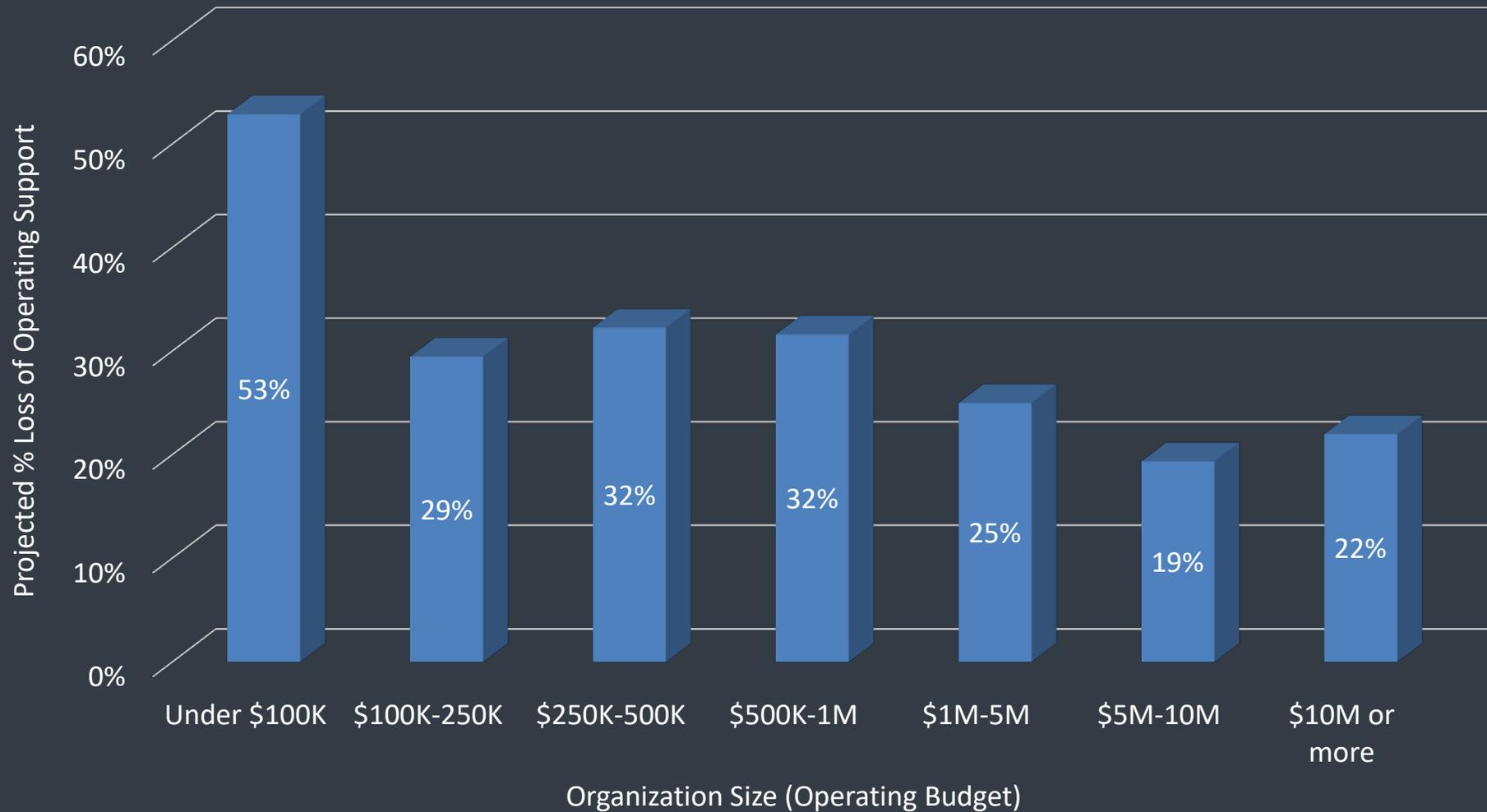


# Projected Revenue Losses = \$489 Million\*



\* Projected city/state, private/foundation and earned revenue losses through June 30, 2020

# Losses by Organization Size



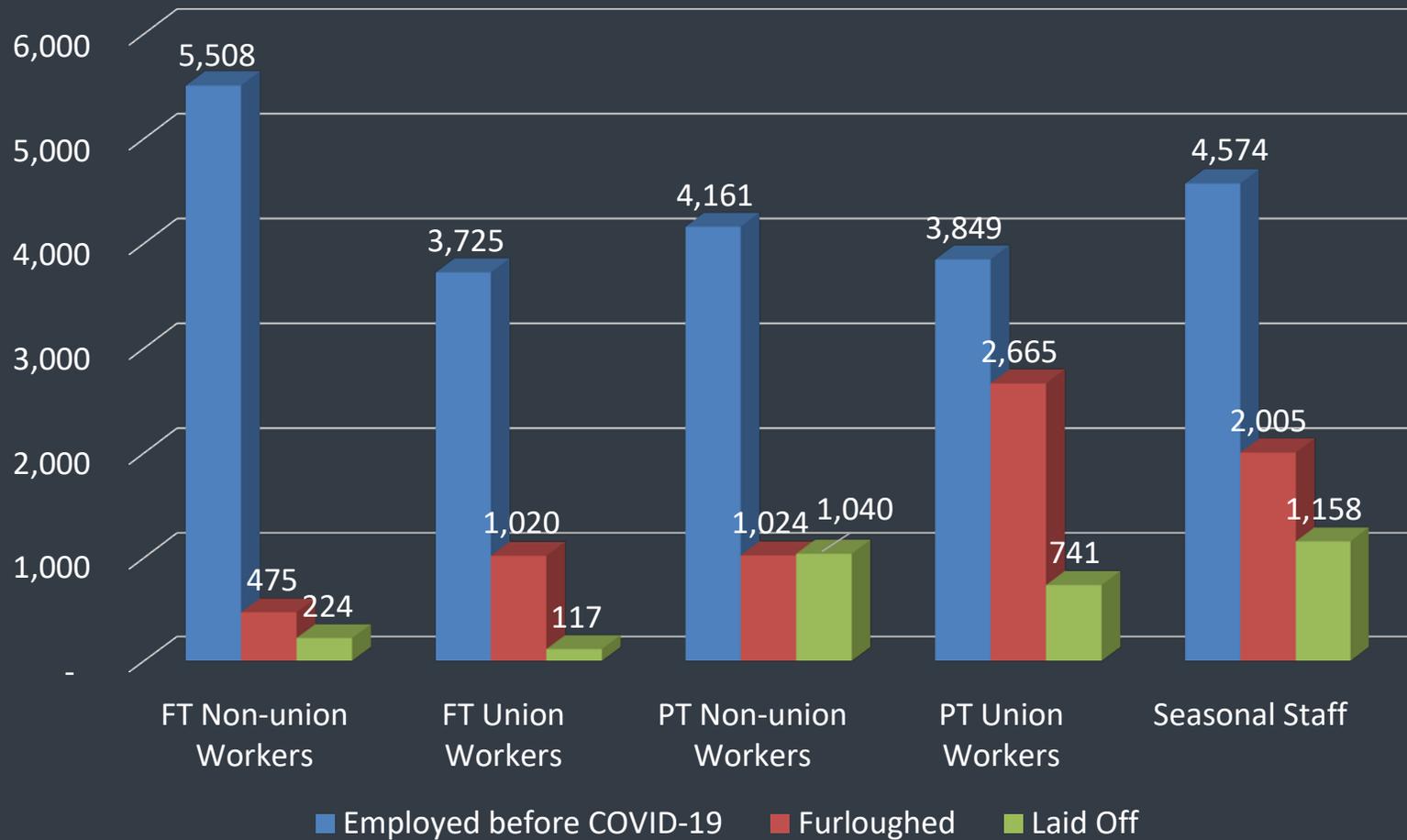
\* Projected city/state, private/foundation and earned revenue losses through June 30, 2020

# Savings Countermeasures

\$126M in savings identified to offset 26% of losses through June 30, 2020:

- Executive pay reductions
  - Hibernation (temporary operational shutdown)
  - Furloughs
  - Layoffs
  - Flexible use of vacation time
  - Other paid time off
  - Other
- 
- Average days operating cash on hand: 80 days (unclear if includes PPP)

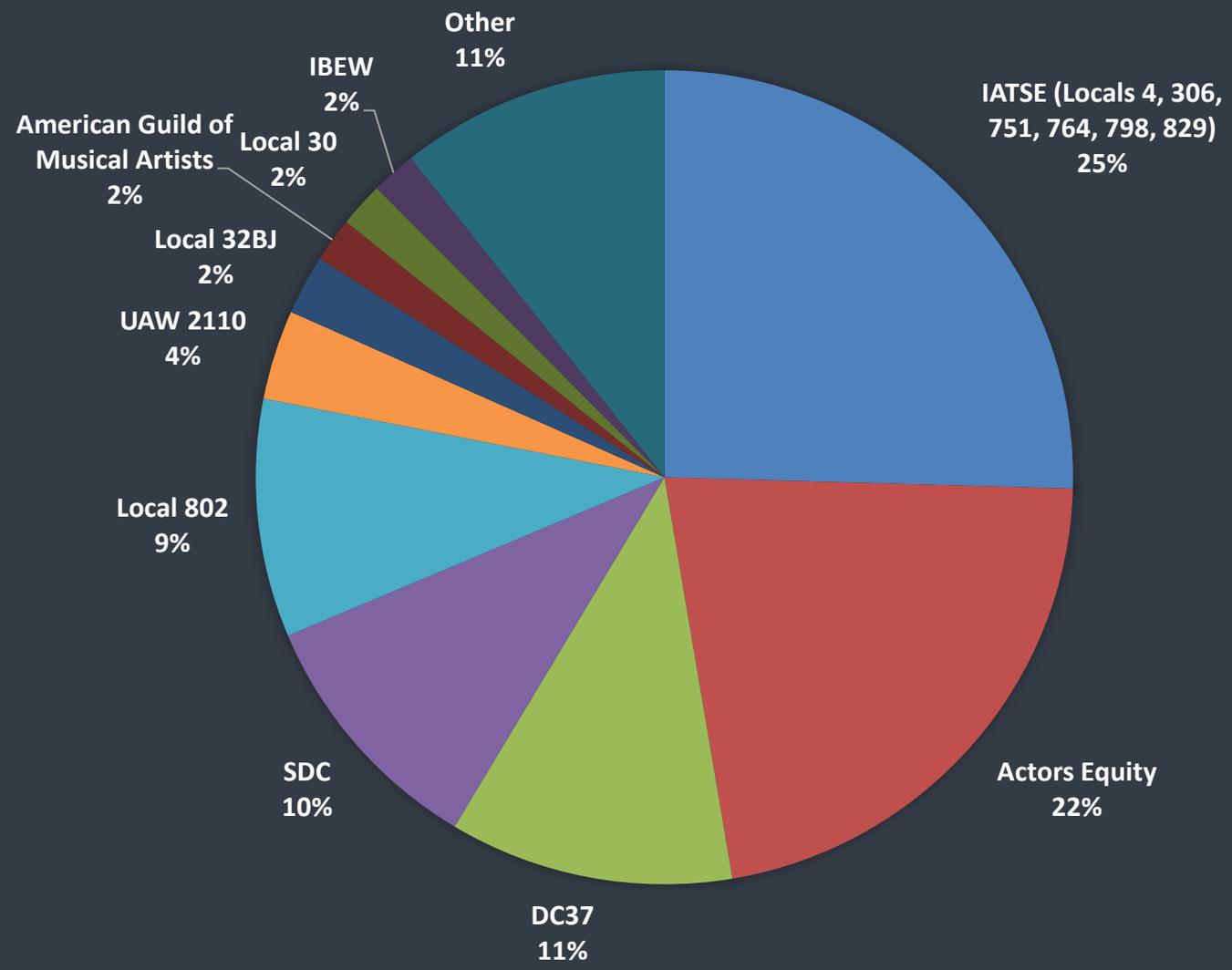
# Cultural Worker Impacts



21,817 employees (1,298 youth) before COVID-19

# Union Representation

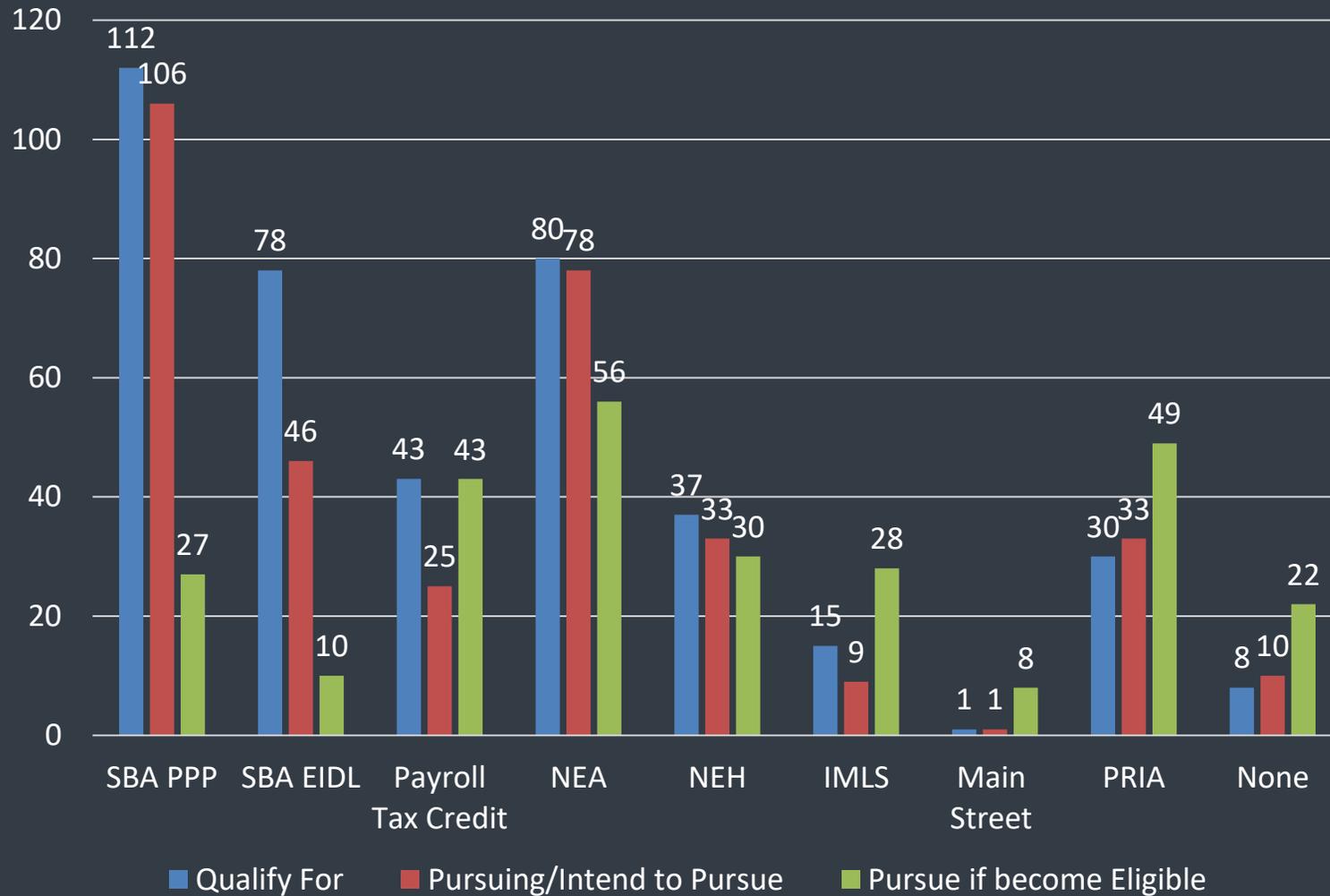
(by Percentage of Respondents)



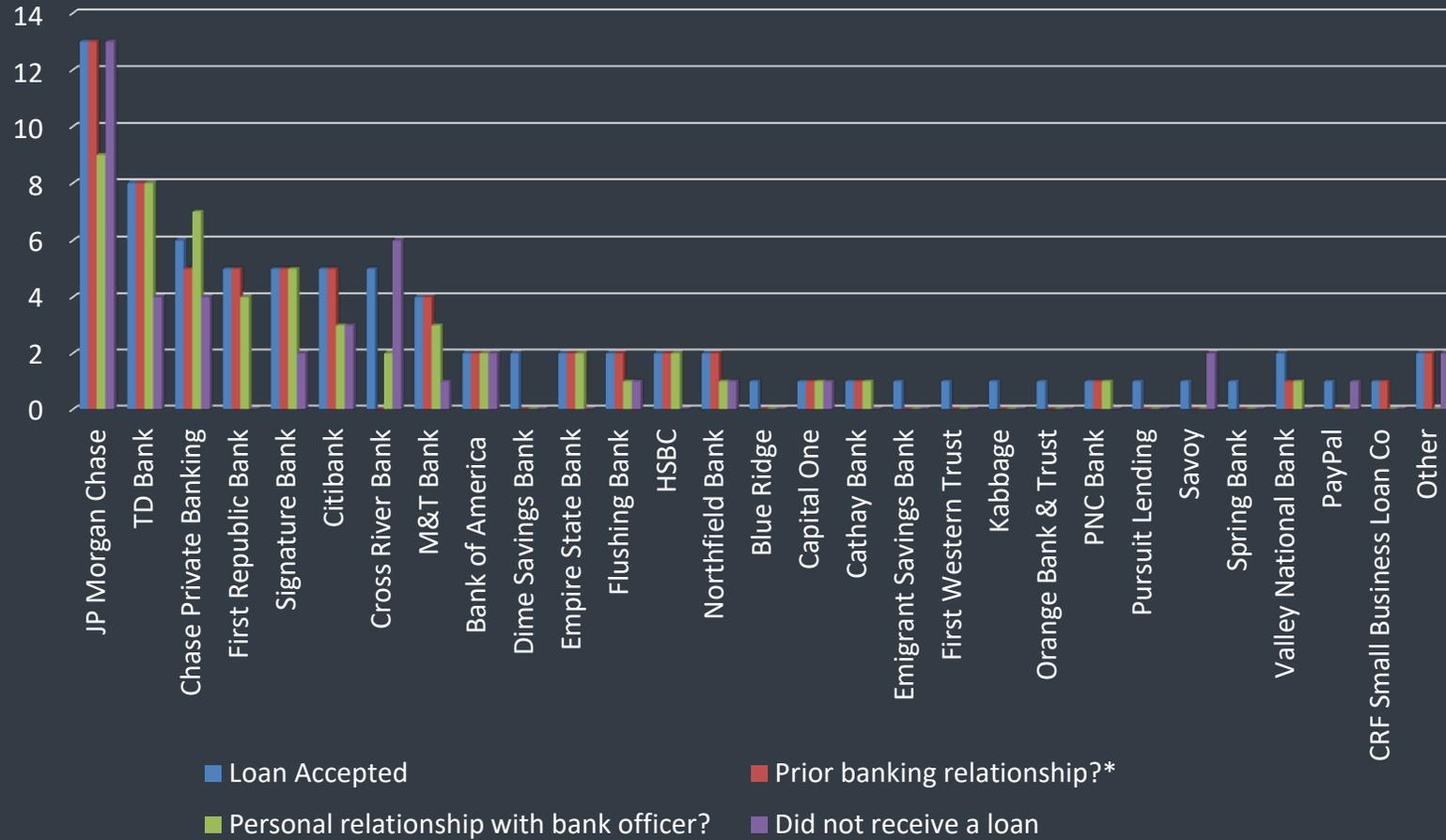
# Internships & Volunteers

- Unpaid volunteers 10,296
- Paid interns 895
- Received government funding for internships 30
  - CUNY 17
  - DYCD SYEP 6
  - DOE 3
  - NYSCA 3
  - DCLA 2
  - NYSDOH 1
- Received foundation funding for internships 37

# Federal COVID-19 Relief

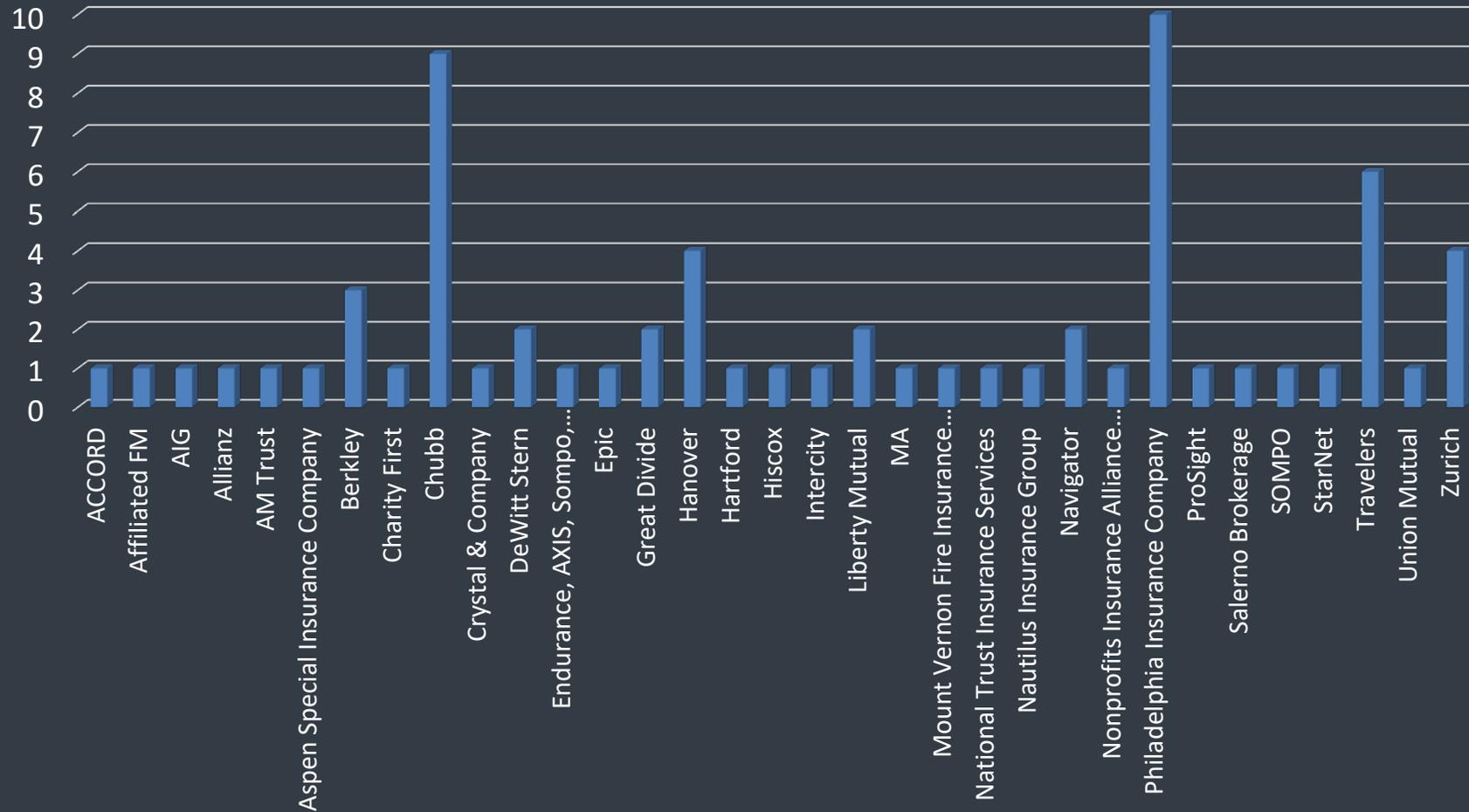


# PPP Loans



\* Prior relationships: 31 lines of credit, 17 credit cards, 7 loans

# Business Interruption Insurance\*



\* 67 respondents have business interruption insurance, 63 filing claim. Most plans have pandemic exclusions.

# City/State Loan & Grant Programs

- NY Community Trust Fund 104
- NY Community Trust Loan 6
- Other 16
  - LMCC
  - FCNY
  - NYC Small Business Services
  - HNY CARES Emergency Relief Grant
  - NYC Employee Reduction Program
  - NY Humanities
  - NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund Employee Retention Program
- Did not apply due to:
  - Capacity 13
  - Eligibility 33

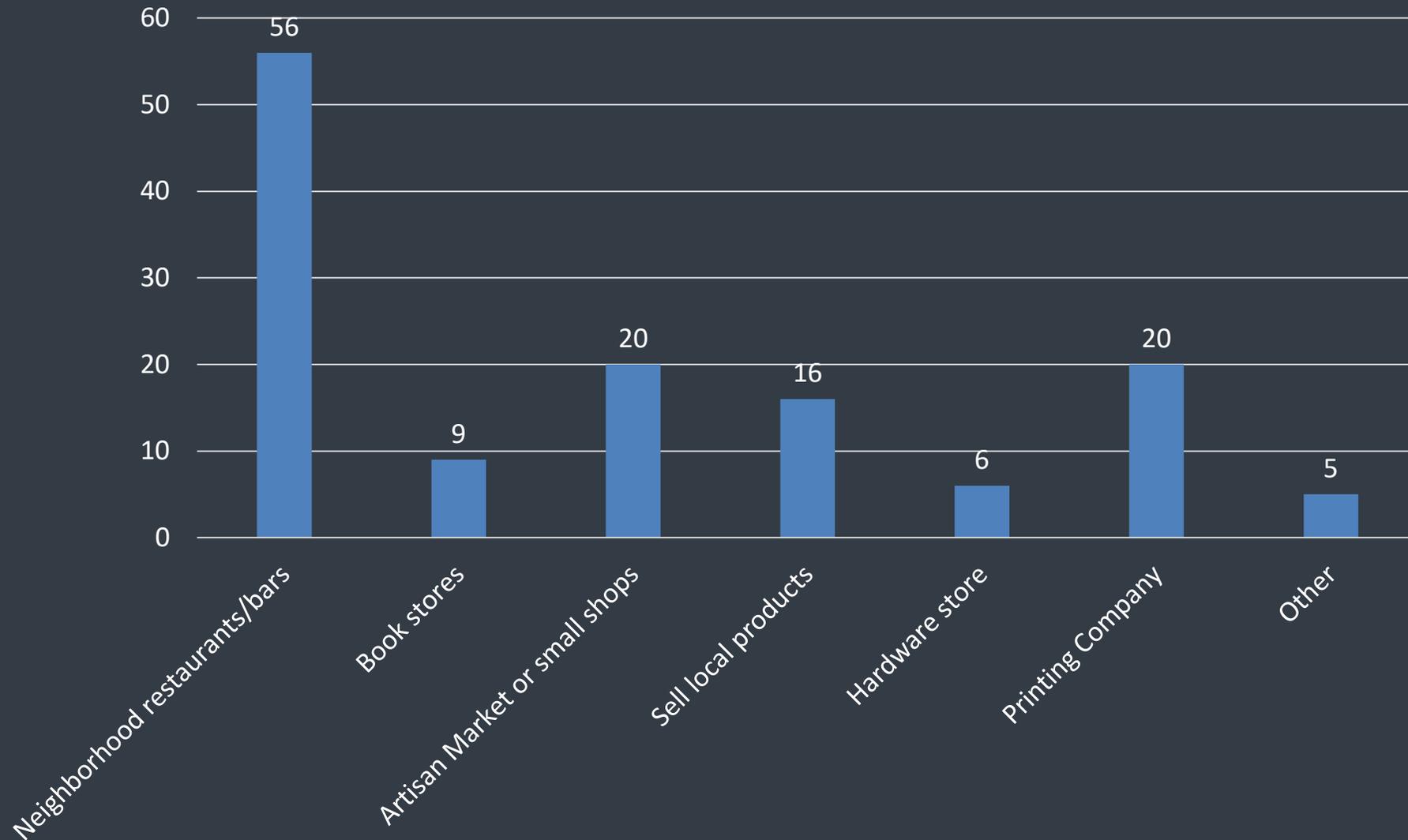
# COVID-19 Response Assistance

- Space donation
- Material donation
- Staff time
- Food donation/pickup site
- Communications/info sharing
- Census Outreach
- Offered to partner with government

# Virtual Programming

- Prior to COVID-19, did you offer virtual educational content?
  - 32% Yes
- Have you increased virtual educational content since?
  - 61% have increased

# Local Business Partnerships



For more information, contact:

Nikiesha Hamilton, Brooklyn Museum  
[Nikiesha.Hamilton@brooklynmuseum.org](mailto:Nikiesha.Hamilton@brooklynmuseum.org)

or

Sara Marinello, Wildlife Conservation Society  
[smarinello@wcs.org](mailto:smarinello@wcs.org)



June 23, 2020

**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in NYC**

**BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK CONSERVANCY TESTIMONY**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Conservancy would like to commend the Council for their hard work and forward thinking about post COVID-19 reopening plans for arts and cultural institutions in New York City.

The Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy works in partnership with Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation -- who is responsible for building and operating the Park -- to bring an innovative portfolio of free and low-cost programming to Brooklyn Bridge Park. Over 150,000 Park visitors per year enjoy our extensive portfolio of arts and cultural events, recreation activities, and environmental education and stewardship.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Park has been a critical lifeline for fresh air, space, respite, and wellness for New Yorkers. As cultural and recreational activities may resume in the City, we understand that parks will be amongst the first venues where the public may safely convene and begin to experience live performance, film screenings, festivals, and cultural events that are the backbone and throughline of NYC civic life. The Conservancy is distinctly positioned to reimagine and reinfuse public programming back into Brooklyn Bridge Park when it can safely begin and looks forward to partnering with local artists and cultural organizations to reactivate its spaces.

Over the past three months, while the Conservancy's programming has been suspended due to COVID-19, we have been reaching out to our audiences and constituents with online activities and resources to enjoy at home or in public parks in a socially distanced manner. The health and safety of all Park visitors continues to be the Conservancy's first priority, and we will work in concert with the Park Corporation in developing protocol for public programming in accordance with the City's reopening guidelines.

We are now beginning to plan for summer activities -- both online and virtual -- and working to adapt our environmental education, youth kayaking, fitness, and arts/cultural programming for the new public health realities and social distancing.

With SYEP cancelled and NYC pools not opening, our young people especially will need enriching -- and free -- outdoor activities more than ever this summer. If permitted by the City, we hope to offer a suite of safe, socially distant programming activities for the public later in 2020. These include:

- Our youth kayak program which targets young people from underserved communities, bringing them to the park for a day of instruction in boating skills and leadership development
- Fitness classes and sports leagues that provide free and heavily-subsidized recreational activities for adults and youth
- Arts and cultural activities currently in exploration such as communal read-alouds, art and nature walks, site-specific performances and workshops, and participatory family stations throughout the Park

We are also planning for virtual programming in the interim until permitting for on-site activities in Brooklyn Bridge Park resumes - for example, working with partners to bring film screenings, book readings, and fitness classes online. We are also excited that presenting a suite of online programming can expand access to our programming and environmental enrichment opportunities in the Park both in the short term and over a longer time frame.

DCLA's support has enabled us to offer an incredibly rich, diverse set of programs enjoyed by thousands of NYC residents per year. This year we have had to cancel several fundraising events and are anticipating a 50% drop in private source revenue. DCLA's FY21 support is more important than ever and will enable us to adapt our programs during this time of COVID-19 as well as offer our full complement of programs and events to Park visitors this coming Fall and Spring 2021 when we will hopefully be able to resume normal activities.

Thank you again for your support.



Eveline Chang-Fritsch  
Director of Programs  
Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy

**DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs Hearing  
6.22.2020 Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation**

I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation. We present Capital One City Parks Foundation SummerStage - New York's largest, free outdoor performing arts festival, taking place in Central Park and 17 neighborhood parks, hosting nearly 100 performances annually for 200,000+ audiences. We also co-manage the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre in Central Park and the traveling PuppetMobile.

City Parks Foundation uses parks to foster community and our festival line-ups celebrate and reflect our city's diversity. Last year, more than 66% of our artists were people of color, and reflected a gender balance of 50-50 male vs. female or non-binary. As we have for more than 30 years, we will continue to give artists a platform to evoke change.

While we have not cancelled SummerStage, we recognize that this will not be a normal season. On June 12th, we launched a digital festival - SummerStage Anywhere - to bring performances to New Yorkers at home. We kicked off with a collaborative program featuring Howard Zinn's *Voices of a People's History*, followed by a Pride celebration in partnership with the Latin Alternative Music Conference. Last Friday, we hosted a very special Juneteenth commemoration in dance. This week, we'll present performances by pop phenom and native New Yorker MAX and global superstar Angélique Kidjo.

Starting in July, SummerStage Anywhere will focus on genres that reflect our city, with interviews and performances by iconic artists, arts engagement for youth, and neighborhood tours and stories centered on arts in parks such as Cedar Park in the Bronx and the birth of hip hop.

COVID has made it resoundingly clear that parks and the arts are indispensable to our communities. When it's time, we would love to reopen SummerStage in Central Park with a special concert outdoors. We have prepared all necessary safety protocols and need just a day to set up our mobile stage. We also hope to have the PuppetMobile on the road for small performances in neighborhood parks around the city.

In the meantime, we are honored to support the city's reopening. Erika Elliott, our executive artistic director, is a member of the Mayor's Arts, Culture, and Tourism Advisory Council, and will also curate a collection for the Mayor's Office for Media and Entertainment's new Virtual NYC initiative.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and thank you for supporting City Parks Foundation and SummerStage.

**DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs Hearing  
6.22.2020 Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation**

I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, which presents Capital One City Parks Foundation SummerStage - New York City's largest, free outdoor performing arts festival, taking place in Central Park and 17 neighborhood parks, hosting nearly 100 performances annually from June-October for 200,000+ audiences. We also co-manage the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre in Central Park and the traveling PuppetMobile.

City Parks Foundation exists to use public green spaces to foster community, while our programs celebrate and reflect the beautiful diversity of our city and our world. Our festival line-ups represent the communities where we present. Last year, more than 66% of our artists were people of color, and reflected a gender balance of 50-50 male vs. female or non-binary. As we have for more than 30 years, we will continue to use our programming to give artists a platform and to provide a voice to evoke change.

While we have not cancelled SummerStage, we recognize that this year will not be a normal season. On June 12th, we launched SummerStage Anywhere, a digital festival that brings performances to New Yorkers sheltering at home. We kicked off with a collaborative program featuring spoken word and performances from Howard Zinn's *Voices of a People's History* followed by a Pride celebration in partnership with the Latin Alternative Music Conference. This past weekend we hosted a special Juneteenth commemoration in dance and spoken word and next weekend, we'll host performances by pop phenom and native New Yorker MAX and global superstar Angélique Kidjo.

Starting in July, our digital festival will focus on genres that reflect New York - hip hop, salsa, jazz, global, indie, and dance - with interviews and performances by iconic artists, neighborhood tours and stories centered on arts in parks (think Cedar Park in the Bronx and the birth of hip hop), and arts engagement for youth.

COVID-19 has made it resoundingly clear that parks and the arts are essential to our communities. When it's time, we would love to reopen SummerStage with a concert in Central Park for essential workers. We have prepared all necessary safety protocols and need just a day or two for setup using our mobile stage. We also hope to have the PuppetMobile on the road for small-scale performances outdoors in neighborhood parks.

While so many cultural institutions are shuttered, we know that they are looking to move programs outside, and we're anxious to partner with other presenters using our mobile stage and live streaming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and thank you for supporting City Parks Foundation and SummerStage.



Corey Johnson  
Speaker of the New York City Council  
Via E-mail: [speakerjohnson@council.nyc.gov](mailto:speakerjohnson@council.nyc.gov)

June 19, 2020

Dear Speaker Johnson,

We are reaching out on behalf of Clubbed Thumb - a 25-year-old downtown arts incubator, and originators of nationally-acclaimed plays and productions, including the recent *What the Constitution Means to Me* on Broadway.

We are urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful work, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, these companies nurture so many shared artists in the New York theater community, which in turn supports and strengthens our work. Playwrights, directors and actors we have recently worked with have also found homes at Ma-Yi, National Black Theatre and many others. We frequently collaborate with NAATCO's Mia Katigbak, who is a Clubbed Thumb Affiliated Artist. A number of CTC theaters have organized groups to attend our programming in support of crossover artists and we have done the same for them—thus expanding both companies' audience bases. This overlap of talent and resources is crucial to the health of our organization, the theater community and New York's artistic sector at large.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

We understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.



We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MS".

Maria Striar  
Producing Artistic Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MB".

Michael Bulger  
Associate Artistic Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Qm.C.". There is a small red mark above the signature.

Quinn Metal Corbin  
Advancement Director



Via E-mail: [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov)

June 19, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

We are reaching out on behalf of Clubbed Thumb - a 25-year-old downtown arts incubator, and originators of nationally-acclaimed plays and productions, including the recent *What the Constitution Means to Me* on Broadway.

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With gratitude,

Maria Striar  
Producing Artistic Director

Michael Bulger  
Associate Artistic Director

Quinn Metal Corbin  
Advancement Director

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am the founding Artistic Director of the Obie Award winning Bushwick Starr Theater in Bushwick Brooklyn, an organization that draws thousands of people year round into our neighborhood through our productions, provides afterschool and summer workshops for our youth, as well as summer classes for our senior community in two of our local senior centers. I am also speaking to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Ridgewood, Queens

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, educate them and give them tools for advancement, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, our theater is blocks away from the Make the Road NYC headquarters who's programming has for decades helped educate and uplift Brooklyn youth. They are a singular organization in North Brooklyn that provides young people of all ages with the skills to be powerful agents of change in their community and in the world.

At the Starr we have recently partnered with National Black Theater to produce Jillian Walker's **SKiNFoLK: An American Show**, a production that was NYT'S Critic's Pick, was deemed Highbrow Brilliant by New York Magazine, and was recently awarded a Broadway Black Antonio Award for Best Orchestrations. Our partnership with NBT was instrumental and at a time when organizations across the city are committing themselves to anti-racist work to break down the barriers that have divided us in this unjust system, partnerships like these represent the future of how white, black, and POC organizations can start to bring our communities into the same rooms and in some small way start to heal the wounds of our division.

As we continue to reel from the effects of the COVID 19 crisis, I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, in numerous public forums we have been told by elected officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget while the \$6 Billion budget for the NYPD remains intact. This feels particularly unjust when the CTC and programs like CASA and SUCASA serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. Please, do not put this money into the *policing* of communities of color. Put this money **into** those communities, into the organizations that help tie communities together, into places that promote positivity, healing, communication, and love.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Noel Allain

**New York City Council**

June 22, 2020

Hearing: **Oversight: DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City.**

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Good morning, Chairman Van Bramer and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss LGBTQ Arts, Culture, COVID-19 and cultural outreach during these challenging times. Also, we thank DCLA and the New York City Council for their ongoing support of the work of our organization and feel compelled to emphasize the critical importance of preserving arts funding and continuing to support cultural organizations across the city. In these times of societal shift, we as cultural spaces can offer ways to imagine and enact alternatives to our current realities. This facet of cultural production is particularly essential when we share the stories and knowledges of historically marginalized people. As the virus continues to be a threat to public health, and the people of our city demand greater justice and equity for Black people, we urge the City to continue its financial commitments to arts and culture.

The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art provides a platform for artistic exploration through multi-faceted queer perspectives. We embrace the power of the arts to inspire, explore, and foster understanding of the rich diversity of LGBTQ+ experiences. We are a home for queer art, artists, scholars, activists and allies, and a catalyst for discourse on art and queerness via a radically transdisciplinary and intersectional approach. The Museum provides citywide educational and arts programming addressing issues facing LGBTQ+ communities to LGBTQ+, its allies, youth, adults, seniors, artists, NYC public school teachers/students, POC, tourists, and museum professionals using an intersectional approach to address a wide range of experiences. The origins of the Leslie-Lohman Museum can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the late 1960s.

In response to COVID-19 we have shifted our work largely to online platforms, and have emphasized , access and intersectionality, in the broadest sense, to guide our approach and activities addressed through online programming, virtual tours, social media outreach, and special events. We believe that this emphasis connects with our ever-growing younger and diverse demographic, confirming that our museum is a place where youth come to identify, learn about their communities, and express themselves freely. For example, our recent virtual workshop and discussion on writing alt-text (the image descriptions by which blind and low-vision persons “see” the internet) focused on the relationship of description to queer and marginalized communities through the practice and observation of queer writers, and drew over 300 online viewers, many from other cultural institutions across the US.

The Museum’s online programming marking the 50th anniversary of the Pride March, is created to offer solace, joy, community, and connection during its temporary closure to help contain the spread of COVID-19. It follows a recent statement of solidarity (<https://www.leslielohman.org/content/black-lives-matter-2>) made by the Museum with those calling for racial justice and an end to all forms of oppression. A vibrant, edgy, and diverse schedule of interdisciplinary art, special events, and free, public activities that honor queer culture and platform multi-faceted queer perspectives begins Wednesday, June 10 on the Museum’s new and expanded website [leslielohman.org](http://leslielohman.org). Highlights include *Can You Save Superman?*, a digital project by New York City artist Jordan Eagles; *Remote Intimacies*, a series of specially commissioned performances on Zoom and Instagram Live; and the *Lockdown Loft*, ([lockdownloft.org](http://lockdownloft.org)) a free and welcoming virtual party, Lockdown Loft ([lockdownloft.org](http://lockdownloft.org)) that will take place on Pride Sunday, June 28 featuring poetry readings, music performances, screenings, and a dance party with DJs evoking the Museum’s home in Soho and

an earlier time in the neighborhood's history.

Throughout June and the summer months, new educational resources will be added on a regular basis, created by the Museum's educators who have made short instructional videos that will be available free on the site and on Instagram TV (@leslielohmanmuseum) and each accompanied by a downloadable guide that provides prompts to approach a work in the collection as well as hands-on activities. These have been made specifically to provide educators and youth with art content that connects to the Museum's educational emphasis on an intersectional and inclusive exploration of queer identity through art.

Laura Raicovich, the newly appointed Interim Director of the Museum said, "In 2020, we may not be able to gather together in physical space for Pride, but we can gather in emotional and social space. The first New York City Pride March was held in 1970, and we intend to mark this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a time of visibility, strength, and solidarity. Stonewall was not, however, the beginning of the LGBTQ rights movement. It was an explosion that came out of enduring years of homophobia and violence. This Pride, that sentiment is magnified by the memory of the Stonewall uprising, and the current protests erupting across the country in response to the murder of George Floyd, and countless others, by sanctioned police brutality. We stand in solidarity with those calling for racial justice and an end to all forms of oppression."

In keeping with its activist history, the Museum also announced that it is dedicating its 2020 Pride programming to the memory and legacy of the late author, playwright, and AIDS activist Larry Kramer, the monumental figure in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Kramer's work and activism, and that of so many queer activists, has had a longstanding and immeasurable impact on LGBTQ+ art, particularly for artists that are part of the Museum's community. These programmatic initiatives are a testament to his enduring legacy, which the Museum continues to celebrate.

Today, thanks to the hard work of generations of activists and artists, our community has gained greater visibility, however the fight for our rights is not over. The Leslie Lohman Museum aims to preserve LGBTQ cultural identity and build community, reclaim scholarship from a queer perspective, and provide a training ground for queer artists and cultural workers. As we continue to stand at the intersection of art and social justice we are a cultural hub for LGBTQ individuals and their communities. Now more than ever, funding for organizations such as ours is fundamental to the healing and uplifting of disenfranchised communities citywide. We stand against injustice everyday and our existence is a testament to the need for opportunities and spaces for complicated yet critical conversations. The city has the opportunity to ensure that our work continues and we hope you will stand with us in calling for the preservation of arts funding for all of our sakes.

#### **Specific Programming Defined:**

***Can You Save Superman?*** A dynamic, responsive art project, *Can You Save Superman?*, is the first to be presented on the Museum's new website. Jordan Eagles (b. 1977), whose ongoing cycle of art and activism addressing the stigma of queer blood, confronts the reality queer men face who want to help during COVID-19 by donating blood and antibody-rich plasma, in a new chapter of work guest curated by Andy Warhol scholar Eric Shiner. (As of April, 2020, even during the COVID-19 pandemic and due to massive blood shortages, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration updated the policy, allowing gay and bisexual men to donate blood if they are celibate for three months.) In this arresting, radical work debuting prior to World Blood Donor Day (June 14), Eagles appropriates a vintage Superman comic book (*Action Comics*, 1971) in which the superhero, in an attempt to save his life, calls on the citizens of

Metropolis for a mass blood transfusion. The experience includes striking details, full-color photography, the preserved original comic book, and a haunting, first person essay by Shiner on Superman, the AIDS crisis, and COVID-19. Shiner aligns Eagles with “Andy Warhol, Philip Pearlstein and countless others who have depicted mainstream superhero characters as representations of hope and victory over evil.”

**Lockdown Loft** To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pride, Leslie-Lohman Museum has created the *Lockdown Loft*, at [lockdownloft.org](https://lockdownloft.org), its virtual Pride party to be held on Sunday, June 28. A schedule of live special performances, encounters, screenings, and ongoing, continuous content accessible throughout the afternoon will take place from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. in a series of ‘rooms,’ rendered in tender, hand drawings that evoke the Museum’s downtown SoHo loft at 26 Wooster Street and New York City of the 1970s and 1980s. The drawings are by artist Buzz Slutzky, credited “with making queer history cool,” and whose art practice incorporates drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, and video. A ‘fire escape’ will feature a live, inclusive, and welcoming chat space in which anyone can participate; a playlist made by singer and viola player Mark Golanco known for his “Ghostlight” series at Café Dancer on New York City’s East Side and his own music that explores alienation, desire, and outlaws; and newly digitized archival footage of Gay Pride marches from the early 1980s shot by experimental filmmaker Jim Hubbard, who made *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (2012) and creator of the AIDS Activist Video Collection at the New York Public Library. Additional participants and content will include a performance by queer sculptor, musician, and filmmaker Rachel Mason known for her cinematic rock operas and director of the documentary *Circus of Books* (2019) chronicling the iconic porn bookstore owned by her parents that served as the epicenter for LGBTQ life and culture in Los Angeles; a Pride themed recommended reading list and a signature video by writer and artist Wayne Koestenbaum, author of *Figure It Out: Essays* (Soft Skull, 2020) and whose work explores the male body; readings organized with the experimental New York City Poetry Project; and an afternoon of DJ sessions taking place from the ‘roof’ to the ‘basement,’ featuring DJ Ushka, whose electronic music weaves stories about migration, queer communities, communities of color, Bronx-born Haitian lesbian DJ Soda Gábor, and Wanda Acosta, an icon in lesbian nightlife in downtown New York. The loft also includes a collaboration with the Museum of Art and Design in New York for a series of makeup and skin care tutorials in the ‘bathroom’ hosted by queer artists.

**Remote Intimacies** A special series of performances and encounters commissioned by the Museum in collaboration with ONE Archives at the University of Southern California Libraries and the Museum of Art and Design, *Remote Intimacies* (2020) debuts June 24 on Zoom and Instagram Live (@leslielohmanmuseum). The ongoing series will explore what it means to produce, experience, and understand art made for a remote audience and considers the transformation of social media platforms from promotional platforms into sites for art making. Series participants include Karen Finley, Joseph Liatella, Anna Betbeze, and Brontez Purnell. The title of the specially commissioned program invokes Manila-born author, cultural critic, podcaster, and gender and sexuality studies professor Karen Tongson’s theories about “communities from whom intimacies cohere across virtual networks of desire.”

