

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES, INTERNATIONAL, INTERGROUP
RELATIONS

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October 20th, 2020
Start: 10:05 a.m.
Recess: 1:54 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing

B E F O R E: Jimmy Van Bramer
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Mark Gjonaj
Francisco Moya
Laurie A. Cumbo
Joseph C. Borelli

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

Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

Melody Capote, Executive Director
Caribbean Cultural Center African
Diaspora Institute

Sade Lythcott, CEO
National Black Theater

Vinnie Bagwell, NYC Artist

Atiba Edwards, Executive Director and
Chief Operating Officer
Brooklyn Children's Museum

Taryn Sacramone, Executive Director
Queens Theater

Amy Andrieux, Executive Director
Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora
Art

Rocky Bucano, Executive Director
Universal Hip Hop Museum

Raymond Codrington, Executive Director
HI-Arts

Alton Aimable
Tropicalfete

Tijay Mohammed, NYC Artist

Lucy Sexton
New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Patrick Joajoco, Cultural Organizer

Lisa Gold, Executive Director
Asian American Arts Alliance

Antonio Serna, Co-organizer
Museum Workers Happy Hour

Alejandra Duques Cifuentes, Executive
Director
Dance NYC

Nicole Touzien, Executive Director
Dance Wave

Yazmany Arboleda
Public Artist In Residence

Nikiesha Hamilton, CEO
A Funny Creative Studios

Marina Ortiz, Founder
Beats Harlem Preservation

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1 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sergeants, all
2
3 Sergeants, you can begin your recording.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: PC recording started.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Cloud recording is good.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Sergeant
8 Sadowsky, you may begin.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and welcome
10 to today's remote New York City Council hearing of
11 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
12 International Intergroup Relations. At this time,
13 would all Council members and Council staff please
14 turn on their video? To minimize disruption, please
15 place electronic devices on vibrate or silent mode.
16 If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you and we are
19 ready to begin.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good morning.
21 My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and I am the Chair of the
22 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
23 International Intergroup Relations and I want to
24 thank everyone for joining us here today for this
25 very important hearing and topic. First, I want to

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1 recognize the Council members who are in this hearing
2 with us today. Council member Francisco Moya,
3 Council member Adams, Council member Louis, and
4 Council member Joe Borelli. Both Council members
5 Moya and Borelli are members of our committee and we
6 thank the other Council members for joining us, as
7 well. There will be other joining along the way and
8 I will certainly recognize the Council members as
9 they join the hearing. Today, we are addressing a
10 very important topic: Black Lives Matter, anti-
11 racism, structural racism in the arts. I don't need
12 to tell anyone— and I see Council member Mark Gjonaj
13 had just joined the hearing, as well. But racial
14 inequity and discrimination against black,
15 indigenous, and people of color in this country dates
16 back to the very beginning of colonization and
17 slavery, but the global response and protests related
18 to the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmad Arbury, Breonna
19 Taylor, and too many others. It, with very good
20 reason, sparked, reignited national conversations
21 about race, police funding, and community engagement.
22 I was proud to vote no on the most recent budget
23 that, in my opinion, did not defund the NYPD, but it
24 is significant that more and more people across the
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1 world are waking up to the fact that racism is
2 structural and it is not just enough to talk about
3 it. we must actually do something about it. And it
4 is very important to note that this most recent
5 budget significantly cut arts and education and that
6 defunding of arts and education disproportionately
7 affects BIPOC communities. In particular, the
8 children of color who are disproportionately lacking
9 in those resources. Some said that this period feels
10 like 1918, 1932, and 1968 rolled into one. A global
11 pandemic, a great depression, and an uprising. A
12 civil rights uprising all unfolding together and that
13 makes clear, more than ever, the inequities, but also
14 the urgency. That's why we're here today. To
15 listen, to learn, and to act. An estimate 15 to 26
16 million people participated in Black Lives Matter
17 marches and demonstrations and rallies in 2020 across
18 the country, making it one of the largest movements
19 in the nation's history. New conversations have been
20 rich, sometimes painful, and I hope increasingly
21 fruitful happening on an organic level in the
22 cultural community, as well. It is especially
23 important that we center and lift up voices of color.
24 This process must include looking inward and ensuring
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1 the BIPOC artist's work is centered in the
2 conversations. The curators at our city's museums
3 are increasingly representative and persons of color
4 and, especially, at the leadership level across the
5 board. Arts and culture is among the most impactful
6 ways to affect societal change, explore racial and
7 ethnic representations, reflect a community's history
8 and identity, and provide an opportunity to engage
9 diverse audiences in transformational learning. And
10 institutions, some institutions have responded to the
11 Black Lives Matter movement. While it is a step in
12 the right direction that many organizations and
13 institutions have made statements acknowledging that
14 they, too, are guilty of structural racism at their
15 institutions, we need to walk the walk and not just
16 talk the talk. Structural racism exists in
17 everything and everywhere from the lack of diversity
18 in museum staff to potential lack of art education
19 options in BIPOC communities. According to a post-
20 budget analysis by Art Net, while the 2021 budget
21 includes an 11 percent reduction to the Department of
22 Cultural Affairs, which is less than many other
23 agencies, but it is still too much in my opinion.
24 There is a 15 million dollar cut from the 21.5
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1 million dollar budget for arts education service in
2 middle and high schools which equates to roughly 70
3 percent reduction. That's reason enough to vote
4 against that budget alone, but we need to think about
5 what cuts like that do to the middle schoolers and
6 high schoolers, particularly the BIPOC young people.
7 Government must address systemic racism with improved
8 systems, practices, and laws developed for racial
9 equity across all fields and spectors including
10 education, but obviously also criminal justice jobs,
11 housing, public infrastructure, and health and,
12 needless to say, culture and the arts. We are here
13 today because Black Lives Matter and while we are
14 ultimately nowhere near our and goals, we are still
15 working to create and design equity into all aspects
16 of our public lives. The Council, in having this
17 hearing today, seeks to listen and understand the
18 impact of this movement on the cultural community and
19 the cultural community's impact on this movement.
20 What organizations are doing, which voices are being
21 lifted, and what the Council can do to support that
22 path forward. We have a number of witnesses. Two
23 are going to testify from the public today and first,
24 of course, as we usually do, we will hear from
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1 Commissioner Casals from the Department of Cultural
2 Affairs and the administration. And I know there are
3 a lot of questions about what more the administration
4 could be doing and what more change they could be
5 driving. And I think that's an important
6 conversation, but I hope Commissioner Casals will
7 address in his testimony. I also know that the
8 acclaims artist Vinnie Bagwell is joining us here
9 today and will be speaking and I know there are--
10 and, obviously, we will hear from Vinnie, but I hope
11 that the Commissioner will address the status of the
12 replacement of the Sims statue and talk to some of
13 the issues around that. I want to recognize that
14 Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo has joined us, as well.
15 And I want to thank my legislative director Jack
16 Brunatavitz, my chief of staff Matt Wallace, our
17 committee's principle financial analyst Aliya Ali,
18 our policy analyst Christie Dwyer, and our committee
19 counsel Brenda McKinney. And I want to thank
20 everyone here for joining us today and we look
21 forward to a powerful hearing and discussion. So, I
22 will hand it over to our legislative counsel to
23 deliver the oath to Commissioner Gonzalo Casals.
24 We'll hear his testimony, have questions from the
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Council members and then we will move on to public
testimony.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
Chair Van Bramer. I am Brenda McKinney, counsel to
the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations of the New York
City Council and I will be moderating today's hearing
and calling on panelists to testify. So, before we
move to the administration and the oath, I'm just
going to go over some procedures for today's hearing.
Before we begin, I'd like to remind everyone that you
will on mute until I call on you to testify. After
you are called on, you will be unmuted by the host.
Please listen for your name. I will periodically
announce who the next panelist will be. Council
member questions will be limited to five minutes and,
Council members, please note that this includes both
questions and the witness answers. Please also note
that we will not have a second round of questions at
today's hearing. For public testimony, I will call
up individuals in panels. Council members who have
questions for a particular panelist should use the
raise hand function in zoom, please. You will be
called on after everyone in the panel, usually up for

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1 individuals, has completed their testimony. Before
2 public panelists, once I call your name, a member of
3 our staff will unmute you in the Sergeant-at-arms
4 will go ahead to begin speaking after setting the
5 timer. All public testimony will be limited to a
6 three minute clock. After I call your name, please
7 wait a brief moment for the Sergeant-at-arms to
8 announce that you may begin before starting. We will
9 remind you of this periodically throughout the
10 hearing. So, now, we will move to administration
11 testimony. So, Commissioner Casals, Gonzalo Casals,
12 the Commissioner of the New York City Department of
13 Cultural Affairs and Sheila Feinberg, the Deputy
14 Commissioner of the New York City Department of
15 Cultural Affairs. I will deliver the oath to both of
16 you and, after, I'll call upon each of you
17 individually to respond to the oath. You will also
18 be unmuted now to respond. Please raise your right
19 hands-- if you could in the frame. Thank you so
20 much. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
21 truth, and nothing but the truth before this
22 committee and respond to Council member questions
23 honestly at today's hearing? Commissioner Casals?
24

25 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I do.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And
3 Deputy Commissioner Feinberg?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Commissioner
6 Casals, you may begin your testimony.

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you. Good
8 morning, Chair Van Bramer, and members of the
9 committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
10 on the urgent topic Black Lives Matter, anti-racism,
11 structural racism, and the arts. I'm joined today
12 for Q&A by DCLA Deputy Commissioner Sheila Feinberg.
13 There's little question that we're facing [inaudible
14 00:13:23] the reckoning with systemic racism that has
15 shaped our society as a whole, including the cultural
16 sector. While the pandemic in the violence against
17 black Americans have brought renewed attention to
18 these issues, efforts to understand and address them
19 BIPOC led organizations is stretched back
20 generations. In the 1970s and 80s, through self-
21 determination and community organizing, a new wave of
22 cultural organizations was established to address the
23 exclusion of communities of colors from Eurocentric
24 mainstream institutions. These organizations, such
25 as the museum in Harlem and [inaudible 00:13:59]

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1 National Black Theater and the Museum of Chinese in
2 America have contributed to the transformation of New
3 York's cultural [inaudible 00:14:06] into something
4 altogether more inclusive, vibrant, and reflective of
5 the people who live here. They established a new
6 motive for arts groups as culturally specific
7 organizations. We're organizing an advocacy just
8 essential to their mission as the presentation of
9 artwork. We continue to be inspired by their
10 examples today which can help us guide the work we
11 still have ahead of us. I owe my career to the
12 generation of Latin X leaders that fought for
13 representation and creative training grounds for
14 those that follow their steps. Today I want to
15 personally acknowledge the work of Dr. Martin Moreno
16 Vega, Rafael [inaudible 00:14:45] Ortiz, and Susana
17 Deval, among so many other Latin X leaders have
18 helped establish the notion of Puerto Rican, Latin
19 X, and Caribbean culture in New York City. The
20 Department of Cultural Affairs has built on the
21 achievements of these community advocates and
22 activities who have pushed diversity, equity, and
23 inclusion, and anti-racism to the center of the
24 agenda. In 2015, my predecessor Tom Finkelppearl
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1 announced a new initiative to examine the diversity
2 of the city's cultural force. While the topic has
3 been brought up by previous administrations, it was
4 the first time the agency commissioner comprehensive
5 study of the demographics of this sector. After our
6 report found many disparities, the cultural workforce
7 was found to be majority wide in a city where a
8 majority of residents are people of color, we set out
9 to address this glaring issue. The public private
10 partnership is the foundation of the city's
11 relationship with arts and culture. With private
12 nonprofits [inaudible 00:15:43] public assets for the
13 benefit of all New Yorkers. So, our efforts to
14 foster a cultural sector that reflects the public
15 we're servicing have placed great emphasis on the
16 public private partnerships we develop. To build
17 that very pipeline, we focus on cultivating diversity
18 at all levels of employment. The Create NYC
19 leadership accelerator is a professional development
20 program that helps more diverse candidates up through
21 the ranks of the sector into leadership positions.
22 This is based on the 2016 study that found that lower
23 midlevel cultural workers were far more diverse than
24 leadership. The CUNY cultural course, which has to
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1 date placed hundreds of students into paid
2 internships in cultural organization, reduces the
3 barriers to entry level employment. We changed the
4 application for our cultural development funds to
5 support to include questions about diversity, equity,
6 and inclusion. This means that every single cultural
7 group getting DCLA funding-- we're talking about
8 around a thousand every year-- has to spell out the
9 ways they engage diverse workers and [inaudible
10 00:16:53] to make sure that the leadership and boards
11 of organizations were burdened to these efforts of
12 self-examination and progress and would require
13 diversity, equity, and inclusion plans for 54 members
14 of our cultural institutions group. Adopted in the
15 spring 2019, these DI plans are among the first of
16 their kind in the country. The members of the CIG
17 embrace the opportunity to examine and address the
18 barriers within their organizations. In just over a
19 year, the plans have produced far reaching changes
20 with, in many cases, have been accelerated by the
21 reckoning of a racial justice. Anti-racist training
22 is now required for many staffs and boards, new
23 committees have been established to hold
24 organizations accountable from within and many groups
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1 reported that the first year they implemented their
2 plans helped to build a shared language and
3 community. [inaudible 00:17:46] the foundation for
4 more additional steps like adjusting human resources
5 policies, revamping, teaching, and interpretation and
6 strategies in order to tell more complete stories
7 about our institution's collections. To be able to
8 authentically engage in this work, DCLA needs to do
9 it, too. We have an internally led committee and are
10 taking a hard look at our policies and how they
11 affect not only our staff, but the cultural groups
12 that we work with and support. We have a chief
13 diversity officer to guide us and hold us accountable
14 internally. And the team that administers program
15 funding has been engaged in a year's long examination
16 of our funding practices to identify ways in which we
17 can eliminate barriers to receive support. We have
18 also made major strides towards increasing the share
19 of agency investment in cultural groups that are
20 doing the work in underserved communities. More than
21 25 million dollars in additional funding has been
22 allocated to groups based on the work of their social
23 impact of the art's project as well as across the
24 board increases to favor small organizations. We
25

1 redirected additional funding to these groups through
2 the Met Museum Admissions Agreement and, while the
3 financial impacts of COVID-19 continue to
4 reverberate, we're proud of these investments and
5 will continue to support organizations that are
6 working in underserved neighborhoods. In just the
7 last few years, we have seen a major shift in
8 mainstream organizations. As protests spread
9 following the killings of George Floyd, Breonna
10 Taylor, and other black American's, the leaders of
11 cultural institutions here and across the world
12 loudly and explicitly condemned systemic racism. It
13 was an inspired moment, but at the same time, the
14 pandemic has showed us, more than ever, how much work
15 we need to do to repair centuries worth of
16 oppression. Words must be followed by actions.
17 Beyond this necessarily longer term policy solutions,
18 we're also inspired to see artists and art groups
19 participate in the fight for racial justice here and
20 now. Art, at its best, can help us make sense of the
21 changes happening around us. One example of this is
22 the Black Lives Matter murals that people painted on
23 streets around the city. In Brooklyn, [inaudible
24 00:20:08] of the Billie Holiday Theater spearheaded

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1 the Black Lives Matter mural on Fulton Street that
2 represented the names of murdered black Americans in
3 its powerful design. In Manhattan, just a block from
4 City Hall on Center Street, three artists designed
5 another mural that helped to channel the public mood
6 in support to the BLM movement. And connected to the
7 [inaudible 00:20:31] traditions. One of these
8 artists, Sophia Dozan, is now serving as the public
9 artist in residency with the Mayor's Office of
10 Criminal Justice where her creative practice will
11 help foster individual healing, community
12 restoration, and systemic transformation. The PAIR
13 program-- by PAIR meaning public artists in
14 residency-- points to another way that artists and
15 creative expressions can be engaged in solving the
16 urgent problems facing us today. As I have said, the
17 symbolic and clear responses are important, but the
18 symbolic actions must be combined by real actions to
19 improve people's lives and address the legacy of
20 racial injustice that pervades our communities.
21 There is still so much more work to be done. I look
22 forward to working with counsel in the cultural
23 community to continue moving the conversation forward
24 in meaningful ways. It is important to seize the
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1 opportunities of structural change that this crisis
2 has presented us. We need to move forward
3 inauthentic, proactive ways. For each of us
4 individually, this is the work of a lifetime. For
5 our cultural organizations, it's the work of
6 generations. Thank you and I am happy to answer any
7 questions you may have.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
10 Commissioner Casals. And I know you care deeply
11 about this work and I know that, on a personal level,
12 this is part of your life's mission, as well. But
13 now, of course, you represent the Department of
14 Cultural Affairs and the Mayor's administration and
15 so it is important to ask, you know, the tough
16 questions. And you said a number of things and I
17 will ask a number of bigger picture things and then
18 get more specific, but are we doing enough? Is the
19 de Blasio administration doing enough and is the
20 Department of Cultural Affairs doing enough to end
21 structural racism, systemic racism within the
22 cultural community?

