

Wanted to call in to the meeting tomorrow but unfortunately I will not be able to, but wanted to address an issue with our industry. We are a talent agency, a New York DCA licensed employment agency. The DCA is requiring that we maintain an office space. The actor's unions normally require this as well but have waived this need due to Covid. But in my initial conversation with the DCA they won't waive this requirement.

Our industry is hit harder than any other. Particularly Broadway will not be back until the spring. The burden of maintaining an office is crippling us. We have no income at all as we work on commission, and there is no acting work for months. We can do all of our work remotely as we have had to do for the last three months. There is no need for an actor to come into our office. Can the council help to make an arrangement with the DCA to waive the office requirement say till next May or so, that way we can continue to work from home until the industry is back in full swing and the city is safer as we may hit a second wave in the fall.

Thanks

Alex Butler
Henderson/Hogan Agency
336 West 37th Street, STE 990
New York, NY 10018
212-765-5190
DCA# 1375860

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

My name is Rachel Chavkin, and I am a Tony Award winning Director, most recently of *Hadestown*, winner of the 2019 Tony Award for Best Musical. I am also an Artist Member of the Board of Directors at New York Theater Workshop (NYTW, known for *Slave Play*, *What the Constitution Means to Me*, *Once*, and *Rent*). I see hundreds of plays a year, ranging from Off-Off-Broadway to Broadway. I am also a member of SDC's Board of Directors, the theatrical union representing Stage Directors and Choreographers across the country. And I am a Brooklyn-resident in Councilwoman Cumbo's District, and have lived and voted in New York for over 20 years.

I am urging you to prioritize and maintain full 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.

On a personal level: Ma-Yi's work has blown my mind for years. And most recently its work *Teenage Dick*, which had a successful run at the Public Theater, was both phenomenal performance and advanced both Pan-Asian voices and voices of artists with physical disabilities. The National Asian American Theatre Company's production of *Awake and Sing* is the best production of a Clifford Odets play I've ever seen. National Black Theater has been home to one shattering work after another, and has also helped forge the careers of some of my closest collaborators, including the extraordinary early-career director Zhailon Levingston, a Black multi-hyphenate artist who is already radically shaping our field.

These Theatres of Color, and other CTC members, play an *essential* role in our ecosystem. They serve audiences often neglected or treated as afterthoughts by larger nonprofit institutions. They serve as homes to some of our most vital artists, who have often struggled for recognition and opportunities in our larger institutions and on Broadway, in large part due to deep white supremacist structures that perpetuate gross inequities for Black artists and artists of color.

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,
Rachel Chavkin
Rachelchavkin@gmail.com

To whom it concerns:

Below is my 2 minute testimony I plan to share via ZOOM to the Committee on Cultural Affairs on Monday, June 22nd at 10AM EDT.

"My name is Gaven Dajay Trinidad, a theatremaker and community engagement associate for New York Theater Workshop, a nonprofit theatre downtown. I live in the East Village, where I was born and raised by two Filipino immigrants. I am urging you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color in the FY21 New York City Budget. I have worked for a handful of theatres who are part of this 42 member BIPOC Coalition: Ma-Yi Theater Company, the Negro Ensemble Company, and Yangtze Repertory Theatre. They have given me internships, my first job opportunities after grad school, and some of my earliest memories of seeing people who looked like me on stage.

Without these companies, I wouldn't know my self-worth and artistry as a brown queer man. I grew up in NYC during a time when the educational system instructed my mother to stop talking to me in our native tongue because "it would confuse me" and that "I wouldn't learn English properly." It was through my accidental finding of these companies during my teenage years that had helped me expand and grow and relearn languages and cultures that were stolen from me. To approve massive and devastating cuts to the funding of the arts, particularly to companies of color, supports the white supremacy in our theatre industry by again devaluing the languages, cultures, and the histories of people of color. I understand the financial devastation that COVID has wrought, but if the city wants to help provide healing and action for Black, Brown, indigenous, POC, queer, immigrant families we need to support our artists and not give that money to the police.