**Queer Care** Author and teacher Nancy Agabian, whose work addresses race, ethnicity, cultural identity, feminism and queer identity, will lead a free writing workshop. “Queer Care” will explore issues of care—physical, emotional, and psychological, as well as disability, aging, and the legislation of queer bodies. Using texts from the canon of queer literature as prompts, participants will have the opportunity to create new work in a supportive, encouraging environment. The writing workshop will meet weekly and will also be streamed on Instagram Live (@leslielohmanmuseum). Each workshop will be followed by a prompt posted the following day on the @leslielohmanmuseum Instagram feed.

**Museum Staff:**

**Laura Raicovich, Interim Executive Director, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art.**

Laura Raicovich, currently the Interim Executive Director at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, is dedicated to art and artistic production that relies on complexity, poetics, and care to create a more engaged and equitable civic realm. She is currently working on a book about museums, cultural institutions, and the myth of neutrality (Verso, 2020), and is the recipient of both the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Fellowship and the inaugural Emily H. Tremaine Journalism Fellowship for Curators at Hyperallergic. Until early 2018, she served as President and Executive Director of the [Queens Museum](#) where she oversaw an inviting and vital commons for art, ideas, and engagement. That same year, she co-curated [Mel Chin: All Over the Place](#) (with Manon Slome and No Longer Empty), the first major presentation in New York City of artist Mel Chin in more than 20 years, which occupied the entire Queens Museum and multiple public sites in the city, and commissioned projects by noted artists Mickalene Thomas, Mariam Ghani, and Duke Riley. Raicovich lectures internationally and has organized numerous talks and programs. She graduated from Swarthmore College and holds a Master's Degree in Liberal Studies from the Graduate Center at the City University of New York.

**Stamatina Gregory, Chief Curator and Director of Programs**

Stamatina Gregory leads the development of the Museum's exhibitions program, and works to expand and diversify its holdings. A contemporary curator and art historian, who has organized exhibitions across the US and internationally, she trained at New York University, The Graduate Center, and the Whitney Independent Study Program.

**Transcript Submitted by:**

**Jerry Kajpust, Director of External Affairs, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art**

Jerry Kajpust has been involved with all aspects of the organization since 2008 and now manages institutional giving, government and foundation relationships. He recommends and implements strategic marketing and communications plans, oversees the website and social media. With an MA in Clinical Psychology and a BA in Communications, he has over 20 years of experience across diverse industries focusing on development and improving businesses.

Rachel Watts  
[rachelnagtu@gmail.com](mailto:rachelnagtu@gmail.com)  
917.624.4002

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Rachel Watts and I work at ArtsConnection, a 40 year old Arts in Education organization that provides vital arts programming in over 120 schools in all 5 boroughs, including Harlem where I live.

When schools closed we were able to pivot quickly and begin remote arts instruction to 25 of our schools that were able to include us in remote learning and understood the value of what we were bringing in this difficult time. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. A loss of funding would impact our capacity to provide programming to 50% of our schools, that don't have access to additional funds through sources like PTAs to bring arts instruction into their schools. This would impact the neediest of our schools. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Watts

**Dance Theatre of Harlem** 466 W 152nd Street New York, NY 10031

To Chairman Van Bramer and the distinguished members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations, I am honored to share with you my personal testimony on the impact of the arts in my life and why it is important to restore cultural funding in communities of color. I thank you for your time and attention in reading my testimony. - **Anthony Santos, Dance Theatre of Harlem Company Artist (Harlem Resident)**

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Growing up as a gay black man in Harlem was never an easy journey. One of my biggest struggles was fitting into a society around me, even when society didn't support me or my beliefs. The arts gave my life meaning. When I found dance at a young age I was fortunate enough to find my lifelong best friend. The arts gave me the confidence and courage to be my complete self. For years I've allowed myself to be uncomfortable in order for the majority around me to be comfortable. I will no longer sit with fear in my heart, instead I am using my voice to spark change in the world. The support of my mother always allowed me to feel like a superhero with the ability to do any and everything. She taught me about my culture/history, work ethic and how to be a beautiful human. Rosie Theatre Kids was my first experience with arts education and it changed my life for the better. I fell in love with performing because of the organization and I wouldn't be where I am today without their love and support. My journey as an artist quickly blossomed into a new life where I experienced many blessings. As a gay man the arts struck confidence in me, allowing me to flourish in all forms of life, to walk around and just be my authentic self. I am currently a company artist with the Dance Theatre of Harlem, created by Arthur Mitchell, the iconic vessel that changed the ballet world. It's a blessing to be a part of a legacy that plays a major role in progression for my culture. **The arts save lives, I can say this because the arts saved my life.**

My mother taught me that hard work pays off in the long run. Growing up I watched this woman raise three children all on her own in New York City. She's just like a lioness, by any means necessary she will take care of and protect her children. She taught me the importance of reliability, honesty and kindness. Quitting was never an option in my household. The rule was if I fell down I would immediately have to get back up and try again until I reached my goal. Persistence was instilled in me and my siblings because of my mother, she remained persistent when raising her kids in this expensive city all alone and with just one job. I thought everyone worked the way she did, tirelessly. Because our education system is extremely flawed, my mother made it her business to educate me and my sisters on our history. As a young child it seemed like I was being punished, because I would come home from school to study more, but as I got older, I became extremely grateful for all of her hard work. Most of what my mother taught me about my history was not being taught in the schools. My community has always overcome any obstacle thrown our way, from being kidnapped and enslaved, to doing

the agricultural work in the south, to performing the textile work in the north, to civil rights, to no reparation for all the black lives taken over centuries. My mother taught me tenacity, confidence and the most fabulous work ethic I could ask for. My mother always told me that it's not about how many times you fall down and screw up, it's about every time you decide to get back up and perform bigger and better the next time.

**Growing up Black and gay forced me to have tough skin.** At a young age I became a fighter, not because I wanted to but because I had no choice, I was discriminated against my entire being. Dealing with hate towards my gayness and blackness depending on where I was in the city was overwhelming. Growing up in the heart of Harlem, I was constantly exposed to drugs, abuse, and violence. I witnessed good kids falling into peer pressure so that they could fit in with the society around them. I was fortunate enough to have a loving family that showered me with support but when it was time to leave my apartment I would worry. I would dress and act differently in Harlem to avoid confrontation. I tried my best to blend in with the people around me.

Once the arts found me I felt a sense of completion. The arts became my therapy, allowing me to release all the tension that came from being a queer black man in America. The arts can be an outlet for children battling anxiety, trauma, and how to use their voices. To escape from a reality that's strongly against them. The studio became my second home, it was another family that loved, supported and educated me and many other children. To see other black gay kids working towards something bigger and better inspired me to do the same. To be seen as an artist, and not as black, gay or anything else felt like a breath of fresh air. To see instructors that looked like me gave me the determination to work harder so that I can give back to my community. I quickly became obsessed with the arts and my confidence began to cultivate. I wore clothing that fit my personality, and didn't pretend to be someone else to fit in. At first it was scary because I felt like the only outsider in my community. People would call me names and stare at me when walking down the street, and make fun of my voice, saying that I sound like a girl. I used to get discouraged a lot until my oldest sister told me that people will talk poorly about me until the day I die and they may continue to talk bad about you once I'm dead. My sister told me to always stay true to myself because it's all I have, and if not I will end up miserable. I kept my chin up and walked down the streets of Harlem as a proud gay black man. I noticed as I got older other kids began to come out of their shells and allow themselves to be who they are. I created small change in my community by just being myself and I have the arts to thank for that. I didn't build the courage to be my complete self until I was exposed to the arts. That sense of purpose bled into my regular lifestyle. **Defunding the arts will destroy many children, especially black and gay children that live in underprivileged neighborhoods. We can no longer let our children of color be robbed of their innocence. If anything we need to pour more money into the arts so we can keep our children out of trouble.**

2005 was the year when Lori Klinger, Artistic Director of Rosie Theatre Kids changed my life. Rosie's Theater Kids is an arts education organization dedicated to enriching the lives of children through the arts. RTKids serve students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to experience theater, positively changing the trajectory of their lives by providing comprehensive classes in music, dance, and drama. Lori came to P.S.19 for a fifteen-week musical theatre workshop. Lori immediately captured my attention with her voice and the different ways she could move her body. I wanted to replicate exactly what she did, singing all the notes, and repeating the dynamic movements. I was asked to audition for the year long program after the workshop came to an end. I remember begging my mother to attend the audition and receiving her blessing. My mother's only requirement was that if I joined the program that I would have to finish it well. Summer of 2005 was the first time I met all of the faculty and the other kids that would be a part of my life forever. At the end of the summer there was a recital, my first big performance at City Center. **After that performance I was sold, I knew that performing was my calling in life, my destiny. I told mother and sisters that I wanted to perform for the rest of my life. My mother was slightly skeptical at first because no fifth grader knows what they want to pursue as a career, but this fifth grader did. I was lucky that Lori found and poured all of her knowledge into me at a young age.** She and the rest of the lovely staff dedicated their lives to helping all of the students feel loved, special and needed. I was given opportunities such as performing on The View, The Martha Stewart Show, Racheal Ray and performing beside artists like Rosie O'donnell, Queen Latifah, Cyndi Lauper, Clay Aiken, and many others. I was exposed to a new world that kept me out of the streets and more importantly out of trouble. Infatuated with the art form and all the work that's required to be successful, to strive for perfection even though it doesn't exist.

When I got to high school I attended the Professional Performing Arts School in midtown. Half of my day was dedicated to academic work and the other to my major, musical theatre. Halfway into the first semester I decided to switch my major strictly to dance. I would still be a part of RTKids after school program, but would strengthen my dance technique during normal school hours. Dancing always felt like second nature to me, picking up choreography and emoting behind the movement never felt like work. Becoming a dance major added another layer of work to my pile: school work, Rosie Theatre Kids after school and weekends, dancing for three hours on the weekdays, history lessons with my mother, and all of my academic work. When I auditioned for the dance program at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre I immediately thought I wouldn't get in. I needed more knowledge for both the modern and ballet technique. The technique was foreign to me and a bit scary. The art form of ballet is not natural for the body, the long limbs high in the air and the turning on the tips of your toes is not normal. People who choose ballet have to leave their egos at the door, walk into the studio as a vessel ready to receive all the blessings thrown their way. I continually trained and participated in summer programs such as Joffrey Ballet, Alonzo King LINES ballet and Jacob's Pillow all on full scholarship. I always worked meticulously on my craft because I knew my mother couldn't afford these programs. I was dependent on receiving full scholarships, it was my save and grace.

After spending four years training at Alvin Ailey and seven years at Rosie's Theatre Kids I went off to the University of North Carolina School of the Arts to receive my BFA. One of the hardest decisions I ever made in my life. It was impossible to balance a job with my crazy schedule. I didn't have a car so traveling in North Carolina always seemed like a hassle and the only form of income was the small amounts from work study and my mother. There were so many times where I thought about quitting college all together, the pressure of trying to survive with almost nothing constantly got to my head. I battled with depression throughout my four years in college, because I wasn't used to being on my own, I wasn't used to being like my mother and figuring out how to survive this gift called life, but I never gave up. Hopelessness and irritation traveled with me through my four years but always in the back corner was hope and prosperity. Classes, rehearsals, and performances kept my spirits high. Dance was the one thing I looked forward to during my college years. Every time I stepped foot on the studio or on stage I didn't have to worry about my everyday struggles for survival. I would just pour all my issues into my performance. I told myself that if I worked sharp, solid and passionately I would graduate with a job and never allow myself to experience that financial blockage again.

I received an acceptance e-mail from Artistic Director Virginia Johnson asking me to join the iconic company, Dance Theatre of Harlem in my school's cafeteria. I remember my heart dropping down to my stomach and losing the ability to speak after reading the e-mail. My hard work was finally paying off, and this was just the beginning for me. I began to do some research on the history of Dance Theatre of Harlem. An obligation as an African American male ballet dancer, I did my part to educate myself on the organization. Dance Theatre of Harlem was constantly proving the point that ballet is for everyone. Arthur Mitchell created DTH in response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Mr. Mitchell established that the work of DTH would be to utilize the art form ballet, not only as a tool for transformation but as a platform for social justice. Arthur Mitchell was able to shape all of his passion and create a safe space where diverse voices were heard. Dance Theatre of Harlem was and still is so aware of our blackness but we don't get stuck there. We work profoundly on mastering the classical art form so we can change the world one step at a time. **Others believe that black people aren't mentally capable or socially able to tap into the classical art form. Arthur Mitchell proved those people wrong when he became the first African American to join an all white ballet company in 1955, New York City Ballet. The same year that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a public bus.** Arthur Mitchell has always changed history through his work ethic and passion by consistently giving back to his community. As an organization Dance Theatre of Harlem is a necessity to the world, that ballet is and will always be for everyone. Dance Theatre of Harlem is not just about blacks in ballet, it's about educating the youth on what is possible with hard work and dedication. Defunding arts education is equivalent to taking food away from hungry people.

Fresh out of college, I became a company artist with the legendary Dance Theatre of Harlem. A safe space for diverse voices and history to be represented through ballet. I

didn't start my ballet training until freshman year of high school, which is late in the ballet world but I didn't allow that to get in my way. I did all the extra work needed in order to perform with excellence. To make sure that as a community we soar high and mighty. The stories that my colleagues shared with me throughout my three years in the company were incredible. Many of them moved from their countries to pursue a career in ballet, because there were no opportunities back in their hometowns. To pick up and leave so that they can create a better life for themselves and their families. Dance Theatre of Harlem has brought me all over the world. Countries like Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, and Brazil. When we traveled to Eastern Europe I remember people in the streets pointing and staring at the company with baffled gazes, because they were not used to seeing black people. Of course it was uncomfortable, but it was essential that the world witnessed the light and beauty of Dance Theatre of Harlem. DTH has and continues to break barriers with the arts. The art form is so important to many of us that we would pick up and go far away if it means having a better life, becoming a better person, and building a better universe.

Arthur Mitchell gave my community hope and possibility at a time when all odds were against us. The arts benefit everyone. The arts make people healthier, the arts put New Yorkers to work, and teaches people how to dream. Today is the beginning of a new era, and we will no longer allow voices to go unheard. We must continue to be civic minded together and united. To keep pushing until we are where we need to be. Art has healing powers, the power to resurrect dead dreams. Creative expression can transform our painful reactions to trauma, providing renewed durability to identity. **One of my favorite quotes from black activist and personal hero, Muhammad Ali is "A man who is not courageous enough to take risk will never accomplish anything in life."** Artists are storytellers, we are the beginning of creating change and starting dialect. So now is the time to seek change and create a better future. **As a dancer and a lifelong New Yorker, I am asking the City Council to recognize that the arts are necessary for the recovery of our communities - especially my community of Harlem. Our communities have experienced trauma caused by two pandemics: COVID-19 and the results of years of operating within systems of white privilege that have negatively and disproportionately impacted communities of color.**

**I urge you to be courageous in your decision making and restore DCLA and initiative funding.**



June 23rd, 2020

Dear Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, Commissioner Casals, and Esteemed Council Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. As ED of Dancewave, I'm honored to advocate for arts education and dance education in the public schools, our senior communities and for people with disabilities. Dancewave, a socially conscious non-profit dance education organization has been a force in Brooklyn for over 25 years.

Our programming reaches 6,000 youth and adults annually in over 50 schools, community centers and senior centers across the five boroughs. A majority of our audience identify as black, latinx, and low-income, and several of our programs serve people with developmental disabilities. With the support of city council initiatives and DCLA, we bring transformative skill development and mentorship that enables our audience to succeed as tomorrow's leaders, artists, thinkers, and visionaries. Last year our *Dancewave Through College and Beyond* nationwide symposium facilitated 4.5M in scholarships for young dancers to attend the nation's top college dance programs.



Prior to COVID-19, people of color and low-income persons already faced daily adversity in addition to economic barriers to achieving their dreams. Now, these communities are facing disproportionate hardship, as we can unequivocally state that there is a clear racial disparity in the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The proposed budget cuts will only further this hardship, as these cuts will predominantly affect smaller organizations like Dancewave serving people of color. Simply put, this will be disastrous for our students and their futures, and a detriment to the amazing work they and we have accomplished so far.



Dancewave itself has also experienced recent and severe losses, as all of our programming had previously been in-person prior to COVID closures. We now anticipate a 50% decrease in revenue, and have been forced to issue pay cuts, furlough dozens of working dance teaching artists, and cancel most of our school residencies due to the announcement from the DOE which excludes dance as an essential service in the public schools.

Since the origins of the pandemic, our staff have been laser-focused on alleviating the hardship our communities face by launching free online programming that has reached over 1,500 people citywide and in 9 countries. We had successfully transitioned all of our NYC public school residencies to a virtual platform when we received a memo from the DOE Chancellor that all classes after April 1 would not be paid as they do not qualify as "Essential Services".

**I ask the City Council to advocate for the continued funding for the arts & culture sector for community based organizations through DCLA, including CASA, SUCASA, and Cultural Immigrant Initiative funding.** The unique and diverse cultural life in New York City *cannot function* without the arts organizations. Let's remember why they call this the greatest city in the world and what we need to bring it back to life . KEEP arts education in the schools so we can keep mentoring our youth to be tomorrow's leaders. And reinstate funding from DCLA so that we can continue to bring the inspiring message of resiliency and hope to our public school children, our seniors, populations of all abilities and those who are suffering from illness, poverty and fear. Let there be no doubt: **THE ARTS ARE AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE.**

Thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity to advocate for the arts and for dance education.

Diane Jacobowitz  
Executive/Artistic Director  
director@dancewave.org  
dancewave.org

Please see the kind words from two of our partner schools:

*"It has been a pleasure and an honor to have Dancewave Teaching Artists at the Brooklyn International High School. The Teaching Artists bring their passion, their creativity, their great talent into the classroom and the students' lives are enriched because of it. Dancewave Teaching Artists are transformative, they are knowledgeable, they are wonderful collaborators, and it has been a gift to have them in our school this year."* - **Megan Minturn, Dance Teacher Brooklyn International High School**

*"Dancewave helps our students throughout all grades at MS 447 connect, create, and grow. During the transition to online learning, they have continued to provide excellent, thoughtful teaching for my students who are in even more need these days to move their bodies, connect with their peers, and be creative. I am so thankful we have been able to continue our partnership with Dancewave during this time. The staff is positive and uplifts my students."* - **Julia Farrell, Dance Teacher MS 447**

## **Dancewave Testimony to City Council June 17th, 2020**

Dear Chairman Dromm, Council Member Gibson, Speaker Johnson, and Esteemed Council Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I'm pleased to be here to advocate for arts education and dance education in the public schools, our senior communities and for people with disabilities. Dancewave, a socially conscious non-profit dance education organization has been a force in Brooklyn for over 25 years. Our programming reaches 6,000 youth and adults annually in over 50 schools, community centers and senior centers in all five boroughs. A majority of our audience identify as POC and low-income, and several of our programs serve people with disabilities. We bring transformative skill development and mentorship that enables our audience to succeed as tomorrow's leaders, artists, thinkers, and visionaries. Last year in our Dancewave Through College and Beyond nationwide symposium facilitated 4.5M in scholarships for young dancers to attend the nation's top college dance programs.

Prior to COVID-19, many communities of color and low-income persons already faced daily adversity in addition to economic barriers to achieving their dreams. Now, these communities are facing even more hardship, as we can unequivocally state that communities of color are disproportionately affected by this pandemic. The proposed budget cuts will only further this hardship, as these cuts will predominantly affect smaller organizations like ours serving people of color. Simply put, this will be disastrous for our students and their futures, and a detriment to the amazing work they and we have accomplished so far. City youth locked in their homes without physical and emotional connections are experiencing depression, loneliness, anxiety and in some cases, loss. Dance releases stress and calms the nervous system, which boosts our immune system and helps our bodies fight sickness like the virus.

Dancewave itself has also experienced recent and severe losses, as all of our programming had previously been in-person prior to COVID closures. We now anticipate a 50% decrease in revenue, and have been forced to issue pay cuts and furlough dozens of working dance teaching artists.

Since the origins of the pandemic, our staff have been laser-focused on alleviating the hardship our communities face by launching free online programming that has reached over 1,500 people citywide and in 9 countries. We had successfully transitioned all of our NYC public school residencies to a virtual platform when we received a memo from the DOE Chancellor that all classes after April 1 would not be paid as they do not qualify as "Essential Services".

**I ask the City Council to release this stipulation from the DOE, and allow continued funding for all arts education services back in the schools.** The unique and diverse cultural life in New York City *cannot function* without the arts organizations. The positive inspiring voices from the arts will lead our city and the country to healing. **All of us here..and the youth, seniors, people of all colors and abilities in NYC and the world need this healing now.** Let's remember why they call this the greatest city in the world and what we need to bring it back to life . KEEP arts education in the schools so we can keep mentoring our youth to be tomorrow's leaders. And reinstate funding from the DOE, and for CASA, SUCASA and the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, so we can continue to bring the inspiring

message of resiliency and hope to our public school children, our seniors, populations of all abilities and those who are suffering from illness, poverty and fear. Let there be no doubt: **THE ARTS ARE AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE for all of us.**

Thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity to advocate for the Arts and Arts Education.

Diane Jacobowitz  
Executive/Artistic Director  
director@dancewave.org  
dancewave.org  
182 4th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217

*"It has been a pleasure and an honor to have Dancewave Teaching Artists at the Brooklyn International High School. The Teaching Artists bring their passion, their creativity, their great talent into the classroom and the students' lives are enriched because of it. Dancewave Teaching Artists are transformative, they are knowledgeable, they are wonderful collaborators, and it has been a gift to have them in our school this year."* - **Megan Minturn, Dance Teacher Brooklyn International High School**

*"Dancewave helps our students throughout all grades at MS 447 connect, create, and grow. During the transition to online learning, they have continued to provide excellent, thoughtful teaching for my students who are in even more need these days to move their bodies, connect with their peers, and be creative. I am so thankful we have been able to continue our partnership with Dancewave during this time. The staff is positive and uplifts my students."* - **Julia Farrell, Dance Teacher MS 447**

Triple Threat Performing Arts Academy DBA of D Warren Inc.

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

June 17, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is David Robertson, and I am the CEO for Triple Threat Performing Arts Academy, located in Manhattan.

The mission of TTPAA is to educate children between the ages of 8 and 16 in the culturally enriched and diverse world of the performing arts. Our purpose is to assess and developed talent, encourage individual self-expression, and nurture creativity. This will be accomplished in a holistic environment designed to motivate and prepare students for professional careers in the performing arts.

I have been in business since 2004 and have served over 5000 students during that time. I was recently working with an El Faro Beacon center located in Harlem. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Triple Threat Performing Arts Academy's request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Due to the pandemic we already see that the summer camps and other outlets might be cut for our youth. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

David Robertson  
CEO/Producer/Writer/Choreographer

# DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN ARTS ALLIANCE

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Brooklyn Youth Chorus  
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Dancewave  
Dieu Donn  Paper Mill, Inc.  
DreamStreet Theatre Company  
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Gallim Dance Company, Inc.  
Irondale Ensemble Project  
ISSUE Project Room  
Jack Arts, Inc.  
Jamel Gaines Creative Outlet  
Kumble Theater for the Performing Arts  
Mark Morris Dance Group  
MoCADA  
New York Transit Museum  
NY Writers Coalition  
Open Source Gallery, Inc.  
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StoryCorps  
The Actors Fund  
The Knights  
Theater 2020  
Theater Mitu  
Theatre for a New Audience  
Triangle Arts Association  
Trilok Fusion Arts  
Urban Bush Women  
UrbanGlass  
ViBe Theater Experience  
White Bird Productions

June 22, 2020

To: Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

From: Beth Allen, Executive Director, Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance

Re: Testimony on the impact of COVID-19 on arts and culture

Thank you Chairman Van Bremer, Commissioner Casals, and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations for your attention to the impact of COVID-19 on the arts community and for the opportunity to submit testimony. I write to you as Executive Director of the Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance (DBAA). DBAA is a small arts service organization that brings together a network of over 50 member arts and cultural non-profits in the greater Downtown Brooklyn community to provide peer support, networking opportunities, and a voice in local community issues. Our group spans the visual, performing, literary and media arts, and includes every presenting venue in the Brooklyn Cultural District in Fort Greene, as well as smaller community-based groups, internationally known dance and theater companies, exhibition venues dedicated to visual art, craft, and history. In addition to presenting and creating and commissioning new works, our group includes organizations that offer subsidized studio and rehearsal space, residencies and other services to artists, especially arts education. Their programs serve over 3 million constituents (approximately 50% of programming is offered free of charge) including over 150,000 children served by school and afterschool programs.

On March 20th DBAA had what was to become a weekly All-Member meeting that began our work of navigating the crisis together. I write to bear witness to the issues that have arisen in those meetings and other conversations with DBAA members on the impact of COVID-19. DBAA provides a snapshot of the non-profit arts and culture sector and while each organization has issues specific to their mission and business model, several general themes have emerged.

1) **Though income loss and the consequential need to lay off or furlough staff is ubiquitous, there is no “one way” that organizations have been impacted financially and thus no one-size fits all key to recovery.** Our organizations like many others have lost income from ticket sales, cancellation of galas, and rental income, as well as program service revenue, touring income, sponsorship income, delayed fundraising campaigns, and other causes.

For many, uncertainties around city funding for especially that of CASA, SU CASA, the Immigrant Arts Initiative, Department of Education funding and other FY21 city funding that comes through Council Initiatives or is supplemental to the Executive Budget are particularly important not only in terms of actual dollars, but also in securing matching funds and ultimately, in fulfilling their missions.

2) **Demand for the work of the cultural community has not decreased.** At our very first DBAA COVID-19-response meeting on March 20th, the topic of how to move programs online was raised. In particular, members were especially concerned with getting programs serving their most vulnerable constituents online as soon as possible. Programs for

children and seniors, for constituents with disabilities, programs serving justice-involved youth, as well as those maintaining or providing work for artists and teaching artists were among the very first to move online.

As the crisis has unfolded and programming has evolved, it has remained a priority to serve those most vulnerable. Throughout the crisis many of our organizations have been and continue to serve individuals from the communities hardest hit by COVID-19, especially communities of color in Central Brooklyn and other neighborhoods in Brooklyn. The importance of maintaining continuity of service has been top-of-mind for leaders serving those grappling with the health and humanitarian crises in their communities. In addition, many of our organizations have participated in humanitarian relief efforts, particularly in the distribution of food and more recently in opening their lobbies to protestors.

As we move into a new phase of limited reopening, we are well aware that the work of cultural institutions is an important component to New York City's larger recovery as we continue to provide opportunities to connect the City's residents with one another, and with artistic experiences that offer hope and healing. We are the intangible aliveness in our communities, fostering a sense of identity and offering a sense of belonging to those we serve. This is needed now more than ever.

**3) The future is uncertain.** There is a great deal of enthusiasm for "reopening" in whatever form that takes – including opportunities during the late-summer and early fall to present smaller scale offerings outdoors. Safety is a top concern, as are increased costs for staffing, staff training, PPE and enhanced sanitation protocols.

For those who expect to maintain online programming, funding for software and equipment as well as for staff with expertise in producing online programming – is also greatly desired.

Arts leaders are, by definition, creative problem solvers, and within our cohort there is great determination to rise to the challenges of the moment, but short and longer-term economic concerns are a tremendous worry right now.

**4) All plans for recovery must prioritize equity.** While the demographics of audiences served and represented by our total membership varies widely, our cohort notably includes prominent organizations devoted to presenting and supporting work by Black artists, including MoCADA, 651 Arts, ActNow Foundation, BRIC, Girl Be Heard, Jamelle Gaines Creative Outlet, RestorationART, Urban Bush Women, viBe Theater Experience and others, and many that serve Black and Brown communities.

We have long been aware that there has been underinvestment in the Black organizations in the geographic area we serve; not only are there fewer organizations led by and serving people of color in a neighborhood that is historically Black and remains diverse, but these organizations tend to be smaller and undercapitalized. Our membership follows larger-scale patterns of under recognition of artistic excellence of artists of color and of programming that primarily serves Black and Brown audiences. We all hope that the attention being brought to this issue through the Black Lives Matter movement will result in real change in the way our cultural institutions and communities are valued and funded. And while we know the City and the Department of Cultural Affairs is but one the many agents of this change in this area, it is an extremely important one. We would be happy to collaborate on addressing these issues with DCLA or other agencies.

The non-profit cultural sector in Downtown Brooklyn has attracted the attention of the world in recent years, in no small part because of its vibrancy, its diversity, and also the thoughtful ways

our organizations engage with their communities. Funding provided by the DCLA Cultural Development Fund, as well as through City Council Initiatives, and the Department of and other city agencies is especially important to serving those most vulnerable in our communities, including many of the neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19, the majority of which are Black and Brown. Eliminating or reducing the FY21 budget for DCLA would be a disaster not only in terms of our ability to continue to serve our constituents, but for an equitable recovery.

Many thanks again for the opportunity to testify, and for your shared commitment to the arts in New York City.



BROOKLYN BALLET

Testimony - DCLA Committee Hearing - June 21, 2020

Greetings Deputy Leader Van Bramer and all members of the NYC Council.

First a huge thank you to Council Members, Alan Maisel, Steve Levin, Matthieu Eugene, Robert Cornegy and Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo for supporting Brooklyn Ballet's *Elevate* public school dance residencies and *The Brooklyn Nutcracker*. And thank you to those Members who came before you, the late Lew Fidler, David Yassky and Attorney General Letitia James for supporting Brooklyn Ballet.

Culture impacts communities. *Elevate*, Brooklyn Ballet's public school dance residency has reached more than 14,300 Brooklyn children since 2005. We serve Canarsie, Flatlands, Weeksville, Vinegar Hill, Downtown Brooklyn, Carroll Gardens and East New York. Brooklyn Ballet offers talented *Elevate* students scholarships to attend Brooklyn Ballet School in Downtown Brooklyn. Indeed, *Elevate* has brought us some of our most talented students – one of our first *Elevate* graduates now has a professional contract with Sofia National Opera Ballet - Bulgaria, another dances professionally with Norwegian National Ballet, and a third has joined Houston Ballet. Countless others have gone on to arts focused high schools and college dance programs. Without CASA and discretionary funds none of this happens.

Radical inclusivity is one of the hallmarks of Brooklyn Ballet. *The Brooklyn Nutcracker*'s cast of 35 ethnically diverse dancers include immigrant dancers from Cuba, Trinidad, China, and Japan, as well as over 30 young dancers from Brooklyn Ballet School. In 2019 *The Brooklyn Nutcracker* at the Kings Theatre reached a total of over 4,000 audience members including over 1,000 public school children, seniors, foster kids, and adults with disabilities, who attended at low or no cost. Cultural Immigrant Initiative grants makes *The Brooklyn Nutcracker* possible.

Proposed cuts to discretionary funding disproportionately impact smaller organizations, run by and serving communities of color like Brooklyn Ballet. Communities hardest hit by COVID need the healing and community strengthening that culture provides.

Proposed cuts to arts in our public schools will be disastrous for students, educational outcomes, schools, and communities.

Culture is in crisis and without support, many organizations will go under. Without cultural organizations, the impact of this crisis will be deeper, the recovery will take longer.

Lynn Parkerson  
Founder and Artistic Director  
Brooklyn Ballet



**BROOKLYN** BALLET



Danielle Martinez, MS 915 CASA student dances through the school hallway

## **Brooklyn Ballet's CASA Program**

### *Elevate*

Elevate, Brooklyn Ballet's dance residency in under-resourced public schools reached more than 14,000 Brooklyn children since 2005. Elevate uses the innovative "Language of Dance" (LOD) system to teach children ballet vocabulary and achieve a physical and intellectual understanding of dance. Ballet training combined with LOD provides children from under-resourced public schools a way to develop self-confidence, self-discipline and critical thinking. At the conclusion of the residency, Brooklyn Ballet offers talented Elevate students 50-100% scholarships to attend Brooklyn Ballet School in Downtown

Brooklyn. In this way we stay connected to our public school students and see their continued growth over time. Indeed, Elevate has brought us some of our most talented students- one of our first Elevate graduates now has a professional contract with Sofia National Opera Ballet - Bulgaria, another dances with Norwegian National Ballet, and a third has joined Houston Ballet.

**Brooklyn Ballet currently runs *Elevate* CASA programs at PS 276 in Canarsie, PS 251 in Flatlands, MS 211 in Canarsie, and MS 915 in Downtown Brooklyn.**

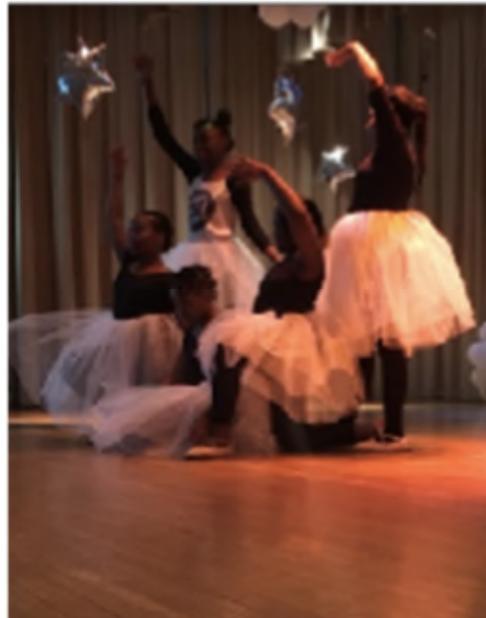
Additional Elevate schools include PS 243 in Weeksville, PS 307 in Vinegar Hill, PS 58 in Carroll Gardens, and the Dock School in Dumbo, supported by the NYC Department of Education, PTA support and private foundations.

*Studying at Brooklyn Ballet has enriched my life. I believe Brooklyn Ballet will set me up for studying dance at a performing arts high school and in college. Dance motivates me to work hard and do my best in school. Brooklyn Ballet has helped me improve my technique and increased my love for dance. My experience and participation in The Brooklyn Nutcracker was amazing. It was my first big production. It made me want to dance more than ever. It showed me that if you work at dance you can do anything.*

-Danielle Martinez, Current Elevate Student, MS 915

*The CASA program offers us the opportunity to meet the needs of students' varied interests, learning styles and ongoing need for exposure to new experiences. Arts programming provides important opportunities of creative outlet for young people, developing personally through self-expression, while learning the values to focus, persistence, communication and teamwork.*

-Leslyn Ward, Assistant Principal, PS 276



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**Brooklyn Ballet - 160 Schermerhorn Street | Brooklyn, NY 11201 |  
718-246-0146, 718-781-1726 | [www.brooklynballet.org](http://www.brooklynballet.org)**

## ***The Brooklyn Nutcracker***

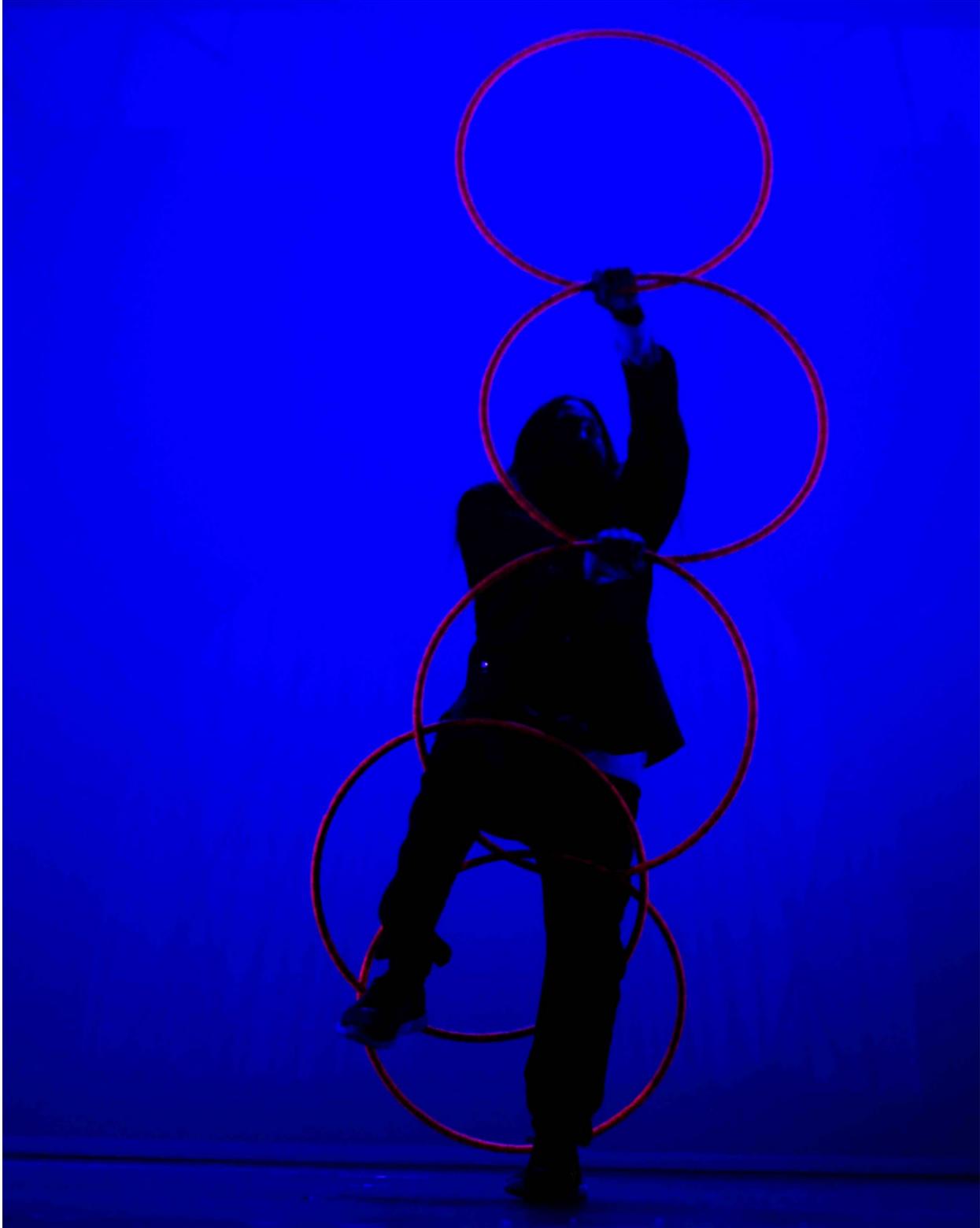
**made possible by a Cultural Immigrant Initiative grant**

Last year, *The Brooklyn Nutcracker at the Kings Theatre* was a huge success, bringing exciting multi-cultural dance forms to the stage, reaching a over 4,000 audience members. Our community matinee reached over 1,000 children and adults from districts all across the borough, who attended at low or no cost. Attendees included public school students, senior center members, foster children, and adults with intellectual and other disabilities. Our public performance brought over 3,000 audience members to Flatbush, Brooklyn for an unforgettable evening of dance. The production seamlessly integrates ballet, baroque, hip-hop, African-fused modern dance, Middle Eastern dance, Classical Chinese dance, Spanish flamenco, and Native American hoop dancing. **Radical inclusivity** is one of the hallmarks of our organization, and *The Brooklyn Nutcracker* features a cast of 35 dancers; 85% are dancers of color including immigrant dancers from Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, China, and Japan, as well as over 30 young dancers from Brooklyn Ballet School.

*“Conceived by Brooklyn Ballet’s founder and Artistic Director Lynn Parkerson, this new twist on an old favorite transforms familiar characters and scenes to represent the diverse and vibrant cultures of Brooklyn... [the dancers are] “joyful and buoyant”, “both laser-sharp and effortlessly relaxed,” and “each in their own style, yet in ideal harmony.”*

*- Cecly Placenti, The Dance Enthusiast, Dec 22, 2018*

**Brooklyn Ballet - 160 Schermerhorn Street | Brooklyn, NY 11201 | 718-246-0146, 718-781-1726 | [www.brooklynballet.org](http://www.brooklynballet.org)**









*The Brooklyn Nutcracker 2018 Photos by Anna Kuzmina*



June 11, 2020

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

My name is Lee Sunday Evans. I am reaching out as the recently appointed Artistic Director of Waterwell. Additionally, I have been an active professional freelance theater director, choreographer in NYC for 10 years. I have had the honor of winning two OBIE awards, and working at and with dozens of non-profit theater and arts education companies in NYC.

I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan where Waterwell has been the theater company in residence at the Professional Performing Arts School, a NYC public school, for the past 10 years. In this capacity, our company runs a conservatory-style training program for over 200 students each year, which is made up of students from all five boroughs of the city.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I have been greatly impacted by imaginative, visceral, rigorous, moving productions I've seen at The National Black Theatre, The Classical Theatre of Harlem, and NAATCO. NBT's production of *The Peculiar Patriot* is so vitally important and should be seen around the country; just one example of how they shepherd and support works led by Black women theater artists. CTH's consistently brave, boundary-pushing productions of works from the classical canon are vital to the NYC theater which is predominantly focused on the development of new plays. *Macbeth* is a play I have wrestled with as a director, and CTH's production of it was unflinching and haunting - the choices they made to activate this notoriously slippery text have and will continue to stay with me for a long time, more so than many other productions of it I've seen. I have worked with NAATCO as a director, and collaborated with many brilliant artists who call this theater their home, including the formidable Artistic Director, Mia Katigbak. NAATCO's production of *Awake and Sing* was riveting and revelatory, it also cracked open many pockets of the NYC theater eco-system about how plays perceived to be confined to the white cannon could be interpreted and embodied by artists of color. I also know how hard it is to be a freelancer in this city and have to advocate for the support and home that NBT, CTH and NAATO provides for many freelance artists who have created work that inspired and challenged me personally as a colleague in the field, and who are having (and will continue to have) enormous impact on the evolution of our art form as a whole.

As a member of our city's beloved theater community, I want to whole-heartedly express how vital it is that all the organizations in the Coalition for Theaters of Color have the financial



support they need to thrive, grow, and continue to produce theater, especially amidst the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Lee Sunday Evans  
Artistic Director, Waterwell  
[lee@waterwell.org](mailto:lee@waterwell.org)

June 11, 2020

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a nearly twenty-year resident of New York – most recently, as a resident of Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, where I've lived since early 2015. I moved to the city immediately after graduating from college, and over the past 19 years, I have attended hundreds of plays at commercial and independent theaters across the boroughs. While I work in technology, theater is a deep passion of mine, and New York's uniquely diverse and exciting theater scene is one of the primary reasons I chose to build a life here, and one of the biggest reasons I've never left.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I believe support for the CTCs is critically important. We must ensure the art we make and consume in the city isn't coming from a predominantly white perspective. Systemic racism is a tree with deep roots and many branches, and one way to begin to dismantle it is to ensure that people of all races are presented with perspectives that vary from their own. A failure to prioritize funding for art from the communities represented by the CTCs would be a failure to live up to our values.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

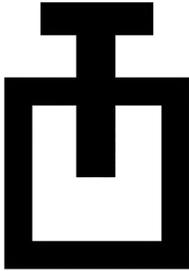
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Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Megan

Megan Blocker  
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**PATRICK ROUSSEAU**  
**STEPHANE SAMUEL**

Dear New York City Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of The Tank and as a member of the NYC Arts and Culture community.

The Tank is a 17-year old nonprofit presenter and producer committed to breaking down the economic barriers that emerging performing artists face in the development and presentation of their work. From our 2-theater complex in Midtown Manhattan, we support 2,500 artists, present over 1,000 performances of over 400 unique projects, and welcome 36,000 audience members annually. Our work spans theater to dance to music to puppetry to comedy to storytelling to public affairs - and often blurs the lines between those genres. The Tank is one of the only remaining organizations in New York City devoted to supporting and making space for emerging artists, and we are the only organization focused on emerging artists that is operating at this scale. We are often an artist's first paid gig in NYC and their first opportunity to share their work with the public.

The initial impact on our organization of closure due to COVID-19 was swift and devastating. At The Tank, our income is derived from 65% earned revenue, including Box Office and co-production income. With the closure of our space, we have ended performances through June for a total of 273 cancelled performances among 89 different artists and groups. Four of our co-productions, New York or world premieres with 16-21 performances up for critical review, have been postponed. We currently project our earned income losses at \$145,000 in ticket revenue for this initial period of closure and \$10,000 - \$15,000 of additional revenue loss for each month we remain close after that. New York City's small and mid-sized arts organizations- our peer organizations- project steep revenue losses—from 17 percent to 50 percent or more of their annual operating budgets.\*

Additionally, as a true community arts space, our artists have not only lost opportunities to rehearse, share new work, and generate their own income via our Box Office but they have also lost an artistic home where they can gather with each other and be valued as generative artists.

While museums, theaters, studios, and arts spaces have been shuttered, culture and the arts never closed. The arts and the work of artists have remained welcome company throughout quarantine, providing



connection, escape, and sustenance for our souls. On March 17th, at the request of our artistic community and staff, The Tank implemented a virtual and online programming hub to help our community of artists connect and feel supported at this difficult time. We began CyberTank, a weekly, remote, multidisciplinary arts gathering that is publicly shared online. CyberTank presents 5-10 shows weekly, featured more than 100 artists to date, and we plan to sustain CyberTank as another platform and tool for our artists through the foreseeable future.

The City is in crisis, and we understand the need for creative solutions to sustain the City and help our communities heal. The Tank, in addition to its virtual programming on CyberTank, is in dialogue with artists about ways to make socially-distanced performance to be performed outdoors in parks, privately-owned public spaces, or in streets already designated as open space for pedestrians and/or restaurants. Artists are leaders in innovation and creative problem-solving, and our artists are ready for this challenge. We are eager to find opportunities for artists to work and earn a living so that they are not forced to leave our city, which would negatively impact the future vibrancy of a city that is such a hub for Arts and Culture.

Culture is key to local economies and to people's attachment and investment in the neighborhoods they live, work, and visit. Cultural centers regenerate neighborhoods and support local businesses. Culture employs nearly 400,000 people\*\* and generates \$110 Billion in economic activity for New York City.\* Neighborhoods with cultural assets show better outcomes for education, aging, crime, health, and community well being.\*\*\*

Like the city, Arts and Culture is also in crisis- the future of the Arts in NYC is at stake. Independent artists may leave our city at an increased rate due to the difficulty of sustaining themselves without work or sufficient relief. Many organizations are at the risk of closing for good. Without Arts and Cultural organizations, the impact of this public health and economic crisis will be deeper, and the recovery will take longer.

We believe that budgets are moral documents and ask that the Council consider what kind of city we want to be. Culture, which is central to the civic fabric of our communities, MUST be at the table as we reimagine and rebuild our city.

We ask that the City Council 'keep culture whole' for the health of our city, meaning both funding to DCLA and the discretionary and initiative funding.



As a member of the NYC Arts and Culture community, I also want to highlight the invaluable work being done by groups receiving discretionary and initiative funding, specifically the Coalition of Theaters of Color. This group is run by and serves communities of color, who have been most impacted by COVID-19. I ask that funding to The Coalition of Theaters of Color not be decreased so that their work is not further jeopardized or compromised due to lack of resources.