23 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. It is my
24 perspective that we are doing enough. At least, you
25 know, in terms of the [inaudible 00:22:52] work that

needs to happen and creating sustainable change.

Like I said, you know, in moments like these, what we also need is symbolic actions like the murals and like, you know, removal of monuments and you name it.

But, it is important to remember that, back in 2015 when this administration in this agency installed the conversation of diversity and said we are going to make sure and get real data, everybody would really worry because there was a lot of concern about what was going to happen. And there was a very important way and a meaningful way in which, you know, this work started and we continue to do that. We continue to do surveys every other year and we continue to work with cultural organizations in improving and expanding their goals in terms of [inaudible 00:23:52].

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. So, just let me say that I believe that there are some significant efforts underway and I certainly, again, have deep respect for you, but I'm surprised to hear you answer the question that, yes. We are doing enough. Both the administration and the Department of Cultural affairs. In some ways, I find that shocking because, you know, the things that you

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1 talked about and we are going to talk about some of
2 them, you know, where we might be moving in the right
3 direction in some places. We might be tinkering
4 around the edges in some ways, but to say that this
5 administration and the Department of Cultural Affairs
6 and the city of New York are doing what it can at
7 this particular moment in time is simply not true.
8 Again, I say that with deep respect to you
9 personally, but how can any of us say, with a
10 straight face, that we are doing all we need to do in
11 this moment while racism runs rampant and we see the
12 diversity numbers and I am going to ask you about
13 those. But what you see what that looks like. And,
14 yes, I think there are some well-intentioned people
15 who are taking stock and engaging it in antiracism
16 work, but do you honestly believe-- all sort of ask
17 it again. Do you honestly believe that this
18 administration and the Department of Cultural Affairs
19 in the city are doing all that it needs to do to that
20 and the structural racism that exists within the
21 cultural community?
22

23 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. I do believe
24 that, you know, my agency within their purview and we
25 then, you know, the resources that we have, we are

1 doing everything that we can do. Again, it's a
2 matter of time. In order for this work to be
3 successful, the change has to be, you know,
4 structural and it has to be with enough time. I have
5 seen it myself. A lot of organizations hire BIPOC
6 folks without necessarily putting enough emphasis on
7 changing organizational culture. Changing, you know,
8 opportunities for, you know, collective leaders. And
9 how both the organizations have failed in that and
10 how difficult it has been, you know, for the
11 employees. And that is one of the many examples of
12 why I continue to say that, you know, it is going to
13 take a while to see significant change. But we have
14 seen enough of that and we want to continue to work
15 on this line.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, let me
18 talk about-- Vinnie, I see you hand up, but I think
19 we're going to have you speak in a few moments. Let
20 me just say, again, you talked about resources, right
21 with the resources that we have. But I was part of
22 the question, of course, right, is that the Mayor and
23 that Council are involved in the discussion about the
24 very nature of your resources. How much and where
25 and to whom they go to. You know, the budget was cut

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1 for the Department of Cultural Affairs. The
2 Department of Education budget for arts and education
3 for middle and high schools was cut 70%. That is a
4 failure, right? That is an absolute failure on the
5 part of this administration to recognize the
6 importance of these budgets, the importance of these
7 programs and the disproportionate impact that those
8 cuts have on BIPOC communities, correct?

10 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. But I must
11 say also that a 10%, 11% cut from a historical high
12 funding from last year, considering the situation in
13 which the city, the state, and that country are in,
14 it's a good thing. We can always, you know, take
15 more money. You know that. We can always continue
16 to invest more money in arts and culture. You and I
17 know that better than anyone. But, again, in the
18 distribution of resources, I think the administration
19 continues to support arts and culture as a priority
20 and at an important level.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I know it is a
22 priority for you. I know it is a priority for me. I
23 know it's a priority for everyone on this call. You
24 know, having worked with this administration for
25 seven years now, I think culture and the arts has

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1 been much more of a priority for the city Council
2 then for the administration and, you are right, that
3 11% cut that the Department received this year is
4 smaller than many other agencies and, you know, I am
5 proud of my work behind-the-scenes fighting for that
6 and Majority Leader Cumbo certainly is a fierce
7 fighter, as well with me on this. We did some good
8 things like making sure there were no cuts to the
9 Coalition of Theaters of Color, but there is still so
10 much more to be done which is, again, why I am
11 surprised to hear anyone say that we are doing what
12 we can, all that we should in this moment. And that
13 includes you, Commissioner Casals. I know you are
14 representing the administration and the Mayor in this
15 hearing, but this not a moment where anyone should be
16 saying we're doing all that we can. I would imagine
17 it would be a much more introspective answer in
18 saying that, while we are doing some good things, we
19 are all called to do far more right now to that end
20 structural racism. You know, meaningfully impact the
21 numbers which I will get to, and address the racism
22 and inequities in our system. And I believe you feel
23 that personally.
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2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I believe you know
3 it's a matter of language, right? We're doing all we
4 can at the agency. Yes. Is there a lot more work
5 that needs to be done? For sure. You know, like I
6 said, each of us need to work internally in just
7 learning and continuing to remove our unconscious
8 bias in our cultural organizations need to continue
9 to do a lot more work.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, let's talk
11 a little bit about numbers. So, as you know, I was
12 involved with the cultural plan and Create NYC and,
13 from that flowed a number of studies and
14 questionnaires and there was a big New York Times
15 article that I am sure you read because we were both
16 quoted in it a couple of months ago talking about the
17 fact that it hasn't-- all of these efforts have not
18 yet produced the change that we seek. And so, you
19 know, tell me today how successful you think this has
20 bidden and how we can quantify that success. Right?
21 Can you point to some numbers and some facts that
22 demonstrate that we are actually demonstrating real
23 structural change within these organizations and
24 institutions? Not just simply pulling them,
25 essentially, as to whether they have a DRI committee

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1 and what that committee is doing and what targeted
2 changes they are making. You know, how do we make
3 more people believe with reality that things are
4 changing, right? That, essentially, forcing not just
5 the conversation within the board of a major and
6 wealthy cultural institution, but actually
7 transforming that institution?
8

9 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I mean, it's
10 important to understand that, while diversifying the
11 workforce, it is extremely important, that's a means
12 to something else. Right? And probably that is one
13 of the few things that can be quantified. What we
14 are trying and talking about here-- my hope is that
15 everybody understands that cultural organizations is
16 that we are talking about, right? And, of course,
17 mind shift comes from bringing enough different
18 perspectives. You know, the decision-making process
19 in each culture organization to understand, you know,
20 how we need to be better at representing and telling
21 stories. And even the way we treat our employees.
22 And that mind shift is difficult to quantify. Right?
23 Like I said in my testimony, it was probably hard to
24 imagine six years ago that many cultural
25 organizations would be putting these plans together,

1 that boards would be talking about white supremacy
2 and, you know, racial injustices. And having you
3 install the conversation is the big first step.

4 Having organizations whose plans that they talk about
5 structural long-term change is a big step and we are
6 just now seeing, after a year, were going to start
7 seeing the results of those plans and were going to
8 have to continue to fine-tune the direction in which
9 helping the organizations to fine-tune the direction
10 in which these plans should go in the goals that they
11 need to emphasize.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Will you be
14 publishing the results?

15 COMMISSIONER CASALS: You know, yes.
16 Anything that is sent to us is public knowledge, so
17 we will certainly work with sharing that information.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. And I
19 know when you say that, for these boards to be having
20 conversations about white supremacy is something that
21 was unimaginable six years ago, there are probably
22 millions of people in this country who would say that
23 that is shocking, right, that only today they are
24 having conversations about white supremacy in
25 structural racism within their institutions. Right?

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1 So, while again that may feel like a step in the
2 right direction for a lot of people, for many, it is
3 long overdue and leave it unacceptable that just in
4 2020 we might actually be talking about white
5 supremacy. But, you mentioned--

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: But that speaks a
8 little bit about, you know, the importance and the
9 power of the agency it be able to establish
10 conversations that sort of encourage cultural
11 organizations to go in a direction that aligns with,
12 you know, the values of the administration.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, can I ask
14 if you have had conversations with Mayor de Blasio
15 about structural racism in the cultural community and
16 where, for example, about Vinnie Bagwell work is at
17 and what is the nature of the discussion within the
18 administration. Many of us here know that you
19 directly report to Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, but, you
20 know, at what level of these conversations going on
21 that include Mayor de Blasio and the deputy mayors
22 and where those conversations are with you.

23 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I did have a
24 conversation with Mayor de Blasio about these issues.
25 They were not specific issues about, you know,

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1 specific organizations or projects, but a high level,
2 you know, of the importance of equity and inclusion
3 in arts and culture. And this is the conversation
4 that we have very often we the Deputy Mayor.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, that is
7 good to hear that you had that Mayors year on this
8 issue. Is that fair to say?

9 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I have had
10 conversations with him. I'm not sure, you know, what
11 you mean by having them mayor's year. But--

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, do you
13 feel that you have access to the Mayor and that the
14 Mayor-- you know, you mentioned that this is a
15 priority for the administration. Obviously, the
16 Mayor is the head of the administration. So, you
17 know, I think it is important for the Department of
18 Cultural Affairs Commissioner to have access to the
19 Mayor and to have the year of the Mayor and to be
20 able to influence the Mayor on these topics. So, I
21 don't know if you care to address any of those
22 particulars.

23 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah. I agree with
24 you that that is important. You know, there are
25 multiple ways in which the agency shows up and sort

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1 of influences the policy at the city level. One of
2 the many as I sit on the race and equity commission
3 task force that was put together at the beginning of
4 the pandemic. And, specifically on the subcommittee
5 on youth education. That is one of the many
6 involved.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I've
9 mentioned it a couple times. You have not chosen to
10 address it. Obviously, Vinnie Bagwell is going to be
11 speaking soon and, obviously, share thoughts, but can
12 you address from the Department of Cultural Affairs
13 perspective where we are at on---

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah. And we have
15 been in contact with some of the stakeholders
16 involved about that. So, when the pandemic hit, you
17 know, and the city is the state shut down and all
18 capital projects have been put on pause, little by
19 little the city is restarting and those capital
20 projects, there are a couple priorities that sort of
21 define the criteria of what is allowed to move
22 forward. One of them are COVID-related capital
23 projects and capital projects also in hardest hit
24 areas in the city. The other one is a priority of
25 projects that had already started construction and

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1
2 OMB continues to monitor cash flow in the city and
3 continues to allow those projects to start. In that
4 case of [inaudible 00:40:43], which is the project
5 that you asked me about, by the time the pandemic
6 hit, they were starting negotiations between the EDC
7 who is-- the agency is going to be managing this
8 project and the contractor. Those conversations were
9 stopped. Were put on pause and we're hoping that
10 very soon those conversations will resume. As soon
11 as the contract is signed, then we can move on into
12 signing a contract between EDC and the arts.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I want to
14 move on soon to Majority Leader Cumbo, but I want to
15 ask just in relation to that and, obviously, you
16 know, that's very frustrating. We'll, at the
17 Council, obviously, have experienced pauses on many
18 capital projects whether they be schools or parks and
19 whatnot. And some have been restarted, right?

20 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It is leading
22 some things go. Are there any capital projects at
23 any-- is anything moving at the Department of
24 Cultural Affairs? Has anything been moved to a
25 priority status or is everything on pause?

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1
2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: No. Some projects
3 have started. You know, an example of a project that
4 presently [inaudible 00:42:10] in Staten Island and
5 this-- I cannot tell you at the top of my mind, but
6 there are a few projects that have started and we
7 continue to work with OMB, DDC, and UDC to continue
8 to prioritize and push, you know, for other projects
9 to restart.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And are you
11 pushing for this one to be restarted?

12 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yep.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. And I
14 know that this is slightly above your pay grade,
15 Commissioner, but, as you know, the Governor just
16 unveiled a statue of Mother Cabrini and that being
17 fast tracked and it got done within a year, including
18 during the COVID crisis and, yet, the City, you know,
19 is not able to make this particular piece of art move
20 and there is a lot of significance to the second it
21 is very frustrating for people to see-- you know, I
22 respect the work that Mother Cabrini did. It's
23 frustrating to see that one move with such rapidity
24 and then to have other pieces of equal importance not
25 move at all. And so, I just want to say that I think

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1 Vinnie Bagwell and others may have more to say about
2 that, too. But, you know, I think we just want to
3 see the sense of urgency around this kind of work and
4 I think you know that. I just-- my last question
5 before I go to Majority Leader Cumbo-- you mentioned
6 to the Departmental eliminating barriers to support
7 within-- I think you are mentioning specifically the
8 cultural development fund and other things. You
9 know, talk to us about what that actually needs in
10 getting more money to BIPOC-led organizations, BIPOC
11 community is and in increasing the pool you've
12 ineligible to receive those funds. I assume that is
13 what you are talking about in some way. But when you
14 say in your testimony that you are eliminating
15 barriers to support, what does that mean and how is
16 it that that is actually working?