Right now we are imagining how to engage New Yorkers, to give them hope, and give them the space to envision how to live better lives in a "post-quarantine" world. The arts and cultural programs are essential in doing so - as many of these companies have not just become essential cultural hubs in their respective communities, but also places of social and civic engagement. I'm afraid that if we cut more of their funding, many cultural institutions of color will not exist anymore beyond this coming fiscal year. When they are gone, you will see many BIPOC and queer communities even more disenfranchised in this city - while the police department is unscathed by the fiscal planning. I hope my words and the protests on the streets for Black Lives Matter, that are filled with songs and dances of ritual and healing, have given you thought on how your decision to help support these art institutions - even more than you are currently - will help generations of New Yorkers to have their voices affirmed and not again stolen or erased."

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Gaven D. Trinidad

Gaven D. Trinidad | Community Engagement Associate | He/Him/His

New York Theatre Workshop | 79 E. 4th Street New York, NY 10003

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Testimony of Renee Foster, Chair of Communications
Universal Hip Hop Museum

Good Morning Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee.

My name is Renee Foster. I am the chair of the communications committee for the Universal Hip Hop Museum. But today I'm here to present a transformative, innovative program, for the kids of NYC. It's called Summer in the City.

We all know of the seismic shift coming in just a few weeks to the lives of NYC students and their families. Especially in vulnerable communities, options for meaningful But for the first time in history, we also have an unprecedented opportunity to create an integrated and level playing field for access to the arts for every NYC public school child. Because of COVID-19, every student now has, or is entitled to have, a tablet plus WiFi in their home.

That makes the Summer in the City program possible. As a City, we can bring our most talented and creative artists, dancers, musicians, and writers to kids this summer through virtual programming. One website, as a portal, will list all the classes. Registration software is in place. Our team has moved very quickly to have it all ready by July 6th.

Just imagine it. A Bronx teen, a Rockaway teen, and a Lower East Side teen sign on to Zoom. Within seconds, they're learning from a world-class artist in Harlem. And that's just one example of the magic that can happen this summer.

Fifty-five of the City's best dance studios, art schools, music programs, museums, theaters, and more have signed on to offer over 140 classes. We have funding to offer about a third of them. We have over 70 classes we're still seeking funding for. We're grateful to you, Chair Van Bramer, for your enthusiasm and endorsement of Summer in the City. The Office of the Mayor and Commissioner Casals have endorsed it as well. We are talking to foundations and also raising money as an executive team.

We urge City Council members who care about giving our kids meaningful and inspirational options this summer to support this program in any way you can. Our kids deserve the best we have to give them. Full information is in the testimony we will submit and at our registration website at SummerInTheCity.nyc.

Thank you for your time.

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as a Black, queer theater maker and artist. Right after graduating from college in 2016 the very next thing I did was move to New York. I specifically came to this city because of the innovative, bold, daring, and important cultural work being done. I am also coming to you as just any ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Crown Heights, 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, simply, produce some of the most extraordinary and impactful plays and are centers of artistic and cultural significance. These organizations employ tens of thousands of people (including me) and nurture the careers of some of the most talented artists in the city. These organizations are cultural epicenters bringing together young people strengthening their voices and seniors in need of gathering and community. These organizations are integral economic and cultural resources for this city.

It is my dream to be an artistic leader like any of the leaders of these organizations. I am constantly inspired and deeply impacted each time I have been able to be engaged in the work of these organizations as an artist and audience member. The work of these people is what gets me up in the morning and, honestly, has kept me alive.

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. This is saddening for me as a theatre artist, resident, and general human being. I, again, urge you to look at your choices and prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color.

Sincerely,
Garrett Allen

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Garrett Allen (they/them)
www.garrett-allen.com

Hello,

I would like to share the below testimony at today's meeting. I will submit a more formal written version after the meeting. I have registered to testify in advance.

Thank you,
Devin

Dear Council Members and Colleagues,

My name is Devin Mathis and I am here to speak to you on behalf of UrbanGlass in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

One of the many programs UrbanGlass runs is our entrepreneurial programming which serves artists and designers at all levels of their career, providing opportunities for education, promotion, and networking within our world-class facility enabling experimentation and innovation in glass.