The road to recovery will be a long one, but we look forward to partnering with City Council on a more equitable and just future.

Thank you for your time and attention,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle M.J. King". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danielle King  
Managing Producer, The Tank

\*Center for an Urban Future

\*\*Comptroller's Report on the Creative Economy 2019

\*\*\*Social Impact of the Arts Project; UPenn



June 19, 2020

RE: Testimony for City Council Finance Committee Hearing

To the Honorable City Council Members:

The 52nd Street Project is a 39 year-old community based arts organization located in and serving the young people of Hell's Kitchen. We work with kids starting at the age of 9 or 10 and they stay with us for 8 years until they graduate, and even beyond, with scholarship programs for higher education.

Our programs are free to the children who participate and our performances are free to our audiences. We have not stopped programming since the pandemic began and we are serving approximately 80 members with 10 different programs at this time. In addition, about 100 artist volunteers are participating in these programs as well. Proposed cuts to discretionary funding disproportionately impact smaller organizations run by and serving communities of color; communities hardest hit by COVID need the healing and community strengthening that culture provides. We respectfully request that discretionary funding be maintained at contracted levels in a time when other funding is already being drawn away to so many worthy health related issues. In addition, we feel it is critical that DCLA's funding be kept whole in order to support our work during this time and in order that the City survive and recover with the economic energy and community strengthening work of Culture.

Respectfully,

Carol Ochs  
Executive Director

789 Tenth Avenue  
New York, NY 10019

212/333-5252  
212/333-5598

EMAIL [info@52project.org](mailto:info@52project.org)  
WEB [52project.org](http://52project.org)

**Five Angels Theater**

**NATALIE HIRSCH**  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**CAROL OCHS**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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On behalf of the Historic House Trust of New York City (HHT) and the community members who rely on our sites as local centers of culture and education, I implore you to use your voice to help sustain [New York City's 23 public house museums](#) through the COVID-19 pandemic. Our City's museums are facing unparalleled challenges that cannot be resolved through philanthropy alone. **With sufficient City support, these public assets can weather this crisis and continue to serve their diverse communities well into the future.**

HHT, in partnership with NYC Parks, preserves, promotes, and provides expertise to 23 publicly-owned historic sites in all five boroughs. Located on parkland, these 23 museums are open to all and are instrumental in creating appealing amenities, engaging programs, and a distinct sense of place for their surrounding neighborhoods. **These historic house museums provide a window into the lives of all New Yorkers, past and present, and speak to New York City's history of resilience.**

Before COVID-19 hit, these sites thrived as cultural centers, attracting more than 860,000 visitors annually, nearly a third of whom are local schoolchildren. They engage the public through distinctive placemaking programming that addresses inclusivity, universal accessibility, ecology, history, science, and the arts. Every dollar these museums receive through grants, private donations, City allocations, and other revenue-making sources is invested back into the communities they serve. **The cultural, educational, and community activities that these historic sites provide are essential to New York's cityscape.**

These 23 historic sites, and the workforce they employ, have been devastated by this crisis. Each one has shut their doors to comply with mandates from the City to limit the spread of the virus. With little warning, they were forced to cancel all public programs, school field trips, fundraising events, and other forms of revenue generation that earned significant dollars to support their missions. Many of these museums were especially vulnerable because they stand in underserved communities and do not have the financial resources of larger cultural institutions. **The financial implications are dire, with losses of up to 50% of annual revenue and cuts of up to 90% of their staff.**

City budget cuts will make this grave situation catastrophic. These museums rely on discretionary allocations from their Councilmembers, the Department of Cultural Affairs, the NYC Parks Department, and other city agencies. **Without sustained City support, many will be forced to close their doors forever.**

We are indebted to the work the City is doing for all New Yorkers during this unprecedented time, and we acknowledge that the City will have to make some painful decisions in the months to come. **But without these distinctive places, where will future generations of New Yorkers learn our history?** And how will our City ever bounce back without the sites that tell our stories and drive our tourism? Please add your voice as an advocate for their survival and support a budget that includes funding for our City's historic houses. Together we can ensure that this great city emerges stronger and more united than ever.

In solidarity,



John Krawchuk, *Executive Director*

Since the beginning of the PAUSE in New York, small arts venues have been at a standstill, unable to generate any revenue while public events remain on hold. Meanwhile, rents are due each month with no relief. As theater space after theater space announces permanent closures, we call on city officials to take action and protect small businesses and performance venues throughout the city.

These indie venues of 99 seats or less operate on the thinnest margins, without the benefit of multi-million dollar endowments or CIG status, yet they generate \$1.3 billion in economic output for the city. Furthermore, these venues are the birthplaces of the non-traditional theatrical techniques now being touted by larger institutions as the future of performance, such as site specific, Promenade and immersive experiences to name a few.

As the already limited number of rehearsal and performance spaces accessible to indie theater companies continues to dwindle, the artists tasked with creating the innovation needed to revive our culture, refresh our economy, and rally our neighborhoods are being forced into untenable financial circumstances. We must cancel rent.

Our community stood up and made painful sacrifices for the health and safety of our beloved city. Now, this often overlooked sector is simply asking that, while we are reinventing the cultural landscape, we are not also burdened with a back-log of debt accrued during a period when our work was involuntarily interrupted. Without full rent cancellation we fear upwards of 25% of our indie venues will shutter for good post Covid19. A loss of that magnitude impacts the entire cultural makeup of the city and leaves thousands of artists without a home to do their work. No rent deferral. We must cancel rent.

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, The League of Independent Theater and IndieSpace hosted a town hall to discuss rent cancellation. Over 400 indie theater makers were in attendance. At that town hall, we heard from venue owners like Angel Gil Orrios of Thalia Spanish Theater, who not only had 80% of his faculty sick with COVID-19, he still has to pay rent while his venue is shut down by government mandate. Links to his testimonial and others are included below.

The League is calling upon the New York State legislature and New York City Council to suspend commercial rent payments (currently introduced in the State Legislature as [S8125A](#) / [A10224A](#)) and provide long-term rent stabilization to give arts venues a fighting chance to survive this pause. We ask that the DCLA support the #cancelrent initiative for the good of our small arts venues.

Small live arts venues are also searching for guidelines on how to re-open safely. The League of Independent Theater has created a smart set of guidelines that would provide a pathway to safe, community-based, small public performance in the LIT Live Arts Permit, presented to the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment and the office of Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer. The proposal is included below.

Just as dining is seen as a central part of life in NYC, access to live art is a quality of life issue for NYers, and if meals can be had outside, so can performance. We hope that these measures outlined in the included LIT Live Art Permit Proposal, crafted through conversation with many artists and arts organizations that specialize in outdoor performance, can be put in place so that live, open air performance can be fast-tracked to take place in the city during the Phase 2 and Phase 3 of re-opening.

We appreciate the bill put forward by Councilmembers Cumbo, Van Bramer and Kallos to outline regulations for live performance, and fully support this action. (File # Int 1967-2020). We also insist that, when this report is created, that representatives from the Independent Theater Community are included. We note that no Indie Artists or Indie Theater organizations are part of the Mayor's Task Force Advisory Councils. This oversight cannot be repeated when the stakes are so high for the health and future of the thousands of independent artists who call NYC home.

Finally, we ask that the DCLA and the City facilitate bulk purchases of PPE, including masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant, so that these items may be available to the independent theater community as low cost. We also hope that distribution can be facilitated.

Additional links are provided below. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Aimee Todoroff,  
Acting Director, The League of Independent Theater

Small Venue Rent Forgiveness Town Hall Highlight Reel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lvp-sCEw6EY&feature=youtu.be>

Small Venue Rent Forgiveness Town Hall Testimonials:  
Angel Gil Orrios, Thalia Spanish Theater: <https://youtu.be/HaNB4QTNl6I>  
Christina Perry, The Chain Theater: <https://youtu.be/JqNQn5rSkz0>  
Terry Greiss, Irondale Ensemble Project: <https://youtu.be/HhTtWIXAEuU>  
Erez Ziv, Frigid NY: <https://youtu.be/S2YFY7JU5Vc>  
Ana Mari de Quesada, The Wild Project: <https://youtu.be/kOb6gKHDNFE>

### **LIT Live Arts Permit Proposal – June 20, 2020**

As New York City emerges from the PAUSE mandated by the COVID-19 crisis, Independent artists and Independent arts organizations are looking to the City for guidelines to bring live performance to the citizens of NYC in a way that is safe, timely, cost effective, and improves the quality of life across all five boroughs.

Independent Theaters (venues that are 99 seats or less) and Independent Artists (individual performing artists who work in Independent venues or in non-traditional spaces) are community based, small arts organizations that are uniquely positioned in this moment to create live performances of the right scale in open-air, public spaces with social distancing protocols in place.

We are asking New York City to create a fast-track process to approve live arts performances that adhere to the requirements listed below. Access to art is essential, especially at this time.

Access to live arts is a quality of life issue for New Yorkers. Independent live arts provide educational opportunities for children, offer moments of reflection and common focus to a community, allow engagement opportunities for the elderly, and are key to mental health.

It has been proven that independent live arts serve as economic and social anchors within communities by incentivizing people to activate neighborhoods and patronize nearby small businesses such as bars, restaurants, and shops. According to a 2019 study, commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, small live arts generate \$1.3 billion in economic output, support more than 8,400 full time jobs plus countless part time and freelance workers, and pays more than \$512 million in wages per year.

The LIT Live Arts Permit is a pathway for small, independent, community based arts organizations to be fast-tracked for a permit to perform outdoors, in public spaces, in a way that is safe and consistent with the needs of the community during the reopening. These small scale performances would help ease the transition for New Yorkers as the city moves through Phase 2 and 3, serving as models for how to best up-scale live arts events for Phase 4.

The LIT Live Arts Permit is ideal for performances of a scale falling in between the Busker permit and a traditional outdoor performance. The performances should be designed to serve the artists and audience from the neighborhood where the performance is happening, and to be of a size that allows for social distancing. Live Arts encompasses but is not limited to theater, poetry readings, dance, music, circus arts, puppetry, clowning, improvisation and comedy.

This program will allow applicants to respond quickly and responsibly to the artistic demands of this moment. Ideally the LIT Live Arts Permit would be available without a fee to the artists or arts organizations.

## Requirements

- The performance time is capped at less than one hour
- Performances are without loudspeaker amplification or lighting equipment. Small, hand held, battery operated lighting or sound equipment may be used for artistic purposes, but are not to be intended for general illumination or amplification beyond typical playback.
- Amplification beyond a standard hand-held device may be approved on a case by case basis and may require an additional fee.
- Cables may not be run across footpaths.
- There is to be no altering or damage to city structures.
- Audience and performers are socially distanced. The size of the performance space will determine the number of audience members that can safely be accommodated with social distancing practices in place.

- Outdoors or in Open Air Spaces only.
- Nearby surfaces or items that are touched frequently must be cleaned with disinfectant before and after the performance.
- Performances may begin between the hours of 11am and 8pm.
- Available to Independent Theater and Independent Artists ONLY
- BIPOC artists and BIPOC lead organizations will receive priority in approval.
- The company or artist is responsible for providing masks and hand sanitizer as well as ensuring social distancing. This may require an additional company or staff member to monitor the amount of people gathered for the performance.

## Recommendations

- Use Virtual Tip Jar or a similar app in addition to or instead of cash tips.
- Have a plan for entrances and exits that do not bottleneck. Ideally, audience would enter through one space and exit through another, allowing for fluid movement in and out of the space. When this is not possible, consider asking audience members to leave in small segments at a time.
- Place non-permanent markers indicating 6 feet to help maintain social distancing.
- Signs and graphics may be helpful in not only communicating with the public, but also in reminding people of social distancing and mask protocols. Consider using visual and audio instructions, either through announcement or through QR codes that can be scanned, so that the information is accessible to audience members of different abilities.
- Remember that the area of space will determine the audience size and plan accordingly.
- Think about performance structure that allows audience members to move through a space. Examples: Promenade performances, a series of short, connected performances that are distanced from each other.
- Consider the use of technology to bypass traditional amplification; use apps and smartphones to share sound cues with audience members, as opposed to using amplification which may disrupt neighboring homes or businesses.
- To best serve the community, companies or artists should present work within the neighborhood, council district or community board district in which they live or operate.
- Artists and Companies should respect the primacy of the community in which they are performing, sharing the space with those who may already be present or who also want to use the space.

Dear Council Speaker Corey Johnson, Council Members and Commissioner Casals:

I am reaching out as the Artistic Director of Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, one of the oldest Off-Broadway theaters in New York City. Since 1994, Rattlestick has been a place where some of the nation's most celebrated playwrights have tested their boldest ideas, and where artists and audiences come together in conversation around urgent social issues. Our mission is to produce ambitious plays to inspire empathy and provoke conversation that will lead to positive social change. In order to achieve this mission, we believe it is vital that our theater, and New York City's theater landscape as whole, reflects the vibrant diversity of our communities and our City.

I am also writing to you as a 45-year old white Jewish woman, mother of a 7 year old, who is a resident of East Midwood, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I have seen incredible theater pieces at a number of the Coalition of Theatres of Color including MaYi, National Black Theater, AMAS Musical Theater, among others and am fortunate enough to have worked directly on productions as a co-producer and an artist with MaYi and the Hip Hop Theater Festival. I have been inspired by the work of these companies and the others that are part of the coalition, by the work of the artists, by the depth and humor of innovation of the work, and humbled to sit in theater spaces that are not dominated by the white experience.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Daniella Topol

Daniella Topol  
Artistic Director  
Rattlestick Playwrights Theater

**Daniella Topol**

Artistic Director

Rattlestick Playwrights Theater

she/her/hers



[212-627-2556](tel:212-627-2556) | [917-627-4269](tel:917-627-4269)



[dtopol@rattlestick.org](mailto:dtopol@rattlestick.org)



[www.rattlestick.org](http://www.rattlestick.org)



224 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an ally and collaborator of new work. I've been a working member of the theater community in New York City for 16 years. I work all over and have been fortunate to help develop such pieces as Jackie Sibblies Drury's Pulitzer prize winning play *Fairview* as well as Pulitzer runner up and Tony Award nominated *What the Constitution Means to Me*. In the last 15 years I've stage managed all over New York and had the opportunity to create work with hundreds of artists. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Brooklyn and patronizes many of the institutions covered under this budget.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, over the years I've seen work at many of these institutions. Ma-Yi and NAATCO are two companies that I have a strong affinity for. Without these companies it is doubtful that I would have the career that I have today. They not only exposed me to work I would not otherwise have seen, but they also took me in and welcomed me as a member of the team. I continue to make the kind of work I make because these companies offered opportunities to grow and learn.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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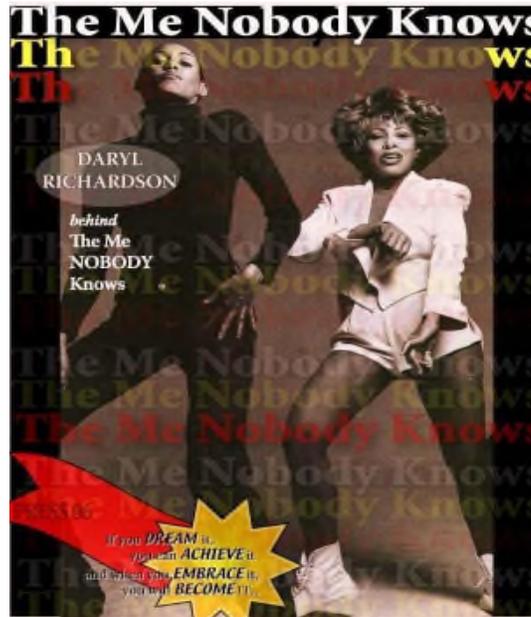
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Sincerely,  
Terri Kohler

--

Terri K Kohler  
terrikohler@gmail.com  
617 460 1460



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
June 12, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Daryl Richardson, and I am the CEO of a 501 C3 CBO; The Me Nobody Knows and we provide performing arts at Math, Science, Technology and Research High School.

Since

Since COVID- 19 and being quarantined I am still creating performance opportunities for the students to try to keep as much normalcy as possible. We are accomplishing this through virtual presentations and this video submission is a five-minute snippet of our talented students.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences.

Arts programs that foster self-esteem, community rejuvenation and encouragement for the Youth should be the last cut, not the first. I have experienced budget cuts in the middle of a school year and my staff and I are out of work and the students are abandoned. Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Daryl Richardson  
The Me Nobody Knows



Ms. Daryl Richardson is a Native New Yorker; a former dancer of the stage, television and film, Director, Producer, Writer, Caterer, CEO and Founder of **The Me Nobody Knows**, which is a 501 C3 non-profit organization, that targets youth through the Performing Arts. She has created programs in over 17 schools throughout New York City and received the Phenomenal Women's Award from KISS FM Radio for her accomplishments within her community. Prior to becoming a Mentor to students, she has appeared on Broadway in *The Wiz*, *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Can-Can* and *Anything Goes*. Her film Credits include; *The Wiz Movie*, *A Chorus Line (The Movie)*, *The Mask*, *What's Love Got to Do with It*, *Junior*, *Hoodlum*, and *Monster Mash*. Having toured with known artists such as **Baby face**, **Barry White**, and **Earth, Wind & Fire**. Her television credits include; *The Academy Awards*, *The Essence Awards*, *The Soul Train Awards*, *The Emmy Awards*, *Cinderella*, *The Jamie Fox Show*, *The Drew Carey Show*, *The Arsenio Hall Show*, *The MTV Awards* and *The Cream video* with **Prince**. Ms. Daryl's Choreography credits are **Tyler Perry's** Stage Play; *Women Thou Art Loosed*, and she has choreographed her appearance in **Paula Abdul's Skat Kat Video**, and was the Assistant Choreographer for **Michael Jackson's Bad Video**. As a self-published Author of her mentoring book, *Mentoring The Me Nobody Knows*, she has facilitated numerous workshops at Temple University, Woodridge Elementary School in Desoto Texas, Wood Hills High School in NYC, a Broadway Bound Summer Intensive in Dallas-Fort Worth Texas and in Nairobi, Kenya at Nairobi Cinema. The Me Nobody knows has proven that the Arts utilizes the entire physical, singing, dancing, walking, talking self of every participant for a well-balanced child to emerge.



Daryl & Tyler Perry



Babyface Tour Daryl



MJ, Gregg Burge & Daryl



LLCool Jw/ Daryl





## Reopening Greener at NYC's Cultural Institutions

Monday June 22nd, 2020

To be read by DeNeile Cooper, Monday June 22nd, 2020 at 10 am  
Before the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

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Hello, my name is DeNeile Cooper, I am speaking today as the Chair of the Cultural Institutions Task Force for the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board, a volunteer citizens' advisory board dedicated to achieving zero waste in NYC. The DCLA is tasked this summer with helping our cultural institutions overcome the logistical and financial barriers brought on by the recent human health catastrophe of COVID-19, and to begin charting a path forward, toward tours that aren't only virtual and performances that aren't only recorded. This is no simple task. I am here today to implore that the DCLA and officers of individual institutions resist the urge to return to normal, and instead envision a new future for NYC's historic and cultural sites that prioritizes not only human health, but environmental health and social equity.

Targeting zero waste will require new or modified business operations, yet this can easily be devised in correlation with reopening strategies. Working with food vendors to implement organics recycling and installing easy-to-read signage and easy-to-locate recycling bins for visitors should be seen as necessary components to designing more sanitary food disposal practices and ensuring that visitors understand your institution's revised cleaning and disposal protocols.

My goal today goes beyond indicating that New York City ranks second as greatest global city emitter with an annual output of just under 52 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e<sup>1</sup>, and that research from global organizations like the UN Environment Programme indicate that poor environmental health takes a toll on human health<sup>2</sup>, and disproportionately so on low-income communities of color.<sup>3</sup> Rather, I urge that cultural institutions embrace the opportunities inherent to their own operations data. Review the cost savings for your facilities, in terms of electricity usage and waste removal services. How much did your facility save over the past few months by not

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<sup>1</sup>CDP. Cities Community Wide Emissions, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>UN Environment. Our Planet: Healthy Planet, Healthy People. 2015.

<sup>3</sup>World Resources Institute, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, and the World Bank. World Resources 1998-99: Environmental change and human health. 1998.

generating energy or solid waste? Moving toward a zero waste building allows your organization to shift its funds to where they're needed most. The operational costs of restocking disposable wine glasses after every event or consolidating waste between the underutilized waste bins can be reallocated to keeping spaces safely disinfected once we again begin welcoming visitors.

Committing to sustainable operations shows visitors that your cultural institution is ensuring human health from a place of integrity, not liability. To help City institutions "green" their strategies, the Cultural Institution Task Force has created a simple handout that is available on the Manhattan SWAB website ([here](#)). We are more than welcome to provide suggestions and connect you to the Department of Sanitation's agency liaison. Thank you for your time, and I wish you all the best in making art and history come alive for NYC's residents and visitors.

**The Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board**

Members of the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board: Matthew M. Civello, chair; Rona Banai, vice chair; Kim Davis, secretary; Diane Orr, treasurer. Members: Margot Becker, Joyce Bialik, Diana Blackwell, Maggie Clarke, Debby Lee Cohen, Peter Cohen, Ellen Cooper, DeNeile Cooper, Lorial Crowder, Ann Marie Cunningham, Meredith Danberg-Ficarelli, Lisa Denby, Wendy Frank, Katie Hanner, Cullen Howe, Sophia Huda, Melissa Iachan, Christine Johnson, Sarah Lehigh, Kate Mikuliak, Kathy Nizzari, Alexis Obernauer, Jacquelyn Ottman, Ushma Pandya, Kristi Parson, Tinia Pina, John Reali, Martin Robertson, Rick Schulman, Brendan Sexton, Marc Shifflett, Amy Uong, Aditi Varshneya, Chana Widawski



# Reopening Greener at NYC's Cultural Institutions

## Visitor Operations

- Inform visitors of the institution's COVID-19 cleaning procedures
- Remind visitors of their role in keeping the institution sanitary
- Educate visitors on recycling with easy-to-read signage and easy-to-locate recycling bins

## Back-of-House Operations

- Proper recycling signage, bin placement, ease of access
- Hold periodic staff meetings on recycling and waste procedures
- Add new waste removal procedures for proper disposal of PPE

## Cafeteria / Catering

- Proper food and food packaging recycling, signage, bin placement, ease of access
- Waste reduction signage. Ex. "Take what you need"; "Straws by request"
- Organics recycling for businesses is still in large part in effect

## Special Events

- Understand the change in waste stream from daily disposal
- Organize recycling and waste removal services for event waste streams
- Prepare reusable/recyclable materials and store surplus for future events
- Posters or children's games with both cultural and environmental lessons

## Staying Virtual

- Review and update facilities operations to include recycling services
  - Learn how you could work with the city to recycle electronics (DSNY), organics (microhaulers/commercial haulers) and textiles (RefashionNYC).
  - Learn how you can donate clothing and accessories (Materials for the Arts) and donate other items (DonateNYC).
- Create new recycling signage that aligns with your institution's brand and mission
- Release a video on "Sustainability at [your institution]" to keep visitors engaged
- Plan how your cafeterias will meet the new Commercial Organics Requirements.

Follow us



[www.manhattanswab.org](http://www.manhattanswab.org)  
[manhattanswab1@gmail.com](mailto:manhattanswab1@gmail.com)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

“What is the city but the people?” – Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, Act III, Scene 1

I am reaching out as Managing Director of Theatre for a New Audience, a Board member of the Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance, and a private citizen committed to budget justice.

Theatre for a New Audience operates Polonsky Shakespeare Center, located in the Brooklyn Cultural District. We serve an annual audience of more than 50,000 through our season of productions celebrating the work of a diverse range of playwrights – Shakespeare and other classic authors in dialogue with contemporary playwrights such as Adrienne Kennedy, María Irene Fornés, Jackie Sibblies Drury, and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins.

The Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance (DBAA) is a multidisciplinary coalition of 50 organizations ranging from the largest and oldest cultural organizations in the area to smaller and emerging organizations. DBAA enables collaboration, professional development, joint advocacy, and action on issues affecting communities and cultural organizations in Downtown Brooklyn.

I am also writing as a private citizen, a resident of Park Slope, and a frequent theatregoer who cares deeply about the ecology of the City’s many communities and the power of theatres to provide so much more than entertainment – educational services for some of the City’s most underserved children, schools and families; gathering places for healing, understanding and community; a perspective into cultures and traditions beyond our own experience; and the opportunity to restore our souls in times of turbulence, such as that we are living with now.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC-led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking from my own experience through our theatre’s relocation to Brooklyn in 2013, I have come to deeply value the artistic excellence, community and family service, youth development and service to the NYC Public Schools of our fellow DBAA members such as the Billie Holiday Theatre, the Museum of Contemporary African and Diasporan Arts, ViBE Theater Experience. I also advocate for the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford Stuyvesant History, which is absolutely central in its importance in Brooklyn’s (and the City’s) history and culture.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

The City's budget and its Councilmanic initiatives tell us so much more than numbers. They communicate the City's values. In the wake of this time of outrage following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and so many others, BIPOC communities will rely on Coalition of Theaters of Color members more than ever for healing and restoration. Voices of BIPOC artists, playwrights, arts workers and communities must not be silenced. As a citizen of New York – the theatre capital of the world – I find it outrageous and incomprehensible that you would consider reducing the CTC initiative at this crucial time.

This is a call for justice, and a clear expression of what this City stands for. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

What is the city but the people?

Sincerely,

Dorothy Ryan  
Managing Director  
Theatre for a New Audience



**El Museo del Barrio**

**Testimony to the New York City Council**

**Hearing for the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**

**June 22, 2020**

**Ana Chireno, Director of Government and Community Affairs**

Hello, thank you to the City Council today for the opportunity to speak about arts and culture in these pivotal times. Thank you also to DCLA for their support of the arts. And to our new commissioner, we are proud to have him as an El Museo del Barrio alumnus.

My name is Ana Chireno, I am the Director of Government and Community Affairs at El Museo del Barrio.

El Museo is anchor of the East Harlem community, started over 50 years ago by artists, parents, and educators with the goal of raising up the Puerto Rican and Latinx community plagued by systemic racism, divestment, and alienation. Issues which I am pained to say we are still in the struggle of addressing and even acknowledging.

This year we have been forced to face the historical lack of access to health in black and brown communities, the precarity of our labor force, and how the institutions that are there to protect us do not. Black and brown communities are intimately familiar with these dynamics. Diversity, Equity, Accesibility Inclusion for us has always been a survival issue. It is not just about hiring practices. We are glad that these issues are now gaining the light and they merit and the political will that will be needed to eliminate them.

Add to this, a pandemic that has uprooted our daily lives and the systems upon which we all depend. East Harlem, by the way, was one of the most affected neighborhoods.

As we transition from a moment to a movement, we will all have a responsibility to each other and our social fabric. The role of cultural organizations will be undeniable through the different functions we serve.

Culture educates: we learn together with our audiences how to change.

Culture presents art: we highlight voices, in El Museo's case Latinx voices – so often marginalized in the arts realm

Culture is a convener: as we create spaces where people come together, we facilitate healing and social cohesion

At El Museo, art is not for arts sake. We see over 12,000 students a year through our educational programs. We host art workshops for seniors with dementia, do job training for youth on the autism spectrum, place teaching artists in schools with a lack of arts programming, conduct after school in Corona and Harlem. Work with inmates on Rikers Island. Lead the largest Three Kings Day Parade in the state, celebrate Dia de los Muertos and work on our local healthcare facility to bring the arts to those in recovery. We conduct Census phonebanking and outreach as a Complete Count Fund grantee. We



present programming via our bilingual digital initiative *El Museo en Tu Casa*, in which thousands of Latinos in New York City are able to explore and learn about our Permanent Collection, past exhibitions and archives, participate in live virtual art talks and programs, access educational resources, and more.

We have done all of this in the wake of COVID-19. The pandemic will have term effects on our ability to produce content, conduct programming, install exhibitions, and repay debts we have incurred. Including our postpostponed gala, we are projecting a loss of at least \$1,665,800 in earned income through June. Revenue streams affected by our March 13<sup>th</sup> closure include admission donations, store sales, membership sales (which usually occur at the point of admission for El Museo del Barrio), and rentals.

For a POC organizations like El Museo, one of the smallest CIGs, this work would not be possible without the support of the NYC City council, especially in these moments of health and economic crises. We will all face an unprecedented fiscal landscape. And we must be unified as we confront what comes. That being said, we humbly request that the city council allow us to continue serving our public via public funds if at all possible. We ask that the budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs be kept whole in order to keep our sector vibrant and diverse. City Council initiatives are currently the only funding El Museo has employ teaching artists in New York City public schools. As the only museum in New York City with a Latinx focus, our absence in the educational curriculum would be detrimental to the future of our city. Many small organizations can only access city finding through council initiatives. To defund DCLA at this moment would be a step away from equitable funding in the cultural sector.

A budget is a moral document. As we talk about reinvesting in communities, we should also be talking about the important role that local arts organizations play in developing our neighborhoods and enriching the lives of our residents.



Arts  
Culture  
Community  
Lower East Side

Fourth Arts Block (FABnyc)  
61 E 4th St., New York, NY 10003  
www.fabnyc.org  
(212) 228-4670

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June 22, 2020

Hello, Chairman Van Bramer and Commissioner Casals.

I'm Ryan Gilliam and I represent Fourth Arts Block -- a team of artists and organizers working in the Lower East Side.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today but I don't want to tell you why arts and culture are meaningful to the people of this city. I don't want to explain why in times like these our communities need us to stay with them and why we must find the means to do so -- because the evidence is in. You have it. The evidence is in.

The Black Lives Matter movement calls upon all of us step up and speak truth.

New York City's funding of arts and culture is racist. Decade after decade, it prioritizes institutions with extraordinary access to wealth, privilege, and political influence, sending them the bulk of its funds. It sustains policies limiting small community organizations to grants based on budget size, the equivalent to funding them according to their access to wealth. The current budget will likely perpetuate that practice, even though we all know which institutions will or won't have the resources to survive this pandemic. I recognize real efforts by the Council and by DCLA to address equity and diversity -- but we're nowhere near an anti-racist budget.

**Make budget justice real in all departments of city government.**

---

There is a bill in Congress - H.R. 40 - which calls for a Commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery and its impact today on the lives of Black Americans. We need this process to move forward on a national level. But we can't just sit and wait for the federal government to act.

H.R. 40 calls for telling the history of slavery, how our federal and state governments supported it, its legacies through redlining, educational funding, predatory finance and more. It asks for recommendations on appropriate ways to educate the public on this history. And it asks for recommendations for remedies -- including how the Government might issue a formal apology, how ongoing laws and policies should be changed, how injuries can be reversed through programs and projects, how any form of compensation might be calculated and awarded.

It is clear than any process that hopes to move us toward future reconciliation must ensure that our understanding of truth encompass not only the history of brutality and injustice that has



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(212) 228-4670

---

been practiced upon Black communities, but also the extraordinary strength and resiliency of Black communities, their accomplishments, their creativity, and their capacity for joy in the face of ongoing attack.

Many of our city's cultural organizations have already engaged in work necessary to the truth-telling and education critical to this process.

But we have not done that work together,  
we have not done it as a city, and  
we have not grappled with the issue of reparations.

I am making two recommendations

First, that we **collectively advocate for the national passage of H.R. 40** and

Second, that we act in partnership to **engage our city in the necessary dialogue on reparation** -- a process of knowing truth, envisioning justice, and enacting remedy.

This is work we all have a part in. I ask elected leadership to publicly commit to this work. I ask the cultural community to take a leading role in this work. And I ask you, Commissioner, to be a champion for this work to begin now.

--- Thanks.

Ryan Gilliam, Executive Director

[ryan@fabnyc.org](mailto:ryan@fabnyc.org)



P.O. BOX 150253  
BROOKLYN, NY 11215  
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718-259-2772

PRESIDENT

Francine Garber-Cohen

EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT/ SECRETARY

Linda Cantoni

VICE-PRESIDENT

José Alejandro Guzmán

TREASURER

Joseph Delfausse

Dear Members of the New York City Council,

I am Francine Garber-Cohen, President of the Regina Opera Company.

For 50 years, Regina Opera has offered the people of Brooklyn year-round, ticketed fully-staged operas with orchestra and English supertitles, as well as free full operas, and ticketed and free concerts. We provide affordable entertainment in handicapped-accessible venues for audiences who may not otherwise be able to attend live opera performances. The need for the cultural enrichment we provide is reflected in the fact that over 4,000 people attended our performances last year.

Our offerings are particularly vital to Senior Citizens, who make up 65 percent of our audience. They come to be uplifted by the music, stimulate their minds, get them out of their homes, and meet friends.

Regina Opera Company performs in Sunset Park, Bay Ridge, Boro Park, and other underserved areas. Our performances add to the cultural vitality of the areas and serve as a magnet for prospective residents and local businesses.

Cuts in funding for the arts will be a terrible hardship for our company, as it will be for most other arts organizations. It will result in fewer performances and even closures of many vital organizations. Especially hurt will be smaller organizations like Regina Opera that serve areas and populations that are all too often overlooked. As we move forward from the COVID-19 pandemic, these communities will need more than ever the healing and strengthening that culture provides.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Francine Garber-Cohen'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Francine Garber-Cohen, President  
Regina Opera Company

from a theatermaker re: Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 NYC Budget

Dear Councilmembers and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as as a Tony Award-nominated choreographer, director, and educator who has made a living working in theater on and off Broadway in New York City for over a decade. I am also writing as a resident of Hell's Kitchen and proud constituent of Mr. Johnson who until very recently was always working full-time at one of the many theaters in the neighborhood.

Last week I reached out to many of you to speak about the citywide call to reevaluate the NYPD's budget for FY21, as I know choruses of New Yorkers have done, but today I reach out on much more specific and personal terms - as a theatermaker and someone invested in the theater that makes NYC what it is.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

These 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce singular work and tell stories that sadly still aren't getting told on our biggest stages. They employ tens of thousands of people and launch and nurture the careers of artists who will take theater as a whole the next - more visionary and more equitable chapter. These theaters are gathering places for seniors and young people. They are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

This past year I was co-chair of the Obie Awards, Off-Broadways highest honor, an umbrella which covers all of these institutions. Having the honor to attend these theaters, some for the first time, showed me the possibilities for the way NYC can lead our country's overdue cultural reckoning. This year the Obies are honoring the work of the National Black Theater for the first time. The artists are here, the stories are being told, and a lot of these institutions are getting long overdue attention - but they need resources. This is a crucial moment for everyone right now, but these institutions can LEAD our city through the next chapter if they have the support they need. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Sam Pinkleton  
460 W 50th St  
10019  
917.359.4858

**Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.**  
**Submission to the NYC Council Committee on Arts and Cultural Affairs:**  
**Written Testimony Regarding the Impact of COVID-19**  
**June 25, 2020**

Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee,

My name is Siri Horvitz, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. On behalf of Lincoln Center, I extend my sincere gratitude to you, your staffs, and all the essential workers for keeping New York City safe, healthy, and supported during this unprecedented time.

I have prepared this testimony to speak to how Lincoln Center has been impacted by COVID-19 and to address the importance of continued support for non-profit cultural organizations. Before moving forward, I want to take a moment to reaffirm that Lincoln Center stands with everyone around the country protesting systemic racism and injustice.

The Board and staff of Lincoln Center are taking time to figure out how our organization can better support calls for equity and representation in the cultural sector. We have committed to thought and action against longstanding racism and inequality and recently took part in Black Out Tuesday. It was a moment to reflect on and recommit to our diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda driving change, not only for Lincoln Center, but for our communities.

There is much more work to be done as we think critically about anti-racism, allyship, intersectionality, and responding to injustice. This includes increasing representation at all levels (including our Board), implementing anti-racism training, and defining metrics to track our progress. We're establishing specialized commission funds to support artists who have been underrepresented on our campus. We are actively searching for a new Artistic Director; this integral position will be charged with ensuring that previously marginalized voices are now heard and celebrated and that the programming at Lincoln Center better reflects the people of New York.

Driving social change, or any change for that matter, requires being accountable, demonstrating compassion, and feeling empowered to challenge norms within and outside of Lincoln Center. This is who we're striving to be. The performing arts are and always will be a catalyst for thought, empathy, and action. The great playwright, novelist, and essayist James Baldwin wrote, "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." We face this moment in our country and at Lincoln Center, together.

In the spirit of togetherness, we remained committed to our mission from our founding 60 years ago: to provide the best of the performing arts for the broadest possible audiences. As a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group, our primary responsibility is to celebrate the City's rich cultural diversity and ensure that all have access, and that all are welcome. Last year, more than half of our audiences attended artistic events completely free of charge, and our community and educational programs engaged residents in all 51 Council districts.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on Lincoln Center. In conjunction with the Governor's Executive Order closing large public gathering spaces and entertainment facilities, Lincoln Center cancelled all performances and activities and closed our indoor venues and public spaces on March 12. Because of this, we have lost about \$13 million in anticipated revenue, and have furloughed or laid off approximately half of our staff.

While we deal with these losses, we have also created a virtual platform to ensure that New Yorkers can still reach the high-quality performing arts and arts education that we're known for. *Lincoln Center at Home* (<http://lincolncenter.org/lincoln-center-at-home>) is a free, one-stop, digital space for new and archival performances, lessons, and more from the 11 constituent organizations that make their home on

the Lincoln Center campus. *Lincoln Center at Home* makes it possible to participate in live-streamed arts education lessons led by Lincoln Center's dynamic teaching artists; learn to plié with New York City Ballet dancers; experience jazz's past, present and future with Wynton Marsalis; and enjoy a 1965 New York Philharmonic concert conducted by Leonard Bernstein, all without having to pay a dime.

In addition, on Sundays at 6pm, we release our weekly #MemorialforUsAll concert, an opportunity to honor our shared grief and take a moment to mourn together in a way that has been otherwise impossible during the pandemic. In partnership with the Mayor's Center for Faith and Community Partnerships and faith-based organizations from around the city, each week an artist, such as Wynton Marsalis or Yo-Yo Ma, leads a secular, musical service paying tribute to those we have lost to COVID-19, with names of loved ones submitted by members of the public displayed alongside video of the performance.

We have been working to transition some of our community programming for virtual access as well—for example, our Lincoln Center Moments program, which presents concerts for people with dementia and their caregivers, had a very successful digital launch, and we're planning to continue offering it online going forward, perhaps even in partnership with future in-person events.

We're also adapting Audition Bootcamp, our extremely successful partnership with the NYC Department of Education, to be held online. Bootcamp helps create the next generation of world-class artists from New York—each year it brings together professionals and teachers from across artistic fields to prepare 300 students from Title I schools for auditions for prestigious performing arts high schools, with a success rate of almost 100%. All students participate free of charge. We're extremely proud of Bootcamp but have been looking for ways to expand it beyond its 300-student cap and broaden its impact. Taking the program online this summer will allow us to experiment with ways we could build the program in future years, eliminating challenges regarding the capacities of our classrooms and focusing solely on potential. This focus on leveraging digital platforms is true across the organization—we're using the setback of this closure as an opportunity to develop innovations that will help us grow after large gatherings resume and we enter the new normal.

Even as experimentation with virtual programming allows Lincoln Center to develop a wider reach around the country, we remain committed to working in every corner of New York City. Whether partnering with public schools, faith-based organizations, senior centers, or peer cultural organizations, we're proud of our programs' impacts across all 51 Council Districts, which includes working with 10,000 students, hundreds of New Yorkers with dementia, 600 low- and middle-income families, and more. We've worked hard to make sure that these programs reach those who need them most: 60% of participants in our program live in census tracts with a median income lower than the New York City average of \$58,000, and our focus areas around the city—including the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Jackson Heights—have fewer local cultural organizations.

We consistently hear stories about the importance of having art in people's lives, especially about the impact of Lincoln Center's offerings. In the schools, one teacher whose classroom was visited by Lincoln Center teaching artists said, "I noticed both classes that I teach unlocked a creative side that I had not previously known was there." A caretaker of a New Yorker with Alzheimer's who attended one of our LC Moments programs described her companion's powerful reaction, saying "she connected with the music instantly and remained engaged throughout the entire program. The joy this program brought her was priceless...and lasted the entire day." And *The New York Times* described our programming for children with developmental disabilities as "a stellar example of how to connect with an underserved audience by identifying obstacles to theatergoing and removing them one by one."

Virtual or in-person, we're determined to reach populations that don't have access to the power of the arts because of location, socioeconomic status, disability, or any other barriers, and either bring them to Lincoln Center or bring Lincoln Center to them. Our work is necessary, and it connects and uplifts people.

While *Lincoln Center at Home* and our other digital efforts allow us to continue our artistic work virtually, we also remain dedicated to continuing to serve our community and our city in any way we can. We are working to use our public spaces to distribute food to hungry New Yorkers and are exploring additional spaces to offer as testing sites, as needed. We partnered with the Board of Elections to hold primary voting at the David Rubenstein Atrium. And we continue to work with the U.S. Census Bureau to encourage all New Yorkers to get counted.

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Lincoln Center is committed to presenting the art that connects and binds us to one another and supporting the New York arts community through this crisis and for generations to come. Today, we are using this pause to innovate and transform our programming to transcend traditional, physical spaces. On the other side of the pandemic, our work will continue to focus on bold, new ideas that will advance our mission and allow us to engage audiences in compelling and equitable ways.

Lincoln Center and its peer cultural organizations rely upon critical funding from the City of New York, as well as from private contributions and earned revenue streams, to provide access to expansive, equitable, and innovative artistic and educational content. In the absence of earned income and severely decreased donations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council's continued investment in arts and cultural organizations is of the utmost importance if we are to continue to help bolster the City's economic recovery and revitalize local, national, and international tourism.

We ask that you consider any and every opportunity to ensure that support for arts and culture is prioritized in the FY21 budget, including capital, discretionary, and initiative items.

Thank you again for your continued leadership during this crisis.

Respectfully submitted,

Siri Horvitz  
Director, Government Relations  
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.  
70 Lincoln Center Plaza, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10023  
[shorvitz@lincolncenter.org](mailto:shorvitz@lincolncenter.org)

**Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.**  
**Submission to the NYC Council Committee on Arts and Cultural Affairs:**  
**Written Testimony Regarding the Impact of COVID-19**  
**June 25, 2020**

Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee,

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Thank you again for your continued leadership during this crisis.

Respectfully submitted,

Siri Horvitz  
Director, Government Relations  
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.  
70 Lincoln Center Plaza, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10023  
[shorvitz@lincolncenter.org](mailto:shorvitz@lincolncenter.org)

June 24, 2020

Hon. Corey Johnson  
New York City Council Speaker  
224 W 30th St, Suite 1206  
New York, NY 10001

Dear Council Speaker Johnson,

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, 1.4 million newly unemployed New Yorkers have filed for benefits, and New York State's unemployment rate currently lies at close to 13%. This is an unstable time for many in our city, and is especially so for artists who suddenly find themselves with no viable source of income, and for young artists just graduating and looking for their first jobs.

For many of these young artists, the difficulties they face are compounded by issues of representation and inclusion -- a serious challenge faced by those seeking entry to the film, TV, and media professions. Most of our city's youth population is rarely given the education, resources, or career opportunities to be hired and to thrive in these creative industries. Arts education is not prioritized for high school students, particularly for those at schools serving a predominantly diverse and low-income population. Relatively few diverse candidates are in film/media degree programs, internships or entry-level jobs; those with highly developed skills too often lack the knowledge and connections to pursue arts programs and creative careers.

Ghetto Film School (GFS) provides a direct solution to this problem by eliminating these traditional barriers. Founded in 2000, and located in the South Bronx, the program model is community-based, culturally relevant, and accessible, greatly increasing the socio-economic mix of the talent pool. With your previous support, and the investment that NYC and the City Council have made into GFS over our 20-year history, we have been able to equip students for top universities and careers in the creative industries through the two tracks in our **NY Talent Pipeline**: the **Fellows Program**, an introductory education program for high school students; and **The Roster**, an early-career support for alumni and young professionals.

Our City Council Discretionary Funding Request asks for support for **GFS' NY Talent Pipeline**, that offers free artistic training and professional development programming for young storytellers and artists to ensure them future opportunities across a broad range of creative industries, particularly film, television and advertising. For twenty years, GFS has set a global standard for how to create a pipeline into film and media by reaching emerging storytellers and equipping them with the 21st century workforce skills to pursue sustainable careers. 98% of our young artists graduate high school on time; 92% go on to colleges and universities on time; 76% of them pursue creative professions upon graduation; and GFS serves a growing network of thousands of early career creatives each year with professional development and job placement services.

In the coming fiscal year, programming for the **NY Talent Pipeline** will serve 3,000+ individuals ages 14-29 across all five boroughs of NYC, equipping participants for top universities, professional internships and work experiences, and lasting careers in creative industries. We hope you will consider our request for support, so we can continue to serve the next generation of American storytellers.

Sincerely,



Stosh Mintek  
CEO, Ghetto Film School

## TESTIMONIALS FROM GFS ROSTER MEMBERS AND ALUMNI



Writer/ Director **Alexi Gonzalez** is an Associate Producer on the Netflix Original Series “On My Block.” Alexi is an alumna from the GFS Fellows Program Class of 2016.

**“GFS has given me opportunities to meet industry executives and network with other filmmakers. If we continue to work together as a community we can make the film industry truly inclusive and not just a diversity trend. Real change is possible.”**



**David Mansour** and eight other GFS Fellows participated in the Ummah Chroma Collective Documentary Project, created in partnership with Het Nieuwe Instituut and the International Film Festival Rotterdam. David is currently a student at Tufts University.

**“Dana Ashwood, GFS’s college advisor, encouraged me to apply. I did, and received a full scholarship! GFS is a strong family where members from different places bring different perspectives, and now I’m bringing that training to a whole new experience in Boston.”**



**Luis G. Santos** is a Dominican American writer, director, and producer based in New York. He is currently freelancing as a commercial director and screenwriter, while working at Quibi as a writer's assistant for the show “Nod Game”.

**“GFS has been an integral part of the success I've achieved so far in my career. The Roster has always given me opportunities to achieve my goals, by recommending me for jobs, introducing me to industry players, and by fostering a community among young artists. The road ahead is paved with obstacles, but having The Roster in my corner gives me the confidence I need.”**

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a member of the NYC theatrical community. I am primarily a director here in the city, having worked in that capacity and other theatrical roles with/at Soho Rep., NYTW, LaMama, Roundabout, Lincoln Center, and The Acting Company, and garnering two-years in the Observership program of the directors union's foundation (SDCF), along with being selected as a reader for the Princess Grace Playwrighting Awards for 2019 and 2020. Following my graduation from UCLA, I moved to NYC explicitly for the theatre that is created here; to be a part of that creation as both a maker and an audience member.

I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Boreum Hill, Brooklyn who values art, performing art specifically, as a part of the essential culture of the city.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, the colleagues and friends that I know who have worked at The Classical Theatre of Harlem and Ma-Yi Theatre Ensemble, to name just a couple of the member theatres of the Coalition of Theatres of Color, have found ways through those companies' resources to grow exponentially as artists and audience members alike.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

We must, as New Yorkers, remain committed to the power of art in our communities doing all we can to ensure its resurgence and longevity.

