

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP
RELATIONS

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June 22, 2020
Start: 10:10 a.m.
Recess: 4:42 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing

B E F O R E: Jimmy Van Bramer
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Jimmy Van Bramer
Joseph C. Borelli
Laurie A. Cumbo
Mark Gjonaj
Francis P. Moya

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

Gonzalo Casals
Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

Kathleen Hughes
First Deputy Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

Sheila Feinberg
Deputy Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

Shirley Levy
Chief of Staff
Department of Cultural Affairs

Parnita Ragavan
General Counsel
Department of Cultural Affairs

Ryan Max
Director of External Affairs
Department of Cultural Affairs

Andrew Burmeister
Associate Commissioner for Capital
Department of Cultural Affairs

Terry Richardson
Associate Commissioner for Institutions
Department of Cultural Affairs

Phillipa Shell
Director of Finance
Department of Cultural Affairs

John Calvelli
WCS and the CIG

Sade Lythcott

Lucy Sexton

Alejandra Duke Sifuentes

Karen Acromon

Sheila Lewandowsky

Lisa Gold

Rachel Amy

Linda Kennedy

Anna Cherino

Jack Kleger

Cheryl Morgan

Christopher Mendoza

Siri Horvitz

Janice Monger

Angel Herz

Heather Lubov

Cindy Lawrence

Eileen Fuchs

Cat Bloomfield

Honorable Bobby Digi

Noel Alain

Beth Allen

Gail Brewer

Takisha Dozier

Deidre Harrington

Ray Yan

Gavin Trinidad

Maroney Paponides

Liz Olson

Daneal Cooper

Cheryl Warfield

Devon Mathis

Renee Foster

Anthony Santos

Garrett Allen

David Newsonbaum

Charlotte Cohen

Marina Ortiz

Katherine Delaney

David Robertson

Melody Capote

Heather Arnson

Ryan Gilliam

Omna Khan

Madaha Kinsey-Lamb

Sandy Luna

Francie Garber Cohen

Natalie Correa

Ana Beatriz Sepulveda

Darrell Richardson

Mohammed Yusef

Guy Yadog

Naomi Avandy

Christopher Freer

Jennifer Wright Cook

Michael Jacobs

Kimberly Olson

Casey Ventrelli

Arlene Sorkan

Jamie Hastings

Naomi Goldberg Haas

Melissa Riker

Tamara Kasheky

Cynthia Flowers

Lorcan Otway

Jason Hewitt

Benjamin Spearman

Jennie Gerston

2 UNIDENTIFIED: Sergeant Martinez, you may
3 begin with your opening statement.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and
5 welcome to today's remote hearing, remote New York
6 City Council hearing of the Committee on Cultural
7 Affairs. At this time would all participants please
8 turn on your video for identification purposes and
9 place electronic devices to vibrate or mute to
10 minimize disruption. If you wish to submit testimony
11 you may do so at testimonycouncil.nyc.gov. Once
12 again, that's testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you
13 for your cooperation. We're ready to begin.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good morning,
15 everyone. My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and I am proud
16 to be the chair of the Cultural Affairs Committee of
17 the New York City Council, and...

18 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm sorry, Chair. I'm
19 sorry, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yep.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: If we could just pause for
22 one second, we're having difficulties with the live
23 stream.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK.

25 UNIDENTIFIED: Sorry about that.

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No worries.

3 UNIDENTIFIED: OK, ladies and gentlemen,
4 once again, sorry for the inconvenience, ah, if you
5 are here for the Committee on Cultural Affairs we are
6 now ready to begin.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So it's still
8 good morning, everyone, from when we last began. Ah,
9 I want to apologize to all of you for the delay. The
10 live stream was not functioning. That is not on the
11 council's end but on the live streaming end, ah, and
12 we wanted to make sure, I wanted to make sure that
13 all of your voices are heard by as many people as
14 possible because I believe what all of you have to
15 say is so important, so, um, ah, instead of
16 postponing or, ah, just talking to room, ah, I wanted
17 this to be a public a meeting as possible. So we now
18 have that ability and we are now going forward. So I
19 want to apologize again to all of you. Ah, Gonzalo
20 Casals has waited a long time to, ah, make his first
21 testimony as the, ah, commissioner of the Department
22 of Cultural Affairs and he was forced to wait a
23 little bit longer. But, ah, I know he'll, ah, bring
24 the goods when he testifies, um, on behalf of the
25 Department of Cultural Affairs. No pressure,

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2 Commissioner. Um, but my name is Jimmy Van Bramer,
3 as many of you know, and I'm proud to be the chair
4 of this committee, and with this gavel, which is a
5 homemade meat tenderizer [gavel], we are now in
6 session, I hope, speaking to a group of cultural
7 affairs folks that brought a little bit of smile
8 after our too-lengthy wait. Um, I want to recognize
9 the members of the committee who are and have been on
10 the, on the call and in the hearing, Council Member
11 Joe Borelli, Council Member Mark Gjonaj, Council
12 Member Francisco Moya, and Majority Leader Laurie
13 Cumbo. Now, so much has changed since we last
14 gathered as a committee and as a cultural community
15 as we do in this space, obviously this virtual space,
16 today. Um, COVID-19 has reshaped our lives and our
17 world in ways that we could never have imagined, and
18 today's hearing will focus on the pandemic and how it
19 has impacted, ah, culture and the arts in New York
20 City. And I know so many of you, ah, are struggling.
21 So many of you have had to endure, ah, painful
22 furloughs and layoffs, ah, and closures, ah, and are
23 very deeply and rightly concerned about what the
24 future will hold for our community as, ah, I am. But
25 we also can't talk about our changed world without

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2 acknowledging the murder of George Floyd and, by
3 police officers, and the worldwide, ah, Black Lives,
4 ah, Matter movement. Ah, this is indeed a moment of
5 reckoning, ah, with structural and systemic racism,
6 ah, and that means our cultural community, ah,
7 meeting the moment as well. Ah, this is an oversight
8 hearing on all that's going to be going on. But I
9 want to frame it just a little bit for all of us. I
10 was one of the first council members who came out in
11 favor of, ah, defunding the NYPD budget by at least
12 one billion dollars. And, but we talk about
13 reinvesting that money in the services that we all
14 believe so strongly in. Ah, we often talk about
15 youth services, rightly so. We talk about education,
16 rightly so. We talk about health services. We talk
17 about targeting resources, ah, to black and brown,
18 ah, communities. Ah, and I hear some people talking
19 about arts and culture within that context, but I
20 just want to make the explicit case that I think
21 everyone in this hearing agrees with that, ah, arts
22 and culture, ah, are youth services, right? The arts
23 and culture, ah, in education goes a long way, ah,
24 towards making our society more just. Ah, I would
25 argue that having art and culture in one's life, ah,

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2 makes for healthier outcomes, ah, for human beings.

3 Ah, and certainly we know that so many of the

4 organizations in this hearing, ah, are, um, run by

5 and serving, ah, communities of color and, ah,

6 traditionally underserved and underfunded communities

7 so what I talk about as the chair of Cultural Affairs

8 and Libraries, um, ah, defunding the NYPD by at least

9 a billion dollars, reallocating that funding, I want

10 to make sure that we're talking about arts and

11 culture, ah, and the programs, the organizations, ah,

12 that, ah, I oversee within, ah, this committee. And

13 we also have, of course, as many of you know, ah, and

14 as I mentioned earlier, a new commissioner for the

15 Department of Cultural Affairs. Ah, Gonzalo Casals

16 is, ah, a progressive, ah, queer, Latinx man who I

17 know and I believe, ah, can help meet this moment,

18 ah, in our history, ah, and in our cultural, ah,

19 community. So, ah, I want to thank him for being

20 here today in his capacity as the new cultural

21 affairs chair. We're also gonna discuss a bill,

22 Intro 1967, ah, which I'm proud to cosponsor with

23 Majority Leader Cumbo in relationship to reporting,

24 ah, post-COVID-19 reopening plans for, ah, all of you

25 and I know that is, ah, deeply anxiety-producing for

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2 so many of you as we go through this budget process
3 and as we all, ah, contemplate what the world, ah,
4 will look like over the next several months and even
5 years. So with that, ah, I want to thank each of
6 you, ah, for being so patient and I know we're going
7 to hear from Gonzalo Casals, our commissioner, ah,
8 but before doing that I'm going to throw it to Brenda
9 McKinney, the counsel for the Cultural Affairs
10 Committee, who is going to swear in all of the
11 Department of Cultural Affairs, ah, representatives,
12 ah, on the call, ah, before, ah, we go to testimony.
13 I'll also note that, I believe, Manhattan Borough
14 President Gail Brewer, ah, is with us and will be
15 testifying, ah, as part of the public testimony in
16 this hearing as well. So with that I'll throw it to,
17 ah, Counsel Brenda McKinney to swear in, ah, the
18 Department of Cultural Affairs commissioner and his
19 staff, and we'll begin with the testimony.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, thank you so
21 much, Chair Van Bramer. Ah, before we move to
22 procedural items and, um, the oath, Chair Van Bramer,
23 is it OK if we also move to Majority Leader Cumbo for
24 a statement about your joint legislation?

25 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, absolutely.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Majority
3 Leader? Please stand by. We are just waiting for
4 the Majority Leader. One moment, please. OK, we
5 could, Chair, um, I'm going to move to procedural
6 items and we can come back, um, if that's OK? So for
7 today's hearing, um, thank you again, Chair Van
8 Bramer. My name is Brenda McKinney and I'm the
9 counsel to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
10 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations of
11 the New York City Council. Before we begin testimony
12 and before the oath I would like to remind everybody
13 today that you will be on mute, um, until you are
14 called to testify. After you are called on you will
15 be unmuted by the host. I will be calling on
16 panelists to testify. Please listen to your name to
17 be called. I will be periodically announcing who the
18 next panelist will be and in order. We will be
19 limiting council member questions to five minutes.
20 This includes both questions and answers. Please
21 note that we will allow a second round of questions,
22 which will be limited to two minutes. Thank you.
23 For public testimony, also a housekeeping matter,
24 please note that individuals will be called up in
25 panels of four people. Council members, if you have

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2 questions, um, for a particular panelist, please use
3 the raise hand function in Zoom. You will be called
4 on after everyone on that panel has completed their
5 testimony and in the order that you have raised your
6 hand. For panelists, once your name has been called
7 a member of our staff will unmute you and the
8 Sergeant at Arms will give you the go-ahead to begin
9 after setting the timer. The timer will appear as a
10 separate icon, like an image, um, and you will see
11 two minutes. All public testimony will be limited to
12 two minutes. Please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to
13 announce you before beginning your testimony. Um,
14 please also note that there might be a small delay
15 today, um, in the hearing so, um, you might notice
16 that, and thank you again for everyone's patience.
17 Um, just to check again if Majority Leader Cumbo is
18 here or we can move to the oath. OK. We will stand
19 by with the Majority Leader, but for now we will move
20 to the oath. I will call on the following members of
21 the administration to testify. I will read your
22 names one by one. If you can please raise your right
23 hand, but first I will list out the names.

24 Commissioner Gonzalo Casals, First Deputy

25 Commissioner Kathleen Hughes, Deputy Commissioner

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2 Sheila Feinberg, Chief of Staff Shirley Levy, General
3 Counsel Parnita Ragavan, Director of External
4 Affairs, Ryan Max, Associate Commissioner for
5 Capital, Andrew Burmeister, Associate Commissioner
6 for Institutions, Terry Richardson, and Director of
7 Finance, Phillipa Shell. I will first read the oath
8 and after I'll call on each panelist here from the
9 administration to testify. Please raise your right
10 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
11 truth, and nothing but the truth before this
12 committee and to respond honestly to council member
13 questions? Commissioner Gonzalo Casals.

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I do.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: First Deputy
16 Commissioner Kathleen Hughes?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HUGHES: I do.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Commissioner
19 Sheila Feinberg? Ah, Deputy Commissioner Feinberg?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. General
22 Counsel Parnita Ragavan?

23 GENERAL COUNSEL RAGAVAN: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Director
25 of External Affairs Ryan Max? Mr. Max?

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2 DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MAX: I do.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Associate
4 Commissioner for Capital Andrew Burmeister. Mr.
5 Burmeister? I think we might have had an issue with
6 his, ah, audio. I'm just looking for the icon. I'll
7 keep going. Um, Assistant Commissioner for
8 Institutions, Terry Richardson?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR INSTITUTIONS

10 RICHARDSON: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, and
12 finally Director of Finance, Phillipa Shell.

13 DIRECTOR OF FINANCE SHELL: I do.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Shell, thank you
15 so much. Chair Van Bramer?

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, so just
17 before the commissioner speaks I just want to make
18 sure everyone knows that, ah, I know that the live
19 stream has, um, ah, not continued, ah, we are still
20 going forward because this is all being record and
21 will be posted to the council's website, and we also
22 can get it out as well. Ah, so, hopefully the live
23 stream will come back while we're all engaged in this
24 important hearing. Um, but either way it's being
25 record and will be shared. So we are going to

2 continue with the hearing and ask for, at this point,
3 I think Majority Leader Cumbo is back and can speak
4 to the legislation and then Commissioner Casals will
5 be asked to testify.

6 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Hello?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Majority Leader, we
8 can hear you.

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: OK. Thank you so
10 much and thank everybody for their patience. I want
11 to thank Chair Jimmy Van Bramer for holding this
12 hearing today and to Brenda McKinney from our
13 legislative division, who has gracefully handled both
14 being a dedicated mother to an infant amidst a global
15 pandemic and a dedicated attorney with the council.
16 I can certainly relate to the challenges of being a
17 mom, um, especially as this delay has interfered with
18 our nap time, food time, and play time. But we
19 persevere and we move on. As we all know, the
20 pandemic has affected industries across the entire
21 city. We are all excited for the Phase 4 reopening
22 of art galleries, museums, and theaters alike, but
23 first we need to plan and place that protects
24 visitors, employees, and their families. Today we
25 hear Intro 1967, legislation that I drafted, which

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2 requires New York City-based art and cultural
3 institutions to compile a report for the council and
4 the city discussing their plans how to reopen. Since
5 mid-March a cumulative 200-plus organizations have
6 been participating in a daily call with elected
7 officials from Chair Jimmy Van Bramer's office, the
8 council's legislative division, and the Department of
9 Cultural Affairs, and many others. My bill, Intro
10 1967, will make sure that the lessons learned from
11 these calls, as well as other work currently being
12 done by DCLA and the city are properly received,
13 distributed, and implemented in preparation for
14 citywide reopening. Thank you to the organizations
15 testifying later today in support of this bill. I
16 know there are concerns as to the timelines of this
17 bill and hearing your concerns today is our goal.
18 And I just want to thank all of the, ah, arts
19 organizations, who I'm a big supporter of, for their
20 continuous, ah, keeping in touch with one another,
21 staying a part of the process, advocating for their
22 organization, and we know we want to make sure that
23 we open safely, um, and that we are protecting the
24 residents and the tourists alike who come to New York
25 City because we are why people come to New York City

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20

2 and we want to make sure we provide the safest
3 opportunity for all that visit this great city.

4 Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Chair Van
6 Bramer.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So now I think
8 we're finally ready to hear from, ah, Commissioner
9 Casals. Please begin your testimony.

10 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you. Good,
11 Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee. I am
12 Gonzalo Casals, commissioner of the Department of
13 Cultural Affairs. I'm here today to testify on
14 COVID-19 and cultural organizations in New York City.
15 I am joined today by a number of my colleagues,
16 including First Deputy Commissioner Kathleen Hughes,
17 Deputy Commissioner Sheila Feinberg, Chief of Staff
18 Shirley Levy, General Counsel Parnita Ragavan,
19 Assistant Commissioners Terry Richardson and Andrew
20 Burmeister, Finance Director Phillipa Shell, and
21 External Affairs Director Ryan Max. I want to take a
22 moment to thank Kathy Hughes, both for stepping up as
23 an acting commissioner and for nearly 40 years of
24 public service to this agency and the people of New
25 York. The COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the

2 cultural sector has been our top priority. By now
3 we're all painfully familiar with the profound
4 challenges that this crisis has posed for everyone in
5 the city. We have all experienced loss in one way or
6 another. While we're seeing signs that the worst of
7 the public health crisis may be behind us, the social
8 and economic damage is still unfolding. With survey
9 data, sorry, with survey data and from daily ongoing
10 conversations with our constituents, we're starting
11 to get a fuller picture of the crisis. For instance,
12 a recent survey conducted by cultural organizations
13 who connect daily on a 3:00 p.m. phone call found
14 nearly a half a billion dollars in revenue lost from
15 the 144 organizations that responded. For groups
16 with budgets under \$100,000 these losses represent
17 more than half of their operating support. There is
18 no question that our cultural community is in a dire
19 situation. But this is a crisis whose full impact
20 won't be understood for many months or even years.
21 The pandemic has affected our low-income
22 neighborhoods and communities of color
23 disproportionately at a time when the [inaudible]
24 anger and protests over the killing of black men and
25 women has reached a boiling point. These communities

3 are enduring a public health and economic crisis,
4 while also struggling against systemic racism. We
5 know that presence of arts and culture in communities
6 correlates with improved public safety, health, and
7 education. And our work must focus on supporting
8 these communities in recovery. There's nothing that
9 makes these communities inherently more vulnerable to
10 COVID-19. It is entirely our economic, health, and
11 other social systems that put communities of color
12 and black communities especially at an enormous
13 disadvantage. COVID-19 hasn't created [inaudible]
14 and disadvantages, but it has shone a harsh new light
15 on them. We must use the power of arts and culture
16 to support the healing of these communities. I have
17 been inspired, I have been inspired to see that
18 cultural communities speak out loudly against racism
19 and white supremacy and declare their commitment to
20 racial justice. We have a long way to go in
21 fostering a more equitable, inclusive city and
22 cultural community. The energy and urgency of this
23 moment remind us of how important it is to back these
24 works with action. Our cultural community has
25 suffered through the crisis alongside our fellow New
Yorkers. Spaces have closed. Entire seasons have

2 been canceled and [inaudible] the streets have
3 disappeared. Organizations have struggled to make
4 rent and payroll. Cultural workers have been getting
5 sick, laid off, and furloughed. But even in these
6 unprecedented circumstances, cultural organizations
7 have continued to serve the people that live in the
8 city. On Staten Island Snug Harbor's campus became a
9 COVID-19 testing site. The Bronx Zoo parking lot
10 became a station site for ambulances. [inaudible] in
11 Brooklyn and [inaudible] in the Bronx transformed
12 their spaces into community footpaths. Dance NYC
13 launched a campaign to remind us that artists are
14 necessary workers. There are more examples than I
15 can list here. The ways our community has shown up
16 for New Yorkers demonstrate how central cultural
17 organizations are to our social fabric, and how
18 important this public-private partnership is to our
19 city. It underscores how critical culture is going
20 to be for our city's recovery. In addition to
21 responding to these urgent needs, cultural
22 organizations also continue to provide us with
23 important [inaudible] ways to connect, engage more,
24 and create. Just yesterday was [inaudible] New York.
25 The Criminal Queerness Festival, which we're

2 supporting through a mayor's grant for cultural
3 impact, is presented online through June 28. The
4 first-ever [inaudible] Festival happened on 11/18/09,
5 on 6/19/09, and [inaudible] the Pride program it is
6 helping us connect even in the absence of the
7 traditional parades. But I admit I'll miss those
8 quite a bit. At DCLA and throughout city government
9 we've done our best to support organizations while
10 also adapting to the constantly changing crisis. At
11 Cultural Affairs we have worked closely with OMB to
12 keep payments flowing. DCLA is current with payments
13 to virtually all grantees. We have been sharing
14 resources with our constituents, notifying them of
15 upcoming funding opportunities from philanthropy and
16 the federal government. The US Small Business
17 Administration Paycheck Protection Program and the
18 Economy Injury Disaster Loan Program, while they have
19 limitations, are particular important sources of
20 support for eligible organizations, and still more
21 federal support is needed, a lot more. We're also
22 working to develop and better quantify our
23 understanding of the impact on the cultural
24 community. This can help us advocate for support
25 from state, federal, and private sources, and direct

2 it where it is most needed. We've partnered with
3 Americans for the Arts to conduct [inaudible]. The
4 final report is being created by SNU Data Arts and
5 preliminary findings suggests the smaller
6 organizations and community-based groups have been
7 hardest hit. We are constantly talking to our
8 grantees through listening sessions, one-on-one
9 conversations, and throughout the sector advisory
10 councils. These conversations have helped us
11 understand the reality on the ground for
12 organizations still struggling to, through so many
13 crises at once. My colleagues and volunteers of the
14 arts have tailored operations to supply much-needed
15 donations to city agencies and culture organizations.
16 Furniture from MFTA was used to create respite
17 centers in Metropolitan Hospital in Queens and Kings
18 County Hospital in Brooklyn to help people on front
19 lines fighting the coronavirus. MFTA has also made a
20 wide range of educational offerings available on line
21 through the newly launched MFTA Online Education
22 Center. The Administration for Children's Services
23 using fabric and sewing machines for masks to
24 distribute to the student population along with
25 notebooks and educational materials. And we work

2 with the Parks Department to provide helmets,
3 equipment, and gardening materials for summer
4 programming. Our partners in city government have
5 also stepped up to assist cultural communities during
6 the crisis. The Mayor's Office of Media and
7 Entertainment and Office of Night Life have launched
8 major engagement efforts with our constituents.
9 Early in the crisis the Department of Small Business
10 Services offered a program to help groups retain
11 employees. And the Mayor's Office, the Department of
12 Consumer and Worker Protection Community Affairs
13 Unit, have been tirelessly updating New Yorkers with
14 public health guidelines, pre-opening strategies, and
15 other resources to help our city get through the
16 worst of the crisis and now take the first steps
17 towards reopening. These local efforts are necessary
18 but no one source of support is going to get our
19 constituents through this crisis. The city cannot do
20 this alone. While we haven't reached the phase...

21 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm on it.

22 COMMISSIONER CASALS: While we haven't
23 reached the phase that includes arts and culture we
24 are already thinking about what reopening would look
25 like for cultural community. I want to take this

2 opportunity to thank all of our cultural workers. We
3 have endured fear, loss, and uncertainty alongside
4 fellow New Yorkers, and now we look to them
5 [inaudible] cultural spaces as the powerful
6 [inaudible] for community connection they have always
7 been. Regarding the council's proposed legislation,
8 Intro 1967 2020, we appreciate the foresight and
9 wanting to support cultural organizations with
10 resources for reopening. I'm not sure the
11 legislation in its current form is the best way to
12 achieve these and we look forward to working with you
13 toward a bill that best suits the needs of our
14 constituents as they look to reopening facilities.
15 Reopening will mean resuming business as usual
16 [inaudible] return after months of hardship,
17 suffering, and loss. How can our spaces be places
18 for reflection, empowerment, creation, and healing?
19 With a new urgency to root out systemic racism at
20 level, how can our collections, programs, and
21 expertise help our organizations to make sense of the
22 profound changes that are happening. Or aren't
23 happening, but they need to. In the last six years
24 together we have centered diversity, equity, and
25 inclusion as core values. How do we ensure that the

2 progress we made if forced it in a more inclusive
3 cultural community is lost? Far from being put on
4 hold during this crisis, we need to focus more than
5 ever on how we bring these values into our work.

6 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My
7 colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions
8 you may have.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Van Bramer?

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
11 Commissioner, ah, for your testimony, and while this
12 is not exactly how I thought we would have our first,
13 ah, conversation, ah, as I had many with Commissioner
14 [inaudible], um, ah, it is, it is how it has to
15 happen today. Ah, and again, I want to apologize to
16 everyone for the technical difficulties. Ah, you all
17 deserve much better. I do want to say to, ah,
18 Commissioner Casals, um, there's a great deal of
19 uncertainty referred that [inaudible] fear, quite
20 frankly. A lot of people have already endured a lot
21 of trauma and one of the, ah, sources of anxiety is,
22 of course, ah, what the next budget will look like
23 and, ah, where we're going. And so maybe you can,
24 ah, ah, talk to us a little bit about the
25 conversation going on within the administration, ah,

2 both, ah, the deputy mayor and the mayor and OMB
3 about, ah, your commitment to making sure that, ah,
4 this pandemic is not used as an excuse to decimate
5 cultural funding.

6 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you for that
7 question, um, Council Member Van Bramer. Um, you
8 know, the, the commitment by the administration to
9 support arts and culture continues after two years of
10 record funding. As you see on the proposed budget,
11 arts and culture baseline funding has not been cut,
12 unlike any other, um, agencies, and I look forward
13 to, um, adoption. That's when, you know, most of the
14 funding for arts and culture happens to, um, see, um,
15 what's gonna be the result of that.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, so is there
17 a, an active conversation, ah, happening between
18 yourself and the deputy mayor, Vicki Been, and OMB,
19 um, you know, I know that you can't share exactly
20 what it is, ah, each of you are saying but, you know,
21 the, the cultural affairs commissioner is in an
22 interesting positioning, right? You are one of the
23 leaders of our great community. Ah, obviously you
24 also report to the mayor and, um, but, but talk to me
25 a little bit about whether or not you feel like this

2 is a priority within the administration based on the
3 conversations that you're having and, um, ah, and I
4 mean going forward. Obviously, I know what the
5 budget is, ah, looking like right now, ah, and, but,
6 but talk a little bit about that for a second.

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah, I mean, um,
8 as much as I can tell you is we're in conversations
9 with OMB almost daily about, you know, FY20 and FY21.
10 Um, we have an amazing team that understands the
11 value of arts and culture in the city. The deputy
12 mayor and the mayor are both huge fans of arts and
13 culture. Again, you know, the past decisions towards
14 arts and culture funding has demonstrated that. And
15 we understand also the, ah, we're continuing to try
16 to understand, you know, the impact that, um, this
17 crisis has had on, on the sector, and that said, you
18 know, this is, um, beyond the city. This is beyond
19 DCLA. Um, the, the month of, um, um, negative impact
20 that it has, the crisis has had on our communities
21 and, you know, hard decisions are going to be made.
22 But, but again, um, I hope that everyone understands
23 that, you know, just keeping the, committed to the
24 baseline, um, budget for arts and culture this year

2 is a way to show that, that we're supportive of the
3 work that all of you do.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. And so
5 talk to me 'cause you mentioned it, we both mentioned
6 it, ah, in our remarks, ah, the moment that we are in
7 and, ah, meeting the moment, right, where we try and,
8 ah, dismantle white supremacy and, and, and deal with
9 structural and systemic racism, even within our own
10 community, and, and, you know, I know you, you're
11 someone who gives, ah, and was already giving a lot
12 of thought to these questions, ah, in your work. Um,
13 how is DCLA confronting this moment, and what does
14 that look like potentially, ah, in terms of how DCLA
15 is going to, ah, ah, assist and increase, ah, its
16 work and support for, ah, cultural organizations, ah,
17 particularly those that are, um, ah, run by and
18 served, ah, black and brown communities.

19 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes, um, I think
20 the first thing I want to see is that, um, I see the
21 work of the agency, um, so much more than just as a
22 funding agency. I think the funds that we distribute
23 are very important and very much needed, but also I
24 see the agency as an advocate for the cultural sector
25 and also a [inaudible], and as [inaudible] in, in

2 ways of, um, providing resources and helping people
3 connect to resources. Um, there are three things
4 that we're doing at DCLA and we continue to do,
5 right? This doesn't start with me, it starts with my
6 predecessor, and it's part of the values of this
7 administration. One is, um, work internally in the
8 agency to make sure that, um, we are all trained on,
9 you know, on understanding racial bias and, you know,
10 antiracism practices. Two is rethinking the way we
11 do business and how we can put a lens of an equity,
12 diversity, and inclusion in the way we, ah, in the
13 processes we create to distribute funds. And then
14 three is, um, continue to, make sure that the
15 conversations that have started among cultural
16 leaders, um, at this point in time continue to happen
17 and provide the leadership needed and bring the
18 resources for the sector to really continue to create
19 change. I think there has been a lot of work done in
20 terms of, um, diversity, including, and equity, um,
21 plans, but I'm, but what we want to start seeing is
22 to figure out and help each other to figure out what
23 the, um, next steps and, and actions that we need to
24 take as a cultural sector so when we reveal, we
25 reveal in a much more equitable wall.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Understood. Um,
3 so obviously we, I think everyone on this, in this
4 hearing has, ah, either been a part of the daily
5 phone calls, ah, at 3 o'clock or, or knows of them
6 and, ah, and I know that that's been growing. So,
7 ah, you can talk to me about how the Department of
8 Cultural Affairs is, is receiving the information
9 that you gain on those calls and then what kind of
10 action the department has been able to take in
11 response, right, because it's not just a, a gathering
12 of, of 300 folks who are, who are complaining. It's
13 a gathering of, ah, 300 folks who are trying to
14 survive and help each other through this moment. But
15 there are concrete ways in which the Department of
16 Cultural Affairs can help, ah, those 300, of course
17 beyond those 300, survive. So, um, I know the
18 department's on the calls, um, but, but outline for
19 me how you've taken what you've heard on the calls,
20 ah, and then, and then turn them into action and in
21 being able to actually act on what you've heard.

22 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. Um, first, I
23 want to clarify, um, the, the 3:00 p.m., um, cultural
24 call is one of the many, many, many meetings I have
25 been taking with different groups in the cultural

2 sector. Um, and I also only attended one call of the
3 3:00 p.m. call and I think it was last week. Um, in
4 general we're trying, the way we're trying to
5 approach, um, this crisis and take leadership on it
6 is twofold. One is through the survey that has been
7 conducted among our grantees and hopefully very soon
8 we can share this with the field, and two is having,
9 um, more focus and conversations with different
10 groups. Um, it's, what's amazing and it's incredible
11 is not only the 3:00 p.m., ah, call, but all the
12 conversations I've had with different cultural groups
13 is that they are completely beyond complaining, you
14 know, and they're like just taking action. So what
15 I'm doing is joining those calls to figure out what's
16 needed, you know, what's the kind of, ah, um,
17 resources, what do they need from the city, and how
18 we can help them, um, access, you know, or figure
19 out, you know, the things that they need to, um, get
20 in order to be open. And I'm going to give you an
21 example. There is a group of, um, I think by now 25
22 museums that have gathered together to figure, you
23 know, a plan for reopening and guidelines and we're
24 working with them and probably soon we're gonna be
25 able to share those with the rest of the community so

2 they can take advantage of sort of the brain power of
3 this specific group and, and just, um, look at those,
4 um, guidelines. I don't have to tell you or anybody
5 on this committee how, um, um, what, what makes
6 amazing, you know, the cultural sector in New York
7 City is that no one, um, cultural organization is
8 like the other ones. Um, so each cultural
9 organization, each sector in the, in the field are
10 going to have very specific needs. But, um, we can
11 all help each other to learn from them best
12 practices.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, um, ah...

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Let me add one more
15 thing. We're also, um, formalizing this work by, um,
16 hopefully very soon, rethinking what, um, the, the
17 department had, um, been doing about office hours and
18 really bring, um, resources from the city in terms of
19 training and best practices, um, as a form of a
20 public program. Apologies for interrupting you.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No worries, no
22 worries. You know, when you, ah, were appointed to
23 this position I, um, gave a quote to the *New York*
24 *Times* about the facts that you are an activist and a
25 real fighter, um, you know, someone who, ah, comes

2 from, you know, not, not just sort of the bureaucracy
3 of, ah, of our world but, but someone's who's
4 actually very comfortable in the streets, um,
5 marching and, and protesting and fighting and, and,
6 you know, I know a lot of people on this call know
7 you and, and believe in you.

8 COMMISSIONER CASALS: [inaudible].

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I just want
10 to make sure that, that fighting, ah, ah, now
11 Commissioner Gonzalo Casals' spirit, ah, continues
12 because this community needs you to be in their
13 fight, um, you know, fighting with those, ah, within
14 the administration who may not prioritize, ah, ah,
15 culture and the arts and, and fighting with, ah,
16 anyone who says, ah, this is a moment to cut these
17 budgets, right, because they're not open and they're
18 not gonna be open for a while and, and we don't know
19 what programming they're going to be able to offer.
20 You know that many of the organizations have
21 continued to offer programming, ah, virtually. So,
22 um, so, you know, talk to me a little bit about what
23 has been happening, ah, and what you seen, and then
24 also, ah, the fact, you know, that, that we need,
25 both of us, you and me, fighting, um, ah, as if all

2 of these organizations' lives depend on it, ah,
3 because they do.

4 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you for your
5 words, um, and the pressure. Um, I, I just want to
6 say a couple of things. One is, um, when I got
7 appointed in this position, um, it was very clear for
8 the administration who they were hiring with nowhere
9 to hide, you know, my values, you know, my career.
10 So I'd like to think that that's, you know, a way,
11 another way in which this administration not only to
12 arts and culture but committed to a very specific
13 kind of arts and culture that speaks of equity and,
14 and inclusion and diversity. Um, I don't, I haven't
15 so far feel like I need to fight with the
16 administration for in arts and culture. Again, I, I
17 continue to see that there's a commitment to support,
18 um, this sector. Um, of course, in the context of
19 the huge economic crisis that, um, not only the, the
20 city but the country is experiencing and with the
21 city, um, with a big deficit and having to, um,
22 rethink their priorities. Um, so, again, you know, I
23 haven't been able to, to put my fighting skills, you
24 know, um, you know, to, to play but one other thing
25 that I bring, which is, I think it's important and it

2 has worked not only in my work with the
3 administration, but with the etc, is that they are
4 community organizing, right? I, I do bring, ah, the
5 idea of a collective leadership, a leadership that is
6 not only about, ah, me, but it's also, it's about the
7 [inaudible] I have to working with and bring
8 everybody together to think, you know, what's the
9 best way to get out of this crisis. And I look
10 forward to working with you and the committee as much
11 as I have worked with the administration and
12 everybody in the cultural sector, um, to figure out
13 what's the best way to, um, reopen and recover.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, we...