18 COMMISSIONER CASALS: So, this study that
19 is taken a few years and we just received, you know,
20 the recommendations, it's not only about the amount
21 of money. It's about, you know, the process in which
22 you access money and how that could be inequitable to
23 smaller organizations. A couple of examples of that,
24 you know, that maybe you see trivial, but they are
25 important in this is something that I myself have

1 heard, you know, while I was running cultural
2 organizations. It's important from allowing smaller
3 organizations to receive multi-year grants. There
4 was always a question if you give a small
5 organization a multiyear grant, the possibilities of
6 increasing the amount of funds that they get year to
7 year is less that if you continued to apply every
8 year, right? But, at the same time, there are so
9 many other benefits that come in. But knowing that
10 for the next three years, you can have that money
11 coming in from DCLA. That's one of the many
12 examples. Examples of simplifying and facilitating
13 the application process, you then neighborhood,
14 borough based, and sort of submission of the
15 paperwork and, hopefully, moving from paper-based to
16 something digital and online. Those are a few of the
17 examples of the accommodations that come forward.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Got it. So, I
20 have many more questions, but I know that Majority
21 Leader Cumbo and others do, as well, and I want to
22 move the discussion along. So, I may be back, but,
23 you know, I just wanted to say that I think we have a
24 lot more to do and I know there are challenges for
25 you, in particular, Commissioner Casals, within the

1 context of the moment and this administration, but,
2 you know, I know that you feel this in a very
3 personal way and we need to do better. With that, I
4 want to ask if Majority Leader Cumbo is ready to
5 begin.
6

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Yes. Thank you,
8 Chair Van Bramer. And I really want to thank you for
9 organizing this really important panel. We really
10 haven't had a hearing specifically focused on racism
11 this way and so I really want to thank you for your
12 leadership in bringing this forward. When I saw
13 this on the calendar, I was like, this is brilliant.
14 This is certainly the conversation that we need to
15 have. There are so many thoughts that I have around
16 this topic and conversation. When-- I don't even
17 really know where to begin because it certainly
18 begins before COVID and it certainly begins-- so
19 many of these conversations have been had prior to
20 this, but I think that COVID and the Black Lives
21 Matter movement certainly pushed it up to the
22 forefront in everyone's face in that way. And so,
23 you know, when we are talking about black lives
24 matter, when we're talking about defunded NYPD, when
25 we are talking about the disparities that we have

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1 witnessed and experienced in COVID and everyone is
2 searching for answers, a lot of focus was placed on
3 the NYPD as far as answers. The Board of Education
4 in terms of education. But I think for me and I
5 think many artistic and cultural practitioners in the
6 artist community, I think we really know that the
7 solution to all of the issues that everyone is
8 talking about really begins with the work of the
9 cultural community and I feel that what we are seeing
10 play out from COVID to the Black Lives Matter
11 movement is that, throughout our culture here in the
12 United States and abroad, there are decisions made
13 every day about one culture is inferior to another
14 culture. One culture is superior. One is inferior.
15 One is a minority. One is a majority. One matters.
16 One doesn't matter. If we have to make life-and-
17 death situations or decisions, whose lives do we
18 value? And in the cultural community, I feel like we
19 have such an incredible opportunity, as well as
20 responsibility to be able to address and to start
21 that work about how do we bring all of the cultures
22 that make up New York City. Let's just focus on New
23 York City. How do we bring all of them up to a level
24 playing field so that people recognize that all
25

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1 cultures, races, religions have something very
2 valuable that everyone should value so that
3 everyone's lives in everyone's culture matters? Now,
4 you have, I suspect, 14 months left in this position.
5 Many of us as Council members are term limited out,
6 but I think that it is important that we address
7 those questions and get to those fundamental issues.
8 When we talk about the Department of Cultural
9 Affairs, I feel very much that a lot of this work
10 that the world is talking about begins with us and
11 how we are going to respond to it. And so, you know,
12 when we look at the Department of Cultural Affairs,
13 we can look at it from a funding perspective, sure.
14 We recognize that organizations of color-- and I'm
15 sure black organizations, if we were to do a value
16 analysis-- would recognize that those organizations
17 are systemically underfunded. If we were to look at
18 the CIG roster. And to look at how that money is
19 distributed, we would see that the organizations of
20 color and black organizations are the least funded
21 within that organization. But, on top of that, they
22 are also a minority within that organizational
23 structure. There is so many disparities that we are
24 seeing. When we had the hearing that Chair Van
25

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1 Bramer brought foreword about tourism in New York
2 City, I have yet to see an amazing tourism plan that
3 celebrates and promotes the organizations of color,
4 black organizations, and the outer boroughs in a way
5 that brings that level of tourism here to New York
6 City. So, there is so much that needs to be done. I
7 will also recognize the importance of partnerships.
8 How do we create partnerships with the larger
9 organizations. And larger in terms of staffing,
10 facility, but not necessarily in mission because the
11 missions of these organizations are all equal. But
12 how do we put that work together so that larger
13 organizations are partnering with smaller in size
14 organizations to build them up together? So, I guess
15 my question to you-- I have a lot of thoughts, but my
16 question is the world is looking at New York City.
17 And it is hard to recognize when a world is looking
18 at New York City because we are sheltering in place.
19 Were like, who was looking at me in my living room?
20 But it is like the world is looking at us for
21 leadership and what do you think is the most
22 revolutionary thing? Because this is a revolution
23 that is happening right now. It doesn't look-- you
24 know, when we read about revolutions, the
25

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1 Revolutionary war, he looked very different in terms
2 of what we visually saw, but we are in a
3 revolutionary time right now and what do you think is
4 the revolutionary movement, that bold movement that
5 cities and countries all over the world are looking
6 at as far as the Department of Cultural Affairs? We
7 need a revolution of ideas, a revolution of
8 approaches. What is it that you feel DC LA has put
9 forward that answers that call from the world of what
10 is New York City doing in this perspective?
11

12 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Good morning.
13 Thank you so much. I don't know where to start.

14 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Your life, what
15 coffee are you drinking?

16 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I'll start and then
17 you-- if I don't answer your question fully, you
18 direct me with other questions. Let's take it one
19 step at a time. I completely agree with you that, in
20 addition to being a public funder that the agency is
21 that it could be so much more. And that is part of
22 the work that I'm doing internally with the staff.
23 To really elevate, you know, the power of these
24 agencies to be an advocate and to be [inaudible
25 00:53:39] for the sector. We can talk in detail, you

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1 know, what that means. And really, also emphasize
2 this idea public-private partnerships because it is
3 in moments like this that we realize that the city
4 alone cannot do the work that needs to happen.
5 Number two, in terms of-- and like, you know,
6 private philanthropy, we move really slow, so it is
7 really difficult for us, you know, having a year-long
8 granting process, having, you know, a budget that
9 takes a full year to be able to change things, you
10 know, really quickly on our track. That is why I
11 continue to insist on long term, you know, structural
12 change. At an example-- and this is something that
13 my predecessor had worked with you for many years,
14 is, you know, the work that we are doing, as an
15 example, with subsites in Brooklyn and in which there
16 were two-- the public library and inaudible
17 00:54:46] were coming in and we were also able to
18 make room to BIPOC led and cultural organizations,
19 MOCADA and 651 arts. Right? So, we are constantly
20 looking at what are the opportunities in which you
21 would kind of help, you know, cultural organizations,
22 not only with giving them funding, but also helping
23 them build wealth. Right? By owning their own
24 buildings and by just having a much more sustainable
25

1 situation. In terms of tourism, it is actually a
2 great moment, you know, for cultural organizations
3 outside Manhattan because New York City and Co is
4 really focusing on the idea of hyper local through
5 their all in campaign, they are inviting cultural
6 organizations and offering them a toolkit in which
7 they can participate and [inaudible 00:55:38] and
8 promote their offerings, you know, two New Yorkers
9 were willing to travel from borough to borough
10 because they have nothing else and nowhere else to
11 go. And in terms of sort of the big idea and the big
12 model, it is our hope that we are going to do another
13 round of surveying after six months of the situation
14 of the cultural organizations and continue to work
15 with private philanthropy to see how the data that we
16 collect can help them inform, you know, their
17 priorities in terms of recovery for the cultural
18 sector.
19

20 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Let me jump in
21 there because I know I have limited time. I just
22 wanted to understand with-- there's a lot of
23 discussion on the Philip topic side that I am
24 hearing, but the conversations I'm hearing, a lot of
25 this corporate philanthropy seems to be happening in

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1 the for-profit sector. So, I love my businesses. I
2 love my small businesses. I love my restaurants. I
3 love all of that. The business is. But there does
4 not seem to be this corporate conversation around the
5 cultural institutions for the not-for-profit sector.
6 So, I'm hearing a lot of conversations by
7 organizations like Goldman Sachs. Here in Brooklyn
8 New York, the Brooklyn Mets are talking about these
9 conversations. I'm getting wind of a lot of these
10 conversations, but it is very difficult to interject--
11 - not difficult for me to interject it, but it seems
12 like there is not a spacer window in these
13 conversations for the cultural and not-for-profit
14 community. Have you had success, real
15 communications? Is something going to be rolled out
16 with Goldman Sachs, Ford foundation, Citigroup, and
17 these groups? All of these I'm just throwing out
18 stuff that are, you know, are saying we recognize
19 that the Black Lives Matter movement has happened and
20 we want to step up to the plate in a real, meaningful
21 way. Have you seen-- have you participated? Have
22 you--
23

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes and no. I just
25 want to draw a line between corporate and foundation.

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1 Foundations of been doing a lot of work and we are
2 constantly in conversations that-- sometimes weekly
3 about, you know, the priorities about how the future
4 looks like, how do we move from relief to recovery?
5 I have not had conversations with the corporate
6 philanthropy.
7

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I think that's
9 important. Now, let me ask you a question because
10 wearing my cultural hat from years ago, I understand
11 my cultural hat and now I understand my political hat
12 better. Some of those worlds can get lost in
13 conversations. So, they can have conversation in
14 conversation and conversation. At a certain point,
15 somebody's got to write a check and pull the trigger.
16 Are these corporations, or rather foundations and
17 organizations, are they pulling their resources in a
18 meaningful way that is providing that level of
19 support that, particularly organizations of color,
20 can benefit from?

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. I can just
22 point out three examples.

23 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: That would be
24 great.

25 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I'm sorry?

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1
2 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: No. That would be
3 great if you could provide examples because--

4 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Early on--

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: we, as elected's,
6 we also want to get this information out to our
7 groups, as well. And if something like this is
8 happening, I need to be able to promote it.

9 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Early on, the New
10 York Community Trust, you know, created a consortium
11 of foundations to do the first round of relief and I
12 know they helped a lot of smaller cultural
13 organizations and they are really good at sort of
14 equitable practices both for [inaudible 00:59:31] to
15 offer millions and millions of dollars in recovery.
16 Lately-- and this is something that Chair Van Bramer
17 brought up as important. The Newell foundation
18 announced \$250 million towards monuments and, you
19 know, markers. So, foundations are like really going
20 beyond, you know, the call of duty to react to the
21 needs of the cultural sector. Many of these, with
22 the exception of New York Community Trust are like
23 national label foundation. And part of the work that
24 is trying to do is to make sure that they remember
25 that they are in New York and they remember how

1 important, as you said, in terms of leadership and
2 modeling for the rest of the world, the cultural
3 sector in New York City is.

4
5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I think that's
6 great and I think it is also great to be able to get
7 that information out as best as you can also to the
8 elected officials. Because monuments are huge also
9 for me. I know that, for the last seven years, I
10 have been trying to get monuments built in my
11 district, particularly for the parks within my
12 district. So, for example, we just did the, prior to
13 the COVID, the Betty Carter Park. And so, I wanted
14 to have a sculpture in recognition of her. I also
15 wanted to do one in Ebbets Field for Jackie Robinson
16 and others. These types of monuments. But it seems
17 like it's more logistic and paperwork and stories
18 about why it can't happen. It would be easier to
19 build a skyscraper than to build a monument to Betty
20 Carter the way this process has been laid out for us.

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: it's just, you
22 know-- and I didn't have the opportunity to answer
23 the comment that Chair Van Bramer made before. And
24 this is no shade to anyone. But, you know, we were
25 talking about processes by the state and by the city.

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1 Right? There's a difference between a political
2 process in the civic process, right? And today we
3 are able to talk about Vinnie's project because there
4 was significant community involvement to the point
5 that the community is the one that's decided, you
6 know, who was the artist and what was the project
7 that needed to go up. And at the time it is messy,
8 but, at the end of the day, yields much better
9 results than just a closed-door process that could
10 happen in no time.

12 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I just wanted to
13 ask one more question and then close with a
14 statement. There was a lot of discussion. Chair Van
15 Bramer hosted a really gate hearing with Council
16 member Fernando Cabrera in discussions about the
17 creation of the first African-American History Museum
18 in New York City and I know that there has been some
19 discussion about that. I think that would also be a
20 tremendous opportunity with New York City having one
21 of, if not the largest, population of black people
22 outside of the continent of Africa and Brazil, has
23 there been discussion about that particular Museum in
24 regards to the Black Lives Matter movement?

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. And,
3 unfortunately, I can't remember exactly at what stage
4 that project is but I can get back exactly to you.
5 You know, of course, it is in very early stages, but
6 I can get back exactly where we are on that.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I think for New
8 York City, that would be a huge step in the right
9 direction to addressing all of the systemic issues
10 that we are talking about because education is not a
11 quick fix and education is not the Band-Aid that I
12 guess people are looking for right now. Education is
13 systems being put in place that take a long time to
14 see the results of. But I feel like, and this
15 administration, we have to put that work into effect
16 to make it happen. But I will just close with saying
17 to me, what the black Lives Matter movement, in many
18 ways, represented is that we have to systematically
19 look at our existing systems and work to figure out
20 how do we create real solutions that are bold,
21 different, revolutionary as far as how the issues
22 that this movement brought to the forefront. So,
23 when we look at black cultural institutions, when we
24 look at institutions of color, I believe it is
25 critical that the Department of Cultural affairs,

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1 With a revolutionary way to answer the calls of the
2 Black Lives Matter movement that answer the calls of
3 the defined NYPD movement where those movements are
4 talking about how do we reinvest in more meaningful
5 ways in our communities and to end the over
6 criminalization and over policing of communities of
7 color? Now, those are the fundamental ideas of those
8 goals, but we have to figure out, through arts and
9 culture, how do we have the real conversations where
10 we are in rooms for hours and weeks and months on end
11 to figure out how can the cultural community be made
12 sure player and the public safety is New York City?
13 And I feel like that is a huge conversation that
14 people are putting together. That public safety is,
15 in so many ways, wrapped around cultural
16 understanding, cultural respect, inclusion,
17 tolerance, understanding. We have got to get that in
18 the forefront of the conversation because that is the
19 real conversation. There are a lot of protests and
20 rallies and marches and that is great, but we have to
21 figure out where does the rubber meets the road on
22 those very important issues? So, I am still looking
23 for something bold from the Department of Cultural
24 Affairs to answer that. I want to be at that press
25

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1 conference when we roll it out and I want to be at
2 the forefront and be the most excited champion
3 cheerleader for that. I will and there and I will
4 turn it back over to Chair Van Bramer.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
7 much, Majority Leader, for your passion and your
8 voice and all of this work. I just want to say,
9 Gonzalo, Commissioner Casals, you can always throw
10 shade the Governors when they at my committee
11 hearings. Do not, and anyway, apologize for that. I
12 agree with you that how they do monuments is very
13 different than how we do monuments. But I think the
14 frustration about the pace and the delay of important
15 works like Vinnie Bagwell's. You know, you are
16 absolutely correct that, when you have a politically
17 driven monument process, boy, you can get done
18 lightning fast. But that does not negate the very
19 real frustration about what is happening with the
20 city efforts that are more inclusive of community
21 input and voices. So, I want to say that. I assume
22 that shade was directed the Governor's way. Did not
23 answer unless you feel free to answer that question.
24 The second, I want to say this. You know, and it
25 gets a little bit to the Majority Leaders, you know,

1 big thinking. And this is me speaking personally,
2 but, you know, when we talk about corporate
3 philanthropy, you know, I just want to remind
4 everyone that, you know, the wealthiest billionaires
5 in this country have had their net worth grow by \$80
6 trillion since COVID happened. And that is obscene
7 and immoral. And while Goldman Sachs and Citigroup
8 and others have corporate philanthropy and that is
9 good, if we just taxed billionaires and corporations
10 in the way that they should be taxed, then we would
11 have the resources that we need to actually fund the
12 programs and the services that we could at least
13 attempt to do it far more equitably. And, you know,
14 I just want to quote Abraham Kendy who wrote that you
15 can't be antiracist without being anti-capitalist and
16 I believe that at night, you know-- it is appalling
17 that we talk about resources and we have
18 conversations about resources and then we you know
19 that Jeff Bezos and all of these billionaires have
20 had incredible gains in their net worth. Several
21 people gaining hundreds of billions of dollars while
22 so many people, in particular BIPOC communities, have
23 suffered and lost. And I think we have come to a
24 moment of reckoning in this country side of the men
25

1 are worth hundreds and hundreds of billions of
2 dollars and the vast majority of people in this
3 country don't have enough to eat and can't pay the
4 rent. And that is a part of the structural racism
5 that we are talking about today. So, I just wanted
6 to mention that and throw that into this discussion.
7 I know that Council member Inez Barron has joined the
8 hearing and I want to recognize Council member Barron
9 and see if there are any other Council members that
10 have questions for Commissioner Casals before we move
11 on to hearing from members of the public in the
12 cultural community, which I am anxious to have that
13 dialogue. So, Brenda and others will let me know if
14 there any other Council members. Commissioner
15 Casals, do you have any other closing words before we
16 potentially move on?
17

18 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I continue to, as
19 the Majority Leader said, we only have 14 more
20 months, probably the three of us, to work together.
21 Into the sense of urgency that comes from the
22 pandemic and the reckoning with racial injustice in
23 our society, there's a sense of urgency of, you know,
24 how much longer the three of us are going to be
25

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1 around and I just want to continue to work with the
2 two of you in making this a priority for all of us.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. Well, I
5 hope the three of us will be around for decades and
6 decades and decades to come, but, obviously, we won't
7 be in these positions for a finite period of time
8 and, yes, we all want to make the most of this moment
9 to have it be as productive and worthy of the moment
10 as possible. So, if there are no other questions
11 from Council members, we will move on to the first
12 public panel in our counsel will-- Yes?