Sincerely,



Heather Arnson



June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Board of Trustees**

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Dear Speaker Johnson and Members of the City Council:

The Louis Armstrong House Museum & Archives (LAHM) has remained active during the COVID-19 crisis. We have maintained our commitment to our regular Museum goers, to school children that benefit from our residency programs, and to the artists we engage via our commissions and special projects. LAHM truly embodies the phrase #CultureNeverClosed, having produced online content that has kept the legacy of Louis Armstrong alive and relevant during this unprecedented health and economic crisis.

Very soon after we closed the Museum for in-person visits in mid-March, we launched [“That’s my Home”](#): a virtual exhibition that is being updated with new content weekly. The exhibit portrays different aspects of Armstrong’s life at his home in Corona, Queens. Governor Cuomo mentioned the That’s My Home exhibition as a “deep-breath moment” in one of his daily emails, reminding New Yorkers that they could rely on the city’s cultural institutions and artistic patrimony to find respite from the crisis.

At the same time, we continued to work on our Armstrong NOW! initiative, which focuses on activating the Armstrong Archives—whose 60,000 objects, documents, recordings, and memorabilia are fully digitized and available to anyone in the world with an internet connection—by inviting contemporary artists and innovators from the African diaspora, the Latinx communities and beyond, to interpret and respond artistically to the Armstrong Archives. We are in the process of producing live-streams of these interactions, which will be hosted through LAHM’s website.

Every year, LAHM receives a number of CASA grants with which we bring the magic of Louis Armstrong’s history and music to public schools in Queens. These residencies are a crucial aspect of the educational and outreach work done by our institution, and a central element in our mission to preserve and promote Satchmo’s legacy. We have remained committed to providing our CASA students with educational material and activities by producing engaging content that they can access through our website. This content has included educational workshops and interactive concerts:

[Pops is Tops](#) Annual Educational Concert - Streamed on June 4th and shared with over 750 students in public schools

[You Don't Learn That in School](#) Educational Workshops - Streaming throughout the summer virtually for students of partner public school (password: CASA2020)

During this time, LAHM has also partnered with local Corona institutions to provide support to our neighborhood residents. LAHM has donated supplies for Elmcors Community Center's daily food pantry program, as well as shared its virtual education programming with Our Lady of Sorrows Church youth program.

The **Louis Armstrong House Museum** is in the midst of executing an exciting physical and programmatic expansion plan that will dramatically increase its capacity to fulfill the mission of sustaining and promoting the cultural, historical, and humanitarian legacy of the great Louis Armstrong in the neighborhood of Corona, Queens. The new **Louis Armstrong Center for Art + Innovation**, rising across the street from the house museum, will provide an opportunity to unite the historic house with the **Armstrong Research Collections** in a dynamic educational and cultural campus in the heart of one of the most diverse regions in the world. Our artists, docents, CASA students, and surrounding community are in their majority people of color who find in Louis Armstrong a familiar figure whose music has influenced America's popular culture in unmeasurable ways.

If LAHM were to interrupt any of its programs for lack of funding, our whole ecosystem would be affected—from the neighbors who attend our annual outdoor festivities, to the school children who get to experience live music and music education via our CASA programs, to the independent artists whose work we commission and who get compensated for their art. We ask the New York City Council to KEEP CULTURE WHOLE and allow us and our partner arts organizations to continue to do the crucial work of providing New Yorkers with places and programs that enrich their lives, that keep them employed, and that help their communities to thrive.

Sincerely,

Pedro Espinoza  
Managing Director  
Louis Armstrong House Museum & Archives

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a theater director, educator and administrator who has had a NYT's Critic's Pick production, been employed from Broadway to Off-Off-Broadway and who would not be the person and New Yorker he is today if it were not for the theatrical community that New York City has fostered. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Hells Kitchen, Manhattan and works at the Atlantic Theater Company in Chelsea, The Flea Theater in Tribeca and is the Associate Artistic Director for Pipeline Theatre Company which has worked around NYC.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

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Speaking personally, New York theater would not be what it is if it were not for the incredible and vital work being done by theatrical institutions of color. As an audience member they have given me some of my most instrumental theatrical experiences and as an educator they have provided a first home to many of my former students.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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Sincerely,  
Tom Costello  
Resident of District 3

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I'm writing to you as a playwright whose work has been produced at many of New York's best theaters, as well as nationally and internationally. My work has won a number of prestigious awards such as the Edinburgh International Festival Fringe Award, the Richard Rodgers Award for Musical Theater, the New York Stage and Film Founder's Award, and most recently a NYSCA individual artist grant. I have collaborated with Blue Man Group, Cirque du Soleil, and Madison Square Garden, to name a few. I currently teach MFA playwriting at The New School and NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. (I am also a public school parent raising my son in **Ridgewood, Queens.**)

**I'm writing you to ask that you maintain funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color in the NYC FY21 budget.**

As a white playwriting professor, I have noticed that in recent years my administrations have begun telling me "remember to include some 'diverse works' in your syllabus!" I have always replied: "No problem, because hands down the most exciting work in American theater at this moment is non-white." The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theaters of Color are precious organizations, laboratories that develop, produce, and present the work that is pushing American theater forward. They are the reason that New York City is a theatrical mecca for artists and audiences worldwide. They discover and lift up the voices that our country desperately needs to hear, in this moment and all moments. And they employ tens of thousands of people, reach seniors and young people, and act as vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

The work of Ma-Yi Theater, National Asian American Theatre, National Black Theater, and Classical Theatre of Harlem has made my life richer—not only by supporting my peers and colleagues, but by moving me as an audience member, and exposing me to great artists whose voices pushed me to become better on every level. **The art that these organizations produce matters.** Don't let these precious institutions become victims of the pandemic!

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City due to COVID-19. However, the CTC theaters (which, by the way, have been historically underfunded) serve the very communities that have been most

impacted by COVID-19. They nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the *overfunded* NYPD. The entire \$3.7 million that was allocated to the CTC initiative last year represents **less than .07% of the proposed NYPD budget**. And yet what an impact that money could make for artists, arts workers, audiences, students and seniors if allocated to the CTC.

Thank you to those of you who have advocated for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. I ask that you now stand strong, and call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Gancher  
Playwright

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am writing to you as a theatre artist and a longtime resident of upper Manhattan (who votes!) I have directed and produced theatre, and frequently attend performances, all over the city.

**I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.**

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

As an uptown resident, I especially value having the National Black Theatre so close by. I love seeing the work of my colleagues and friends in this historic venue. It is a cultural touchstone in Harlem, with a creative reach felt around the country, supporting Black theatre artists at all stages of their careers.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are vital institutions in their neighborhoods.

**This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice – a budget tells the story of an institution's, or a city's, values. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.**

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Michele Travis

Dear City Council,

As a lifelong New Yorker (I live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan), member of a cultural family that's enmeshed in the city's cultural fabric, and as a theater producer, I'm urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color in the FY21 NYC Budget.

The Coalition of Theaters of Color are 42 BIPOC led cultural organizations that are telling stories and revealing history that are vital to the ecological balance of culture in our city. More importantly, these organizations employ tens of thousands of New Yorkers, are economic engines in their communities, represent voices that are under-represented, lift up and engage young people and the elderly, and so much more. I can't imagine a city without Ma-Yi, Amerinda, Classical Theater of Harlem, Pregones, Negro Ensemble Company, Hip-Hop Theater Festival, and the others that make up this group. They are companies that uphold the promise that this city welcomes and supports all.

I'm sure the Council is keenly aware of the conversations happening on the streets, on social media, in newsrooms and across the globe to "defund" the police. It seems unconscionable to deny the conversation in your discussion of the FY21 budget, to not acknowledge and take action on the fundamental disconnect between cutting vital social services, education, youth services, and health, while the NYPD budget stays significantly in tact.

Reflect the values that are fundamental to our city's lifeblood and to our recovery from this terrible time. Please consider restoring cuts, and prioritizing the Colin of Theaters of Color.

Thank you.

Jenny Gersten  
98 Riverside Drive  
NYC NY 10024



## Testimony to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations on June 22, 2020

*Prepared by Dance/NYC, Executive Director, Alejandra Duque Cifuentes*

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**On behalf of Dance/NYC, a service organization which serves over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, and 500 nonprofit dance companies based in the New York City area, including dance workers of color, immigrants, and disabled dance workers, I join colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking the Committee for your leadership during this time and in requesting:**

- 1. The Committee include the Arts and Culture communities in their economic support and relief plans and pass legislation to protect our organizations and workers;**
- 2. The Committee acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts, and repair the harm done by immediately establishing a Commission for Reparations for past and continuing harms inflicted upon Black and Indigenous people -- from colonialism to slavery through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance; and**
- 3. Committee reduces the proposed cuts to the Arts and Culture sector, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led and serving organizations, ensuring that organizations and their arts workers remain necessary workers and community members in New York City.**

After this pandemic and the recent national unrest due to the ongoing murders of Black people at the hands of a white supremacist system and those who benefit and uphold it, **there is no returning to business as usual.** The need and opportunity for funding, legislation, and actionable responses is urgent. Culture is what makes NYC the most important city in the world, and a leading force that has led the city's economic and social recovery in past crises including 9/11. During this crisis, It's been made evident that artists are necessary workers, as dance organizations, artists, dance workers, and educators have remained active providing online dance classes, digital performances, conversations on recovery, developing and providing mental health support, providing recovery and mutual aid support to their neighborhoods, and making all of the countermeasures possible to ensure the ongoing payment and care of their staffs, all while experiencing steep revenue drops. Dance workers and organizations play a significant role in the cultural and social landscape contributing over \$300 million to the NYC economy and employing thousands of workers; however, the crisis has increased the likelihood of many organizations having to shut down completely for failure to pay rent and pay their workers especially now as full use of PPP, and PUA funding has expended made and possibilities for engaging audiences, one of the primary forms of revenue for dance related nonprofits, remains limited. Similarly, we are at risk of losing dance workers who have had to relocate recently due to the severe affordability crisis artists and arts workers are facing.



Dance/NYC has undertaken unplanned comprehensive research on the impact this moment is having on the dance sector, all while providing nearly \$1 million in relief support to individual freelance dance workers and organizations, providing digital content and continuing to advocate for the dance sector at the City, State, and Federal level. To date the findings reveal that the losses are devastating: Individual dance workers report a cumulative loss of at least \$4.2M and dance related organizations a loss that exceeds \$22 Million. The highest areas of need include rent, food, and groceries, and cleaning supplies. The research highlights that 7% of respondents have recently relocated, with most leaving the City to stay with family to “escape the virus,” and due to the overwhelming difficulties they are experiencing in accessing unemployment benefits and aid and inability to pay rent, particularly our freelance dance workforce. These concerns are further exacerbated as multi-system failures come to light during this moment.

For example, defunding the police and funding social services, passing housing and healthcare reform, and ensuring Black and POC- led organizations continue to thrive are all important for the survival of artists, arts workers, the cultural life of NYC and are steps towards the envisioning of what anti-racist systemic reform could look like. Furthermore, the recent budget cuts to Arts and Culture reflect real life changes for arts workers. In NYC the majority of dance company’s make a huge portion of their revenue from teaching through the: Department of Education, community centers, or after school programs. When this City and State funding is taken away from their budgets, it sets a precedent on the value and existence artists will have post-COVID.

All of these issues are inherently connected to the Black Lives Matter call to action. White supremacy continuously manifests itself in violence at the hands of law enforcement and in interpersonal interactions, our government’s response to COVID-19, and our cultural institutions. A step towards reparations is defunding the police by \$1 billion and funding equitable opportunities aimed at creating accountability and dismantling white supremacy in arts and culture and amplifying the voices and autonomy of the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community. There is no going back to life pre-COVID. We all hold a responsibility to dismantle white supremacy in all the ways it manifests at our cultural institutions, policies, funding, and interpersonal interactions and envisioning justice. We are in a crisis and need continued support now.

**For Dance/NYC and its constituents, the most urgent four priorities are:**

1. Maintain levels of funding for dance organizations who are most severely impacted by the COVID-19, unemployment, and the recession. As underscored by Dance/NYC’s Coronavirus research the public and the funding community often overvalue the individual artist’s final works and prominence, leading to an inequitable funding landscape that has failed to consider the value of their process and personhood.
2. Include BIPOC artists in your decision-making and cross-sector task forces. Survey respondents and Fund applicants are seeking platforms to share their stories and want to prevent being further anonymized. It is crucial for City officials and leaders to listen and respond more equitably to the needs of their constituent base. We need to create funding structures that value artists and art workers, too, as necessary members of our society by providing them living wages and health care.



3. Establish structures and best practices for funding organizations rooted in equity, ensuring culturally specific groups, and smaller organizations are not left out of relief support, particularly those led and historically serving BIPOC communities. It's time for NYC government to address its historic debt to Black and Indigenous communities.
4. Ensure that legislation and structures tied to recovery and the safe opening of our City do not place overwhelming financial burden on individuals or organizations already strapped for financial support, without proper City support and guidance. It is our joint responsibility to ensure the survival of the cultural institutions that ensure NYC remains the cultural capital of the world.

Community and culture are inextricably linked; and the planning and execution of racial justice work requires all hands on deck. It is in this vein that Dance/NYC advocates for the dance community, and stands in solidarity with our colleague advocates across disciplines in the City to request increased funding and integration of dance and arts workers into the decision-making that will envision our future post-pandemic.

Dance/NYC recognizes the City is facing a crushing budget deficit, and that our entire City is facing enormous hardship; however, we believe that together, we can navigate this moment and ensure our united survival. We thank the Committee and the City at large for its partnership, and for your labor of love in serving our city during these unprecedented times.

##

**New York City Council Testimony**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**  
**Monday June 2, 2020 at 10AM in Virtual Room 2**  
**Hearing Oversight - DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City**

Good morning, Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee. I am Ana-Ofelia Rodriguez, Director of Community Development, and I'm here to offer testimony on behalf of the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling and its parent organization Broadway Housing Communities located in West Harlem and Washington Heights.

Since 1997, we've been supporting the Upper Manhattan community and the work and careers of local artists, first through BHC's community galleries, located on the top floor of two of its five permanent affordable buildings, and more recently through the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling. The Museum opened its doors in 2015 as an extension of the community galleries to continue our effort to bring the community together and empower them through the arts and culture, while supporting the work and careers of artists.

In just five years, the Sugar Hill Children's Museum has become a cultural anchor in the neighborhood of Sugar Hill. It is the only museum in Upper Manhattan solely devoted to the visual arts and storytelling for young children ages 3-8. Each year, the Sugar Hill Children's Museum serves 24,000 visitors, including 3,800 through school and summer camp tours, 250 public school students from Title 1 schools who participate in multi-week-long school partnerships. With an average of 7 exhibitions each year, 200 storytelling programs, and free and low cost family programs, the Museum's programmatic focus is rooted on social justice and celebrates the history of Harlem and African-Americans who have contributed to the cultural landscape of NYC. It provides families with monthly free programming that builds familial bonds and allows children to develop critical skills such as visual-thinking, communications and empathy. Parents in the neighborhood look to us to provide excellence in programming and a safe space for their children to learn, explore and express themselves.

Unfortunately, our programs have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing us to close BHC's two community art galleries as well as the Sugar Hill Children's Museum to ensure the safety and health of our families and children. The financial impact of these closures on the Museum alone forced us to lay off one full-time and nine part-time staff members, as well as furlough three full-time employees, resulting in a 39% reduction in staff. While the Museum

expects to rehire these employees prior to its reopening, SHCMAS's remaining staff are currently working to ensure that the Museum is able to plan, design, and prepare the programming and be ready to open its doors to the vulnerable families it serves, once the City of New York permits us to open and it is safe for our families and children.

The Museum's closure has also resulted in an ongoing loss of revenue that threatens the organization's continued operations. Compared to the same period in 2019, the Museum has already seen a 53% decrease in revenue in 2020, with similar losses projected for the duration of the closure. The Museum is also projecting an additional 50% decline in fundraising from institutional, individual donors, and Museum members. And earned revenue losses amount to approximately \$10,000-\$15,000/month, for each month that it remains closed to the public. The Museum relies on earned revenue from admissions, space rentals, group tours, and Museum shop, with the building's closure having a broad impact on this vital income.

As a museum serving young children where art-making and experimentation is fostered, the considerations on a safe reopening are heavily weighed and costly. New Yorkers have suffered greatly during this pandemic, and as evidenced by the data collected from those affected, it has been African Americans and Latinos from low-income communities who have been impacted the most. We've already seen many of our families and residents lose their jobs; suffer from mental illness, domestic violence and financial hardship and even the loss of loved ones. The arts will play an even more critical role in the re-building of our community and the mental and physical recovery of our community members. Support of community art organizations such as ours is more important than ever to ensure that we can be there for them and help them and their children heal through robust and interactive cultural programming.

We are extremely grateful for the support that DCLA and City Council has provided the Sugar Hill Museum and Broadway Housing over the years. We hope we're soon able to safely provide our community, especially our families and children, with free and affordable cultural programming to help them heal, uplift and enrich their lives and overcome the tragic impact of COVID-19, working together with schools, City agencies and community partners. Thank you.

Kati Koerner  
720 Ft. Washington Avenue, #5S  
New York, NY 10040

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
June 25, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Kati Koerner, and I am the Director of Education at Lincoln Center Theater, on the Drama faculty at The Juilliard School, and serve on the board of directors of The New York City Arts in Education Roundtable. I live in Washington Heights and am the parent of a child in 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Lab Middle School for Collaborative Studies in Chelsea. I am writing to you today both as an arts education professional and as a concerned parent.

The mission of Lincoln Center Theater's (LCT) education programs is to connect the artistry on our stages to New York City's public schools by supporting creative teaching and imaginative student learning through theater. LCT serves more than 4,500 middle and high school students in 38 high-needs public schools throughout the city. At LCT, I am particularly proud of our work with English Language Learners, helping recent immigrants become more confident speakers of English and developing their literacy skills through theater.

After the pandemic hit and schools closed, LCT pivoted to providing our school partners with online instruction. We helped high school students at Millennium High School in the Bronx process their experiences during the pandemic by writing songs, and worked with students at Emma Lazarus High School on their slam poetry. As our beloved city emerges from the pandemic, I know that arts and cultural experiences will play a key role in restoring students' mental health, and keeping them engaged in their learning. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

I am gravely concerned, both as an arts education professional and as a parent, about the disproportionate budget cuts being proposed for the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, and the Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial budget projections for these agencies for the coming fiscal year would spell disaster for arts education and for the cultural community that is a key part of the fabric of our city.

My son's education has been immeasurably enhanced by his school's partnerships with the Whitney Museum and the New Victory Theatre. I know that students and teachers in LCT's partner schools depend on us to deepen and enhance student learning. Cultural arts partnerships are critical in helping young people become literate in the arts and in building 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Spending on the arts is also smart money: it is estimated that every dollar spent on after-school art programs will save \$9 in costs related to crime and other public services.

Young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. I know that the city is facing difficult budget decisions. Nevertheless, I implore you to reconsider cuts to the very institutions necessary for young people in New York City to learn and thrive.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Kati Koerner

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as the incoming Artistic Director of Encores at City Center, and the Resident Director at the Public Theater, where I also founded the Public Works program. I am also writing to you as a resident of Ditmas Park, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Lear deBessonnet

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an award-winning Broadway and Off-Broadway producer and as the Producing Artistic Director of WP Theater, a Drama Desk, Lortel, and Obie Award-winning Off-Broadway theater located on the Upper West Side, that is the oldest and largest theater devoted to new work by women+ in the country. We employ hundreds of people annually at our institution, and serve tens of thousands across the five boroughs with our productions and programs. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who has been a resident of Sugar Hill in District 7 for 12 years, and a New York City resident and voter for 28 years.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I can't imagine the city without these extraordinary cultural institutions. We are in active collaboration with viBe Theater Experience—a city that doesn't support the vital work to help these young women find their voices isn't a city I want to live and make art in. I look to the leaders of all of these organizations as touchstones, leaders, and essential parts of the communities they represent. As the leader of an identity-focused theater, I understand only too well how bias and prejudice keep these institutions small, without the resources, access and support afforded to larger, largely white theaters. These theaters are small, but their impact on their communities are enormous. We need them now more than ever.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Lisa McNulty

**Lisa McNulty | Producing Artistic Director | Pronouns: She/Her/Hers**

**WP Theater** | 2162 Broadway & 76th St. | NYC 10024

Office | 55 West End Ave | NYC 10023 | T: [212.765.1706](tel:212.765.1706) | F: [212.765.2024](tel:212.765.2024) | [WPTheater.org](http://WPTheater.org)

E-mail | [lisa@wptheater.org](mailto:lisa@wptheater.org)

*Join the WP Community:* [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)

**"WP Theater ensures the future is female."** - *Playbill*

**"WP Theater is an important, risk-taking organization."** - *New York Magazine*

*2019-2020 SEASON*

**OUR DEAR DEAD DRUG LORD** by Alexis Scheer, directed by Whitney White | [Sept. 11 - November 3](#)

**WHERE WE STAND** by Donnetta Lavinia Grays, directed by Tamilla Woodard | [February 1 - March 1](#)

**THE 2020 PIPELINE FESTIVAL** written, directed & produced by the WP Lab | [March 26 - April 25](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the importance of continued funding for quality arts education in New York City Public Schools. My name is Naomi Avadanei, and I am a theatre Educator at the Ella Baker School where I teach 300 students in grades Pre-K to 8 on a weekly basis.

On March 13th of this year 75 4th and 5th grade students were excitedly running through their final dress rehearsals of our production of Aladdin kids when the COVID-19 pandemic closed all schools indefinitely. I didn't know how we would go forward, but I knew I needed to find a way after hearing the determination and hope in my students' voices as they asked, "what's going to happen with Aladdin?" Over the next two months, we worked to transition to a virtual production. On Wednesday, June 17th our virtual production premiered. Witnessing the school community come together in the Zoom audience spoke volumes of the power of arts education to bring communities together and to heal. Even in the face of EXTREME adversity these young artists were able to come together and to bring together a community of over 500 people.

In theatre there is an old adage that says, "show, don't tell" and so, I'll close with a few words from some of the parents and students at Ella Baker who wrote to me after the Virtual Aladdin Watch Party that will truly show you why arts education is essential and why the arts are critical to the health and well-being of New York City's recovery from this incredibly traumatic time.

Mary, the PTA parent of a 1st and 3rd grader shared:

"You were mentioned so many times in the End of year Survey results. Over and over parents mentioned that you were a bright spot for their kids. Improv, Puppetry and Aladdin were seen as some of the best things for the kids mentally!"

Karina, our 4th grade student stage manager and older sister of a 2nd grader wrote to me:

"My sister goes to your 11:30 classes almost every day of the week. After the class ends she'll come to me and say, "Look at what I made!" She says this with pride and I can see that she is proud. That is a look that I didn't see on my sister's face before she started spending time with you. I am not the only one who notices that.

There are so many more kids in Ella Baker who have a voice because of you. My dream isn't to be in theater but I am still inspired by you because I want to have the same attitude for my dream.

Sometimes kids can't reach their best. You push kids so they see what their full potential is. Many 4th and 5th graders started Aladdin thinking they could not sing, dance or act. Look at them now. You help Ella Baker students see all the things they can do. And when the show is done, everyone feels proud."

Julian, a fifth grader, said:

"The arts have been very important to me because they help me to get emotion out after a stressful day at school. It helps you calm down and get excited about something in the future. If arts weren't a part of school, I would be disappointed and it would be harder to go to school."

Bella, a fourth grader said:

"I, and I am sure many others, will agree that arts at school are one of the motivated me to get up and get ready for school every morning. I think, "yay! Today is art!" Or, "Drama is so fun."

Clara, a parent of 2 4th grade students said:

"Arts give our kids a chance to build confidence, teamwork and skills that they really can't learn in any other class. They stretch themselves and their relationships with classmates in art, music, dance and drama. Especially now, it is essential that our kids have opportunities to develop trust, respect and empathy with classmates who may not otherwise be their friends. They don't learn this in math or social studies, but they do in drama."

Jennifer and Trevor, parents of a fifth grade student said:

"We cannot express how important arts programming in public school has been to the positive social and emotional development of our child, Julian. The arts have improved his self-confidence tremendously, have made him feel a part of a positive community within school and helped him to discover something that he truly loves. Since getting more involved in arts programming, Julian's overall attitude towards school has become more positive. We can't thank his arts teachers enough for the way they have helped Julian grow into an expressive, confident child. He is always looking forward to the next theater project."

Ben, a fifth grader said:

“I really love performing because it’s fun, and it made me feel valuable.”

Shanwel, a fourth grade student said:

“Arts is essential because when you have arts it builds character and personality. When you act out different characters in shows you have the ability to express different emotions.”

Riley, a 7th grader said:

“The inclusion of an arts education in school is way more important than you think. For everything you would want to have as a career, you need some kind of childhood experience to pursue it. And one of the best ways to get that type of education- is within your school. However, In most schools, their main focuses are: Reading, Writing, Math and Science. But what if your passion is being an artist or a theatre actor? And what if they don't teach you anything about that in school? Where would you get that childhood education from? Schools need to teach you more than just Reading, Writing, Math and Science!

All kids need an education, but not all kid's parents can afford one. This is why kids' education systems can't run by profit, as they put a kids education before the money- which IS totally true. Now, look at schools compared to art/theatre classes. A lot of art/theatre organizations DOES run on profit (With of course, SOME exceptions) meaning a lot of art/theatre classes end up being crazy expensive! What I am trying to say is, if you bring that arts education INTO a public school then parents would get to avoid that trouble- and yet, their kids will still get an arts education!

Now, what about kids that DO NOT want an art's education based career? Well, believe it or not, they STILL need an arts education. Think about this- there are many life skills that are only mainly obtained through good arts education. Like creativity and performing! These are skills that you will likely need- even if your career(s) are not based on arts education! But here is another mind blown that has been scientifically proven- creative thinkers are the main key to solving the world's problems. Yeah. Not only does giving schools arts education improve INDIVIDUAL

lives, but it improves THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE! Creative thinking is EXACTLY what we need a lot of for future generations. Creative thinkers are basically what will make our society better- and schools can play a huge role in that. Another way arts education improves community is by giving students who are not the smartest a place to shine. Some kids are not the smartest in school, but you don't need to be a super smart kid to shine in an Arts program, you just need creativity and talent.

So, if you want to have kids play a part in saving society's problems, give students a good arts education. Not only will it improve their own lives, but will play a part in improving society as a whole.”

Rachel parent of a 4th and 7th grader

“This might be cheesy or cliché but I often think of the quote from rent”

"The opposite of war isn't peace, it's creation"

They may not realize it, but being creative gives children a sense of purpose. Whether it's in art, music, dance, theater...In a nutshell, these programs help keep children out of trouble because they have something to focus on and somewhere to feel like they are making a contribution. This thought is extremely important for children who attend at risk schools and often come from broken homes.

Extremely important as well for LGBT and ASD/ADHD youth who often feel like outsiders and otherwise might have trouble finding friends or feeling accepted as they are.

My son barely spoke a word in the classroom. When he discovered theater and performing he found his voice. This gave him the confidence to finally speak up in class and be himself.

Skye, a 4th grade student said:

“We need art, theatre, and dance to complete ourselves. Not all schools have these special programs. All the kids who wind up with bad jobs or even going to jail probably never went to a school like Ella Baker that gives them the art education they needed. All those people who become scientist or authors probably spent most of their childhood being creative and imaginative.”

Cutting funding for Arts Education will disproportionately affect students like Julian, Karina, Shanwel, Ben, Riley, and Skye who have experienced trauma and many of whom would not have access to quality arts programming outside of their public schools.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education and specifically on arts education programming. Arts education is an essential to the fabric of this city and crucial in the effort to restore and rebuild our great city and the bright future our students have. Let us not take it out on our students or their future.

We need you, the Council members who understand that the #ARTSareEssential, to urge the Mayor to do everything in his power to foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation through arts education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a member of the theater community in NYC and as a former grant evaluator for the DCLA. I have worked at cultural institutions of all shapes and sizes in NYC over the past decade as well as been an audience member at almost every institution that exists in NYC for more than 20 years. The arts is such a major driver of not only the economy in NYC but also our cultural fabric. At a time where the world has closed the arts has been a source of comfort, creating connections remotely to help keep people safe and sane inside. But because of this pause, cultural institutions are hurting, especially cultural institutions that primarily serve people of color. The lack of ticket revenue is devastating - the proposed funding cut would be a death knell. Please reconsider signing death warrants for the livelihoods of thousands of New Yorkers and the centers of our culture here. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Astoria, Queens and as a full-time employee of the New School of Drama in the West Village, Manhattan.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, their voices are needed more than anyone's at this moment in our history. I have seen moving plays and musicals in their walls and know artists whose work was launched thanks to the platform that they created. This is a critical moment where we need more BIPOC voices in the world.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very

communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Liz Olson

Lucy Sexton  
Executive Director  
New Yorkers for Culture & Arts  
[lucy@NY4CA.org](mailto:lucy@NY4CA.org)  
NY4CA.org

June 22, 2020

Thank you for hearing my and so many others' testimony. And thank you and the entire City Council for all the care and work you have been doing for our city in this crisis. My name is Lucy Sexton and I am proud to head New Yorkers for Culture and Arts, a citywide coalition of cultural groups of every size from every neighborhood. The damage of the COVID to every artist, cultural worker, and organization has been immense. I am submitting with my testimony the results of a survey of 143 cultural groups--a mere 10 percent of the city's total cultural landscape. **These 143 groups have combined operating budgets totaling \$2.2B, a workforce of 22,000, and the engagement of 10,000 volunteers.** These groups projected

a revenue loss of **\$489M through June 30<sup>th</sup> alone. It's not just their own workforces impacted:** as the Comptroller's recent report noted, the creative economy generates \$110Billion in economic activity for our city every year.\*\* So a crisis for culture is a crisis for our city.

Despite the shutdown Culture never closed. As you will see in the survey, Culture is playing a critical role in addressing the pressing needs of communities devastated by this crisis: serving as food distribution centers, testing centers, relief centers for protestors, doing critical census outreach, and more. Online programs provide a lifeline for kids stuck at home, for seniors struggling with isolation; and offline, Queens Theatre is sending packages of art materials to kids stuck at home---this is in a school district where 104 children have lost one or both parents. For their and all of our mental health, we need the connection, catharsis, and healing that arts and culture provide. Data shows neighborhoods with robust cultural centers have better outcomes in education, aging, youth caught in the criminal justice system, community strength and safety, and

more.\*\*\* My colleague Nikiesha Hamilton at the Brooklyn Museum points out that if you look at the old redlining maps alongside the COVID maps, you will see they are the same. If you then add the map of cultural assets, you see they are missing in those exact neighborhoods.\*\*\*

As you struggle with this budget during this time of crisis and upheaval, we ask that you break with the past. Instead of cutting arts and culture first, instead of slashing arts ed, instead of abandoning those neighborhoods hardest hit, we ask that you imagine a city where every citizen has value, and every neighborhood deserves the dignity, the healing, and community-strengthening power that culture provides. Arts and culture can again lead the economic regeneration of our communities, but City Council needs to keep culture whole in order for us to do that work. And when a full 40% of the cultural dollars get added at adoption, keeping culture for every community from failing means supporting both DCLA and initiative funding.

\*\* <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>

\*\*\* <https://repository.upenn.edu/siap/>

June 20, 2020

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals:

I am writing as an ordinary person who cares about the Coalition of Theatres of Color. I travel to New York City two to three times a year to enjoy great plays and appreciate so much the variety and diversity of the artistic work available to me throughout your great city. I believe very strongly that there is no better way to educate and inform than through theatre, art and music. At this particular time in our history it seems to me that we need each and every avenue possible to share that education and information, more than ever.

I watched, concerned for many reasons, from miles away as the city of New York has suffered in so many ways from the COVID-19 crisis. I was saddened as I watched the theatres, large and small close in March with no clear path to reopen. Knowing that communities of color have suffered far greater consequences and have been the most impacted by this crisis simply means that the artists, workers, audiences and others involved with the Coalition of Theatres of Color will continue to carry a much greater burden, especially if their funding is cut.

Also knowing that NYC like most of the rest of the country is facing serious, not seen before, budgetary shortfalls due to the COVID-19 shutdowns, now is the time to take a serious look at priorities. What do we value in this great city? The people and organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color bring amazing work to multiple stages, employ thousands of people and bring people like myself to the NYC as many times as year as we can get there to enjoy, to learn and participate in the best place for theatre in the world.

I appreciate what I have come to know as a certain physical safety and security when I visit your city. I believe that level of protection can be achieved without what often times looks like a military presence more than a “serve and protect” organization. NYPD should not be funded to the tune of what I understand is currently 6 billion dollars, at the cost of loss of funding to the Coalition of Theatres of Color and other such cultural organizations. While there are unprecedented financial hurdles to face by the City of New York, those hurdles are far greater at this time in communities of color served so beautifully by the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

It is for all of the above reasons that I am urging you, the Council Members and Commissioner Casals to make the right decision, prioritize ALL considerations and fully fund the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the NY21 New York City Budget.

Sincerely,

Marilyn M. Flowers

**Testimony presented to the NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries and International Inter-group Relations  
Marina Ortiz, June 22, 2020**

Good morning. This is Marina Ortiz, from East Harlem Preservation and the Committee to Empower Voices for Healing and Equity.

The city and nation and world continue undergo change for the better, with millions clamoring for the removal of monuments upholding white supremacy. But, as you know, this call is not new. In 2017 hundreds of NYC residents demanded the removal of the Teddy Roosevelt and Christopher Columbus statues. Here in East Harlem we won a 10-year battle to remove a statue honoring J Marion Sims—a white southern doctor who experimented on Black female slaves and their infants to “perfect” his techniques. The statue was removed on April 17, 2018. But, we have yet to see a replacement that reflect the spirit and resilience of black and brown people.

Today, now is precisely the time to act and move forward with Vinnie Bagwell’s “Black Victory” installation. In 2018, Mayor de Blasio and the First Lady set aside \$1 million dollars for that project and representatives from DCLA and the Percent for Art Program assured us that the project would be finalized by the end of this year. But, even before COVID-19 hit NYC, the Committee to Empower Voices for Healing and Equity were kept out of the loop, the process came to a standstill, again, BEFORE the virus hit us, with emails and calls unanswered while Vinnie Bagwell waited patiently to sign her contract and move forward.

We sincerely hope that the current climate will not affect this project, which is dear to so many Black and Latino residents of this city. I believe that moving forward with Vinnie’s amazing vision would be a powerful yet simple gesture towards bringing restorative justice and serve as an important resource for healing and educating.

Thank you.

Marina Ortiz, Founder and President  
East Harlem Preservation  
646-271-6854



Where creative learning  
meets community change

Martha Bowers, Executive Director  
Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
[June 23, 2020]

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Martha Bowers, and I work as the Executive Director of Hook Arts Media located in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Founded in 1994, the mission of Hook Arts Media is to unite artists and community members to co-create cultural activities, using the arts as a vehicle for critical investigations that lead to personal and social transformation, towards the goal of establishing a more just and equitable society. Hook Arts Media's annual programs **serve approximately 6,000 individuals each year**. Hook Arts serves **750 young people through arts and media education programs, targeted to predominantly African American and Latino teens and young adults aged 16-25 from high-poverty communities (Red Hook, Queensbridge, Brownsville, Bushwick, East New York)**. Hook Arts Media's free arts productions and festivals typically attract 5,000 people: 50% African American, 30% Latino and 20% White or other, with over 80% coming from Red Hook.

According to the NYC DOE, there are approximately 138,000 young adults in NYC who drop out or are at least 2 years off-track for graduation, as a result of the effects of systemic poverty and racism. Hook Arts Media's programs provide support to these young people, by providing them with culturally relevant arts programming, job training, and high-level skills they need to succeed. Hook Arts Media's focus on digital media responds to a serious digital divide in NYC's low-income communities, and a need for programs that provide technology access and training.

Hook Arts Media has completely reconfigured our school-based, afterschool and festival programming in light of COVID-19. We have worked quickly with our teaching artists to develop new online teaching modalities, deliver equipment to students, and partner with schools to structure our programs within their new virtual school days. Our community-based Digital Media program continued online as of March 21st and plans are in progress for online summer filmmaking classes. Both of our afterschool film programs pay participants minimum wage stipends, which are especially important at this time especially since the NYC SYEP has been cancelled. We are currently working on plans to offer our free Red Hook Fest this June on a virtual platform, bringing the Red Hook community together online when the community cannot connect in person. Lastly, we are providing live music performances to Red Hook residents waiting on food distribution lines and donating supplies to distribution sites.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, to engage students in learning and prepare them for college or the workforce. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to



Where creative learning  
meets community change

take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

On behalf of Hook Arts Media's staff and Board, I request that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let us not make New York – **where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs** – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. These cuts will have devastating impact on our organization, forcing us to lay off staff and curtail vital arts programming to under-served communities. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through the work of many extraordinary cultural organizations. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martha Bowers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "B".

Martha Bowers



## **MIND-BUILDERS TESTIMONY – JUNE 22 & 23, 2020 - MADAHA KINSEY-LAMB**

To you dedicated leaders of New York City, let me first say **thank you for this opportunity, and for your commitment to arrive at just and thoughtful policies for the distribution of public funds in these extraordinary times.** My name is Madaha Kinsey-Lamb, and I am the Executive Director and Founder of Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center in the Northeast Bronx. **Current statistics for our neighborhood show that our (10467) zip code has the highest numbers of COVID-19 infection in all of New York City.**

We conduct classes and community productions with more than 750 students each year, with a particular focus on youth. Since we began with arts education more than 40 years ago, we have known that we serve a vulnerable population. But it's why we, like so many other community-based cultural organizations, have always been about more than providing music and dance classes; UPK, theater, community folk culture research, and fitness classes.

At Mind-Builders we work alongside our parents, students, the grandparents, and more than 34 teaching artists to empower our children and our community, to build confidence, prepare for college scholarship auditions and access to specialized high schools; provide free tutoring, counseling, jobs, and career training; and have youth realize dreams they never thought possible. Within two weeks of the NYC shutdown order, we had **transitioned all of our classes to online. Close to 75% of our students continued in over 225 weekly virtual classes that we provided at no charge.**

Without your support over the years, Mind-Builders could not have become the force that it is for hope and leadership in this community, and so again we thank you. But more is needed. **The need for what we do has never been greater. The inequities of twelve generations that continue to be evidenced in our communities every day must be addressed.** Thank you for the courage and wisdom you will continue to demonstrate towards this goal.

## Testimony for the NYC City Council on Arts and Culture

My name is Melissa Riker, I am a dancer, choreographer & producer living and working professionally in NYC for 20 years. I thank Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo and Commissioner Casals for your clear support of the arts, social justice and to all of the inspiring artists that have spoken before me today. I testify in support of Dance NYC, and to share the story of my own, unusual, dance organization.

My dance company is Kinesis Project dance theatre, a large scale, outdoor dance company that places crafted dances in large, public spaces primarily in New York and Seattle for **all** of the people in those spaces, bringing surprise and joy to our audiences of all ages.

We believe in a “free range” and facilitated audience, there are no barriers to watching our work, and audience members who are intimidated by theaters, or who many not be comfortable sitting for extended periods, enjoy the freedom of experiencing Kinesis Project’s dances.

We have partnered with many NYC institutions, Snug Harbor, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Queens Botanical Garden, South Street Seaport, Riverside Park South and many parks and public spaces. You can learn more about us at [kinesisproject.com](http://kinesisproject.com).

Chair Van Bramer, you may have seen Kinesis Project during the inaugural Insitu festival along LIC in 2017 with costumes that drew our performance with colored sand and engaged our audiences by sending a wish and sand into the East River. We were also in contact for you to join us in Ft. Tilden in 2016 to witness our work Secrets and Seawalls - Stephanie Goldstein is a big fan of our work and I believe she was pushing for you and I to meet for a while.

Mr. Commissioner, you, Solana and I had a meeting to plan toward a Kinesis Project performance on the Highline in 2017 (the performance didn’t happen). It was lovely to meet you then, and inspiring to see you leading DCLA now.

Majority Leader, I have long admired your work, and am honored to have been commissioned by Brooklyn Botanic Garden to unveil their Discovery Garden in 2016.

Due to the timing of stay home orders, Kinesis Project’s NYC dancers are scattered between usual spots like Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens, but also Florida and Pittsburgh - they are all still paying NYC rents.

To keep the dancers connected, working and creative, Kinesis Project has continued rehearsing both the NY and Seattle core companies and have been offering LIVE, crafted, performances and gatherings on zoom. We are a grateful recipient of COVID emergency grants from Dance NYC & the Indie Theatre Fund to make this possible.

### **MAIN TESTIMONY:**

Kinesis Project has performances scheduled in NYC parks this summer, in July and in August. We are prepared to pivot to a hybrid model in partnership with our parks presenters to bring dance to our audiences either online or in a hybrid online/live format.

HOWEVER we lack any guidelines for how outdoor cultural organizations might proceed. This makes planning close to impossible. I am left feeling like we are taking a chance in every direction. And left on our own without any cultural support.

While I see baseball games and pick up soccer games happen in my neighborhood, I am concerned and confused about asking my dancers to get on the subway and about the safety of bringing our diverse and multi generational audiences together to see us perform.

Kinesis Project CAN offer beautiful, distanced and inspiring art to the people of NYC now, or later, **but without clear guidance on these steps and support from City Council on the Value of the Arts in public spaces why should I ask my dancers to take the chance?**

**Kinesis Project, and outdoor artists like myself could be working, helping everyone else experience relief, but not without clear support.**

**THE STORY OF JUST ONE ARTIST**

As a New York City dance Artist I wear many hats; I am a teacher in schools and to young women on Riker's Island, a resident artist in an international school, resident choreographer of New York City Children's Theatre, a curator, and producer.

From those roles I individually impact hundreds of young, recovering and emerging artistic lives.

I co-direct the organization Women in Motion, a year long commission of three female artists per year with development support for their work and a culminating performance.

I am the Executive Producer of the EstroGenius Festival, an annual festival celebrating the voices of female identifying, gender non conforming, and racially diverse artists, 2020 is the Festival's 20th year, we postponed our March 18th opening pivoting to small experiences online knowing that the voices of artists needed to continue to be heard.

We appreciate the 2020 LMCC/DCLA Creative Community grant to support the festival.

We are committed to sharing the art of our 2020 artists in a strong, hybrid format when we can manage to re-open.

I am just one artist, but between these three organizations my collaborators and I support well over 100 artists per year in NYC. I am sure there are many other individual artists in NYC who touch even more lives.

**PLEASE CONSIDER:**

1. Culture and dance experiences a social service to the mental, physical and aesthetic health of NYC.
2. Continue fighting for a City Budget that reveals that Black Lives Matter to the City Council
3. Cancelling Rent so artists and organizations can stay in NYC
4. Offering support and guidelines for OUTDOOR CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS
5. In support of Jennifer Wright Cook's revelation of the Seal of NYC - Please move to re vamp the design to tell a story of justice, reparation and apology.

Thank you for your time.

Melissa Riker

Kinesis Project dance theatre

EstroGenius Festival

Women in motion NYC



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs  
June 23, 2020

My name is Michelle Amador, and I am the Director of Development at the Mark Morris Dance Group located in Fort Greene, Brooklyn (District #35). On behalf of the Mark Morris Dance Group and the vibrant community of artists, teaching artists, students and participants of all ages and all abilities who hail from all boroughs of our great City and who rely on our programming, **I urge you to continue to support NYC arts education and the cultural community.**

Support from the City has played a vital role in the Mark Morris Dance Group's continued evolution as community resource since 1998. In 2001, the City also provided key support for the creation of the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, NY. Propelled by core values of access, community, excellence, and creativity, **MMDG now engages 37,000 New Yorkers each year** through award-winning adaptive/inclusive education and community programs, subsidized rehearsal space for local artists, critically acclaimed performances, and artist/audience engagements.

The Mark Morris Dance Center is home to the critically acclaimed performance group and to MMDG's education and engagement programs serving a **broad constituency ranging from schoolchildren, residents of public housing children with special needs, court-involved youth, individuals with Parkinson's disease, local artists using subsidized rehearsal space, and others of all ages and abilities.** Inspired by Morris' work and ethos that "dance is for anybody", The School at the Dance Center welcomes New Yorkers from every borough, **annually serving 2,500 students between the ages of 18 months and 18 years**, in addition to **5,000 adults per month**. Beyond the Dance Center, in FY20, MMDG's Community Outreach programs engaged **46 NYC community partnerships** with organizations across three boroughs, reaching **2,113 New Yorkers**. Nearly 60% of those partnerships took place in schools. All youth programming is informed by the five strands of learning in dance as stipulated by the NYCDOE Blueprint for Learning and Teaching in Dance. Additionally, MMDG's groundbreaking Dance for PD® program engaged **1,300 people living with Parkinson's and their care partners** in classes taking place in nine locations across the 5 boroughs of New York City.

Despite the severe financial and operational challenges presented by COVID-19, MMDG has remained committed to its mission - forging new pathways for engaging a now extremely isolated community through online/digital programming. At the onset, we immediately began a dialogue with our community members to assure them that we are still a support, resource, and no matter what, we are not going away. We initiated regular communication around proactive strategies to keep participants safe and healthy while programs continued prior to the DOE and other community-based closures. We fostered reciprocal communication regarding accessible resources that allow the community to continue to participate in the services of the Mark Morris Dance Group. We began a virtual learning program immediately following the SIP orders to **keep our community engaged and moving, and to provide critical wellness for people in isolation.** Committed to our community partnerships, we have developed customized interactive virtual engagement programs with input from each community partner with an aim to continue to support the organization's core value of community. These expanded online programming has proven



to be a lifeline, particularly for our constituents in the Parkinson's community, who benefit from our groundbreaking Dance for PD program.

**On behalf of all of us at the Mark Morris Dance Group, I urge you to advocate for NYC arts education and the cultural community** by ensuring that the Cultural Development Fund and other Initiatives remain intact. Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant NYC, helping to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. As a major economic driver, **NYC's arts and culture sector provides over 400,000 jobs.**

Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages and rebuild our economy. For this to happen, arts organizations need sustained funding. Indeed, programs that foster creative discovery, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first, as we look to build a strong road to recovery.

Our fellow New Yorkers benefit on many levels by exploring and experience dance, music, music, visual art, writing, and media arts available through cultural programming. From youth building important life skills for the future, to older adults finding meaning and connection while aging with dignity, these people represent the cultural and economic vitality of our city.

Additionally, I write to provide my support for the movement to divest from the police and re-invest those funds more directly into the community, prioritizing Black-led organizations, and communities of color. The reallocation of this funding represents a direct opportunity to create a new future for the people who have been unjustly affected by years of police brutality.

Please continue to support the programs that support New Yorkers. And please, reallocate funding from the police to the communities that are in the greatest need and who have been so horrifically affected by systemic racism. Help us create a world wherein the connections between our communities and the impact we have on one another is not so invisible that it requires this kind of laborious testimonial by artists, arts workers, and beneficiaries of these services who are already taxed by limited resources. New York City is rare as a cultural global leader. Your actions now determine our fate.