15 COMMISSIONER CASALS: And, and I want to
16 say, you know, clearly, that there is, there is a
17 complete understanding by the administration that in
18 order to bring New York City back we need to bring
19 our cultural acceleration, ah, our cultural
20 organizations back.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. So I, I
22 know that if you, ah, when called upon to take off
23 your gloves, ah, or put on the gloves, rather, ah,
24 that, ah, you will do so. Um, ah, and, ah, I have,
25 ah, another question or two but I know people have

2 already been waiting and so we want to get to the
3 public, ah, testimony as soon as possible. Um, but,
4 ah, ah, I believe Majority Leader Cumbo has a
5 question or questions for the administration.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Majority Leader, are
7 you, can we please unmute the Majority Leader?

8 Please stand by. Chair Van Bramer, we have having an
9 issue with the unmute. If, um, we can come back to
10 the Majority Leader in one minute, in one moment?

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, OK. Ah,
12 you'll let me know when that is. So, um, I think you
13 mentioned, Commissioner, the national survey, ah,
14 that's been, ah, going on with respect to cultural
15 organizations and I know that DCLA, ah, asked, ah,
16 for, ah, information data from our local, ah, New
17 York City cultural organizations. I don't believe
18 DCLA has released that data yet. But what is, what
19 is the plan on actually, ah, making that information
20 public, sharing with it and making it actionable?

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah, um, I just
22 want to make two things clear. One is I mentioned
23 two surveys in my, ah, testimony. One was conducted
24 by the [inaudible] poll and the group [inaudible] and
25 the [inaudible] one is the one that we, um, conducted

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2 with, um, um, Americans for the Arts. Um, the report
3 is being finalized, hopefully in the next couple of
4 weeks, um, the report will be ready and the idea is,
5 again, as our role as an advocate and, you know,
6 convener and sharing resources, to make that, um,
7 survey as, um, public as possible, um, so we help,
8 um, not only, um, ask, but, you know, the state and
9 private philanthropy understand, you know, what's the
10 impact, the negative impact that COVID has had on our
11 cultural organizations and where they should be
12 directing their funds. So I'll be happy to share
13 that with you as soon as, um, it's ready.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. Do you
15 think there's any possibility of having that survey
16 released before budget adoption?

17 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Um, I need to check
18 on that. Um, I'll get back to you on that.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, I mean,
20 obviously...

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: [inaudible] it
22 shouldn't come as any surprise to all of us, and I
23 said in my testimony that, you know, small
24 organizations, culturally specific organizations,
25

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2 organizations that are community-based, are the ones
3 that are being hardest hit by the, by COVID.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, no, and I
5 just think that as we get to the finish line here,
6 um, within the next potentially, ah, ah, eight or
7 nine days, um, you know, we, we need as much
8 ammunition as possible to defend this, this
9 community. Um, you know, and, ah, so I think, ah,
10 ah, you know, that would be HPD to have. Ah, and for
11 me to use, also quite frankly, within, ah, the City
12 Council, ah, to make the case, although obviously
13 there's a lot of support for culture and the arts
14 within the City Council. Um, I think we're ready for
15 the Majority Leader. Are we ready, ah, Brenda?

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're standing by,
17 Chair. Um, yep, and she is ready. Ah, Majority
18 Leader Cumbo, we will also, um, be on a five-minute
19 clock, but we can see you and I believe hear you, um,
20 if you are ready.

21 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: OK. Ah, thank
22 you so much, Commissioner. I know you've had a very
23 difficult transition from the time that you were
24 hired, um, experiencing COVID-19 yourself and being
25 thrust into a new position. But what I wanted to

2 know is, um, as Council Member Van Bramer may have
3 spoke about it and I'm sorry, I'm, I'm managing my
4 son at the same time. But the Black Lives Matter
5 movement has had such a professional impact all
6 across the world. Has the Department of Cultural
7 Affairs come up with any sort of strategy or
8 implementation in terms of how they are immediately
9 going to specifically address the Black Lives Matter,
10 um, movement? Because you and I both know that what
11 people are fighting for out here in the streets,
12 while they have many different understandings of what
13 it is, I know that we in the cultural community know
14 and understand that we play the most integral role in
15 addressing the issues of the Black Lives Matter
16 movement. And that's about us learning about each
17 other's culture, having equal respect for one
18 another, understanding the trials and the
19 tribulations that we have faced, educating our youth.
20 Has there been any dynamic, and I'll give you a small
21 dynamic, so, for example, the Parks Department, they
22 have come out with some sort of strategy to rename
23 public parks after notable African Americans. What's
24 happening with DCLA immediately, in the, in the short
25 term, as well as the mid and long term?

2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you for your
3 question. Um, let me start by saying that it is
4 unfortunate that we had to see, you know, so many of
5 the lives of the African Americans and black folks
6 been lost in order to get to this point of reckoning.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Um-hmm.

8 COMMISSIONER CASALS: That said, um, I
9 see that there's a huge window of opportunity for
10 many of us to continue to push the envelope and
11 continue to push for the change that we wanted to
12 create for so many years. And while it has been, um,
13 very inspiring to see so many cultural organizations,
14 ah, come out in support of Black Lives Matter, in
15 support of, you know, antiracism, um, practices, um,
16 I think it's the moment to really, um, expand the,
17 um, the, ah, ambition that we have in terms of the
18 changes that we were proposing. And I've been saying
19 that, you know, prior to COVID most of the, the
20 diversity, including, and, and equity plans were
21 focusing mostly on hiring practices. And that's only
22 just the tip of the iceberg, right, of all the work
23 that we need to do. Um, we need to include not only
24 training with our staffs, but also we need to, um,
25 look at, you know, how do we change, um,

2 organizational cultures within institutions? How do
3 we change content that we present. And how do we
4 really center, you know, the cultures of, um,
5 marginal communities, specifically, um, communities
6 of color.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Um...

8 COMMISSIONER CASALS: We're, yeah, go
9 ahead.

10 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: That, that answer
11 is not quite tangible enough for me. I mean, I, I
12 need more specifics in terms of, I guess you could
13 say, unfortunately, we get reduced to talking points
14 and headliners. What is the headline for the
15 Department of Cultural Affairs? And I'll follow it
16 up by saying there's a huge movement to defund the
17 NYPD. There is a huge movement to redirect the
18 funding to redirect the funding to communities of
19 color. There, I believe, is where the intersection
20 of the administration and the defund and bring to
21 communities of color. DCLA to me is that pivotal
22 agency that has the ability to say funding can be
23 redirected from the NYPD into our cultural
24 communities, specifically communities of color,
25 organizations that are working with communities of

2 color. How are they empowered? Has the
3 administration had any conversations with how to
4 redirect that NYPD funding into cultural
5 institutions?

6 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Um, what I can tell
7 is that, and like I've said in my testimony, right,
8 um, um, and you know this better than me, you know,
9 those neighborhoods in which arts and culture,
10 there's an investment of arts and culture. There's
11 an improvement in public safety. There's an
12 improvement in health. There's an improvement in
13 education. So I think it's important, as you've
14 said, that we rethink public safety in a much broader
15 way and not only about policing but also to bring the
16 resources in order for our communities to thrive.

17 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Um-hmm. Um, I
18 just want to say that these conversations, we're in a
19 point of urgency. There's a, there's a moment of
20 right now and so we have to elevate above and beyond
21 the conversations into real demands because if we
22 don't put those real demands forward right now this
23 window of opportunity is going to close. We have to
24 address issues in terms of systemic inequitable

2 funding, particularly into the organizations that are
3 funded by DCLA.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is up.

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: We have to change
6 the, the dynamics in terms of, I would think a power
7 position would be for DCLA to recognize an
8 institution of color, a black institution, in every
9 borough to be considered for CIG status. I think
10 that there are monuments and statues being torn down
11 all across the world. What is DCLA's position in
12 terms of how will they respond and put up statues and
13 monuments of people of color, from Lena Horn in Bed-
14 Sty to Ida B. Wells in Time Plaza? Um, and all
15 throughout this entire city. So if we don't move
16 urgently this window is going to close and the
17 systemic racism that has been and the inequitable
18 funding for communities of color and institutions of
19 color and, and those organizations that serve
20 communities of color is going to close.

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Do I have time to
22 respond to that?

23 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Yes.

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I think we lost,
25 great. Thank you. Um, just three things. One is,

2 and, and I mentioned this before. Um, we're doing a
3 lot of internal work ourselves to look at the way we
4 distribute funds and how that process can be much
5 more equitable. And we're gonna share that, um, some
6 of the, um, um, findings and, you know, actions with,
7 with all of you pretty soon. Two is, um, in
8 collaboration with the City Council there's a new
9 task force putting together all the monuments, and
10 while we're already committed as an administration to
11 build, ah, a number of monuments recognizing the work
12 of, um, people of color, um, I look forward to that
13 task force to help us continue to push that work, ah,
14 forward. And then in terms of, ah, CIGs, um, I
15 think, you know, each cultural organization is unique
16 and while becoming a CIG could be, um, helpful for a
17 few cultural organizations, um, that's not
18 necessarily the only answer that we can give as an,
19 as an agency in terms of, um, the, the kind of
20 relationship and partnership that we could have with
21 each cultural organization. That said, I look
22 forward to, um, talking to you offline, um, about all
23 these ideas, um, farther and come up with a plan.

24 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I look forward to
25 it. I have been waiting for a meeting for two or

2 three weeks now so I hope that we can have that
3 meeting scheduled. And I would say that while adding
4 additional organizations, ah, to the CIG, ah,
5 community, particularly through finding that could be
6 redirected from the NYPD, will not solve all of the
7 issues. Neither will the Parks Department renaming
8 parks after people of color. But it demonstrates a
9 significant step in the right direction to showing
10 that DCLA will not be business as usual. And I think
11 that the people, the community, and the fight needs
12 to hear that. There are people outside of our doors
13 on a everyday-basis as elected officials protesting
14 us, saying defund the NYPD, but we need those same
15 voices on the outside to also fight for redirecting
16 those funds to cultural institutions and communities
17 of color. That's where, that's where we've got to
18 start pushing this fight, because if we just keep
19 saying defund NYPD and we don't make that marriage
20 between our cultural communities we're gonna have a
21 lost opportunity. So I look forward to meeting with
22 you, um, to discuss many issues that we've discussed
23 today as well as in my district. Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Absolutely, and,
25 and my, my understanding is that the meeting is

2 already on the books. If it's not, I apologize for
3 that.

4 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: OK, so then I
5 won't curse out my scheduler. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, so, thank
7 you, ah, Commissioner. I do want to just, ah,
8 reiterate, um, ah, I don't know if, ah, Laurie heard
9 my opening, but, ah, ah, I am very proud to have been
10 one of the first council members to call for at least
11 one billion dollars in cuts to the NYPD and very
12 specifically, ah, ah stated the fact, ah,
13 reinvestment, ah, needs to come to culture and the
14 arts, um, and we are particularly, ah, ah, as the
15 Majority Leader very much knows, ah, included and
16 should be included when we talk about youth services,
17 education, health services, ah, and obviously, ah,
18 reallocating, ah, a portion of these funds to, ah,
19 communities of color and cultural organizations of
20 color. Um, so on that we agree and I hope, ah, as
21 the next eight or nine days, ah, unfold we can get
22 there. Um, so with that I think, ah, ah,
23 Commissioner Casals, we are, um, ah, thankful that
24 you have taken on this roll. Ah, I wish it had
25 happened under different circumstances. Ah, we're

2 grateful to see you healthy and, ah, smiling and, um,
3 obviously you and I coordinated on backdrops since we
4 both have our, ah, bookcases, um, ah, framing out our
5 collective words.

6 COMMISSIONER CASALS: And glasses.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, and
8 glasses, gone to all glasses during this moment.
9 Um, but, ah, thank you. And I know that we want to
10 move on to hearing from, ah, so many of our wonderful
11 cultural organizations who have been extremely
12 patient, ah, in what has been a challenging, ah,
13 hearing, ah, technologically this morning. So, um,
14 with that, thank you, Commissioner Casals.

15 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you. And
16 I'll stay for the rest of the hearing.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, please,
18 thank you. And I know then that Brenda McKinney, our
19 general counsel, will call the first four, ah, people
20 who will testify.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank you
22 so much, Chair Van Bramer. Um, we, the next person
23 to testify, um, was Manhattan Borough President,
24 President Gail Brewer. Um, we think that we have
25 lost her. So we will keep going. Um, before we move

2 on, ah, I just want to double check that no other
3 members of the committee have questions. OK, great.
4 Um, so we'll begin with a few housekeeping items
5 about public testimony, and I will call the four
6 names of the first panelists. So we have now
7 concluded administration testimony and we will turn
8 to public testimony. Once more, I'd like to remind
9 everyone, individuals will be called up in a panel of
10 four people. Council members who have questions for
11 a particular panelist should raise their hand in Zoom
12 using the raise hand function. You will be called on
13 after everyone on the panel has completed their
14 testimony. For panelists, once your name is called a
15 member of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant
16 at Arms will give you the go-ahead to begin after
17 setting the timer. Please remember to wait for the
18 timer, which will be set to two minutes, and all
19 testimony will be strictly limited to two minutes.
20 Um, again, we will wait to see if we, if the
21 Manhattan Borough President rejoins us. But for now
22 I will, um, list the name of the next four, the first
23 four panelists for public testimony. Please wait for
24 the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin
25 before delivering your testimony. The first four

2 individuals will be John Calvelli, Sade Lythcott,
3 Lucy Sexton, and Alejandra Duke, ah, excuse my
4 pronunciation, but Sifuentes. So the first panelist
5 is John Calvelli from WCS and the CIG. Mr. Calvelli?

6 JOHN CALVELLI: Good afternoon, Chairman
7 Van Bramer and members of the...

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time will begin now.

9 JOHN CALVELLI: Can you hear me?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, yes, that's the
11 Sergeant beginning the clock. Thank you.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
13 now.

14 JOHN CALVELLI: Good afternoon, Chairman
15 Van Bramer and members of the committee, Commissioner
16 Gonzalo Casals. I am John Calvelli, executive VP for
17 Public Affairs at the Wildlife Conservation Society
18 and chair of the Cultural Institutions Group, and
19 cofounder of New Yorkers for Culture and Arts. I am
20 here today to provide testimony on behalf of the
21 CIGs, a coalition of 34 cultural organizations who
22 share a public-private partnership with the City of
23 New York and are located in all five boroughs of the
24 city, employing approximately 11,400 people with more
25 than 8000 additional volunteers. Culture, as you

3 know, is critical to education, providing a first-
4 ever job for many young students, maintaining vibrant
5 lives of seniors, sustaining mental health in our
6 communities, and community well-being overall. Over
7 the past 80-plus days since New York went on PAUSE we
8 have seen the New York cultural community come
9 together like no other time, rallying support for
10 each other's organizations, and tenaciously finding
11 ways to continue to provide educational and essential
12 services to their communities, and thank you,
13 Commissioner, for referencing some of the things that
14 we've done. As a universal language, it gives voice
15 to communities and is accessible across all social
16 boundaries. Culture has historically played a
17 pivotal role in social justice reform. What better
18 time than this moment in history to support our
19 community. In the CIG-led culture at 3:00 p.m. call
20 we have seen this play out and today as a
21 representative of the CIG I would like to convey the
22 importance of the city holding fast in support of the
23 cultural organizations that will be completely
24 decimated if City Council initiatives are taken away,
25 specifically those organizations, ah, that have
played such a pivotal role, ah, throughout this

2 period. Ah, organizations such as the National Black
3 Theater, the Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora
4 Arts, and many others who stand to be gravely harmed
5 should city funding be cut in these critical areas.
6 As the community we need to ensure that the budget
7 policies of the City of New York can keep the
8 cultural ecology of the city alive and represent
9 those needs and values. New York is at a critical
10 juncture, where it can lead the state and nation...

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

12 JOHN CALVELLI: ...in rebuilding a more
13 equitable city for all who come to call it home.
14 Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK, thank you. Chair
16 Van Bramer, um, we will, so, again, to reiterate, we
17 will go through the entire panel and then hold
18 questions for the end. If council members have
19 questions please raise your hand in the Zoom raise
20 hand function using that function. Um, so the next
21 panelist in the panel of four, if you are ready...

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sade Lythcott. Thank
24 you.

2 SADE LYTHCOTT: Good morning, and thank
3 you, Council Member Van Bramer, Majority Leader
4 Cumbo, and Commissioner Casals. Um, my name is Sade
5 Lythcott. I testify today as the CEO of the National
6 Black Theater, the oldest continually run black
7 theater in New York. I'm also the chair of
8 Coalitions of Theaters of Color, a coalition that
9 represents the largest body of culturally specific
10 theaters in New York City, but enjoys the smallest
11 amount of cultural dollars through the council's CTC
12 initiative. I come here as a cultural leader who
13 watched my mother, Dr. Barbara Ann Teer, fight until
14 her last breath to get this coalition the security of
15 baseline funding, only to be inexplicably removed
16 from the executive budget shortly after her death in
17 2008 into the world of, into the world of a vital but
18 insecure discretionary funding. We as the CTC
19 represent 52 cultural institutions across all five
20 boroughs in communities hardest hit by COVID-19.
21 Today our missions are more vital than ever in
22 playing a key role in the recovery of our great city
23 and as many of our, and as many of our organizations
24 are more than just theaters, CTC institutions have
25 functioned as safe havens for our communities in

2 which they operate, each year serving millions of New
3 Yorkers with vitally needed cultural, educational,
4 social, economic resources and opportunities for
5 youth, senior, families in local neighborhoods and
6 the broader residents living in the outer boroughs.
7 These are the same people and communities who have
8 suffered systemic underinvestment and oppression that
9 have resulted in overwhelming and disproportionate
10 numbers of deaths due to COVID-19 and on the
11 frontlines of police brutality. Today I testify with
12 pristine understanding of the tremendous deficits
13 that the city is facing and the inarguable fact that
14 City Council's budget will have to endure deep and
15 sweeping cuts. However, today we are asking that no
16 harm come to the initiative funding for the CTC
17 [inaudible] redistribution...

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time's up.

19 SADE LYTHCOTT: ...[inaudible] direction
20 of funds from the NYPD be used to actually increase
21 the initiative funding. Lastly, and I will submit
22 the rest of my testimony, um, but lastly I want to
23 point out that we as artists share a common private
24 with you electeds, that you are, too, storytellers.
25 Every vote, every decision, every cut tells a story.

2 I would challenge you and say look at the decisions
3 in front of you as the greatest story ever told.

4 Look at the budget as a moral narrative to tell the
5 story of our lives, our values, and reflect back the
6 priorities of not only our great city, but of our
7 times. You get the absolute privilege to articulate
8 our stated values into loving action. What a private
9 you have to be a power of, the power of storytelling.
10 You, like us artists and art workers, have the
11 responsibility of imagining and manifesting a new and
12 better world. This is your chance, like the artists
13 you reverse so, to be creative, to be bold, and take
14 courageous risks towards budget justice, to shine a
15 light in these dark times onto spaces that need it
16 most. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
18 your testimony. We'll now move to the next member of
19 the panel, Ms. Lucy Sexton of New Yorkers for Culture
20 and Arts. Please wait for the sergeant.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired. Your
22 time will begin now.

23 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you for hearing my
24 and so many others' testimony, and thank you, ah,
25 Chair Van Bramer and the entire City Council for all

3 the care and work you have been doing for our city in
4 this crisis. My name is Lucy Sexton. I'm proud to
5 head New Yorkers for Culture and Arts, a citywide
6 coalition of cultural groups of every size, from
7 every neighbor. The damage of COVID to every artist,
8 cultural worker, and organization has been immense.
9 I am submitting with my testimony the results of the
10 survey the commissioner referenced. These 144 groups
11 who answered it, a mere 10% of the city's cultural
12 sector, have combined operating budgets of 2.2
13 billion dollars, a work force of 22,000 people, and
14 the engagement of 10,000 volunteers. These groups
15 projected a revenue loss of 489 million dollars
16 through June 30 alone. It's not just their work
17 forces that are impacted. As the comptroller's
18 recent report noted, the creative economy generates
19 110 billion dollars in economic activity for our
20 city. So a crisis for culture is a crisis for our
21 city. Despite the shutdown, culture never closed.
22 As you'll see in the survey, culture is playing a
23 critical role in addressing the pressing needs of
24 communities devastated by this crisis, serving as
25 food distribution centers, testing centers, relief
centers for protestors, doing critical census

2 outreach and more. Online programs provide a
3 lifeline for kids stuck at home, for seniors
4 struggling with isolation, and offline Queens Theater
5 and are others are sending packages of art materials
6 to kids at home. This is in a school district where
7 104 children have lost one or both parents in Queens.
8 For their and all of our mental health we need the
9 connection, the catharsis that arts and culture
10 provide. Data shows neighborhoods with robust
11 cultural centers have better outcomes in education,
12 aging, youth caught up in the criminal justice
13 system, community strength and safety, and more. My
14 colleague, Nikisha Hamilton at the Brooklyn Museum,
15 points out that if you look at the old redlining maps
16 alongside the COVID maps you'll see they are the
17 same. And if you then add the map of cultural assets
18 you see they, the cultural assets are missing in
19 those exact neighborhoods. As you struggle with this
20 budget during this time of crisis and upheaval, we
21 ask that you break with the past.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is up.

23 LUCY SEXTON: Instead of funding arts and
24 culture first, instead of slashing arts education,
25 instead of abandoning those neighborhoods hardest

2 hit, we ask that you imagine a city where every
3 citizen has value, every neighborhood deserves the
4 dignity, the healing, and community strengthening
5 power that culture provides. Arts and culture can,
6 again, lead the economic regeneration of our
7 communities, but City Council needs to keep culture
8 whole in order for us to do that work. And when a
9 full 40% of the cultural dollars get added at
10 adoption, keeping culture for every community strong
11 means supporting both DCLA and initiative funding.

12 Thank you so much.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Ms.

14 Sexton. Before we move to the final member of this
15 panel, I'm going to read the members of panel 2 to
16 let you know that, um, it will be starting soon. So
17 the panel 2 members will be Karen Acromon, Sheila
18 Lewandowsky, and Lisa Gold. Now the final member of
19 panel one is Alejandra Duke Sifuentes, excuse me if
20 that's mispronounced, from Dance NYC. Please wait
21 for the sergeant.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

23 ALEJANDRA DUKE SIFUENTES: Thank you.

24 Thank you for bringing us together and for listening
25 to this testimony at this time. My name is Alejandra

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2 Duke Sifuentes. I am a Rego Park, Queens resident
3 and immigrant New Yorker, and I serve as the
4 executive director of Dance NYC. On behalf of Dance
5 NYC, a service organization which serves over 5000
6 individual dance workers, 1200 dance-making entities,
7 and 500 nonprofit dance companies based in New York
8 City, including dance workers of color, immigrants,
9 and disabled dance workers. I join colleague
10 advocates working across creative disciplines in
11 thanking the committee for your leadership during
12 this time and in requesting one, that the committee
13 include arts and culture communities in your economic
14 support and relief plans and pass legislation to
15 protect our organization and workers. Two, that the
16 committee acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of
17 slavery and establish and execute a plan to address
18 those impacts and re pair the harm done by
19 immediately establishing a commission for reparations
20 for past and continuing harms inflicted upon black
21 and indigenous peoples, from colonialism to slavery
22 through food and housing redlining, mass
23 incarceration, and surveillance. And three, that the
24 committee reduces the proposed cuts to the arts and
25 culture sector, particularly black, indigenous, and

2 people of color led in serving organizations,
3 ensuring that they remain necessary workers and
4 community members in New York City. After this
5 pandemic and the recent national unrest due to the
6 ongoing murders of black people at the hands of a
7 white supremacist system, um, and those who benefit
8 and uphold it, there is no returning to business as
9 usual. Culture is what makes New York City the most
10 important city in the world and a leading force that
11 has lead our economic and social recovery and past
12 crises, including 9/11. During this crisis it has
13 been made evident that artists are necessary workers
14 and dance organizations, artists, dance workers, and
15 educators have remained active providing online
16 classes, digital performances, conversations on
17 recovery, developing and providing mental health
18 support, providing recovery...

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is up.

20 ALEJANDRO DUKE SIFUENTES: ...and mutual
21 aid support to their neighborhood, and making all of
22 the countermeasures possible to ensure the ongoing
23 payment and care of their staffs while experiencing
24 steep revenue drops. We encourage you to continue to
25

2 put your money where your mouth is at and every step
3 of the way as we support the recovery of the city.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

5 Chair Van Bramer, this is the end of panel one.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, ah,
7 very much. First of all I, I just want to, ah, say a
8 couple of things. Um, ah, John, thank you for your
9 work. Um, Sade, ah, I don't know if you've ever
10 thought of running for office but after hearing your
11 testimony, and I totally want to encourage you to do
12 that, um, and, ah, just let you know that, um, we are
13 big supporters of, of CTC and, ah, both the Majority
14 Leader and I worked together last year on the budget
15 negotiating team and there was a, a very significant
16 increase. I realize you're, ah, asking for another,
17 ah, very significant increase. But there is a
18 commitment, um, ah, to the CTC, both on my part and,
19 and obviously also the Majority Leader, and, ah, and
20 I agree with you that this budget is the eleventh
21 budget that I have participated in, um, but it's
22 without question the most important budget, um, ah,
23 from the very place of values and what we're saying
24 with this budget and, and how we, ah, reorient our
25 society. So, um, I hear you and, and I am feeling

3 that very strongly as we go through this process
4 that, ah, um, that I want to vote in a way that truly
5 reflects my values and, and meet this moment and, um,
6 and so I thank you for that. Um, and, and Lucy, um,
7 ah, the council has been very strong and I believe
8 we'll continue to be very strong. Ah, but we also
9 need the administration to be very strong here in
10 support of culture and the arts, right. There are
11 two, ah, um, elements to this tango and, and so we
12 just can't have, ah, the council alone pushing. We
13 need the administration to meet us and, and create
14 this budget that we want. Ah, and Alejandra, I just
15 want to say thank you, um, for your testimony. Um,
16 as Sheila knows and a few other people know, ah,
17 dance is my absolute, ah, favorite ah, ah, thing in
18 the arts, although I love everyone equally, but, um,
19 ah, it is something that I, it's actually the only
20 thing I can personally do when it comes to the arts,
21 um, as the chair of this committee for the last 11
22 years and, um, and I, I respect your organization and
23 everything that you said, ah, ah, and agree, ah, on,
24 on the reparations. That's something that, ah,
25 Council Member Inez Barron has been talking about,
um, for a long time, and as I've mentioned in other

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2 calls and other meetings, um, ah, the world is
3 catching up to council member Inez Barron, um, and,
4 ah, and I hope this is the moment for that as well.
5 Um, and also you mentioned you're from, from Queens,
6 so I just have to say as a fellow Queens resident,
7 um, thank you for that. Um, love to Queens. Um, so
8 with that I think, ah, ah, I'll ask our counsel
9 again, Brenda McKinney, to call the next panel.
10 Thank you all.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
12 Chair Van Bramer. We do not have any other council
13 member questions for this panel at this time. So we
14 will move to the next panel. We will also be adding
15 one person, Rachel Amy, to this panel, so it will be
16 four people, um, followed by questions from council
17 members. So I'll read those names again before
18 moving to Karen Acromon. Ah, the panel two will be
19 Karen Acromon, Sheila Lewandowsky, Lisa Gold, and
20 Rachel Amy. So, Ms. Acromon, um, if you can wait for
21 the sergeant to bring your testimony, you may begin.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
23 now.

24 KAREN ACROMON: I'm Karen Acromon,
25 executive director of Queens [inaudible], vice chair

3 of the CIG, also in Queens. The last time I had the
4 opportunity to address this committee was in early
5 March. That day I shared that a respondent to a
6 survey had said that growing up in New York cultural
7 institutions were places of hope that were always
8 available to them, places of hope. That has taken
9 new meaning over the last three months as New York
10 has confronted and grappled with the crises of a
11 global pandemic, record job losses, and the pain of
12 systemic racism. In these three months I have seen
13 New York's cultural leaders come together from
14 organizations of all scales and disciplines across
15 all five boroughs, sharing resources, and supporting
16 each other. I've seen our institutions prove that we
17 are places of hope, even when our doors are closed.
18 At Queens Theater our motto became Queens Theater is
19 more than a building. We worked with our Su Casa
20 partners, Queens senior centers, and set up weekly
21 calls with teaching artists performing and the
22 seniors themselves sharing original poems, songs, and
23 jokes. We moved our CASA programs online, working
24 with teachers to incorporate them in their plans. We
25 shared videos of Queens families at home playing
music together and held weekly digital story circles.

2 One participant said that the story circle was the
3 first time they had spoken to another person in a
4 week. After the murder of George Floyd we created an
5 affinity space for black women, trans, and nonbinary
6 community members to grieve and find joy together.
7 We continued our Theater For All initiative to
8 advance the inclusion of disabled people in the
9 performing art, a project that had been funded in
10 part by the Disability Forward Fund, at our planning
11 events in recognition of the 30th anniversary of the
12 ADA. As conversations turn to reopening and to the
13 city coming back from this, people say that New
14 Yorkers are resilient. As someone who was not raised
15 here, but who has chosen to raise a family here I
16 urge you don't underestimate the role that the
17 richness and diversity of the entire cultural sector
18 plays in making New Yorkers resilient. We are places
19 of hope, even when our doors are closed.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Ms.

22 Acromon. We will move to the next member of the
23 committee, Ms. Sheila Lewandowsky, or, sorry, excuse
24 me, the next member of the panel. Ms. Lewandowsky,
25 when the sergeant calls you may begin your testimony.

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
3 now.

4 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKY: Good afternoon,
5 chairman and friend, Jimmy Van Bramer, and the
6 committee. Thank you for this opportunity to
7 testify. My name is Sheila Lewandowsky, cofounder
8 and executive director of The Chocolate Factory
9 Theater in Long Island City, Queens. Um, get right
10 into it. I do not envy the task before you. You are
11 fighting for the body and the soul of this city, for
12 the bodies and souls of all who inhabit this city,
13 prioritizing monies collected from all of us for all
14 of us. My mom told me this week about prioritizing
15 feeding us when we are on food stamps when I was a
16 child. She said she made it work with \$7 a week for
17 food. She also made sure we had music, drawing,
18 dancing, playing, and storytelling, and she
19 volunteered doing arts with the community center in
20 the projects we lived in, because a full belly
21 without hope, dreams, community, and learning is not
22 living. All moms want their children to have futures
23 and hopes. Now you have to decide what you want for
24 this city, want the city to have in its future.
25 That's the council and the executive branch. Now is

3 not the time to cut funding for culture in New York,
4 especially not now and especially not initiative
5 funding specific to organizations run by and serving
6 communities of color and those historically unseen
7 and not heard. We need more ways to elevate the
8 diverse voices, blackness, queerness, immigrants,
9 First Nation, everyone. We need to come together to
10 build truthful, consistent, lasting equity using
11 culture and the arts. We need greater truth in
12 education told through stories of and by the
13 oppressed and marginalized told in dance, music,
14 theater, painting, sculptures, the recontextualizing
15 of public art and monuments. These truths, if fully
16 supported, will help lead the city in its recovery.
17 As you prioritize this budget, that is a fraction of
18 its prior self, keep in mind that culture will help
19 in the economic recovery, too. The world is rising
20 to its feet for truth and will return to and look to
21 New York City if New York City leads the way
22 supporting culture and the arts, not just through the
23 COVID-19 recovery. But we cannot be partners if you
24 cut us now and expect us to be here next year. Some
25 of us, including artists, may not be here next year
anyway if council rent or some comprehensive rent

2 relief does not come through. The eviction extension
3 will not protect us. The Chocolate Factory has
4 continued without stop to employ a year-round team
5 and artists whether or not they are able to be in our
6 space. We continue to work with peers, small local
7 businesses to make Queens and New York City vibrant.
8 This morning when the park opened across the street
9 my phone blew up with people asking about the
10 sprinklers, because that's the kind of partner we
11 are. We are and want to be ready to come back to the
12 city, but we need help. We cannot shut down now and
13 just reopen in a year. And echoing what Sade has
14 said, a budget is a frame for a story. What is the
15 story you want for the city? What are your
16 priorities for a just and humane city? Tell us your
17 story.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time's up.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
20 Ms. Lewandowsky. Um, as a reminder, if council
21 members have questions please raise your hand using
22 the Zoom raise hand function. We'll move to
23 questions after all panelists. The next member of
24 panel two, the next person will be Lisa Gold. Ms.