13 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I think the
14 Majority Leader wants to say something.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Oh, okay.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

17 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I've got a new
18 computer, so learning it. And I just want to say I
19 think that one of the inspiring things that I have
20 seen have been those murals. The ability to see the
21 Black Lives Matter movement just all over our streets
22 and bringing together people in unimaginable ways. I
23 think that UCLA needs to continue to work to see how
24 many of the spaces can be made permanent. Permanent
25 gathering spaces so that this is not a temporary.

1 But I also want to say at the same time that it
2 shows-- those murals in the ability to obtain our
3 streets show what is possible. Prior to COVID, if I
4 said I wanted to paint a street Bought Lives Matter,
5 the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy that would
6 have made it impossible to do, it is exciting to see
7 how the will of the people can move and can change
8 things. And I think it is important for people to
9 continue to raise their voices and that way because
10 that shows that it matters. That that voice matters.
11 But, at the same time, I don't want any of us to
12 become satisfied were complacent with the fact that
13 painting the streets is what we were asking for.
14 Those are really symbolic gestures that are symbolic
15 of the history and the period in time, but they are,
16 in no way, an answer or a solution to the systemic
17 issues that are really bubbling far beneath the
18 ground of the streets that they are painted on. So,
19 the murals, the portraits, the statues are wonderful
20 and necessary, but the deep-rooted work still needs
21 to happen and I am going to continue to work these
22 next 14 months, along with Chair Van Bramer and the
23 rest of the members on this committee and is well
24 with you, Commissioner, to see to it that we leave
25

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1 these positions in a better place and better footing
2 for the next generation of new leaders that we have
3 set a strong foundation. And that is so important to
4 me because the people that are on this call are role
5 going to be doing this work for the rest of our lives
6 and we are just crazy that way and we are wired and
7 built that way. So, you know, we're going to be on
8 the next level of Zooms 20 years from now doing
9 something related to this work. So, it is important
10 that we set that foundation now.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. I don't
13 think it is crazy, Majority Leader. I think it is
14 exactly what we were born to do. But thank you. I
15 think Council member Barron has raised her hand. If
16 Council member Barron is ready to speak--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There we go.
19 Council member Barron.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you. Thank
23 you so much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the panel.
24 I didn't have the opportunity to be able to hear the
25 testimony. You know, the zoom has created, in fact,

1 the opportunity for us to actually be in two places
2 at the same time, so I was here in another place and
3 did not get an opportunity to hear. But my question--
4 - as everyone knows, I've come in talking about the
5 inequity and the injustices that black people have
6 experienced starkly, so that is nothing new. So,
7 just to get quickly-- and perhaps it is already
8 something that has been addressed. Terms of the
9 commitment to Vinnie Borrows and do we have a
10 timetable and when will that happen? Because we
11 don't want it to linger-- so, if you could quickly
12 respond. I see you nodding your head. So, if you
13 could quickly--

15 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: give me an answer.

17 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I mentioned it
18 before. The project is on pause now. It is one of
19 our priorities to restart. It is my hope that it
20 will restart soon. You know, contracting human
21 design. Sort of a construction design. My hope is
22 that, by next year we are going to be seeing that and
23 if you other monuments happening.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, has she been
25 given a contract? Is all of that--

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1
2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: No. No. What I
3 explained before is, when COVID hey, the contract
4 negotiations between the contractor and EDC, who is
5 the agency that is going to be managing this project,
6 were starting. That is on pause. The next step to
7 start those conversations again, and once that
8 contract is signed, then there is going to be a
9 contract signed--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, do you date? A
11 timeline that you could tell me that I could expect
12 that that would happen?

13 COMMISSIONER CASALS: No. Again--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I can't we get a
15 date? Why can't we get you hard and fast target date
16 for that to happen?

17 COMMISSIONER CASALS: For the project to
18 restart? Because--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Well, for the
20 contract to be signed.

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Because the project
22 hasn't restarted. It is true on pause by, you know--
23 like I mentioned before, OMB is prioritizing COVID-
24 related capital projects and projects that have
25 already been in contradiction.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I would just as a committee within the city Council to push that. To get a firm date. Because we are talking about the injustices that we have been subjected to. In all due respect to all of the panelists here, we need a date to be able to say we understand and we want to make sure that we are going to take an action that will, in fact, guarantee that this will happen. We don't want to have, oh, it can't happen. You know, so I would urge this committee to push for a target date for that contract to be signed so that we can make sure that that goes forward. And I just want to encourage everybody to realize that this is an opportunity for us to change what has existed. There's been a lot of talk and a lot of symbolism and now we want to make sure that, when we come through this on the other side, that our cultural institutions in fact have a presentation and a demonstration that we acknowledge that our libraries, the our museums, and other cultural institutions have not gotten their fair share and I do have to go back to the fight that was waged by our predecessors, particularly my husband when he was a Council member. To fight because he

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1 was the one who made it an issue. No. There is not
2 equitable funding here. So, we've got to do that.
3 Play that groundwork. Build on that and pass it on
4 to those who are coming behind so that it can be
5 concretize and we can see tangible demonstrations of
6 the push and the move towards getting that kind of
7 representation that talks about all of the things
8 that we have contributed in so many facets of our
9 culture. An understanding that culture is not just
10 the arts. It is our language. It's our history.
11 It's all of those things that define us as a people.
12 So, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the
13 opportunity to be able to share. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Council member
16 Barron, thank you very much and I want to assure you
17 that I asked the Commissioner two rounds of questions
18 about this particular piece and I agree that the
19 administrations pause here is absolutely insufficient
20 and we need a commitment when you're correct that we
21 need dates and we need a contract. Vinnie is going
22 to be speaking soon and testify herself and we are
23 thrilled to have her here and we will continue to
24 push. You know, while I am no big fan of the
25 governor, I did reference that there was a statue of

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1 Mother Cabrini commissioned and built within a year
2 and this very, very important piece of work is on
3 pause by the Office of Management and Budget without
4 any line of restarting. So, the Commissioner Casals
5 knows how we feel and I believe he wants to get this
6 done, but-- and I also asked him in his
7 conversations with the Mayor. We've just got to get
8 it done. And Commissioner Casals, maybe you want to
9 address some of Council member Barron's concerns, but
10 also the importance of doing this. I saw your-- you
11 gave Council member Barron, I suppose, a bit of a
12 timeline in next year, but maybe you can speak to
13 some of the specifics.

15 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I cannot tell you a
16 timeline, again, until the project starts, but by a
17 at the risk of boring all of you, you know, I work in
18 East Harlem. [inaudible 01:21:15] for eight years.
19 I gave a lot of tool wars that would point out at
20 that monument and the injustices that monument and it
21 was instrumental when I was part of the monument
22 commission that the Mayor had put together and making
23 sure that that monument was taken down. This is not
24 a way of defending, you know, the position of the
25 administration were to use the frustrations that we

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2 all have of this project not moving forward, but it
3 is a way to let you know that I am very much behind
4 this project and I'm doing everything I can in order
5 to make it happen.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And is Council
7 member Barron raising her hand? Would she like to
8 speak?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Just for the--
10 Yes. Just for the record, Vinnie Bagwell, not Vinnie
11 Borrrows. Thank you. Someone alerted me that I used
12 the wrong name. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
14 Council member Barron. And unless I am alerted that
15 there are other Council members who wish to speak, I
16 believe Vinnie Bagwell is on the first panel and we
17 can hear directly from the artist and some other
18 folks. So, Committee counsel, if you would like to
19 take it from there. Commissioner Casals, we will be
20 following up, obviously, but I thank you for being a
21 part of this important conversation and pushing the
22 administration to do better.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
24 Chair Van Bramer. Correct. We do not see any other
25 Council member hands. If there are any other Council

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1 members that would like to ask a question, if you can
2 please raise your hand now just to double check. We
3 are not seeing any other hands, so we will move to
4 the public portion of this hearing. So, now that we
5 have concluded the administration's testimony, we
6 will turn to the public testimony. I would like to
7 remind everyone that individuals will be called up in
8 panels. So, for members of the public, please wait
9 until your name is called. So, we've noticed a few
10 people raising their hand in the Zoom and we will
11 call on you first as part of a panel and then
12 individually. Council members, if you have questions
13 for a particular panelist, please use the raise hand
14 function in zoom and you will be called on after
15 everyone in a panel has completed their testimony in
16 the order that you raised your hand. There are
17 approximately four individuals per panel. For
18 panelists and members of the public, once your name
19 is called, a member of our staff will unmute you in
20 the Sergeant-at-arms will give you the go-ahead to
21 begin after setting the timer. All testimony will be
22 limited to three minutes today. Please wait for the
23 Sergeant-at-arms to announce that you may begin
24 before starting your testimony. So, we will begin

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1 with the first panel now and, in order of speaking,
2 this panel will be Melody Capote, Sade Lythcott,
3 Vinnie Bagwell, and Atiba Edwards. So, I will call
4 on you one at a time. The first panel list and
5 witness when the public is Melody Capote.
6

7 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Your time starts now.

8 MELODY CAPOTE: Good morning, Mr.
9 Chairman and members of the city Council and
10 Commissioner Casals. My name is Melody Capote ,
11 executive director of the Caribbean Cultural Center
12 African Diaspora Institute. I still can't breathe.
13 I appeared before you in June and told you then that
14 I can't breathe. And, to my great embarrassment,
15 nothing was done. While I still can't breathe,
16 because after George Floyd smarter, more of my
17 relatives have been killed for living while black. I
18 ask you this. If Breonna Taylor were your daughter,
19 would you be able to breathe? I still can't breathe
20 because I still have to have a talk with my black son
21 who believes that it-- that is death by law
22 enforcement-- can't happened to him, yet I know
23 better. I still can't breathe because the city
24 Council in the administration speak about the special
25 row of arts and culture and healing a community whose

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1 culture has been stolen from them only to find that
2 that stolen culture is on display somewhere in the
3 Fifth Avenue Museum. Here's what we, as an
4 organization, have done since June. We are just
5 finishing a series of workshops on antiracism in the
6 arts and culture and are presently, today, in our
7 session, in a closing session. To date, we have
8 trained 100 arts and culture executives representing
9 60 organizations, 85% of which are white. So, I
10 challenge you to step up to the plate and honor
11 George Floyd and the other martyrs and, in their
12 name, I ask that you, one, establish special capacity
13 building fund for organizations of color with a
14 budget of under \$5 million you would be required to
15 use their great to address racial and social
16 injustice. For anyone to on a pilot basis, and
17 artists curator-- an incubator. I'm sorry. An
18 artist incubator which will train artist of color to
19 provide arts and culture services using the new
20 digital platforms and assist artists to develop
21 entrepreneurial ventures through culturally competent
22 technical assistance. And, lastly, fund on a
23 negotiated basis, the Institute for Racial and Social
24 Justice for Arts and Culture housed presently at the
25

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Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute

because that is where the work is being done. Our community needs you to put your money where your words are. I close with the new phrase being used by the NYPD: collaborative re-imagination or collaborative reimagining. If you want to do this work, don't ask us to testify. Instead, ask us to sit at the table as equal partners--

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time.

MELODY CAPOTE: to reimagine and collaboratively negotiate the new package. Thank you for your time. And, yes, black lives do matter.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Melody, for your work and for always being part of these discussions. I wanted to ask Commissioner Casals, relative to Melody's recommendations, capacity building fund, do you have any thoughts on that particular first recommendation of Melody from the department's perspective?

COMMISSIONER CASALS: We are-- As the Majority Leader said, you know, like the situation which [inaudible 01:28:28], you know, an opportunity to change, you know, some policies that, you know, otherwise we would not be able to do. And we are

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1 considering, as a pilot, you know, the barriers to
2 access public funds, if, you know, release a portion
3 or the totality of the city grant could go to Geo
4 West would not to the service to the public, which
5 could be a huge-- in a moment like this could be a
6 huge support to cultural organization and open up the
7 opportunity to support other projects like building
8 capacity for their organization.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sure, but
11 could the department do more and allocate more very
12 specifically towards capacity building for any by
13 BIPOC organizations?

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: In addition to what
15 I just said, which is a general sort of funds that go
16 for CDF, very much like what we did in the past with
17 the [inaudible 01:29:41] money which was added funds
18 in organizations in neighborhoods that we felt that
19 needed it the most, it usually aligns with culturally
20 specific organizations . We're doing a portion of
21 the funds as part of COVID relief and another one as
22 part of arts in education relief and they are
23 sending, you know, that those are two of the places
24 in which organizations have been hardest hit.
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Van Bramer, I
3 think you're on mute still.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you for
5 pointing that out, both of you. So, do you and
6 Melody talk about these issues and are you open to
7 these suggestions that Melody talks about? And it is
8 important that we--

9 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. And we--

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: get to a--

11 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Just to clarify,
12 right? You know, our grants are not sort of
13 prescribing, you know, one can use-- if anybody
14 wants to use the CDFM money you for cultural capacity
15 like that, they can do so. We also have to be more
16 flexible in this time. If somebody applies in
17 February for money for a specific project and they
18 decided to go other ways, there is an opportunity to
19 change the scope. So, we are always open to this
20 kind of work. It doesn't have to be necessarily a
21 specific to CDF.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: All right. We
23 will continue to have that discussion. We have to
24 move on to our next panelist, but, obviously, Melody,
25

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I always appreciate you bringing fierce challenging
comments to our hearings.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. The
next panelist will be Sade Lythcott.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

SADE LYTHCOTT: Good morning. Thank
you, Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo,
Commissioner Casals, and all of the city Council
members and DC LA present today. My name is Sade
Lythcott. I testify today as the CEO of the National
Black Theater, the oldest continually run black
theater in New York. I am also proudly the Chair of
Coalitions of Theaters of Color, a coalition that
represents the largest body of culturally specific
theaters in the city representing 52 cultural
institutions across all five boroughs, each year
serving millions of New Yorkers with vitally needed
cultural, educational, and economic resources and
opportunities for youth, seniors, families, and local
neighborhoods into the broader residents living in
the outer boroughs. These are the same people and
communities who have suffered systemic
underinvestment and oppression that has resulted in
the overwhelming and disproportionate number of

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1 deaths from COVID-19 and from the front lines of
2 police brutality and structural racism. I must say
3 publicly, on the record we are grateful, in
4 particular, to the Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader
5 Laurie Cumbo, and the members of black for the
6 preservation of this initiative over the past three
7 years, especially in the last budget cycle. I would
8 argue they shouldn't have had to fight so hard to
9 preserve the only source of culturally specific
10 funding to the arts. Respectfully, I am fatigued as
11 these conversations continue to be unbalanced,
12 centering predominantly white institutions deficit
13 instead of equally offering sustainable solutions and
14 investment for BIPOC communities which is a form of
15 supremacy. These systems of power grant privilege
16 and access unequally such that an equity use and
17 injustice are the result and that must continually be
18 addressed and changed. Action steps that I would put
19 forward. Our city must take concrete actionable
20 steps, not just recognize, but to protect its
21 culturally specific institutions, especially those
22 located in and serving its vulnerable communities
23 might be inclusion in our institution to baseline
24 funding, creating secure funding for the communities
25

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1 that have been systemically disenfranchised,
2
3 marginalized, and historically oppressed. Next,
4 adding justice to all diverse city equity, and
5 inclusion initiatives. It is not enough to just try
6 to shift white organizations and institutions, but
7 justice must sit at the center of this work next,
8 recognize and terminate systemic racism and other
9 barriers to fair and just distribution of resources,
10 access, and opportunities by auditing, and knowledge,
11 and--

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

13 SADE LYTHCOTT: dismantling inequities
14 with policy systems, programs, and services. In
15 conclusion, black lives matter, but black lives
16 matter is not a moment. I would argue it's not even
17 a movement. Black lives matter is a value
18 proposition. It is about taking accountability and
19 dismantling structural inequities that keep our
20 people, communities, and institutions on the margins
21 struggling for basic survival. From the
22 disproportionate impact of COBID-19, to the murder of
23 George Floyd, the city must play a vital role in
24 creating economic parity, justice, anything less is

25

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1 contributing to the problem. Will you commit to
2 being a part of the solution? Thank you.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
5 much for all your work and, as you stated, we fought
6 very hard, in particular the Majority Leader and
7 myself for Coalition Theaters of Color, so any
8 credible increased two years ago, not this past year,
9 and did not cut any of the funding this year. You
10 are right that it shouldn't be such a big fight and I
11 absolutely support your recommendations and believe
12 that base lighting all of this funding-- obviously,
13 there is the second player in this part, which is the
14 administration and the Mayor and the Department of
15 Cultural Affairs, so I absolutely support and will
16 fight for all of those things that you have
17 mentioned. With the Majority Leader and this
18 committee and I will ask Commissioner Casals if you
19 would like to respond to those recommendations, as
20 well, and on behalf of the Mayor.