Sincerely,

Michelle Amador

Director of Development, Mark Morris Dance Group

(And Independent Singer/Songwriter, And Member of Women of Color in the Arts, and Mother)

June 20, 2020

Re: Request to Establish Commission for Reparations

Dear Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Thank you for your continued support of the arts in New York City. I am writing on behalf of The Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA), to call upon the City of New York to acknowledge its history, its support of slavery and its legacies through redlining, gentrification, food and medical apartheid, educational exploitation, erasure, mass incarceration, surveillance, predatory finance, and more, and for this Council to take action to repair the systemic injustices inflicted upon Black residents of New York City, especially to arts organizations that uplift this community (which includes Black artists) by first immediately establishing a Commission for Reparations.

As you may know MoCADA was born from our Founder Laurie Cumbo's graduate thesis on the feasibility of whether an African museum could contribute to the revitalization of neighboring Black communities socially, economically, and politically. Inspired by the DuSable museum in Chicago, the oldest museum dedicated to African American history in the U.S., Ms. Cumbo launched MoCADA in 1999 in a building owned by the historic Bridge Street AWME Church in BedStuy, Brooklyn.

Twenty years later, our mission has grown and our activities are delivered through three programmatic arms -- Exhibitions, Education and Community. Each of our programmatic arms use the visual arts as a point of exploration through the experience of the African Diaspora to incite dialogue around pressing issues Black communities face worldwide. Through new artistic productions across a variety of disciplines, we reach well beyond the walls of the museum's physical space to deliver dynamic arts and educational programming that explore social justice topics through the lens of creativity and help break down barriers to the arts by highlighting the people, cultures, and themes that give art its power in the world.

### **MORE THAN A MUSEUM**

Since our founding, we have worked tirelessly to be "more than a museum", collaborating with over 30 arts organizations, public school administrators, public housing community leaders, educators, artists, local businesses and government agencies to make the arts an integral component of neighborhood development and economic sustainability. The primary aims of our mission are to:

- break down barriers to the arts
- explore social justice topics through the lens of creativity
- serve as a conduit to expression, inspiration and learning
- highlight people, cultures, and themes that give art its power
- serve as a critical tool for engaging people across social divides
- welcome those systematically left out (Black people, children, low income, women, LBTQIAP+, seniors, people living with disabilities)
- help to eliminate the financial disparities that Black artists endure
- empower artists/curators of African descent to further their craft, present and sell work.

As a result, through our various on-and-off site programs that reach over 200,000 people every year on and offline, MoCADA:

- Welcomes those who are systematically left out, most especially, Black artists, Black residents of Brooklyn, children, low income individuals, women, LBTQIAP+, seniors, and people living with disabilities;
- Serves as a critical tool for engaging with people across social divides; and
- Preserves and restores the cultural narratives to ensure the recognition and honoring of the collective struggles and triumphs of Black people worldwide;

### **ART WORLD AT A GLANCE**

MoCADA has a longstanding history as an incubator for emerging artists of Black artists, providing a platform in which to use their creativity to connect and inspire communities throughout the African diaspora, with a particular emphasis on the communities of NYC. Over the years, over 100 groundbreaking artists across 20+ countries, like, Terence Nance (Random Acts of Flyness), Dread Scott, Wangechi Mutu, Jamel Shabazz, Ava DuVernay, Saul Williams, have looked to and were greatly supported by MoCADA to delve deeper into their artistic practice at the museum.

These artists have looked to and were greatly supported by MoCADA to delve deeper into their artistic practice and/or support the museum's various programs. For many, whom we identify as MoCADA Firsts!, the privilege was and remains an opportunity to showcase their comprehensive body of work for the very first time.

I joined this rich legacy of MoCADA one year ago as Executive Director, hoping to lend my expertise to an organization that was and is ready to realize the next level of its growth. What I have found in that time is that at MoCADA and other Blacks arts institutions, the problems are the same: While creative enterprise by our artists and service to our community is never lacking, among the ongoing concerns are funding for artists, general operations—whether to build, maintain, or scale infrastructure—and the rigamarole of maintaining compliance to receive actual dollars while navigating systems that were created to leave us behind.

Inspired by an investigative report by In Other Words and artnet News that makes clear the disparities that Black artists face in juxtaposition to their non-POC counterparts, I have been steadfast in my commitment to leverage our work in the arts sector to eliminate this disparity. I am just as dedicated to upending the intrinsic undervaluing that Black arts institutions face as well, so that we may continue to serve our communities in the ways that only we know how.

Some fun facts:

- Since 2008, just 2.37 percent of all acquisitions and gifts and 7.6 percent of all exhibitions at 30 prominent American museums have been of work by African American artists (In Other Words and artnet News). And yet, over the past decade, purchases and gifts of work by African American artists accounted for a mere 2.4 percent of all acquisitions by the 30 museums we surveyed. Even starker is the fact that at four of these museums, this work accounted for less than one percent of all acquisitions.
- Researchers examined more than 40,000 artworks in the collections of 18 museums across the US, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. At The National Gallery of Art, there are 986 works by black artists out of the 153,621 total works. Meanwhile the Met has hosted eight exhibitions focused on African American artists in the past 10 years of the about 40 exhibitions they produce every year.

- Only 16 percent of leadership positions in art museums are held by people of color and only four percent of museum curators are African American, according to a 2015 study by Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
- In 2015, 76 percent of staff at participating AAMD museums were held by White employees, with employees of color concentrated in facilities, security and human resources positions, revealing that many institutions in the field lack a clear path to advancement for POC to the most influential positions.

And while some museums now scramble to meet this gap in representation thanks to DEI efforts and the current Black Lives Matter movement, such as The Brooklyn Museum which received \$4.2 million to establish a wing for African art (to incorporate the existing Egyptian collection); and MoMA shut their doors last year to reopen as a more inclusive space, receiving \$400 million and 40k square feet of new space to celebrate contemporary artists who have traditionally been overlooked in the art world including women and artists of color, Black arts institutions remain severely underfunded.

### **FOUNDATIONS & FUNDING**

These public financial figures, which are great for the greater arts space and should be celebrated, are a rarity in the Black arts space. We, Black arts institutions like MoCADA, never see the likes of these budgets to work on our specific practice, which has always directly benefited the communities DEI intends to support.

“For foundations, it is a matter of grantmaking institutions largely led and governed by whites trying to discern the significance of African-American museums to their communities and to society overall.” - Rick Cohen, “The State of Black Museums”, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, June 6, 2014.

Here’s another quote that speaks to the heart of the matter, from Randall A. Williams and Michael Worth of George Washington University who examined the disparity in funding to Black museums (one of the few existing, academic papers to do so): “African American museums face a unique set of challenges that impede their efforts to achieve financial sustainability. African American museums are under funded due to historical barriers, cultural preferences for charitable giving, institutional youth, and a dearth of professional business and museum skills.”

“Virtually none are accredited with the American Association of Museums (AAM), few have endowments beyond a nominal size, and many have had to cut staff, programs, or projects in order to remain open,” Williams and Worth wrote. “African American museums need an internal reorientation of missions and staff, as well as an external infusion of funds and experience to address these challenges.”

Two big factors:

- “Nationally, only 6 percent of minority organizations receive comparable funding from individual donors to organizations serving mostly White patrons, according to Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA), which evaluates how equally grants are distributed, according to Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA), which evaluates how equally grants are distributed.
- “The proportion of foundation CEOs who are persons of color actually decreased between 2011 and 2012; in its 2012 report, the Council of Foundations reported that the proportion of foundation CEOs of color decreased from 9.2 to 8.4 percent and as

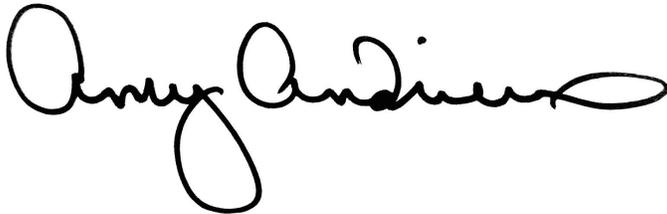
Executive Vice Presidents or assistant directors from 12.9 to 11.9 percent. Although the foundation CEO proportion is above where it was in the mid-1990s, it has stagnated in recent years.”

All this to say that while change is hoped for now with engaged awareness of anti-Blackness, we cannot forget the institutions who have worked diligently to bring about this change and serve Black communities since their inception — institutions who understand these communities because they are of and from these communities.

As such, shouldn't reparations to Black arts institutions be central to the mission of DEI, funding from foundations, city and state? As an example, where would Weeksville Heritage Center, a cultural landmark that nearly closed its doors in the last year, be now hadn't it been awarded CIG status and \$300k in funding? This is cultural reparations at work....

With that said, I implore you and every other institution and the gatekeepers who oversee these decisions to take action to repair this relationship to Black residents in deeper and more meaningful and lasting ways by establishing a Commission for Reparations, lest we leave behind the Black community again, and close the doors to our institutions tomorrow.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Andrieux". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

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**DCLA, COVID-19, and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs Hearing  
Cindy Lawrence, Executive Director and CEO, National Museum of Mathematics**

Good morning, Chair Van Bramer and Members of the Council, and thank you for holding today's important hearing. My name is Cindy Lawrence and I am the Executive Director and CEO of the National Museum of Mathematics, also known as MoMath. MoMath is the only math museum in North America, and its mission is to enhance public understanding and perception of mathematics. Its mission takes on an even greater significance in today's environment, since competency in math can impact success in all aspects of a student's life. The Museum features more than 40 interactive exhibits and hosts a broad variety of programs that stimulate inquiry, spark curiosity, and reveal the wonders of mathematics.

Prior to COVID-19, MoMath hosted multiple school trips every school day and regularly offered free community programming. During the most recent school year, the Museum hosted almost 400 field trips for NYC schools, 80 of which were free for Title I schools through MoMath's *Maxima* program. These trips gave students the opportunity to experience the wonders of math through exploration of dynamic exhibits and participation in hands-on, educator-led sessions. The Museum also consistently offered free in-person programming, such as *Family Fridays*, where families come together to enjoy a diverse array of engaging, interactive mathematical activities, and *Math Encounters*, a popular public presentation series celebrating the spectacular world of mathematics.

MoMath ceased in-person programming at the Museum on March 13 due to COVID-19. While closing the Museum had a profound impact on operations, MoMath was resilient, quickly pivoting to providing online and virtual programming. In fact, the Museum's first online field trip took place on the same day as its last in-person field trip. To date, MoMath has hosted almost 50 virtual field trips reaching more than 1,000 students, more than half of whom attended free of charge. In addition, approximately 25,000 participants have engaged in more than 700 online and virtual programs offered by the Museum. Many of these programs were offered for free to the public, while the Museum's fee-based programs are available free to families with financial need.

MoMath's online field trips offer a variety of inspiring mathematical themes for grades Pre-K through 12, including topics such as Möbius madness, secrets of cryptography, and topological tic-tac-toe. These trips have been very successful so far; teachers have raved about the level of their students' engagement. One teacher emailed to say, "Feedback has been amazing. You made the day of my students and teachers. Please let us know how to register for more of the Title I experiences. You truly helped make education come alive for students who normally would not get such an experience."

While we can't wait to welcome visitors back to MoMath, we're thrilled to continue providing continued free online programming for New York City students and families. With schools closed and limited opportunities for youth this summer, it is vital that we keep the city's youth engaged. In addition, due to COVID-19, many students are falling behind academically. A few weeks ago, the Mayor shared that he estimates that almost 178,000 students, or nearly 1 out of 6 students, are projected to be in summer classes. MoMath is uniquely suited to address both issues of youth engagement and academic challenges through engaging and educating students in a core subject. MoMath's online programs captivate students



by using games, puzzles, and crafts to connect math to other subjects like sports, music, visual arts, card games, astronomy, and engineering. In short, MoMath helps students realize that math can be fun.

I'd like to thank the Council for its dedicated advocacy on behalf of the cultural community and our city's youth. We at MoMath are excited to continue to work together to provide free and engaging educational programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**DCLA, COVID-19, and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs Hearing  
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I'd like to thank the Council for its dedicated advocacy on behalf of the cultural community and our city's youth. We at MoMath are excited to continue to work together to provide free and engaging educational programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a producer and theatermaker in the downtown theater world (where many shows are developed and incubated that end up on Broadway or in larger institutions and CIGs). I have worked for organizations including The Bushwick Starr, a 10+ year performance venue whose programming includes afterschool and senior center workshops generously supported by CASA and SU-CASA grants, and Target Margin Theater in Sunset Park, whose space is temporarily serving as a food pantry operated by South Brooklyn Mutual Aid. I served on the board of A.R.T./New York and, while no longer in the nonprofit theater field, I still turn to them as allies and advocates. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Sunset Park and currently works as the full-time Producer of the Mercury Store, a new developmental space for theater artists set to open in the fall or winter in Gowanus.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I have partnered with Sade Lythcott, Jonathan McCrory and National Black Theatre, with Ralph B. Peña and Ma-Yi Theatre Company, as well as with Mia Katigbak who is on the leadership team at National Asian American Theatre Co. They are but a handful of an amazing and committed group of people leading these institutions and conversations. As a cis white gay man, I have enjoyed plenty of privilege in my life and in this field, and I continue to benefit from a system that perpetually and disproportionately disincludes artists and leaders of color. The CTC organizations are at the forefront of pushing the artform and pushing necessary dialogues and action plans. They will continue to shoulder so much of this work but those of us who identify as white have to do better at doing our own work. This work includes investing more now than ever. In all honesty, this should be a letter urging increased funding for the CTC, not one pushing for the survival of its funding.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

John Del Gaudio (he/him/his)  
Producer, Mercury Store  
(646) 281-2076

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**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations  
Oversight Hearing: DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City**

**Submitted by Barry Grove, Executive Producer**

June 18, 2020

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. I am writing on behalf of Manhattan Theatre Club, a not-for-profit theatre company founded in 1970 that annually produces a season of eight new plays and musicals divided between three theatres on and Off-Broadway. In addition to developing and producing new plays, we also strive to make this work accessible to New Yorkers of all ages and walks of life. For over 30 years, MTC's vibrant Education program has ignited the imaginations of young people around the region by connecting them to theatre and playwriting.

Over the years, MTC productions have earned 27 Tony Awards, 41 Drama Desk Awards, and seven Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Recent notable MTC productions include *My Name is Lucy Barton*, adapted from Elizabeth Strout's novel by Rona Munro, James Graham's *INK*, Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Choir Boy*, Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, and August Wilson's *Jitney*.

MTC's core mission is to create, develop and produce new works of theatre—an art form that, when it is most successful, holds a mirror up to us as individuals and as a society. That mirror reflects the need to address racism as it exists in every industry, including our own. In recent weeks, we have been thinking about how our role as an arts organization can create the change needed to address the racism, bias and prejudice that pervade our industry and our culture, and we have embraced a mandate to do much more to promote this change. With a renewed spirit, we are moving forward and redoubling our efforts to promote equity and diversity.

As New York City begins to reopen, we are looking forward to the day when we will be able to welcome audiences and students back into our theatres. We are proud to be part of New York City's vibrant theatrical community, which is so vital to the City's economy and a cultural asset that enhances quality of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a devastating toll on MTC, like our peer theatres around the City. This spring, MTC closed its first Off-Broadway production of 2020, *The Perplexed*, on March 13, about two weeks early. Our remaining three productions planned for the 2019-20 season—Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*, Qui Nguyen's *Poor Yella Rednecks* and Emily Feldman's *The Best We Could (A Family Tragedy)*—were cancelled. We also cancelled two of the four readings in our annual free public reading series in March.

While our theatres are dark, we have pivoted to serving our community remotely. Staff in our costume department have sewn masks for healthcare workers with fabric provided by MTC; and we are now donating refreshments from our theatre concessions to groups offering support to protestors. *Write Now!*, our free after-school playwriting program, transitioned to online meetings. *TheatreLink*, our distance-learning playwriting and production project, served almost 250 students on three continents throughout

the spring. We have also launched an ongoing Student Monologue-Writing Challenge and created the Family Drama Playwriting Series, which includes short video modules providing dramatic writing and theatre activities for families, students, or teachers looking for curriculum ideas. This summer, Stargate Theatre, our theatre-making and job skills development program that helps young men overcoming involvement with the justice system, will be held online. And MTC is hosting regular live Q&A sessions with playwrights, directors, and other guests that offer a behind the scenes look at theatre. Our goal is to continue connecting New Yorkers of all ages to theatre until we can gather together in person.

This spring, we lost ticket revenue for the three cancelled productions and some revenue from our annual Gala, which was also called off. We entered May projecting an operating deficit of approximately \$1 million, before depreciation. Thankfully, MTC was approved for a PPP loan that will offset much of this shortfall. We may also be able to recoup some of our losses from performance insurance. While we have furloughed some theatre staff and artists who would have worked on our spring productions, we have worked very hard to preserve jobs, and have thus far been able to avoid widespread cuts. Regardless of when we can reopen, we expect large reductions in revenue from ticket sales and donations throughout 2020-21. Even our best case scenario budget projections include multi-million dollar deficits. Senior staff have already taken pay cuts, and we anticipate beginning more temporary furloughs over the summer.

As we move toward reopening the City, we are eager to be part of its rebirth. To this end, we are moving forward with planning a renovation project at our Broadway home, the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, to ensure that when we are able to reopen safely, this historic theatre can continue to be an economic engine for New York City, and a safe destination for New Yorkers and tourists alike. Opened in 1925, the theatre was reopened by MTC in 2003 following a \$35 million renovation. Since then, it has been home to nearly 20% of the new plays on Broadway.

With the theatre in use for almost 20 years since then, its major systems and equipment are nearing the end of their useful lives and need to be replaced. Replacement parts are becoming difficult to find, and existing equipment is not up to current standards. MTC has requested a \$6 million capital allocation from the City Council, DCLA, and the Manhattan Borough President to support these critically needed renovations. Capital funds will support updates to the Friedman Theatre's HVAC, security, and fire suppression systems, and help us replace outdated theatrical lighting and sound equipment. The renovation project will reduce costs and energy usage, increase public safety, enhance the theatre-going experience for the public, and preserve jobs.

In a normal season, MTC produces three plays and/or musicals at the Friedman Theatre that employ over 300 people and attract 150,000 audience members, including 1,000+ NYC students and family members that attend Education programs free of charge. More than 90% of the young people participating in our Education programs are people of color, and nearly 75% are living in poverty. 12% of our students are in juvenile detention facilities or attend alternative schools. The Friedman is fully ADA accessible, and last year we offered Broadway's first-ever set touch tour for people who are blind or have low vision.

The last few months have reminded us powerfully of how transformative it is to gather together in person in a theatre, and we are so eager to bring audiences back to our shuttered spaces. Support from the City of New York will be critical to our ability to weather this storm so that we can once again bring together New Yorkers of all ages to share theatrical experiences that inspire and enlighten.



dances for a variable population

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City Council Testimony  
NYC Department of Cultural Affairs  
June 9, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs. My name is Naomi Goldberg Haas and I am the Founder and Artistic Director of Dances For A Variable Population in Harlem. The mission of Dances For A Variable Population is bring strong and creative movement to older adults that supports wellness, happiness, and health. Dances For A Variable Population annually serves over 2,500 older adults throughout four boroughs of NYC with weekly programs of classes and large scale performances.

We are advocating for critical funding to be sustained for the arts that we and so many other organizations provide to people of all ages across the city, that is especially critical at this time.

The older adults we serve are primarily living alone, are highly vulnerable to COVID-19, and lack other outlets for physical exercise and social connections. Even before this pandemic pushed society in social isolation, loneliness was at epidemic levels affecting 60-80% of the population. Recognizing that loneliness decreases life span by 26% exceeding the risks of death associated with obesity, physical activity and air pollution, programs that mitigate this life-threatening condition are essential at this time.

This spring, we moved very rapidly to provide remote programming. We now offer 14 classes a week, 7 days a week via video, live Zoom, and even telephone-based classes for participants, which have been wildly popular for isolated older adults without internet. Our remote programs have an attendance of over 350 seniors each week, with 20-50 students in each virtual class, and our videos have had nearly 4,000 views.

At this critical time, programs like ours are maintaining the physical and mental health of New York City's most vulnerable populations. We rely on discretionary funding from the New York City Council through the Department for the Aging and Department of Cultural Affairs to sustain these programs, as we work in low-income communities that cannot afford to pay for them. Loss of New York City funding would have a devastating impact on the health and welfare of the communities we serve. These programs promote a sense of safety, and a sense of possibility for all our communities, and they must not be cut.

Thank you.



**June 22, 2020**

**New York City Council Hearing**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**  
Submitted by Natalie A. Correa, Program Assistant, National Dance Institute

Good morning, everyone. My name is Natalie Correa and I am a Program Assistant at National Dance Institute (also known as NDI). In 1976, ballet star Jacques d'Amboise founded NDI in the belief that the arts have a unique power to engage and motivate individuals towards excellence. Ever since, NDI has transformed the lives of more than 2 million children.

As Jacques said, "With limitations comes creativity." During the COVID-19 pandemic, NDI has continued its mission via creative online programming. We have launched ndiLIVE!, a platform of free online classes, where NDI teaching artists are leading children in signature NDI choreography, a variety of high-energy dance classes for all ability levels, plus a weekly music class. We have also created an online learning hub for our In-School Program Partners and have offered online teaching artist trainings. Additionally, we are offering free dance classes for our DREAM dance program—which provides children with disabilities the opportunity to perform—via weekly live classes as well as through our free on-demand series DREAM Project@Home. While most of our programs are free, we've lost tremendous revenue during this time and can't sustain future revenue cuts.

Arts education is essential and supports the social and emotional well-being of our students, whether through distance learning or in person. Though teaching and learning will never quite be the same in the post-COVID-19 world, our commitment to providing high-quality arts education remains unwavering. We have witnessed how the arts have played an important role in these tumultuous times through our students' engagement and consistent attendance, and we know it will continue to do so for *all* students, including the traditionally underrepresented, those with special needs, and from low-income families.

Alongside my colleagues from New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts (also known as NYC4A), we believe arts organizations are an essential part of the communities we serve. Thank you.

**Submitted by:**

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**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Hearing**

**Oversight: DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City**

**June 22, 2020**

**New York Philharmonic Statement to New York City Council**

**Introduction**

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic have had a devastating impact on New York City's arts and culture sector. Even the New York Philharmonic, one of the City's first professional arts organizations and the nation's oldest Orchestra, is operating in a perilous situation that challenges its foundation and threatens its future. The mandated cancellation of live performances and large gatherings, though necessary for public safety, has had profound community and economic ramifications, with the full impact yet to be determined and sure to be felt for years to come. Even more disheartening is the loss of opportunity for the New York City public to engage with their hometown Orchestra, as concerts and education programs have been abruptly put on hold. Being forced to close the doors of David Geffen Hall and to cancel our free citywide summer concerts and education programs has denied thousands of New Yorkers access to classic music and eliminated crucial revenue to sustain the Orchestra.

**Impact of COVID-19**

Beginning in March 2020, the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic forced the New York Philharmonic to take immediate action in order to protect its community members and the general public. At that time, the measures included the cancellation of all concerts and activities from March 12 to July 29, 2020, representing over 60 unique performances in New York City, including the Philharmonic's beloved Concerts in the Parks series, through which over 100,000 diverse New Yorkers attend free concerts in parks across all five boroughs, and Young People's Concerts for Schools, which bring 13,000 students in grades 3–12 to Lincoln Center for orchestral concerts. Due to the pandemic's global implications, the Philharmonic was also forced to withdraw from a highly anticipated European tour, which was scheduled to include historic performances as the first American orchestra to perform at the Mahler Festival in Amsterdam, as well as summer residencies in China and Vail, Colorado.

In response to these circumstances, the Philharmonic took the following actions beginning March 23:

- Implemented a 13-week pay reduction for select administrative staff, ranging from 5 to 30%;
- Reduced orchestra salary to minimum scale during the month of April and 75% of minimum scale through May, with health benefits until September 20, when the musicians' contract is up for renegotiation;
- Launched an emergency fundraising campaign to bridge financial losses due to the loss of ticket sales, program sponsorship, and cancellation of galas; and
- Began analysis of staffing requirements in preparation for furloughs and layoffs of administrative staff.

Due to the loss of ticket revenue, the primary source of earned income, the Philharmonic projected an operating loss of \$10 million, and a significantly reduced endowment due to the pandemic's impact on the economy (representing a loss of \$30 million) as of late March.

A bleaker picture for the organization's future emerged throughout the spring as the Philharmonic consulted with medical professionals, including a Lincoln Center Medical Council, and the Governor's

Office. Health experts revealed that under social distancing guidelines the maximum number of audience members that would be allowed in the 2,700-seat David Geffen Hall at any one time would be approximately 400 people. This reality has proven untenable with the Philharmonic's business model, which relies on ticket sales as a primary source of earned income. In addition, contributions and grants from individual donors, government agencies, and the City's Department of Education remains at risk as a significant portion is tethered to the production of specific concert programs and educational activities, now cancelled.

On June 10, 2020, the Philharmonic announced the cancellation of the fall season, creating another four months without ticket revenue, from September through January 5, 2021, and representing over 60 unique performances and public events. It remains uncertain whether it will be feasible to open the upcoming 2020–21 concert season on January 6, 2021. There remains a distinct possibility that the entire 2020–21 season, through July 2021, will be cancelled. Significant layoffs of administrative employees will be announced by July 2020 as the current staffing format has become unsustainable in light of these recent challenges.

President and CEO Deborah Borda announced on June 10: "While the New York Philharmonic deeply regrets having to cancel our fall concerts, we had no choice...Our number one concern is the health and safety of our audiences, musicians, and employees. It has become very clear that large groups of people will not be able to safely gather for the remainder of the calendar year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our decision to let the entire Philharmonic family and our public know at this time has been strongly informed by New York State government regulations, along with the advice of medical experts."

In total, the cancellation of spring and fall concerts will cost nearly \$20 million in lost revenue at a minimum. The delay of the 2020–21 season will result in another \$9 million in lost ticket revenue, on top of the loss of \$10 million incurred this spring. Additionally, this has halted the Philharmonic's ability to sell subscriptions to season ticket holders for next season, which presents another challenge to the organization's business model and threatens stability of cash flow. The financial losses will be exacerbated significantly if the entire 2020–21 season is cancelled.

With reductions being made to an already lean budget, the Philharmonic will require significant support from the philanthropic community and the City in order to survive. These financial problems are mirrored by other performing arts and not-for-profit cultural organizations across the City as the entire sector struggles to develop new operating procedures in the face of unprecedented challenges.

### **Impact on Public Service**

Over the past two seasons, President and CEO Deborah Borda and Music Director Jaap van Zweden have ushered in a new era for the New York Philharmonic that prioritizes community engagement and seeks to expand the Orchestra's presence across all five boroughs. As New York's hometown orchestra, this is amplified by education partnerships with schools across the city and concerts in public parks. The impact of COVID-19, which prohibits public gatherings, has eradicated most opportunities to engage the public through the typical, in-person programming that has come to define a core component of cultural life in New York City. The result is decreased exposure to vital musical experiences, and other arts and culture opportunities, for New Yorkers who deserve to benefit from living in the nation's cultural capitol.

This is the first summer in 55 years that the free Concerts in the Parks series will not be presented throughout the boroughs. Last summer, over 100,000 New Yorkers attended concerts held in Central Park, Cunningham Park, Van Cortlandt Park, Prospect Park, and at the St. George Theatre. Since 1996, public support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs has ensured that this beloved

community tradition takes place annually. Plans were already in place for this summer's performances in June, which were slated to feature a diverse array of compositions by historically underrepresented voices, elementary school students in the New York Philharmonic Very Young Composers Program, as well as popular staples of classical music repertoire. For many New Yorkers, these concerts are their first exposure to the New York Philharmonic, and their cancellation mitigates the opportunity for residents to develop a meaningful connection with their local orchestra. This is a significant loss for all New Yorkers throughout Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Staten Island.

Building on the many challenges currently facing New York City's students and teachers, the pandemic has significantly reduced the number of music education opportunities available to students across the city, such as the Philharmonic Schools program. Through direct partnerships with elementary schools and classroom teachers developed since 1994, New York Philharmonic Teaching Artists implement a sequential music curriculum to students at schools that would otherwise have little or no music education, including after-school workshops in music composition. The program reaches all students in third through fifth grades, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. In typical years, all students at participating schools would also attend the Young People's Concerts for Schools at David Geffen Hall, though this year's performances, scheduled for late March, were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The absence of the Philharmonic's in-person music education workshops affects 3,200 students at twelve schools across the five boroughs: Manhattan (Council Districts 4, 6, 7, and 8), Bronx (Council District 11), Brooklyn (Council Districts 34, 35, and 39), Queens (Council District 21), and Staten Island (Council Districts 49 and 50). Philharmonic Schools reaches a broad student population reflective of New York City's diversity. Average demographics of the student bodies in participating partner schools are approximately 12% African American, 42% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 36% Caucasian, and 3% from other backgrounds. The program is implemented in several schools with high concentrations of low-income students, and five partner schools (PS 108, PS 165, PS 19, PS 78, and PS 132) receive Title I funding. While the Philharmonic's staff is producing online educational resources and presenting digital lessons to reach students while at home, this cannot compare to the educational benefits of the personalized instruction afforded to all students by the Philharmonic.

### **NY Phil Plays On**

Despite the devastating loss of concerts and education programs, the Philharmonic remains firmly committed to serving its local audience at a time when the benefits of classical music are needed more than ever. A new digital portal, *NY Phil Plays On*, was launched on March 23, 2020, offering a collection of free digital content totaling more than 150 hours to date ([nyphil.org/playson](https://nyphil.org/playson)). *NY Phil Plays On* includes a wealth of educational resources, video and radio broadcasts, interviews with celebrated artists, curated digital festivals, digitized materials from the Philharmonic's extensive Archives, and even live performances of Philharmonic musicians from their homes. The portal aims to utilize the Philharmonic's vast array of multimedia materials to simulate the concert-going experience and build a digital community of classical music lovers. While many organizations are presenting online programming during the pandemic, few can provide the level of depth and insight afforded to the Philharmonic because of its longstanding history and tradition as a media pioneer.

*NY Phil Plays On* is already being used by a substantial audience since its launch in March. Our Thursday live broadcasts have received over 2.3 million video views and 7.2 million impressions between Facebook and YouTube. The *NY Phil Plays On* web portal has been visited over 100,000 times, and its Educational videos teaching students about composers Benjamin Britten and Antonín Dvořák have received nearly 20,000 views since schools closed. Additionally, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have gained a total of

30,000 followers since the March launch. Although the portal is available to a global audience, the highest concentration of viewers is in the New York City area, demonstrating the hunger for classical music content among local audiences.

### **Adapting Educational Resources**

Working with school principals and teachers to understand students' needs, the Philharmonic's education and community engagement team quickly adapted programs to help develop digital content, including weekly, asynchronous lessons for schools and students. Online educational initiatives developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic include:

NY Phil Learning @ Home ([nyphil.org/education/learning-at-home](https://nyphil.org/education/learning-at-home)), a new portal with a collection of online concerts, lessons, videos, and other resources to engage young audiences, their families, and teachers. This content adds to *Young People's Concerts Play!* ([nyphil.org/education/young-peoples-concerts/young-peoples-concerts-play](https://nyphil.org/education/young-peoples-concerts/young-peoples-concerts-play)), on-demand broadcasts of past Young People's Concerts complemented by interactive components. The latest installment, *An African-American Legacy: The Harlem Renaissance*, was released as Facebook and YouTube Premieres on May 23, 2020. Learning video series also include "What's in My Case?" featuring Philharmonic musicians describing their instruments and offering tips and fun ways to practice and stay musical at home.

Very Young People's Concerts and Young People's Concerts ([nyphil.org/education/young-peoples-concerts](https://nyphil.org/education/young-peoples-concerts)), beloved weekend concert series for children, continue to be held via online streaming. Associate Principal Viola Rebecca ("Becky") Young hosts short episodes of activities for young children and families in the morning and then a full-length Young People's Concert performance is shown in the afternoon. The first broadcast took place on the afternoon of April 18 with the theme, "Who is Gustav Mahler?" conducted by Leonard Bernstein.

Very Young Composers Program instructional videos are made by Philharmonic Teaching Artists. These creative lessons include ideas for music-making at home, such as the Kitchen Percussion Challenge (<https://vimeo.com/418106559>). In addition, student composers have the opportunity to compose Musical Postcards, guided by Teaching Artists. These short musical compositions reflect New York City students' own unique experiences and connect them to their peers in Finland.

The Philharmonic's education team has worked to identify creative solutions for remote learning and has distributed curriculum, learning guides, and video content to serve our partner schools, students, teachers, and families. These resources have been shared with the New York City Department of Education to be accessed by 1.1 million students city-wide.

### **Conclusion**

Since its founding 178 years ago, the New York Philharmonic has weathered the U.S. Civil War, two World Wars, the 1918 pandemic, 9/11, and more. Still, the COVID-19 health crisis and its community and financial repercussions have created the gravest crisis this Orchestra has ever faced.

Continued public support from the City Council and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs will enable the New York Philharmonic, and its peer organizations, to revitalize our community when the worst has passed, when people can finally come together for the unique shared experience of a live performance. The New York City Council's partnership is critical to ensuring that the Philharmonic will continue as a steadfast resource for all New Yorkers in the future when gathering for concerts and music education programs will be possible once again.

June 18, 2020

Dear Council Members and Colleagues,

My name is Ana Beatriz Sepúlveda from Performance Space New York. We are part of the New Coalition - an alliance of cultural institutions in City-Owned Buildings. We each receive a subsidy for our utilities, which is now in question. This funding is critical to our operations and helps us maintain and care for a city asset.

My colleagues are BRIC, Bronx River Art Center, Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center, DCTV, Harlem Stage, Mabou Mines, Movement Research, Pregones/Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Theatre for a New Audience, UrbanGlass, 651 Arts and MoCADA.

I'm sure the Council is familiar with BRIC Art's Youth Media and the multigenerational programs of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. Notably, the Coalition cares after populations and neighborhoods historically underserved by larger cultural institutions. Together, we engage 1.8 million New Yorkers.

Some of us are in the districts hardest hit by COVID-19. But we have not given into fear. That's not what New Yorkers do. In times of crisis, we take care of each other. We lean in.

Collectively, we are demanding racial justice, mourning together, marching together, and opening up our lobbies, community centers, theatres and hearts. The current crisis has shown us the underlying economic vulnerability of our cultural organizations. It has also revealed the tenacity of our arts workers, experts at creating something out of nothing, as they gather PPE for protesters and organize for Black Lives Matter.

We oppose the Mayor's budget, which gives the NYPD 6 billion dollars while slashing social services, the arts and essential city operations. The over policing of our communities has had devastating impacts on generations of New Yorkers - especially black men and their families - and it's time to end those cycles now.

Instead, let's invest in our communities and the arts organizations that serve them, especially organizations with black leadership. Arts and Culture will play a key role in the recovery - as we always do. Please use your influence to adjust the FY21 budget by moving resources away from policing and back into our communities.

The institutions who are most vulnerable to budget cuts are also those who take care of the most vulnerable. Please do not cut funding for programs that serve our youth. Please do not disproportionately reduce funding for organizations that serve communities of color including the coalition of theaters of color and immigrant arts initiatives.

For our own part, the utility subsidy constitutes a large proportion of our budget. We ask that it be preserved to whatever extent possible in context with the shared needs of our sector and city.

On Behalf of the New Coalition - Thank you for hearing us today.



**TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
June 2020**

**Kristina Newman-Scott,  
President, BRIC**

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Immediately prior to temporarily closing BRIC's multidisciplinary arts and media center, BRIC House, to the public in March, our institution had completed our first-ever Strategic Plan + Manifesto. This plan was completed in collaboration with hundreds of stakeholders through a human-centered planning process.

While BRIC has forty years of history and a commitment to cultural programming in Brooklyn and beyond, we had never before articulated a Vision and Values statement, along with our Mission. This Statement today outlines:

**VISION**

**Our Vision for Brooklyn**

We envision a Brooklyn where all people have meaningful connections to artistic experiences, the tools and opportunity to express their creative potential, and the power to transform their world.

**MISSION**

**What We Do and Why**

BRIC builds Brooklyn's creative future.

We **ADVANCE OPPORTUNITY** for visual artists, performers, and media makers.

We **PRESENT BOLD WORK** that reflects diverse audiences and speaks to the world.

We **IGNITE LEARNING** in people of all ages.

We **UNITE BROOKLYN** through art and creativity to build community and make change.

647 Fulton Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
718.683.5600

[BRICartsmedia.org](http://BRICartsmedia.org)

## VALUES

### Our Behavioral Compass

Rooted in **Brooklyn**, and reaching out to the world, BRIC is guided by our commitment to **creative risk-taking** and a definition of **excellence** that values creators and communities that are under-recognized in the cultural sector. We operate with **integrity, inclusivity**, and a commitment to **equity**. We listen and respond to our communities, ensure that our spaces allow all people to feel welcome and free, and support people with the unique resources they need to thrive.

As New York City faces the dual pandemics of Covid-19 and anti-black racism, along with an unprecedented economic crisis, this vision of a more equitable and creative future for our city is more urgent now than ever.

As New Yorkers have struggled over the past several months with the impacts of an inequitable health system, isolation, and economic distress, the arts, media, and education programs presented by BRIC and our fellow cultural organizations remain vital and relevant.

Each year, BRIC engages more than 350,000 New Yorkers through live events, and we reach an additional five million virtually. Our live event audience is more than 60% communities of color. BRIC's six broadcast channels reach individuals that are most at risk right now of social isolation, including elders, speakers of English as a second language, and low-income residents. Our audience includes five times as many African American households compared to all television audiences and nearly twice as many low-income households.

In March, like many of our peers, BRIC pivoted to present online programs to engage and serve our fellow New Yorkers. Because BRIC is the Public Access provider for the borough of Brooklyn, we are distinguished by our ability to present programming in a multi-platform format, sharing content simultaneously on our Public Access television network, social media platforms, and now—Zoom.

To date, we have presented more than 60 public programs, in addition to low-cost adult media education classes, youth education residencies in collaboration with our public school partners, and live Town Hall events that address the core social justice challenges we must face together.

And this July, which would have marked our 42<sup>nd</sup> season in Prospect Park, we will transition our beloved BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival to a multi-platform virtual event, headlined by world-class artists from around the world and around the block, including Common, Questlove, Lila Downs, and Angélique Kidjo.

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Through it all, BRIC has maintained our commitment to investing in the creative workforce of Brooklyn, including BRIC's 100-member full-time staff, freelance media makers and teaching artists, and hundreds of artists across all disciplines. Since this crisis began, we have not laid off a single full-time staff member.

Most recently, BRIC has participated in the city-wide #OpenYourLobby initiative, welcoming thousands of New Yorkers protesting for a just and equitable city to rest and recover in our public cultural facility. Our priority in this moment is to listen to our community, provide them with resources, and amplify and present artists, works, and content that grapple with this moment and reflect on the history that has led us here.

As a black-led institution with one of the most diverse cultural workforces in New York City (reported in the 2016 DCLA Diversity Survey), BRIC will continue to operate with integrity, inclusivity, and a commitment to equity. In a moment when (according to a 2018 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's survey), only 12% of museum directors in major leadership roles are by people of color, BRIC's leadership will ensure BRIC is accountable to these values.

As in prior moments of crisis and devastation for our city, arts and culture will be integral to New York City's economic and civic recovery as we embark on the difficult work ahead.

The City Council's support was critical to creating BRIC House, and we are forever grateful. Looking forward, we need steadfast and continued support from the City to ensure we return stronger than ever for the local communities we serve.

Our commitment is to ensure that our beloved BRIC House, our public access channels, our satellite spaces in public schools and libraries across the borough, and our social platforms continue to thrive with rich cultural and educational programming that is free and accessible to all. We remain particularly invested in the 10,000 young people and their families we engage, who (as they recover from this pandemic) need meaningful opportunities to connect with one another and process the world around them more than ever.

We need your help to do so.

Thank you very much for your time, partnership, and tireless advocacy and work on behalf of all New Yorkers.



**New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations' oversight hearing on "DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City" June 22, 2020**

Claudie Mabry and Tom Oesau, Program Consultant and Program Manager at Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY)

Testimony

Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY) is a citywide network of cultural organizations and community leaders who are using our creativity to revitalize New York City from the neighborhood up. Community based arts and cultural groups are playing an essential role in responding to the COVID crisis. We draw on the deep relationships and trust we have with our communities to break down isolation, collect and share stories, support youth and seniors, heal from trauma, and create moments of joy. Our networks are swiftly connecting residents to mutual aid and food distribution services, activating local alternative economies and infrastructure, and lifting spirits through theater, music and poetry. We are creating the ongoing cultural infrastructure needed for long term recovery, prioritizing the needs of the communities of color and low-income communities most impacted by the crisis.

In this challenging yet critical moment of confronting COVID-19 and the related racial justice movement of Black Lives Matter, our communities have come together to identify core challenges, needs and opportunities, which were also shared in a recent listening session with the Department of Cultural Affairs and newly appointed Commissioner Gonzalo Casals. Our cohort of cultural hubs and community networks across the City have identified key recommendations and lessons learned from their experiences working with communities on the ground. Through cultural partnerships with public housing communities since 2017, where residents have demonstrated the power of arts and culture in promoting community healing, belonging, safety, collaboration, and connection to neighbors, restorative investments must continue in pursuit of a just and equitable city.

While we are busier than ever serving our communities, small community-based hubs and networks must shift from struggling to survive to thriving. To assure thriving organizations and communities, the City Council and DCLA should:

- Take leadership on creating a public-private partnership focused on supporting small cultural organizations and networks who are working closely in their communities. While these groups are responding dynamically to meet community need, they are not able to benefit from many of the relief efforts. These smaller groups need more than a stop-gap financial measure. Our research process last year with small arts organizations, service organizations/intermediaries, funders, consultants, community development experts, and other colleagues in the field reaffirmed what we already knew: small groups are huge assets in their communities, despite being chronically under-resourced with shrinking pools of general support from philanthropy and the City.
- Recognize and support community driven responses to COVID-19, not just in the short term but as an enduring investment in resiliency over time. We have seen how networks, including key cultural groups, have been critical in responding to crises—from Hurricane Sandy to the COVID. The City should support and collaborate with these relationship-based mutual aid networks and involve them in future resiliency planning.
- Advocate for artists and cultural workers to be included in City jobs programs, as they were in CETA and WPA programs in the past. They have much creativity and resourcefulness to contribute to the rebuilding and healing of our communities.
- Protect SIAP and City Council initiative funding (such as the Cultural Immigrant Initiative and the Speaker’s Initiative), which are critical for small arts organizations in underserved committees. Understand that what may seem like a small loss to large organizations can have a huge impact on budgets for small organizations.
- Support youth working with community based cultural organizations that are supported by the Summer Youth Employment Program. Advocate for the restoration of this program or, if that is not possible, other programs that can provide jobs to low income youth this summer. Shift City resources from the NYPD to human resources, including the arts.
- Advocate for cultural organizations who are working in community and across sectors, leaving them vulnerable to financial risk because of unfulfilled contracts and delayed payment from multiple City agencies.

Some of these recommendations have a significant bearing on our work in public housing communities, where we are supporting self determined processes for residents to develop leadership, break down isolation, build community infrastructure, further entrepreneurialism, deepen healing, and shape community planning processes, all while NYCHA struggles to

reinvest and federal funding declines. Giancarlo Fernandez, who leads CVH Vision—a public housing resident driven design collective within Community Voices Heard—explains, “When the people who are directly affected by the issues affecting NYCHA work on visual campaigns there is more authenticity and the public responds to that...We're not just talking about the problems, we're living through them.” Over the past year, we have partnered with two projects in particular that are pursuing transformational change, yet are susceptible to shifts in City funding due to budget shortfalls associated with COVID. It is important to retain investments in precisely the communities hit hardest by COVID, especially those facing disproportionate impacts of racial and social injustice more broadly.

- *What Creates Health? @Queensbridge*, a cross-sector partnership with NOCD-NY, NYC Department of Health, 696 Build Queensbridge and Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement, is shifting narratives to counter gun violence, a threat to public health outcomes in North America’s largest public housing development. We are facilitating artist engagements with intergenerational residents, hosting story circles and mediamaking, cultivating dialogue around care and safety, and using different arts practices to build collaborative community action.

Due to COVID-19 and additional bureaucratic hurdles, we are struggling to support the intended implementation of this program. A key component rooted in equity of *What Creates Health?* includes paying residents enrolled in the program for their time and commitment, many of these residents being youth participants. With the threatened elimination of the 2020 Summer Youth Employer Program, this leaves our programmatic structure with a significant funding gap to fill. Additionally, delays in receiving our program funds has made it difficult to contractually commit to local artists to support the early stages of our work. This impacts our small network as we have to engage in challenging discussions around how our existing capacity and budget can keep *What Creates Health? @Queensbridge* moving forward with minimal disruption.

- Over the past year, NOCD-NY and The Gowanus Community Center at Gowanus Houses, with support from the Speaker’s Initiative administered by DCLA, were able to develop interim programming to reactivate the center and engage residents in its future. Ultimately, the center is charted for a capital renovation and permanent reopening, likely as a DYCD Cornerstone program. The Gowanus Residents Association, artist-in-residence Imani Gayle Gillison, and a planning committee of local residents have met consistently over the past year to host celebratory events, a dance workshop with Urban Bush Women, and several community building events through Gillison’s resident-based Theater of the Liberated.

Just as momentum of the project was peaking, COVID hit, and the community had to pivot to address the immediate health concerns of the community. With several organizing leaders facing personal family losses connected to the pandemic, community center visioning rebounded. Theater of the Liberated planned a Mother's Day healing event in May and a Juneteenth procession ceremony this past Friday, which has been documented for virtual sharing. The community continues to be committed to the center, a longstanding cultural asset in the neighborhood, as we overcome this crisis. However, the uncertainty of whether we will receive the balance of FY20 funding or any funding in FY21 leaves its future in question.

Cultural programming helps to strengthen and support neighborhood resilience and social infrastructure, especially during difficult moments like now. Now more than ever, it's critical to support community-building through arts and culture, both in NYC's neighborhoods and in our NYCHA communities. City Council and DCLA must advocate for organizations, networks and artists serving their communities on the ground, and amplify community-based cultural resources, programming and organizing.

NOCD-NY is one of many cultural organizations coming together to join the Movement for Black Lives to demand reparations for past and continuing harms inflicted upon Black people -- from colonialism to slavery through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance.

We call upon the City of New York to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts, and repair the harm done by immediately establishing a Commission for Reparations. We acknowledge the new Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission as a first step in this process and urge it to advance systemic change.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Claudie Mabry, Program Consultant  
Tom Oesau, Program Manager  
Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY)  
claudie@nocdny.org  
tom@nocdny.org  
nocdny.org

Good morning, my name is Andy Hamingson, and I am the Interim Executive Director at Second Stage Theater. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about how important City funding is to the arts and culture community in New York City as a whole and to the work of Second Stage Theater in particular.

The Department of Cultural Affairs provides critical support that makes it possible for Second Stage to serve an audience of more than 100,000 each year.