2 Gold. Once the sergeant calls the clock you may
3 begin. Thank you.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

5 LISA GOLD: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer
6 and the entire City Council for this opportunity. My
7 name is Lisa Gold and I'm the executive director of
8 the Asian American Arts Alliance, known as A4. We're
9 a small but very mighty 37-year-old Brooklyn-based
10 service organization dedicated to ensuring greater
11 representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian
12 American artists and arts organizations, as well as
13 providing a critical voice for this community. And
14 right now our community is hurting. Yet we remain
15 hopeful and resilient. Um, our constituents,
16 primarily Asian American artists, have been uniquely
17 impacted by COVID-19. I mean, of course, the entire
18 cultural community has been affected by closings and
19 cancellations, yet our community faces the added
20 weight of anti-Asian racism, harassment, and attacks
21 due to the framings of the origins of the
22 coronavirus. So we at A4 have been working overtime
23 to ensure that our community feels safe and connected
24 and cared for. In mid March we surveyed our
25 constituents and we adjusted all of our programs and

2 services based on what they said that they needed.

3 We created a comprehensive list of financial and

4 COVID and APA-specific resources that have been

5 shared throughout the community. We've developed

6 programs, such as the Resilience and Response to

7 Anti-Asian Racism Workshop, which has garnered more

8 than 5700 views on Facebook. And we'll continue to

9 bring together our community and share their powerful

10 work through our events like July's town hall, which

11 features artists in solidarity with justice

12 movements. Our creative community contributes so

13 much to the greatness of this city, and we comprise

14 about 15% of the city's population. We need the

15 support of the Department of Cultural Affairs and the

16 City Council to ensure that New Yorkers and this

17 community can recover fully, economically,

18 emotionally, and culturally. I just, I ask and I beg

19 of you to please ensure that the arts, especially in

20 underserved and traditionally underfunded communities

21 continue to receive the council's fullest support.

22 Thank you all.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
24 your testimony. We will now move to the final member

25

2 of this panel, Ms. Rachel Amy. You may begin when
3 the sergeant calls the clock.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

5 RACHEL AMY: Thank you for having me. My
6 name is Rachel Amy and I am the executive director of
7 Drag Queen Story Hour NYC. Drag Queen Story Hour is
8 a program where drag queens read stories to children
9 in libraries, schools, and community spaces all
10 across the city. Through storytelling and creativity
11 our program teaches children about gender diversity
12 and all forms of difference to build empathy and give
13 kids the confidence to express themselves however
14 they feel comfortable. During these challenging
15 times messages of acceptance and empathy are more
16 important than ever. We believe that educating a
17 more empathetic new generation of kids begins with
18 diverse books and diverse storytelling experiences.
19 Drag Queen Story Hour NYC began providing virtual
20 programming on March 20, two days before the citywide
21 shutdown. Since then we've produced 73 virtual Drag
22 Queen Story Hour events via Zoom, Google Meets, and
23 Instagram live in partnership with the public library
24 systems, local schools, and other community
25 organizations. And thanks in large part to funding

3 from the New York City Council members and Department
4 of Cultural Affairs. Um, through our virtual
5 programming we're actually reaching more children
6 than in regular times since many of our live stream
7 events are viewed by hundreds of people. Um, our
8 library partners tell us that our program is among
9 the most popular of their virtual programming. The
10 following is a quote from Fritzie Bodenheimer, press
11 officer, Brooklyn Public Library. She says, "One of
12 our most popular live stream programs this week has
13 been Drag Queen Story Hour. The drag queens are so
14 sparkly and colorful and the kids just love to hear
15 stories and songs from them. Many of the stories
16 they read are about tolerance and acceptance and
17 love, so it's even more important to present that at
18 this time when we all need a little more love." Um,
19 and our Brooklyn Public Library programs, which we
20 do, um, once or twice a month, are funded in part,
21 um, due to support from Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo.
22 Um, the following is a quote from, um, Erin Levowsky,
23 the PTA president at PS-150Q in Astoria. "PS-150Q
24 was scheduled to have Drag Queen Story Hour performed
25 last month before the schools closed, and we were so

2 happy when they offered to perform virtually. We had
3 such a lovely evening...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is up.

5 RACHEL AMY: ...um, with students from K
6 to 5 joining a virtual meeting to hear Harmonica read
7 wonderful stories of inclusion and sing songs." Um,
8 so I just wanted to end by saying that we're a very
9 grassroots organization. Um, I'm the only staff
10 member and I work part time and we depend on the New
11 York City Council members for support. Um, we're so
12 grateful to you, Council Member Danny Dromm, Council
13 Member Jimmy Van Bramer, um, Council Member Carlina
14 Rivera, Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo, Council Member
15 Ben Kallos, and Council Member Keith Powers for
16 support, and we hope we can count on your support
17 next year. Thank you very much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

19 I'm going to move to Chair Van Bramer. Um, this is,
20 this concludes panel two. Ah, Council Member Cumbo
21 also has a question.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Ah,
23 I just want to say as a queer man living in the
24 borough of Queens this panel was, ah, spot on with
25 Drag Queen Story Hour and, of course, Karen and, ah,

2 Sheila and, ah, thank you Lisa, obviously, for all of
3 your work. Um, you know, and I was really, ah, happy
4 I participated in a couple of Drag Queen Story Hour,
5 um, ah, ah, performances and programs as well. And,
6 again, that's an example of the fact that many of you
7 continue to, ah, do work, um, while, um, we can't do
8 them in the places and the spaces that we've done
9 them in previously. Ah, and, ah, thank you again to,
10 ah, Karen and Sheila for, um, talking about, ah, the
11 importance of centering, ah, all of this work that we
12 do, and Lisa, ah, on the budget, ah, and making sure
13 that it's, ah, it's doing budget justice, ah, and
14 that we are, ah, really focused on, um, black and
15 brown communities and, and communities that have been
16 underserved, ah, for far too long. So, um, with that
17 I just want to thank everyone and, and throw it to,
18 ah, Majority Leader Cumbo [inaudible] gonna speak,
19 ah, to this panel as well.

20 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you so
21 much, Chair Van Bramer. I just wanted to, because I
22 have to get on a budget negotiation, um, meeting,
23 I'll look out for you, Jimmy. Um, I think it's very
24 important that we continue, I, I recognize the
25 importance of the budget and all of the, the

2 organizations want to get adequate funding. But I
3 think we also have to dig deeper as organizations and
4 find solutions to address the systemic inequities
5 that are happening all throughout the city. And I
6 think it's important for cultural institutions
7 specifically to recognize the Black Lives Matter
8 movement, to dig deep and find out how can we hear
9 what's being said and how can we adequately respond
10 to it, and I think that collectively all
11 organizations that are being funded by the Department
12 of Cultural Affairs need to find some way that
13 unifies how are we responding to the Black Lives
14 Matter movement as cultural institutions in New York
15 City. If we continue to just stay focused on getting
16 funding, which is critical and I get that, and, and
17 we all understand that, but we have to take advantage
18 of this moment to discover how does the Black Lives
19 movement matter impact our organizations, how can we
20 have a statement collectively, and what are the
21 innovative and revolutionary ideas that we want to
22 see to turn this city inside out and upside down in
23 order to reflect the demands that are being made by
24 the people, and it's important that we do something
25 radically different to respond. So I just wanted to

2 put that out there because I totally understand as
3 being the founder of a not-for-profit cultural
4 institution, I understand the need for money and it's
5 real and it's not just money, it's of investment,
6 and, but we also have to dig deeper to find things we
7 can do collectively together and to be able to put
8 out something to say that however many 900 groups
9 that are supported by the DCLA we are committed to
10 doing X, Y, and Z in response to the Black Lives
11 Matter movement and the pandemic that COVID-19
12 exposed of systemic inequalities that are as rampant
13 throughout the city and our healthcare agencies as it
14 is in our cultural institutions. So I'm gonna end
15 there. I'm gonna be back and forth because this is a
16 critically important conversation and the role of the
17 cultural institutions is critically important in
18 rebuilding our city, rebuilding it in an equitable
19 way that's fair and that recognize that the greatest
20 pandemic we have had has been racism. So I will end
21 there and I'll continue to be checking in back and
22 forth. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Brenda,
25 are you gonna call the next panel?

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: OK.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So the next panel,
5 panel three, thank you, Chair Van Bramer, we will
6 have four people and we will take questions at the
7 end of the panel. The first person is Linda Kennedy
8 from the Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum,
9 followed by Anna Cherino, again apologies for any
10 mispronunciation, from El Museo del Barrio, followed
11 by Jack Kleger from the Museum of Jewish Heritage,
12 followed by the New York Historical Society and Ms.
13 Cheryl Morgan. So the next witness will be Linda
14 Kennedy. You can begin when the sergeant calls the
15 clock.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin your
17 time now.

18 LINDA KENNEDY: I'm Linda Kennedy. I'm
19 the vice president of evaluation and education at the
20 Intrepid Museum and a Woodside resident, so yay
21 Queens represent. Um, thank you for having me here
22 today. Um, like many of our institutional peers
23 we've had to make some tough decisions being closed
24 for basically a quarter of our year, and have been
25 operating with nearly 80% furlough of staff. In

2 spite of that, the museum's education department
3 produced daily live free digital programming aimed to
4 support schools and families, and have served 3000
5 people through those as of the beginning of June. We
6 redesigned programs offered for teacher professional
7 development, teams, veterans and their families, and
8 children and adults with cognitive, developmental,
9 and physical disabilities, all to be provided
10 remotely. We've continued work with our CASA school
11 partners and our immigrant initiative school
12 partners, serving over 500 students in virtual
13 afterschool sessions. And we've continued with our
14 career ladder paid internships with our mentors
15 working with the students to finish out their
16 projects and produce a day-long virtual use summit
17 for 400 of their peers. We've had two virtual
18 astronomy programs, serving 12,000 people from all
19 over the world through Twitch TV and featuring
20 astronauts, which is Mike Massimino, Nicole Stott,
21 and Garrett Reisman. And while remote programming
22 has helped us reach audiences all over the world, our
23 heart, of course, is here and we've been working with
24 our partners in the New York City Department of
25 Education, the Department of Homeless Services, the

2 three city library systems, and others to provide
3 engaging, inspiring content to local communities as
4 much as possible. And as we look forward to the time
5 where we can safely reopen our doors, we encourage
6 and thank you for the continued support, for the
7 contribution of museums and cultural organizations to
8 the educational community and economic fabric of New
9 York City.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Moving to
11 the next witness, ah, Ms. Anna Cherino from El Museo
12 del Barrio. You may begin when the sergeant.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.

14 ANNA CHERINO: Thank you to the City
15 Council today for the opportunity to speak about arts
16 and culture in these pivotal times. Thank you also
17 to DCLA for their support of the arts, and to our new
18 commissioner, we are proud to have you as [inaudible]
19 alum. My name is Anna Cherino. I'm representing El
20 Museo del Barrio. We are an anchor of the East
21 Harlem community, started over 50 years ago by
22 artists, parents, and educators with the goal of
23 raising up the Puerto Rican and Latinx community that
24 at the time and still is plagued by systemic racism,
25 divestment, and alienation, issues which I'm pained

3 to say we are still in the struggle of addressing and
4 even acknowledging. This year we have been forced to
5 face the historical lack of access to health in black
6 and brown communities, the [inaudible] of our labor
7 force, and how the institutions that are there to
8 protect us do not. Black and brown communities are
9 intimately familiar with these dynamics. Diversity,
10 equity, accessible, and inclusion for us has always
11 been a survival issue. It's not just about hiring
12 practices. We are glad that these issues are now
13 gaining the light that they merit and the political
14 will that will be needed to eliminate them after
15 this, a pandemic that has uprooted our daily lives
16 and the systems upon which we all depend. East
17 Harlem, by the way, was one of the most affected
18 neighborhoods. As we transition from a moment to a
19 movement we all have a responsibility to each other
20 and our social fabric. The role of cultural
21 organizations will be undeniable through the
22 different functions we serve. Culture educates. We
23 learn together with our audiences about how we need
24 to change. Culture presents art. We highlight
25 voices [inaudible] Latinx voices so often
marginalized. Culture is also a convener. As we

2 create spaces where people come together we
3 facilitate healing and social cohesion. At El Museo
4 art is not for art's sake. We serve over 12,000
5 students a year through our educational programs. We
6 host art workshops for seniors with dementia. We do
7 job training for youth on the autism spectrum. We
8 place teaching artists in schools with a lack of arts
9 programming. Work, we work with inmates on Riker's
10 Island. We lead the largest [inaudible] parade in
11 the state. We celebrate Dia de los Muertos and work
12 with our local healthcare facilities to bring arts to
13 those in recovery. We conduct census phone banking
14 and outreach and we present programming by our
15 bilingual digital initiative [inaudible] and through
16 CASA.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is up.

18 ANNA CHERINO: We're a POC-led
19 organization [inaudible] El Museo del Barrio and one
20 of the smallest CIGs, this work would not be possible
21 with the support of the New York City Council. This
22 crisis has affected all of us and we're facing an
23 unprecedented fiscal landscape. We must be unified
24 as we confront what comes. That being said, we
25 humbly request that the City Council allow us to

2 continue serving our public via public funds if at
3 all possible. A budget is a moral document and as we
4 talk about reinvesting in our communities we should
5 also be talking about important role that local arts
6 organizations play in developing our neighborhoods
7 and enriching the lives of our black, indigenous, and
8 POC youth. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
10 your testimony. We'll now move to the next witness.
11 We'll hold questions for the end of the panel. We're
12 moving to witness number three, ah, Mr. Jack Kleger
13 from the Museum of Jewish Heritage, a living memorial
14 to the Holocaust. You may begin when the sergeant
15 calls the clock.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 JACK KLEGER: Thank you to Chair Van
18 Bramer and the other members of the council for the
19 opportunity to speak today. My name is Ari
20 Goldstein. Jack Kleger was planning to testify
21 himself, but he couldn't participate given the delay
22 this morning. So I will deliver Jack's testimony on
23 behalf of the Museum of Jewish Heritage. Located in
24 Battery Park City, we are the third-largest Holocaust
25 museum in the world and the primary resource for

3 teaching and learning about anti-Semitism in New
4 York. We usually educate more than 200,000 visitors
5 per year, including more than 60,000 New York
6 schoolchildren, about the history and lessons of the
7 Holocaust. Our work is grounded in the conviction
8 that teaching the evils of the past to the next
9 generation will help build a more compassionate and
10 tolerant world. That goal is more important than
11 ever before, with anti-Semitic hate crimes and racism
12 against many minority communities in New York rising
13 sharply over the last several years, and particularly
14 so during the coronavirus pandemic. The Museum of
15 Jewish Heritage is rising to the challenges presented
16 by the pandemic by creating new online resources
17 focused on teaching virtually what hate can do, as
18 well as weekly professional development seminars for
19 New York educators, online classes for New York
20 students, and public programs for people across the
21 country. All our online programs are free and our
22 content is aligned with the urgent calls for racial
23 justice and an end to police violence being made by
24 so many members of our community. Since the pandemic
25 forced us to close our doors on March 15, we've
created online educational programming that has

3 reached more than 80,000 people. We've been treating
4 the pandemic not only as a threat to our old way of
5 doing things, but also as an opportunity to do things
6 a new way, to make progress towards our goal of going
7 beyond the walls of the museum and reaching people
8 directly in their homes and communities. But amidst
9 the successes we've had in going behind the walls and
10 reaching so many people with our educational content,
11 the pandemic is presenting the museum with an
12 existential crisis. It has reduced all our revenue
13 streams, required us to cancel our in-person events
14 through at least December, and forced us to lay
15 off...

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 JACK KLEGER: ...more than 40% of our
18 staff, including much of our education department.
19 We will do our best to pursue our essential mission
20 as a New York educational and cultural institution
21 over the months ahead. But this work will be
22 extremely challenging with our reduced staff, and
23 even more so if we don't receive funding at expected
24 levels from the city. On behalf of Jack Kleger, I
25 ask the city to prioritize funding for institutions
like ours amidst this budget crisis because

2 educational work to combat anti-Semitism and racism
3 cannot wait until the pandemic is over. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
5 your testimony. We will be moving on to the final
6 witness in this panel, and just to remind people we
7 do have a two-minute clock because of the list of
8 witnesses. But, um, we will be reviewing all written
9 testimony in detail. So, um, you can still submit
10 written and updates to written testimony up to 72
11 hours after the hearing, and that will be reviewed in
12 testimony, um, if you cannot orally testify to all of
13 it. So the last member of this panel is Ms. Cheryl
14 Morgan from the New York Historical Society, and then
15 we will be calling the next panel. Before we move to
16 the final panelist I'll also read the names of the
17 people on the next panel. The first member will be
18 Christopher Mendoza from the National 9/11 Memorial
19 Museum, Ms. Siri Horvitz from the Lincoln Center, Ms.
20 Janice Monger from Staten Island Museum, and Angel
21 Hernandez from the New York Botanical Garden. That's
22 the next panel, but first we will move to, um, the
23 last witness on this panel, Ms. Morgan. Thank you.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

2 CHERYL MORGAN: My name is Cheryl Morgan
3 and I am the director of development at the New York
4 Historical Society. Members of the City Council,
5 thank you for your exceptional support and for the
6 opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of New York
7 Historical today. In response to the pandemic, New
8 York Historical closed our doors on March 13. By
9 March 23 we transitioned all of our K through 12
10 museum and classroom programs and family learning
11 workshops to the virtual space, making our daily
12 offerings free and accessible to all. This
13 transition was only possible because of the vital
14 programmatic support of the Department of Cultural
15 Affairs and the City Council. It has allowed us to
16 provide direct educational service to more than
17 25,000 New York City public school students,
18 teachers, and other learners since the pause began.
19 And this work will continue through December and for
20 as long as is needed until our regular education
21 programming can resume and we can get back into
22 schools across the five boroughs. This setting also
23 helped us advanced public understanding of black
24 history. We distributed free digital resources from
25 our exhibitions Slavery in New York and Black

3 Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow, and produced free
4 virtual programs exploring Juneteenth, a legacy of
5 Frederick Douglass, and leadership in times of civil
6 and social unrest. Now the museum's closure has
7 resulted in a staggering loss of 6 million dollars of
8 earned income for us. Urgent cost-saving measures
9 and a PPP forgivable loan allowed us to retain staff
10 through mid July. However, the effect of the income
11 loss on our operating budget has been so severe we've
12 been forced to implement staff reductions and
13 furloughs across every department starting next
14 month, and cut back our exhibition schedule
15 dramatically. But despite these setbacks we're eager
16 to open our doors and provide the community with a
17 safe space to gather once again, and the historical
18 context to understand the world in which we live. So
19 in mid to late September we plan to open, excuse me,
20 mid to late summer we will open [inaudible] New York
21 City Under Quarantine and opening our exhibition of
22 our transformed courtyard that will document the
23 experiences of diverse New Yorkers across the five
24 boroughs during the height of the pandemic.
25 Admission will be free to all New Yorkers. In the
months afterwards we will gradually reopen the rest

2 of our building and increase programmatic
3 opportunities...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 CHERYL MORGAN: In these uncertain times
6 we remain grateful for the city's investment in the
7 arts and culture sector through programming and
8 capital support, needed now more than ever. Thank
9 you for your exceptional service and continued
10 commitment.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
12 your testimony. This is the end of the panel. So we
13 will now move to council member questions. Chair Van
14 Bramer.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, ah, I have
16 no questions. I just want to, um, reiterate, ah, my
17 support, obviously, as, ah, the Majority Leader just
18 left to join the budget negotiating team, ah, meeting
19 that started, ah, probably eight minutes ago. I'm
20 also on the budget negotiating team and normally we
21 are both in there, um, ah, turning over tables for
22 culture and the arts. But, um, I'm going to assume
23 that, ah, Laurie is holding it down, um, ah, and we
24 will, ah, I know at the council, ah, prioritize, ah,
25 this community, um, and I very much see it as a moral

2 document as well. So just want to thank everyone
3 and, um, keep this flowing, because I know folks have
4 been waiting a long time to testify.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
6 Chair Van Bramer. We'll now move to the next panel.
7 So I'll call the four names again before moving to
8 Mr. Mendoza, um, from the National 9/11 Memorial
9 Museum. So the four members of the next panel are
10 Christopher Mendoza from the 9/11 Memorial Museum,
11 Siri Horvitz from Lincoln Center, Janice Monger, and
12 Angel Hernandez. Mr. Mendoza, you may begin when the
13 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 CHRISTOPHER MENDOZA: Thank you, council
16 members, ah, for the opportunity to testify. Ah, my
17 name is Chris Mendoza, manager of government
18 community affairs at the National 9/11 Memorial
19 Museum. Ah, first of all, I just want to say my
20 heart goes out to anyone who suffered the death of a
21 loved one during this terrible time. Ah, it's hard
22 to imagine, but it's been more than three months
23 since we closed our site. While we began planning
24 for how COVID might impact us back in January of this
25 year, no one expected that we would be here today.

2 Our reality is, like any other, like many of the
3 cultural sites in New York City, we don't know when
4 we'll be able to open the museum. But we've been
5 very proud of how we've been able to deliver
6 digitally. This includes our moving digital
7 commemoration at the end, of the end of rescue
8 recovery operations at Ground Zero on May 30.

9 However, the 9/11 Memorial Museum has only been open
10 for six years. We are a young institution. We have
11 no endowment and we're not considered a CIG, missing
12 out on valuable financial assistance that the city
13 provides to other members of that group. The fact is
14 money is going out the door much faster than it's
15 coming in. Museum attendance pre-COVID covered an
16 astonishing 95% of our annual operating budget.

17 Revenue earned by the museum enabled us to keep the
18 memorial free but and open to the public. With our
19 closure on March 13 our business model collapsed.

20 The challenge we face is great. As we anticipate
21 reduced visitation number, we have greatly reduced
22 our operating budget, but we're still at a potential
23 45 million deficit. Leadership has had to make
24 difficult choices that are heartbreaking, including
25 most recently letting 60% of our beloved staff go.

2 No one can predict the future, but we will have to
3 adapt like many others are doing. What won't change,
4 however, is our commitment to continue to honor the
5 memory and sacrifice of those who were killed on 9/11
6 and on February 26, 1993, and to recognize the
7 service and sacrifice of all who responded as part of
8 the rescue, recovery, and relief operations in the
9 aftermath of 9/11. On July 4 we take our first step
10 in...

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 CHRISTOPHER MENDOZA: ...in reopening
13 Memorial Plaza and reaffirming the role of the 9/11
14 Memorial as a symbol of hope and resiliency in the
15 face of devastating loss and as an essential
16 component to our city. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
18 testimony, Mr. Mendoza. The next panelist will be
19 Siri Horvitz from Lincoln Center.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 SIRI HORVITZ: Good afternoon and thank
22 you to Chair Van Bramer, committee members, and to
23 Commissioner Casals and the entire DCLA. My name is
24 Siri Horvitz and I'm the director of government
25 relations at the Lincoln Center for the Performing

3 Arts. I extend my sincere gratitude to the council
4 and all essential workers for keeping our city safe
5 during this unprecedented time. Before proceeding, I
6 want to reaffirm that Lincoln Center stands against
7 systemic racism and injustice. We are exploring how
8 we can better support calls for equity in the
9 cultural sector, especially across our staff, board,
10 and artists, and we are committed to action against
11 long-standing inequality. In the spirit of
12 togetherness we remain committed to our founding
13 mission from 60 years ago, to provide the best of the
14 performing arts to the broadest possible audiences.
15 COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on Lincoln
16 Center. Our facilities have been closed since March
17 12 and all performances have been canceled through
18 January 2021. We've lost about 13 million in
19 anticipated revenue and we furloughed or laid off
20 approximately half of our staff. While this has been
21 extraordinarily difficult, we continue to ensure
22 access to Lincoln Center's 11 resident organizations
23 via Lincoln Center at Home, our new digital platform
24 which features such content as performances, arts
25 education, lessons and more. The council has been an
invaluable partner in communicating the availability

3 of this content in local newsletter, enabling Lincoln
4 Center to continue to engage audiences in all 51
5 districts. We are transitioning some of our school
6 and community programming for virtual access as well,
7 such as Audition Boot Camp, our extremely successful
8 partnership with the Department of Education, and
9 Lincoln Center Moments, an arts engagement program
10 for individuals with dementia. Beyond our artistic
11 offerings, we are serving the city through
12 partnerships with the Board of Elections to host
13 primary voting and with the US Census Bureau to count
14 all New Yorkers, and we're in discussions to offer
15 our public spaces for food distribution and testing
16 as needed. We have begun planning for the reopening
17 of the public portions of the Lincoln Center campus.
18 When permitted, we intend to host a campus-wide
19 festival dedicated to our essential workers and first
20 responders. We'll partner with neighborhood arts
21 groups and local artists to celebrate the diversity
22 of the city's residents, and we will work with the
23 city's marketing, transportation, and hospitality
24 outlets...

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time's expired.

2 SIRI HORVITZ: ...to help drive hyper
3 local tourism. The council's continued support will
4 allow us to continue to focus on bold new ideas that
5 will advance our mission and allow us to engage all
6 audiences in compelling and equitable ways. Thank
7 you all for your continued leadership during this
8 crisis.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
10 your testimony. The next panelist will be Janice
11 Monger from the Staten Island Museum.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 JANICE MONGER: Hello. Thank you for
14 your attention to cultural organizations and
15 opportunity to speak. I'm Janice Monger, president
16 and CEO of the Staten Island Museum. The Staten
17 Island Museum sparks curiosity and generates
18 meaningful shared experiences through natural
19 science, art, and history, to deepen understanding of
20 our environment, ourselves, and each other. The
21 museum is located on the diverse North Shore, with
22 about 30% African American and 30% Latino
23 populations. We offer [inaudible] education
24 programming, serving 13,000 school students annually.
25 More than 50% are Title I students that receive free

3 or reduced-cost offerings. The Staten Island Museum
4 closed our doors one week after opening Women of the
5 Nation Arise, a major exhibition about intersectional
6 women's suffrage from the Nineteenth Amendment
7 Centennial that connects to current issues of civic
8 participation and voting rights. The exhibit is now
9 online and will be outdoors at Snug Harbor this
10 summer for a socially distanced experience. We
11 presented our Earth Day festival to 2500 virtual
12 participants, and in July we will hold Moth Night,
13 with downloadable tools for families to unplug and
14 explore night science in their own back yards and
15 outdoor spaces. In spite of this crisis, we are
16 committed to advancing our capital plan of opening an
17 expanded [inaudible] education center that will
18 highlight biodiversity and Lenape Native American
19 culture. The Staten Island Museum is actively
20 engaged with diversity, equity, and inclusion goals
21 through a comprehensive plan overseen by a standing
22 board committee and a rigorous staff working group.
23 We see equity in work a central priority at this
24 time. Building closure has resulted in \$250,000 in
25 revenue loss since March. We are eager to reopen the
museum's doors safely and responsibly, even with

2 increased costs of COVID-19 protocols. With
3 suggested admission of \$8 for adults and discounts
4 for students and seniors, we don't charge the true
5 cost to visitors. New York City's investment helps
6 keep the museum affordable. Please protect city
7 funding for culture so, that is so vital to all of us
8 that you hear here.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 JANICE MONGER: And continue to provide a
11 world-class museum and experiencing with accessible
12 admission right in the local community. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
14 your testimony. The next witness will be the last
15 witness on this panel, Mr. Angel Hernandez from the
16 New York Botanical Garden.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Mr. Hernandez? Ah,
19 you can begin your testimony if you are still on the
20 line. I see...

21 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Am I unmuted?

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Now you're unmuted,
23 we've got you, yes.

24 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: OK.
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You can begin.

3 [inaudible] start the clock. Thank you so much.

4 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Sorry about that.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon,

7 Chairman Van Bramer and members of the committee. My

8 name is Angel Hernandez and I'm director of

9 government relations for the New York Botanical

10 Garden. Chairman Van Bramer, I first want to thank

11 you for letting me speak this afternoon and for

12 always being the cultural community's champion in the

13 council. I also want to thank New York City Council

14 Speaker Corey Johnson and your colleagues for the

15 ongoing support for our city's cultural institutions.

16 Before the onset of COVID-19, the garden had just

17 celebrated Black History Month with a well-attended

18 awards dinner in late February. In early March the

19 momentum for our much-anticipated exhibition, Kusama,

20 Cosmic Nature, began to intensify with plans to offer

21 100,000 free tickets to local and underserved

22 populations. With our efforts to slow the spread and

23 all public events canceled or postponed for the

24 remainder of FY20, earned income, which is 35% of our

25 annual revenue, has all but vanished. Our total

2 estimated financial impact of all COVID-19 loss
3 through July 1 is close to 15 million dollars. Our
4 school programs were in full effect as well. One of
5 them was the Edible Academy School Partnership
6 Program, a state-of-the-art educational complex. The
7 academy is where students are taught the essentials
8 of plant science and healthier eating while learning
9 the core values of leadership, responsibility, and
10 team work. At the onset of the virus outbreak the
11 academy was hosting 10 public schools with an
12 attendance of over, of 1000 students. When schools
13 finally closed in mid March our staff at the academy
14 was left with a fast-growing harvest but no attending
15 students to demonstrate for. Seeing a growing trend
16 for food distribution, by mid April our staff began
17 dropping off multiple pounds of fresh produce to our
18 friends at POTS, Part of the Solution, Bronx
19 Veterans' Hospital, Children's Aid Society, and
20 partnering schools that operate a grab and go meal
21 program during the summer. Under the Bronx Greener
22 Program, we are also donating over...

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 ANGEL MENDOZA: ...[inaudible] to
25 community gardens throughout the borough. This will

2 help those gardens become food hubs for local
3 pantries and the community. As we plan to continue
4 our multilayered approach to address food insecurity
5 in neighboring communities throughout, through the
6 crisis, we wholeheartedly ask the City Council to
7 hold the line on additional cuts to DCLA. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Mr.
9 Hernandez. I'm going to, ah, we'll move back to
10 Chair Van Bramer. This is the end of the panel. We
11 do not have other council members question.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Thank
13 you very much to all of you, and I know, ah, a lot of
14 the cultural organizations have been engaged in, ah,
15 recovery work and, and, ah, work to help those who
16 are food insecure in, in this, ah, ah, horrific
17 moment in our, in our lives. So, ah, I want to thank
18 all of you for, ah, for everything that you continue
19 to do and, and, ah, once again we are, um, watching
20 the budget like the budget hawks that we are. So,
21 um, thank you very much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.
23 We'll now move to the next panel. I'll call out the
24 four names of the panelists before we move to the
25 first panelist. The first is Heather Lubov from City

2 Parks Foundation and Summer Stage. The next is Cindy
3 Lawrence from the National Museum of Mathematics,
4 followed by Eileen Fuchs from Snug Harbor Cultural
5 Center and Botanic Garden, followed by Carol Ox, or
6 Ox, excuse my pronunciation, at the 52nd Street
7 Project. So we'll begin with the first panelist,
8 Heather Lubov. You may begin when the sergeant calls
9 the clock. Thank you.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you, Chairman Van
12 Bramer. I'm Heather Lubov, executive director of
13 City Parks Foundation. We present Capital One City
14 Parks Foundation Summer Stage, New York's largest
15 free outdoor performing arts festival, which usually
16 takes place in 18 neighborhood parks across the city,
17 hosting nearly 100 performances each year for
18 200,000-plus audiences. We also co-manage the
19 Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater and the
20 [inaudible] Puppetmobile. We present art in parks to
21 foster community in these democratic spaces and our
22 festival lineups celebrate and reflect our students'
23 diversity. Last year more than two-thirds of our
24 artists were people of color and were evenly balanced
25 by gender. As Nina [inaudible] said, it's an

2 artist's duty to reflect the times. On June 12 we
3 launched our digital festival, Summer Stage Anywhere,
4 to bring performances to New Yorkers at home, and
5 continue to give a platform to artist voices that
6 reflect our times. We open with a program featuring
7 readings from Howard Zinn's *Voices of a People's*
8 *History*. We followed up with the Pride celebration
9 in partnership with the Latin Alternative Music
10 Conference. And last Friday we presented a day-long
11 Juneteenth commemoration and dance. This week we'll
12 present global music star and UNICEF ambassador,
13 Angeliqe Cujo. And our festival will continue
14 throughout the summer. Few experiences match
15 watching a live performance with an audience as a
16 community although we have lost close to 60% of our
17 revenue this year, we are ready to reopen live
18 outdoor concerts at Summer Stage in Central Park, and
19 to partner with other cultural institutions to use
20 our outdoor expertise to bring live performance back
21 to New Yorkers safely. As you know, parks have
22 remained open because it is safe to be outdoors, so
23 we have prepared extensive safety protocols and can
24 set up our mobile stage in just a day. We also hope
25 the Puppetsmobile will be able to present small

2 performances in neighborhood parks around the city.

3 In the meantime, Erica Elliot, our executive artistic
4 director, is proud to support the city's reopening as
5 a member of the mayor's Arts, Culture, and Tourism
6 Advisory...