21 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I don't think I
22 have much more to that at. I'm just going to stay in
23 the hearing and just here for the sector.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay but
25 baselining, do you support baselining? I realize you

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1 don't have to respond to questions from the public,
2
3 but--

4 COMMISSIONER CASALS: When I have
5 something to say, I am happy to respond. And, if I'm
6 going to stay, play along. I need to talk to my team
7 and I need to sort of think that through before I
8 could say something about that.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. But you
10 are open to it and will continue to have discussions
11 about that.

12 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yep.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.
14 Not exactly all the answers you are looking for
15 there, but I appreciate you calling the questions and
16 holding people, including me and Commissioner Casals
17 accountable. Next. The speaking next?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panelist
19 will be Vinnie Bagwell.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

21 VINNIE BAGWELL: Good morning. Good
22 morning, Chairman Van Bramer and city Council
23 members, the community at large. I want to thank you
24 for bringing this topic to the floor for the support
25 of art in public places and enabling the community to

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1 have a voice. This is excellent. I want to begin by
2 expressing my deepest gratitude, frankly, to Mayor
3 Bill de Blasio and the first lady Charlene McCray,
4 for creating an endowed pathway for new public art
5 that represents marginalized people and that reflects
6 our evolving culture in New York City. I am the
7 artist who will be creating victory to replace the J.
8 Marion Sims culture on Fifth Avenue. And the
9 architect, Bryce Turner and I appreciate the
10 opportunity to employ our work as an innovative
11 method of historical preservation, education, and
12 advancement of equity for the city of New York. I
13 also want to express my heartfelt thanks to the Hon.
14 Inez Barron, Ward 11 and the community at large for
15 their collective advocacy of my work. I am here
16 today to support the improvements for the [inaudible
17 01:39:32] art program particularly as it pertains to
18 public art about the history of people of color.
19 Experience has informed me of what best practices
20 look like for public art competitions. I created the
21 first public artwork of a contemporary African-
22 American to be conditioned by a municipality in the
23 United States. I have been a finalist for 36 times.
24 I have one 21 commissions in the last 10 years. In
25

1 the public art arena, we have been discussing the
2 need for diversity for a number of years. I've been
3 a keynote speaker for best practices for the American
4 for the arts, their semi-annual conventions. I have
5 also won the inaugural George and Darlene Perez prize
6 for civic engagement. On topic, I sincerely hope
7 that the city of New York retains all the budgets and
8 lifts the suspension for the She Built NYC victory,
9 the Lyons family, Tito Fuente, and the other
10 commissions that pertain to the history of people of
11 color. Because, as the largest repository of public
12 art in the country and the capital of the art world,
13 the voice of artists in New York is more important
14 now than ever. According to research data, the most
15 successful public art projects involve both the
16 artist and the community at the onset of the project
17 to encourage a sense of shared ownership and
18 collective affiliation. [Inaudible 01:40:51]
19 happened for me for victory. The effort of creating
20 art for public places is not solitary. Of course,
21 these days, virtual attendance is becoming the norm
22 in New York City must set a higher standard for
23 community participation. With the victory
24 commission, there was a significant disconnect
25

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1 between the actual online comments and what was
2 shared with participants at the finalist
3 presentation. Acknowledging respecting the voice of
4 the community is imperative in keeping them involved
5 in the process is my mantra. And communication is
6 key. Carefully conceived public art installations--

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

9 VINNIE BAGWELL: Stop.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No. Keep
11 going, Vinnie.

12 VINNIE BAGWELL: Okay. My point is--
13 Let me be real direct. I feel that, in the name of
14 diversity, New York City must work harder on setting
15 higher standards for leading the charge for inclusion
16 in the representation of people of color in the
17 public art realm in this city. Relative to the
18 impact of the pandemic, I am fearful for the new
19 leadership of our nation and I expect, without
20 change, New York will receive the fiscal world
21 support it deserves and needs. Meanwhile, Your
22 Honor, the victory beyond Sims public art commission
23 outcome and the outcry from the community are the
24 reason that the Department of Cultural Affairs was
25 called to the carpet by the oversight committee. The

1 former Commissioner quit his job the day after
2 finals. That's what took four months to have your
3 first two meetings. And most of that time in those
4 two meetings were spent shooting down the design and
5 imposing a deconstruction of the design. They are
6 calling for major adjustments to the design. A bias
7 for style on this subject on the part of cultural
8 affairs and then design seems more than apparent.
9 The pandemic began more than five months after the
10 announcement of the winner. It is an excuse for
11 procrastination now. I believe there are things that
12 can be done. Mr. Casals, it's nice to make you
13 acquaintance, finally. You've been in office for
14 more than six months and you have not reached out to
15 me not want to even introduce yourself or declare
16 your commitment as a person of color yourself to
17 continue the important commissions for people of
18 color in the city. Why haven't we met? For your
19 information, I always have to reach out twice. It
20 takes days, sometimes weeks before your director gets
21 back to me. [inaudible 01:43:11] is 48 hours. The
22 media has been more forthcoming with information
23 coming out of your office. I have had our long
24 discussions with new thinkers and writers for the New
25

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1 York Times and Time magazine. Can you confirm that
2 the funding is secure? I can't seem to get any
3 answer to that question. Even with the suspension of
4 public art, why can't we at least begin the process
5 of negotiating an agreement? Because I can almost
6 guarantee you that right there is going to take quite
7 a bit of time going back-and-forth. When will you be
8 setting the date to begin a negotiation? There are a
9 lot of things we can do while you're waiting for the
10 pandemic to pass. And, by the way, regarding my
11 governor, you better not say nothing bad about my
12 governor. This man had his office call me on day two
13 to make me an essential business so that I could
14 finish public art. Mother Cabrini got done in six
15 months. That is unprecedented in the public art
16 world. And I understand you guys do it differently
17 than the state, but the point that I am making is
18 that I disagree. I do not think that the Office of
19 Cultural Affairs is doing enough. You can use your
20 finger and dial and talk. You can at least start
21 with talking. Even if your hands are bound and
22 gagged for initiating the actual execution of the
23 agreement, we can talk. I would appreciate that much
24 for starters. I look forward to advancing the vision
25

1 of the city of New York by creating this artwork.

2
3 And I just think it is so important to inform viewers
4 that artistry is a powerful and useful tool of social
5 transformation. It's capable of convincing our
6 thoughts, stilling our minds, and renewing our hopes
7 and aspirations. I really appreciate the extra time.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. So
10 with respect to victory and your work here, when is
11 the last-- what is sort of the last concrete
12 discussion you've had with the Department of Cultural
13 Affairs or this administration and, as Council member
14 Barron was talking about, right, there's no contract,
15 right? We see to be stuck in a very early stage here
16 with respect to even you, the artist.

17 VINNIE BAGWELL: February 4th, 2020 is
18 the last meeting that we had February 4th, 2020.
19 Again, I understand reality. I have not badgered. I
20 played back. I haven't said much. I check in every
21 now and then to say, hey, how's it going? What are
22 we doing? Kendall Henry's responses you will know
23 when we know. Well, evidently, you don't know. But
24 it doesn't mean that we can't start negotiating the
25 contract. I have been neck associating the contract

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1 with the city of Norfolk for eight months. It takes
2 a while. The language isn't always fair and
3 equitable for the artist when you are talking to
4 municipalities. Often times, municipalities, and is
5 always me, me, me, it's all about you. So, I don't
6 expect the city of New York to be much different. I
7 am probably going to need some adjustment to that
8 agreement. Why can I get a hard copy? A draft to at
9 least go over with my attorney? If it is perfect and
10 it's great, fine. Then we will wait for you to say,
11 let's execute. But to wait until you are ready to
12 execute and then have to take another year and a
13 century to negotiate the contract is not a good use
14 of the time. That's my point.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.
17 Commissioner, I understand you probably aren't
18 interested in discussing all of the internals about
19 this, but this is a very important-- let me just
20 finish, Commissioner Casals. This is a very
21 important piece of work, as you know. Right?
22 Replacing a horrific statue honoring a horrific
23 person and so, there is so much here, right and yet
24 you have an artist who is incredibly frustrated. You
25 have Also members who are rightfully incredibly

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1 frustrated and not seeing any progress. So, you
2 know, I understand as even Vinnie was very sensitive
3 to both the COVID moment and the budgetary
4 implications for the city of New York, but as I
5 mentioned earlier, right, there are important
6 projects that have moved forward that have been
7 approved. This is such a high profile piece. This
8 is such an incredibly important work, I had to have,
9 you know, the artist speaking in these terms, you
10 know, the as Council member Barron spoke earlier, you
11 know, why can't we do some of the things that Vinnie
12 is talking about and move some of this forward even
13 as you press the Mayor and the Office of Management
14 and Budget? And I will just say this. You know, if
15 the mayor wanted to get this done, he certainly has
16 the power to call Dean Fulihan [sp?] or-- I realize
17 Melanie Hertzog has now been promoted to Deputy
18 Mayor, but now Director Giha [sp?]- if the Mayor
19 called him and said, you know, free this up, you
20 know, move this project, it would happen. So, I
21 realize you don't have control over that particular
22 series of conversations, but you have a voice and you
23 certainly have the ability to work with the artist
24 here on some of the preliminary steps to-- once you
25

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1 get the approval for the funding to be taken the
2 pause off, get this done more quickly, right? I
3 forget the exact date when Vinnie was awarded and
4 chosen as the artist here, but, you know, this is
5 dragging on for years, potentially and how can you
6 move this faster? What can the administration do to
7 make this happen?

9 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I believe-- May I
10 call you Vinnie? I believe we're at the one year
11 mark, probably, since-- you're muted. Can you
12 unmute Vinnie Bagwell?

13 VINNIE BAGWELL: October 4th was the
14 presentation on the finals. October 6th was the
15 announcement of the official winner. It's been more
16 than a year.

17 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah. A year and a
18 few weeks. Let me clarify a couple things. One is
19 that this is not a funding issue. This is a cashflow
20 issue. The funding for this project is secure and
21 it's in place. The question is where can we start on
22 unpausing or removing the pause on capital projects
23 based on the city's cashflow. That is much larger
24 than, you know, the Department of Cultural Affairs.
25 It has to do the with the city finances. And then I

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1 must be honest with you. I don't know exactly why
2 the process is like this, but, again, in order to
3 start having conversation with Vinnie in terms of her
4 contract, a contract with a contractor that's going
5 to be building the monument needs to be first. And
6 that's the first step on the process.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, can I ask,
9 Commissioner, do you know the amount of funding for
10 this particular piece of work that's involved?

11 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I can't remember
12 off the top of my head right now.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Vinnie, do you
14 know? Can we unmute Vinnie?

15 VINNIE BAGWELL: It's a million project.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: A million
17 dollars?

18 VINNIE BAGWELL: 1 million dollars is the
19 project budget.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. So,
21 you know, I will just say, Commissioner Casals. I
22 know this is, ultimately, not your call, but we have
23 had projects that are in the tens of millions of
24 dollars taken off pause and this is \$1 million, even
25 for a city that is going through what we are going,

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1 you know, if there was the political will to do it,
2 if there was a priority memo, if you will, from the
3 Mayor to OMB, this would get unleashed and fast
4 tracked right away. Right? Just right away and I
5 think that is what we are missing here. You know,
6 making this a priority. So, you know, I also just
7 want to clarify one thing because I understand you're
8 saying that in the process, Commissioner Casals, you
9 need to work with the person who's actually going to
10 build this first, work out that agreement. But that
11 doesn't preclude you-- does that preclude you from
12 having a conversation with Vinnie and--

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Not at all.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So--

16 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Conversation, not
17 at all. And that's the part in which I wanted to--
18 as a second point, I wanted to apologize. I been in
19 contact with Marin Ortiz which has been organized in
20 the community around this project. I have also been
21 in contact with Council member Ayala mostly in a
22 reactive way when they were wanting to know
23 something. They wanted to put pressure on this.
24 Then I would, you know, answer the phone. Apologize,
25 Vinnie, for not reaching out proactively, but I just

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1 want you to know that-- you're muted again, Vinnie.

2 I want to apologize for that, but just to also tell
3 you that I'm open to talk to you any time you need
4 to.

5
6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Can we unmute
7 Vinnie? I think Vinnie had something else to say.

8 VINNIE BAGWELL: I emailed you to
9 introduce myself to you. I don't know where your
10 emails go, but I emailed you. When you got your job,
11 I emailed you to welcome you and say that I would
12 love to talk to you. I don't know that you even got
13 that email because I didn't receive a response.

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I did not get that
15 email and I apologize for that.

16 VINNIE BAGWELL: You know, the one that
17 goes through the city. I didn't have your exact
18 email, but if I go to the website where it's yours
19 and it says, you may contact this person there and
20 you can write a nice little something, that is how I
21 tried to contact you. If that doesn't work, you
22 might want to look into that with your webmaster.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Vinnie, do you
24 have anything else that you would like to add in
25 terms of your personal experience here and moving--

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2 VINNIE BAGWELL: Well, you know, this is
3 a very interesting time. People are only now
4 learning about the public art arena. This is a white
5 patriarch arena. Was on the phone a couple weeks ago
6 with the time magazine and I was trying to explain to
7 them that you will not see a major change in the
8 public art arena unless people make an effort to help
9 neophytes get in. It is the kind of arena where you
10 have to be invited in. You can't win, normally, a
11 million-dollar commission unless you have had a
12 million-dollar commission. That is why this is so
13 important to me. Besides the fact that I want to
14 make this work, having one this commission now takes
15 me off of the bronze ceiling. For people who are
16 trying to get into the arena-- for instance, women
17 of any color. Women, people of color -- that want
18 to get into the arena, they are going to need some
19 handholding. The question I want to know, aside from
20 my personal concerns, is how does the City of New
21 York intend to enable new artists that want to come
22 into the arena to come in? Because part of the
23 challenge for those people is they need leadership.
24 So, whoever is running the commission needs to be
25 able to know how to support those people. I assume

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1 that that is not in place now, but that might be
2 something that you might want to consider developing.
3 Some kind of program that helps new artist-- people
4 who have never had public art before who are worthy
5 because of the quality of their work-- to be able to
6 participate in the public art program in New York
7 City. I think that is going to be important all over
8 the country because the principalities have not
9 created some kind of safety net for the new people to
10 come in, they are not going to be welcomed in.
11 Nobody is going to give somebody \$1 million, 500,000,
12 \$100,000 to make public art when they have never done
13 it before. You're going to need some kind of
14 transitional program. Someone who already knows the
15 ropes to be able to support them when they first win.
16 So, I don't know how that is going to happen, but
17 that is going to be a major transformation of the
18 public part arena. Creating some sort of wherewithal
19 for new people to come in. Otherwise, you're going
20 to continue to see white people needing to do public
21 art projects for people of color because there are no
22 people of color in the arena. I am one of the very
23 few.
24
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Incredibly
3 important. And I want to get Commissioner Casals'
4 response to some of that. But I also see that
5 Majority Leader Cumbo is, I think, raising her hand
6 to weigh in here. Majority Leader, are you there?