Maintaining this programming following the revenue loss from our COVID-19 closure is critical for the nearly 500 professional artists who depend on our studios to create work and make a living. However, the PAUSE order has left hundreds of New York City artists without the means to generate income due to our studio's closure.

In addition to supporting established artists, UrbanGlass enables the development of artists, future small business owners, through programs such as our Bead Project.

Since 1997, the Bead Project has served as a unique scholarship program designed for women in New York City to learn the art of glass beadmaking while gaining an education in entrepreneurship, with the goal of launching their own business. In March, UrbanGlass was forced to postpone our spring 2020 semester of the Bead Project due to Coronavirus. Upon reopening, our priority is to reinstate this critical program and ensure that we are able to provide both healing and financial avenues to the thousands of artists we serve.

I am specifically mentioning these two UrbanGlass programs today to highlight not only the importance of the arts but more specifically the important role the arts play in our City's economy.

With the Mayor's proposed budget, Arts and culture are economically fragile.
All of the small businesses run out of UrbanGlass are economically fragile
NYC's greatest asset- emerging and mid-career artists are economically fragile -

I am asking today that you keep DCLA and initiative funding whole- I am asking today that you do everything you can to keep culture whole!

Thank you for your time.

--

Devin Mathis
Executive Director
Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

UrbanGlass

647 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, NY 11217
718.625.3685 x 225
www.urbanglass.org



UrbanGlass' has suspended all programming and our staff is working remotely to help curtail the spread of COVID-19. For more information about rescheduled programs and our work during this time, please visit our website [here](#).

Cultural Affairs Hearing 6/22/20
Michael Jacobs, Board Member, Art Students League of New York
New York City resident - District 6

Good morning Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee. My name is Michael Jacobs, and I am a Board member for the Art Students League of New York. I am here today to share how the Art Students League continues to support our communities' needs during the COVID crisis.

The Art Students League has likely never experienced such a crisis in its history of over 145 years. The League's history has always been about welcoming everyone to learn and make art in an atelier model. Our founders were innovative in creating a Board that specifically included women Board members from the beginning, as well as opening instruction to women artists.

Our demographics continue to diversify—ranging from high school students from the outer boroughs looking to build out their portfolios ahead of college applications to retirees who are finally happy to be able to work at their art with no requirements, flexible scheduling and affordable tuition, which is heavily subsidized by the League.

Considering restrictions around physical proximity, we quickly converted our model from an effectively unchanged atelier system, originating from the French beaux-arts academies of the 19th century, to online education via Zoom—what we like to refer to as our new e-telier classes. This move online has surprisingly attracted even more seniors—as well as appealing to the next generation of New York artists. We also continue our collaboration with our Seeds of the League youth arts program in New York City parks in collaboration with the Parks Department.

The uptake in demand was impressive as we converted our existing student population onto our new platform, found new ways to engage our professors and models, and even welcomed new students. We are frankly amazed by the connections being made with people who would have had trouble getting to the League: from homebound seniors and high school students from the five boroughs to international students, making the League a global ambassador for New York arts education at an affordable, accessible price point. Art is connecting the community at a most isolating moment in our history, providing intellectual and creative sustenance to help us all cope with the stresses of this time.

We are ever grateful for the support from Chair Van Bremer and Commissioner Casals for arts in the City. We look forward to partnering with you on our many programs which reach New Yorkers in all five boroughs. I am proud of our City and its institutions, like the Art Students League of New York.

Thank you for your time.

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Michael Jacobs
+1 347 753 1660

Dear NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs:

I am the Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Houses on the Moon Theater Company whose mission has been to amplify the unheard voice since our inception in 2001. We have never strayed from this mission and are as committed as always to continue telling these stories and making our work accessible to all.