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 HEATHER LUBOV: ...[inaudible] collection
9 through the Mayor's Office of Media and
10 Entertainment. Thank you for your time and
11 attention.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
13 your testimony. We'll move to the next panelist,
14 Cindy Lawrence from the National Museum of
15 Mathematics.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 CINDY LAWRENCE: Good afternoon, Chair
18 Van Bramer and members of the council. My name is
19 Cindy Lawrence. I'm the executive director and CEO
20 of the National Museum of Mathematics, also known as
21 MoMath. MoMath is the only math museum in North
22 America and its mission to enhance public
23 understanding of math takes on an even greater
24 significance in today's environment since competency
25 in math can impact success in all aspects of a

2 student's life. Prior to the pandemic MoMath hosted
3 school trips every school day, many of which were
4 free to Title I schools. Students explore dynamic
5 exhibits and participated in interactive group
6 sessions. The museum also offered a robust schedule
7 of free community programming, including Family
8 Fridays for families of all ages and Math Encounters
9 the flagship series that launched the museum. MoMath
10 ceased in-person programming on March 13. While
11 closing the museum had a profound impact on
12 operations, the museum was resilient, quickly
13 pivoting to online programming. In fact, the
14 museum's first online field trip occurred the same
15 day as its last in-person field trip. Since that
16 time, approximately 25,000 participants have
17 participated in more than 700 online programs, many
18 of which were free. After one such free program a
19 teacher emailed us to say you truly helped education
20 come alive for students who normally would not get
21 such an experience. While we can't wait to welcome
22 visitors back to MoMath, we're thrilled to continue
23 to provide free online programming for New York City
24 students and families. With limited opportunities
25 for youth this summer, it is vital that we keep the

2 city's youth engaged. MoMath is uniquely suited to
3 address issues of both youth engagement and academic
4 challenges. We use games, puzzles, and crafts to
5 connect math to other subjects, like sports, music,
6 visual arts, astronomy, and engineering. In short,
7 we help students realize that math can be fun. Thank
8 you to the council for your dedicated advocacy...

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 CINDY LAWRENCE: Delighted to continue to
11 work together. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
13 testimony. We'll now move to Ms. Eileen Fuchs
14 from...

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time...

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Snug Harbor Cultural
17 Center. Yes, excuse me, Sergeant.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: It's OK. Time starts
19 now.

20 EILEEN FUCHS: Good day, Chair Van Bramer
21 and members of the committee. My name is Eileen
22 Fuchs and I'm the president and CEO of Snug Harbor
23 Cultural Center and Botanical Garden in Staten
24 Island, and a proud member of the CIG. I'm here
25 today to urge full funding for cultural organizations

2 in the FY21 city budget. I'm grateful to the New
3 York City Council and the mayor for recognizing the
4 essential nature of the arts and culture sector
5 [inaudible] the resiliency and economic recovery of
6 New York City. Snug Harbor is the cultural
7 programmer and property manager of an 83-acre
8 historic campus. The cultural anchor of our borough,
9 we collectively welcome 500,000 visitors annually.
10 We provide critical staff and resources to conserve
11 our landscapes, incubate artistry that celebrates our
12 vibrant diversity, and maintain a safe and secure
13 home for numerous small businesses and museums that
14 serve our communities. And we do all this in the
15 best of times with limited human and capital
16 resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has validated Snug
17 Harbor's place in our communities. We have remained
18 opened through New York on PAUSE, providing free and
19 open green space for safe and socially distant
20 exploration while also serving as a COVID-19 testing
21 facility. We have responded to the current crisis
22 with resiliency and imagination, moving content and
23 programming online, serving regional enrichment
24 centers, and creating virtual community-building
25 events. Our Heritage Fund donates weekly to a local

2 food pantry and launched a new community-sponsored
3 agricultural initiative. Our gardeners provide
4 plants and advice to local community gardens.

5 Cutting funding to Snug Harbor will harm the
6 vulnerable communities we serve, impair our progress
7 towards social justice, and decimate the 40-plus
8 individual artists and small businesses who call our
9 campus home. We are located on the north shore,
10 where nearly one-third of residents live in poverty.

11 We serve upwards of 22,000 students in Title I
12 schools annually and engage marginalized youth
13 through many programs and partnerships, including
14 with the Department of Probation. Today our city is
15 grappling with a public health and economic crisis in
16 an ongoing pandemic of racial injustice. Cultural
17 organizations can lead our communities through
18 essential progressive changes and nexus for public
19 discourse and engagement. Everyone in this hearing
20 today has spent the last several weeks avidly
21 consuming arts and culture, binge watching your
22 favorite shows, listening to music, drawing herbs and
23 plants and flowers. Arts and culture bring
24 communities together, nurture our shared community,

2 and celebrate our diversity. Please maintain our
3 finding to inspire...

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 EILEEN FUCHS: ...[inaudible] and build an
6 equitable and just city that never sleeps.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
8 your testimony. Before we move to the next witness
9 I'm going to call the next panel so you aware, um,
10 that you're coming, and then we'll have the final
11 panelist in this panel. The next four witnesses for
12 the following panel will be Cat Bloomfield from Arts
13 Business Collaborative, the Honorable Bobby Digi,
14 excuse my pronunciation, from Canvas Institute and
15 Gallery, Noel Alain or Allen from the Bushwick Star,
16 and Beth Allen from Downtown Brooklyn Alliance.
17 Before that we will move to the final member of this
18 panel and any council members questions. As a
19 reminder to council members, please raise your hand
20 if you have any questions. The next person is Carol
21 Ox from the 52nd Street Project. You may begin when
22 the sergeant calls the clock.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Can we confirm that
25 Ms. Ox is on the line? We'll wait one minute. We'll

2 be on standby, and then we will conclude this panel
3 and move to any council member questions. Ms. Ox, if
4 you're on and cannot speak, if you could message us
5 or let us know. OK, we'll move to the next panelist.
6 Ah, we'll move to the next, sorry, panel. Um, before
7 that we can take council member questions and we can
8 come back to Ms. Ox. Ah, Chair Van Bramer? This
9 concludes this panel. OK, so we'll move to the next
10 panel. Those individuals are Cat Bloomfield from
11 Arts Business Collaborative, the Honorable Bobby Digi
12 or Digi, from Canvas Institute and Gallery, Noel
13 Alain from the Bushwick Star, and Beth Allen from
14 Downtown Brooklyn Alliance. Ms. Bloomfield, you may
15 begin when the sergeant calls the clock.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 CAT BLOOMFIELD: Thank you for taking the
18 time to be here today. Today I present an urgent
19 plea to the DCLA on behalf of POC, people of color-
20 led arts organizations and artists throughout New
21 York City. My name is Cat Bloomfield and I'm CEO of
22 Arts Business Collaborative, ABC, a nonprofit
23 organization dedicated to improving the quality of
24 life for communities and artists of color. I have
25 been living in Queens, New York for eight years and

2 currently rent a space in the Living Artists
3 Organization in Woodside, Queens, which is in
4 District 26. We are also a participate of the
5 Culture at Three Calls, representing very small POC-
6 led and serving arts organizations. I created ABC
7 because I want to see more people of color,
8 especially women of color, succeed in the creative
9 economy and greater work force. ABC compacts the
10 subtle structures in place that prevent communities
11 and artists of color from surviving and thriving by
12 providing technical assistance, entrepreneurship
13 support, research, community organizing, and fiscal
14 sponsorship. We are fiscal sponsors of groups such
15 as the [inaudible] Project, For the [inaudible], and
16 Black Trans Fems in the Arts, three groups at the
17 forefront of serving black transgender communities.
18 Due to COVID-19 many POC-led small businesses and
19 nonprofit organizations saw the revenues decimated,
20 especially as a large portion of revenue come from
21 commissions, classes, and space rentals. With the
22 help of the Howard Gillman Foundation, Dance NYC, and
23 the Hillman Family Foundations, we were able to step
24 in to serve over 100 POC-led organizations,
25 individual artists, and creative economy small

2 business owners throughout NYC. We have called upon
3 foundation program officers to modify their emergency
4 funding procedures, provided nearly 400 hours of one-
5 on-one grant writing and strategy sessions, office
6 hours, and workshops, collected and analyzed data
7 around POC-led small businesses and nonprofits, and
8 reached out to independent artists and activists to
9 help track their impact on and access for communities
10 of color. However, we need the City Council and the
11 Department of Cultural Affairs to fiscally recognize
12 the contributions of artists of color to the cultural
13 fabric of the city. White-led, governed, and staff
14 organizations receive the...

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 CAT BLOOMFIELD: ...[inaudible] of
17 discretionary CII and CASA funds. Discretionary
18 funds are given to community arts organizations at
19 the recommendation of NYC public school principals,
20 the majority of whom, 85%, are white despite having
21 83% POC student body. We call upon the City Council
22 to mandate that nonprofits seeking DCLA funds must
23 have at least one-third of their nonprofits board of
24 directors be people of color such that the
25 communities of color served in nonprofit programs are

2 proportionally represented and have a say in the
3 governance of the organizations meant to serve them.
4 Although the DCLA already requires one-third of
5 executive boards to be POC, there's a stipulation
6 that allows for organizations to only have a plan to
7 instate POC, allowing for POC to continuously be
8 excluded from senior leadership positions. Finally,
9 we call for culturally competent capacity-building
10 support for POC-led groups applying for government
11 funds. To Majority Leader Cumbo's point, we need to
12 address issues of systemic inequitable funding and at
13 this moment we have an opportunity to redirect
14 funding specifically for this purpose. In this way
15 communities of color are no longer shut out of
16 government funding and can access the skill building
17 necessary to flourish on the same level as white-led
18 institutions. Thank you for your time and
19 consideration.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
21 Ms. Bloomfield. We're going to defer back to Chair
22 Van Bramer, um, before we move forward, about for
23 comments and questions about the previous pan. Chair
24 Van Bramer.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, I just
3 wanted to thank the, the previous, ah, panel, um,
4 for, for their work and their testimony. Um, I just
5 want to make sure that everyone who's speaking knows
6 that I'm listening to every word, and also that
7 Commissioner Casals and apparently his cat are also
8 listening, um, to every single word. So, ah, I
9 didn't get a chance to thank the last panel and Cat,
10 I just want to say, ah, even though I'm supposed to
11 wait until this panel is over, um, you know, ah, I
12 should have already met with you and, ah, and, and
13 will make that happen now. Ah, I was just talking to
14 my staff, um, saying how have I not met with Cat, ah,
15 already and, ah, I know they have had some
16 conversations with you, but we'll make sure that we
17 right that wrong and see, ah, how we can better
18 support you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
20 Chair Van Bramer. We'll move back to this panel, and
21 thank you again, ah, Ms. Bloomfield, for your
22 testimony. We'll move to the next witness, which is
23 the Honorable Bobby Digi or Digi, apologies for the
24 pronunciation.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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2 HONORABLE BOBBY DIGI: Hello, Brenda,
3 it's, ah, Digi. Can you hear me? OK.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I can hear you.

5 HONORABLE BOBBY DIGI: Ah, I'd like to
6 acknowledge, um, Council Majority, ah, Leader, Laurie
7 Cumbo, um, Chair Van Bramer, ah Gonzalo, my ICLP
8 cohort. Um, we want to choral together. Um, it's an
9 honor to have the opportunity to speak. Coming from
10 Staten Island, the forgotten borough, ah, but I want,
11 I want to tell you all something very quickly. So
12 Canvas Institute was formed about three-and-a-years
13 ago, um, under the, you know, the, the guide of
14 Councilman Laurie Cumbo, ah, and a few others in the
15 community. It's the only black-led, ah,
16 multidisciplinary space located on the borough of
17 Staten Island, on the north shore. Um, we have the
18 largest collection of books dedicated to the history
19 of the African, African American, Caribbeans on
20 Staten Island. We are the only one that has that
21 catalog. We partnered up with St. John's University.
22 This organization was born out of necessity. We are
23 the only, again, black-owned, black-led arts gallery
24 and, ah, community space, where we utilize arts,
25 culture, um, as way to bridge and have discussions

2 in the community. During the Eric Garner, um,
3 killing we were able to bring, ah, community and
4 police together when issues were tense. Um, we also
5 offer arts and yoga classes for health and, and
6 wellness. As you know, in the black and brown
7 communities, um, as the COVID-19 has showed that the
8 inequities and the, the disparities are, this is
9 where the work needs to be done.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 HONORABLE BOBBY DIGI: You all have
12 [inaudible] I want to ask that Canvas Institute, um,
13 be looked at to get, to receive support because there
14 are institutions in this borough that have
15 historically gotten all of the dollars, the majority,
16 if we're talking about equity and equality and
17 looking to resolve and seize on the moment that we
18 can turn things around, we have to look at those
19 smaller organizations that are black and brown led
20 and we have to look at the way that we're funding
21 those organizations, because those are the grassroots
22 organizations who are dealing with the community at
23 large, and if we're talking about social justice
24 inequity we must do the right thing. We also should
25 look at the largest institutions that are white led

2 and see how are you working in partnership and in
3 unison with smaller organizations. And again, Staten
4 Island, the forgotten borough. Let's look at how the
5 work is being done here. Ah, I've heard many other
6 organizations say that there are five boroughs. If
7 you have not met or dealt with Canvas Institute you
8 need to rethink that five borough, ah, label that
9 you're utilizing because everyone knows that Staten
10 Island is often left out of citywide, ah, initiatives
11 and funding. Ah, it's all there, so I don't want to,
12 ah, echo too much. Thank you for the time, and thank
13 you, ah, Chairman Van Bramer. I look forward to
14 meeting you as well, or reconnecting, rather.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
16 your testimony. Um, the next witness is Noel Alain
17 from...

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 NOEL ALAIN: Ah, thank you. Dear council
20 members and, ah, Chairman Van Bramer and Commissioner
21 Casals. I'm the founding artistic director of the
22 Obie award-winning Bushwick Star Theater in Bushwick,
23 Brooklyn, an organization that draws thousands of
24 people year round into our neighborhood through our
25 productions, provides afterschool and summer

2 workshops for our youth, as well as summer classes
3 for our senior community in two of our local senior
4 centers, also speaking to you as an ordinary New
5 Yorker who is a resident of Ridgewood, Queens. Um,
6 today I'm taking this time to urge you to prioritize
7 and maintain funding for the Coalition of Theaters of
8 Color in the FY21 New York City budget. Um, locally
9 our theater is blocks away from Make the Road by
10 walking. Ah, this programming has for decades helped
11 educate and uplift Brooklyn youth. They are a
12 singular organization in north Brooklyn that provides
13 young people of all ages with the skills to be
14 powerful agents of change in their community and in
15 the world. Ah, at the Star we have recently
16 partnered with National Black Theater to produce an
17 award-winning production of Gillian Walker's Skin
18 Folk, An American Show. Um, our partnership with NBT
19 was instrumental to the success of that production.
20 Ah, as we continue to reel from the effects of COVID-
21 19 and this crisis, I understand the, the very real
22 and unprecedented budgetary challenges facing New
23 York City. However, in numerous public forums we
24 have been told by elected officials to expect cuts in
25 the FY21 budget, while the 6 billion dollar budget

2 for the NYPD remains intact. This feels particularly
3 unjust from the CCC and programs like CASA and Su
4 Casa serve the very communities that have been most
5 [inaudible] systemic injustice and violence at the
6 hands of the overfunded NYPD. Please do not put this
7 money into the policing of communities of color. Put
8 this money into those communities, into the
9 organizations that help this, ah, help tie
10 communities together, into places that promote
11 positivity, healing, communication, and love.
12 Budgets tell a story. They tell a story of our
13 values. This is not just a call for funding. This
14 is a call for justice.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 NOEL ALAIN: The funding and the
17 sustained funding of CASA and Su Casa and the CTC is
18 a direct and just investment in the social fabric of
19 our city. Thank you very much.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
21 your testimony. Um, we will have one more panelist
22 before we move to Chair Van Bramer and council member
23 questions. I'm going to read the members of the next
24 panel, um, now. So just for awareness, before we
25 move to the final panelist, the next panel will be

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2 Takisha Dozier, or Dozier, again, apologies for any
3 mispronunciation, from the Bronx Children's Museum.

4 Ah, Deidre Harrington from the Movement Theater

5 Company, and Rand Yan or Yan from Lewis Latimer House

6 Museum. So now to move to the final panelist on this

7 panel, Ms. Beth Allen from the Brooklyn Arts,

8 Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance. Um, Ms. Allen, you

9 may begin when the sergeant calls the clock. Thank

10 you.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 BETH ALLEN: Thank you, Chairman Van

13 Bramer, Commissioner Casals, and members of the

14 community for the opportunity to present testimony.

15 My name is Beth Allen and I'm the executive director

16 of the Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance, or as we call

17 it, DBAA. Um, DBAA is a small service organization

18 that brings together a network of over 50 arts and

19 cultural nonprofits in downtown Brooklyn and the

20 adjacent areas, excuse me. We provide peer support,

21 networking opportunities, and a voice in local

22 community issues. Our group spans the visual,

23 performing, literary, and media arts and includes

24 every presenting venue in the Brooklyn cultural

25 district in Fort Greene, as well as smaller

2 community-based groups, internationally known dance
3 and theater companies, exhibition venues dedicated to
4 visual art, craft, history, organizations that offer
5 studio and rehearsal space, subsidy, subsidized for
6 artists, and other, um, nonprofits, residencies, and
7 other services to artists, and a great deal of arts
8 education. On March 20 DBAA had what was to become a
9 weekly all-member meeting, um, that began our work of
10 navigating the crisis together. And so my remarks
11 today are based on the conversations I've had at
12 those meetings and also, you know, individually with
13 our, the heads of our member organizations. While
14 each organization has issues specific to their
15 mission and business model related to COVID, there
16 are some general themes. Ah, the first one, um,
17 income loss, ah, layoffs, etcetera, um, are
18 universal, ah, but there's not one single way that
19 organizations have been impacted financially or
20 otherwise, and thus no one-size-fits-all key to, to
21 recovery. We all need money [laughs], um, um, as
22 that's a major portion of what's been lost. Um, but
23 there are other things that, um, I think are also
24 crucial to recovery. Ah, for many uncertainties
25 around city funding, especially that for CASA, Su

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2 Casa, DOE contracts, and other, um, funding from
3 other city agencies are particularly important, not
4 only in terms of actual dollars, but also in securing
5 matching funds and ultimately in fulfilling their
6 mission. Point number two, demand for our work has
7 not decreased. From the very first meeting on March
8 20 the issue of how to move programs online,
9 particularly those programs serving our most
10 vulnerable constituents, was raised. Throughout the
11 crisis, um, our members have been serving, ah, lots
12 of vulnerable people, um, as many have served, ah,
13 many regularly served communities hardest hit by
14 COVID, especially communities of color in central
15 Brooklyn and other neighborhoods in Brooklyn. The
16 importance of having that continuity of service, of
17 reaching out to those who are struggling, has been a
18 lifeline for many who have been dealing with the
19 health and humanitarian crises. In addition, many of
20 our organizations have participated in humanitarian
21 relief efforts, ah, in the distribution of food and
22 more recently in opening their lobbies to protestors.
23 General theme number three, the future is really
24 uncertain. Um, there's a lot of enthusiasm for
25 reopening in whatever form that takes. Ah, safety is

2 a top concern, as our increased costs for staffing,
3 staff training, PPE, and enhanced sanitation
4 protocols. Ah, definitely it would be helpful to
5 have guidelines from, um, the Department of Cultural
6 Affairs on that. Um, there's also a need for
7 investment in online programming. Um, as we expect,
8 a lot of that will continue for the foreseeable
9 future and, and, and maybe forever, um, and, ah, that
10 is a need. Um, the fourth and last point I wish to
11 make, ah, is something that as our organizations have
12 been serving vulnerable communities throughout the,
13 the crisis and continue to do so. Ah, all plans for
14 recovery, all investment in recovery, must prioritize
15 equity. While the demographics of audiences served
16 and represented by our total membership varies
17 widely, our cohort includes prominent organizations
18 presenting and supporting work by black artists,
19 including Macada, Six by One Arts, Act Now
20 Foundation, Brick, Girl Be Heard, Restoration Art,
21 Urban Bush Woman, Vibe Theater Experience, and I'm
22 sure I'm missing a few. But also many that are
23 serving, ah, communities of colors and have long
24 histories of working with, ah, with, ah, other
25 partner organizations, schools, afterschool programs,

2 etcetera in neighborhoods that are, um, that are
3 either majority black or otherwise consist of, um,
4 low-income and other people of color. We have long
5 been aware that there's been underinvestment in black
6 organizations in our cohort and more generally in a
7 lack of investment or an underinvestment in black
8 artistic excellence and in programming that primarily
9 serves black and brown audience. I am, you know,
10 cautiously hopeful, ah, that the attention being
11 brought to this issue now through the Black Lives
12 Matter movement will result in real change, um, and
13 while we know the city is but one of the many agents
14 of this change. It has an important role to play,
15 um, and I wanted to offer our services in working
16 with on, on helping to make that change.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
18 your testimony. Ah, I will move to Chair Van Bramer.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, and,
20 um, ah, first of all, I just, I don't know if, ah,
21 Mr. Digi is still with us, um, but, ah, I, I heard,
22 um, every word he said about Staten Island being the
23 forgotten borough and, um, we do not want anyone to
24 feel that and look forward to reconnecting as well
25 and, ah, know, um, ah, Make the Road is one of my

2 favorite organizations, um, and the work they've have
3 done for so long is incredible. You also spoke
4 about, ah, CTC and, again, I reiterate my support
5 there. Ah, and then several folks talked about CASA
6 and Su Casa and the [inaudible] Initiative and the
7 next person who, ah, I'm gonna ask to speak, ah,
8 knows all too well how valuable those programs are,
9 ah, and also how much they've increased since I've
10 been the chair of cultural affairs because when, ah,
11 Manhattan Borough President Gail Brewer was a council
12 member, ah, CASA was, ah, created and it started as a
13 5 million dollar, ah, initiative. It is now closer
14 to 20 million dollars. And I am extremely proud of
15 that as cultural affairs chair that we've made that
16 investment and increased that program and, ah, Su
17 Casa, ah, and our Cultural Immigrant Initiative were
18 both invented since I'm the chair and that's another,
19 ah, plus 10 million dollars in cultural, ah, monies
20 that are going to, ah, mostly, ah, smaller
21 organizations and obviously we've got to do a better
22 job of making sure there's equity, but, um, needless
23 to say, ah, I am the biggest champion for CASA, Su
24 Casa and the Cultural Immigrant Initiative funding,
25 ah, in the City of New York and will continue to

2 fight for those. Having said that, ah, I do want to
3 introduce, ah, and she's been, as always, ah,
4 listening and working, um, but Manhattan Borough
5 President Gail Brewer has joined us. She's an
6 enormous champion of culture and the arts, as many of
7 you know, and probably the hardest-working person in
8 government. So, ah, with that I want to ask, ah,
9 Manhattan Borough President Gail Brewer to, ah,
10 speak, ah, at our hearing. Thank you very much for
11 joining us, Borough President. Are we hearing the
12 Borough President?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We are not hearing
14 the Borough President. We're on standby. She was
15 just here, so we think something happened.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I see her
17 talking. I see her talking, but I can't hear her.
18 There she is. Can't hear you, Gail. I'm not sure
19 what that is.

20 MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT GAIL BREWER:
21 Can you hear me now?

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, we can.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

24 MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT GAIL BREWER:
25 Oh, OK, that's my fault, I'm sorry. All right, so I,

2 I apologize. I am Gail Brewer. I am the Manhattan
3 Borough President. And I want to thank, ah, both the
4 Chair, ah, Van Bramer, and also the commissioner,
5 because recently we've been focused on uptown, ah,
6 arts organizations and both of them have spoke at
7 these really phenomenonal discussions and, ah, the
8 discussion is really appreciated. I'm just gonna
9 summarize, ah, testimony that we're sending in. Ah,
10 last year I worked with Independent Budget Office on
11 the role of the arts in New York, and it's no
12 surprise to you the importance. It is concentrated
13 in Manhattan. I know other boroughs don't like to
14 hear that. But employment, measured by jobs and the
15 share of total wages as paid, 2017 almost 81% of the
16 arts and cultural sector jobs and 87%, 88% of the
17 wages were located in Manhattan. And from 2014 to
18 2017 employment at the city's art and cultural
19 establish grew at an average rate of 2.7%, exceeding
20 citywide employment over the same period. That only
21 grew at 2.3%. Ah, wages grew faster than employment
22 and the reason I mention this is I don't need to tell
23 you that arts are employment and economic development
24 in the City of New York. I really love your CASA and
25 your Su Casa and I appreciate that you've really

2 improved them. Um, some years ago we had our aging
3 summer, ah, forum and we focused on the arts and it
4 was absolute our most productive. So, as I
5 indicated, we have been focusing on the uptown arts
6 groups. There are hundreds of them. We've had four
7 virtual town halls, ah, sponsored by, as you know,
8 the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, the Harlem
9 Arts Organization, Northern Manhattan Arts
10 Organization, and all the uptown community boards.
11 And the reason I mention that is that coming together
12 during this awful pandemic has made the difference in
13 terms of sometimes survival or not. Just getting
14 ideas from other organizations has been phenomenal,
15 something to remember for the future. Um, these
16 organizations have been doing online and virtual and
17 doing a great job, but there's not a lot of money in
18 that. So I want to make sure we all know the
19 importance of these small organizations in the
20 communities of color as well as the [inaudible].
21 Second thing I want to say in terms of communities of
22 color, known as the Coalition of Theaters of Color.
23 I know it's initiative, I was there when it was
24 started. Now there are 42 members. It is incredibly
25 important to keep that initiative going. Now

3 something that didn't come up so far are the murals.
4 I have been to every mural in Manhattan, or at least
5 I have tried, on the [inaudible] and we're gonna try
6 to save them and then in the end have an exhibit.
7 But we do need to focus on this public art and it's
8 something that needs to be, I think as time goes on
9 with Black Lives Matter and other, ah, challenges
10 needs to be more a part of our public discourse. So
11 art can be creative. It can be healing. Um, but it
12 has to foster economic development. And in fact NYC
13 and Company, the [inaudible] is actually bringing
14 people tourists from around the world just to see our
15 murals, ah, as part of this, ah, pandemic. And when
16 I say pandemic there's a S on that. So I don't want
17 to, ah, spend a lot of time except to say in addition
18 to the [inaudible] and the theaters of color and the
19 Su Casa, Mi CASA programs and keeping the agency
20 going, arts education is not, ah, doing well in the
21 mayor's budget. And I can say that in addition to
22 the, you know, the many discussions in the classroom,
23 if you don't have art as part of that discussion
24 you're not going to be able to involve in a
25 meaningful way the young people. Arts education
cannot be cut. It's our future audience and it's

2 obviously the young people who can express themselves
3 sometimes no other way. Those are really important,
4 ah, ah, theories. I thank all the council members,
5 particularly the chair, and I look forward to trying
6 to figure out in this very challenging world how we
7 can make sure these arts organizations survive, not
8 just the next few months, but into the future. Thank
9 you very much.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Van Bramer?

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much, Madam Borough President and, um, not surprising
13 that I agree with, ah, every word that you said. And
14 I'm sure that the commissioner, um, as well
15 appreciates, um, how much you care about this issue,
16 how much you get this issue, ah, and how much you
17 fight for this community. So, ah, thank you very
18 much, and with that I'll throw it back to, ah,
19 Brenda, for the next panel.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
21 and thank you, Madam Borough President, as well. Um,
22 before we move to the next panel I'll recall the
23 names, but we just also want to check if Carol Ox is
24 on the line again. Ms. Ox, we'll put you at the end
25 of this panel if you are on the line. Um, please let

2 us know. The next members of the public to testify
3 will be Takisha Dozier from Bronx Children's Museum,
4 Deidre Harrington from the Movement Theater Company,
5 Ray Yan or Ran Yan, please excuse pronunciation, from
6 the Lewis Latimer House Museum, and Ms. Carol Ox. So
7 we'll move to the first panelist. We'll hold
8 questions to the end of the panel and, ah, Ms.
9 Takisha Dozier you can begin when the sergeant calls
10 the clock.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

13 TAKISHA DOZIER: Sorry, good afternoon. I
14 pray that you are all safe and healthy at this time.
15 My name is Takisha Dozier, Bronx resident, parent,
16 and community liaison for the Bronx Children's
17 Museum. Welcome, Commissioner Casals, we look
18 forward to meeting with you in the coming weeks.
19 Thank you to the City Council for your previous
20 support and Chair Van Bramer and Majority Leader
21 Cumbo for this opportunity. Just a quick shout-out
22 to Majority Leader for doing all that you do in the
23 community and being a parent at the same time. I
24 definitely see you. Because those of you who spoke
25 so eloquently before we did, I would like to share

2 with you a short update and to ask that you support
3 our FY21 request for program and capital money to
4 ensure we can continue our reason for being, which is
5 to be accessible to all. For the past 10 years we've
6 proudly operated in schools and in the streets as a
7 museum without walls and we see 16,000 children and
8 caregivers each year and after an in-school programs
9 funded in part with CASA, CII, CDF, and expense
10 funding from our City Council members. Our purple
11 bus travels throughout the Bronx providing
12 [inaudible] programming, accessibles in schools.
13 We're also at the end of developing a museum facility
14 near Yankee Stadium and will be first children's
15 museum facility in Bronx's history. In response to
16 the COVID-19 pandemic and guided by community survey
17 results the museum developed three kinds of online
18 programming - short online activities and educational
19 content, tailored virtual museum for teachers and
20 activity sheets, online programming on Bronx Net for
21 Children who did not have access to tablets. And, as
22 I said, we're all about access for all. We're
23 currently working on developing summer enrichment
24 programming that will be available to Bronx Net,
25 WNET, we hope, and other community venues. Also in

2 the response to the COVID-19 pandemic we were able to
3 partner with the mayor's office to help distribute
4 over 36,000 masks in the Bronx community by
5 connecting them with our partners who are on the
6 ground. In response to the, sorry, to the Black
7 Lives Matter movement the museum is also working
8 internally and externally to find ways to support the
9 movement both short and long term. Please note that
10 the Bronx Children's Museum is not a CIG and does not
11 receive any [inaudible] support from the city. Once
12 we open in late 2021 we will charge a very nominal
13 fee. CDF, discretionary and expense monies are
14 critical to our survival. Any cuts to the city's
15 support of arts and culture programs will be
16 devastating to all arts and culture organizations.
17 Pediatric mental health experts have shared with us
18 that culturals are absolutely essential to the well-
19 being of children and the quality of life of all
20 people in the city. We rely on this funding to serve
21 our community. We are a lifeline for our community,
22 especially as we transition from pandemic to
23 recovery. The Bronx Children's Museum is already
24 trusted in the Bronx. Please help [inaudible] to
25 keep and strengthen that trust. Without your

2 leadership and help we will have to literally end our
3 outreach programs and we will be unable to reach a
4 new generation of our youngest and most vulnerable
5 children. However, with your support we can continue
6 to meet the needs of our borough's youngest
7 constituents through a museum with and without walls
8 that is accessible to all, regardless of age, skin
9 color, ability, or geographic location in a safe and
10 sanitary way. Thank you very much for your
11 consideration during these unprecedented times. Arts
12 and culture are economically fragile and [inaudible]
13 in asking that the City Council keep culture whole,
14 including DCLA and initiative funding. We see you.
15 Please see the Bronx children. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
17 your testimony. We'll move to the next panelist,
18 Deidre Harrington from the Movement Theater.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 DEIDRE HARRINGTON: Good afternoon. I'm
21 Deidre Harrington from the Movement Theater Company
22 and a board member of the Alliance of Resident
23 Theaters, New York, speaking for Ginny Laludis, who
24 has a family emergency. Art New York serves and
25 represents 420 of New York City's nonprofit theaters.