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I am here.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts ow.

10 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I just want to
11 thank you, Vinnie, for outlining the way that you
12 have had for Commissioner Casals. Because believe
13 what you are talking about is the type of
14 breakthroughs that we need to see in terms of how do
15 we create real pipelines and real opportunities and
16 opening for artists and for communities of color.
17 What you are saying you so right about the public art
18 arena. While I have seen nationally, while there has
19 been some attention and focus to having portraits,
20 having statues of women, as well as people of color,
21 I still seen that the conversation or the pipeline to
22 having artists of color, as well as women, to do
23 those commissions, has not caught up with the desire
24 to see more public works of art. And for-- So,
25 that's why this hearing is so important in these

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1 types of conversations are so important. Because,
2 until you have lived the situation, you can't really
3 articulate where the barriers are. So, I really
4 appreciate you for articulating the barriers and,
5 while this is not why role on the side, Commissioner
6 Casals has been working with best in many ways in
7 terms of having those kinds of conversations. I hear
8 your frustration and you are totally on point and on
9 board with your frustration in terms of the lines of
10 communication. I would just say, for Commissioner
11 Casals, I know that when you first got this position
12 in the middle of COVID, he also had COVID-- and not
13 the type of COVID you stay at home with. The type of
14 COVID that you've got to go to the hospital and fight
15 for your life. So, I know he's not articulating that
16 in the same way, but being thrown into a new
17 commissionership with COVID, having to fight for your
18 life, and learning the ropes and not being able to
19 meet and fully grasp your staff because of the
20 challenges has been a difficult one. But I would say
21 everything you have said is spot on and that is the
22 role to the type of revolutionary work that we need
23 to see. More women that look like you need to be at
24 the forefront of creating art that is representative
25

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1 of us, as well as everyone. You know, you should be
2 designated to doing work about black women only. You
3 could do statues of people of all races and
4 nationalities the way we been subjected to. So, you
5 know, it's important for us to have those
6 conversations and I appreciate your honesty, your
7 frankness, and you are getting it out on the table
8 and speaking truth to power. So, I appreciate that
9 and thank you.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much, Majority Leader Cumbo. And for a very
13 sensitively raising some of the challenges that
14 Commissioner Casals has faced. But I want to just
15 maybe go back to a bigger picture piece that part of
16 Vinnie Bagwell's experience. The referenced,
17 previously Commissioner Finkelparl's departure, you
18 know, obviously, you know I have great suspect for.
19 There are some that his departure was, in some ways,
20 associated with from the debates around public art
21 and statues and monuments. So, having that, maybe
22 you can, Commissioner Casals, go through some of the
23 bigger picture, right? The status of She Build, the
24 status of all of the public art and the statues. We
25 talked a little bird about sort of all of them being

1 on pause. All of them-- again, that is not your
2 call. That is the Office of Management and Budget
3 who has paused thousands of projects all over the
4 city, but can you talk to us about the status of all
5 of that? You know, the commission, you know, and all
6 of these public art works including Vinnie's and what
7 you're now doing. And I know we've talked a little
8 bit about this, but what you're now doing to break
9 that log jam and get these works back on track.
10

11 COMMISSIONER CASALS: So, one of the ones
12 that is already on track is because-- is the Shirley
13 Chisholm monument. And that is because it's tied to
14 a capital project, the very same plaza in which the
15 monument is going to be placed has started. And so
16 that project-- and they are like tied together.
17 That project is started. I don't have a specific
18 timeline avoid it is going to be finished, but, like
19 I said, you know, probably it is going to be sometime
20 next year and the other two that were our priority is
21 victory be on and Tito Fuente. We will just continue
22 to work. They are both in different stages. Tito
23 Fuentes is in the moment that we need some of the
24 funds released so the-- we can pay the artist to
25

1 start working on the design and we are just working
2 into making those funds available to the artist.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, victory is
5 behind so that pipeline, if you will, right? So,
6 Tito Fuente would seem to be next? And then victory?

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Well, they're in
8 parallel. You know, every time we talk about one, we
9 talk about the other one. Tito Fuente, the process
10 started earlier. So that's why we're at a different
11 moment in the process.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right.

13 COMMISSIONER CASALS: But, you know,
14 those are the three that you are just focusing now.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And maybe
16 just walk us through the timeline. Lets just hope
17 that this hearing is being monitored by the Mayor's
18 office and they have heard Council member Barron and
19 the Majority Leader and myself and Vinnie Bagwell and
20 lots of other folks talk about how this needs to be
21 released and taken off pause and moved. Let's just
22 say, in the best possible scenario, you get a call
23 this afternoon from the Office of Management and
24 Budget and they said, Vinnie Bagwell is a very
25 powerful voice and we cannot deny this longer. We

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1 have release the funds for this project, which is \$1
2 million, again, within the skill of the city's
3 budget, you know, the rounding error, but, let's just
4 say that. How quickly-- what is the timeline for
5 getting this done? If that best of all case scenario
6 happens.

8 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah. And let's
9 assume that nothing else happens for the rest of
10 the--

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Fair enough.

12 COMMISSIONER CASALS: the next year.
13 We're looking-- I'm just looking at an email that I
14 have specifics, but I'm not going to delay this much
15 more. We are looking at around a year once, you
16 know, things are in block and everything is going.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: A year and
18 please share all our year and to the beginning?

19 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Completion.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And that
21 includes the artist's time and everything that Vinnie
22 needs to do to get--

23 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Contract--

24
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: to a place of
3 completion of-- and installation of the work? We're
4 talking a year?

5 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yep.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Does that
7 sound right to you, Vinnie? Can we unmute Vinnie?

8 VINNIE BAGWELL: I would say it would be
9 a year after contract execution. The question is how
10 long does contract execution-- my concern is Tito
11 Fuente-- Correct me if I'm wrong-- has been going
12 on for almost a decade. I don't want to have to live
13 that long to negotiate contract to begin. So, the
14 big concern is how to get to an executed contract?
15 Once we begin, I believe the year is real.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. So, 10
17 years would be unacceptable to everyone.

18 VINNIE BAGWELL: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And let's just
20 hope and we will push both the Commissioner, I'm
21 sure, and this committee to get the 1 million dollars
22 for this project taken off pause. It seems like that
23 could be done with a simple email or phone call from
24 the Mayor's office. So, I thank you, Vinnie, for
25 joining this. I think this was an important

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1 discussion that needed to be had around this
2 particular piece but also all of the work and
3 centering women of color, in particular, and artists.
4 So, thank you, Vinnie, for your participation and,
5 the committee counsel, we will move on person panel.
6 I'm not sure where we are at.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
9 Van Bramer. We have one more member of this panel.
10 The last member of the panel is Atiba Edwards.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

12 ATIBA EDWARDS: Good afternoon, Chair
13 Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and Commissioner
14 Casals and members of the committee. My name is
15 Atiba Edwards and I was born on the island of Saint
16 Vincent and grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn.
17 Throughout my entire life, culture has always been a
18 huge part of who I am, who I set out to update, and
19 also those spaces that I felt comfortable and that.
20 That is one of the reasons I chose to take on the
21 role of executive vice president and chief operating
22 officer at Brooklyn Children's Museum, as I saw this
23 as an opportunity to serve the community I know far
24 too well, but also serve the community of central
25 Brooklyn and New York City at large. And it was

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1 really a full circle opportunity because I grew up
2 coming to this museum more times than I can even
3 remember. Earlier this year, I was appointed to the
4 Chair of the CEIG DEI committee which is now renamed
5 to the IDEA committee. Inclusion, diversity, equity,
6 and access. We are working on many different things,
7 but one of our current focuses is really on workforce
8 development as it's essential that we change the
9 makeup of the staff of our cultural organization as
10 that is a key part of shifting the culture of these
11 organization. Without a doubt, we need to improve
12 upon and expand the staff who are working in a
13 variety of positions from entry level through
14 executive at cultural institutions and it's very
15 important, Commissioner Van Bramer-- you mentioned
16 this in your opening remarks that our staff should
17 reflect the culture of New York City. And our work
18 isn't just on bringing in diverse talent, but, more
19 important focused on supporting them to advance in
20 all positions because when we are joining these
21 organizations that historically are white, a diverse
22 person joining a space like this oftentimes can be
23 very traumatic. So that's why we think support is
24 essential and it's starting to come to fruition. In
25

1 many cases, the CIG's have started to lay the
2 groundwork through their DEI plans and other internal
3 work such as getting support and buy-in amongst their
4 staff, leadership, and boards. And that is just some
5 of the groundwork, but it's an essential part, to get
6 this journey completed. Myself and many other CIG
7 members and staff members have decided to join an
8 organization and in organizations that have a spotty
9 history when you think about structural racism. Many
10 of these organizations were founded in the 1800s to
11 1900s and all. So, that is one of the key reasons
12 why it is important for us to be systematic in our
13 approach and to changing the all too prevalent
14 structural racism that exists so that, when we are
15 starting to realize this change, the changes both
16 sustained as part of a daily practice, but also
17 integral to everything these organizations are doing.
18 And I would be remorse to say that more often than
19 not, the work will feel like it's never moving
20 quickly, but do keep in mind we are changing and
21 rewriting and, in some cases, centuries of systemic
22 issues, but we are working on that. That change is
23 happening and also the last couple years to do that.
24 And I think, to close out with a quote from James

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1 Baldwin, the world before you and you need not take
2 it or leave it as it was when you came in. And the
3 reason why I really keep that close to my heart is
4 that it guides the work I do here and it guides the
5 work that the IDEA committee will be doing and the
6 CIGs are doing. We've entered a world that is
7 founded during structural racist times and we're
8 working to change that. So, thank you again for this
9 time and I open the floor back up.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much. So, how has your experience been? I realize
13 you're chairing the IDEA committee and you work for a
14 particular institution, so there's your experience
15 within the institution you're currently working at.
16 But maybe you can speak to some of the larger
17 organizations within the CIGs that are predominately
18 white. You know, are people moving? Are people
19 doing things? Are you seeing the progress that you
20 would want to see or is there a lot of resistance?
21 Is there more talk rather than action? Mean, talk to
22 us a little bit about what you are experiencing is
23 the Chair of this committee.

24 ATIBA EDWARDS: I think there has been
25 progress. I don't think there will ever be enough

1 progress because achieving diversity, inclusion,
2 equity, and access, it is not a static place where
3 you sit and celebrate. It requires ongoing work and
4 really reflecting the times. If you think about the
5 work that was needed five years ago and work that is
6 needed five months ago, they definitely overlap in
7 many cases, but there is still new things that we
8 need to take on. So, one of the essential parts
9 where the DEI plans that were created, as they help
10 guide institutions on the work that needs to get done
11 and how it is going to be measured. So, to your
12 question, I think there has and there will continue
13 to be work across all institutions, but I would never
14 say-- I don't think enough will be the adequate
15 term. There's work that's happening and it will
16 never be enough because we're really rewriting
17 history in many ways. So, institutions are working.
18 They're doing some self-reflection. They're being
19 called out in some cases and being held to task, but
20 I think you are seeing reactions and response to
21 guide the work. And some of it is coming and some of
22 it will come in the future as we continue to get to a
23 place where we can share things publicly across all
24 CIGs. So, I can really speak on behalf of Brooklyn
25

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1 Children's Museum and then the CIG's at large, but I
2 would say work is happening and there's still a lot
3 of work to be done.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I realize
6 you may not have sort of numbers and figures in front
7 of you, but can you sense, do you see progress in
8 hiring at leadership levels and, you know, I know
9 that some of the very large institutions have made
10 statements about structural racism within the
11 institutions and that is a form of progress, I
12 suppose, but there's also the need to make real the
13 words into action in terms of leadership development
14 and actual hiring in terms of curators and artistic
15 directors and CEOs and whatnot. And are you even
16 feeling that sort of anecdotally and in your
17 experience or is it more words at this point?

18 ATIBA EDWARDS: Yeah. I think I feel
19 it. And it's one thing to stand with and stand
20 alongside, but it's another thing to actually walk
21 the talk. So, we're starting to see that. So, a key
22 part is the workforce development because that's
23 developing the bench. That's supporting the bench to
24 advance from entry level to C suite and higher so we
25 can really put together a welcome environment where

1 folks can see themselves growing so when those
2 positions open, they can then step into them. When
3 those positions open, they are feeling like self-care
4 isn't me leading this white institution because I've
5 suffered so much. I've actually been able to
6 achieve, succeed, and move through the ranks. So, I
7 think there is and has been some change, but it's a
8 key part of developing the bench. You know, a
9 position like my in the COO suite, my plan is to be
10 here for a long time so, as a result, the next in
11 line waits until the day I leave. So that's why
12 workforce development is such an essential part of
13 shifting the cultures because true change happens
14 when a culture from the highest position all the way
15 through reflects diversity. If we're talking
16 predominantly then white institutions, there will be
17 missteps. There will be things that aren't
18 completely thought through in the right way, but if
19 we start to diversify the bench and diversify the
20 talent, we'll start to see a fabric of cultural
21 institutions that more accurately reflects New York
22 City. So, yes. There is change. I think workforce
23 development is a key part of that because we're
24 working to strengthen the bench so that when it's out
25

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2 time to step up, we have that ability to step into
3 these positions and lead them to a better and
4 brighter future.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
6 much, Atiba, for your testimony and for your work. I
7 know it's not easy to create the structural change
8 that you are engaged in particularly of these
9 institutions. I want to recognize Council member
10 Helen Rosenthal has joined our hearing today, as
11 well, and very, very thrilled that so many Council
12 members who are not on the committee have chosen to
13 attend this hearing. I think the tops is such--
14 Commissioner Casals, your cat is adorable behind you
15 there. But I do want to say I think we've been
16 joined by so many Council members who are not on this
17 cultural affairs committee because the topic is so
18 important and so relevant and everyone wants to be a
19 part of it which is great. With that, I will turn it
20 back over to our counsel for the second panel.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
22 Van Bramer. Before we move to the second panel, if
23 we could just check if there are any other Council
24 members who have questions for this panel. If you
25 could please raise your hand if you have questions.