As a Broadway theater, Second Stage is part of an industry that last year generated nearly \$15 billion for New York City's economy. We provided employment for more than 500 writers, performers, directors, designers, stage managers, arts administrators, and other theater artists and technicians. The majority of those jobs are under Broadway union contracts, which provide a living wage and stability for artists. Beyond direct spending on productions and theater maintenance, our work generated ancillary spending in restaurants, hotels, parking garages and transit, and neighboring small businesses.

City funding helped us make our productions accessible to all through our Affordable Ticket Initiative, which provided free and deeply subsidized tickets to more than 10,000 humans even in this current truncated season. DCLA support helps us bring diverse works to our stages, such as STRAIGHT WHITE MEN by Young Jean Lee, which was the first play on Broadway written by an Asian American female writer, and GRAND HORIZONS by Bess Wohl, which was the only original new play on Broadway by a woman this season. Second Stage also has a long history of

producing plays that address racism and social justice, and we pledge to continue to do so. These include works like Anna Deavere Smith's NOTES FROM THE FIELD, Lydia R. Diamond's SMART PEOPLE, and BETWEEN RIVERSIDE AND CRAZY by Stephen Adly Guirgus.

City funding for the arts is vital during the current crisis. Second Stage has lost more than \$5 million in projected revenue for FY20 due to the shutdown of all of NYC's theaters. Despite these losses and the closure of our theaters, we are continuing to serve our communities. We are working with artists on virtual play development sessions; we are providing online content for our friends and supporters. In addition, we're serving our city by participating in #openyourlobby, providing safe space for community members participating in the protests surrounding Black Lives Matter and in July we will open our lobby so residents can register to vote. We are facing an incomprehensible funding landscape as we plan for FY21 with no guarantee when we will be able to return to live theater. Until we can bring art back to our stages, we have almost no ability to bring in earned revenue. Contributed income, including City support, is the only financial resource we have to survive at this time.

We understand that the City is facing an unprecedented public health crisis that has had a devastating impact on revenue, and that difficult choices must be made. However, the proposed budget cuts to core social services -- education, youth, housing, homelessness, the arts, and more -- further devastate the communities most impacted by the virus. Yet, the proposed NYPD budget remains largely intact at \$6 billion -- more than all the community services combined. We ask that the City consider a more equitable budget with a portion of

resources from law enforcement reallocated to where they are most needed. A decrease of \$1 billion to the NYPD budget would return it to where it was in 2014 when Mayor de Blasio took office, and would provide much needed financial support for social services and community and cultural programs that serve New Yorkers across the five boroughs.

The arts are critical to the fabric and character of New York City. People need the opportunity that the arts provide to come together, to share their stories, to connect, and to heal. The arts will be an extremely important part of the City's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, helping to bring people back to public life, bring vibrancy back to our city, and encourage the return of tourists when it is safe. Please ensure that continued City funding makes it possible for Second Stage and other arts organizations throughout the City to continue our critical work. Thank you.

**Testimony of Melody Capote, Executive Director  
Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute  
before the  
City Council Committee on  
Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
June 22, 2020**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the City Council. My name is Melody Capote, Executive Director of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute.

The very first thing that I want you to know is that **Black Lives Matter** and that, Ladies and Gentlemen, **I Can't Breathe**.

**I can't breathe** when my relatives are dealt the ultimate punishment for simply *Living While Black*.

**I can't breathe** when funding for arts and culture is so inequitable that we are unable to do what arts and culture does best, namely, healing the community, simply because we do not have the resources to meet the need.

In response to COVID and the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Arts & Culture community not only did not close but instead rose to the occasion by providing virtual programming that directly responded to the needs of the community. So, I challenge you to do the same and create a *Black Lives Matter Is Culture Initiative* despite the pressures to the contrary. Doing nothing is unacceptable.

To honor George Floyd and the other martyrs in our community, I ask that:

- A. DCLA establish a special capacity building fund for organizations of color with a budget of under \$5 million who will propose to use their capacity expansion grant to address racial and social injustice;
- B. DCLA reconfigure its CASA funds to support a Digital Education & Empowerment Program (DEEP) that will train artists of color to provide services to public schools using the new digital platforms;
- C. DCLA hold the status quo on the budget of the Coalition of Theatres of Color by providing its grantees an increase of 5% representing the equivalent of a cost of living allowance.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, we desperately need core funding that allows us to be responsive to the needs of our community by providing them with programming that honors the contributions of the African Diaspora.

Thank you. **Black Lives Matter**.

###



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
June 22, 2020

As New York City recovers from the COVID-19 crisis over the coming months and years, the arts and culture community will play a crucial role in the recovery of schools and communities. In allocating cuts and resources, the City Council must put their faith in the arts to help process trauma, restore joy, support physical fitness, and build communities.

The New York City Arts in Education Roundtable is a service organization whose core purpose is to elevate, enhance, and sustain the work of the arts education community in New York City's schools and beyond. We are a community of organizations and educators that shares resources, provides professional development, and advocates for the needs of our members and the communities they serve. Our work lies at the intersection of culture, education, and community and occurs in over 1,290 public schools, in every neighborhood, and in all five boroughs.

Arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained funding.

Our request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on our students or their future. And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city.

Please reinvest in these agencies and in NYC's future. The #ArtsAreEssential for our city, now and forever. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

Sobha Kavanakudiyil, Board Co-Chair  
Jennifer DiBella, Board Co-Chair  
Kimberly Olsen, Managing Director  
Rachel Watts, Board Member & Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee  
David King, Board Member & Co-Chair, Advocacy Committee  
NYC Arts in Education Roundtable

Hello,

My name is Rebekah Skovron and I live at 41 Village Gate Way, Nyack, New York, 10960. I am writing to urge you to request revisions to the Mayor's proposed budget. This proposed budget is removing recourses from valuable entities such as public health, the Library, and community development services, while increasing an already exorbitant police budget. Data shows that increasing police body cams and officers does NOT improve crime rates. The residents of Rockland Country deserve better than this. I urge you to demand revisions to the proposed budget.

Thank you,  
Rebekah

# NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS  
MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2020

Members of the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs:

Thank you for your service to the arts and culture community in New York City, and for the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the New-York Historical Society, New York's oldest Museum. For over 200 years, New-York Historical has told the story of our nation's founding and history, using our vast collections to highlight under-told stories and diverse perspectives throughout that history.

In these difficult times of loss and upheaval, as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread social unrest and demonstrations, cultural institutions like ours must respond to the communities they serve. As a learning and gathering space for visitors across New York City and beyond, New-York Historical remains committed to its mission of fostering public exploration and examination of our national history and culture. The continued support of the Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Council has allowed New-York Historical to remain a strong, vibrant institution reaching more than 400,000 students, teachers, and visitors each year—onsite, in schools, and, now, remotely.

### **Closure and Staffing Updates**

New-York Historical closed its doors in March 13, 2020 in response to the ongoing pandemic. Since that time staff have been working remotely to develop new ways of reaching our audiences at home. Urgent cost-saving measures, including salary reductions for high-earning staff, along with receipt of a PPP forgivable loan have allowed New-York Historical to retain all staff through July 16, 2020. However, the continued and staggering loss of more than \$6 million in earned income from admissions, building rentals, program fees, Museum Store, café, and restaurant sales have jeopardized our long-term financial stability. The institution will therefore dramatically shrink its operating budget for the coming fiscal year and beyond, and has had to implement severe staff reductions and furloughs across all departments beginning in July.

### **Programmatic Updates**

Our K-12 educational programs serve more 200,000 NYC public school students from all five boroughs—more than 72% of whom are from low-income households. When the Museum was shuttered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we moved swiftly to bring our enriching history programming online without interruption. On March 23, we launched History@Home (<https://www.nyhistory.org/education/history-home>), transitioning our Museum- and classroom-based offerings to a virtual space. All K-12 classroom-based social studies enrichment programs have been turned into free, daily video classes available to all interested students and teachers; onsite teacher programs have shifted to weekly virtual teacher workshops; and our Teen Programs have moved their meetings, lectures, and working sessions to a video conferencing platform. Our DiMenna Children's History Museum also continues to serve families and parents by providing fun and engaging intergenerational experiences online via video conferencing software. **These measures have allowed us to provide direct cultural education services to more than 25,000 learners since the PAUSE began, and will continue as long as is needed until our in-person services can resume.**

New-York Historical has long been dedicated to offering exhibitions, public programs, and educational materials designed to advance public understanding of the legacy of slavery and its impact on our present. Our Equality and Justice for All initiative, launched in 2018 with lead support from the City Council, focused these efforts. As the recent, tragic killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others shine a national spotlight on this ugly history, New-York Historical remains steadfast in its commitment to educate the public. In recent weeks we have distributed free resources developed in conjunction with landmark exhibitions like *Slavery in New York* (2005) and *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow* (2018), and produced new free programs and digital content exploring Juneteenth, the legacy of Frederick Douglass, and leadership in times of civil and social unrest.

#### **PLANS FOR REOPENING**

New-York Historical is eager to open our doors and provide the community with a safe space to gather and the historical context to understand the world in which we live. To that end we will reopen with *Hope Wanted: New York City Under Quarantine*, an exhibition that documents the experiences of diverse New Yorkers across the five boroughs during the height of the pandemic. The exhibition, anticipated to open mid- to late summer as allowed by Federal, State, and City guidelines, will transform New-York Historical's outdoor back lot into an arena for collective reflection, healing, and education for all New Yorkers in the midst of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Admission will be free for all.

Our building will reopen to the public soon after, as allowed by official guidelines, and we will gradually increase programming opportunities throughout the year as conditions permit. The building is being specially cleaned; staff has been trained in enhanced procedures to maintain a safe space; masks will be available for all to wear; and visitors and staff will be screened for health indicators. We will also implement a no-touch or low-touch experience through contactless payments and timed entry, with periods reserved exclusively for individuals who are over 65 or immunocompromised. Throughout the fall, education staff are preparing to offer virtual gallery and exhibition field trips along with other free, online learning opportunities that will ensure our most vulnerable constituents remain connected to and inspired by history and our museum collections until schools are able to resume in-person field trips and Museum education experiences. Our new partnership with the American LGBTQ+ Museum will further our steadfast commitment to telling the underrepresented stories from our nation's history in the years ahead.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The New-York Historical Society remains deeply grateful for the important programmatic and capital funds from New York City that have allowed us to expand our resources and reach and adapt to the urgent needs of our local community. These funds will become even more essential in the months and years of recovery ahead. In this time of fiscal uncertainty, we remain grateful for the city's investment in the arts and culture sector, and hope the Committee continues its good work to expedite reimbursement for the important cultural work being done. We thank you and your fellow City Council Members for your exceptional service.

*Cheryl Morgan, Director of Development*  
*Cheryl.morgan@nyhistory.org*

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

My name is Oana Botez and I am reaching out as an immigrant theater/opera/dance designer and an educator. I am a Princess Grace Recipient and NEA/TCG Career Development Program Recipient, I've been nominated for The Lucille Lortel Award, The Henry Hewes Design Awards, The Barrymore and Drammy Award; and won both The Barrymore and Drammy Award.

My designs have raised critical acclaim in New York's: BAM Next Wave, Playwrights Horizons, Bard SummerScape/Richard B. Fisher Center, Baryshnikov Arts Center, The David H. Koch Theater/Lincoln Center, Soho Rep, LCT3, The Public Theater, 59East59, La MaMa, The Kitchen, PS122, HERE Arts Center, The Joyce Theater, The Ontological-Hysteric Theater, BRIC Arts Media, Big Apple Circus/Lincoln Center and The Classic Stage Company.

Regionally, my work has been seen: The Wilma Theater (Philadelphia, PA), Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (MA), Hartford Stage Company (CT), Long Wharf Theater (New Haven, CT), Shakespeare Theater (DC), Berkeley Rep (Berkeley, CA), ArtsEmerson (Boston, MA), Broad Stage (Santa Monica, CA), MCA (Chicago, IL), Shakespeare Theatre Company (Washington, D.C.), ODC (San Francisco), The Walker Arts Center (Minneapolis, MN), Peak Performances (Montclair, NJ), ADI (Rockville, MD), Academy of Music (Philadelphia, PA), Curtis Institute of Music (Philadelphia, PA), Cutler Majestic Theater (Boston, MA).

Internationally: Bucharest National Theater (Romania), Arad National Theater (Romania), Bulandra Theater (Bucharest), Théâtre National de Chaillot (Paris), Les Subsistances (Lyon, France), Budapest National Theater, Cluj Hungarian National Theater (Romania), Bucharest Operetta Theater (Romania), International Festival of Contemporary Theater (Adana, Turkey), Le Quartz (Brest, France), La Filature (Mulhouse, France), Exit Festival /Maison des Arts Creteil (Paris, France), Tanz im August Festival Hebbel am Ufer – HAU1 (Berlin, Germany), Centro Cultural Universidad del Pacífico (Lima, Peru), Centro Cultural (Lima, Peru), Palazzo Simoncelli (Orvieto, Italy), Edinburgh International Festival (UK), Singapore Arts Festival. I currently teach costume design at Yale School of Drama.

I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Manhattan, where NY has been my home for the past 20 years.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of

people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I've been interested to see that the city is raising the bar when it comes supporting arts, as well as supporting the arts education in public schools. This is a city that proudly expresses a voice in media about the cultural lives of its immigrants and BIPOC community, along with the already and funded established theater/dance community.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Oana Botez  
[www.oanabotez.com](http://www.oanabotez.com)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a theater director and producer who has been living and working in New York City for 20 years. I directed the play *What the Constitution Means to Me* which was a Pulitzer Finalist and won multiple Best play awards last season, finishing with a sold out Broadway run. I also run the ensemble theater company The Debate Society that has created and produced 10 plays in 16 years and has taught at many prestigious institutions like Princeton, NYU, Juilliard, and The National Theater Institute. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Long Island City, Queens.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

These theaters are leaders in the field and inspire progress and artistic community across our industry. They are also going to be critical voices in the post-covid world to help us re-find our humanity and safety.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Oliver Butler  
917-202-1240

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a Puerto Rican, early career playwright involved with companies such as The Lark, Soho Rep and Ars Nova with planson continuing my artistic career in NYC. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Flatbush.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, theatre companies like Pregones Touring Puerto Rican Theatre Collection, Spanish Theatre Repertory Company, Teatro Círculo are companies have been extremely important for narratives that advocate for people of color, especially my Latinx community.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Omar Vélez Meléndez

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a member of the New York City theater community. I've been a stage manager in the city for 7 years working almost exclusively on new plays, primarily Off-Broadway. It is a privilege to be in the room as the great new voices of our time emerge and create groundbreaking works of art. I've had the honor of working on productions such as *An Octoroon*, *Duat*, *Fairview*, *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play*, *While I Yet Live*, *Everybody*, and many other new plays. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Harlem, New York.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of arts funding. I have personally learned so much just from being in the room as new plays were developed by creatives of the BIPOC community and I know the impact these works have had on audience members as well. Now more than ever it seems so obvious that the arts provide a space to safely share unique perspectives and to promote the understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds. We've been isolated for three months without our usual artistic outlets and the city has literally erupted from their homes into the streets of New York to have their voices heard and promote change in our society. Now is the time to focus on change and supporting disadvantaged communities. This requires more funding to provide the BIPOC community the resources needed to elevate their platform and produce art. More funding so that arts institutions can provide arts education and better support the youth community. Prioritizing arts and culture funding right now is crucial and an important part of creating the change we want to see in our world.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serves the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Gross

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Rachel Gross  
[rachelkwg@gmail.com](mailto:rachelkwg@gmail.com)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out to you today as the Development Director of New York Theatre Workshop, one of NYC's premiere Off-Broadway theatres, in the East Village of Manhattan. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker and concerned citizen who is a resident of Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Lee Ann Gullie

**Lee Ann Gullie** | Development Director | She/Her/Hers  
**New York Theatre Workshop** | 79 E. 4th Street New York, NY 10003  
Office: 212-780-9037 | Direct: 646-957-9567  
[leeanng@nytw.org](mailto:leeanng@nytw.org) | [www.nytw.org](http://www.nytw.org)  
[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Tumblr](#)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an NYC-based independent producer and manager of live performance projects through my company Lingua Franca Arts, having developed, presented and toured more than 20 projects in the past five years at venues large and small from Brooklyn Academy of Music and The Public Theater to JACK and The Bushwick Starr. Before starting my own company in 2014, I worked in a variety of management and production roles with leading non-profits in our artistic community including Playwrights Horizons, Multi-Arts Projects and Productions and The Wooster Group. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Flatbush, Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC-led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, I want to lift up the incredible impact Liza Jessie Peterson's 'The Peculiar Patriot' has had on my understanding of our criminal justice system. The piece was co-presented by National Black Theatre and Hi-ARTS and was in development with Multi-Arts Projects and Productions during my time there as an Associate Producer. Were it not for groups like the National Black Theatre, a project like this would not have had the depth and breadth of reach and impact that it has. Funding the groups who are a part of the Coalition of Theatres of Color is absolutely imperative to support the creation and telling of the stories of historically marginalized people.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your

colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Sandra Garner

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Sandra Garner, Producer  
she/her/hers  
Lingua Franca Arts

e: [info@linguafrancaarts.com](mailto:info@linguafrancaarts.com)  
w: [www.linguafrancaarts.com](http://www.linguafrancaarts.com)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a fundraising professional and theatre lover who has worked at many premiere theatrical institutions throughout the city. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Forest Hills, Queens.

**I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.**

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, the work these institutions produce and create has changed my worldview many times over. The landscape of NYC theatre would be forever changed without them – for the worse. On stage and off, the work that they do is vital as a reflection of our city.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Leah Cox

**Leah Cox** | Director of Individual Giving | She/Her/Hers  
**New York Theatre Workshop** | 79 E. 4th Street New York, NY 10003  
Office: 212-780-9037 | Direct: 646-957-9573  
[leahc@nytw.org](mailto:leahc@nytw.org) | [www.nytw.org](http://www.nytw.org)  
[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Tumblr](#)

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

My name is Camara McLaughlin. I am an actor who up until March 12, had been performing in the off-Broadway hit Sleep No More. I became a cast member in 2017, but the show has been in Chelsea since 2011. I am also a theater administrator who has been employed part-time at New York Theatre Workshop in the East Village, for the last five years. For the past 7+ years I have lived in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. I love my neighborhoods and I love my city.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

The Coalition of Theatres of Color is indicative of the city itself. Many people. Many backgrounds. Many stories. Many points of view. New York City MUST value these theatres. They have been underfunded for years and are more vulnerable now than ever.

Yes the city has to cut the FY21 budget. Let the NYPD budget be the one that is cut.

The Coalition of Theatres of Color serve the communities that have been most heavily impacted by COVID-19. These theaters are serving the people who the NYPD is harming.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget. Defund the police. Don't defund the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Camara McLaughlin

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a member of the theatre community. I am a Bessie award winner, and obie award winner, I have been on the primary creative team for the last two recent Pulitzer Prize winning dramas to name a few. I have been profiled in the New York Times over 15 times. My work is important, I am a leader to these communities and I run two dance and theater companies in NYC from Brooklyn to Broadway and I have had sold out performances since 2009 more than once a year. I serve tens of thousands of New Yorkers. I also attend performances year round multiple times a week. I came to New York City in 2009 and I have been making my career and contributing to its culture non-stop ever since. This past year I have been producing other people's work. I employ many people a year. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn and I run New Brooklyn Theatre and the feath3r thoery a non-for-profit theater in Brooklyn.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally,

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Raja Feather Kelly

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# THE FEATH3R THEORY

raja feather kelly | founder & artistic director | +732.299.2204

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a lighting designer for theater, opera, and dance. My work has been seen across the city by hundreds of audience members for the past 20+ years. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Jackson Heights NY and a ardent supporter of Art institutions of color in NYC.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color and dance organizations of color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

The same is true of the dance organizations currently serving the NYC community such as Dance Theater of Harlem. This company has impacted me directly with their strong body of work that shines a light on what is possible with black bodies. I have been proud to collaborate and share space with this organizations.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, in numerous public forums, arts and culture workers have been told by multiple City officials to expect cuts in the FY21 budget. These same elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a reason that arts organizations should expect and accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters of Color along with the above mentioned Dance Organizations have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now.

I understand the very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New York City. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color and Dance Theater of Harlem both serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

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We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,

Nicole Pearce

Jackson Heights, NY 11372

+1-917-674-7069

[www.nicolepearcedesign.com](http://www.nicolepearcedesign.com)



Good Morning,

My name is Raymond Codrington and I am the Executive Director of Hi-ARTS located in East Harlem. We are a leading cultural hub within the urban arts movement. For over twenty years, we have provided unique development opportunities to artists of color, always placing issues of equity and social justice at the forefront. To date, we have supported works by over 1,500 lead artists, and we serve an audience of over 10,000 annually at our home in the City and beyond, with a local audience that is 75% Black and/or Latinx.

While we thank the City for consistent funding through CDF, CTC, CASA, and discretionary funding, like so many arts organizations, the impact of COVID-19 has resulted in financial losses for us. Moreover, one of the biggest impacts will be on our ability to provide resources to artists. To understand what our artists needed, we surveyed them in April and found that 93% of respondents cited losses of work and income and/or the uncertainty of future work and funding as their main challenges. One artist shared,

“Just because I'm not working for a check, doesn't mean I'm not working. I'm working on work, which can be exhausting mentally. All these unknowns are creating anxiety on how we are going to get through this.”

This was pre George Floyd, Breyona Taylor, and protests, so now for many the financial and psychological strain has increased exponentially.

To help artists during this time, we launched a virtual artist residency program, hosted a DJ Series on Instagram Live, and we are planning socially engaged and distanced public art and a sound-based community narrative project.

These are challenging times, and it is obvious that systemic racism does not pause during a pandemic, but we remain optimistic about the necessity and resilience of the arts to create change and help us recover and reimagine notions of community.

In closing, Hi-ARTS joins our colleagues in asking that the Council “keep culture whole,” including DCLA *and* initiative funding. We thank Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, the members of the Committee, and the City at large for its partnership.

Thank You



**Written Testimony from Libertad Guerra,  
Executive Director of the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Education Center, Inc.  
To the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International  
Intergroup Relations**

Dear Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee,

My name is Libertad Guerra, I am Executive Director at the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Education Center, and we are grateful to be testifying on behalf the more than 60,000 Latino, Black, and multicultural residents, artists, and audiences that we serve in one of New York City's core Latinx communities on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are a cultural organization in a city-owned building and have faced significant economic, logistical, social, and cultural tribulations during these multiple crises.

In light of the recent events and evidence, we respectfully stress the urgency to protect the city's cultural institutions which serve communities of color in the forthcoming budget adoption. The communities most impacted by COVID-19 are the communities heavily reliant on discretionary funding, which only accounts for 0.42% of the city budget. Discretionary funding is how small organizations closest to New Yorkers and organizations led by people of color get access to public funding. Instead of cutting discretionary funding, we call on the city to find more impactful efficiencies, while maintaining a low-cost budget line with huge impact for under-served communities. We also support what other nonprofits are calling for: restricted funding to be made general operating support, eliminating the hearings requirement for FY20 contract registration, no retroactive cuts, and at least two weeks planning time if a program must end. These concrete actions the Council can take will support community based organizations led by and serving those most impacted by COVID-19.

In response to cultural organizations' indefinite physical closure, and to the anti-racist revolts across our city and within our insitutions, The Clemente, together with Pregones/PRTT and BAAD! formed a coalition of 8 initial members of a cultural equity NYC based consortium. We are eight legacy arts organizations in NYC who share the vital mission of championing the work and wellbeing of Latinx/People Of Color artists and cultural workers. Our consortium demonstrates a shared commitment to growing dynamic brick-and-mortar institutions, serving both underrepresented and general audiences, and deploying multiple generations of leadership to the field. We proudly share a decades-long track record of collaboration and connectedness with an ear to the ground.

In surveying our collective states, we found that temporary closure of our eight spaces/community hubs upended the livelihood of more than 3,000 creatives, and disrupted



access to the arts and culture for more than 1,000,000 diverse participants of all ages. Our collective losses due to COVID-19 exceed \$4,200,000, while our collective operating budgets round up to \$19 million, rivaling various major public cultural institutions. Ongoing migration of our programs to digital platforms, and related devising of alternative means of engagement, come with added financial, labor, and logistical burdens.

In addition to pursuing private fundraising for adaptive and working capital, our intent is to coalesce as organizations with a founding ethos of correcting under-representation and push back against the systemic lack of inclusion, and band together as an expanded think tank structure with other aligned organizational leaders and we continue to operate through twin crises of physical uncertainty and structural racism. The goal is to generate mid and long term thinking around Latinx/POC institutional legacy, durational values, safety net options for operational and adaptive capital, cross-borough and multi-disciplinary collaborations.

As a mid-sized cultural organization, and like many without an endowment, our existence is precarious and our medium- and long-term fate faced jeopardy. Our nimble staff often wear many hats providing a range of capacities but structurally and in the provision of service to New Yorkers of color. Our staff are depending on government support and coordination at every level, and our communities—the Lower East Side / Loisaida community—will depend on our survival in the coming years.

Our 100,00 square foot facility is home to the largest cultural community center in the LES dedicated to the preservation of affordable creative space for individual artists, organizations and mission-aligned cultural producers. It is also the only collaborative, multi-arts and multicultural hub with a Latinx founding mission in all of Lower Manhattan. We are part of the New Coalition - an alliance of cultural institutions in City-Owned Buildings. We each receive a subsidy for our utilities, which is now in question. This funding is critical to our operations and helps us maintain and care for a city asset.

Artists and communities of color face a compounding crisis as our institutions are forced to contract without significant federal support, as the health of our communities and families is dire. In 2017, I chaired a Loisaida neighborhood and cultural plan, that the Community Board 3 resolved to support, evidencing the crucial role cultural institutions of color play in the daily life of New York residents and visitors in social cohesion and advancing equity. The Department of Cultural Affairs had just released a commissioned report on the Social Impact of the Arts that supported these conclusions. These conclusions could not be more relevant today: there is an urgent need for holistic approaches to equity in the wake of the crisis, ones that consider culture as a part of our economic, physical, and mental recovery from a lense of racial justice.



For these reasons, we have a responsibility to advocate for a budget that revitalizes our city and supports its citizens and arts and culture organizations. Mayor Bill de Blasio's Executive Budget proposal for the 2021 fiscal year calls for **only a 0.32% cut to the New York Police Department**. We resoundingly support the calls to redirect the funding from made available through these \$1 billion in cuts to the NYPD to social services and arts with programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program, Coalition of Theaters of Color, Cultural Immigrant Initiative, CASA, Su Casa, and the programs and infrastructure we need for our city to recover from COVID-19.

Sincerely,

*Libertad Guerra*

Libertad Guerra  
Executive Director  
The Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Education Center, Inc.  
107 Suffolk Street  
New York, NY 10002



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Sincerely,

Libertad Guerra



231 West 39th St. | Suite 1200 | New York, NY 10018  
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 American Airlines Theatre™ • Stephen Sondheim Theatre • Studio 54 • Black Box Theatre and Laura Pels Theatre at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre

June 17, 2020

New York City Council  
 Committee on Cultural Affairs Oversight Hearing  
 “DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in NYC”  
 Written Testimony

To the Committee on Cultural Affairs:

As we continue to navigate through uncharted territory, we at Roundabout deeply appreciate the City of New York’s steadfast encouragement and support – through both the New York City Council, Department of Cultural Affairs and Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment. These past few months have brought challenges no one would have expected, and the last couple weeks have brought others that we must face head on.

We are proud to say that the programming detailed below that has been happening virtually during COVID-19 is the result of our ongoing commitment to equity and inclusion on and off our stages. That does not mean that we believe it is time for self-congratulations; we know there is much more work to be done and we continue and are committed to that work until real change is achieved throughout our institution.

A silver lining to this shutdown has been how quickly we’ve adapted to offering online programming. This has enabled us to reach out to people well beyond the walls of our theatres and studios. We will continue to build on these new connections well after we are back in our spaces, extending our reach and expanding our impact.

We are proud of Roundabout’s Education staff’s dedication to providing public high school students, teachers and community partners throughout the five boroughs with programming throughout this shutdown. They will be offering comprehensive programming in the coming year and have become adept virtual theatre makers and teachers! Some of their remarkable work includes:

- Theatrical Workforce Development Program will continue through the summer through remote training, with workshops in lighting, sound, wardrobe and scenic, panels with professional theatre technicians, and wraparound social service support to help the Fellows navigate the COVID-19 crisis. As soon as theatres and shops open, these Fellows will begin their 4-month hands-on internships. We are excited to share with you this [3-minute video](#) with highlights from a virtual sharing of their projects during quarantine.

(continued on next page..)

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Lauren Stein  
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- Theatrical Teaching Institute Summer Intensive provides professional development for teachers and will be offered remotely from August 3 – 21. Participants will experience some activities in real time via ZOOM and receive assignments and projects to work on individually at their own pace.
- First virtual Student Matinee talkback took place on April 29 which introduced *72 Miles to Go...* director Jo Bonney, lighting designer Lap Chi Chu, sound designer Elisheba Ittoop, hair/makeup designer J. Jared Janas, writer Hilary Bettis, and the entire cast for questions and opportunities to discuss their processes. Hosted by Director of Teaching and Learning Paul Brewster McGinley, the video has been viewed over 400 times.
- Roundabout Youth Ensemble (RYE) will meet and create a new virtual theatre piece this summer from August 3 – 21 and present their work to the public via a virtual sharing
- RYNOW (Roundabout Youth New Original Works) invited students from all over the country to create a theatre piece in response to the current crisis. In addition to dozens of current NYC RYE students, this project welcomed many new students from all over the country. The 5 minute video recap link is here: <https://youtu.be/MKrTnlGT88U>

And finally, we are planning to move forward with essential renovations to the American Airlines Theatre also taking advantage of the shutdown until the new year. These include a new roof, new HVAC (ours is past its useful life) and stabilizing our 43<sup>rd</sup> Street façade. Each of these items are necessary to ensure the safety and proper operation of the theatre. We had planned a full renovation including the interior but that has been put on hold until we are able to rebuild our reserve fund.

As we look to re-opening, in March 2021, our production will include:

- *Caroline, or Change* starring Olivier Award Winner Sharon D Clarke, Spring 2021 at Studio 54
- *...what the end will be* by Jiréh Breon Holder (Inaugural Mimi Commission recipient), Spring 2021 at The Laura Pels Theatre at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre
- *1776* starring Crystal Lucas-Perry as John Adams, Begins Previews March 25, 2021 and Opens April 8, 2021 at the American Airlines Theatre
- *Exception to the Rule* by Dave Harris, Spring 2021 in the Underground at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre

We thank you again for the New York City Council's belief in our work and we look forward to welcoming you back to the theatre in 2021!

As we make progress in the re-opening plans we will be sure to keep you updated.

Sincerely,

Julia Levy, Executive Director

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an active member of the NYC theatre community, a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Union, and a former artistic director of a Tony Award-winning theatre. I've worked at theatres in NYC and across the country. I am also writing to you as an ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Manhattan in Hell's Kitchen.

**Please please please** prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ tens of thousands of people, nurture the careers of some of the greatest talent in this City, are gathering places for seniors, uplift young people who want to express themselves, and are vital economic and cultural neighborhood resources.

Speaking personally, these theatres are why I believe in American theatre. Truly. They make work and develop talent that represents America, far more so than any other list of non-profit theatres in the city and country. Their artists go on to shape culture, and as you know culture changes the world. And, it's not an accident that so many leaders and activists come from the arts, from theatre, from these organizations. Without these organizations, to me, NYC is no longer NYC.

The Coalition of Theaters of Color have been historically underfunded, and are particularly vulnerable now. The Coalition of Theaters of Color serve the very communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and nourish people who continue to face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces for healing of all kinds.

Budgets tell the story of our values. This is not just a call for funding; this is a call for justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget.

We are grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theatres of Color for many years. We ask you to please stand strong now, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Russell  
460 West 50th Street  
New York, NY 10019



Arts  
Culture  
Community  
Lower East Side

Fourth Arts Block (FABnyc)  
61 E 4th St., New York, NY 10003  
[www.fabnyc.org](http://www.fabnyc.org)  
(212) 228-4670

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June 5, 2020

Hello, Councilmember Van Bramer and members of the Cultural Affairs Committee,

I'm Ryan Gilliam and I'm representing Fourth Arts Block or FAB -- a team of artists and organizers working in the Lower East Side.

There is a bill in Congress - H.R. 40 - which calls for a Commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery and its impact today on the lives of Black Americans.

We need this process to move forward on a national level. But we can't just sit and wait for the federal government to act. I'm asking the City Council to work in partnership with the cultural community and others, so that our city may begin the dialogue on Reparations.

H.R. 40 calls for telling the history of slavery, how our federal and state governments supported it, its legacies through redlining, educational funding, predatory finance and more. It asks for recommendations on appropriate ways to educate the public on this history. And it asks for recommendations for remedies -- including how the Government might issue a formal apology, how ongoing laws and policies should be changed, how injuries can be reversed through programs and projects, how any form of compensation might be calculated and awarded.

Many of our city's cultural organizations have already engaged in work necessary to the truth-telling and education critical to this process. But we have not done that work collectively, we have not done it as a city, and we have not grappled with the issue of reparations.

I believe any process that hopes to move us toward future reconciliation must ensure that our understanding of Truth encompass not only the history of brutality and injustice that has been practiced upon Black communities here, but also recognize the extraordinary strength and resiliency of Black communities, their accomplishments, their creativity, and their capacity for joy in the face of that ongoing attack.

Engaging with truth telling and the consideration of reparations is work that calls everyone to participate. I would like to see our city publicly commit to that work. I would like to see our cultural community collaborate and take a leading role in that work. And I ask you, Councilmembers, to be champions for that work to begin here now.

Ryan Gilliam

Executive Director, Fourth Arts Block - [ryan@fabnyc.org](mailto:ryan@fabnyc.org) / [www.fabnyc.org](http://www.fabnyc.org)

**Testimony of Sade Lythcott, Chief Executive Officer of the National Black Theatre before the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations June 22, 2020**

- Good Morning and thank you to Council member Van Bramer, Majority leader Cumbo, commissioner Casals, and all of the City Council and members of DCLA present today for having me today my name is Sade Lythcott. I testify today as the: The CEO of the National Black Theatre, the oldest continually run Black theater in New York. I am also proudly the Chair of Coalitions Of Theaters of Color (CTC). A coalition that Rep the largest body of culturally specific theaters in the City. We are one of the very first Cultural initiatives we but one that receives one of the smallest sums of cultural dollars through the Council's CTC Initiative at 3.7 million dollars .
- I come here as a cultural leader who watched mom. Dr. Barbara Ann Teer fight until her last breath to get vital but insecure discretionary funding.
- We are grateful in particular to Chair Van Brammer and Majority Leader Cumbo for the preservation and growth of the initiative over the past 3 years.
- We as the CTC body represent 52 cultural institutions across all 5 boroughs in the communities hardest hit by COVID-19, Today our missions are more vital than ever in playing a key role in the recovery of our great city as many of our organizations are more than just theaters. CTC institutions have functioned as "safe havens" for the communities in which they operate, each year serving millions of New Yorkers with vitally needed cultural, educational, social, economic resources and opportunities for youth, seniors, families, in local neighborhoods and to the broader residents living in the outer boroughs; These are the same People and Communities who have suffered systemic underinvestment and oppression that have resulted in an overwhelming and

disproportionate number of deaths from COVID-19 and on the frontline of Police brutality.

- Today I testify with a pristine understanding of the tremendous deficits that the city faces and the inarguable fact that the Council's budget will have to endure deep and sweeping cuts.
- However, Today we are asking NO HARM COME TO the initiative funding for CTC and that redistribution / redirection of funds from the NYPD to be used to actually be used increase our initiative funding.
- For us, though we are truly grateful, we take offense that the small amount of funding we receive would even be in question. For us this is not about money, This is about our lives and the wellbeing of the communities we serve.
- Cuts to the CTC would be destabilizing and will undoubtedly mean that over half of our theaters will be gone for good some that represent the only theaters of their kind in the country.
- For far too long we have been silent as NYC elected talk the talk.....But have not walked the walk for communities and Artists of Color. It is time that the City takes accountability in dismantling the structural inequities that keep our people, communities and institutions on the margins struggling for basic survival. We are asking for a step towards justice, towards closing the gap of the gross disparities that are ravaging our people and communities.
- Lastly, i want to point out that we as artists share a common privilege with you electeds in that You too are storytellers; Every vote, decision and cut tells a story. I would challenge you and say look at the decisions in front of you as the greatest story ever told. Look at the budget as a moral narrative that tells the story of our lives, our values and reflects back the priorities of not only our great city but of our times. You get the absolute privilege to articulate our stated values put into loving action. What a privilege to have the power to tell that story. You, like us artists and arts workers, have the responsibility of imagining and manifesting new and better worlds. This is your chance like the artists you revere so, to be

creative, to be bold, to take courageous risks towards budget justice! To shine light in these dark times into the spaces that need it most.

- Thank You!

## **NYC Council, Cultural Affairs Committee written Testimony – June 22, 2020**

COVID19 has caused so much loss and pain, and my heart goes-out to all who have suffered the death of a loved one during this terrible time. As the virus raged here in NYC, we've endured much and not one person, one organization or institution has gone unaffected. This includes the 9/11 Memorial & Museum.

Many individuals have been working diligently every day to evaluate how and when we can reopen the Memorial and eventually, the Museum. It is hard to imagine but it's been more than three months since we closed our site.

While we began planning for how COVID might impact us back in January of this year, no one expected we would be here today.

Our reality is that, like other cultural sites in New York City, we do not know when we will be able to re-open the Museum.

We have, however, been so proud of how much we've been able to deliver even while working remotely. We offered a series of online public programs, most recently on Friday last week with former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, and we offered a virtual professional development program for teachers earlier this month. We also hosted an incredibly moving digital commemoration of the end of rescue, recovery and relief operations at Ground Zero on May 30, featuring 9/11 health advocate and our Board member Jon Stewart.

Every Wednesday, we publish new Stories of Hope on Instagram TV, connecting stories of selflessness and compassion after 9/11 with comparable expressions happening now in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided families, caregivers and teachers meaningful educational activities to do with children while staying home – including our “Dear Hero” project that sends messages of appreciation to frontline responders at this moment of crisis, just as we did almost 19 years ago in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. And, of course, perhaps most meaningfully, we have continued to place white roses daily on the names of individuals inscribed on the Memorial pools who would have been celebrating a birthday, thanks to members of our essential on-site staff of security personnel who stepped up to do the job!

It's been remarkable to see how productive we can be, even when we're closed! And, it's incredibly gratifying to know how dedicated our staff is to this place and our mission.

A few weeks ago, on May 15th, we marked the sixth anniversary of the Museum's dedication. It's truly amazing what we've accomplished in a very short period of time. But we are a young institution; we have no endowment; and due to not being on NYC property, we are not

considered a CIG (Cultural Institution Group), missing out on valuable financial assistance that the City could be providing us as they do to others. We simply do not have unlimited resources.

The fact is: money is going out the door much faster than it is coming in. Until now, we've relied on our robust Museum attendance to drive earned revenue levels that enabled us to cover an astonishing 95% of our annual operating budget. In fact, our business model was always that the revenue earned by the Museum would enable us to keep the Memorial free and open to the public. With the closure of the Memorial & Museum on March 13th, our business model collapsed.

Given any number of factors, including predictions of a slow return to pre-COVID-19 tourism levels, we can anticipate that our ability to generate earned revenue from high attendance numbers will be significantly compromised for an indefinite period of time.

Like other cultural institutions, we've scrubbed the budget numerous times and we've been able to reduce our operating budget significantly. But we are still facing a potential \$45 million deficit.

The challenge we face is great. We think about this daily. Raising money is a difficult task at a moment when so many not-for-profits are in such dire need, and everyone is being asked to help.

Many have been here since we started to plan the 9/11 Memorial Museum in 2006. They've helped envision with others what this Museum could be. They have worked and lived its planning, opening and operation with blood, sweat, and tears.

I want to be straight with the Council. We face difficult days ahead, and we don't have all the answers. We have been forced to let 60% of our beloved staff go and cut our operating expenses to the bone. I can't predict the future, but I do know we will be a different institution at the end of this. We will have to adapt like many others are doing.

What won't change is our commitment, both personally and professionally, to continue to honor the memory and sacrifice of those who were killed on 9/11 and on February 26, 1993, and to recognize the service and sacrifice of all who responded as part of the rescue, recovery and relief operations in the aftermath of 9/11. Our mission does not change. While I can't say with certainty when we will re-open the Museum, we are working towards that day. In the meantime, we will continue to observe our three commemorations each year, and on July 4th, we will take our first step by re-opening our Memorial plaza, and reaffirming the role of the 9/11 Memorial as a symbol of hope and resiliency in the face of devastating loss and an essential component of our City and our nation's landscape, needed now more than ever.

One day, hopefully soon, we will reopen the Museum and provide educational and programmatic experiences. Most importantly, we will do everything we can to preserve this sacred site.

The Memorial & Museum that eventually reopens will not be the Memorial & Museum we closed on March 13th. But reopening will afford us the opportunity to dream again and to build forward. And, like the story we tell here about 9/12, we will once again demonstrate our capacity for resilience and renewal.

Thank you for your time and support,

Christopher Mendoza

Manager of Government and Community Affairs at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum

TESTIMONY OF AILEEN FUCHS, PRESIDENT & CEO  
SNUG HARBOR CULTURAL CENTER & BOTANICAL GARDEN

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FY21 BUDGET HEARINGS**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and**  
**International Intergroup Relations**

June 22, 2020

Good day Speaker Johnson, Chair Van Bramer and Members of the Committee. My name is Aileen Fuchs and I am the President & CEO of Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden in Staten Island and a proud member of the CIG. I am here today to urge full funding for cultural organizations in the FY21 City budget. I am grateful to the New York City Council and the Mayor for recognizing the essential nature of the arts and culture sector to the resiliency and economic recovery of New York City.

Snug Harbor is the cultural programmer and property manager of an 83-acre historic campus. The cultural anchor of our borough, we collectively welcome 500,000 visitors annually. We provide critical staff and resources to conserve our landscapes, incubate artistry that celebrates our vibrant diversity, and maintain a safe and secure home for numerous small businesses and museums that serve our

communities. And we do all of this, in the best of times, with limited human and capital resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has validated Snug Harbor's place in our communities. We have remained open throughout NY on PAUSE, providing free and open green space for safe, socially distant exploration while also serving as a COVID-19 testing facility. We have responded to the current crisis with resiliency and imagination, moving content and programming online, serving Regional Enrichment Centers, and creating virtual community-building events. Our Heritage Farm donates weekly to a local food pantry and launched a new Community Sponsored Agriculture initiative. Our gardeners provide plants and advice to local community gardens. Cutting funding to Snug Harbor will harm the vulnerable communities we serve, impair our progress toward social justice and decimate the 40+ individual artists and small businesses who call our campus home.

Our home at Snug Harbor is located on the North Shore where nearly one-third of residents live in poverty. We serve upwards of 22,000 students in Title I schools annually and engage marginalized youth through many programs and partnerships including with the Department of Probation.

Today, our City is grappling with a public health and economic crisis in an ongoing pandemic of racial injustice. We can no longer turn our backs on inequity.

Cultural organizations can lead our communities through essential progressive change as a nexus for public discourse and engagement. Cuts to arts and culture are cuts to the communities most in need.

Everyone in this hearing today has spent the last several weeks avidly consuming arts and culture: binge-watching our favorite TV shows and movies, listening to music, and growing herbs, plants and flowers. Arts and culture brings communities together, nurtures our shared humanity and celebrates our diversity. Do not leave us behind. Maintain our funding to inspire visitors and tourists and build an equitable and just City That Never Sleeps.

Thank you.

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and**  
**International Intergroup Relations**  
**June 22, 2020**

***Testimony presented by Melissa West, Vice President of Curation, Visual & Performing Arts, Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden***

Good day, Speaker Johnson, Chair Van Bramer and Members of the Committee. My name is Melissa West and I am the Vice President of Curation for the Visual & Performing Arts for Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden on Staten Island. I oversee bold and exciting arts programming across the 83-acre historic campus that serves as both a cultural anchor and economic driver for the borough. Snug Harbor has been a creative and vibrant hub for artists and neighbors since the 1970s while also providing solace and respite for the community at large. I am writing to testify that cultural organizations are crucial and essential to our communities, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing pandemic of racial injustice across this country. And with the economic impact of COVID-19 on the city budget, allocating resources to the cultural sector will be even more important to ensure the health, wellness and viability of our city.

Throughout New York City, museums, galleries and theaters are critical spaces that bring people together through the transformative power of art. Places for arts and culture allow neighbors to gather, disseminate information and ideas, and become more civically engaged. The arts have a role as a public good. Cultural organizations provide essential programs to empower the elderly, economically distressed, and those who are most vulnerable. We need these spaces to perform our civic responsibilities and to amplify marginalized voices—women, people of color, the impoverished, and the youth. As an example, Snug Harbor’s Youth Matters/Teen Ambassadors program provides professional development to Staten Island high school students looking to pursue careers in the arts. Many of these students come from the North Shore, where 23% of residents live in poverty. This program connects students to visual and performing artists, curators and arts administrators, while exposing them to the spectrum of career paths within the cultural sector. One of our Teen Ambassadors writes, “I definitely know a lot of my friends who are trying to break into the arts scene don’t exactly have safe

avenues to do so. It's really nice to offer a safe and supportive environment for young people to get mentorship that doesn't endanger them." Access to local arts and cultural programs equip our youth with the tools they need to pursue their future careers.

While the arts do cultivate inspiration and entertainment, they more importantly provide a necessary venue to nurture our shared humanity. Impending cuts to the City budget will force smaller organizations, often operating in the most vulnerable communities, to close their doors or drastically reduce their services. This will have dire consequences to those who consider these organizations a lifeline. Despite our current pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice, culture persists—it is resilient, and brings us together in moments of uncertainty and unrest. Culture is integral to our city's identity. New York City needs arts and culture to thrive. Thank you for your continued support for the cultural sector—never has that support been more important than it is now.

Thank you.

My name is Jill Sigman. I am a native New Yorker and the Artistic Director of a non-profit dance company called jill sigman/thinkdance. We have existed in New York City for the past 22 years through perseverance, ingenuity, and love. We have performed in 13 countries, and here at home in NYC. We work with a changing pool of dancers, currently 8 women.

Arts and culture must be part of the urgent budget transformation of New York City. Significant public funds from the city's budget must be reallocated from policing and state-sanctioned violence against black and brown people to community needs and social services. Arts and culture are *an invaluable part* of those needs and services. Artists are the health workers of the spirit. Our work creates community, cultivates compassion, and encourages creative expression. It empowers participants of all ages. It enables New Yorkers to find their humanity in the face of conflict and challenge. I performed in the street repeatedly in the wake of 9/11. I will never forget the crowds of people who gathered, who sat down on the pavement, who stayed for long periods to watch, whose faces softened. Art allows people to process their current reality.