2 It has been humbling to listen to the previous
3 speakers, and thank you so much for this hearing. At
4 Art New York we dare to dream of a theatrical
5 community in a city that centers access, equity, and
6 justice. We empower our members to make the best
7 decisions for their unique companies through classes,
8 grants, cash flow loans, consultancies, and
9 affordable space. Since the city went on PAUSE, Art
10 New York shut down our affordable spaces - two
11 theaters, eight rehearsal studios, and 40 shared
12 offices. Each month we lose \$200,000 in earned
13 revenue from these spaces. But, like the theaters we
14 represent, Art New York has not stopped. We've moved
15 all of our programming online and saw our attendance
16 grow by over 30%. We were responding to the
17 immediate needs of the field through a number of
18 programs, including workshops in how to make online
19 programming accessible for the people with
20 disabilities and micro grants to help companies
21 execute that programming, continuing our grant-making
22 programs, awarding over \$120,000 since March to more
23 than 50 small theaters, caring for our spaces so they
24 are ready when we can reopen, while providing rest
25 rooms, water, and charging stations for protestors,

2 and providing spaces for black, non-black POC, and
3 white members of our theater community to receive
4 tools for healing and allyship as we reel from the
5 numerous racial incidents and violence against black
6 Americans. All over New York City, from Sunset Park
7 to Flushing, from Bed-Sty to the South Bronx to lower
8 Manhattan, DCLA-funded theaters have not closed and
9 are engaging with their artists and communities in
10 imaginative, exciting new ways, making masks, posting
11 online play readings, Zoom dance parties, and
12 [inaudible] sing-alongs for seniors. They're putting
13 artists and activists at the center of neighborhood
14 discussions and actions around public health and
15 racial justice. Our theaters are responding swiftly
16 to the needs of their community, all while balancing
17 income and security. This work would not be possible
18 without the support of the City of New York and I
19 urge you to hold the NYC Department of Cultural
20 Affairs budget harmless. The DCLA supports theaters
21 that tell important stories, stories set in a car
22 factory in Detroit, on the Korean Island Manjae, and
23 a kitchen table that spans generations. The work
24 seen on New York's stages awakens our humanity. It
25 allows us to see each other in all of our complexity

2 and beautiful and at its best inspires us to change
3 for the better and connect. As we continue to move
4 through this public health crisis and pause public
5 gatherings, theater will be essential in the healing
6 and processing of the trauma we are all experiencing.
7 Please hold cultural funding harmless so we can
8 continue to provide spiritual help to New Yorkers
9 during this crisis and beyond. No civilization has
10 existed without its culture. Why should we? Thank
11 you so much.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
13 your testimony. Ah, we'll move to the next pant, Ray
14 Yan from the Louis, ah, excuse me, from the Lewis
15 Latimer House Museum.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 RAY YAN: Thank you for the opportunity
18 to testify. My name is Ray Yan. I'm the executive
19 director of the Lewis Latimer House Museum. As the
20 historic home of black inventor Lewis Latimer, we
21 serve majority communities of color in Queens and
22 across New York City, who are among the hardest hit
23 by coronavirus. Although the site is currently
24 closed, Latimer House never stopped addressing racial
25 justice through the cultural lens and providing

2 equitable [inaudible] education. We recently hosted
3 a virtual tour of the exhibition, Recent Revolution
4 Homeland, exploring the systemic practice of family
5 separation with in-depth, timely, live conversations.
6 Because families need remote learning resources, we
7 launched a weekly bilingual [inaudible] lab at home
8 newsletter, teaching [inaudible] using easily found
9 household materials. Our online CASA sessions have
10 become available opportunity for students to find
11 creative outlet, socially connect with their peers
12 and teachers during this time of isolation. All
13 virtual programs are free. With the nationwide
14 conversation on racial justice, it is even more
15 important now to support grassroots cultural
16 organizations by and for people of color, such as
17 Latimer House. By focusing on the historically
18 under-represented groups, the CASA Cultural Immigrant
19 Initiative and the DCLA initiatives, such as the
20 Language Access Fund, take the critical first steps
21 of addressing equity in culture. Losing them would
22 be detrimental to the progress we have made as a
23 city. Equity and access are not the extra toppings,
24 they are at the core of our work. The communities of
25 color we serve need more support now, not less. We

2 ask you to restore funding for CASA, Cultural
3 Immigrant Initiative, and the DCLA initiatives so
4 community-based cultural hubs like Latimer House can
5 continue to collaborate with the city to invest in
6 those demographics most affected by COVID-19. Thank
7 you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
9 your testimony. Before moving on, ah, we just want
10 to check one more time if Carol Ox is logged in. OK,
11 we'll move forward. Um, Chair Van Bramer, before we
12 move to the next panel?

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, ah,
14 very much, um, ah, to the Bronx Children's Museum. I
15 know you have, ah, a great deal of supporters in your
16 delegation who, ah, talk about you all the time and,
17 ah, appreciate, ah, the work you continue to do and
18 the, ah, expansion of, of the CIGs would be a great
19 thing, um, in, in so many places. And, um, Art New
20 York please send my love to Ginny and, ah, one of my
21 favorite people. And Latimer House, you know, as, as
22 a Queens kid, um, ah, we used to work for the Queens
23 Public Library, um, you know, we've, we've learned a
24 lot about, ah, Mr. Latimer and, ah, his family. Ah,
25 and one of his descendents used to be on the board of

2 the Queens Public Library while I worked there, so,
3 um, ah, great appreciation for your telling the story
4 of Mr. Latimer, which very few people, ah, too few
5 people know and understand. So, with that, ah, thank
6 you to this panel and, ah, Brenda will call the next
7 one.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Van
9 Bramer. And thank you, panelists, for your
10 testimony. The next three panelists are Gavin
11 Trinidad, Heather Arnson, and Maroney Paponides,
12 Paponides, apologies for any pronunciation. Gavin
13 Trinidad, you are the next witness. When the
14 sergeant calls the clock you may begin.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 GAVIN TRINIDAD: Hi, my name is Gavin
17 [inaudible] Trinidad. I'm a theater maker and also
18 the community engagement associate at New York
19 Theater Workshop. I live and work in the East
20 Village, where I was born and raised by two Filipino
21 immigrants. I'm urging you to prioritize and
22 maintain funding for the Coalition of Theaters of
23 Color in the FY21 New York City budget. I've worked
24 for a handful of theaters who are part of this large
25 [inaudible] coalition, [inaudible] Theater Company,

2 the Negro Ensemble Company, and Yancy Repertory

3 Theater. They have given me internships, my first

4 job opportunities, and some of the earliest memories

5 of seeing people who looked like me on stage.

6 Without these companies I wouldn't know myself worth

7 an artistry as a brown queer man. I grew up in New

8 York City during a time when the educational system

9 instructed my mother to stop talking to me in our

10 native tongue because they would confuse me and that

11 I wouldn't learn English properly. It was through my

12 accidental findings of these companies that helped me

13 expand and grow and relearn languages and cultures

14 that were stolen from me. To approve massive and

15 devastating cuts to the funding of the arts,

16 particularly to communities of color, supports the

17 white supremacy in the American arts by again

18 devaluing the languages, cultures, and the histories

19 of people of color. I understand the financial

20 devastation that COVID has wrought. But if the city

21 wants to help provide healing and action for black,

22 brown, indigenous, Asian, POC, queer, immigrant

23 families we need to support our artists and not give

24 that money to the police. Right now we are imagining

25 how to engage New Yorkers to envision better lives in

2 a post-quarantine world. The arts, cultural programs
3 are essential in doing so as many of these companies
4 have not just become essential cultural hubs, but
5 also places of social and civic engagement. I'm
6 afraid if we cut more of their funding many cultural
7 institutions of color will not exist by the end of
8 this coming fiscal year. When they are gone you will
9 see many [inaudible] and queer communities even more
10 disenfranchised in this city while the police
11 department is unscathed by the fiscal planning. I
12 hope my words and the protests of the people in the
13 streets have given you thought on how our decision,
14 ah, how your decision helps support these art
15 institutions can assure generations of New Yorkers of
16 color to have their voices affirmed and not against,
17 stolen, or erased. Thank you very much for your
18 time.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
20 your testimony. We are going to move to the next
21 panelist, who is Heather Arnson.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 HEATHER ARNSON: [inaudible]

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Arnson? Can we
25 please confirm that you are there? We'll move back

2 to Ms. Arnson. The next witness will be Maroney
3 Paponides.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 MARONEY PAPONIDES: Thank you. Um,
6 hello, my name is Maroney Paponides, um, and I am a,
7 ah, cultural worker and arts leader in Manhattan and
8 Brooklyn. I co-lead two organizations that live at
9 the intersection of the arts and civic engagement. I
10 am the cofounder of Radical Evolution, a multiethnic
11 performance collective that unearths the little-known
12 histories of people of color and immigrant
13 communities and celebrates their contributions to
14 this nation. And I'm also one of the directors of
15 Civil Rap, a critically acclaimed off-Broadway
16 theater known for socially engaged work that pushes
17 artistic boundaries. Ah, I would like to use this
18 time today to urge you to prioritize and maintain
19 funding for the coalitions, Coalition of Theaters of
20 Color, in the FY21 New York City budget. The 42, ah,
21 [inaudible] led organizations that make up the CTC
22 produce extraordinary and impactful plays, employ
23 tens of thousands of people, and nurtures, nurture
24 the careers of some of the greatest talent in this
25 city. Um, speaking personally, I participated in a

2 wonderful residency at [inaudible] Theater in the
3 Bronx, seen many impactful theater works at the
4 National Black Theater in Harlem, and I've enjoyed
5 visits to the Billie Holiday in Brooklyn, among many
6 other, ah, incredible organizations that are part of
7 this coalition. Ah, since the COVID-19 crisis began,
8 ah, in numerous public forums, arts and culture
9 workers have been told by multiple city officials to
10 expect cuts in the FY21 budget. Ah, these same
11 elected officials have repeatedly and explicitly
12 cited the need to maintain the NYPD budget as a
13 reason that arts organizations should expect and
14 accept these funding cuts. The Coalition of Theaters
15 of Color have been historically underfunded and are
16 particularly vulnerable now, um, and I understand the
17 very real and unprecedented budgetary challenges, um,
18 but I urge, ah, the council as well as the mayor's
19 office to prioritize funding to these historically
20 underfunded theaters who, ah, are gonna be part of
21 the, a crucial part of the recovery of the city, um,
22 and of their communities who have been
23 disproportionately impacted. Budgets tell the story
24 of our values and this is not just a call for
25 funding, this is a call for justice. We have been

2 grateful to those of you who have been steadfast and
3 vocal advocates for the Coalition of Theaters of
4 Color for many years and we ask you to please stand
5 strong now, ah, and call upon your colleagues to
6 maintain this funding. Thank you very much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

8 We are adding one more person to this panel and then
9 we will check with Ms. Heather Arnson again before
10 moving on to the next panel. Um, Liz Olson is being
11 added to this panel. Ms. Olson, are you available?

12 LIZ OLSON: Yes, I am.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. When the
14 sergeant calls the clock if you can please begin.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 LIZ OLSON: Hi, my name is Liz Olson and
17 I'm the general manager at the New School for the
18 Performing Arts in their drama program. I wanted to
19 speak today because we're training students who are
20 going to be the next generation of leaders in these
21 cultural institutions in New York. I know I myself
22 have worked at cultural institutions across the city
23 and I've been a patron at cultural institutions for
24 the better part of the last three decades. The arts
25 really are the center of New York City culture, and

2 particularly at this moment the, um, [inaudible]
3 cultural institutions really need the support of your
4 committee. I'm sorry, I was just eating when we,
5 when you called me. Now more than ever we need to
6 support funding for the arts. It is the engine of
7 our economy. It is the center of our culture as a
8 city, and without the arts we won't have a recovery.
9 We won't have a city to come back to. Um, so I
10 really urge the committee to, to support as much arts
11 funding as possible, knowing that we're in this
12 devastating budgetary moment, but rather than funding
13 policing of our communities we need to fund the
14 centering of our communities in these artistic
15 institutions, particularly those that support people
16 of color. So if we can push for as much funding for
17 them as possible, ah, I would greatly appreciate it.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
19 testimony. Before we move to the chair and then to
20 the next panel, if we can just check if Ms. Arnson,
21 Heather Arnson, Heather Arnson? OK, we will move to
22 the next panel. Before that, ah, Chair Van Bramer.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Ah,
24 first, ah, Gavin, thank you for that, ah, incredibly
25 moving testimony. Um, ah, the fact that you got

2 emotional, ah, during the testimony, um, got me a
3 little emotional, um, and, ah, I really appreciate,
4 ah, the passion with which you, ah, came to the
5 hearing today with. Um, and, ah, we are thrilled, I
6 am thrilled, to represent one of the largest Filipino
7 communities, ah, in Woodside, Queens, and we just
8 celebrated, ah, Little Manila, ah, last week, um, and
9 in fact I announced we're gonna be, ah, renaming the
10 street, ah, ah, Little Manila. So, ah, thank you for
11 sharing your experience and, ah, also being, um, a
12 queer man myself I appreciate, ah, um, where you're
13 coming from. So to, ah, some of the substance of
14 what you were talking about, ah, but also Maroney,
15 um, I've said it a million times in this hearing,
16 I'll keep saying, I was one of the first council
17 members to come out and say that we should cut, ah,
18 the NYPD's budget by at least a billion dollars, ah,
19 more if we can get there. Um, and, and I
20 desperately want to protect funding to, ah, culture
21 and the arts. Coalition of Theaters of Color, ah,
22 come here today in force and I appreciate, um, that
23 advocacy, ah, and support it and, and obviously I'm
24 going to do everything we can to make sure that, ah,
25 we achieve some budget justice here. So, um, to all

2 of you, I understand it's more than just about
3 numbers, it's about justice. Um, so, ah, with that,
4 you know, I'm, I'm fighting, ah, on behalf of the
5 very things that so many of you have come here to
6 talk about. So with that, um, I'll ask Brenda to
7 call the next panel.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
9 Chair Van Bramer. The next three panelists will be
10 Daneal Cooper for the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory,
11 Cheryl Warfield from Moore Opera, and Devon Mattis or
12 Mathis, from Urban Glass. Daneal Cooper, when the
13 sergeant calls the clock you may begin. Thank you.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 DANEAL COOPER: Hello, my name is Daneal
16 Cooper. I am speaking today as the chair of the
17 Cultural Institutions Task Force for the Manhattan
18 Solid Waste Advisory Board, a volunteer citizens'
19 advisory board dedicated to achieving zero waste in
20 New York City. The DCLA is tasked this summer with
21 helping the cultural institutions overcome tremendous
22 logistical and financial barriers brought on by the
23 recent COVID-19 pandemic is no simple task. I am
24 here to implore that the DCLA and officers of
25 individual institutions work to envision a new future

2 for visitation practices in New York City's historic
3 and cultural sites that prioritizes not only human
4 health but environmental health and social equity.
5 Targeting zero waste will require new and modified
6 business operations, yet this can easily be devised
7 in correlation with new opening strategies. I urge
8 that cultural institutions embrace the opportunities
9 inherent in their existing facilities' operations to
10 [inaudible]. Working with food vendors to implement
11 organics recycling and installing easy-to-read
12 signage and easy-to-locate recycling bins for
13 visitors should be necessary components to designing
14 more sanitary food disposal practices and ensuring
15 that visitors understand your institution's advised
16 cleaning and disposal protocols. New York City ranks
17 second as the greatest global city leader of
18 greenhouse gases with an annual output of just under
19 52 million tons of CO2 equivalent and research from
20 global environmental organizations indicate that poor
21 environmental health takes a toll on human health and
22 disproportionately so on [inaudible] communities of
23 color. Committing to sustainable operations shows
24 visitors that your cultural institution is ensuring
25 human health and a place of integrity, not liability.

2 To help city institutions [inaudible] their
3 strategies the Cultural Institution Task Force has
4 created a simple handout that is available on the
5 Manhattan SWAB website. We look forward to being of
6 assistance. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
8 your testimony today. Our next panelist will be
9 Cheryl Warfield from Moore Opera.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 CHERYL WARFIELD: So, thank you, Chairman
12 Bramer and the City Council for this opportunity to
13 speak. New York needs to keep culture whole for the
14 health and welfare of our communities. Arts and
15 culture must not be cut in the fiscal year 21 budget.
16 My name is Cheryl Warfield and I am a professional
17 opera singer and a member of three professional
18 unions. I have performed at the Metropolitan Opera
19 and on Broadway, and I am the founder of Moore Opera,
20 a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit providing educational and
21 outreach programs to underserved audiences. For 20
22 years I have worked with children of color in schools
23 in poor neighborhoods on Staten Island, in Crown
24 Heights, and East New York, and the South Bronx and
25 University Heights. New York has endured economic

2 downturns before and I am here to tell you that
3 culture did not stop then and will not stop now. My
4 nonprofit is connecting virtually in ways we never
5 anticipated via remote rehearsals, live streaming new
6 concerts, and new content creation. Since 2018 I've
7 been the chorus director at the Jazz Event Cortlandt
8 Senior Center in the Bronx through a Su Casa grant
9 administered by the Bronx Opera. I began to explore
10 ways to stay connected to the seniors after all
11 activities were canceled effective March 13. By
12 April 2, with trepidation, the seniors began
13 rehearsing online and this Thursday, June 25 at 7:30
14 p.m. via Zoom the Jazz Event Cortlandt Virtual Chorus
15 will present a public performance. The seniors are
16 extremely excited to present their new skills and
17 exhibit their creativity. I implore the council to
18 continue this vital funding to the communities that
19 need it. Please fight for a fair and just fiscal
20 year 21 budget that adequately funds the Department
21 of Education, the Department of Youth and Community
22 Development, and the Department of Cultural Affairs
23 for a better future for all. So thank you very much,
24 and I also would like to thank my colleagues at
25 Culture Three for inclusion of small organizations

2 like Moore Opera. We are here and ready to help in
3 any way that we can, ah, as agents for, um, ah, for
4 changes and a more positive New York. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
6 your testimony. We have no evidence more panelist
7 before we move to the next panel. Devon Mathis from
8 Urban Glass. You may begin when the sergeant calls
9 the clock.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 DEVON MATHIS: Hello, Chair Van Bramer
12 and colleagues. My name is Devon Mathis and I'm here
13 to speak to you on behalf of Urban Glass in Fort
14 Greene, Brooklyn. One of the many programs Urban
15 Glass runs is our entrepreneurial programming, which
16 serves artists and designers at all levels of their
17 career, providing opportunities for education,
18 promotion, and networking within our world-class
19 facility, enabling experimentation and innovation in
20 glass. Maintaining this programming following the
21 revenue loss from our COVID-19 closure is critical
22 for the nearly 500 professional artists who depend on
23 our studios to create work and make a living.

24 However, the PAUSE order has left hundreds of New
25 York City artists and designers without the means to

2 generate income due to our studios' closure. In
3 addition to supporting established artists, Urban
4 Glass enables the development of artists, future
5 small business owners, through programs such as our
6 Bead Project. Since 1997 the Bead Project has served
7 as a unique scholarship program designed for women to
8 learn the art of glass bead making while gaining
9 education in entrepreneurial-ship with the goal of
10 launching their own business. In March Urban Glass
11 was forced to postpone our spring 2020 semester due
12 to coronavirus. Upon reopening our priority is to
13 reinstate this critical program and ensure that we
14 are able to provide both healing and financial
15 avenues to the thousands of artists we serve. I'm
16 specifically mentioning these two Urban Glass
17 programs today to highlight not only the importance
18 of the arts, but more specifically the important role
19 that arts and artists play in our city's economy.
20 With the current budget, arts and culture are left
21 economically fragile. All the small businesses run
22 out of Urban Glass are economically fragile. New
23 York City's greatest asset, emerging artists and mid-
24 career artists are economically fragile. I'm asking
25 today that you redirect NYPD funding to keep DCLA and

2 initiative funding whole. I am asking today that you
3 do everything you can to keep culture whole. Thank
4 you for your time.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
6 testimony. This concludes this panel. I'll call the
7 names of the next panel before moving to Chair Van
8 Bramer and the next panel. The next panel will be
9 Renee Foster, Anthony Santos, Garrett Allen, and
10 David Newsonbaum. Before we move to the next panel
11 and Renee Foster from Summer in the City we will move
12 to Chair Van Bramer. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
14 much. Um, ah, Cheryl, that was, um, amazing if I may
15 say so. Um, when you put your papers, ah, I thought
16 you were gonna sing perhaps for us, um, and I got
17 very excited. But, ah, but equally excited that you
18 talked about the Su Casa program, ah, at the senior
19 center and, um, you know, I, I say often we've, we've
20 poured, as I mentioned before, you know, we have
21 quadrupled, ah, CASA, ah, we've created Su Casa,
22 we've created the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. And
23 when I hear people actually tell me the stories of,
24 of where that money went and, and whose lives are
25 being touched by it, it makes me fight for it even

2 harder, right, because particularly in a year like
3 this, um, ah, you know, the budget vultures are out
4 there, right, and, and often people, um, do want to
5 go after culture and the arts and, um, ah, even
6 though everyone says publicly they support it. But,
7 um, but, ah, I just want to say, ah, that was an
8 incredibly important story for me here and, ah, given
9 how difficult times are, it's got to be awfully, ah,
10 ah, emotional and uplifting to watch the program and
11 watch those seniors, ah, ah, sing on Thursday. I
12 wish I could be able to, ah, to do that and just,
13 just watch it. Um, but, ah, thank you. Ah, and
14 Urban Glass, we love Urban Glass. I've been there
15 and, um, ah, it's a great program. So, ah, to all of
16 you, thank you, and to the next panel, um, I just
17 want you to know, ah, I saw all of you waiting out
18 there, ah, including Anthony, Renee, and Garrett,
19 and, ah, and said to my, my staff those folks have
20 been waiting to testify. I hope you call their names
21 soon. So, um, ah, I, I want to thank everyone who's
22 been waiting. I know we're in like hour four, ah, of
23 this hearing. But, um, but thank you for waiting,
24 thank you for testifying. And, um, Brenda, you can

2 officially call the next panel, even though we just
3 said their names.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank you
5 so much, Chair Van Bramer. I'll repeat the names of
6 the next panel and then call Renee Foster. So the
7 next four individuals will be Renee Foster, Anthony
8 Santos, Garrett Allen, and David Newsonbaum. Ms.
9 Foster, if you are ready you can begin when the
10 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 RENEE FOSTER: Hello. Good afternoon,
13 Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee. I'm
14 Renee Foster and I'm the chair of the communications
15 of the Universal Hip Hop Museum. The UHHM was
16 founded on the knowledge that black lives, black
17 power, and black creativity deserve full,
18 unapologetic expression. Hip hop music has amplified
19 this message from its inception. While for much of
20 the world black lives matters is a revelation, for
21 the UHHM it is a fundamental truth that undergirds
22 our mission. And I'm a Queens resident from Kew
23 Gardens and I'm a proud graduate of these New York
24 City public schools at a time when arts education was
25 well funded. But today I'm here to present a

2 transformative, innovative program for the kids of
3 New York City called Summer in the City, in
4 association with the Arts Student League, Greenwood
5 Cemetery, and the Time in Arts Children's Arts
6 Initiative. For the first time in New York City we
7 have an unprecedented opportunity to integrate a
8 level playing field for access to the arts for every
9 New York City public school child. Because of COVID-
10 19 every student now has or is entitled to have a
11 tablet plus Wi-Fi in their home. And that's what
12 makes this program possible, OK? So Summer in the
13 City will bring the most talented, creative artists,
14 dancers, musicians, and writers of all kinds to kids
15 this summer through virtual programming. We have a
16 website with a portal that lists all the classes.
17 Registration software is already in place. Our team
18 has moved very quickly to have it all ready by July
19 6. Imagine, teens from across all the boroughs sign
20 onto Zoom and within seconds they're learning from a
21 world-class artist in Harlem. And that's only one
22 example of the magic that can happen this summer. 55
23 of the city's best dance studios, art schools, music
24 programs, museums, theaters, and more have signed on
25 to over 140 classes. We have funding to offer about

2 a third of them. We have over 70 classes we're still
3 seeking funding for and we're really grateful to you,
4 Chair Van Bramer, for your enthusiasm and endorsement
5 of Summer in the City. The Office of the Mayor, and
6 the Commissioner Casals have already endorsed us as
7 well, and we are constantly talking to foundations
8 and raising money as an executive [inaudible]. We
9 urge to City Council members who care about giving
10 our kids meaningful and inspirational options this
11 summer to support this program in any way you can.
12 Our kids deserve the very best that we can give them.
13 Full information about this testimony we will submit
14 to you and our registration is our at our website at
15 summerinthecity.nyc. Thank you so much. Thank you
16 for your time.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
18 your testimony. Ah, the next witness will be Anthony
19 Santos from the Dance Theater of Harlem. Mr. Santos?

20 ANTHONY SANTOS: Hi.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We see you.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 ANTHONY SANTOS: Good afternoon. Good
24 afternoon, Chairman Van Bramer and the distinguished
25 members of the City Council. My name is Anthony

2 Santos and I am a proud company artist with the
3 legendary Dance Theater of Harlem. Today I share a
4 short excerpt of my personal testimony on the impact
5 of New York City's cultural community, which has been
6 submitted in full to the committee. I hope you all
7 take the time to read and experience my full story.
8 Growing up as a gay black man in Harlem has never
9 been an easy journey. One of my biggest struggles
10 was fitting into a society around me. Even when
11 society didn't support me or my beliefs, the arts
12 gave my life meaning. When I found dance at a young
13 age I was fortunate enough to find my lifelong best
14 friend. The arts gave me the confidence and the
15 courage to be my component self. Rosie's Theater
16 Kids was my first experience with arts education and
17 it changed my life for the better. I am a product of
18 New York City's education system and New York City's
19 commitment to culture, especially in communities of
20 color. The arts benefits everyone, all New Yorkers.
21 The arts makes people healthier. The arts put New
22 Yorkers to work and teaches people how to dream.
23 Today is the beginning of a new era and we will no
24 longer allow voices to go unheard. We must continue
25 to be civic-minded together and united. As a dancer

2 and a lifelong New Yorker I am asking the City
3 Council to recognize that the arts are necessary for
4 the recovery of our communities, especially
5 communities like mine, Harlem. Our communities have
6 experienced trauma caused by two pandemics, COVID-19
7 and the results of years of operating within systems
8 of white privilege that have negatively and
9 disproportionately impacted communities of color.
10 I'd like to end with a quote from a black activist
11 and personal hero, Mohammed Ali. "A man who is not
12 courageous enough to take risks will never accomplish
13 anything in life." Artists are storytellers. We are
14 the beginning of creating change. So now is the time
15 to seek change and create a better future. I ask
16 that you be courageous in your decision-making and
17 restore DCLA and initiative funding. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Mr.
19 Santos, for your testimony. The next member of the
20 panel will be Garrett Allen. You can begin when the
21 sergeant calls the clock.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 GARRETT ALLEN: Ah, dear Council Member
24 Chair Van Bramer and Commissioner Casals, I'm
25 reaching out to you as a black queer theater-maker

3 and artist. Right after graduating from college in
4 2016 the very next thing I did was move to New York.
5 I came, I specifically came to the city because of
6 the innovative, bold, daring, and important cultural
7 work they've done. I'm also coming to you as just an
8 ordinary New Yorker who is a resident of Crown
9 Heights, Brooklyn. I'm urging you to prioritize and
10 maintain funding for the Coalition of Theaters of
11 Color in the fiscal year 21 New York City budget.
12 The 42 black, indigenous, and people of color-led
13 organizations that make up the Coalition of Theaters
14 of Color simply produce some of the most
15 extraordinary and impactful work and are centers of
16 artistic and cultural significance. These
17 organizations employ tens of thousands of people,
18 including me, and nurture the careers of some of the
19 most talented artists in the city. These
20 organizations are cultural epicenters, bringing
21 together youth, young people, strengthening their
22 voices, and seniors in need of gathering and
23 community. These organizations are integral economic
24 and cultural resources of this city. It is my dream
25 to be an artistic leader, like any of these leaders
of these organizations. I am constantly inspired and

2 deeply impacted each time I am able to be engaged
3 with to work with these organizations as an artist or
4 an audience member. The work of these people is what
5 gets me up on the morning and honestly has kept me
6 alive. The Coalition of Theaters of Color has been
7 historically underfunded and is particularly
8 vulnerable now. The Coalition of Theaters of Color
9 serve the very communities that have the, been most
10 impacted by COVID-19 and nourish the people who
11 continue to face systematic injustice and violence at
12 the hands of the overfunded NYPD. They are spaces of
13 healing of all kinds. The entire 3.7 million dollars
14 allocated to the theater of Coalition of Theaters of
15 Color initiative last year represents less than 0.7%
16 of the proposed fiscal year 21 NYPD budget. This is
17 saddening for me as a theater artist, a resident, and
18 general human being. I again urge you to look at
19 your choices and prioritize and maintain funding for
20 the Coalition of Theaters of Color. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
22 testimony, Mr. Allen. The final member of this panel
23 will be David Newsonbaum. Before you begin, I will
24 read the members of the next panel. Um, they will be
25 Charlotte Cohen from the Brooklyn Arts Council,

2 Marina Ortiz from East Harlem Preservation Inc., and
3 Katherine Delaney from New York Foundation for the
4 Arts. So before we finish this panel we'll move to
5 David Newsonbaum from Bronx Arts Ensemble. Thank
6 you.

7 DAVID NEWSONBAUM: Hi. Dear [inaudible]
8 Van Bramer, Commissioner Casals, and council members.
9 Bronx Arts Ensemble annually...

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry, Mr.
11 Newsonbaum, sorry, I apologize. Um, I was going to
12 say the sergeant should start the clock, but it just
13 started.

14 DAVID NEWSONBAUM: OK. Bronx Arts
15 Ensemble annually employs over a hundred talented
16 artists and administrators who are now more deeply
17 than ever committed to our Bronx constituents. This
18 spring the communities we served have been
19 disproportionately affected by our two major recent
20 nationwide crises. We are closing out the spring
21 season digitally in both our school teaching and
22 musical performances. Each week this summer we will
23 launch five new free online art classes. Digital is
24 a different classroom and concert experience, keeping
25 us relatively locked down and opening an alternative

2 channel to be more inclusive beyond reopening. When
3 reopening and recovery begin Bronx Arts Ensemble and
4 our theaters will be front line in helping the
5 borough recover emotionally. Our tens of thousands
6 of constituents, from students to seniors, have
7 depended on us for 48 years to transcend oppression,
8 to celebrate our many different cultural traditions,
9 and to nourish pride and identity. What is
10 systematic racism? It's telling our students and
11 audiences, who are overwhelming black and brown, that
12 public art education and free concerts are
13 discretionary and nonessential. In 40 public schools
14 our educational framework addresses 21st century
15 learning skills and social emotional learning. Our
16 free community concerts in over 35 Bronx community
17 venues are performed by New York City's finest
18 musicians and embrace diverse cultural traditions.
19 Bronxites will recover through these exceptional
20 experiences in the classroom, afterschool, and many
21 public community venues where we perform. Bronxites
22 are counting on your ongoing support of cultural
23 development and critical initiatives like CASA.
24 These, they need these experiences more than ever to
25 properly recover. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much
3 your testimony. This concludes this panel. Before
4 we move to the next panel, Chair Van Bramer?

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
6 much. Um, so I don't know if Garrett is, ah, still
7 listening or still with us, but I, but I see Anthony,
8 ah, and I just want to say thank you for, um, telling
9 that story and also for, for challenging me, ah, to,
10 as I believe you said, to take a risk and be
11 courageous, right? Um, and, ah, I know that, ah,
12 [inaudible] am a queer man, I enjoy an enormous
13 amount of privilege, um, and, ah, and I have an
14 enormous responsibility to use the power, ah, and the
15 privilege that I have right now to be as courageous
16 as I possibly can be and to take as many risks as I
17 possibly can. Um, ah, you know, it, it doesn't feel
18 that risky or courageous to, to say that we should,
19 ah, cut the NYPD's budget to by at least a billion
20 dollars. Um, but when I did that I certainly got a
21 lot of shit from a lot of people, um, for, for being
22 so early, ah, and, um, and I just want you to, I want
23 both of you to know in particular ah, ah, you know,
24 as queer black men, but also, ah, the other panelists
25 as well that like I, I really feel this moment and I

2 really feel like, um, ah, you know, I need to do
3 something bold, ah, with my position, with my life,
4 and, and, and this is the moment, right, like if we
5 don't seize this moment now, um, will we ever? Um,
6 so, um, I'm moved by your testimony. I'm sure the
7 commissioner, ah, is as well and, and, um, and
8 Garrett I think you said that the theater, you know,
9 and the arts sort of saved your life, um, and, ah,
10 you know, it's just incredibly powerful to hear that.
11 So, again, the Coalition of Theaters of Color, ah,
12 you know, if it were just up to me and I'm one member
13 of the 22-member budget negotiating team, if it were
14 just up to me we'd put all the money from the NYPD
15 into the arts. But, um, ah, we will have to, ah,
16 battle that out as the council with the
17 administration. But, I mean, you know where my
18 priorities lie and, and I just want to say again like
19 I, I am, I have a year and a half left as a council
20 member, um, and, ah, I'm one of the first openly gay
21 people ever elected, ah, in the borough of Queens,
22 where I grew up and, and I want to make it count.
23 So, um, I'm gonna do everything I can.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
25 Chair Van Bramer, and to the members of the panel for

2 your testimony. I'm going to read the names of the
3 next four witnesses again. Um, there are four on
4 this panel, not three. Ah, Charlotte Cohen from
5 Brooklyn Arts Council, Marina Ortiz from East Harlem
6 Preservation, Katherine Delaney from New York
7 Foundation for the Arts, and David Robertson from
8 Triple Threat Performance Arts. We'll move to
9 Charlotte Cohen First. You may begin when the
10 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you so much.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 CHARLOTTE COHEN: I'm Charlotte Cohen,
13 executive director of Brooklyn Arts Council. Thank
14 you for allowing me to testify today. I know City
15 Council needs to make hard decisions that respond to
16 the extraordinary financial challenges we face
17 because of the pandemic. I speak for the borough
18 arts councils and many other organizations when I say
19 that these decisions will have a ripple effect. If
20 the cultural initiatives are cut it means that tens
21 of thousands of children, families and seniors who
22 participate in our programs in mostly black and brown
23 communities won't have access to arts activities that
24 literally save their lives. Thank you, Council
25 Member Van Bramer for your comments and support of

2 reallocating NYPD, um, funds to arts and culture.