We have relied heavily on city and government funding as we travel with our productions and workshops to underserved communities in non-traditional settings and present at no cost (thanks to this support). We have been committed to providing services through the Cultural Immigrant Initiative and Arts as Catalyst for Change anti-gun violence initiative for many years. With extra special thanks to CM Daniel Dromm and CM Diana Ayala. When the pandemic hit, we continued our student residency (google hangouts) with Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science in the Bronx and we did not miss a beat. It has been a profound residency this spring with our graduating students and has been a major source of comfort throughout (for all of us). We would be devastated for these programs to cease because of potential budget cuts. Here is a testimonial from one of our students:

"As a senior student who has been involved in this after school program for almost 4 years, I would like to say, it was an honor and it was an amazing experience to be a part of Houses on the moon. I have never thought I would enjoy such a program to the point they have become my family. From the moment my principal kept kidnapping us to join House on the Moon, I knew I would receive some challenges, as well enjoyment in other people's company. This group is my everything. I enjoy the laughs we have on field trips, the quiet writing sessions in class, the silly games to make us laugh more til we couldn't breathe. And let's not forget the delicious pizza I always end up eating, along with that one sprite bottle that loves to never properly open when I touch it, but sprays the soda all over me. Yes, good times. It's sad that I will leave it all in such short notice because of the corona virus and yet, I have faith that Hostos will keep the tradition. I'm Jah'Xenia Stone and I love you Houses on the moon."

We are working hard with new platforms and forms to create and develop multicultural projects and have several programs running regardless of the enormous challenges we are all facing. These include virtual reading of developing works, a new podcast series, hopefully a planned in person workshop run of our new piece SHARED SENTENCES (exploring the lives of family members and loved ones of the incarcerated) at Theatre Row in December, and more.

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, who are essential to ensuring a just and equitable NYC.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Emily Joy Weiner
Artistic Director

Houses on the Moon Theater Company

--

Emily Joy Weiner

Artistic Director

Houses on the Moon Theater Company

646-228-2292

www.housesonthemoon.org

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out as an Obie Award winning actor, graduate of the Juilliard School, and lifelong Manhattanite who benefitted from arts programs like LaGuardia HS and The Harlem School for the Arts as a youth. I started my career in the Off- and Off-Off- Broadway theaters of this city and they remain central to my mission and purpose as an 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.

My first ever paid acting job, at the age of 14, was in a professional production of MACBETH at the Classical Theater of Harlem. This changed my life, and is why I aimed to attend The Juilliard School for acting. I have since focused my career on giving back through arts institutions and non-profits, to give other young artists the same privilege to bask in black theater as I did. This is the fabric of opportunity that makes New York City one of a kind.

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,
Chris Myers

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Chris Myers

chrismyersinc.com

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

My name is Alaine Alldaffer and I am a Casting Director and Acting teacher in New York City. I am the casting director for Playwrights Horizons and other Theaters. My credits include *GREY GARDENS* (also for Broadway), The Pulitzer Prize and Tony winning play *CLYBOURNE PARK* (also for Broadway), The Pulitzer Prize winning play *The Flick* (Playwright Horizons and The Barrow Street Theater). Most recently the Pulitzer Prize winning Musical *A STRANGE LOOP*.

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

I understand the budgetary challenges facing New York City at this unprecedented time in our history. However, the Coalition of Theaters of Color support the communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19 and lift up people who face systematic injustice and violence at the hands of the overfunded NYPD.

I have witnessed first-hand how Theater and Theatre programs can be an oasis for people of color. Young people choose to tell their stories as a way to heal trauma. They choose catharsis through Art rather than self-destructive behaviors, understandable knowing the hardships and inequities they face. Here is one of many stories I could share.

The acting bug bit Aaron at an early age. He would have loved to go to college and major in drama but didn't have the resources. He chose to enter the military because it seemed most practical option. After serving in the Middle East for two tours, He never lost the desire to be an actor and was more determined than ever to pursue that dream. Soon after arriving in the US, he decided to move to New York to study the craft. First, he had to drive across country to pick up his belongs from storage and head back to NY to start the next chapter in his life. After a full day of driving, exhausted he decided to pull over for a quick power nap. He had gone without sleep many times on duty and figured he could manage it. He thought he could recharge and continue on to his destination. Shortly after a banging on his window awakened him. He found himself surrounded by Police offers guns drawn. He spend several minutes of terror tormented by sadistic cops. They kept a gun to his head and threatened to shoot him repeatedly. They took turns. Laughing the entire time. They never told him

why and indeed seemed to have no reason. At least he wasn't informed of a reason. Eventually they let him go but only after, he presented his military ID.