While artists are crucial to the support of our communities, they are, at the same time, part of those very communities that need support. When the lockdown began, jill sigman/thinkdance immediately lost all of our scheduled engagements—9 events and over \$15,000 in revenue plus no additional work for the foreseeable future. Given that our annual budgets range from \$18,000-\$50,000 depending on the year, this is a significant loss.

Despite this, we have rallied. We have introduced new online programming consisting of “somatic tools for crisis” workshops that serve a broad constituency of activists, educators, students, legal advocates, and faith leaders. We have continued rehearsals remotely. We have made emergency payments to dancers to aid them as they face total or partial loss of employment. We have turned to video, outdoor site-specific work, visual art practices, and ‘social practice art’ involving seed sharing—all artistic strategies that do not require public convening.

Like all performing artists in NYC, we are adaptable, resourceful, innovative, and resilient. But that resilience should not be mistaken for lack of need. It should not provide an excuse for glossing over our economic vulnerabilities in the face of Covid-19 and the larger context of a society that prioritizes policing, militarization, and detention. Those who make art in this city are not immune to the forces that affect the rest of the population. We are *part of* the population. My company includes people who are low-income, disabled, immune compromised, pregnant, people of color, LGBTQ+, and survivors of violence. These experiences and identities are exactly what allow us to speak so affectingly to the public. The arts need your support right now; Covid-19 is not over.

This is not a budgetary issue; it is a moral issue. Please significantly reduce the NYPD budget and direct those funds back to social service and the arts, with additional Covid-19 support for artists. Thank you for your consideration.



COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL  
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

June 22, 2020

TESTIMONY

Dear New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, my name is Tamara Keshecki, Director of Grants and Government Relations at the St. George Theatre Restoration, a nonprofit performing arts center located on the North Shore of Staten Island. Thank you for your time today and your ongoing commitment to arts and culture, especially during this difficult time of converging pandemics.

The St. George Theatre Restoration is a historic theater that was on the brink of ruin, and the cusp of being torn down, when three women took over in 2004 and reinvented it as a nonprofit arts venue. It is the only venue of its size and capacity in Staten Island and provides Staten Island residents the ability to see a show of any kind in their home borough without high tolls or a long commute. Each year over 100,000 people visit The St. George.

The St. George Theatre is not part of the Cultural Institutions Group nor does it receive any city-provided general operating or facility support. Despite experiencing a revenue loss of over \$300,000 per month due to the mandated COVID-19 closures, the St. George Theatre has remained committed to its community and will provide its free, annual summer arts education programs virtually to over 150 Staten Island and Brooklyn youth, ages 9-18, via the Summer Dance/Theater/Literacy Workshop and Career Paths for the Arts programs.

Historic theatres are proven community revitalizers and economic drivers that create dynamic, livable and walkable neighborhoods, and will be critical pieces to the next stages of community recovery. Capital support of arts venues is a crucial component that allows small venues to be safe, sound, and function in a business model that does not leave much in the way of earned revenue beyond covering basic operating expenses. The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Council are essential partners in this work. Capital support of life/safety projects, such as the St. George Theatre’s roof, directly contributes to creating cultural, community anchors. It is only with city support that we can fulfill our mission to restore and renovate the historic 1929 building.

*“Across the country theatres are illuminated with ghost lights, waiting anxiously to once again welcome audiences. Don’t let historic theatres become history.”*

– League of Historic American Theatres

Having a cultural organization in the community increases property values up to 20% and sparks growth and innovation as “they create a fast-growth, dynamic business sector, help mature industries become more competitive, provide critical ingredients for innovative places, catalyze community revitalization, and deliver a better prepared workforce.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally 86% of Americans “agree art institutions are important to local businesses and the economy.”<sup>2</sup>

Since the inception of the St. George Theatre Restoration in 2004, the board and staff have worked tirelessly to restore the venue to its majestic 1929 condition along with the requisite 21st century rigging, technology, and equipment. The St. George Theatre has the only legitimate Broadway-size stage with 54 line sets on Staten Island, and maintains three floors of dressing rooms. Currently, the Theatre’s roof and façade are leaking and in desperate need of full repair to protect the theatre’s envelope and ensure its longtime viability as a community cornerstone.

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<sup>1</sup> Waits, M. “Five Roles for Arts, Culture, and Design in Economic Development. Community Development Investment Review, p. 21. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/100908>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ARTS\\_FullInfographic\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ARTS_FullInfographic_FINAL_0.pdf)

With New York City home to almost 2,200 nonprofit arts organizations that employ 293,000 workers at a wage cost of over \$30 billion,<sup>3</sup> the arts and culture sector is economically critical and a part of every New Yorker’s fabric of life. The St. George Theatre looks forward to the day when we can reopen, resume providing invaluable arts experiences to our local community, and once again be a hub of economic activity in the St. George community.

In closing, we at the St. George Theatre would like to express our condolences for all who have succumbed to COVID-19 and their families. We stand in solidarity with the families of George Floyd, Eric Garner, and so many others in the black community because black lives matter – yesterday, today and every day.

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<sup>3</sup> New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer, “The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City,” Office of the New York City Comptroller (Office of the New York City Comptroller, Bureau of Budget, October 25, 2019), <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>

Thank you for your attention to cultural organizations and the opportunity to speak. I'm Janice Monger, President and CEO of the Staten Island Museum.

The Staten Island Museum sparks curiosity and generates meaningful shared experiences through natural science, art and history to deepen understanding of our environment, ourselves and each other. The museum is located on the north shore that is diverse with about 30% African American and 30% Latino populations. We offer STEAM educational programming, serving 13,000 school students annually, of which more than 50% are Title 1 students that receive free or reduced cost offerings.

The Staten Island Museum closed our doors one week after opening *Women of the Nation Arise!*, a major exhibition taking an intersectional look women's suffrage for the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment Centennial that also connects to current issues of civic participation and voting rights. The exhibit is now online and will be outdoors at Snug Harbor this summer for a socially distanced experience. We presented our **Earth Day Festival** online to 2500 virtual participants, and in July we will hold **Moth Night** with downloadable tools for families to unplug and explore night science in their own backyards and outdoor spaces.

In spite of this crisis, we are committed to advancing our capital plan of opening an expanded STEAM Education Center that will highlight biodiversity and Lenape Native American culture.

The Staten Island Museum is actively engaged with diversity, equity and inclusion goals through a comprehensive plan, overseen by a standing board committee and rigorous staff working group. We see equity work as central priority.

Building closure has resulted in about \$250,000 in revenue loss since March. We are eager to reopen the museum's doors safely and responsibly even with increased costs of COVID protocols. With suggested admission of \$8 for adults, and discounts for students and seniors, we don't charge the true cost to visitors. New York City's investment helps keep the museum affordable. Please protect city funding for culture that is so vital for us, and many others here, for the Staten Island Museum to continue providing a world-class museum experience, with accessible admission, right in the local community. Thank you.



Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams  
June 22, 2020

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Good morning. I would like to thank the chair, Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer of the Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Committee for hosting this hearing. The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and will continue to have, a profound effect on New York City's arts and cultural communities. Our city relies on these institutions for our economic, educational, and community needs. While we may be able to quantify effects such as the boost in tourism we get from these institutions, and the hundreds of thousands of jobs they create and sustain, their impact goes far beyond our economy. The arts and cultural communities also play a significant role in boosting our spiritual needs by touching us in ways that improve our mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and stress. Further, they improve student academic performance by promoting self-confidence, diversity, and tolerance.

According to the New York City Comptroller, in 2019, nearly 300,000 people were employed in arts and culture jobs, representing \$30.4 billion in wages. The arts and culture sector contributed more than \$100 billion to our economy, representing 13 percent of the City's total economic output. It is imperative that we create a sustainability plan to assist our arts organizations as much as possible. Specifically, I am asking you to encourage the Federal government, and our philanthropic partners, to step in and help immediately, as many organizations are laying off staff, are unable to pay rent, and some are about to close their doors, possibly for good.

Each day, I am contacted by our Brooklyn cultural institutions pleading for intervention and support. I understand that New York City has limited dollars because of this crisis and, as Brooklyn's borough president, I have allocated \$32.3 million of capital funding to various arts and culture projects in Fiscal Years 2015-2020 (FY15/FY20), but now more than ever, we must ensure that our cultural institutions remain intact, as they contribute greatly to the fabric of our city. Every one of our smaller independent theaters, museums, performance venues, and arts education organizations and programs are facing the threat of insolvency without some form of intervention.

Our city is world-renowned for being a cultural melting pot. From Broadway, to off-Broadway, to off-off Broadway, and around the five boroughs, theatre and performing arts lend our city a vibrancy that is hard to find anywhere else on earth.

June 22, 2020

Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Page 2

Recently, I wrote to the Mayor on this issue, requesting a briefing on his administration's plans to help ensure that these vital institutions will not disappear. Now I am putting the same question to you: How is this Council planning to protect the viability of these institutions? As elected representatives, we must do all in our power to provide a lifeline to our arts institutions and the thousands whose careers and livelihoods are centered in our arts and cultural institutions. I look forward to working with you all on this important effort.

Thank you.

Diana Crum, Independent Artist, Educator and Arts Worker  
Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
June 21, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts and cultural programming. I have worked in the arts and in education for the past 14 years. Currently, my active roles include Chair of Dance at Usdan Summer Camp for the Arts; Dance Makers in the Schools Program Director at Movement Research; Teaching Artist at Brooklyn Arts Council, ArtsConnection and New Jersey Performing Arts Center; and Dance Instructor at Brooklyn Prospect Charter School. In addition, I premiered original choreography in New Dance Alliance's Performance Mix Festival on May 20, 2020.

I list my many roles and responsibilities for two reasons. One reason is to demonstrate the depth and range of my involvement in the field, so that you understand I speak from an experienced point of view. Another reason is to show that we, arts workers, do a lot. The majority of us work hard, with very little resources, and for small financial compensations. We are already turning water into wine. In the past several decades, the city, state and federal government have already cut art budgets down to a minimum. Please do NOT cut anymore.

I wrote to you almost a month ago in support of arts education. Today, I write for the same reasons, but in regards to the art and culture sector. New York City students show the same needs that New York City residents have. **The arts build community, foster social discourse, and help with mental and emotional health.** During a pandemic, these needs are even greater than they are in normal times. **Now more than ever, we need the City of New York to support a robust, active, creative arts community.**

- 1) **The arts build community.** When the school buildings closed, our students lost an important place, where they could count on seeing their friends and a team of supportive adults. Online, gathering the same community was difficult. School art events successfully brought students, teachers, administrators and family members back together. We gathered to watch videos, hear music and look at visual works. The professional arts industry of New York City is similarly providing opportunities for New Yorkers to gather. Personally, I've been taking classes with @mercetrust on Instagram, watching the MetOpera streams, and showing up for peer performances in festivals like New Dance Alliance's Performance Mix Festival. These events have been vital in keeping me connected to my communities.
- 2) **The arts are a vital forum for social discourse.** After the death of George Floyd, when Black Lives Matters took the streets, (again), we, educators, didn't know how to talk about it with students. Performance events, visual art works, and creative writing have helped us and our students process current events. They gave us vehicles for expression and ways to engage with what otherwise felt overwhelming. New Yorkers need creative, rich modes of expression to understand complex histories and hear multiple perspectives. Artists and art works help us collectively share our points of view, learn from one another and enhance our understandings.
- 3) **The arts add to mental, emotional and physical health.** This spring, in my role as a dance teacher, I often asked students to participate in a weekly movement class. For full credit, they had to write down how they felt before and after the class. Consistently, across ages, they responded with comments like "this class calmed me down," "I feel better afterwards," and "I feel less stress." Participation in the arts helps relieve anxiety. It has a real effect on the health of New Yorkers. When so many New Yorkers have had their daily routines disrupted and many face added financial stress, we need ways to take care of ourselves. The arts help us maintain our health.

We need art. It keeps us engaged. It builds our communities. And it offers us ways to process our current events. It is paramount to a healthy, thriving society.

As demonstrators call for a defunding of the NYPD, we must see the connection to the debate around arts funding. The arts foster a healthy society. A healthy society has less need of jails, hospitals and police than an unhealthy one. The arts are a preventative measure that saves the City billions of dollars in corrective and punitive costs later. I have no doubt that my colleagues from New Yorkers for Culture and Arts and Arts in Education Roundtable, among others, are sharing important data that demonstrates the incredible scope of arts in the city. I hope that you appreciate the numbers they share and understand the very real impact that the numbers represent. #ArtsAreEssential. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely, Diana Crum



## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

June 24, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the hearing on DCLA, COVID-19, and Cultural Organizations in NYC.

We are writing on behalf of Ping Chong +Company, which has been a vital part of New York City's cultural community for almost 50years. An integral part of the NYC performing arts ecosystem, Ping Chong + Company is guided by values of beauty, innovation and social justice. Our work addresses culture, identity and belonging, using a community-engaged process to bring under-represented voices to the stage.

We are located in the East Village cultural district, and present our work to audiences in all 5 boroughs of New York, at venues such as La MaMa ETC, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New Victory Theater, Downtown Arts, BRIC, LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, and many more. In addition to our theatrical performances, our K-12 education programs serve up to 2,000 students each year across the boroughs, and employs two dozen teaching artists.

Like arts organizations across the city, Ping Chong + Company had to cancel or postpone all of our live programming in Spring 2020, and faces great uncertainty about when we will be able to reconvene in person. However, we have found creative ways to continue to bring our programs online, premiering new productions digitally, and hosting artist dialogues and community panels. In addition, we were able to transform arts education residencies into virtual delivery to continue engaging with students during remote learning.

We have worked tirelessly to keep our staff together, employed, and to continue to mentor and support our team of artists, including emerging artists of color, who will this week be sharing online new creative work generated in response to this moment of COVID shut down and uprisings for racial justice.

Beyond the pandemic, arts and cultural experiences are going to be the bridge to re-opening and re-building a vibrant New York City, to restore community connections and dialogues, and to engage young people in learning and speaking with their authentic voices. Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with presenting partners, community-based organizations, schools, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages.

In order for this to happen, city agencies need sustained and equitable funding and support as we plan for re-opening. We call upon your support to ensure that budget cuts do not fall disproportionately on Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department of Education, and Department of Youth & Community Development.

We also note that the Theatre community has long played an important role in telling stories of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and we urge the Council to take action by “holding harmless” funding for DCLA’s Coalition of Theatres of Color, of which we are a proud member, who are essential to ensuring a just and equitable NYC.

And let us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Let’s celebrate, affirm, and sustain, with proactive City Council financial support, the role of arts in the future of New York City.

Sincerely,

The Staff of Ping Chong + Company  
47 Great Jones Street  
New York, NY 10012  
212-529-1557  
[www.pingchong.org](http://www.pingchong.org)

# Meghan Grover

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

June 22, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Meghan Grover, and I work for New York City Children's Theater as a teaching artist.

Every year, New York City Children's Theater serves over 10,000 students with inclusive theatre and music programs that advance literacy and social-emotional skills in Pre-K-5th graders at schools and homeless shelters in all 5 boroughs. We are dedicated to serving every New York City student, and have designed original programming to serve special populations, including students with disabilities and MLL's.

Currently, 40 New York City Children's Theater Teaching Artists are working to develop innovative and engaging virtual programming:

- We are currently running 20 long-term residencies with our school and homeless shelter partners, and creating a database of online programming named "Creative Clubhouse" that will serve the wider public online.
- We have adapted our multi-media musical, FIVE, to digital format, and are offering it for free to schools in District 75, the special needs district.
- We are developing a series of trauma-informed training webinars for educators so that they can learn how to handle the lasting effects of this collective trauma on students, and help to provide stability for their students.
- We are also creating a new applied theatre workshop for grades K through 4 that teaches skills in resilience, mindfulness, and anxiety management through traumatic experiences.

New York City Children's Theater relies heavily on the grant programs that we receive each year from DCLA and the DOE. Without this funding, our organization would be unable to deliver our arts programming to schools and homeless shelters at this time when the arts is imperative for healthy child development.

My request is that budget cuts not fall disproportionately on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. And let

us not make New York – where culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences. Indeed, programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
Meghan Grover



Testimony on Cultural Affairs and COVID  
June 22, 2020

Dear Chair Van Bramer, Commissioner Casals, Councilmembers:

Bronx Arts Ensemble annually employs over 100 talented artists and administrators who are now more deeply than ever committed to our Bronx constituents. This spring the communities we serve have been disproportionately affected by our two major recent nationwide crises.

We are closing out the spring season digitally in both our school teaching and musical performances. Each week this summer we will launch five new free online art classes. Digital is a different classroom and concert experience, keeping us relevant in lockdown and opening an alternative channel to be more inclusive beyond reopening.

When reopening and recovery begin Bronx Arts and our peers will be frontline in helping the borough recover emotionally. Our tens of thousands of constituents, from students to seniors, have depended on us for 48 years to transcend oppression, to celebrate our many cultural traditions and to nourish pride and identity.

What is systemic racism? It's telling our students and audiences, overwhelmingly black and brown, that public art education and free concerts are discretionary and non-essential. In 40 public schools, our educational framework addresses 21st Century learning skills and social-emotional learning. Our free community concerts in over 35 Bronx community venues are performed by New York's finest musicians and embrace diverse cultural traditions. Bronxites will recover through these exceptional experiences in the classroom, after school, and in the many public community venues where we perform. Bronxites are counting on your ongoing support of cultural development and critical initiatives like CASA. They need these experiences more than ever to properly recover.

David Nussenbaum  
Executive Director





WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP  
RELATIONS

New York City Council, New York, New York  
June 22, 2020

Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to furnish written testimony on the issue of COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City.

Normally at this time of year we would be updating you on the work that has taken place in FY20 and what is in store for FY21. However, these are not typical times. We are grateful to the City and its support during this difficult period for all New Yorkers, and we look forward to playing our role alongside the City as we work towards reopening, recovery and a transformed cultural and city landscape.

The Museum of the City of New York is one of 34 organizations within the CIG—the Cultural Institutions Group—that comprise a partnership with the City to provide cultural, educational, and community services that foster a healthy, vibrant, equitable and inclusive community. We work with all ages, in all demographics, from all over the City.

This testimony provides information about some of the work we have engaged in during the COVID-19 crisis to serve New Yorkers and many others around the world. As the city and the nation look ahead, the Museum aspires to provide humanities context and diverse perspectives that shed new light on New York's changing urbanism, while reckoning with the city's deep inequities that the pandemic has compounded and exposed, including in our own neighborhood of East Harlem and the under-resourced communities across the city that the Museum's education programs serve. This testimony also looks ahead to how we can continue to be a resource to all New Yorkers and a partner to the City and our cultural institution colleagues, within and beyond the CIG.

Since March the Museum has continued to provide for our communities by moving programs online, promoting these offerings virtually, and making sure that populations hit hardest by the shelter-in-place mandates – school children and senior citizens -- are made aware of what is available to them.



In addition to these cultural and educational services, the Museum recognizes its critical role as a partner to the City in supporting New Yorkers during this pandemic. We have participated with the Department of Cultural Affairs to provide needed information on our responses to COVID-19 and its impact on the Museum and its staff, and indicate our ability to support COVID-19 related and other civic initiatives such as cooling stations and early voting sites. We have assisted our neighbors Mt. Sinai and Terence Cardinal Cooke hospitals with PPE equipment and space for equipment storage as they manage the crisis. We have worked proactively along with our cultural institution colleagues, as a participant of the Culture@3 consortium, and as a member of the East Harlem Community Alliance to advocate for support from Congress to increase federal relief to reduce the economic impacts of COVID-19 on non-profits and in support of our city.

The documented unequal effects of COVID-19 on communities of color has amplified collective disaffection with existing systems of protection, justice, and representation, especially at this moment of reckoning against endemic racist violence against Black Americans. These are topics that the Museum has worked hard to illuminate over many years, in exhibitions such as *Activist New York*, *King in New York*, and *New York at Its Core*, among many others. We believe deeply in the heightened importance of that work at this moment, both in our public facing content and in committing to actionable means of addressing systemic issues of bias and discrimination within our historically white-led institution.



Looking ahead, FY21 brings with it many new challenges beyond financial impacts. I acknowledge the gravity of the City's fiscal position and offer the Museum of the City of New York as a partner to finding creative solutions to help our communities and city heal socially and economically. Culture is critical to education, to maintaining and expanding vibrant lives, and sustaining mental health and community well-being. Countless individuals and families have come to rely on our services. As we think about recovery we will have our sights clearly on the vital role we can play in developing a more equitable City through:

- employment: our creative sector directly employs over 293,000 people, paying \$30.4B in wages. Stabilizing our workforce and giving renewed urgency to our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) program will dismantle systemic barriers to being a truly inclusive organization and will have a profound impact on New York City's economy
- being an economic driver: our sector is responsible for \$110B in total economic activity

- local service: through our exhibitions, online resources, and education and public program we are a place for learning about our history and for exploration and identification of creative solutions for building a better city. The CIGs provide access to nearly 24 million New Yorkers and tourists annually, with 4.2 million free visits and 1.5 million K-12 student visitors.

Thank you members of the committee for receiving this testimony and for your work in the service of the continued health and vibrancy of New York City's arts and cultural communities. We look forward to our continued partnership in support and celebration of the past, present, and future of all New Yorkers.



Whitney W. Donhauser

*Ronay Menschel Director & President*

Museum of the City of New York



**Cultural Institutions Group  
Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Oversight – DCLA, COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City  
June 19, 2020  
John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs – Wildlife Conservation Society  
Chair, Cultural Institutions Group**

Good afternoon, Chair Jimmy Van Bramer and members of the committee. I am John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President for Public Affairs at the Wildlife Conservation Society, Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) and Co-Founder of New Yorkers For Culture and Arts. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the CIGs – a coalition of 34 cultural organizations who share a public-private partnership with the City of New York and are located in all five boroughs of the City. In a recent survey conducted by the CIGs, as a collective, the CIGs annually employ over 11,941 with over 8,265 additional volunteers across the city with a combined operating budget of over \$1.47 billion USD. Culture has historically played a pivotal role in social justice reforms. It is the universal language that gives voice to communities and is accessible across social boundaries. What better time than this moment in history to support this community.

Over the past 80+ days since New York went on PAUSE, we have seen the New York cultural community come together like no other time before, rallying support for each other's organizations and tenaciously finding ways to continue to provide educational and essential services to their communities. In the CIG-led Culture@3pm call we have seen this play out, and today as the representative of the CIG, I convey the importance of the city holding fast in support of the cultural organizations that will be completely decimated if City Council initiatives are taken away. Specifically, those organizations and

programs from communities of color, like the National Black Theater, the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, The Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute and many others who stand to be gravely harmed should city funding be cut in these critical areas. As a community, we need to ensure that the budget policies of the city of NY can keep the cultural ecology of the city alive and represent those needs and values. We are one collective community, and the diversity of cultural communities is built on the diversity of the city.

New York is at a critical juncture where it can lead the state and nation in rebuilding a more equitable city for all who call it home. As we wrote in our 6/3 statement, “As movements continue to evolve around bringing awareness and action for those who are disenfranchised and marginalized, we stand with and support these communities and encourage everyone to join us. There is no right one-size fits all approach on how to enact change, but daily individual actions will result in a better future. We stand together with our colleagues, fellow members, community, and the world’s citizens calling for and demanding a more peaceful, equitable, and just world for all.” We believe that culture, including the CIG, has an important role to play in appropriately reflecting on our history as well as elevating and employing diverse voices and stories.

Culture is critical to education, providing a first-ever job for many young students, maintaining vibrant lives of seniors, sustaining mental health and community well-being. As we think about recovery though let’s not lose sight of the vital role we can play in developing a more equitable City.

Countless individuals and families have come to rely on the services of our community provided through City Council Initiatives. For our program group partners, in particular, this funding is vital. We want to

especially highlight the invaluable work being done by groups receiving discretionary and initiative funding (Coalition of Theaters of Color, Immigrant Arts Initiative, Casa, Su Casa, and more).

With reopening on the horizon for some, while in the distant future for others, those CIGs that are able and have spaces conducive to social distancing would like to offer spaces for program groups, to provide residencies for artists and bring in new programs helping them to continue to work and elevate diverse voices.

At this point in time, I would like to highlight for the committee the varied programming the CIGs and program groups are continuing to deliver.

- New York Botanical Garden has created “NYBG At Home” for kids and families, with educational activities, recipes, virtual botany lessons and tours. For adult learning, courses on landscape design, botanical art, gardening, crafts and wellness are just a variety of courses and lectures available as well.
- Lincoln Center at Home, a free, one-stop, digital platform for new and archival performances, lessons, and more from the 11 constituent organizations that reside on the Lincoln Center campus. Lincoln Center at Home makes it possible to participate in live-streamed arts education lessons led by Lincoln Center’s dynamic teaching artists, learn to plié with New York City Ballet dancers, and enjoy a 1965 New York Philharmonic concert conducted by Leonard Bernstein without having to pay a dime. A highlight of their programs designed to harness the power of the performing arts to connect, uplift, and heal, each Sunday at 6pm, we release our weekly #MemorialforUsAll concert, an opportunity to honor our shared grief and take a moment to mourn together in a way that has been otherwise impossible during the pandemic. In partnership with the Mayor's Center for Faith and Community Partnerships and faith-based organizations from around the city, each week an artist, such as Wynton Marsalis or Yo-Yo Ma, leads a secular, musical service paying tribute to those we have lost to COVID-19, with names of loved ones submitted by members of the public displayed alongside video of the performance.
- Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning has Daily Live-Streamed Pop-Up Classes (#jcalPOPUPclasses) Led by top professional teaching artists, JCAL’s daily live-streamed free classes over YouTube feature programs on dance, songwriting, music, drama, art, and more. While the programs are geared toward school-age audiences, they are produced with every age group in mind.
- Brooklyn Museum hosts regular meetups such as LGBTQ+ Teen Night, Quaranteen Tuesdays, and offers online art lessons, educational resources for teachers and students, coloring pages based on artworks in the collection, and curated work-from-home spotify playlists.

- El Museo del Barrio (EMDB) is currently offering a Permanent Collection series featuring highlights from our Collection with information in English and Spanish; YouTube highlights on homepage and a partnership with New York Latino Film Festival to bring film content.
- Staten Island Museum has released a new documentary film honoring the centennial of women's suffrage, *Passing the Torch: Women Who Lead*. Produced by the Staten Island Museum, the film was originally part of the exhibition *Women of the Nation Arise: Staten Islanders in the Fight for Women's Right to Vote* and interviews women leaders (on the local, city, and state level) to discuss their roles in public service, their earliest memories of voting, and why it is still so important today.
- Historic Richmond Town's Arts & Culture in Quarantine is a free, online endeavor our staff has put together to continue to provide diverse programming and digital content to our audience. For the foreseeable future, we'll be bringing audiences fresh, educational content to enjoy every day. There will be living history demonstration videos, staff interviews, blog posts, and even virtual tours and behind-the-scenes looks at our collection, buildings, and historic houses on-site.
- Snug Harbor's grounds have remained an urban oasis for health and wellness during the past few months, with visitors maintaining social distancing while enjoying the outdoor gardens.

Thank you for the opportunity to present on behalf of the CIGs in this format. I know my colleagues in the CIGs and across the broader New York cultural community appreciate that the city administration and council is looking into every option in order to continue delivering services to the community. I would like to acknowledge the grave fiscal crisis facing our city and would like to volunteer the CIGs as a partner to the city in finding creative solutions to help our communities and city heal socially and economically.

Culture is also in crisis and many organizations are at risk. Without cultural orgs, the impact of this crisis will be deeper, and the recovery will take longer. From small to large, across performing arts, gardens, zoos, children's museums and historical societies, we collectively provide access to nearly 24 million New Yorkers and tourists annually, with 4.2 million free visits and 1.5 million K-12 student visitors. As one community, we from the CIG are standing in support together with all culture to urge the city council to protect all cultural organizations, initiatives, and programs – especially those from and



for communities of color. I am inspired by the passion in our community to be a part of real lasting change in finding social justice for all and feel firmly how critical culture is to pushing that ever forward.

# COVID-19 Impacts on NYC Cultural Institutions

Survey conducted April/May 2020

## About the Survey

- Outreach for the survey was conducted through the Culture@3PM coalition.
- The following survey findings represent 33 of the 34 members of the Cultural Institutions Group, who have a long history of partnership with City of New York
- The enclosed survey results provide a snapshot in time (April 23-May 9) during the evolving circumstances of COVID-19.
- While this survey only covers projected impacts through June 30, 2020, significant impacts on this “last-to-reopen” sector are expected to continue through the remainder of 2020 and beyond.

# Summary Findings

## Financial

- Total FY20 operating budgets: \$1.47 billion
- Total Projected revenue losses through June 30: \$345 million

## Workers

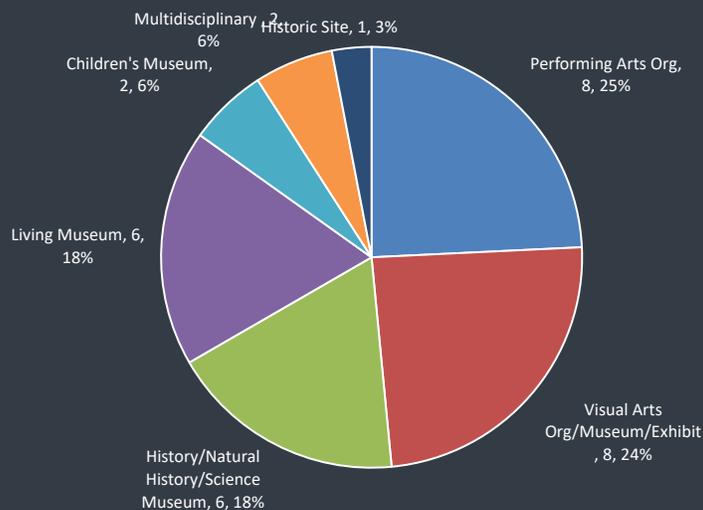
- 11,941 total workers pre-COVID (March 2020, FT/PT/seasonal)
  - 2,273 furloughed (74% PT/seasonal)
  - 1,853 laid off (86% PT/seasonal)
- 8,265 volunteers (annually, on average)

## Visitors (FY19)

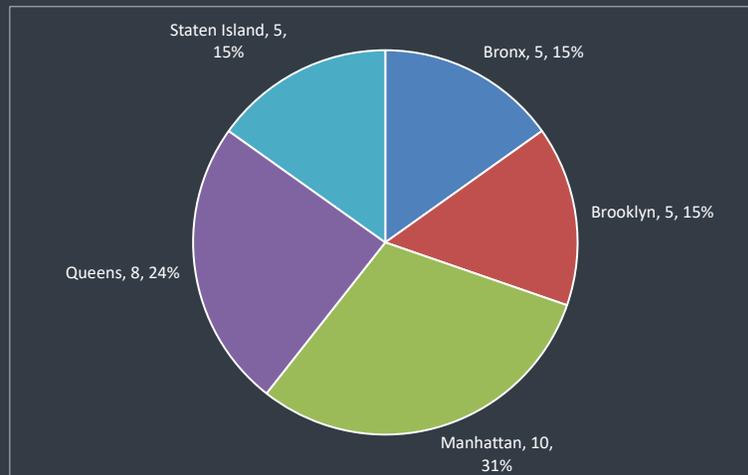
- Total visitors 23,960,271
- Free Visits 4,275,337
- K-12 Students 1,544,021



# Type of Organization



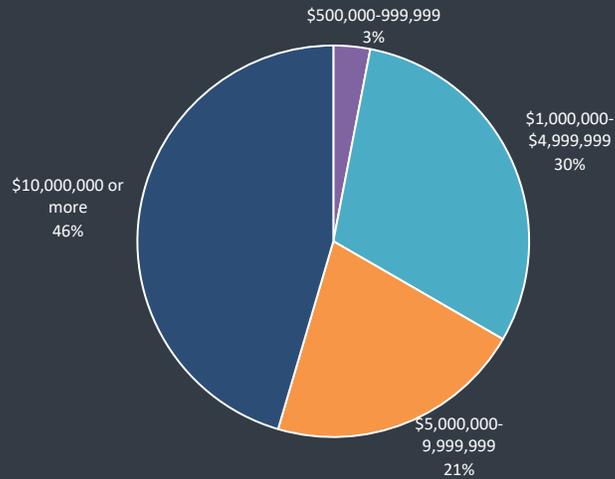
## Location



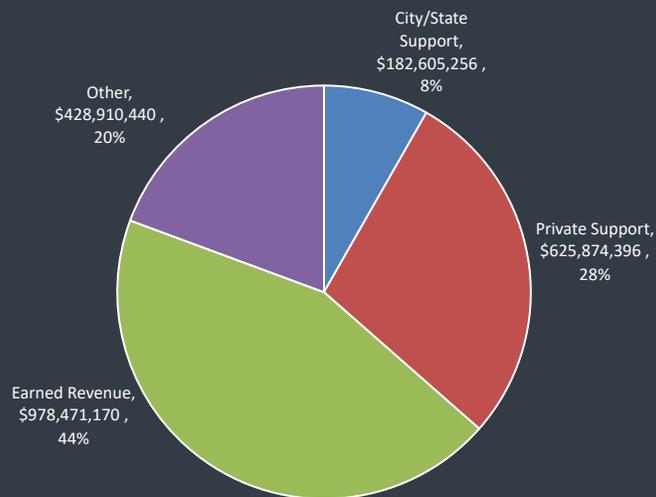
## FY19 Visitorship

- Total visitors 23,960,271
- Free Visits 4,275,337
- K-12 Students 1,544,021
- University students 65,266

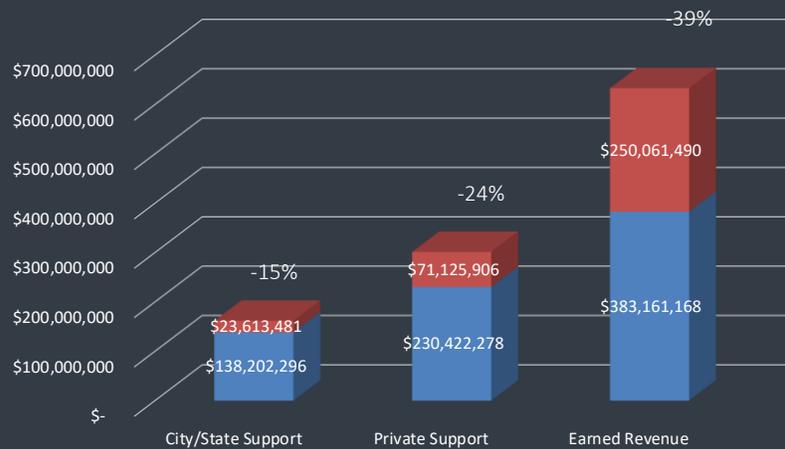
## Organization Size



## Operating Budgets = \$1.47 Billion



## FY20 Revenue Losses = \$489 Million (23%)\*



\* Projected city/state, private/foundation and earned revenue losses through June 30, 2020

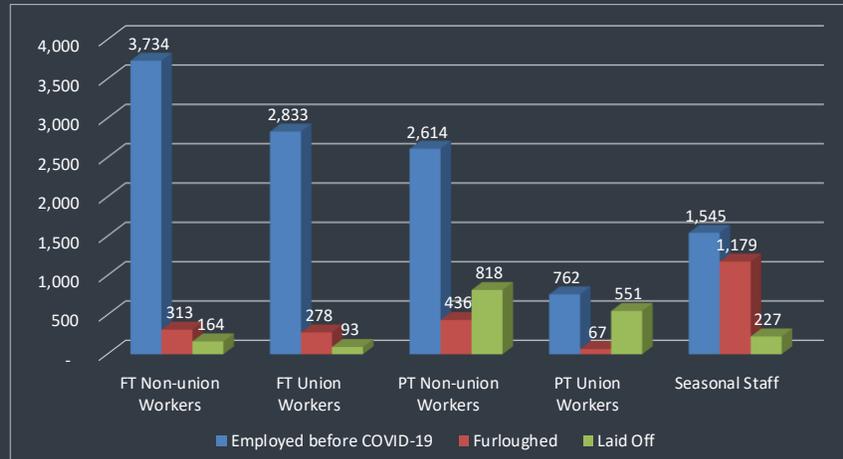
## Savings Countermeasures

\$85M in savings identified to offset 25% of losses through June 30, 2020:

- Executive pay reductions
- Furloughs
- Layoffs
- Pay cuts
- Canceled contracts
- Hiring and spending freezes
- Flexible use of vacation time
- Other paid time off
- Other

- Average days operating cash on hand: 64 days (unclear if includes PPP)

## Cultural Worker Impacts

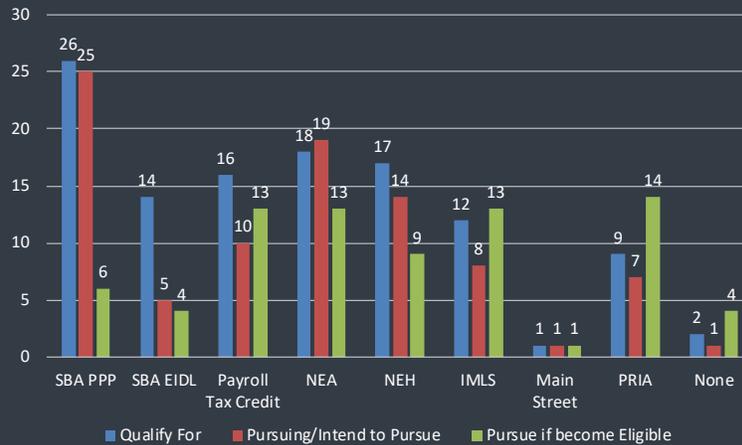


11,488 employees (1,129 youth) before COVID-19

## Internships & Volunteers

- Unpaid volunteers 8,135
- Paid interns 493
- Received government funding for internships 14
  - CUNY 11
  - DYCD SYEP 2
  - NYSCA 2
  - DOE 1
  - NYSDOH 1
- Received foundation funding for internships 17

## Federal COVID-19 Relief



## City/State Loan & Grant Programs

- NY Community Trust Fund 21
- NY Community Trust Loan 1
- Other 16
  - LMCC
  - FCNY
  - NYC Small Business Services
  - HNY CARES Emergency Relief Grant
  - NYC Employee Reduction Program
  - NY Humanities
  - NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund Employee Retention Program
- Did not apply due to:
  - Capacity 13
  - Eligibility 33

## COVID-19 Response Assistance

- Space donation
- Material donation
- Staff time
- Food donation/pickup site
- Census Outreach
- Offered to partner with government

CIG

CIG

For more information, contact:

Nikiesha Hamilton, Brooklyn Museum  
[Nikiesha.Hamilton@brooklynmuseum.org](mailto:Nikiesha.Hamilton@brooklynmuseum.org)

or

Sara Marinello, Wildlife Conservation Society  
[smarinello@wcs.org](mailto:smarinello@wcs.org)



June 22, 2020

Dear New York City Council Cultural Affairs Committee Chair Jimmy Van Bramer and Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

As the historic home of black inventor Lewis Latimer, the Lewis Latimer House Museum provides the residents in Queens and across NYC with valuable educational and cultural resources in African American heritage and S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math). Last year, we received over 3,896 visitors, and over two thousand students participated in our educational programs, over half of which came from Queens, and the great majority were from Communities of Color. About 40% of the participants were African American, 17% Asian, and 17% Hispanic, now among the population hardest hit by coronavirus.

Although the physical site is closed, we never stopped serving NYC's diverse communities, in addressing racial justice through the cultural lens and providing equitable STEAM education. We recently hosted a virtual tour of the exhibition Race & Revolution: Home/Land, exploring the systemic practice of family separation from the Fugitive Slaves Act in the past to today's immigrant detention centers. Because families need remote learning resources, on March 30<sup>th</sup> we launched the weekly bilingual TinkerLab@Home newsletter teaching STEAM using easily found household materials. Our online CASA sessions have become an irreplaceable opportunity for participants to find creative outlet, socially connect with their peers and teachers during this time of isolation. As demonstrated by a final report put together by our students and instructors of CASA with IS237 following this testimony. All of our virtual programs are free.

With the national conversation around racial justice and the citywide protests over police brutality, it is even more important now to support grass-roots cultural organization by and for Communities of Color such as Latimer House, who have been doing the work on the ground even without enough resources. By focusing on the historically under-represented populations, the CASA, Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and the DCLA initiatives such as the Language Access Fund and CUNY Cultural Corps take the critical first steps of addressing equity in culture. Losing them would be detrimental to the progress we have made as a city. Initiatives on equity and access are not the extra "toppings". They're at the core of our work.

Culture is essential to the well-being of NYC's residents during this crisis, and will be central to the city's recovery from both the health pandemic and the trauma of systemic inequality. The Communities of Color we serve need more support now, not less. We ask you to restore funding for CASA, Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and the DCLA initiatives, so community-based cultural hubs like the Lewis Latimer House Museum can continue to collaborate with the City Council to rehabilitate and invest in the demographics most affected by COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Ran Yan  
Executive Director  
Lewis Latimer House Museum  
ran.yan@lewislatimerhouse.org

lewislatimerhouse.org  
718.961.8585

34-41 137<sup>th</sup> Street  
Flushing, NY 11354

Lewis Latimer  
House Museum

# Coding Club

Teaching Artist: Karl Orozco

Teacher: Priscilla Alvarez

School: IS237Q, Flushing, NY

Cultural Institution: Lewis Latimer House Museum

# Artistic Educational Goals

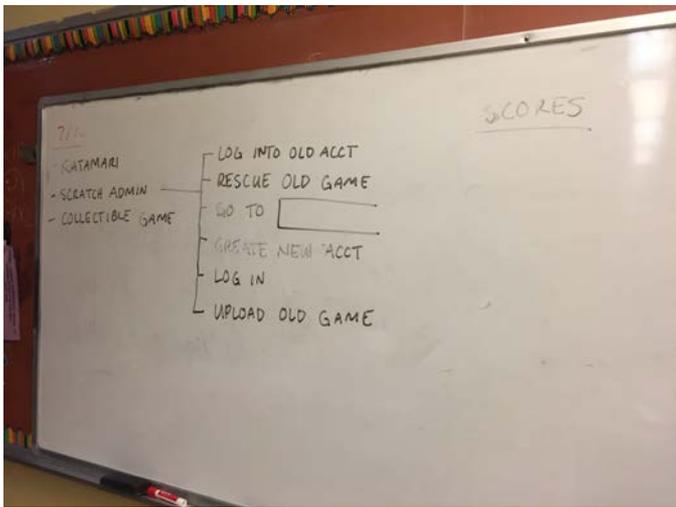
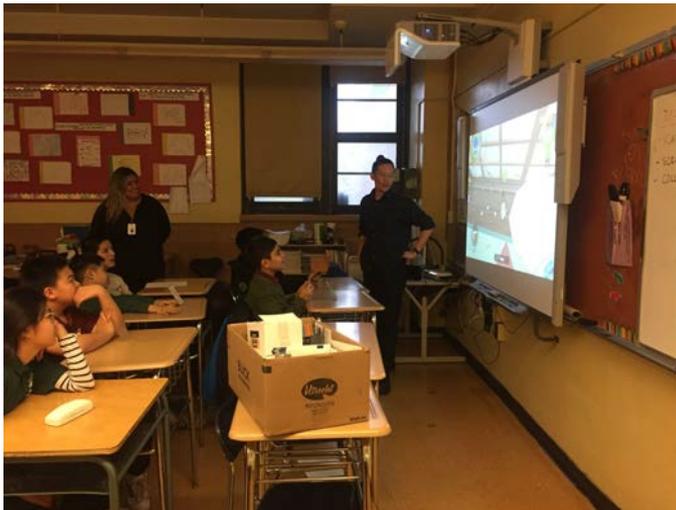
Students played video games and discussed the different artistic and design choices their creators made.

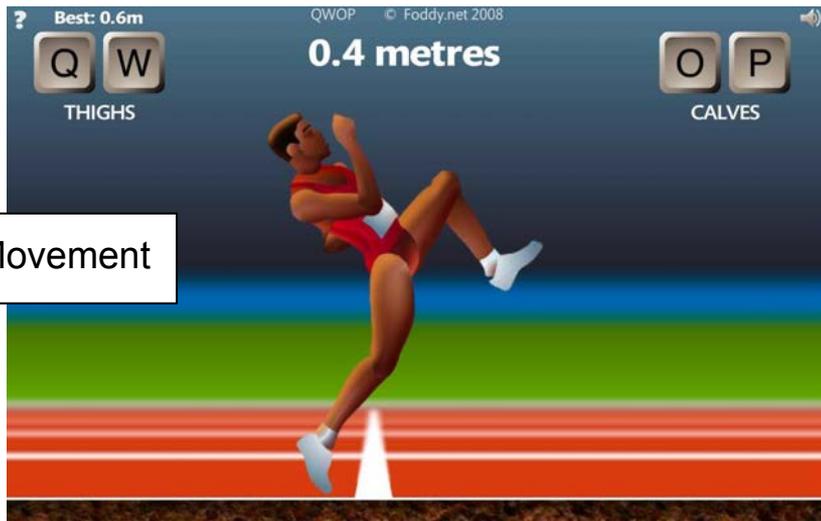
Students learned core concepts of game design (movement, loops, variables) and tied them to games they play.

Students created Scratch web games that incorporated these concepts.