3 CASA programs provides safe haven to many children in
4 vulnerable situations and participation in Su Casa is

5 often the only social engagement seniors have for

6 days on end. At PS-274 of Brooklyn, a school where

7 over 76% of students are speakers of language,

8 languages other than English and 21% reside in

9 temporary housing, the principal said arts education

10 gives our students the opportunity to think

11 critically about concepts, instills confidence, and

12 gives our students exposure to cultures and spaces

13 beyond their immediate worlds. These initiatives are

14 essential because they provide employment for

15 thousands of people. BAC has employed over 300

16 artists and educators annually. These programs are a

17 critical source of income for these part-time

18 seasonal workers. In addition, our organization is

19 heavily subsidized with DOE's arts programs, for

20 which we are paid very little in overhead. Here's

21 what we're doing now - providing online training for

22 the teaching artists so that they're prepared to

23 teach under all circumstances, collaborating on a

24 COVID-19 relief fund for traditional artists, and

25 holding remote workshops for artists to share their

2 work and approaches to solving issues like food
3 insecurity, wellness, and financial challenges. It's
4 organizations like the Five Borough Arts Councils
5 that provide close relationships with our citizens,
6 and it is your arts initiatives that help make that
7 possible. We know that the pandemic and the economic
8 downturn have destabilized the lives of New Yorkers,
9 particularly in our black and brown communities. By
10 supporting the cultural initiatives you'll be
11 supporting the development and healing of our
12 communities, aiding vulnerable populations, providing
13 learning opportunities to those in greatest need, and
14 keeping thousands of people employed. I ask you to
15 keep the cultural initiatives' budgets intact, and
16 thank you for your consideration and continued
17 support of the arts councils and all of us who
18 participate in these programs that are so important
19 to our communities.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
21 your testimony. As with previous panels, we will
22 wait until the end of the panel for comments and
23 council member questions. The next panelist will be
24 Marina Ortiz. You may begin when the sergeant calls
25 the clock.

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 MARINA ORTIZ: Good afternoon. Ah, the
4 city and world continue to undergo changes for the
5 greater good with millions clamoring for the removal
6 of monuments upholding white supremacy, but this call
7 is not new. In 2017 Harlem residents won a 10-year
8 battle to remove a statue honoring J. Marion Sims, a
9 white southern doctor who experimented on black
10 female slaves and their infants to perfect his
11 techniques. The statue was finally removed on April
12 17, 2018. Two years later, however, we have yet to
13 see a replacement that reflects the spirit and
14 resilience of black, Latino, and indigenous people.
15 Today, now, is precisely the right time to act and
16 move forward with Vinnie Bagwell's Black Victory
17 installation, which was selected as the replacement.
18 Back in 2018 Mayor de Blasio and the first lady set
19 aside one million dollars for that project and
20 representatives from DCLA and the [inaudible] Art
21 Program assured us that the project would be
22 finalized by the end of this year. But even before
23 COVID-19, members of the Committee to Empower Voices
24 for Healing Inequity here in East Harlem were kept
25 out of the loop and the process came to a standstill,

2 again before the virus hit us, with emails and calls
3 unanswered while Vinnie Bagwell, the artist, waited
4 patiently, and still does, to sign her contract and
5 move forward. I'm not here to beg, and I sincerely
6 hope that the current fiscal climate will not affect
7 this project, which is dear to so many residents of
8 these community. I believe that moving with Vinnie
9 Bagwell's amazing vision, without any cutbacks or
10 corporate funding, would be a simple yet powerful
11 gesture towards restorative justice for people of
12 color and will serve as an important resource for
13 healing and educating. Lastly, I want to express my
14 displeasure with the suggestion to fund murals that
15 were painted on high-end shops whose owners chose to
16 board up their windows. The murals were privately
17 funded and do not deserve to be further funded, as
18 that would only co-op the blood, sweat, and tears
19 shed by people in the front line of these protests.
20 And then I'd also like to know what time the Teddy
21 Roosevelt statue is coming down tomorrow, because I'd
22 like to be there. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
24 your testimony. The next witness will be Katherine
25 Delaney from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ms. Delaney, we are
4 going to go to the next panelist, but we will come
5 back to you after this panelist, so I will go to the
6 final panelist on this panel, David Robertson from
7 the Triple Threat Performance Arts. Mr. Robertson,
8 if you are prepared you may begin when the sergeant
9 calls.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 DAVID ROBERTSON: Ah, good afternoon. I
12 want to thank, ah, Chairman Bramer and, ah, the City
13 Council for allowing me the opportunity to speak
14 today. My name is David Robertson and I'm the CEO of
15 a not-for-profit organization called Triple Threat
16 Performance Arts Academy. The mission of my academy
17 is to educate children between the ages of 8 and 16
18 in the cultural enriched and diverse world of the
19 performing arts. Our purpose is to assess and
20 develop talent and to encourage self-expression.
21 I've been in, um, business since 2004 and I've served
22 over 5000 students during that time. But due to
23 COVID I have not been able to do any type of online
24 work with my students due to the fact that they do
25 not, um, have, ah, access to tablets. So, um, you

2 know, throughout the history of the United States
3 black bodies have been tortured. They have been
4 policed and marginalized in political, social, and
5 creative spaces, and in the world of high dance forms
6 like ballet and theater, black dancers and
7 choreographers have had to confront notions of white
8 supremacy, ah, and privileged white bodies beautiful
9 and graceful while denying such attributes to black
10 bodies, and my organization therefore is, ah,
11 producing a film entitled Up in the Air, and uses the
12 life of black choreographer, director Louis Johnson,
13 who we lost to the coronavirus recently in March, ah,
14 to address those marginalizations. And that has
15 inspired me to want to, ah, do an afterschool film
16 program, ah, where students will learn, ah, how to
17 edit and write and release all of their ambitions and
18 insecurities. So I am pleading with you to, ah, ah,
19 not fall, not let the Department of Education or
20 Department of Youth or Department of Cultural Affairs
21 be hit by any type of, ah, fund break. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
23 your testimony. Before we conclude this panel, um,
24 and move to Chair Van Bramer, Ms. Delaney, are you,
25 we see that you're on Zoom. Can you respond?

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2 KATHERINE DELANEY: Hi. Can you hear me?

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you now.

4 KATHERINE DELANEY: OK.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Um, when the sergeant
6 calls the clock you can begin. Thank you so much.

7 KATHERINE DELANEY: Great, all right,
8 thank you.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 KATHERINE DELANEY: Hello. I'm here
11 representing the New York Foundation for the Arts and
12 we are an arts service organization whose mission is
13 to provide financial, educational, and professional
14 support to individual artists and emerging arts
15 organizations. During the COVID crisis we have been
16 hard at work providing emergency funding to
17 individual artists and arts workers. By the end of
18 our fiscal year, which ends, ah, this month on June
19 30, we will have dispersed nearly 4 million dollars
20 to individuals and we will continue to focus all of
21 our resources on providing aid to artists,
22 particularly artists of color and arts workers who
23 have been hit hardest by this crisis. Our work
24 impacts real human beings and it is critical work to
25 the communities in New York City. There are hundreds

2 of thousands of artists living across the city who
3 are being economically impacted by COVID, not just
4 because of the shutdown of the arts sector, but also
5 because the part-time work they use to supplement
6 their income, such as restaurant work and retail
7 work, has also been impacted. The desperation we're
8 seeing from our constituents is very real. In order
9 for us to continue our work we need funding now more
10 than ever. While we are working to get millions of
11 dollars out to artists, our own operating costs have
12 increased and we have limited funds remaining to
13 continue our own operations, and we see that this is
14 true for many arts organizations. We need
15 discretionary funding to continue and we need core
16 program funding to continue so that we can survive
17 this. We recognize the City Council is facing some
18 very difficult budget decisions and a ballooning
19 budget deficit. All we ask is that you keep in mind
20 that artists and arts workers are real people who
21 rely on the program services and economic support
22 that arts organizations provide. They rely on your
23 support. We also ask that you remember arts and
24 culture is a huge economic driver and is responsible
25 for nearly 15% of the city's economic activity. We

2 know you have a difficult job ahead and we want to
3 thank you for doing your best and just special thanks
4 to our council member in [inaudible], Steven Levin,
5 for supporting the immigrant artist community that
6 we've been serving for the past 12 years. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
8 the witnesses on this panel. We will now move to
9 Council Member Chair Van Bramer.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, ah,
11 very much to everyone, ah, on the panel, and, ah, I
12 wanted to invite Commissioner Casals, um, ah,
13 obviously he was not in the position, ah, that he is
14 in now when, ah, a bunch of decisions were made, ah,
15 around the J. Marion Sims, ah, replacement, ah, that
16 Marina mentioned, but I think Commissioner Casals
17 has, ah, ah, an update on that and can provide some
18 additional information.

19 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you, Chair
20 Van Bramer. Ah, Marina, with apologies, after you
21 and I spoke I did the, I did the research and, you
22 know, to answer your question, I mean, I, I didn't
23 get to call you back. Um, the, the project is still
24 going. It was, ah, delayed because things were on
25 pause, but my understanding is that the contract is

2 with ABC and they're going to, um, contact the artist
3 very soon, um, to finalize the contract and then move
4 forward with the, the monument. And then I have no
5 idea what time, and I didn't know that Teddy
6 Roosevelt was coming down tomorrow. I know that it's
7 coming down, but I didn't know it was tomorrow, so I
8 don't know at what time. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, ah,
10 ah, Commissioner Casals and, um, I'm not surprised,
11 but it is, it is very good and sends, I think, a very
12 good message that you are here to listen, ah, for
13 hours, ah, to hundreds of our, ah, cultural workers
14 and, and community leaders and cultural
15 organizations, ah, large and small. Um, but, ah, I'm
16 glad you are here with us still, um, and, ah, are
17 able to hear and respond, ah, to questions.
18 Commissioners don't always hang around for hours
19 after they have finished, ah, testifying. Um, so
20 with that, thank you and, ah, ah, I, too, did not
21 know the statute was coming down, ah, tomorrow, but,
22 ah, we're thrilled, ah, that it is. Um, and, ah, we
23 will all try and get that information exactly what
24 time that's coming down. So with that I'll ask, ah,
25 Brenda to move us to the next panel.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much
3 again to the panelists. And thank you so much, Chair
4 Van Bramer. The next panel will have five
5 individuals, apologies, it will have four
6 individuals. I will read all the names before going
7 to the first panelist, then we will hold questions to
8 the end of the panel. The next panelists are Melody
9 Capote from the Caribbean Cultural Center African
10 Diaspora Institute, Heather Arnson, Ryan Gilliam, and
11 Omna Khan. Apologies if I mispronounce the last
12 name. The first panelist will be Melody Capote.
13 Thank you so much.

14 MELODY CAPOTE: Good afternoon.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 MELODY CAPOTE: [inaudible] Mr. Chairman,
17 Majority Leader Cumbo, and members of the City
18 Council. My name is Melody Capote, executive
19 director of the Caribbean Cultural Center African
20 Diaspora Institute, based in the heart of East
21 Harlem. The first thing I want you to know is that
22 black lives matter and that I can't breathe. I can't
23 breathe when my relatives are dealt the ultimate
24 punishment for simply living while black. I can't
25 breathe when funding for arts and culture is so

2 inequitable that we are unable to do what arts and
3 culture does best, blame healing a community simply
4 because we do not have the resources to meet the
5 need. In response, am I on? Can you hear me?

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you, Ms.
7 Capote.

8 MELODY CAPOTE: In response to COVID-19
9 and the Black Lives Matter movement the arts and
10 culture community not only did not close, but instead
11 rose to the occasion by providing virtual programming
12 that directly responded to the needs of the
13 community. So I challenge you to do the same and
14 create a Black Lives Matter is Culture initiative
15 despite the pressures to the contrary. Doing nothing
16 is simply unacceptable. To honor George Floyd and
17 the other martyrs in our community I ask that this
18 initiative include that DCA establish a special
19 capacity building fund for organizations of color
20 with a budget under 5 million dollars who will
21 propose to use their capacity expansion grant to
22 address racial and social injustice. B, that DCA,
23 DCLA reconfigure its CASA funds to support a digital
24 education and empowerment program that will train
25 artists of color to provide the services to public

2 schools using the new digital platforms. And c,
3 that DCLA hold the status quo on the budget of the
4 Coalition of Theaters of Color by providing its
5 grantees an increase of 5%, representing the
6 equivalent of a cost-of-living allowance. Chairman
7 Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and committee
8 members, we desperately need core funding that allows
9 us to be responsive to the needs of our community by
10 providing them with programming that honors the
11 contributions of the African diaspora. Thank you.
12 Let us remember the black lives matter and also
13 remember that self-care is very important during
14 these very, very difficult times.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
16 your testimony. We will now move to the next
17 panelist, Heather Arnson.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 HEATHER ARNSON: Thank you, Chair Van
20 Bramer and the council for this opportunity to speak.
21 My name is Heather Arnson. I'm a freelance director
22 working in New York City, an LI native, and a New
23 Yorker by choice. Having only New York City in my
24 sights following my graduation from UCLA School of
25 Theater, Film, and Television. I'm also here as a

2 citizen of Brooklyn for the past 15 years. I
3 submitted a fuller written testimony earlier, but I
4 wanted to show up today not only to give a short in-
5 person testimony, but my presence today is mainly
6 showing up to witness all these arts colleagues and
7 leaders have to say on behalf of the needs of artists
8 and communities in the city, but particularly for the
9 Coalition of Theaters of Color. I implore the
10 council to increase fiscal support for the Coalition
11 of Theaters of Color. They are essential. And
12 here's where my testimony echoes that of Garrett
13 Allen's. Having theater in my life not only saved me
14 as a child, but it continues to save me as an adult
15 as both an active maker of theater and as a witness
16 to what other artists make. Please take the future
17 of a thriving arts community into to great
18 consideration as you move forward with a [inaudible]
19 police budget and investing those funds into the
20 artists and people of this great city. Thank you for
21 this time to add to the voices supporting arts and
22 culture in New York City.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
24 testimony. The next person on the panel will be Ryan
25 Gilliam from FabNYC. Thank you.

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
3 now.

4 RYAN GILLIAM: Hi, Chairman Van Bramer,
5 Commissioner Casals, I want to echo that this is the
6 first time I've ever seen a commissioner of cultural
7 affairs stay through public testimony. Thank you for
8 doing that. I'm Ryan Gilliam and I represent Fourth
9 Arts Block, a team of artists and organizers working
10 in the Lower East Side. I appreciate the opportunity
11 to speak today, but I don't want to tell you why arts
12 and culture are meaningful to the people of this
13 city. I don't want to explain why in times like
14 these our communities need us to stay with them,
15 because the evidence is in. You have it. The
16 evidence is in. The Black Lives Matter movement
17 calls upon all of us to step up and speak truth, and
18 as this panel has already said, this is a time to
19 take risks and be courageous and call upon our
20 fighter selves. New York City's funding of arts and
21 culture is racist. Decade after decade it
22 prioritizes institutions with extraordinary access to
23 wealth, privilege, and political influence, sending
24 them the bulk of its funds. It sustains policies
25 limiting small community organizations to grants

2 based on budget size, the equivalent of funding them
3 according to their access to wealth. The current
4 budget will likely perpetuate that practice, even
5 though we all know which institutions will or won't
6 have the resources to survive this pandemic. I
7 recognize real efforts by the council and by DCLA to
8 address equity and diversity. But we're no where
9 near an anti-racist budget. Make budget justice real
10 in all departments of city government. We also must
11 fully recognize that New York City's foundation was
12 built on the labor of enslaved people. Fourth Arts
13 Block is one of many cultural organizations coming
14 together to join the movement for black lives to
15 demand reparations for past and continuing harms
16 inflicted upon black communities. We call upon the
17 City of New York to acknowledge its history, its
18 support of slavery, and its legacies through
19 redlining, educational funding, predatory finance,
20 and more, and for this council to take action to
21 repair the harm done to black people by first
22 immediately establishing a commission for
23 reparations. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
25 testimony. We'll move to the last panelist on this

2 panel. Before we go to the final panelists we'll
3 read the names of the next panel. Madaha Kinsey-
4 Lamb, Sandy Luna, Francie Garber-Cohen, and Natalie
5 Correa. Please excuse any pronunciation. Finally,
6 the final member of this panel is Omna Khan. Thank
7 you.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time begins now.

9 OMNA KHAN: Hello, my name is Omna Khan
10 and I'm the youth organizer in, for Arts and
11 Democracy in Kensington, Brooklyn. When I think of
12 this pandemic I think of the pain. I think of those
13 who lost loved ones or risked their lives to provide
14 essential services, struggled to make ends meet, or
15 keep their local mom and pop shops in business,
16 stayed in abusive situations, protested systemic
17 racism, or deferred milestone celebrations. I think
18 about the government's failure to act fast or how the
19 mutual aid group I help coordinate is fulfilling
20 those missing links. I think about the compassion
21 fatigue, how unfazed I became as I learned of yet
22 another loss. Despite my obsession with the status
23 quo being unhealthy, I couldn't take a break because
24 I didn't know how to cope. In quarantine as I stayed
25 at home to protect my at-risk parents I felt

2 helpless. But I learned I could navigating multiple
3 realities, which didn't have to contradict each
4 other. I could grieve and still find joy, and I
5 found joy in my work at Arts and Democracy, which is
6 funded by the City Council's Cultural Immigrant
7 Initiative and a critical source of support in our
8 community and across the city. We urge you to
9 continue this important program. Despite the
10 pandemic forcing us to cancel our in-person open mic,
11 we didn't stop there. As the saying goes, the show
12 must go on. As we piloted a virtual open mic series
13 called Regeneration, we tackled social issues such as
14 integration and paid homage to spring and community
15 healing to return to our roots and nourish the soul.
16 We spent the evenings immersed in visual art, video,
17 prayer, song, and spoken word. At our annual
18 community Iftar we witnessed Muslim feminists lift
19 the virtual veil to reclaim their space and affirm
20 their existence as resistance. And this past weekend
21 as we launched the second volume of our writing
22 workshop series we saw South Asian youth both in the
23 states and abroad reflect upon the concept of home.
24 This pandemic had to break us apart to build each
25 other back up. We see culture hasn't closed during

2 this time period. Culture isn't simply the attire,
3 food, or language, but the traditions we continue to
4 create. We believe that all people in communities
5 have a right to their creativity and traditions, and
6 that transformation happens when people bring their
7 full selves to their activism. At Arts and Democracy
8 we pride ourselves in amplifying the voices of
9 immigrant women and youth, like myself, to have
10 autonomy over future programming. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
12 your testimony. We will now move to council member
13 questions and Chair Van Bramer. Chair?

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
15 much, um, to everyone, um, and I don't know if, if
16 Heather is still, ah, with us, but, ah, um, deeply
17 moved by, ah, her presentation, um, and, there you
18 are, I see you. Um, and, and I felt, ah, ah, the
19 emotion of that. So thank you for sharing, um, ah,
20 what the arts has meant to your life and, ah, um,
21 both as a little girl and then, ah, today, ah, even
22 though this is a difficult way to do this and we're
23 not in person um, I still find myself very moved by
24 these presentations and, and the testimony and, um,
25 ah, and, ah, just as Garrett, ah, said the arts saved

2 his life as a queer black man. Um, you shared that
3 and, um, um, and I, I, and another person, um,
4 Garrett, not Garrett, um, Gavin, ah, ah, got very
5 emotional earlier and, um, so even still it's coming
6 through, ah, on Zoom, which is amazing, ah, the power
7 of all this. Ryan, thank you for everything you do,
8 um, you know, that was very powerful. Obviously I've
9 heard you speak and I know where you're coming from.
10 Ah, and Omna Khan, that was, ah, brilliant, and as I
11 mentioned before, um, the Cultural Immigrant
12 Initiative is something that, ah, I created along
13 with the former speaker, Melissa Mark-Viverito, and,
14 um, and it matters so much when I actually get to
15 hear from people who are, ah, participating in the
16 programming, getting funded, working with the
17 program, um, and, and so someone spoke about Su Casa
18 before and you mentioned the Cultural Immigrant
19 Initiative, ah, so, ah, thank you. Obviously, you
20 know, we've been lucky enough to, ah, increase all of
21 those initiatives over the last several years,
22 dramatically in some cases. Um, and we want to, ah,
23 ah, do everything we can to, ah, save the budgets
24 where we can, expand them where we must, including,
25 um, ah, into black and brown communities in

2 particular. So, um, really appreciate all of that,
3 ah, testimony and I believe that, ah, Majority Leader
4 Cumbo is, ah, ah, jumped back into this hearing from
5 the budget negotiating team and, ah, I'm gonna ask
6 her to, ah, say a few words.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair
8 Van Bramer, and I'm fighting for the arts on your
9 behalf. Um, just wanted to ask Melody Capote, I was
10 really, um, excited about the concept that you
11 brought up in terms of the Black Lives Matter
12 initiative. On your three afternoon phone call have
13 you brought up this initiative? Has there been any
14 energy or momentum behind it? Is there discussions
15 about how we collectively in the art world in our
16 organizations and in institutions having so many
17 creative people of so many genres and sectors and
18 talents, has there been a collaborative discussion
19 about how can we utilize this moment in history, um,
20 probably the most substantial, influential, changing
21 time in history since the Civil Rights Movement, how
22 we talked about or shifted the conversation as to how
23 do we utilize the Black Lives Matter movement in
24 order to create systemic change?

25 MELODY CAPOTE: Can you hear me?

2 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I can hear you.

3 MELODY CAPOTE: OK. So there a couple of
4 things where I propose in the testimony the Black
5 Lives Matter, its cultural initiative is a project of
6 a program that we're hoping DCA would consider. But
7 what we have done on the 3 o'clock call, the culture
8 at 3 call, is that everyone understands that
9 something needs to be done, that something needs to
10 be different. And for many of the institutions, most
11 of the institutions on that call, are white
12 organizations, white institutions. And so based on
13 our conversations and quite honestly being able to
14 have the difficult conversations that we all have to
15 be having at home and have to be having with our
16 boards and our staff, we at the Caribbean Cultural
17 Center proposed an initiative that we're calling the
18 #artsgoblackinitiative and we've proposed it to all
19 of the partners on the call. We, um, actually
20 started the campaign, initiated the campaign in early
21 June and because of the momentum we actually created
22 a campaign that was implemented on Friday and
23 reintroduced today to the groups and to organizations
24 that continue to reach out to us wanting to be part
25 of this project. And what we've done is asked

2 everyone organization to put a black curtain on their
3 website, ah, a tab, a [inaudible] that says I can't
4 breathe, that has a button that leads folks back to
5 your website so that, you know, you're, you're
6 activities are current and active, and the link to
7 actions, actions that your own boards and staff have
8 decided how they will move forward in this time where
9 we're all understanding that business cannot be, we,
10 we can't go back to normal because normal was never
11 good, especially for communities of color and in this
12 instance for organizations of color. And so it is
13 agreed that with this pause, with this black screen
14 that we're asking folks to put up, we're asking
15 organizations to have the conversations, take a pause
16 within this pause, and think about what your
17 commitment is when you come back. What is your
18 commitment not [inaudible] thinking about
19 diversifying our boards and staff, not going to
20 employ more people of color, but what is your
21 commitment truly to, to the injustices of, well,
22 social, so racism and social justice. What is the
23 work you're going to do to make sure that that is
24 different? Art for us has always been about
25 activism. Art is activism. The artist's voice is

2 one that the normal person doesn't have. The average
3 person doesn't speak the way the artist speaks
4 through their work. And so we have not challenged
5 the community but asked the arts community, arts and
6 culture community not only citywide, it's a national
7 campaign that, um, we've undertaken with partners
8 throughout the country, saying take a moment to
9 rethink how you're going to come back in this moment
10 because it is a moment for us to really employ, ah, a
11 different model because the present model has not
12 worked. The CIG members recognize, too, that
13 organizations of color need more money and resources.
14 They've been part of these calls. So return to the
15 council with this initiative for the Black Lives
16 Matter, Black Lives Matter initiative that will
17 create a pot of money that really speaks to
18 organizations that are prepared to do this work.

19 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: So let me ask you
20 this question. Is there excitement around this idea?
21 Are there many organizations that are going to
22 participate? Would you say it's the vast majority,
23 half, a handful? How do you see it?

24 MELODY CAPOTE: Right now the, the group
25 on the call averages at about 300 to 400

2 organizations every day on this call at 3 o'clock.

3 We've already received a response based on, on
4 Friday's, ah, email. We received a response of over
5 a hundred organizations that are participating in the
6 campaign. Um, we're providing the toolkit, so it's
7 as simple as applying, you know, the, the tools to be
8 able to implement the campaign and be a part of
9 something big. It was going to also include a blog
10 and knowledge [inaudible] organizations like The
11 Field and Dance NYC, who have already done this work
12 and have committed themselves to working differently
13 when addressing racial and social justice in their
14 work. So they're acknowledge this kind of great
15 models within the campaign that folks can, can look
16 to.

17 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I think that's
18 very powerful because the administration, the City
19 Council, everybody is looking for ways to be
20 responsive. People are looking for ways to address
21 the issues that the city is facing. People are
22 looking at ways to hear better, to understand better,
23 and so to simply say we need more funding or to
24 simply say we need more money to do X, Y, and Z, I
25 think what you're saying is very powerful. We have

2 to dig deeper and we have to continue to find ways to
3 show that we are answering the call of the people
4 citywide for change and I think that's one of many
5 great ideas. I also think it would be great if
6 organizations could look at ways to really partner,
7 like partner in a very real way, some of the larger
8 organizations partnering with some of the
9 organizations, um, that are community-based and
10 figuring out real ways that they can work together to
11 advance their mission. This has been a conversation
12 that's been discussed for many years, but it really
13 hasn't taken off in a way that we could point to like
14 extraordinary models. So I, I hope to see more of
15 that. I thank you for your advocacy and for your
16 leadership, and hopefully more organizations will buy
17 into this and have those deep conversations. Thank
18 you.

19 MELODY CAPOTE: Thank you so much, thank
20 you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Van Bramer,
22 before we move to the next panel do you have any
23 questions?
24
25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, yeah, let's,
3 let's, ah, move on to the next panel. Appreciate,
4 ah, everything that everyone has offered.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank you
6 so much, Chair, and thank you so much to panelists.
7 We will move to the next panel. I will read the four
8 names for the witnesses on the panel and we will
9 pause for questions at the end of the panel. Madaha
10 Kinsey-Lamb, Sandy Luna, Francie Garber Cohen, and
11 Natalie Perreira. So the first witness is Madaha
12 Kinsey-Lamb. You may begin your testimony when the
13 sergeant begins the clock. Thank you.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin now.

15 MADAHA KINSEY LAMB: To you dedicated
16 leaders of New York City, let me first say thank you
17 for this opportunity and for your commitment to
18 arrive at just and really, um, powerful policies for
19 the distribution of public funds in these
20 extraordinary times. My name is Madaha Kinsey-Lamb
21 and I am the executive director and founder of Mind
22 Builders Creative Arts Center in the northeast Bronx,
23 and a member of the Coalition of Theaters of Color.
24 We also receive funding through the Cultural
25 Immigrant Initiative, DCLA, council member items.

3 Current statistics for our neighborhood show that our
4 ZIP code has the highest number of COVID-19 infection
5 in all of New York City. We conduct classes and
6 community productions with more than 750 students
7 each year, and with a particular focus on youth and
8 families. Since we began with arts education more
9 than 40 years ago we have known that we serve a
10 vulnerable population. But it's why we, like so many
11 other community-based cultural organizations have
12 always been about more than providing music and dance
13 and theater classes, UPK, community folk culture
14 resources, and visual arts classes. At Mind Builders
15 we work alongside our parents, students,
16 grandparents, and more than 34 teaching artists that
17 are employed to empower our children and our
18 community to build confidence, prepare for college
19 scholarship auditions, access to special high
20 schools, tutoring, counseling, career training, and
21 have youth realize dreams they never thought
22 possible. Within two weeks of the New York City
23 shutdown order we had transitioned all of our classes
24 to online. Close to 75% of our students continued in
25 over 225 weekly virtual classes that we provided at
no charge. Just for the first registration of the

2 first program this summer we received 140
3 applications for the 20 slots that were available in
4 that first teen program. Without your support over
5 the years, Mind Builders could not have become the
6 force that it is for hope and leadership in this
7 community. And so again we thank you, and more is
8 needed. The need for what we do has never been
9 greater. The inequities of 12 generations that
10 continue to be evidenced in our communities every day
11 must be addressed. Thank you for the courage and
12 wisdom you will continue to demonstrate towards this
13 goal.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
15 your testimony. We'll now move to the next witness,
16 Sandy Luna.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
18 now.

19 SANDY LUNA: Good afternoon, and thank
20 you, everyone. I am Sandy Luna, an Afro Latinx
21 immigrant. I'm the executive director at ID Studio
22 Theater, a cultural organization in the South Bronx,
23 an area that has been gravely affected by COVID-19.
24 Our mission is to advance the artistic and social
25 development of immigrant communities through the

2 performing arts. And since the beginning of the
3 pandemic, like most, we have remained active and
4 shifted to virtual programming. For example, our
5 intergenerational community-building theater workshop
6 has been meeting every Wednesday to work on material
7 that allows participants of different age groups the
8 space to reflect on and process their current
9 situation. The populations we serve face
10 particularly challenging circumstances due to limited
11 access to resources and they have repeatedly
12 expressed to us how having a regular creative outlet
13 with peers in similar situations working so
14 intimately with a facilitator has allowed them the
15 room to process, connect, and at times kept them from
16 losing hope. In addition to creating much-needed
17 virtual content in Spanish for our communities to
18 keep engaged and inspired, we have brought on a
19 public health fellow who has a conversation with
20 local senior centers, hospitals, and health centers,
21 and who is in direct contact with the families we
22 serve, gathering information that we use to shape how
23 we adapt to this moment in direct response to their
24 needs. Starting in July we are launching
25 [inaudible], a series of performances in residential

2 courtyards that allow residents to look and
3 participate from the safety of their homes, and
4 obvious to say that culture never closed during this
5 pandemic, that we have used our boundless creativity
6 to expand our ways of working because we are
7 committed to the well-being of our city. And we
8 understand the healing transformative power of the
9 arts, particularly in communities of color. Our role
10 in our neighborhoods has become even more clear and
11 urgent because without our programs it will take a
12 lot longer for all of us to recover from the
13 repercussions of this health and social crisis. We
14 are extremely thankful for funding from the Coalition
15 of Theaters of Color and Su Casa. Gracias. Thank
16 you, Chair Van Bramer, Commissioner Casals, and
17 Majority Leader Cumbo.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
19 your testimony. We'll now move to the next witness,
20 ah, the third person on the panel is Francie Garber
21 Cohen.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
23 now.

24 FRANCIE GARBER COHEN: Can you hear me?
25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you. You
3 can begin your testimony. Thank you.

4 FRANCIE GARBER COHEN: Thank you. Um,
5 dear council members, I'm Fran Garber Cohen,
6 president of Regina Opera. For 50 years Regina Opera
7 has offered year-round, fully staged operas with
8 orchestra and English supertitles, as well as many
9 free full operas and concerts. We provide affordable
10 entertainment in handicap-accessible public venues,
11 such as festivals, libraries, and our own theater in
12 Sunset Park for those people who may not otherwise be
13 able to attend live performances. We provide
14 training and experience for musical artists of all
15 ethnic groups and sexual orientations, and we plan to
16 increase the black and brown representation in our
17 performances. The need for this cultural enrichment
18 is reflected in the fact that over 4000 people
19 attended our live performances last year, most of
20 which were located in Sunset Park. That's an
21 underserved and low-income community, mostly Latinx
22 and Asian. Although this 50th season was cut short
23 by COVID-19, Regina Opera never closed. We've been
24 posting free full operas and operatic selections
25 weekly for a total of five full operas and almost 30

2 opera scenes which are on demand any time, and they
3 feature New Yorkers of all ethnic groups. Since the
4 pandemic began we've had over 1500 views. Just
5 yesterday, as part of Make Music New York we had over
6 150 views of our operas and selections. Our offers,
7 our offerings are particularly vital to New York
8 City. They uplift the spirit, especially of senior
9 citizens who may live alone or are alone during the
10 day.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And just
13 a reminder, written testimony will also be reviewed
14 in detail. So we have copies of everyone's written
15 testimony. If you would like to submit an update to
16 your testimony or submit testimony, ah, we will be
17 accepting, the council will be accepting written
18 testimony for up to 72 hours after the hearing, which
19 you can submit at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Um,
20 we'll move to the next member of the panel, which is
21 the final panelist, um, and then move to the chair
22 and Council Member questions. Ah, thank you all for
23 your testimony. The next person will be Natalie
24 Correra.

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin,
3 Natalie.