Aaron was one of my most talented students. He confessed to me that that day gave him PTSD. More than even his dangerous experiences in Iraq. He was however able to channel his pain and rage into his acting. I am proud of Aaron. He still struggles from the effects of that day but he clings to his art for respite. He has participated in productions at CLASSICAL THEATER OF HARLEM and other programs affiliated with Coalition of Theatres of Color. He has also appeared in many successful films and TV.

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,
Alaine Alldaffer
Playwrights Horizons
Alldaffer Casting,
Casting Director

Honorable Council members,

I am writing on behalf of Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST) as Acting Executive Director. I am also a long time New Yorker.

EST has been making theatre in the same City-owned building at 52nd Street and 11th Avenue in Hells Kitchen, for half a century. We have seen first-hand the effect that culture has on a neighborhood and its economy, as our block has evolved from derelict and forbidding to up-and-coming with a vibrant theatre scene.

EST is dedicated to bringing stories into being, and we are deeply committed to the values of diversity, equity and inclusion. We develop new plays through readings, workshops, and full productions that attract youthful, adventurous, diverse audiences – 12,000 annually. Home to the award-winning EST/Youngblood program for emerging playwrights under age 30 for the past 26 years, we also serve theatres and playwrights across the country through the 22-year old EST/Sloan Project for Science and Technology, and an Artist Membership of more than 600.

When COVID-19 forced us to close our doors in mid-March, we were compelled to cancel programs – productions, workshops, and readings – and to work remotely. As our income took a big hit, we recognized the shutdown’s catastrophic impact on theatre artists whose livelihoods have been devastated. They are bereft of the collaboration and engagement that is so important to the art form.

A PPP loan has helped to pivot to this new reality, as we remain focused on our central mission of developing plays and artists. In this anxious time, we are providing much-needed employment for as many artists as we can in a series of play development workshops on Zoom.

We also have opened our lobby as a respite for protesters practicing their first amendment rights, and we promote voter registration on-site in our lobby and online.

We don’t know when our artists and audiences can safely return to our space. When that is possible, we will continue to tell bold, authentic stories. It is stories that bring us together and help us all to cope in this uncertain time, to understand what is lost, and to reimagine the future. Budgets tell stories too. They announce our priorities in how we imagine our neighborhoods, and our City. We stand in support of DCLA’s Coalition of Theatre’s of Color and a just and equitable New York.

Susan J. Vitucci
Acting Executive Director
Ensemble Studio Theatre
212.247.4982 x117

Good afternoon and thank you, everyone. I am Sandie Luna, an Afro-Latinx immigrant, executive director at ID Studio Theater, a cultural organization in the South Bronx, an area that has been gravely affected by Covid19. Our mission is to advance the artistic and social empowerment of immigrant communities through the performing arts.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, like most, we have remained active and shifted to virtual programming. For example: Our Intergenerational Community Building Theater Workshop has been meeting virtually every Wednesday to work on material that allows participants of different age groups the space to reflect on and process their current situation. The populations we serve face particularly challenging circumstances due to limited access to resources, and they have repeatedly expressed how having a regular creative outlet with peers in similar situations and working so intimately with a facilitator has allowed them the room to process, connect and, at times, kept them from losing hope.

In addition to creating much needed virtual content in Spanish for our communities to keep engaged and inspired, we have brought on a Public Health Fellow who is in conversation with local senior centers, hospitals and health centers and who is in direct contact with the families we serve, gathering information that we use to shape how we adapt to this moment in direct response to their needs.

Starting in July we are launching Teatro a Domicilio - a series of performances in residential courtyards that allow residents to look on and participate from the safety of their homes.