# Class Structure (Pre-Quarantine)

- **Playtest** - Karl brings in a video or web-based game for students to play, then leads a discussion around something interesting that game accomplishes
- **Instruction** - Karl shares a new concept in Scratch and demonstrates how to use it
- **Snack Break**
- **Coding Session** - Students try to implement the new coding concepts while Karl and Priscilla roam around to help
- **Recognitions** - After a project wraps up, students go around the room thanking another student in the room for their support





Movement



Collectibles

Line Rider

Moving Backgrounds

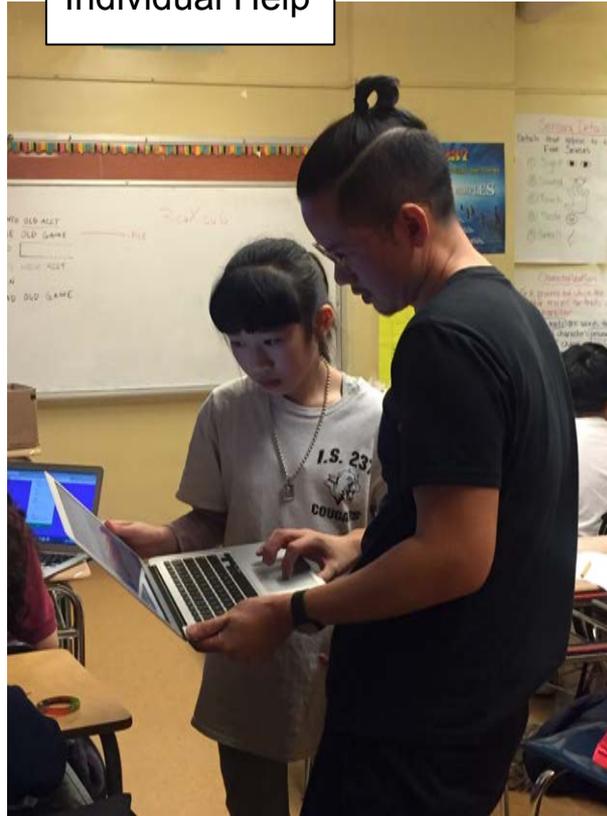


Variables

Group Lecture



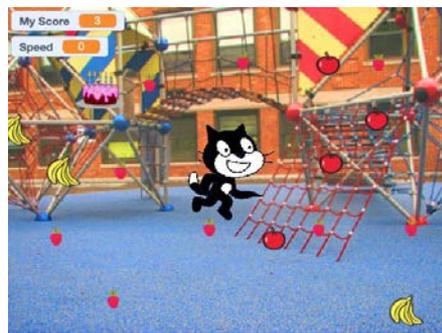
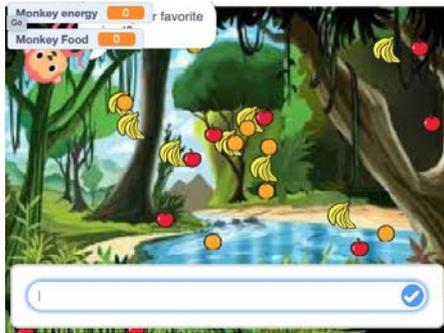
Individual Help



# Projects

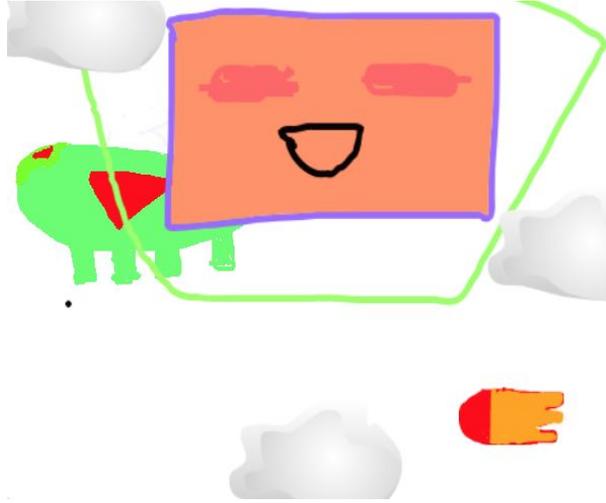
- **Board Game Concept** - Students created concepts for board games centered around challenges they face personally, in their community, or see in the world.
- **Collectible Game** - Students learned about X and Y axes, “if” statements, and cloning to create a simple collecting game
- **Scroller Game** - Students learned how to create moving backgrounds and add gravity to character movement to create a scroller game
- **Bingo Board** - Students created a point-and-click bingo board to be used for a final class bingo party

# Collectible Game



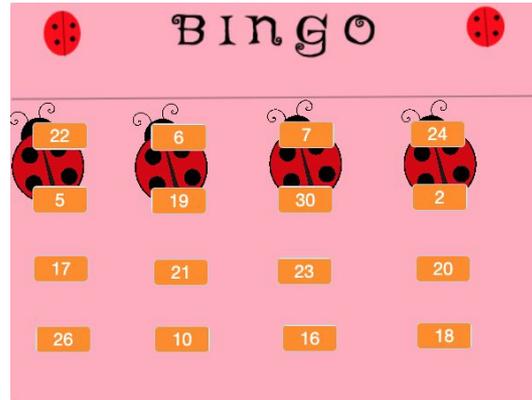
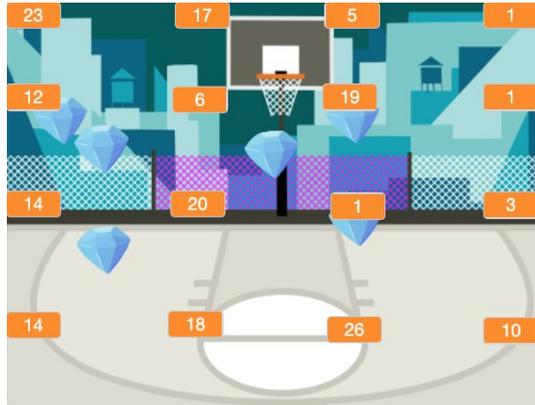
Try them out [here!](#)

# Scroller Game



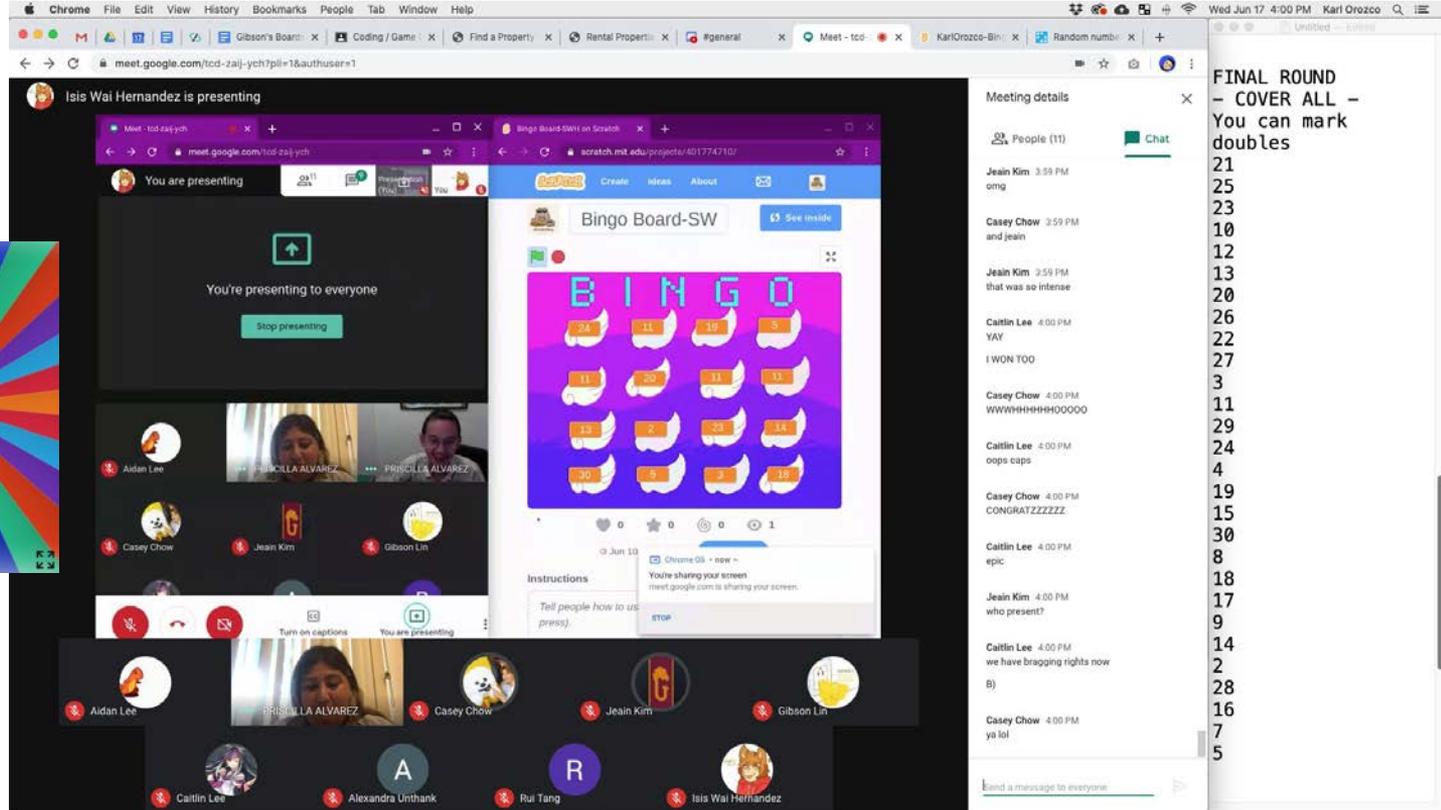
Try them  
out [here!](#)

# Bingo Game



Try them out [here!](#)

# Bingo Game



The screenshot shows a Google Meet session with a bingo game. On the left, a colorful wheel of numbers from 1 to 30 is shown, with a grey arrow pointing towards it. The main meeting window displays a presentation titled "Bingo Board-SW" on a Scratch project. The bingo board is a 5x5 grid with numbers 1-25. The word "BINGO" is written in large, colorful letters across the top row. The board shows the following numbers in the cells:

24	11	19	5	
11	20	11	31	
13	7	22	14	
20	5	2	15	

The meeting interface shows participants: Aidan Lee, Priscilla Alvarez, Casey Chow, Jeain Kim, and Gibson Lin. The chat window on the right contains the following messages:

- Jeain Kim 3:59 PM omg
- Casey Chow 3:59 PM and jeain
- Jeain Kim 3:59 PM that was so intense
- Caitlin Lee 4:00 PM YAY
- I WON TOO
- Casey Chow 4:00 PM WWWHHHHHHHOOOOO
- Caitlin Lee 4:00 PM oops caps
- Casey Chow 4:00 PM CONGRATZZZZZZ
- Caitlin Lee 4:00 PM epic
- Jeain Kim 4:00 PM who present?
- Caitlin Lee 4:00 PM we have bragging rights now B)
- Casey Chow 4:00 PM ya lol

At the bottom of the meeting window, there are large letters "A" and "R" on a dark background. The meeting details panel on the right shows "Meeting details - COVER ALL - You can mark doubles" and a list of numbers from 1 to 30.

# Transition to Distance Learning

All written communication transitioned to Google Classroom, and remote learning through Google Meet.

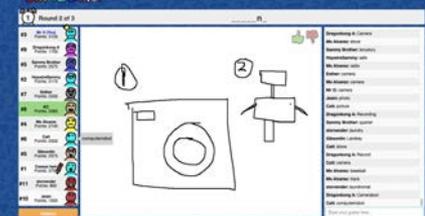
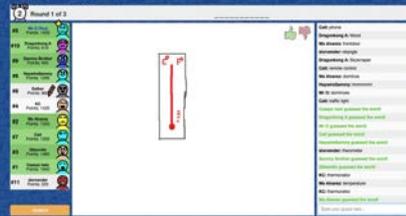
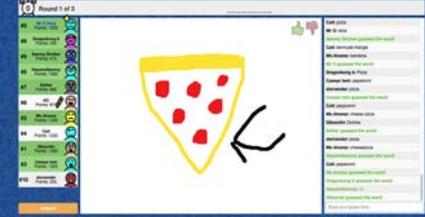
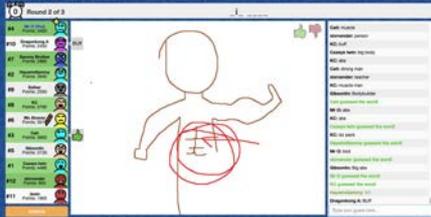
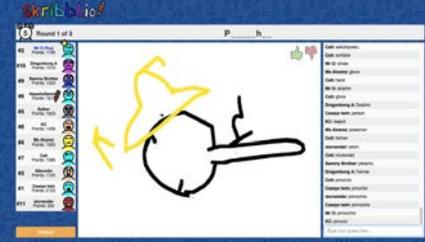
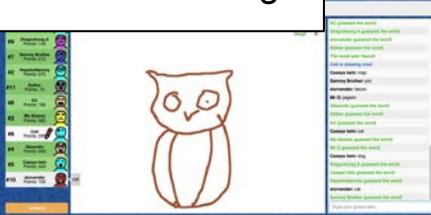
Mondays

- **Video Lesson** - Karl uploads a short 10 minute video tutorial on a new coding concept for students to try out

Wednesdays

- **Live Demonstration** - Karl goes over the material from Monday's video lesson but with the entire group of students
- **Office Hours** - Students that need extra help could sign up for 20 minute one-on-one sessions with Karl
- **Skribbl.io** - We quickly learned that one of the best ways to get students to keep showing up is to play online Pictionary!

# Skribl.io Drawings



# Insights to Distance Learning

- Students need to be reminded of meetings and assignments... a lot
- It was important to give students many entry points to the material
  - Videos lessons for self-
  - Live demonstrations for the group
  - Office hours for students who need extra help, or want to learn more
- Students looked forward to a fun afternoon where they get to socialize
- Students need an incentive to show up

# Our Students



Everyone  
will miss  
this class!



Casey Chow  
11:32 AM

Can we still call during the summer?

2 class comments



PRISCILLA ALVAREZ 1:12 PM  
Sure! Caitlin can go over how to use Discord to stay in touch after this



Casey Chow 1:22 PM  
Yay!



Add class comment...



PRISCILLA ALVAREZ  
Jun 10



Hi everyone,

Next week is our last class! For the end of our Coding Club, Ms. Alvarez and I would like to create a Flipgrid video of your thoughts on the program. We also ask to write your responses in an End-of-Class Survey (both posted to the Classwork section) which we will add to a slideshow showing all of our time together.

If you have any questions about these two assignments, please let us know! We would like to have them by Monday (June 15).

- Mr. O

4 class comments



PRISCILLA ALVAREZ Jun 10

+[glin6974@rcis237.org](mailto:glin6974@rcis237.org) Since you don't have a computer to create a bingo board, please submit both a FlipGrid video and fill out the survey! I will then send you some bingo boards to use next Wednesday.



Jean Kim Jun 10

:( so sad this is going to be over next week.



PRISCILLA ALVAREZ Jun 10

@[kim0617@rcis237.org](mailto:kim0617@rcis237.org) I know - it went by so quickly. I will miss everyone so much



Aidan Lee 10:06 AM

I will miss this class too....I wish we had more time here



Add class comment...



# Final Reflections

What will you remember most about the Coding Club?

13 responses

Something that I will remember the most about Coding club is the funny things we did while we were coding and times when we played together as a group (ex. Mario Cart).

Fun and Ms.Alvarez and Mr.O

My coding club classmates and teachers!

I will remember us using scratch and having fun in it.

We use scratch to code and sometimes we make things using materials ex:games

Everything, probably the first time I came here

To create a game for coding.

Learning about coding with people all around me.

The games we made.

Learn new things get new friends

I remember all the fun times I had in the Coding Club. Like, making a board game, creating a collectible game and more!

I remember playing games before class starts.

I remember when we used scratch.

# Final Reflections

What is something that you're proud of accomplishing in the Coding Club?

13 responses

Something that I am proud of accomplishing in the coding club is actually using codes to create something that moves and works. I'm also proud of making new friends 😊

Coding

I've learned a lot about coding in the coding club and the coding club actually helped me get back into coding because I stopped doing it.

Um I think the monopoly game that I made.

That I know how to use scratch

Coding games successfully

I accomplish the coding for coding club.

To learn how to code for different kind of things and use simple programs.

Coding a game.

I made a coding

I am proud of creating a collectible game in the Coding Club.

I'm most proud of my chick and soccer game.

Um I think my monopoly board I made.

# Final Reflections

What was the most difficult part of the Coding Club?

13 responses

The most difficult part of the coding club was to not get overly excited about coding because when I got overly excited I messed everything up

I actually don't know-

The most difficult part was coming up with a solid idea for my board game.

Kind of understanding how to use scratch.

Making a game using codes

Trying to code the ENTIRE game

The most difficult part of coding club is create a game in coding.

First learning about codings.

Finding the right code and design of the game.

Sometimes don't know what do to.

The most difficult part of the Coding Club is the coding part of every game.

The most difficult part was the variable.

Understanding the abilities in scratch.

# Final Reflections



# Final Reflections



What I will remember most about the Coding Club is the people here and the amazing stuff we do like make board games and code them!



I don't want this to end!

**Thank You!**



Something that I will remember the most about the Coding club is the fun/Teamwork we had will playing Mario Cart and the times when some of us were goofing around while coding our games. :D

I'm going to



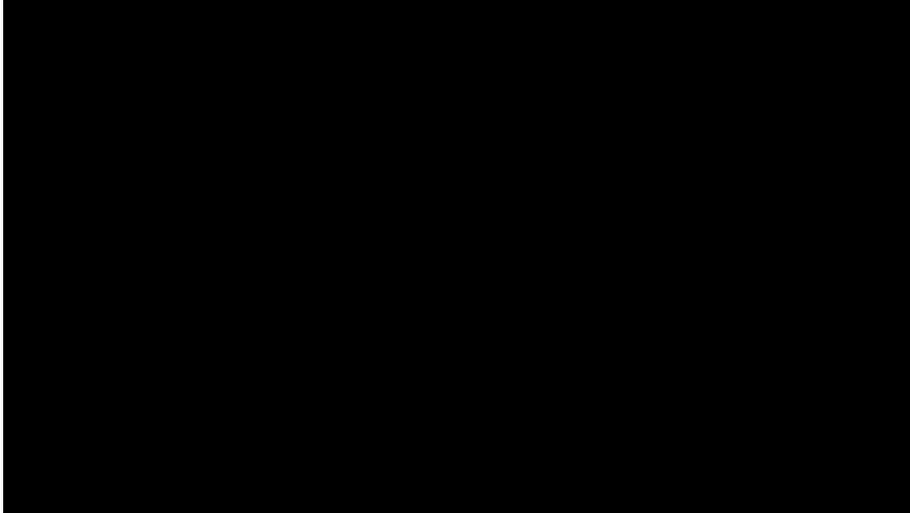
Miss everything!

I'm really going to miss the hilarious times we had while we were still in school :(



Thank you for the best 6th grade memories!!!

# Final Reflections



**I like most about coding class is fun because to create game with coding and making new friends.**

# Final Reflections

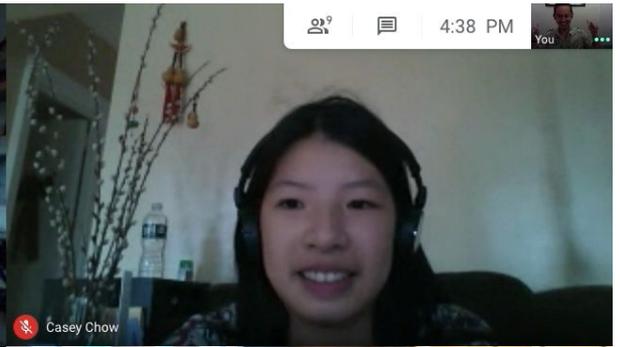




... Caitlin Lee



... Jeain Kim



... Casey Chow



... Alexandra Unthank



... Aidan Lee



... PRISCILLA ALVAREZ



... Isis Wai Hernandez



... Gibson Lin



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## **AMMENDED TESTIMONY FOR JUNE 22, 2020**

Dear New York City Council Members,

I am Francine Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera Company. For 50 years, Regina Opera has offered fully-staged operas with full orchestra and English supertitles, as well as many concerts. We provide affordable entertainment in handicap accessible public venues for audience members who may not otherwise attend live performances. For each of the 3 full operas we perform each season, we present one totally free full opera performance, in our theater, complete with costumes, scenery, and supertitles. We also present many free concerts in public venues such as parks, libraries, and festivals each season, and ticketed concerts in our theater located in Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Sunset Park.

We have always provided training and experience of musical artists of all ethnic groups and sexual orientations, judging singers solely on their talent and musical skills. However, we plan to increase the number of black and brown musical artists in our performances.

The need for this cultural enrichment is reflected in the fact that over 4000 people attended these live performances last year, most of which were in Sunset Park, an underserved and low income community with a large percentage of Latinx and Asian residents and workers.

Although our 2019-2020 Season was cut short by COVID-19, Regina Opera never closed. We have been posting free full operas and opera selections weekly, for a total of 5 full operas and almost 30 opera scenes. Just since the pandemic began, we have had over 1500 views. Just this past Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, as part of "Make Music NY", we had over 170 views of the latest posting – one short opera and a one-hour concert of opera selections – which was a live performance recorded on March 8, 2020.

Our offerings are particularly vital to NYC. They are uplifting to the spirit, especially for Senior Citizens who may live alone or may be alone during the day.

NYC Cultural groups bring in a significant percentage of the revenue for NYC. At this time, our cultural institutions are relegated to Phase 4 for reopening. We will continue to present our opera "on demand". As with all arts organizations, we don't know when we will again present "live" performances, and be able to again earn income through ticket sales and donations.

As a result, we are reliant upon DCLA and City Council Members funding, such as that of Council Members Menchaca and Brannan. This funding will help alleviate some of the pain and insecurity that we, like many cultural institutions now face.

Sincerely,

*Francine D'Arbo-Cohen*

It is imperative that dancers receive funding. Due to covid, I have had to move from New York back to my hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, I--amongst other artists who feel the same way--have had to consider leaving New York City after quarantine ends. What brings dancers to New York City in the first place is the abundance of opportunities to freelance, create work, and be exposed to a multitude of dance works. Without proper funding, that environment clearly deteriorates and causes artists to seek work elsewhere--or worse--be forced to put their careers on hold. Not only does this affect me, a dancer. This affects forward progression for art, hinders people from accessing live performance, and halts human connection that dance offers.

I am very grateful to still be working for Kinesis Project; a dance company that is New York City based. We work via zoom meetings every week. Companies such as Kinesis who are fortunate to be financially resilient enough to work during quarantine, especially require funding. Those of us still working during this time need to continue our practices while New York City slowly rebuilds itself back together. We even perform live online! Countless audience members have commented that these little performances have brought light, inspiration, and relief to them in this time of quarantine. We need funding to maintain our sharing of dance, our ability to hold safe spaces for people to learn and grow together.

Live dance works cannot, and will not, die. My work with Kinesis in particular exists to span bridges for those who may never have watched dance before. We are a site specific company, which means we perform in outdoor spaces in a more sensory way, meant to dance up close and personal with people. I as a dancer strive to invite, to welcome people into the dance community, especially non-dancers. Dance itself is the language of movement, the one form of communication that spans across all communities, nations, etc. Dance is vital to New York City itself, an artery that feeds directly into the heart of culture and the spirit of this city.

After graduating from NYU Tisch Dance this past year, I personally have watched dance facilitate a multitude of audiences to come together. I am a contemporary dancer, constantly working with artists of other mediums to create. The past few years that I have spent in New York as a dancer have been centered around connection; connection to fellow artists as well as a greatly diverse and complex audience. My time in New York has taught me countless lessons about community, connection, politics, human nature, and the overall centrality that dance holds inside all of those things. Dance, one of the most physical mediums of the arts, is constantly utilized in live theatre, music videos, television, movies, physical fitness classes, social gatherings, protests, performance art, and so much more. Dancers are overworked, which unfortunately means that we are also underfunded and underrepresented. As an art form that is so popularly recognized, viewed, and enjoyed, we need funding. I as a dancer and as a member of Kinesis Project need proper funding. We as a dance community that is so accessible to the arts and entertainment community and beyond, need proper funding to continue our work.

Especially in this time of political unrest, disease, and separation, the world needs dance now more than ever.

Nicole Truzzi



June 16, 2020

## Dance Entropy Testimonial

### Overview

Dance Entropy, Inc. is comprised of the professional not-for-profit modern dance company **Valerie Green/Dance Entropy (VG/DE)** and **Green Space**, a Long Island City-based studio, established by Valerie Green in 1998 and 2005. VG/DE believes in humanizing movement, both in Green's critically acclaimed choreographic work and the company's mission to plant creative seeds in communities across the world. To date, Green has created 39 dances including 10 evening-length works, all of which incorporate forms of original production, musical composition, innovative set design or new media. The communities we engage with have included at risk youth, adolescents, trauma survivors, the disabled, senior citizens and aspiring/professional dancers. Green Space houses the company and serves artists who create & present work, holds classes for various ages, outreach programs, & multi-arts events.

### The VG/DE Mission:

- Create a platform for multicultural understanding through dance
- Nurture connections between dance creation and education
- Build community among dance artists
- Foster physicality, creativity and empowerment in underserved communities

### Covid-19 Impact

Dance Entropy's primary issue is the closure of our home studio, Green Space; cancellation of multiple performance events for the studio and company, the annual Gala, touring and teaching residencies; and all associated loss of income. The impact that the loss of these programs have on our audiences, students and community members is substantial. Summary of cancellations to date are below.

- VG/DE April 15 performance featuring "Immeasurable" at Judson Church
- VG/DE Wild Kingdom Young Audience Performances at Green Space and Jamaica Performing Arts Center - March 23- April 1 (6 shows)
- VG/DE Performance Tour to Chicago - May 2020
- Valerie Green's Master Class Tour at two Maryland universities- April
- Green Space autistic adults weekly ongoing creative movement class at Green Space
- Green Space Affordable Rental Program, ongoing
- Green Space presenting programs Take Root and Fertile Ground March-June 2020
- VG/DE Annual Gala

In addition, VG/DE has postponed the penultimate phase of the international collaborative project HOME, with Lebanese choreographer Bassam Abou Diab, to an unknown date.

Green Space has been closed for studio rentals since the evening of March 22, 2020. All paid bookings since then have been credited to renters. Once the studio re-opens, we anticipate it will take time for the space to return to full occupancy. Green Space has also cancelled the March-June performances of Take Root and Fertile Ground, resulting in a loss of ticket income and opportunities for artists. We hope to re-schedule the work of these talented 25 dance makers in our next season.

**GREEN SPACE**  
INCUBATOR OF DANCE IN QUEENS

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### Dance Entropy Inc. Board of Directors

Lamel Adkins  
Emily Bunning  
Naomi Cosman  
Scott Crowley  
Valerie Green  
Jeffrey Gross  
Sharon Harsa  
Adonis Madera

Dance Entropy has utilized Zoom, Facebook live, You Tube and all other social media to stay engaged with the local Queens community and connect with dance and art lovers from all over the world. Offerings include dance classes and residencies for schoolchildren, senior citizens and the general public; VG/DE performance offerings; and the annual summer intensive which will take place in July 2020.

Dance Entropy's Community Impact/Underserved Population Engagement  
Dance Entropy, Inc. serves dance artists, schoolchildren, senior citizens, the disabled, trauma survivors and audience members from all over New York City—with an emphasis in Queens, where the company is based. Queens is an underserved borough in arts education and exposure, and the company works to fulfill its mission by providing quality performances, education and outreach programs, and affordable studio space to the local community and the general public.

Dancers and choreographers of all ages, racial and economic backgrounds, and artistic specialties rent the studio at Green Space to hone their craft, and the Take Root and Fertile Ground programs offer performance opportunities for emerging and established artists performing to diverse audiences. Dance Entropy offers residencies at several NYC public schools, and the annual Wild Kingdom Young Audience Series tailors shows especially for elementary aged children. Our youth audiences' are both boys and girls and come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, primarily African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American. Most students are economically disadvantaged coming from Title 1 schools. Valerie Green presents her "Skimming the Surface" workshop to victims of various forms of trauma including abuse, rape, human trafficking, homelessness or anyone suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Green has offered these workshops at institutions all over NYC including the Department of Corrections at Riker's Island, Phoenix House, Safe Horizon, Goodwill Citiview, Crime Victims Treatment Center, Elmhurst Hospital and Queens Library among others. Green also leads a weekly movement class for autistic adults. Through the City's SU-CASA program, Dance Entropy is also in residency at Queens senior centers in Ravenswood, Rego Park, and Forest Hills. In conclusion, through the various programs of Dance Entropy Inc., population demographics the organization serves are diverse cutting across all spectrums for both participants and audience members.

**Conclusion:**

Dance Entropy nurtures dance creation, empowers artists and builds a community for dancers and audiences in Queens. Through the various programs and services Dance Entropy and Green Space offers we serve approximately **4,000** people of all ages annually. Our presenting series celebrates the work of each artist and the reputation of Queens as a performing arts destination. We offer low-income ticket prices in addition to general admission. Dance Entropy offers free outreach workshops in various locations to serve the community and generate knowledge of and interest in our programs. Dance Entropy/Green Space is an asset to the community, highly regarded in providing a greatly valued resource, and an incubator for new and emerging talent. **Continued DCLA, City Council and Discretionary support is critical to maintaining operations and providing valuable and diverse movement/dance based services to the New York City community at large.**



June 22, 2020

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**Producing Director**  
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**Artistic Director – Dream Music**  
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Barbara Busackino  
Tim Maner  
Kristin Marting  
Randy Rollison

Good morning Commissioner Casals, Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Cumbo, and honorable City Council Members,

My name is Brenna Thomas. I am the Director of External Affairs of HERE, an award-winning performing arts space and home for artists and their adventurous audiences in Hudson Square. And I am speaking today on behalf of HERE’s Founding Artistic Director Kristin Marting.

Since 1993, HERE has stood as a pillar in our community, on the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just south of Spring Street; we have fostered the careers of more than 15,000 artists; and we have welcomed over 1,000,000 audience members through our doors.

Each year, we are home to more than 400 performances. That means that more than 500 artists work and further their careers at HERE—in productions created by our resident artists or in productions created by one of the dozens of New York City based theatre companies who use our space. HERE has made a commitment over our 26 years to keep our lights on, and our doors open, as much as possible. Renting our theatre spaces at subsidized rates and providing partnership to artists without venues of their own, has been an important part of who we are.

We are also committed to maintaining affordable ticket prices and free ticket options, which means we have an audience of all ages and backgrounds. The work created at HERE and the artists who call HERE their home, like Taylor Mac and Eve Ensler, have gone on to be named MacArthur Geniuses, win awards, and be celebrated around the world.

Since closing our doors on March 12, we have pivoted to re-build our community online, presenting screenings of productions, live artist-talks, and new performances and videos. So far, we have reached more than 150,000 viewers and we have paid 375 artists for their work. At a time when artists are losing all of their income and jobs, this was a huge priority for us. We believe artists are leaders in our community and they must be taken care of now, and included in our recovery.

Today, I am here to urge you to continue to fight for support of Arts and Culture and to maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City budget. HERE has been a home to many of the companies in this coalition. These companies are essential to the ecosystem of our community. Their ability to thrive and keep working makes the whole theatre community stronger. The stories they create must continue to be told, in order for us to hear all of the voices and perspectives of our city. The artists that they hire, nurture, and teach are our neighbors, our colleagues, and future leaders in this field.

**Mission**

HERE builds an inclusive community that nurtures artists of all backgrounds as they disrupt conventional expectations to create innovative performances in theatre, dance, music, puppetry, media, and visual art. By providing these genre-blending artists with an adaptive, flexible home for developing and producing their work, we share a range of perspectives reflective of the complexity of our city. HERE welcomes curious audiences to witness groundbreaking performances, responsive to the world in which we live, at free and affordable prices.

We applaud the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs for establishing this support and we urge you to maintain it. We understand that the city faces real and unprecedented budget challenges in the year ahead. But, as we have heard many voices cry out these past few weeks: budgets tell the story of our values. Our call for sustained arts funding and support for the CTC is a call for healing and justice. The entire \$3.7M allocated through the Coalition of Theatres of Color initiative last year represents less than .07% of the proposed FY21 NYPD budget. We must keep this funding intact.

On behalf the entire HERE community, I hope you will be an advocate for this important funding.

We thank those of you who have been steadfast in your support, and we call upon your colleagues to join you in prioritizing and maintaining funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Marting". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristin Marting  
Founding Artistic Director  
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**CELEBRATING THE JOY  
OF DANCING ON ICE**

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Testimony by Moira North,  
Founder and Artistic Director of Ice Theatre of New York®  
before the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
 June 22, 2020

The New York City FY21 Budget must maintain New York City’s commitment to the arts and culture. Ice Theatre of New York® (ITNY), like all cultural organizations, is suffering from the pandemic shutdown and I see that we have been placed in Phase Four of reopening set out by New York State. *Despite the pandemic, we deserve a city budget that shows why this is a great city because of ITNY and myriad other large and small arts and culture organizations.*

My name is Moira North and I am the Founder/Artistic Director of Ice Theatre of New York®, the first non-profit ice dance company in the Nation. While it was not self evident that New York was the best location for my icy project (as it had very few indoor ice rinks) it was the one I chose...New York has always been known as the cultural center of the world and also, for its “Why not” attitude towards new forms of artistic endeavors.

For over 35 years ITNY has not only survived, but thrived in this City. We currently have programming in three boroughs, Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens and are hoping to expand to the Bronx in the coming years. Our signature public school program reaches about 2,000 children per year and with our City Skate Concert performances at The Rink at Rockefeller Center, Sky Rink Chelsea Piers, Bryant Park, Riverbank State Park, Prospect Park, City Ice Pavilion, and other venues, we enlighten and entertain around 10,000 spectators - not counting additional New Yorkers viewing some of our contracted performances. Each Spring and Fall, we find some of our fans flying in for our major shows. ITNY has no peer in New York City: it is the only dance company performing on ice. What makes New York City such a magnet is the intensity of the creative life blossoming here.

ITNY rented space at Sky Rink before Chelsea Piers was founded, then became an inaugural tenant and the resident Ice Dance Company on Chelsea Pier’s 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. We also rent costume and set storage space in Brooklyn. Chelsea Piers allows us nearly 3 hours weekly of in-kind ice time. We also rent ice time; cost ranges from \$500 to \$1,000 per hour. Each year, we spend over \$20,000 renting ice time, mostly at Chelsea Piers, where the two ice rinks are normally open year-round. We also own synthetic ice in 4’ x 8’ panels donated by PolyGlide for use in a variety of venues.

ITNY is currently supported by the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department of Youth and Community Development, Manhattan Borough President/NYC & Co. Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, our Board of Trustees, several family foundations and our enthusiastic patrons and supporters. We received a grant from the Dance/NYC Coronavirus Dance Relief Fund.

Over the years, ITNY has collaborated with numerous choreographers and other artists including Jody Sperling, William Whitener, Heather Harrington, Twyla Tharp, Edward Villella, Ann Carlson, Lar Lubovitch, and Jacquelyn Buglisi, and with diverse artists, singers, composers and poets, as well as renowned choreographers from the world of ice including Lorna Brown—an original member of the John Curry Theatre of Skating, David Liu, Gary Beacom, and Elisa Angeli, who is our Ensemble Director.

ITNY's audiences are young adults and adults in New York City—professional and recreational skaters, former skaters and those who love ice skating and their families; our junior ensemble ages 13-17 and junior apprentices ages 7-13; and over 1,500 NYC public school children K-12 in Harlem, Brooklyn and Queens. Our audience includes both New York residents and tourists. We have 2 full-time and 2 part-time office staff and 35 dancers. Our staff and performers are diverse: 5 immigrants, 3 with disabilities, 6 gender queer, and 5 minorities: 2 African American, 1 Latinx, 2 Asian, 1 Arab and 1 Native American. As we feature performers of color, our general audiences are increasingly diverse. Among the public school children we serve, 90% are African American and Latinx.

The pandemic shut down the ice rinks along with all performances. Our dancers lost the wages they would have earned from us as well as from ongoing work teaching and coaching their private students. ITNY cancelled our Spring fundraiser planned for May 8, thus losing the \$25,000 we would have earned from our patrons and friends, and the \$4,250 we would have earned at the box office. With a total ITNY budget of \$503,000, these sums are critical to our dancers and us; dancers lost nearly \$17,000 in wages they would have earned for performing, teaching and rehearsing.

Cancellations: Number of Income-Providing Opportunities Lost, through August 2020

- 6 Performances and Productions—One at Rockefeller Center March 25, four performances for K-12 public school classes in 3 boroughs, and one performance, our Spring Unplugged fundraiser, would have been fully produced by ITNY at Chelsea Piers—this was disappointing to our passionate fans;
- 12 or more Rehearsals;
- 28 Teaching Engagements, 4 with K-12 public school classes and 24 with our Junior Ensemble; and
- 2 or more Contracted Events including Kids' Week at Bryant Park, and the Skating Easter Bunny at Rockefeller Center.

Our dancers are paid \$150 per performance, and \$100 per teaching engagement. In our outreach program for public school children, we aim to have at least 10-12 teachers on the ice for 120-150 children. We also pay our artists \$25 per rehearsal.

Artistically, we would have presented several newly choreographed pieces in their world premières as well as re-stagings of repertory pieces. We would have had a guest artist skating at our Spring Unplugged and we would have given the Will Sears Award to a renowned ice artist who has shown persistence in pursuing his/her dream, while the gala performance and party would have brought in needed funds and built patron engagement.

Recent recipients of the ITNY Will Sears Award included Adam Rippon and Gracie Gold.

#### How ITNY is Serving the Public Remotely During the Pandemic

During Covid-19 ITNY turned right away to online programming for both our professional and junior ensembles. ITNY geared up to provide remote classes, paying \$327 to Zoom and \$49 for one remote connection. In order to reduce social isolation and lack of opportunities to learn techniques of dancing on ice, we committed to streaming online artistic and educational content. We use Vimeo Pro so that our audiences can view our past performances. Our Vimeo Pro subscription is \$235.

ITNY also has two Zoom and Instagram outreach classes for ice dancers of ages that range from the very young to senior citizens. We employ principal company member, Sarah France, to make videos each Tuesday teaching basic ballet moves intended for ice (plié power), but performed by her in her living room, replacing some of the allure of our weekly Master EDGE class on the ice at Chelsea Piers. The free classes online draw up to 400 attendees; classes will end June 30. For seven weeks, we added a Thursday “Choreography Lab” Class taught by noted ice and dance choreographers, which was also successful. When we get to September, we hope ice rinks will be open so we can continue our free Tuesday Master EDGE classes on ice.

#### ITNY Strong

ITNY continues to serve its community, even when all its regular programming had to be canceled. We are a very lean organization and like all other small arts organization in the City, the loss of earned revenue and reduced private and public funding will impact us way beyond this year.

ITNY is nothing if not intrepid and we are determined to maintain our place in the rich arts community of New York City. We consider our work to be a small but essential part of the prism of all the cultural possibilities that make our City so recognized.

Page four  
Ice Theatre of New York ®

In conclusion, in the midst of this astonishing year, Ice Theatre of New York® is confident that with strong support from the City Council, ITNY and other cultural organizations will create a new and exciting future bringing our performances to diverse New Yorkers, pushing the boundaries of what has been done and creating art. We hope you will advocate for the levels of funding you have recently provided. Thank you.

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Moira North". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Moira North, Founder/Artistic Director  
Ice Theatre of New York ®



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP  
RELATIONS

New York City Council, New York, New York  
June 22, 2020

Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to furnish written testimony on the issue of COVID-19 and Cultural Organizations in New York City.

Normally at this time of year we would be updating you on the work that has taken place in FY20 and what is in store for FY21. However, these are not typical times. We are grateful to the City and its support during this difficult period for all New Yorkers, and we look forward to playing our role alongside the City as we work towards reopening, recovery and a transformed cultural and city landscape.

The Museum of the City of New York is one of 34 organizations within the CIG—the Cultural Institutions Group—that comprise a partnership with the City to provide cultural, educational, and community services that foster a healthy, vibrant, equitable and inclusive community. We work with all ages, in all demographics, from all over the City.

This testimony provides information about some of the work we have engaged in during the COVID-19 crisis to serve New Yorkers and many others around the world. As the city and the nation look ahead, the Museum aspires to provide humanities context and diverse perspectives that shed new light on New York's changing urbanism, while reckoning with the city's deep inequities that the pandemic has compounded and exposed, including in our own neighborhood of East Harlem and the under-resourced communities across the city that the Museum's education programs serve. This testimony also looks ahead to how we can continue to be a resource to all New Yorkers and a partner to the City and our cultural institution colleagues, within and beyond the CIG.

Since March the Museum has continued to provide for our communities by moving programs online, promoting these offerings virtually, and making sure that populations hit hardest by the shelter-in-place mandates – school children and senior citizens -- are made aware of what is available to them.



In addition to these cultural and educational services, the Museum recognizes its critical role as a partner to the City in supporting New Yorkers during this pandemic. We have participated with the Department of Cultural Affairs to provide needed information on our responses to COVID-19 and its impact on the Museum and its staff, and indicate our ability to support COVID-19 related and other civic initiatives such as cooling stations and early voting sites. We have assisted our neighbors Mt. Sinai and Terence Cardinal Cooke hospitals with PPE equipment and space for equipment storage as they manage the crisis. We have worked proactively along with our cultural institution colleagues, as a participant of the Culture@3 consortium, and as a member of the East Harlem Community Alliance to advocate for support from Congress to increase federal relief to reduce the economic impacts of COVID-19 on non-profits and in support of our city.

The documented unequal effects of COVID-19 on communities of color has amplified collective disaffection with existing systems of protection, justice, and representation, especially at this moment of reckoning against endemic racist violence against Black Americans. These are topics that the Museum has worked hard to illuminate over many years, in exhibitions such as *Activist New York*, *King in New York*, and *New York at Its Core*, among many others. We believe deeply in the heightened importance of that work at this moment, both in our public facing content and in committing to actionable means of addressing systemic issues of bias and discrimination within our historically white-led institution.



Looking ahead, FY21 brings with it many new challenges beyond financial impacts. I acknowledge the gravity of the City's fiscal position and offer the Museum of the City of New York as a partner to finding creative solutions to help our communities and city heal socially and economically. Culture is critical to education, to maintaining and expanding vibrant lives, and sustaining mental health and community well-being. Countless individuals and families have come to rely on our services. As we think about recovery we will have our sights clearly on the vital role we can play in developing a more equitable City through:

- employment: our creative sector directly employs over 293,000 people, paying \$30.4B in wages. Stabilizing our workforce and giving renewed urgency to our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) program will dismantle systemic barriers to being a truly inclusive organization and will have a profound impact on New York City's economy
- being an economic driver: our sector is responsible for \$110B in total economic activity

- local service: through our exhibitions, online resources, and education and public program we are a place for learning about our history and for exploration and identification of creative solutions for building a better city. The CIGs provide access to nearly 24 million New Yorkers and tourists annually, with 4.2 million free visits and 1.5 million K-12 student visitors.

Thank you members of the committee for receiving this testimony and for your work in the service of the continued health and vibrancy of New York City's arts and cultural communities. We look forward to our continued partnership in support and celebration of the past, present, and future of all New Yorkers.



Whitney W. Donhauser

*Ronay Menschel Director & President*

Museum of the City of New York

Madeline Hoak  
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Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council

June 23, 2020

Thank you to the City Council for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of arts education. My name is Madeline Hoak, I am a dance and creative movement teaching artist, adjunct professor at Pace University and graduate student at New York University.

As a teaching artist, I am dedicated to bringing quality dance and creative movement education to students of all ages in the NYC public school system. I have worked with a variety of institutions that serve the NYC public schools including the Daniel Gwartzman Dance Company, Music for Many, Groundbreak, Young Dancers in Repertory, Kinesis Project Dance Theater, and Manhattan Youth. Through these programs I have had the pleasure of teaching **thousands of children at dozens of NYC public schools** over the past 15 years. I have taught from Canarsie to the Bronx, and witnessed first hand the **powerful, tangibly positive impact arts programming makes on children's individual education**, teacher/student relationships, trans-classroom support and harmonious communities. I have maintained relationships with schools for 5+ years, watched children grow up and helped to foster their education through formative stages of their life. **Teaching artists and arts programming are absolutely vital to a healthy educational environment and community.**

This pandemic suddenly and severely cut off relationships between teaching artists and students. I was personally requested to reconnect with classrooms virtually, but due to reallocation of funds for arts residencies, this relationship was unable to be maintained. **Rekindling these connections through arts and cultural** experiences are going to be the bridge to a vibrant New York City, **to restore mental health for families, and to engage students in learning.** Artists and cultural organizations are ready to continue partnering with schools, after-school programs, community-based organizations, and health service organizations to take proactive steps to restore the health and safety of New Yorkers of all ages. In order for this to happen, **city agencies need sustained funding.**

My sincere request is that **budget cuts not fall disproportionately** on the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, or Department of Cultural Affairs. The initial projections for these agencies would spell disaster for arts education and the cultural community that is part of the foundational fabric of this city. Let us not take it out on young people or their future. Their future is our future, and **arts are essential** to our household, community and global health.

Let us not make New York – where **culture is a major economic sector with over 400,000 jobs** – a place that disregards culture and community as an integral part of our lived experiences, physical and mental wellbeing. If budget cuts occur, myself and thousands of other artists will be unable to engage with NYC students and communities. Indeed, **programs that foster renewal, mental health, and community rejuvenation should be the last cut, not the first.**

Let us remember that countless NYC youth discover a passion for theatre, music, visual art, dance, writing, or media arts, and build important life skills that help them in the future through our members' work. **These young people represent the future cultural and economic vitality of our city.** Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Madeline Hoak

## Drag Queen Story Hour NYC

Testimony for City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Rachel Aimee, Executive Director

Drag Queen Story Hour NYC is just what it sounds like—drag queens reading stories to kids in libraries, schools, and community spaces all across the city. Through storytelling and creativity, DQSH teaches children about gender diversity and all forms of difference to build empathy and give kids the confidence to express themselves however they feel comfortable. During these challenging times, messages of acceptance and empathy are more important than ever. We stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and we believe that change begins with teaching a new generation of kids to embrace all forms of difference.

DQSH NYC began providing virtual programming on March 20, two days before the citywide shutdown. Since then we have produced 73 virtual DQSH events via Zoom, Google Meets, and Instagram and Facebook livestream, in partnership with the public library systems, local schools, and other community organizations, and thanks in large part to funding from New York City Council.

28 of those 73 events have been in partnership with the public libraries and 18 have been for schools as part of their remote learning curriculums. This Wednesday June 24 we are presenting DQSH on Zoom that is open to all DOE public school students, presented in collaboration with the UFT Pride Committee.

Through our virtual programming, we are actually reaching more children than in regular times, since many of our livestream events on Facebook are viewed by hundreds people. Our library partners tell us that our program is among the most popular of their virtual programming. The following quote is from Fritz Bodenheimer, press officer at Brooklyn Public Library.

“One of our most popular livestream programs this week has been Drag Queen Story Hour, which always draws a big crowd in the branches. The drag queens are so sparkly and colorful

and the kids just love to hear stories and songs from them. Many of the stories they read are about tolerance and acceptance and love, so it's even more important to present that at this time when we all need a little more love. This week we featured Miz Jade, singing songs and reading books from her home. We are just delighted to be able to continue this program while people are sheltering in place and staying home."

The following quote is from Erin Lisowski, PTA president at PS 150Q in Astoria:

"PS150Q was scheduled to have Drag Queen Story Hour perform last month, before the schools closed, and we were so happy when they offered to perform virtually! We had such a lovely evening with students from K-5 joining a virtual meeting to hear Harmonica read wonderful stories of inclusion and even sing songs. One of the highlights was that our kids were even able to interact and ask questions, which they were so excited by! While of course we would have loved to experience this in person (and plan to do so in the future), this was a fantastic experience for all involved!"

Speaking to DQSH's overall impact on DOE schools, the following is a quote from Eric Vaughan, LGBTQ Program Manager at the NYC DOE:

"DQSH is an amazing program and provides students across many diverse backgrounds the opportunity to discuss gender expression and diversity in a safe space. DQSH has truly changed the culture in many schools and has helped to open up dialogue as it pertains to gender identity. The book choices are also great!"

The schools we have visited virtually in the past month include PS 34 in the East Village, thanks to funding from Councilwoman Carlina Rivera, Renaissance Charter High School in Jackson Heights, thanks to funding from Council Member Danny Dromm, PS150Q in Astoria, thanks to funding from Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, Life Sciences Secondary School on the Upper East Side, thanks to funding from Council Member Ben Kallos, bilingual Spanish/English DQSH at PS56 in Clinton Hill, thanks to funding from Council Member Laurie Cumbo, and 2 DQSH sessions at Hunter College Elementary School on the Upper East Side, thanks to funding from Council Member Keith Powers.