4 NATALIE CORRERA: Ah, good, good
5 afternoon everyone. My name is Natalie Correa and I
6 am a program assistant with National Dance Institute,
7 also known as NDI, which is based in Harlem, New
8 York. Um, in 1976 ballet star Jacques d'Amboise
9 founded NDI in the belief that the arts have a unique
10 power to engage and motivate children towards
11 excellence. Ever since NDI has transformed the lives
12 of over 2 million children across the world. As
13 Jacques said, with limitations comes creativity.
14 During the coronavirus pandemic NDI has continued its
15 mission via creative online programming. We have
16 launched NDI Live, a platform of free online classes
17 where NDI teaching artists are leading children in
18 signature NDI choreography, a variety of high-energy
19 dance classes for all ability levels, plus a weekly
20 music class. We have also created an online learning
21 hub for our in-school program partners and have
22 offered online teaching artist trainings.
23 Additionally, we are offering free dance classes for
24 our Dream dance program, which provides children with
25 disabilities the opportunity to perform via weekly

2 live free classes as well as through our free on-
3 demand series, Dream Project at Home. While most of
4 our programs are free, we've lost tremendous revenue
5 during this time and can't sustain future revenue
6 cuts. Arts education is essential and supports the
7 social and emotional well-being of our students,
8 whether through distance learning or in person.
9 Though teaching and learning will never quite be the
10 same after this coronavirus pandemic, our commitment
11 to providing high-quality arts education remains
12 unwavering. We have witnessed how the arts have
13 played an important role in these tumultuous times to
14 our students' engagement and consistent attendance,
15 and we know it will continue to do so for all
16 students, including the traditionally under-
17 represented, those with special needs and low-income
18 families. We believe arts organizations are an
19 essential part of the community we serve.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

21 NATALIE CORREA: Please fund the arts
22 programs that our communities need to continue to
23 thrive during this time and beyond. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
25 your testimony. Before we move to Chair Van Bramer,

2 I will read the names of the next panel. This
3 concludes this panel. The next four people will be
4 Allison Scott Williams from Studio in a School New
5 York City, Susan Vitucci, Ana Beatriz Sepulveda from
6 Performance Space in New York, and Darrell Richardson
7 from Arts Education. Chair Van Bramer.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Ah, once again
9 just want to thank, ah, everyone for their time and
10 their testimony. I know it's been a long wait for a
11 lot of folks, um, to be able to, ah, testify. But,
12 ah, it is, it is worthwhile, and, ah, I still see
13 Commissioner Casals with us, um, and, ah, grateful
14 that he's joined me here for the entire time and I
15 now, ah, Majority Leader Cumbo is going back and
16 forth into the budget negotiating team, ah, as we are
17 texting each other on the status of, ah, culture and
18 the arts. So, um, thank you again for all of you,
19 and I know we have, ah, ah, maybe a couple dozen more
20 folks still waiting. So, ah, want to just move this
21 along because folks have waited an awful long time to
22 be able to, ah, to speak to us. Thank you all.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. I
24 believe several members of the next panel are not
25 available, so we are going to, um, they're not on

2 Zoom anymore, so we are going to rearrange things a
3 little bit and I will update the panel. So the next
4 person to testify from the next panel, um, is Ana
5 Beatriz Sepulveda, followed by, I'll just read the
6 four names. Darrell Richardson, Mohammed Yusef, and
7 Guy Yadog. So Ana Beatriz Sepulveda, you are the
8 next, and apologies for any mispronunciation. You
9 are the next witness and you can begin when the
10 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 ANA BEATRIZ SEPULVEDA: Hi, can you hear
13 me?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you, yes.

15 ANA BEATRIZ SEPULVEDA: Great, hola and
16 buenas tardes to the council members and colleagues
17 present. A quick thank you to Jimmy Van Bramer for
18 his continued support. A warm and genuine welcome to
19 our new cultural commissioner, Gonzalo Casals. I'm
20 very excited to see what you along with your team
21 make of DCLA. Um, thank you for the opportunity to
22 testify. My name is Ana Beatriz Sepulveda. I'm a
23 Puerto Rican native, Bronx borough resident, and work
24 at Performance Based New York in the East Village.
25 However, today I'm speaking to you on behalf of a new

2 coalition which is an alliance with cultural
3 institutions and city-owned buildings throughout New
4 York City. We each receive a subsidy for our
5 utilities, which is now in question. Um, this
6 funding is critical to our operations and helps us
7 maintain and care for a city assess. My colleagues
8 are Brick, Bronx River Art Center, Clemente
9 [inaudible] Center, DCTV, Harlem Stage, [inaudible]
10 Minds, Movement Research, [inaudible] Puerto Rican
11 Traveling Theater, Theater for a new audience, Urban
12 Glass, 651 Arts, and Mocada. Together we serve, ah,
13 1.8 million New Yorkers. Some of us are in the
14 districts hardest hit by COVID-19. But we have not
15 given into fear. That's not what New Yorkers tend to
16 do. In times of crisis we take care of each other
17 and so have we during this time. Collectively we are
18 demanding racial justice, mourning together, marching
19 together, and opening up our lobbies, community
20 centers, theaters, and hearts. We oppose the mayor's
21 budget, which currently still gives the NYPD 6
22 billion dollars while slashing social services, arts,
23 and essential city operations. The over-policing of
24 our communities has had devastating impacts on

2 generations of New Yorkers, especially the black
3 community, and it's time to end those cycles now.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

5 ANA BEATRIZ SEPULVEDA: In fact, let's
6 invest in our communities and the arts organizations
7 who serve them, especially those that serve
8 communities of color. For our own part, the
9 utilities, ah, subsidy constitutes a large proportion
10 of our budgets. So we ask that it be preserved to
11 what ever extent possible in context with the shared
12 needs of our communities. We are asking for budget
13 justice. We'll also be a submitting a longer written
14 statement, which will include further details, um,
15 about what this represents for our, um, our
16 institutions. And on behalf of the new coalition
17 thank you for hearing us today.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
19 your testimony and also for the written testimony.
20 Our next witness will be Darrell Richardson. You may
21 begin when the sergeant calls the clock.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
23 now.

24 DARRELL RICHARDSON: Good afternoon to
25 the Committee of Cultural Affairs. My name is

3 Darrell Richardson and I'm the CEO and founding
4 direct of The Me Nobody Knows. The Me Nobody Knows
5 is a grassroots community-based organization in
6 southeast Queens. We tap into the me in the children
7 that no one knows, their gifts, their talents, their
8 abilities, their passion that are innate in every
9 child by way of the performing arts, mentoring, and
10 social emotional learning. I'm a witness to see the
11 impact of what the arts through social emotional
12 learning can do for our young people, tapping into
13 their building their confidence and self-esteem,
14 respect of self and other, building vision boards,
15 setting short-term goals and long-term goals,
16 ultimately creating them for their future and for a
17 career that they would endeavor to pursue. The Me
18 Nobody Knows has produced performance opportunities
19 that educate and articulate black history beyond what
20 is taught in the history books. We also have a
21 multicultural presentation that covers the history of
22 our diverse students. We have over, I teach over 130
23 students at day at Mass High School, which was a stem
24 school up until two years ago when the principal
25 invited my program into the school, now has become a
STEAM school, incorporating the arts. I had the

2 opportunity to go to Nairobi, Kenya last year to
3 facilitate a dance and mentoring workshop and upon my
4 return I am able now to have a student exchange
5 program with students from the United States as well
6 as Kenya to do an exchange program. However, I need
7 funding to do that, to make that happen. Since my
8 background is in the entertainment industry, I was a
9 professional dancer for over 40 years, that's right,
10 40 years, and I want to make sure I take my students
11 to see Broadway shows, Albanelli, Dance Theater of
12 Harlem to expose them to opportunities that they may
13 never have an opportunity to be exposed to. Since
14 I'm a native in the community where I provide my
15 services and also have been in over 17 schools
16 throughout the New York City area, my challenge has
17 always been budget cuts, and the budget cuts has been
18 my program. So not only have I suffered, but my team
19 has suffered, my staff has suffered, and most
20 important the students suffer.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

22 DARRELL RICHARDSON: They feel abandoned.
23 I'm currently having my program at the Mass Science
24 School and I want to thank you for allowing me to
25 speak, because I know the arts are essential and the

2 fact that you see that I'm honored to be here today
3 and hope you will consider my grant opportunity to
4 fund my program, and I thank you again. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
6 your testimony. We'll move to the next person on the
7 panel. There are two other individuals. Mohammed
8 Yusef.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
10 now.

11 MOHAMMED YUSEF: Thank you, Chair Van
12 Bramer, the committee, and Commissioner Casals. My
13 name is Mohammed Yusef. I'm a South Asian and
14 American Indian artist and associate artistic
15 director of Target Margin Theater in Sunset Park,
16 Brooklyn, where I live and work. I'm here to testify
17 to the importance of sustaining arts and cultural
18 funding in New York City and urge the redirection of
19 any cuts in NYPD funding to support cultural
20 organizations, especially those working in and
21 serving communities of color. Target Margin is a 30-
22 year-old organization whose mission celebrates
23 difference of all kinds, difference in race, age,
24 ethnicity, ability, gender, and our work expands the
25 possibility of what can take place in a theater. But

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AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

2 on March 12, 2020, to flatten the COVID-19 curve and
3 protect our artists, audiences, and local community,
4 we temporarily closed our theater in Sunset Park. We
5 postponed productions, lost income, and felt a whole
6 lot of uncertainty under so many levels of failed
7 government and leadership. Bowed but not broken,
8 Target Margin embraced the limitations of this moment
9 as best we know how. On April 21 we launched We Will
10 Care for You, a performative action which distributed
11 220 face masks via bike across New York City. We
12 partnered with a consortium of New York City-based
13 designers and a local health organization to make and
14 donate masks to undocumented residents. Artistic
15 director David Herskowitz and myself personally
16 covered over 200 miles of pavement delivering face
17 masks on bike to relieve the burden of essential
18 workers. On April 30 we also began partnering with
19 the South Brooklyn Community Mutual Aid group to
20 repurpose and reimagine our warehouse theater as a
21 food distribution site, offering 450-plus wheels,
22 meals weekly to people in need. To the committee
23 members and elected officials present here today, I
24 say arts and cultural organizations are resilient.
25 You know this. We build healthier communities. You

2 know this. We need you as our allies if we here to
3 survive. You know this. But even more, we need you
4 to know you are complicit if we do not survive this
5 pandemic and [inaudible] racial injustices and
6 inequity in New York City. We need our city, our
7 mayor, our administration, our commissioners, and our
8 City Council members to step up.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

10 MOHAMMED YUSEF: We need you to double
11 down on arts and cultural funding because it's not
12 the time to tap out. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
14 your testimony. We have one person left on this
15 panel and then we'll move to council member questions
16 and the chair before moving to the next panel. The
17 last witness on this panel is Guy Yadog. Please
18 pardon any mispronunciations. Thank you.

19 GUY YADOG: Thank you.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
21 now.

22 GUY YADOG: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer,
23 for the opportunity to testify. Um, I'm with the
24 League of Independent Theater, whose members create
25 theater performances in 99-seat or less theaters or

2 outside of traditional theater spaces. Of the
3 estimated 60,000 theater makers in New York City,
4 virtually every single one passes through small,
5 independent venues in all five boroughs in every
6 community. I want to echo the eloquent call for
7 budget justice articulated by so many groups today.
8 But I'm going to focus specifically on the urgent
9 critical need to cancel rent to save independent arts
10 venues. According to the Mayor's Office of Media and
11 Entertainment, almost half of the seats for live
12 performance are independent, er, almost half of the
13 seats for theater are in independent theater venues.
14 84% of independent theaters rent their performance
15 space. In other words, when you venture out beyond
16 large institutions many, many theaters largely depend
17 on renting space, commercial spaces in this city.
18 Whether open or closed, these performance venues
19 continue to pay rent or, more likely, fail to pay
20 rent, accruing piles and piles of debt. *The New York*
21 *Times*, ah, 511 epidemiologists asking how long it
22 would take until they would be willing to attend a
23 play. 64% said that they would wait one year or more
24 before returning. It's clear that we won't see
25 gatherings in our spaces the way we've become

2 accustomed for quite some time. And even when we do
3 it may be a fraction of capacity, meaning it is not
4 likely to be profitable or even sustainable to
5 produce work. One year of income means 12 months of
6 rent due. One year of no profits and rent due, rents
7 due means the spaces won't reopen. Shedler Studios
8 closed its doors after 30 years in business,
9 impacting the entire theater community when a
10 rehearsal space that housed thousands of companies
11 and artists developing their work was gone. The
12 Secret Theater, one of a few performance venues in
13 western Queens, shut its doors after a decade in the
14 community. The Artist Co-ops, Space Works, other
15 important infrastructure has already been lost, and
16 we're only three months into what may be a year or
17 more crisis. Only rent relief can help protect
18 these.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

20 GUY YADOG: Eviction moratoriums and
21 small business loans only delay the inevitable. So
22 long as rents continue to come due each month
23 interminably those who run gathering and performance
24 space will continue to face financial ruin with
25 little road to recovery. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

3 And just to remind everyone, your written testimony
4 will be reviewed in detail. Um, and you can, you can
5 amend, um, and submit additional testimony after the
6 hearing as well. Thank you so much to the panel.

7 Before we move to the next panel, I'll read the names
8 of the five members of the next panel and then move
9 to Chair Van Bramer. The next panel will be Naomi
10 Avandy, apologies again, ah, Christopher Freer,
11 Jennifer Wright Cook, Michael Jacobs, and Kimberly
12 Olson. Before we move to the panel, Chair Van
13 Bramer.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Um,
15 Guy, I continue to love your, ah, backdrop there, um,
16 from when we last met, ah, and appreciate, ah, Lit so
17 very much and, um, I don't know if Darrell is still
18 with us, but, ah, heard loud and clear. Um, thank
19 you for your work in southeast Queens and in the
20 schools, and, um, ah, you know, fighting for budget
21 justice all the way. And Mohammed I hear you loud
22 and clear on, um, if we don't do the right thing
23 we're complicit. So, um, you know, it is, ah, it is
24 time to be bold and take risks, as we talked about,
25 ah, it seems like hours ago in this hearing with a

2 couple of other folks testified, ah, and, ah, I am
3 ready, ah, to be as courageous as I've ever been in
4 my career, um, when it comes to, ah, doing the right
5 thing here, um, with this budget. So, um, and Ana
6 thank you for, ah, representing that coalition of
7 amazing organizations, almost all of which, ah, I, I
8 know and love very well. So with that, just thank
9 you, um, and Guy, ah, don't worry, I have a very
10 difficult to pronounce last name as well. So I, I
11 feel for you. Brenda's got a lot of names to say
12 but, um, it's ah, it's always challenging. But thank
13 you for all the work that all of you do, um, and, and
14 defending the arts and calling, ah, all of us and
15 holding us accountable, really, which is what needs
16 to happen, ah, this year more than any other year.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
18 Chair Van Bramer. We do not have any other council
19 member questions for this panel. So I will call the
20 names of the next panel. I'll read them quickly
21 again and then move to the first panelist. Naomi
22 Avandy, Christopher Freer, Jennifer Wright Cook,
23 Michael Jacobs, and Kimberly Olson. Naomi Avandy,
24 you are the next panelist. You can begin when the
25 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
3 now.

4 NAOMI AVANDY: Thank you for the
5 opportunity to speak about the importance of
6 continued funding for quality arts education in the
7 New York City public schools. My name is Naomi
8 Avandy, and I'm the theater educator at the Ella
9 Baker School. The Ella Baker School was founded on
10 the beliefs of Ella Baker and is one of the few truly
11 diverse schools in District 2. Every week I teach
12 more than 300 students in grades pre-K to eighth
13 grade. Last year I applied for a grant through
14 Disney Musicals in School, which is a three-year
15 partnership through Disney Theatricals, in which
16 public schools receive the support and resources
17 necessary to create a lasting culture of musical
18 theater in schools. Before this Ella Baker had no
19 theater program. To date, more than 500 of my
20 students have had the opportunity to participate in
21 creating a place of musical theater from the ground
22 up. Partnerships with cultural institutions, like
23 Disney Musicals in Schools, the New Victory Theater,
24 and Lincoln Center Education, have afforded my
25 students valuable opportunities to experience live

2 theater and work with professional teaching artists.

3 75 fourth- and fifth-grade students were excitedly

4 running through their final rehearsals of Aladdin

5 Kids when the COVID-19 pandemic closed all schools.

6 I knew I needed to find a way to go forward after

7 hearing the determination and hope in my students'

8 voices when they asked what's going to happen with

9 Aladdin? Over the next two months we transitioned to

10 a virtual production. Witnessing more than 700

11 people from across the world come together last

12 Wednesday in the Zoom audience spoke volumes of the

13 power of arts education to bring communities together

14 and to heal. In theater there's an old adage, show,

15 don't tell. So I'll close with a few words from some

16 of the parents and students at Ella Baker that will

17 truly show you why arts education is essential to New

18 York City's recovery. Mary, the PTA parent of a

19 first and third grader shared, "In the end of your

20 survey results over and over parents mentioned that

21 theater was a bright spot for their kids. Improv,

22 puppetry, and Aladdin were seen as some of the best

23 things for kids mentally." Corrina, our fourth grade

24 stage manager and older sister of a second grader,

25 wrote, "My sister goes to 11:30 classes almost every

2 day of the week. After the class ends she'll come to
3 me and say look at what I made. She says this with
4 pride and I can see that she is proud. This is a
5 look that I didn't see on my sister's face before she
6 started spending time with you."

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

8 NAOMI AVANDY: "There are so many poor
9 kids in Ella Baker who have a voice because of you."
10 "You help Ella Baker students see all the things they
11 can do." And I'll just jump to the end. Um,
12 "Cutting funding for the arts will disproportionately
13 affect students of color, like Julian and Corrina,
14 many of whom would not have access to the arts
15 outside of their schools. Their request is that
16 budget cuts not fall disproportionately on arts
17 education programming. Arts education is essential
18 to the fabric of this city and crucial in the effort
19 to restore and rebuild our great city and the great
20 future our students have. We need you, the council
21 members, to understand that arts are essential, to
22 urge the mayor to do everything in his power to
23 foster renewal, mental health, and community
24 rejuvenation for arts education. Thank you for your
25 time and consideration.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
3 your testimony. We'll move to the next panelist,
4 Christopher Freer. You may begin when the sergeant
5 starts the clock.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
7 now.

8 CHRISTOPHER FREER: Thank you so much for
9 the opportunity to provide some testimony at today's
10 hearing. Um, my name is Christopher Freer. I'm an
11 owner of a licensed talent agency here in New York
12 City, and I sit on the board of directors for the
13 National Association of Talent Representatives. We
14 are a trade association for licensed talent agencies
15 and the members of our association represent roughly
16 90% of the licensed talent agents in the New York
17 City area. I'm providing testimony today to put a
18 face on and shed some light on the devastating effect
19 that COVID has had on both the commercial theater and
20 the film and TV industries and the lack of long-term
21 support for the many businesses within those
22 industry. As of mid March, both of the theater and
23 film and TV industries came to a halt, as all of us
24 in New York City did, and my agency and the
25 overwhelming majority of my colleagues and their

2 businesses entered into a zero-income scenario, and
3 they will remain, and we will remain in a zero-income
4 scenario for the foreseeable future. These talent
5 agencies are predominantly small businesses who will
6 not be able to survive the pandemic, given the
7 current economic climate and the projected return for
8 these industries. While the city starts to reopen
9 and enters into Phase 2, the entertainment industry
10 will be the last to reopen, and when it does there's
11 an enormous possibility the industry will be at a
12 fraction of where we left off in the March of this
13 year and will take many months, likely years, to get
14 back to the robust industry that New York City has
15 enjoyed for the last several years. Our member
16 agencies are as diversely owned and operated as the
17 actors and the performers that we represent, female
18 owned, minority owned, and, like myself, LGBTQ owned.
19 I'm a proud gay man and a proud Brooklyn resident.
20 While many of our members have availed themselves of
21 PPP loans and some of the other resources via NYC SBS
22 and the EIDL grants and loans, they don't come close
23 in covering the complete loss of revenues our members
24 are looking at. Conservative estimates are looking
25 at the beginning of 2021 as a possible return, while

2 many other estimates are looking at March of 2021.

3 That's a year of these small businesses and our
4 clients receiving no income. The potential closure
5 of those small businesses will have a devastating
6 long-term effect on the economy of both New York City
7 and New York State. Our member agencies are crucial
8 in helping artists navigate the theater, film, and TV
9 industries. And many of these artists go on to
10 become leaders in our community and our society as a
11 whole. These agencies help artists push boundaries
12 in their storytelling, help create opportunities for
13 people who traditionally do not have a voice. We are
14 at times their sole advocate in what can be a
15 difficult climate to be heard. Losing a major
16 element of support to these artists will have a
17 rippling effect on the art and the projects New York
18 City is known for creating and for promoting. As
19 talent agents...

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

21 CHRISTOPHER FREER: ...we can't do our job
22 of supporting artists if we don't weather this and
23 make it out on the other end. In closing, as the
24 future of the city's return to our new normal is
25 being discussed and planned, I ask that the economic

2 impact of these small businesses be taken into
3 consideration. Their health and well-beings are a
4 vital component.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
6 your testimony, Mr. Freer. We'll now move to the
7 next member of the panel, Jennifer Wright Cook. You
8 may begin when the sergeant calls the clock.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
10 now.

11 JENNIFER WRIGHT COOK: Hi. Um, after
12 five hours I'm so nervous. Um, my name is Jennifer
13 Wright Cook. I'm the executive director of The
14 Field, a small but nimble 34-year-old arts service
15 organization, based in lower Manhattan, helping 1200
16 artists a year in all five boroughs. I'm also
17 cochair of New Yorkers for Culture and Arts. I am a
18 resident of Prospect Heights, a mom, an alto, and a
19 retired dance artist. It was through my dance career
20 that I learned about my whiteness and about racism.
21 As two speakers said earlier, the arts literally
22 saved me and they transformed my life. After five
23 hours on this meeting today, I must reference the New
24 York City logo that comes up before each speaker.
25 I've never fully seen it. Now I've seen it hundreds

3 of times. It features a deeply racist image of an
4 indigenous person happily alongside a Pilgrim/
5 colonist-looking person. I encourage all of us to
6 look at it and to advocate for a new logo for our
7 city. I also want to add my support of Melody
8 Capote's powerful testimony and advocacy for Black
9 Lives Matter initiative and Arts Go Black. Thank
10 you, Melody, for giving The Field a shout-out on our
11 work. CCIADI has also really changed my life and my
12 work. If New York City is going to recover from the
13 COVID pandemic and the pandemic of systemic racism
14 the city must invest in artists. Artists are the key
15 to the health and resilience of our neighborhoods.
16 Artists are the key towards seniors' vitality and to
17 our kids' education. Artists are the key to our joy
18 and to the fight against white supremacy. As you all
19 know, before COVID artists were barely surviving,
20 particularly black and brown artists. After COVID
21 95% of all artists have lost income. At The Field
22 the 200-plus artists who fund raise with us will lose
23 about 6 to 12 million dollars total in grants and
24 income. For artists who survive on \$300, sorry, on
25 \$30,000 or years or less this is crushing. They
won't survive. Edisa Weeks is a Bed-Sty Brooklyn-

2 based choreographer and educator. She was in the
3 midst of residencies and touring when COVID hit. Her
4 next premier at 651 Arts is rescheduled till 2002,
5 luckily. But she has since lost income from touring
6 and teacher. Her dancers have lost income and two
7 had to leave...

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

9 JENNIFER WRIGHT COOK: ...[inaudible]. A
10 long-term artist at The Field, Edisa turned to us to
11 help her secure a much-needed grant from Black Arts
12 Future. I urge the City Council to ensure that
13 artists are prioritized in recovery. Ensure that all
14 DCLA grantees are paying livable wages to artists for
15 all labor, including intellectual and emotional
16 labor. I urge the City Council to support key
17 initiatives, like CASA, Su Casa, Immigrants Arts, and
18 CTC that support theaters of color and artists.

19 Thank you so much for your time today. I also want
20 to align myself with Ryan Gilliam from Fab, as The
21 Field is one of many cultural organizations coming
22 together to join the movement for black lives to
23 demand reparations. We acknowledge that the city's
24 newly formed racial justice and reconciliation
25 commission is an important first step. However, this

2 commission must focus on action and not symbolic
3 gesture. Thank you for your time today.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
5 your testimony. We have two more members of the
6 panel, Michael Jacobs and Kimberly Olson. Ah, we
7 will move to Michael Jacobs next. You may begin when
8 the sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
10 now.

11 MICHAEL JACOBS: Good afternoon, Chair
12 Van Bramer and members of the committee. My name is
13 Michael Jacobs and I'm a board member for the Arts
14 Student League of New York. I'm here today to share
15 how the Arts Student League continues to supports our
16 communities' needs during the COVID crisis. The Arts
17 Student League has likely never experienced such a
18 crisis in its over 145 years. The League's history
19 has always been about welcoming everyone to learn and
20 make art in an atelier model. Our founders were
21 innovative in creating a board that specifically
22 included women board members from the beginning, as
23 well as opening instruction to women artists. Our
24 demographics continue to diversity, ranging from high
25 school students from the outer boroughs looking to

2 build out their profiles ahead of college
3 applications, to retirees who are finally happy to be
4 able to work on their art with no requirements,
5 flexible scheduling, and affordable tuition, which is
6 heavily subsidized by the League. Considering
7 restrictions around physical proximity, we quickly
8 converted our model from an effectively unchanged
9 atelier system originating from the French Beaux-Arts
10 Academie of the 19th century to online education via
11 Zoom, what we like to refer to as our new atelier
12 classes. The move online has surprisingly attracted
13 even more seniors as well as appealing to the next
14 generation of New York artists. We also continue art
15 collaboration with our seasonably youth arts program
16 in New York City in collaboration with the Parks
17 Department and we serve roughly 8000 New York
18 students through this program per year. The uptake
19 in demand was impressive as we converted our existing
20 student population on to our new platform, found new
21 ways to engage our instructors' models, and even
22 welcomed new students. We are frankly amazed by the
23 connections being made with people who would have had
24 trouble getting to the League, from homebound seniors
25 and high school students from the five boroughs to

2 international students, making the League a global
3 investor for New York arts education an affordable,
4 accessible price point. Art is connecting the
5 community at a most isolating moment in our history,
6 providing intellectual and creative assistance to
7 help us cope with the stresses of this time. We are
8 ever grateful to the support from Chair Van Bramer
9 and Commissioner Casals for arts in the city. Ah, we
10 look forward to partnering with you on our many
11 programs which reach New Yorkers in all five
12 boroughs. I'm proud of our city and its institutions
13 like the Arts Student League. Thank you for your
14 testimony.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Mr.
16 Jacobs. We'll now move, before moving back to the
17 chair we'll move to the final member of this panel,
18 Kimberly Olson. You may begin your testimony when
19 the sergeant calls the clock. Thank you so much.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
21 now.

22 KIMBERLY OLSON: Thank you so much for
23 the opportunity to testify and Council Member Van
24 Bramer for your leadership on this issue. My name is
25 Kimberly Olson and I come to you today as the

2 executive director of the New York City Arts and
3 Education Round Table, as someone who has worked as a
4 teaching artist for cultural organizations across New
5 York City for the past eight years and also as a
6 Hunters Point, Queens resident. I'm here to
7 highlight the importance of immediately investigate
8 in arts education's ability to support the city's
9 recovery process and positively engage young people.
10 The New York City Arts and Education Round Table is a
11 grassroots service organization who builds its
12 efforts around the values that arts are essential and
13 that arts are a right for all New York City students.
14 Specifically and especially students who are black,
15 indigenous, and people of color, as well as students
16 with disabilities. We represent hundreds of cultural
17 organizations and thousands of teaching artists in
18 every discipline. These creative thinkers, many of
19 them who are on the call today, quickly pivoted to
20 designing engaging remote learning opportunities to
21 support students, teachers, and families. These arts
22 learning opportunities gave students space to process
23 and think critically about the world around them and
24 to build important life skills that will help them
25 move beyond this pandemic. As New York City recovers

2 from the COVID-19 crisis over the coming months and
3 years the arts and culture sector will play a crucial
4 role in the recovery of schools and communities. In
5 allocating cuts in resources, the City Council must
6 put their faith in the arts. It helps students
7 process trauma, restore joy, support physical
8 fitness, and build communities. In order for this to
9 happen, city agencies need sustained funding. The
10 Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department of
11 Education, and the Department of Youth and Community
12 Development, um, provide cultural institutions with
13 much-needed funding to offer expanded arts
14 programming to our students. Any additional cuts
15 would deprive these students of an equitable
16 education. Our request is that funding cuts for arts
17 education are proportional to the other disciplines
18 and that the infrastructure for arts education is not
19 lost. Please reinvest in our students and in New
20 York City's future. The arts are essential for our
21 city now and forever. Thank you so much for your
22 time and consideration.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
24 your testimony. Before we move to Chair Van Bramer I
25 will read the members of the next panel. Ah, the

2 next panel will be Casey Ventrelli, Arlene Sorkan,
3 Jamie Hastings, and Naomi Goldberg Haas.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, ah,
5 ah, very much to all the panelists, um, and, ah, ah,
6 I have to start with my constituent, Kimberly Olson.
7 Um, thank you, ah, with the arts in education, you
8 know, when the mayor first got elected at the
9 council's urging we added 96 million dollars to, ah,
10 the budget for arts in the schools and, and the
11 former chancellor, ah, Farina used to talk about how
12 many, um, arts teachers were hired with that funding
13 and how many new programs were started in public
14 schools and how many, ah, dance studios that had been
15 dormant were activated, um, and, ah, you know, now
16 we're looking at decimating the budget for arts
17 education, which is, ah, ah, would be a travesty,
18 obviously, um, assuming we're gonna get out of it.
19 Ah, Jennifer, obviously we know each other a long
20 time now. Thank you for your, ah, testimony and, and
21 I have a different screen than you so I don't see
22 the, um, ah, the seal pop up every, ah, time someone
23 speaks, but I will, ah, I will take another look at
24 that, um, after you, you raised it. Um, and Chris,
25 ah, I, I hear you. Thank you. Um, I was, ah,

2 sharing with the commissioner, um, ah, a second ago.
3 I'm just glad that, ah, so many, ah, LGBTQ, gay,
4 queer folks have found a home in the arts and, um,
5 you know, I, ah, I'm grateful to be the, ah,
6 openly gay chair of the Cultural Affairs Committee
7 and, ah, and I now have, ah, also, ah, a queer
8 commissioner for the Department of Cultural Affairs
9 and of course, um, just grateful that so many, ah, of
10 us have found a home in so many people's lives. Ah,
11 um, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, those lives have been saved
12 because of the arts, and we've had so many people
13 today literally talk about how their lives have been
14 saved, um, and transformed by the arts, which is, ah,
15 something I know and believe and, and I know all of
16 you do as well. So, um, again I want to thank, ah,
17 everyone who is part of this panel, including Naomi
18 and the others, ah, and I know a lot of other folks,
19 ah, continue to wait, so I'll try and limit my, um,
20 remarks so people can go as quickly as possible as we
21 enter hour six of this hearing, which, ah, may be the
22 longest one that I've ever done. But, ah, ah, it's
23 all incredibly worthwhile and, and the commissioner
24 and I continue to listen to every single word and
25 hear and see every single one of you. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
3 Chair Van Bramer. And also to all of our panelists,
4 um, I'll read the names of panelists again quickly
5 and then call on the first panelist. Casey
6 Ventrelli, Arlene Sorkan, Jamie Hastings, and Naomi
7 Goldberg Haas. The next witness will be Casey
8 Ventrelli. You may begin when the sergeant calls the
9 clock. Thank you.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
11 now.

12 CASEY VENTRELLI: Dear Chairman Van
13 Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and Commissioner
14 Casals, um, I want to thank you for the opportunity
15 to speak with you today and I'm pleased to be here
16 alongside all of these inspiring and passionate
17 speakers. I feel honored to speak alongside each one
18 of you today. Um, today I speak to the necessity of
19 arts education in the public sector, and I also
20 welcome Commissioner Casals. My name is Casey
21 Ventrelli and I work for the school and community
22 programs of Dance Wave, a socially conscious,
23 nonprofit dance education organization that has been
24 a force in Brooklyn for over 25 years. Our program
25 reaches 6000 youth and adults annually in over 50

2 schools, community centers, and senior centers in the
3 five boroughs of New York City. A majority of our
4 audience identify as black, Latinx, and low-income,
5 and several of our programs serve people with
6 developmental disabilities. With the support of City
7 Council initiatives and DCLA we bring transformative
8 skill development and mentorship that enables our
9 audience to succeed as tomorrow's leaders, artists,
10 anchors, and visionaries. Prior to COVID-19 people
11 of color and low-income persons faced daily adversity
12 in addition to economic barriers to achieving their
13 dreams, and as has been highlighted in this hearing
14 we can unequivocally state that there is clear racial
15 disparity in the coronavirus pandemic and the
16 communities affected most. Dance Wave has
17 experienced severe losses due to COVID-19. Even with
18 our team's rapid response to create virtual
19 programming to meet our community's needs we
20 anticipate a 50% decrease in revenue and have been
21 issued to, we have been forced to issue pay cuts,
22 furlough dozens of teaching artists, and cancel many
23 of our school residencies due to the announcement
24 from DOE, which excludes dance as an essential
25 service in the public schools and today I ask the

2 City Council to advocate for the continued funding
3 for the arts and culture sector and for community-
4 based organizations through DCLA, including CASA, Su
5 Casa, and Cultural Immigrant Initiative funding. The
6 unique and diverse cultural life in New York City
7 cannot function without the arts organizations and
8 we'll remember why we call this the greatest city in
9 the world. Keep arts education in the schools so we
10 can continue to mentor our youth...