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I see Council
3 member Rosenthal has raised her hand. Council member
4 Rosenthal, thank you for being here.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You have to
7 unmute Council member Rosenthal.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yep. Just got
9 the ability to do so. Thank you so much. And,
10 Jimmy, really, thank you for having this hearing.
11 You know, Inez Barron and her staff member, Indigo,
12 have been champions on this and I've been honored to
13 be brought into their circle mainly because my
14 district includes Central Park. So, I have been able
15 to be a part of the work to bring the Jay Marion Sims
16 statue down and I am delighted with the community who
17 found and supported Vinnie-- or Vinnie found us.
18 However, it worked. But I have to say I was just at--
19 - I just want to press on the point which everyone
20 has pressed home, Commissioner, so but if I could add
21 my two centers here, you know, the significance of
22 that sight is so important to just to community who
23 live around there as well as citywide as we, you
24 know, come to understand what Sims-- the torture
25 that Sims perpetrated on women. So, bringing down

1 the statue was very joyous and the other day we had a
2 press conference that was intended to be in front of
3 the new statue or the placard marking why the Sims
4 statue came down because the women at Mount Sinai
5 Hospital-- the women physicians and medical students
6 are suing the hospital and the medical school there
7 for gender discrimination.
8

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. Of
11 course, Council member, continue.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you.
13 And you should just know that it is incredibly
14 heartbreaking to show up and I thought the work was
15 already done. I just don't go over there often. I'm
16 not following this too closely. And to see that it
17 was still just the pedestal there with a placard that
18 I don't as anyone-- I don't think it's adequate. It
19 was very disappointing. I just want to double down
20 on what the Chair has said over and over and over
21 again. The significance of putting up the new
22 statue. I just can't-- I just want to double down
23 on what the Chair has said and what Council member
24 Barron has said and others in the community have
25 said. What Vinnie has created is very exciting and,

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1 given what is happening in the world for the past two
2 years, everyone is beyond excited to see the new
3 work, you know, if you are prioritizing things, I
4 really do hope that this is number one on your list.
5 There are so many people who want it and the Chair of
6 the Committee on Women in Gender, you should probably
7 more important to a lot of people that this new
8 statute, that Vinnie's statute goes up. So, think Q,
9 Chair for giving me a minute to share my thoughts.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you for
12 joining us and your important contributions to this
13 discussion Council member Rosenthal. I see Vinnie
14 has raised her hand. I don't know if Commissioner
15 Casals wants to respond to Council member Rosenthal
16 at all, but if the staff could unmute Vinnie who
17 wants to say something.

18 VINNIE BAGWELL: I just wanted to say
19 that the victory beyond Sims maquette is on view at
20 the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers until January 22nd
21 if anybody wants to [inaudible 02:21:39].

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Can you say
23 that again just so everyone has it and its in the
24 record?

25

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1
2 VINNIE BAGWELL: The maquette, the
3 miniature version of the sculpture that I'm
4 proposing, victory beyond Sims, the maquette is on
5 view at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York
6 through January, I believe 22nd. So, if anybody is
7 curious and they just want to see it up close, it's
8 on public view until January 2nd at the Hudson River
9 Museum in Yonkers, New York.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: That's
11 fantastic. Thank you all.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.
13 Thank you, Vinnie. Counsel?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank
15 you so much, Chair Van Bramer. With that, we'll move
16 to the next panel. I'll start by calling all of the
17 panelists and then call you one by one for your
18 testimony. So, the second public panel will be Taryn
19 Sacramone, Amy Andrieux-- and please excuse any
20 pronunciation errors. Rocky Bucano and Raymond
21 Codrington. So, next, we will start with Taryn
22 Sacramone.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

24 TARYN SACRAMONE: Hi. Good afternoon.
25 Thank you for creating this space for this morning's

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1 conversation. Chair, Majority Leader Cumbo,
2 Commissioner Casals, it feels like it has been a very
3 candid in already productive conversation. I am the
4 executive director of Queens Theater, executive vice
5 chair of the Cultural Institutions Group and coleader
6 of Culture Art Three. At the time of the theater's
7 closure, we were midway through a sold out round of a
8 new play called Chicken and Biscuits by a black
9 playwright with a black creative team, cast, and
10 producing team. It's a beautiful comedy, a love
11 letter to black families. We were selling tickets to
12 [inaudible 02:23:29] ballerinas and looking forward
13 to full houses of Queens public school children
14 watching a company of black ballerinas. Then COVID.
15 It was shattering to see communities of color,
16 especially hard hit by COVID, by the murder of George
17 Floyd, by resistance to the historic Black Lives
18 Matter movement. Seeing this trauma inflicted on our
19 colleagues in community, we created an online
20 affinity space for black women, trans, and non-binary
21 community members. We curated a place reading series
22 by black playwrights over the summer including one
23 that told the story of police brutality and its
24 affects on youth. Our staff members are doing the
25

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1 intensive anti-racism training with the People's
2 Institute for Survival and Beyond as part of a
3 consortium of performing arts organizations who are
4 members of the CIG. Along with Sade Lythcott of
5 National Black Theater and chair of the Coalition of
6 Theaters of Color and Lucy Sexton, New Yorkers for
7 Arts and Culture, I lead the culture at three daily
8 calls. There are hundreds of cultural leaders
9 representing institutions of all sizes and
10 disciplines across all boroughs. The partnership
11 that Majority Leader Cumbo spoke of earlier today,
12 the idea of larger organizations sharing resources
13 with smaller organizations, that's part of sort of
14 the day to day way that that space operates, although
15 I would say that it's a partnership both ways because
16 all organizational leaders are learning from each
17 other. A call dedicated to the top of racism in May
18 drew more than 250 leader. Individually and
19 collectively, the culture of the three communities
20 has been working to advance racial equity in the
21 cultural sector. We formed a working group which I
22 co-lead with Regina Bain, executive director of
23 Louis Armstrong House Museum, and Melissa Sanders,
24 strategic arts consultant. Dozens of leaders
25

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1 participate in biweekly meetings sharing resources
2 and strategies including skill building and
3 facilitation. Of course you heard Melody Capote of
4 Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute
5 launch the Arts Go Black initiative offering
6 antiracism training to dozens of Culture Three
7 participants. When the Coalition of Theaters of
8 Color was fully funded for this year, it was
9 celebrated as an important moment for all on a call.
10 There's a growing Pass the Mic Campaign where
11 organizations with large social media followings lend
12 their platforms to BIPOC-led organizations. Each CIG
13 member completed an access, diversity, inclusion
14 plan, but we've also been working together with--

15
16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

17 TARYN SACRAMONE: leadership. I'm proud
18 to be a member of the committee that [inaudible
19 02:25:57] meeting. I want to recognize the leaders
20 of Coalition of Theaters of Color and other BIPOC-led
21 organization because it's only because of their
22 decades of work that we have an opportunity to make
23 change for the better. The work is internal and
24 external, invisible, and visible, short and long-
25 term. Most importantly, it is ongoing. I want to

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1 support the recommendations that are being made by my
2 colleagues here today and I have more to say, but I'm
3 at a time.

4
5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
6 Taryn. Thank you. The Culture at Three calls have
7 really become a thing, to say the least. But thank
8 you for all your work.

9 TARYN'S SACRAMONE: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Next.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panelist
12 will be Amy Andrieux.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

14 AMY ANDRIEUX: Good afternoon, members
15 of city Council and colleagues. My name is Amy
16 Andrieux and I'm the executive director of the Museum
17 of Contemporary African Diaspora Art, aka MOCADA.
18 Thank you for the opportunity to address the critical
19 juncture that exists for my community. I will use
20 this time to point out the lack of parity
21 inconsistent support for museums like MOCADA who
22 serve the black community specifically. As you know,
23 MOCADA was born from the graduate thesis of our
24 founder and New York City Council Majority Leader
25 Laurie Cumbo on the feasibility of an African arts

1 museum contributing to the revitalization of
2 neighboring black communities, politically, socially,
3 economically. This origin story is similarly true
4 for many black arts institutions across the country.
5 Most, if not all, of our institutions were created
6 within a different cultural framework that are peers.
7 Our work is grounded in deconstructing colonial
8 systems through the cultural and artistic lands and
9 we welcome those who have been systemically left out
10 through arts education. The legacy of the cultural
11 equity groups [inaudible 02:27:41], the work of the
12 People's cultural plan and the cultural justice
13 initiative also speaks to this. Simply said, our
14 institutions have a double mandate or a double remit
15 that goes beyond just being arts and culture
16 practitioners or making art for art's sake. We are
17 critical resources for community. Safe spaces that
18 deliver mutual aid in all of its forms. Black lives
19 have always mattered. Black safety and social
20 justice have always been our work. And, yet,
21 nationally, African-American museums are underfunded
22 due to historical barriers and cultural preferences
23 for charitable giving. Only 6% of minority
24 organizations receive comparable funding from
25

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1 individual donors to the organization serving mostly
2 white patrons. Virtually none of us are accredited,
3 if you have endowments beyond, and many of us have
4 had to cut staff, programs, or projects in order to
5 remain open during non-COVID years. In recent weeks,
6 we have seen firsthand how fragile: COVID-19 and
7 racism, especially when placed in the hands of broad
8 legislation with little understanding of the nature
9 of our lives and the systemic limitations placed upon
10 them due to even slight hint of misinterpretation.
11 So where do we go from here? I leave you with three
12 questions to consider. How might the city and the
13 philanthropic community review the strategy work that
14 has already been done by thought leaders in the black
15 community then and now instead of seeking voices
16 outside of our community to speak for or collect data
17 on our behalf? Two, go beyond the performative to
18 allocate baselined funding for black arts
19 institutions that comparable to those received by
20 mainstream organization. And three, proactively
21 commit to a long-term plan. 50 years, 100 years to
22 ensure the sustainability of black arts institutions,
23 the livelihood of black artists, and the survival of
24 the communities that we serve. Thank you.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
3 much, Amy, for-- what's that? Thank you very much,
4 Amy, for your leadership at MOCADA and your three
5 core suggestions or recommendations, shall I say.
6 And absolutely all should and need to happen. And,
7 you know, I think the first thing we have to do is
8 commit as a city to not cutting funding for the arts
9 and that would be a start and then, you know,
10 obviously I've mentioned some ideas today. Obviously
11 a support, you know, cutting \$1 billion from the NYPD
12 at a minimum and reallocating those funds, but also I
13 called earlier for fair and aggressive taxation of
14 billionaires and corporations that would not force us
15 into this position of austerity where we are saying
16 we don't have any money, yet, Jeff Bezos is worth
17 \$250 billion. So, we can do these things if we have
18 the political will to reimagine how we operate as a
19 society. And that includes taking on the billionaire
20 class in a way that is real and reallocating
21 resources to the BIPOC communities, in particular,
22 who have been robbed of so much of those resources
23 that now sit in the hands of men like Jeff Bezos. I
24 shouldn't just single him out. He's not the only
25 straight, white, male billionaire in the world, but

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2 is the richest, so he gets top billing, so to speak.

3 So, thank you, Amy, for that and your leadership.

4 And I do want to also recognize and thank

5 Commissioner Casals for staying at these hearings.

6 When we use to have them at City Hall, the

7 commissioner would normally speak and then, after she

8 or he took questions from Council members would leave

9 the hearing in Commissioner Casals, since taking on

10 this job, is committed to staying and listening to

11 all of the public testimony. So, I just want to

12 recognize that from the Commissioner and thank him

13 for that. Amy, thank you again I will move on to the

14 next panelist.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very
16 much, Chair Van Bramer. The third member of this
17 panel will be rocky Bucano. Mr. Bucano, you may
18 start when the Sergeant calls the clock.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

20 ROCKY BUCANO: Thank you, Council
21 members. New York City Council members. Thank you,
22 Chair Van Bramer and thank you Majority Leader Laurie
23 Cumbo. My name is Rocky Bucano. I am the executive
24 director of the Universal Hip Hop Museum and I am
25 bringing you my testimony from our Revolution of Hip

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1 Hop experience which is a temporary sneak preview of
2 the future Museum which will be located at the Bronx
3 Point. I would like to bring up a few issues. I
4 think the opening testimony by Majority Leader
5 Councilwoman Cumbo was indicative of everything that
6 hip pop represents. Hip-hop has always been the
7 voice of the voiceless. It is been in the middle of
8 the Black Lives Matter discussion since its
9 inception. So, to us, Black Lives Matter has always
10 been part of the fabric of hip pop and hip-hop, as
11 everyone knows, is New York's most well you treasure
12 of music, dance, fashion, lifestyle, or for that has,
13 basically, been adopted in every part of the world.
14 When we opened the Revolution of Hip Pop back in
15 December, we had to-- you know, like everyone else,
16 we closed March 15th, but prior to closing, we had
17 welcomed more than 10,000 visitors from all around
18 the world and that is just a sample of the kind of
19 tourism that the museum would generate once it opens,
20 hopefully, in 2023, which is the 50th anniversary of
21 hip-hop. We were supposed to start construction on
22 our project in June with our development partners L
23 and M Development. The museum is part of a larger
24 mixed-use development project which I think everyone
25

1 knows, called the Bronx Point. I know we are
2 hoping-- you know, we are in discussions with HPD
3 and the Department of Cultural Affairs that we can
4 close on this project this December and begin
5 construction right away so that we don't miss this
6 major milestone which is the 50th anniversary of hip
7 up in 2023. The Universal Hip Hop Museum has, since
8 we been operating and we have been bootstrapping for
9 over eight years, we participated in a variety of
10 different projects, including a benefit to help New
11 York City frontline healthcare workers. We did a
12 benefit called New York-- Hip Hop Loves New York in
13 April and we raised approximately \$73,000 to support
14 [inaudible 02:35:17] community which is a nonprofit
15 organization and the Bronx Community Relief Effort
16 and we were surprised at our funding request for
17 program--

18
19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

20 ROCKY BUCANO: was not granted in this
21 year's city budget. So, we're just hoping that the
22 city Council and Commissioner Casals recognizes the
23 importance of this museum because we do represent the
24 entire spirit of everything that we're talking about
25 in today's testimony and public hearing.

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
3 Rocky, for all of your work and we look forward to
4 visiting when we can. Just a point of clarity, who
5 is your local representative there?

6 ROCKY BUCANO: We have two.
7 Councilwoman Ayala and Councilman Salamanca.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Got it. Okay.
9 That's helpful to know.

10 ROCKY BUCANO: And Chairman--

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yep?

12 ROCKY BUCANO: We will be reopening on
13 November 5th. We have a VIP opening next Friday,
14 October 30th and I invite all of the Council members
15 to come. We have a COVID screen here, so we are
16 partnering with a company called Sauder Technologies
17 and they have a digital health gateway that scans
18 people for COVID. So, it measures your ambient
19 temperature, your breathing capacity, your oxygen
20 level, your heartrate, and it gives you-- within 20
21 seconds, it lets you know if any of those vital signs
22 are off. So, that is just one of the steps that the
23 museum is taking to ensure that the public is
24 protected when we do real bed in a couple weeks.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you for
3 the invitation and I also want to just say that,
4 instead of looking at everyone's bookcases like mine
5 or behind their living rooms, you win for the most
6 interesting backdrop in this hearing because of the
7 art that is behind you. I even took you off the wide
8 pan of everyone just wanted to look at what was
9 behind you as you are speaking because it is so
10 interesting.

11 ROCKY BUCANO: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
13 much, Rocky, and we'll hear from the next speaker.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
15 Chair Van Bramer. The last member of this panel will
16 be Raymond Codrington.

17 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time-- Sorry. Time
18 starts now.

19 RAYMOND CODRINGTON: Good afternoon. My
20 name is Raymond Codrington and I am the executive
21 director of Hi-Arts. We are located at Barrios Art
22 Space PS 109 in East Harlem. We are a leading
23 cultural hub within the urban arts movement for over
24 20 years. We have provided unique development
25 opportunities to artists of color, always placing

1 issues of equity and social justice at the forefront.

2 To date we have supported works by over 1500 lead

3 artists and we serve an audience of over 10,000

4 annually at our home and nationally with a local

5 audience that is 75% black and or Latin X. We are

6 currently in the midst of a once in a lifetime crisis

7 with two global pandemics converging. That of

8 structural racism and COVID-19. With that said, what

9 will the Council's response be and what side of

10 history will it be on when we look back at this time?

11 As we consider defunding the police and distributing

12 funds and revenue to the arts, can New York City

13 serve as a national model that speaks to the cultural

14 worth and economic viability of the art sector?