All this to say culture never closed during this pandemic. We have used our boundless creativity to expand our ways of working because we are committed to the well-being of our city and we understand the healing transformative power of the arts, particularly for communities of color which have suffered disproportionately. Our role in our neighborhoods has become even more clear and urgent because without our programs it will take a lot longer for all of us to recover from the repercussions of this health and social crisis.

We are extremely thankful for funding from the Coalition of Theaters of Color, SIAP and the Su Casa initiative. Gracias. Thank you Chair Van Bramer, Commissioner Casals and Majority Leader Cumbo.



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 Charmian Wells and I work at Lehman College in The Bronx.

Lehman College is a Hispanic-serving institute that is a proven engine of social mobility for poor, black and brown students and their families. Many of our students also support themselves in the vibrant sector of arts in education work, while attending school.

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,

Charmian Wells

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PhD Dance Studies
Temple University

Dear New York City Council Members,

I am reaching out on behalf of my organization, 651 ARTS, and as a member of New York City's cultural community. Like many, many others we have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, have made efforts to pivot and adjust our programming, and continue to serve our community and cultural workers in the wake of the pandemic. We acknowledge the hardship and sacrifices that individuals, fellow organizations, and government agencies have had to make and will continue to face through the recovery.

651 ARTS is a presenting organization that champions the work of performing artists from across the African Diaspora. We are based in Brooklyn, and pride ourselves on being both hyper-local and global; bringing Brooklyn to the world, and the world to Brooklyn. Our constituents are at the intersection of those most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 both physically and economically: neighborhoods and communities of color, and artists.

Black and Diasporic communities and artists have historically been underfunded. As the City and the Council grapple with difficult budgeting decisions in the coming days and weeks, I join in the chorus of my many colleagues and fellow organizations who have called for budget justice, as one way to begin addressing some of these disparities.

All of us at 651 ARTS deeply appreciate the Council's ongoing and steadfast support, advocacy, and championing of the role of arts and culture to the quality of life of our great city. Thank you for your work on behalf of all New Yorkers.

Respectfully submitted,

David J. Roberts

Executive Director

david.roberts@651arts.org



Dear Council Members

My name is Andrea Smith, I am on the Board of 651 ARTS and a resident of Brooklyn. I am reaching out on behalf of my institution, and as a part of New York City's cultural community. 651 ARTS is a Brooklyn based presenting organization that champions the work of performing artists from across the African Diaspora. Like many, many others we have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, my organization has made efforts to pivot and adjust our programming and continue to serve our community and cultural workers in the wake of the pandemic.

We acknowledge and appreciate the impossible situation the virus has put the entire City in, and the sacrifices that people have had to make. We are doing, and will continue to do, what we can to continue to support New Yorkers during these difficult times.

Black and Diasporic communities and artists have historically been underfunded. As the City and the Council grapple with difficult budgeting decisions in the coming days and weeks, I join in the chorus of my many colleagues and fellow organizations who have called for budget justice, as one way to begin addressing some of these disparities.

All of us at 651 ARTS deeply appreciate the Council's ongoing and steadfast support, advocacy, and championing of the role of arts and culture to the quality of life of our great city. Thank you for your work on behalf of all New Yorkers.

Kind regards,

Andrea E. Smith

Dear Council Members and Commissioner Casals,

I am reaching out for many reasons but mostly because I am an engaged citizen of NYC (I live in Tribeca) who has for the last two years had the privilege of leading the Board of Soho Rep., a Pulitzer Prize winning non-profit theater with the mission of telling stories by and about people who are underrepresented in our field. I know firsthand the powerful impact these narratives have had on our audience and the positive ripple effects that are generated for the larger community. As someone who cares deeply about ensuring that this kind of theater continues to be a vital part of our city going forward I urge you to prioritize and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color (including the Billie Holiday Theatre and Ma-Yi Filipino Theatre Ensemble with whom Soho Rep. has collaborated) in the FY21 New York City Budget.

The 42 BIPOC led organizations that make up the Coalition of Theatres of Color produce extraordinary and powerful 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.

Respectfully and hopefully,

Victoria

Victoria Meakin
Chair, Soho Rep. Board of Directors
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