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

12 CASEY VENTRELLI: ...[inaudible] funding
13 for public art and cultural programs for CASA, Su
14 Casa and CII, and let there be no doubt the arts are
15 an essential service for all of us. Thank you so
16 much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
18 your testimony. We'll move to the next panelist now.
19 Arlene Sorkan, you are next and can begin when the
20 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
22 now.

23 ARLENE SORKAN: Good afternoon. Thank
24 you, Chairman Van Bramer, Commissioner Casals,
25 Majority Leader Cumbo, and City Council members for

2 this opportunity to testify. I'm Arlene Sorkan, a
3 social worker, president and CEO of Illuminar
4 Productions on Staten Island. Our mission is to
5 empower students from preschool to seniors to utilize
6 the power of the arts to create conversations about
7 critical social issues, for residencies and schools
8 in senior centers that develop social emotional
9 skills through writing, theater, and visual arts, a
10 touring company of actors who perform original
11 interactive plays about social issues, including
12 racial injustice, and an arts employment program for
13 young people impacted by a family member's addiction.
14 Our 30 residencies serve 900 students a year and our
15 actors reach audiences of over 4000 annually. We
16 work primarily with students of color, English
17 language learners, those over age and under-credited,
18 have special needs, and have histories of family
19 substance use. These groups are particularly
20 vulnerable at this time due to the trauma and stress
21 of the pandemic, social unrest, and racial injustice.
22 Our programs help our participants problem solve
23 through artistic expression. When everything shut
24 down my diverse staff of five full-time and 25 part-
25 time teaching artists and actors made it our mission

2 to adapt. Within four days we created Imagine with
3 Illuminar, a YouTube channel that currently has 70
4 video lessons, including those in multiple languages
5 and some specifically for seniors. All of our
6 residencies, both during and after school, have
7 continued virtually. Our touring company of actors
8 created new work virtually about living during the
9 pandemic and in support of Black Lives Matter.
10 Through social media we have over 10,000 views of our
11 videos and in order to reach our middle school
12 students we created a Tik Tok which has over 3500
13 views. 78% of our funding for our programs comes
14 from New York City, including DCLA, CDF, City Council
15 discretionary, CASA, Su Casa, cultural immigrant,
16 Dove, and speaker's initiatives, all that
17 overwhelming support underserved and at-risk
18 communities that are most impacted by COVID. We
19 support the health and well-being of our communities
20 at a time when they need us more than ever. I want
21 to thank the Staten Island delegation for your
22 previous support and ask that all City Council
23 members consider the...

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

2 ARLENE SORKAN: ...the consequences of
3 removing creative outlets at a time when they are
4 most needed. Thank you again for allowing me to
5 testify.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
7 Ms. Sorkan, for your testimony. The next witness
8 will be Jamie Hastings. You may begin when the
9 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
11 now.

12 JAMIE HASTINGS: Thank you. My name is
13 Jamie Hastings and I'm the executive director of the
14 Arthur Miller Foundation, a nonprofit organization
15 founded by Arthur's daughter, filmmaker Rebecca
16 Miller. We're sincerely appreciative for the value
17 New York City Council places on arts education and
18 our cultural institutions. Arthur Miller was the son
19 of an illiterate Polish immigrant. He went to public
20 schools in Harlem and in Brooklyn at a time when the
21 arts were regular components of a core education.
22 Our mission is to provide equity and access to
23 quality theater education, making it a right, not a
24 privilege. Our fellows program, in partnership with
25 the New York City Department of Education, supports

3 theater teachers in building sustainable school
4 theater programs by providing mentorship, cultural
5 partner residencies, classroom materials, theater
6 tickets for students, and professional development.
7 We work with cultural institutions such as Lincoln
8 Center, Roundabout Theater Company, Epic Theater
9 Ensemble, and Arts Connection, to name a few. Over
10 the last five years we've invested about 1.5 million
11 dollars in our program, which impacts over 30,000
12 students across all five boroughs. We've adapted our
13 support to meet remote learning needs through virtual
14 theater labs and crucial online resources. We fear
15 budget cuts may have lasting negative impacts on arts
16 education. I'm here to request that those cuts do
17 not affect in-school arts programming, which is
18 already severely under-represented in our schools.
19 Only about 200 out of 1800 schools have a certified
20 theater teacher. And that we preserve the arts
21 education infrastructure, including cultural
22 partnerships. We must continue giving a voice to all
23 our young people, particularly our black and brown
24 students, who make up the majority of our student
25 population. We believe that it is time to deem arts
education essential. New York's social emotional

2 learning benchmarks are naturally activated through
3 the theater process, building trust and empowering
4 students by integrating their mind, body, and voice.
5 These skills will be key in providing our kids with
6 trauma-informed care as they transition back to
7 school in whatever form classes may take. Thank you,
8 Chair Van Bramer, and City Council, for recognizing
9 that arts education is a right, not a privilege. We
10 know that to together we can cross...

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

12 JAMIE HASTINGS: ...[inaudible] today to
13 become the forward-thinking, creative, problem-
14 solving citizens of tomorrow. Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
16 your testimony. Before we call the final witness in
17 this panel I'm going to read the names of the
18 panelists for the next panel. Melissa Riker, Tamara
19 Kasheky, Cynthia Flowers, and Barry Grove. Before we
20 move to that panel we'll call the final witness on
21 this panel and then move to Chair Van Bramer and any
22 council member questions. The final member is Naomi
23 Goldberg Haas.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin.
25

2 NAOMI GOLDBERG HAAS: First of all, I
3 want everyone to just raise your arms over your head.
4 You especially, Ms. [inaudible] and just feel, come
5 on, everybody, it's important to move. I, I'm Naomi
6 Goldberg Haas and I'm the [inaudible], right?
7 [inaudible] I'm the founder and artistic director of
8 Dancers for a Variable Population. We bring strong,
9 creative movement to older adults that supports
10 wellness, happiness, and health. We annually serve
11 over 2500 older adults through our four boroughs in
12 New York City with weekly dance classes and annual
13 free public performances. The older adults we serve
14 are highly vulnerable to COVID-19 and are trapped in
15 their apartments. They lack outlets for physical
16 exercise and social connection. Before this pandemic
17 loneliness was affecting 60% to 80% of our
18 population. Loneliness is not just a social problem,
19 it's a health risk. It decreases lifespan by 26%.
20 We know that this can be a life or death issue for
21 seniors to stay connected at this time. This spring
22 Dancers for a Variable Population moved rapidly to
23 continue our programs remotely. We are now offering
24 23 dance classes a week in English and Spanish, seven
25 days a week, with an attendance of nearly 700 per

2 week. This includes 15 Zoom-based classes and then
3 to meet the seniors who don't have internet access,
4 telephone, eight telephone-based classes with 40, 50
5 people, seniors in every class. Let that sink in.
6 Older adults are desperate for cultural engagement,
7 social connection, and physical activity. Ah,
8 hundreds each week are talking on the phone to take a
9 dance class. Imagine that. Our request is that,
10 that the budget calls, the budget cuts do not
11 [inaudible] disproportionately on the arts, aging and
12 youth services, libraries, and education. The
13 initial projections for these agencies would spell
14 disaster for our organization. And for the social
15 and cultural services, the lifeblood of the city. We
16 stand affirmatively for cultural...

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

18 NAOMI GOLDBERG HAAS: ...[inaudible]
19 creativity, mental health, and possibility, a sense
20 of possibility to all New Yorkers. Not, OK,
21 [inaudible].

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
23 your testimony. Ah, this is the, you were the final
24 witness on this panel. So before we move to the next
25 panel we'll move to Chair Van Bramer.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, ah,
3 Naomi, I hadn't stretched in several hours and I knew
4 you were gonna bring something good, ah, to this
5 hearing, ah, in addition, ah, to that, ah, incredible
6 bookcase behind you. But, um, I thought you might
7 dance, just as I thought that, ah, as someone earlier
8 might sing, I thought you might dance because, um, I
9 have danced with you, ah, with seniors at the
10 Queensbridge, ah, Houses and, ah, believe very much
11 in the power of, ah, your programming. So, ah, I'm a
12 big fan, Naomi, as you know, of, ah, of the work that
13 you do. Um, and, ah, ah, you know, a bunch of other
14 folks, Jamie and Casey talked about, ah, um, arts in
15 education, you know, we're fighting for it. Um, you
16 know, ah, also Casey I love your background, um, ah,
17 you know, and, ah, ah, it's a difficult time and
18 Zoom, ah, has consumed our lives but it is sort of
19 interesting to look at everybody's apartment, um,
20 and, ah, and Arlene to see that, ah, um, ah, ah
21 workout machine behind you, um, ah, pretty, pretty,
22 ah, pretty cool. We have to take the joy in whatever
23 and wherein we can find it right about now. Um, but
24 I want to thank all of you, ah, for your testimony,
25 ah, and just know that, you know, I, I'm fighting

2 along with the commissioner, who is still here, um,
3 you know, against the cuts. Ah, we know how
4 important arts in education is. Ah, and Naomi, ah,
5 you know, the work that you do with our seniors, um,
6 as someone who has a mom in her early eighties, who's
7 dealing with some very serious issues associated with
8 aging, ah, you know, it's just incredibly important
9 work. So thank you. Do you want to call the next
10 panel?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, thank you so
12 much, Chair Van Bramer. We have no other council
13 member questions, so we'll move to the next panel.
14 I'll quickly read the four names of the panelists and
15 then call the first panelist. Melissa Riker, Tamara
16 Kasheky, Cynthia Flowers, and Barry Grove. The next
17 panelist is Melissa Riker. You may begin when the
18 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
20 now.

21 MELISSA RIKER: Thank you. My name is
22 Melissa Riker. I am a dancer at [inaudible],
23 producer, living and working professionally in New
24 York for 20 years. I thank the member of the City
25 Council here for your clear support of the arts,

3 social justice, and to all the inspiring artists that
4 have spoken before me today. My dance company is
5 Kinesis Project Dance Theater. We are a large-scale
6 outdoor dance company that places crafted dances in
7 large public spaces, primarily in New York and
8 Seattle, for all of the people in those places,
9 bringing surprise and joy to our audiences. Due to
10 the timing of the stay-at-home orders, Kinesis
11 Project's New York City dancers are scattered between
12 the usual spots like Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens,
13 but also Florida and Pittsburgh and still paying New
14 York City rents. To keep the dancers connected,
15 working, and creative Kinesis Project has continued
16 rehearsing in both the New York and core, Seattle
17 core companies and have been offering live crafted
18 performances and gatherings on Zoom. We are a
19 grateful recipient of the COVID emergency room funds
20 from Dance NYC and the Indie Theater Fund. Kinesis
21 Project has performances scheduled in New York City
22 parks this summer in July and in August. We are
23 prepared to pivot to a hybrid model in partnership
24 with our parks presenters and bring dance to our
25 audiences. However, we lack the guidelines for how
outdoor cultural organizations might proceed and it

2 makes planning challenging. I'm concerned about
3 asking my dancers to get on the subway and about
4 bringing our diverse and multigenerational audiences
5 together to see us perform. Kinesis Project can
6 offer beautiful distance and inspiring art to the
7 people of New York City now or later, but without
8 clear guidance on these steps and support from City
9 Council about the value of the arts in public spaces
10 we cannot ask dancers to take the chance. As a New
11 York City dance artist I wear many hats. I am a
12 teacher in schools and to young women's on Riker's
13 Island, a resident artist in an international school,
14 resident choreographer of New York City Children's
15 Theater, a curator, and a producer. I co-direct the
16 organization Women in Motion, a year-long commission
17 of female artists, and I am the executive producer of
18 the [inaudible] Festival, an annual festival
19 celebrating the voices of female-identifying, gender
20 nonconforming, and racially diverse artists. 2020 is
21 the festival's 20th year.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

23 MELISSA RIKER: We postponed our March 18
24 opening, um, to pivot to small experiences and we
25 appreciate the LNCC DCLA creative community grant to

2 support the festival. Between these three
3 organizations, my collaborators and I support over 90
4 artists per year in New York City, and I'm just one
5 individual artist. Please consider culture and dance
6 experiences a social service to the mental, physical,
7 and aesthetic health of New York City. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
9 testimony, and just a reminder that we will be
10 reading, ah, written testimony, which can be longer
11 and you can still submit at
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. The next panelist will be
13 Tamara Kasheky. You may begin when the sergeant
14 calls the clock. Thank you.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
16 now.

17 TAMARA KASHEKY: Good afternoon, almost
18 good evening. Ah, thank you, Chair Van Bramer and
19 everyone who's hanging in on this long but very
20 committed and dedicated call in support of culture
21 today. Um, my name is Tamara Kasheky. I am the
22 director of grants and government relations at the
23 St. George Theater Restoration, a nonprofit
24 performing arts center located on the North Shore of
25 Staten Island. Again, thank you for your time and

2 your ongoing, ah, commitment to arts and culture,
3 especially during this difficult time of converging
4 pandemics. The St. George Theater Restoration is an
5 historic theater that was on the brink of ruin and
6 the cusp of being torn down when three women took
7 over in 2004 and reinvented it as a nonprofit arts
8 venue. It is the only venue of its size and capacity
9 in Staten Island and provides Staten Island residents
10 the ability to see a show of any kind in their home
11 borough without high tolls or a long commute. Each
12 year over 100,000 people visit the St. George. The
13 theater is not a part of the cultural institutions
14 group, nor does it receive any city-provided general
15 operating or facility support. And despite
16 experiencing a revenue loss of over \$300,000 per
17 month due to the mandated COVID-19 closures, the
18 theater has remained committed to its community and
19 will provide its free annual summer arts education
20 programs virtually to over 150 Staten Island and
21 Brooklyn youth, ages 9 through 18, via our summer
22 dance theater literacy workshop and our career paths
23 for the arts programs. Historic theaters are proven
24 community revitalizers and economic drivers that
25 create dynamic livable and walkable neighborhoods and

2 they will be critical pieces to the next stages of
3 community recovery. Capital support of arts venues
4 is a crucial component that allows small venues to be
5 safe, sound, and function in a business model that
6 does not leave much in the way of earned revenue that
7 beyond covering basic operating expenses. The New
8 York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New
9 York City Council are essential partners in this
10 work. Capital support of life safety projects, such
11 as the St. George Theater's roof, directly
12 contributes to creating cultural community anchors.
13 It is only with city support that we can fulfill our
14 mission to restore and renovate the historic 1929
15 building.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

17 TAMARA KASHEKY: Thank you for your time.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
19 your testimony. The next witness will be Cynthia
20 Flowers.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
22 now.

23 CYNTHIA FLOWERS: Hello. My name is
24 Cynthia Flowers. I'm the executive director of SoHo
25 Rep, the theater that first commissioned and produced

2 Jackie Sibly Story's Pulitzer Prize-winning play,
3 Fairview. However, I am not here to testify on
4 behalf of SoHo Rep, but like many of my colleagues to
5 ask you to maintain and prioritize funding for the
6 Coalition of Theaters of Color. Since the COVID-19
7 crisis began arts leaders have been repeatedly told
8 by city officials that police funding would take
9 priority over culture. The last time I heard this,
10 along with 30 of my peers, was May 27 in a meeting
11 with the council speaker. This was five days before
12 a SoHo Rep staff member was attacked by the NYPD at a
13 peaceful protest in Cadman Plaza. During that same
14 week I was reminded that the National Black Theater
15 brought hundreds of community members together in
16 conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement
17 five years ago, a natural extension of the thoughtful
18 talks they host after every production. Later as
19 scenic designers finished the Black Lives Matter
20 mural in front of the Billie Holiday Theater, I was
21 reminded that every time I see a show at that 200-
22 seat theater it is completely packed with black
23 audiences of all ages from across the city and across
24 the country. Then as the *Times* ran an article
25 bemoaning that an extraordinary season of Asian

2 American work was cut short due to COVID I was
3 reminded that [inaudible] has been launching the
4 careers of playwrights and [inaudible] has been
5 providing roles for some of the greatest and most
6 under-utilized actors in our city for decades. The
7 companies I have mentioned are just four of the 42
8 theaters that make up the Coalition of Theaters of
9 Color and that are led by black, indigenous, Latinx,
10 and Asian people. These are incredible organizations
11 that will keep the communities most impacted by
12 COVID-19 and police violence the ability to heal, to
13 grieve, to celebrate, to share joy, and to recover.
14 We need their power and purpose in our city. While
15 the CTC budget was higher than ever last year, as
16 Council Member Van Bramer has noted several times,
17 it's still...

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

19 CYNTHIA FLOWERS: ...totaled less than 1%
20 of the mayor's proposed NYPD budget, less than 1%.
21 Council Member Van Bramer, you are also my
22 councilperson as a resident of Long Island City. I
23 thank you for restating your commitment to the CTCs
24 on this call. I urge you to stay steadfast and vocal
25 in your advocacy outside of this meeting. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
3 your testimony. Before we move to the final member
4 of this panel I'm going to read the names of the
5 panelists for the next panel. Lorcan Otway, Jason
6 Hewitt, Benjamin Spearman, and Jennie Gerston, or
7 Gerston, apologies again for pronunciation. Um, the
8 final member of this panel will be Barry Grove. The
9 next panel is our last panel, our final panel. If we
10 have not called your name after this next panel, and
11 we will repeat this, please let us know, um, via the
12 raise hand function or other methods. Thank you,
13 and, ah, Barry Grove, you are free to testify, um,
14 once the sergeant starts the clock. Thank you.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin now.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK, apologies, I
17 think that we, um, have lost, ah, Mr. Grove. I think
18 he dropped off Zoom. So we, um, will move to the
19 next panel. Ah, we can circle back if he comes back
20 on. Chair Van Bramer? This is the last panelist for
21 this panel.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Here we go. Um,
23 ah, so, Cynthia, yes, I will continue to be very
24 vocal about this, ah, outside of this hearing. Ah,
25 you know, I was one of the first council members and

2 continue, um, ah, to speak about this, ah, on my
3 social media, you know, ah, and rightfully so all the
4 time. Um, so, ah, ah, you have my commitment to, to,
5 ah, in, in both, ah, this room, in public, but then
6 also in the, in the prime of budget negotiating this,
7 right, ah, that I'll keep talking, ah, talking about,
8 um, defunding the NYPD and making sure that we are,
9 ah, putting resources into this and, and I agree the,
10 the budget for CTC is still, ah, ah, very small
11 compared to in particular the NYPD's budget, um, but,
12 ah, ah, with Laurie and I working together we, we
13 almost doubled it last year, right. It was, it was
14 a, you know, a massive increase. I get that it's
15 still relatively small compared to so many other
16 things. Um, and more and more groups have come in.
17 So, ah, obviously we're gonna continue to, to, ah,
18 you know, not only hold the line but increase, ah,
19 ah, funding for, um, CTC and, and other cultural
20 organizations in particular that serving black and
21 brown communities. Um, but, ah, um, yeah, I'm gonna,
22 I'm gonna keep fighting, ah, rest assured, ah, in
23 public and in private. Um, and, ah, Tara, it's great
24 to see you, St. George back there, um, and, and the
25 work that you're doing and, ah, Melissa, um, if she's

2 still on the call. I love, I love dance and I love
3 outdoor dance, um, and, ah, you know, I'm, I'm gonna
4 do everything I can to save, ah, all of our, our
5 cultural, but, ah, but as you may know and I said,
6 ah, seemingly like seven hours ago, ah, dance is
7 among my favorite things in the world. So, ah, I
8 really, really care a lot about that. Um, so I know
9 we have, is it one last panel, Brenda?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Correct, Chair, yeah,
11 we have one last panel. And if we inadvertently
12 missed anyone that would like to testify they can
13 also raise their hand in Zoom. But we should have
14 four more witnesses and one last panel.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. So one
17 more time, um, we'll move forward. So thank you so
18 much, Chair Van Bramer. Thank you so much, ah,
19 everyone that has testified. If we inadvertently
20 missed anyone and you would like to testify please
21 use the Zoom raise hand function at this time, or
22 throughout this panel. We will call on you in the
23 order that your hand is raised. We have four members
24 of this next and final panel. I will list all the
25 names and then call you one by one, as we've done

2 with previous panels. Lorcan Otway, Jason Hewitt,
3 Benjamin Spearman, and Jennie Gerston are the final
4 witnesses for this hearing. So next is Lorcan Otway.
5 You may begin your testimony when the sergeant calls
6 the clock. Thank you.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
8 now.

9 LORCAN OTWAY: [inaudible] I'm Lorcan
10 Otway, a Romany American activist. Ah, we are
11 racialized as Gypsy. I was born into a theater
12 family. I grew up a working child. At 9 my family
13 built Theatre 80, a commercial community-serving off-
14 Broadway theater. From Hair to our partnering with
15 the Negro Ensemble Company the broad mandate of
16 commercial theater makes us the avant-garde in free
17 speech and socially transformative theater. When the
18 not-for-profit world turned its back on our former
19 neighbors, the Negro Ensemble Company, in both of our
20 50th years, Theatre 80 invited them in to our season
21 for free, not because we could afford to, but because
22 they represent the tradition of my family that
23 theater must be, ah, that theater must advance
24 society's dreams of justice. At Theatre, um, at
25 Theatre 80 Black Lives Matter from its first moments

2 when in 1964 Woodie King, Jr. helped us build our
3 theater with a group of diverse theater people who
4 created the East Village. This COVID crisis has not
5 been the beginning of the end of independent,
6 socially transformative commercial theater in New
7 York. In the past years, past 10 years, we've lost
8 over 75 theaters. The COVID crisis can well be the
9 final [inaudible] of independent mid-sized theaters.
10 Using half our seats we lose half our income at
11 least. This in a city where our taxes and insurance
12 have risen so high we have no savings and get deeper
13 in debt every year. We need a solution like
14 restaurants allowed to self-certify and use the
15 sidewalk and parking space in front of their
16 building. Theaters need to be able to broaden how we
17 make money. Theatre 80, we can survive taking out
18 our seats to become a cabaret theater. We have a
19 tavern. The change should not be hard, unless, of
20 course, as a 56-year-old business we lose all our
21 grandfathering, having to make extensive and
22 expensive changes. We have been...

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

24 LORCAN OTWAY: ...inspected, we have been
25 inspected each year for 56 years and found to be

2 compliant. Um, I'll send the rest, but in short if
3 the City Council could work with the Department of
4 Buildings to ensure that what should be an easy
5 change is a temporary and expedited trip through the
6 Buildings Department. Thanks very much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
8 testimony. And as a reminder we will review all
9 written testimony that's submitted. It can still be
10 amended and submitted at testimony@council.nyc.gov.
11 The next witness is Jason Hewitt. You may begin when
12 the clock starts. Thank you.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
14 now.

15 JASON HEWITT: To the committee here
16 gathered and other elected officials, thank you so
17 much for the chance to speak to you today. My name
18 is Jason Hewitt. For many years I worked for a
19 Broadway general management office and since then
20 I've been producing as an independent producer off-
21 Broadway and off-off-Broadway [inaudible] all the way
22 down to 30- and 40-seat venues [inaudible] lower
23 Manhattan as well. Today I want to speak to you
24 about why these smaller theaters that we're talking
25 about are going to be so important to the business of

2 theater as a whole as we move forward. One of the
3 big misconceptions that's afoot here is that Broadway
4 will lead us back. And while they may well set a
5 timetable for reference for us to aspire to, in terms
6 of actually starting performances they are looking to
7 other venues both here in New York and abroad to get
8 out and try this before the multi, multi, multi
9 million dollar investments made that's going to bring
10 that aspect of the industry back to us. The smaller
11 theaters will bring us back. There are several
12 reasons why this is. First, they're smaller, so God
13 willing there's less exposure. Secondly, the
14 logistics of these smaller theaters are much more
15 manageable. You're not dealing with a massive amount
16 of theatrical physical productions [inaudible]
17 personal days to get this going before each show
18 [inaudible] money is going to be less to get it
19 going. It will take money but not what Broadway is
20 [inaudible]. Also a lot of the smaller theaters
21 employ nonunion actors, which gives people who are
22 starting their career a chance to be seen, so that is
23 an important investment in our future, and something
24 that's often overlooked here is smaller theaters are
25 much less dependent on the last aspect of our

2 audience that will come back and that is the tourist
3 trade. People that are gonna be in these theaters
4 when they resume performances are people from
5 [inaudible]. I guess a little bit on the lighter
6 side it's worth noting people who work in the
7 smaller theaters are accustomed to making difficult
8 situations work economically, so if you need people
9 to do something with very little you've got the right
10 people. Thanks for the chance to speak. Thank you
11 to my fellow artists for appearing here today.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
13 testimony. The next witness is Benjamin Spearman.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
15 now.

16 BENJAMIN SPEARMAN: Good afternoon, Chair
17 Van Bramer, members of the committee, and arts and
18 culture colleagues. I'm Ben Spearman, a lifelong
19 Bronxite and general director of the 53-year-old
20 Bronx Opera, which has presented over 100 shows, all
21 in English, and has helped hundreds of singers of all
22 backgrounds begin professional careers. We would
23 also be a proud participant in #artsgoblack because
24 unlike Mike Pence I can say Black Lives Matter
25 without hesitation. Over the years we've received

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2 funds through CASA, Su Casa, the Immigrant
3 Initiative, and the CDF. These funds have allowed us
4 to partner with schools, parent groups, community
5 centers, and senior centers to connect Bronxites as
6 only the arts and culture can. Even during COVID, as
7 all of our public performances were canceled, we've
8 been able to continue our three choral programs for
9 senior citizens through Su Casa as well as dance
10 classes for kids on the autism spectrum through the
11 Immigrant Initiative. This work has been and will be
12 accomplished through, with the support of Council
13 Members Cohen, Gjonaj, and Cumbo, and we thank them.
14 We also thank the BCLA and welcome Gonzalo Casals as
15 commissioner. We also thank Kathy Hughes for her
16 years of service in the New York City arts and
17 culture community. And by the way, thanks for
18 staying, Commissioner. I don't know if you know how
19 much it means to all of us that you're still here. I
20 want to echo the chair and Majority Leader Cumbo by
21 saying that the funds that you give to arts and
22 culture organizations must be used to help move the
23 city through the changes we hope to see as the
24 reality of defunding the police comes into focus. As
25 money that is now devoted to policing moves into more

2 intelligently targeted community work, the work that
3 our sector does as part of social services, youth
4 services, education, and senior services will Olympus
5 become more important. We thank the chair for his
6 leadership and know that today in speaking with this
7 committee and this audience we're preaching to the
8 choir, which is kind of a poignant idiom given the
9 CDC's warnings about singing. The arts are both an
10 end and a means. We create art that is the end and
11 it matters. But it's the ability of the arts to
12 educate and be part of social service work in a
13 personal way, and I'm emphasizing today...

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

15 BENJAMIN SPEARMAN: ...as well as art's
16 ability to enrich the lives of those who create it.
17 We know that everybody is experiencing physical pain.
18 And we as an organization and sector ask for our fair
19 share as we help reopen and heal our fractured city.
20 Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
22 your testimony. We'll now move to the final member
23 of this panel. This is also the final witness for
24 this hearing. If we have inadvertently missed anyone
25 that would like to testify please use the Zoom raise

2 hand function now and we will call on you in the
3 order that you have raised your hand. Otherwise, ah,
4 this is the last witness for this hearing, once
5 again. So we will call on Jennie Gerston. You may
6 begin when the sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time will begin
8 now.

9 JENNIE GERSTON: Thank you very much for
10 hearing my testimony today, City Council and Chair
11 Van Bramen. It's a great pleasure to be here,
12 especially, ah, to welcome my good friend, um, my
13 good friend, Gonzalo Casals, who I used to work with
14 at Friends of the High Line, and I speak to you
15 mostly today as a citizen, but also as a long-time,
16 um, producer, ah, and, ah, arts administrator in New
17 York City. My, I come from a family of arts
18 administrators who work in not-for-profit theater and
19 dance and helped build major institutions around New
20 York City. But today I speak on behalf of the
21 Coalition of Theaters of Color just because, ah,
22 these, these are 42 [inaudible] organizations that
23 are community based and I, I want to just encourage
24 the council to continue to, ah, highlight their work
25 and prioritize funding for those organizations

2 because these are community-based organizations that
3 are not only places of convening, but they are places
4 of activism and you know that the arts are, it's
5 responsible for change. You've heard from all of my
6 colleagues today and friends, and, um, I just, I
7 really just wanted to encourage you to, to keep those
8 theaters specifically in mind. [dog barking] I
9 apologize for my dog.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
11 your testimony. This concludes this panel. Chair
12 Van Bramer.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Ah,
14 Jennie, I was gonna say as the final person to
15 testify after almost six hours you had to do
16 something to like close us out with a crescendo and
17 then it was your dog that actually, ah, saved the,
18 the day and allowed us to leave with a little bit of
19 a smile on our faces. Um, thank you, um, ah, for
20 your, ah, work and advocacy, um, and of all the
21 things in Commissioner Casals' resume, ah, I guess
22 his time in the High Line is the one that I most
23 often forget, um, ah, but he's, he's done so many
24 things, ah, with so many great organizations. Ah,
25 Ben, ah, thank you for, um, ah, being able to say

2 Black Lives Matter, but, ah, also great to hear you
3 get all of the council initiatives, um, ah, which is,
4 ah, very exciting to hear somebody say we get CASA,
5 we get Su Casa, we get, ah, Cultural Immigrant, we
6 get CDF, we, ah, um, we're getting, ah, funded. And
7 Jason, um, ah, I appreciate, ah, the long wait, um, I
8 feel like I've been looking at you and those two
9 doors behind you, ah, for several hours, so I
10 appreciate you, ah, sticking with us. And I agree
11 with you that small theaters, I love small, um,
12 theaters. Ah, I love Broadway, but, ah, it's, it's
13 the Chocolate Factories, and, ah, ah, the Bergonises
14 of the world that, ah, as you point out, are gonna
15 lead us out of this thing. Um, and, and Lorcan, ah,
16 self-certifying for outdoor performances is, is a
17 bill that I've already introduced and, and we really
18 want to do, ah, more outdoor performances, um, and
19 make that easier for folks. I do want to, um, thank
20 once again Commissioner Casals, who has, ah, sat
21 through several hours of testimony, ah, and just ask
22 him, ah, if he'll, ah, ah, say a few words, ah, in
23 response to the, ah, nearly 100, um, people who
24 testified, ah, in this hearing before I officially
25 close it out. Commissioner Casals?

2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you, Chair
3 Van Bramer. Um, thank you for recognizing that I, I
4 stayed, you know, for so long. But I, I think it's
5 part of my job to sit here and listen from your, um,
6 you know, experiences and your priorities and your
7 needs, and I just want to make sure you know that,
8 you know, I see you, I hear you, and I'm gonna do as
9 much as I can to support all of you and to help us,
10 um, reopen and recover our cultural organizations so
11 we can, um, have the New York City that we all love.
12 So thank you for all your hard work. Thank you for
13 enduring with all of us, you know, such a long
14 hearing, and I look forward to continue working with
15 you, um, in the near future. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, um,
18 thank you, Commissioner. Um, ah, I was very excited
19 when, ah, Gonzalo Casals, ah, became the
20 commissioner, ah, and when I understood that he was
21 under serious consideration and, um, it's no
22 surprise. I also want to recognize Robbie Wells from
23 the speaker's office who's here, um, ah, joining us
24 and, um, I know the speaker cares a lot about culture
25 and the arts as well and, um, ah, some other folks

2 who have, ah, come and gone over the last seven
3 hours. But, um, ah, I want to thank each and
4 everyone one of you. I want to thank the staff, ah,
5 if you can believe it, though the technology, ah,
6 failed us today. We started out with an 8 o'clock
7 a.m., ah, um, ah, mock hearing. Ah, so we've been at
8 this since 8:00 a.m. with the staff. And, ah, the
9 technology didn't quite, ah, work but, ah, the
10 hearing, um, ah, happened and, ah, I am told that we
11 will be, ah, it was recorded and we'll be sharing
12 this, ah, in, ah, on the council's website and, and
13 I'll share it as well, ah, in any way I can to make
14 sure that, ah, as many people see all this hard folk
15 testimony, ah, that people delivered today. So, um,
16 so thank you again everyone for all the work that you
17 do. I see Tarin has joined us again, um, ah, and,
18 ah, ah, Cheryl, I wish you could sing, um, some
19 opera, but, ah, um, ah, I love being the chair of
20 cultural affairs, um, and libraries, ah, for 11 years
21 and, and I love representing and fighting for this
22 community and, ah, I will certainly be doing that
23 with my colleagues, with Commissioner Casals, um,
24 and, and with the speaker over the next, ah, week,
25 um, as we approach probably the most, ah, important

2 budget of our lifetimes, right, in this particular
3 moment in time. So, ah, with that I think, Brenda,
4 it is OK for me to gavel out?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Correct, thank you,
6 Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Once again with
8 my meat tenderizer acting as the gavel, um, so it's
9 the only thing I had in the house that resembles a
10 gavel and I got that this morning, so, um, what is
11 Melody showing us? [laughs] Um, thank you all again
12 and, ah, with this [gavel] we are adjourned. Thank
13 you. [laughs]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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

Date July 18, 2020