15 These are definitely challenging time and it is

16 obvious that structural racism does not pause during

17 the pandemic. But we remain optimistic about the

18 resilience of the arts to create change and help us

19 recover and we imagined notions of community. We, as

20 arts organizations, are uniquely positioned to frame

21 discussions, programming, and partnerships that

22 address structural racism. What is clear is we

23 cannot go back to business as usual. The public,

24 frankly, won't allow it. The stakes are too high and

25

1 the time is now. A recent study by the Philanthropic
2 Initiative for Racial Equity shows that 8.9 percent
3 of grant making in foundations goes into communities
4 of color in the US. Another recent report cited in
5 the Chronicle of Philanthropy, states that, when
6 awarded funds, the unrestricted assets granted to
7 nonprofits to leaders of color was 76% smaller than
8 those with organizations with white leadership.
9 While we are hopeful that philanthropic community
10 will take note of the stark disparities and
11 prioritize funding for organizations dedicated and
12 led by people of color, we also need public support
13 from our local government and not just private
14 foundations. Maintaining initiative funding for the
15 Coalition of Theaters of Color in FY 21 was a huge
16 win for our community and a great first step, so
17 thank you for that. It is time for civic leaders to
18 adopt an anti-racist lens, continue to affirm that
19 black lives matter, and support organizations who
20 have been here doing the work long before diversity,
21 equity, and inclusion were popular terms. With
22 that, we thank Chair Van Bramer, the members of the
23 committee, DCLA, and the city at large for its
24 partnership. Thank you.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
3 much for your testimony and, you know, maintaining
4 the funding for the Coalition of Theaters of Color
5 should be, you know, the baseline of what we start
6 from and then actually adopt that lens, as you
7 discussed, when it comes to funding for culture and
8 the arts. I believe that Majority Leader Cumbo has
9 raised her hand and I would like to ask her to say a
10 few words.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

12 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Raymond, I want to
13 thank you for your presentation. I mean, it really
14 spoke to so many of the things that, essentially,
15 inspired me to run for office. When I first came
16 into the Council, I was part of an organization--
17 and I'm still part of the organization-- the
18 Cultural Equity Group in talking very much about that
19 level of equity and highlighting for many for the
20 world to see the inequities in corporate, foundation,
21 and governmental funding for organizations of color.
22 And I know for Council member Van Bramer, it was a
23 huge feat to be able to protect to the Theaters of
24 Color Initiative and program when really severe cuts
25 were being made to the budget and all agencies across

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1 the board at all disciplines and I am happy that we
2 are able to work together with the support of the
3 theaters of color to make sure that we protected that
4 level of funding. But today's hearing for me,
5 Council member Van Bramer, was really so important
6 because this really highlights how important the work
7 is and it really shows that we have so much more to
8 do today take way deeper because we are going to pull
9 through this pandemic, but when we pull through this
10 pandemic, it cannot be business as usual. It has to
11 be a new framework, a new rubric, a new way of
12 funding and supporting and promoting and celebrating
13 all organizations of all cultural backgrounds,
14 breaking down those boundaries of words like minority
15 and majority and having a space in the city of New
16 York. Because when we can create that level playing
17 field, whether it is funding or other ways, then we
18 start to tear apart racism. As long as we continue
19 to disproportionately fund certain communities over
20 other communities, the dynamics of racism are still
21 alive and well. So, I will just end their and,
22 again, thank you for all of those who have been on
23 this panel today. You could have been so many
24 places, but I appreciate you. I appreciate you,
25

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1 Commissioner Casals, for being on this call. I
2 remember a time before I entered the Council after
3 the Commissioners did their opening speech, answered
4 a few questions from members, they were gone. So,
5 this level of communication and interest is critical,
6 but now we have got to turn to the revolution. So,
7 thank you all so much. And thank you so much, Van
8 Bramer. This was a brilliant panel in conversation
9 that needed to be had.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much, Majority Leader, and, indeed, we are at the
13 very beginning of the transformation. And we also
14 have many more participants and speakers to go, so I
15 do think this is been a very important hearing and,
16 in some ways, historic. But we are not done by a
17 long shot. But we have many more people from the
18 public who would like to speak. So, I will ask the
19 Council to call the next panel.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
21 Chair Van Bramer. Before we moved to the next panel,
22 can we please double check that there are no Council
23 members who have questions for this panel? We're not
24 seeing any hands so we are going to move on. So, I
25 will read the next panel and then call you one by

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1 one. The next panel-- and apologies for
2 mispronouncing any names-- will be Alton Aimable, TJ
3 Mohammed, Lucy Sexton, and Patrick Jaojoco. Mr.
4 Aimable, Alton Aimable, when the Sergeant calls the
5 clock, you may begin your testimony.
6

7 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

8 ALTON AIMABLE: I would like to thank
9 Chairman Van Bramer and the rest of the city Council,
10 including Council member Laurie Cumbo for having this
11 hearing will black lives matter including black art.
12 It has always mattered and in this pandemic in this
13 revolution that we are in, it is important that the
14 voices of our cultural institutions be heard. I want
15 to focus on an area of why it is important to fund
16 cultural institutions and black cultural institutions
17 such as mine, an organization called Tropicalfete
18 that provides cultural programming for both youth and
19 seniors. By them having the ability to come to our
20 program, we teach them the history, we teach them
21 their heritage. Therefore, they have an opportunity,
22 the community and grow from there. We appreciate the
23 funding we get from the city Council, but is it
24 enough? The question is always no. but it's
25 important that you guys understand the work being

1 done. For example, someone learning how to play a
2 steelpan should also know the history behind playing
3 the steelpan and someone walking on stilts would
4 learn the history that this came from Africa and
5 walking across the Caribbean on stilts was how we
6 told our story. So, it is important for us to tell
7 the stories of our culture by our people and not be
8 dictated by other people in terms of their vision or
9 how we are all seen in different likeness. I
10 appreciate, appreciate any opportunity we have to, on
11 a stage to just showcase our culture because, in
12 doing that, what I have seen is culture can be used
13 as a tool to destroy racism because many people from
14 different cultural groups come and say, oh, cool.
15 Oh, this is beautiful. I have never danced on stilts
16 before. Could we try it? And that unity and culture
17 and arts, we need to put that together. I just want
18 to ask one question in reference to the Commissioner.
19 He mentioned multiple year funding for small
20 institutions. When will the program be started?

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Can we unmute
23 the Commissioner?

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I still don't know
25 exactly when that's going to happen. Hopefully on

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1 the next round of grants would be-- if you were to
2 apply in February, we're going to be able to put that
3 in motion.

4
5 ALTON AIMABLE: Okay. So that's for FY
6 22?

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: 22. Yes. 21 is
8 already is motion. So--

9 ALTON AIMABLE: Understood.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Anything else,
11 Alton, or--

12 ALTON AIMABLE: That's it. I see the
13 Council member has a question.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sure. We can go
15 through the panel and hold-- Is it okay, Chair, if
16 we go through the rest of the panel and then hold
17 Council member questions to the end of the panel?

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, if the
19 Majority Leader has a question for Alton specifically
20 are the Commissioner, I am more than fine with her
21 asking her question.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Majority Leader
23 Cumbo?

24 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

25

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1
2 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I don't have a
3 question. I just want to say as we would if we were
4 in person, I just love Tropicalfete and they do
5 incredible work and I just love that organization
6 because they are so centered around our youth and
7 children and, in this movement in this time, all the
8 work that we can do to focus on our young people is
9 so critical. And so, I thank you so much for your
10 leadership and for your work and for giving our
11 children a platform. And as soon as I can, my son is
12 going to be right over there with you playing the--

13 ALTON AIMABLE: My background, actually,
14 is the studio that's in your district. So, we're
15 looking forward to welcoming your son at Complete
16 Music Studio.

17 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Wonderful. Thank
18 you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And, counsel,
20 any Council member can interject at any point if they
21 are going to praise our cultural organizations and,
22 particularly, their work with children. So, that is
23 a beautiful thing. It was next?

24

25

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1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank
3 you so much, Chair and thank you so much, Majority
4 Leader. Our next witness will be Tijay Mohammed.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

6 TIJAY MOHAMMED: Good morning and Salam
7 to everyone. Mr. Chairman, Commissioner, Council
8 members, community leaders, fellow artists, I also
9 acknowledge Vinnie who has been a very great
10 inspiration to a lot of the things that I do in
11 public arts. Thank you for the opportunity to
12 testify today in Black Live Matter Anti-Racism and
13 Structural Racism in the Arts. I'm a multi-
14 disciplinary artist from the Bronx. I was born in
15 Ghana. The process of my artistic practice is just
16 deposing my personal and historical references
17 including in community stories. I [inaudible
18 02:50:27] in symbolic engaging discoveries which are
19 sometimes viewed as group portraits or community
20 portraits. I communicate the hopefulness and
21 discarded remains of our lives. Among many ways that
22 I've done it in the public is a recent one that I
23 designed the word black in Black Lives Matter mural
24 which is Four Leaf Square in front of the
25 courthouses. I'm inspired by a code by Nelson

1 Mandela which says it is in your hands to create a
2 better world for all who live in it. We all know for
3 centuries art has remained a leading goal in changing
4 the world and putting it where it's supposed to be.
5 In the US, we see it clearly as a way of how art has
6 been able to change and engage communities. And
7 also, most importantly, I'm teaching our children and
8 encouraging them to think big. Personally, I've been
9 supported by the Bronx Council of the Arts to the
10 DCLA and in creating story circles that is where I
11 seek inspiration for the work that I do through
12 mosques, churches, communities, and sidewalks. In
13 addressing the Black Lives Matter mural-- In
14 designing my Black Lives Matter mural, I was thinking
15 about what it means to be black, what I means to be
16 black in America, and what it means to be black at
17 this moment. Most of the stories that I've collected
18 are a lamentation of people about stepping out of
19 their homes and being afraid to do that and even
20 staying at home and being killed while they are
21 enjoying time with families and loved ones just like
22 Breonna Taylor. I was born in Ghana. Amadou Diallo
23 was born in Guinea yet he was killed here in the
24 Bronx. I remember a lot of the conversation I've had
25

1 with his mom of how she lamented on how the dreams
2 that Amadou Diallo had and the families he supported
3 even here in the Bronx and, most importantly, in
4 Africa which seeks to be all our roots and identity.
5 I interpret the word black in looking at what it
6 means in terms of our care and climate change in the
7 world because it's not only about the color black,
8 but it is also about living in your minority. It is
9 also about the LGBTQ--

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

12 TIJAY MOHAMMED: pallet. Symbolically, I
13 emphasize all of this and pay homage to the African
14 burial ground and respect to that much by Dr. King in
15 1963. Many brothers and sisters have been killed,
16 families have been broken, our aspirations have been
17 shut down. Martyrs and children who are the backbone
18 throughout our nations have all had their dreams
19 shuttered. I know the history of a nation is
20 embedded and rooted deeply in people and we all know
21 the history of New York in America is embedded in
22 black [inaudible 02:53:26] and minority. Finally, I
23 urge all to support our cultural institutions and
24 encourage them to do conceptual programs. New York
25 City, in general, has been a leader in changing the

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1 world. Inspiration, conceptually, aesthetically, and
2 also activism for people around the world. I will
3 end by [inaudible 02:53:51] Nelson Mandela's quote
4 and saying it is in our hands to make New York City a
5 better place for all who live and visit it. Thank
6 you.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
9 much, Mr. Mohammed, for sharing your story and your
10 work with us and, as a queer man, I want to thank you
11 for mentioning the LGBTQ community which is the first
12 time that we've recognized the LGBT community today.
13 So thank you for that inclusion.

14 TIJAY MOHAMMED: Thank you. You're
15 welcome.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I believe
17 Council member Rosenthal has raised her hand.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yes.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: If there's a
21 question or comment from Council member Rosenthal
22 before we go to the next panelist.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You are unmuted,
25 Council member.

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1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you very
3 much. Mr. Mohammed, I'm listening to you describe
4 your story and just very enthralled. I'm wondering
5 where your mural is.

6 TIJAY MOHAMMED: Yeah. The one for Black
7 Live Matter is in front of the courthouses downtown
8 by Foley's Square.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Foley's
10 Square. Oh, wow. Okay.

11 TIJAY MOHAMMED: I designed the word
12 black.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Can you give a
14 specific address? Just for the record, I would love
15 this to be in the record. I would love this to be
16 in the record.

17 TIJAY MOHAMMED: I think Commissioner
18 Gonzalo could give the exact, but I know it's in
19 front of the courthouses by the [inaudible 02:55:33]
20 courthouses next to the [inaudible 02:55:38] or
21 sculpture piece that is right opposite the court
22 houses by Foley's Square. But the street has been
23 named Black Lives Matter Boulevard.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah. Yeah.
25

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2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: It starts at the
3 municipal building and finishes in front of the
4 courthouse.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Great. Thank
6 you. I just wanted to make sure that got in the
7 record. Beautiful. Beautiful work. Thank you.
8 Thank you, Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.
10 Who is next?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.
12 The next panelist will be Lucy Sexton from New
13 Yorkers for Culture and the Arts.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

15 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer,
16 Majority Leader Cumbo, Commissioner Casals, and
17 members of the city Council for this important and
18 urgent hearing. My name is Lucy Sexton. I am with
19 the cultural advocacy coalition, New Yorkers for
20 Culture and Arts. A few days after the murder of
21 George Floyd, John Wright of the Wright Group spoke
22 to hundreds of cultural groups on our Culture at
23 Three call. Among other powerful and devastating
24 remarks, he asked us, in this crisis, whose jobs
25 would be the first to go? Which groups would be the

1 first to close? It would be the lower paid workers,
2 the lower budget organizations, both of which are
3 disproportionately BIPOC identified. This is indeed
4 what is now happening. I just found out that Artiste
5 New York, that the only cultural center in that area
6 of Brooklyn has officially closed. I know that many
7 today will speak of the work being done by the arts
8 and culture sector to examine and exercise the
9 scourge of racism in ourselves and our organization.
10 We also need to talk about a radical reimagining of
11 New York City's cultural landscape. We cannot come
12 out of this terrible time with a decimated arts and
13 culture landscape that is more white and more
14 centralized than it was before and we need your help,
15 Counsel. It is not just money. It is also policy.
16 In the 70s, the city was broke and artists moved into
17 empty industrial spaces and Soho. Because the scene
18 was almost entirely unfunded, it was largely white
19 artists from middle-class backgrounds. When
20 commercial interests wanted that neighborhood, the
21 city created a system of artist certification which
22 kept artists in the AI are buildings, but the city
23 limited artist certification to those living in that
24 small section of Soho. What if the Council now
25

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1 opened up the artist certification process which
2 still exists and functions to include artists living
3 throughout the five boroughs? What if we certify
4 artists performing in Rooted Theater in Brownsville
5 dancing with Full Circle Souljahs in the Bronx? Or
6 playing world-class salsa at Terraza Seven in Queens?
7 What if being certified meant you had access to
8 artist housing, freelance artist health insurance,
9 discounts at cultural institutions? Then kids would
10 see that being an artist in their neighborhood, not
11 just in Soho, was valued and was a viable option for
12 making a living. And many other policies to look at
13 which might fundamentally change not just the
14 demographics of the cultural field, but the shape of
15 the sector and who gets included. I talked to a
16 theater maker yesterday who was asked by the
17 administration to produce an outdoor event and told
18 the city would reimburse, but she would have to put
19 up \$30,000 to do the event first. That kind of
20 system necessarily favors groups with deep pockets.
21 The system is entrenched in economic practices which
22 tend to keep the field white and middle-class. As we
23 dismantle it and rethink it, let's start by going to
24 where cultural is already happening in every
25

1 community and seeing what we can do to support it
2 there. We were also so grateful and pleased that the
3 city Council made weeks will heritage center a member
4 of the cultural Institute group last year, but there
5 is no transparency to that process still. Let's make
6 it intentional and clear that we will--

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

9 LUCY SEXTON: that recognizes and invests
10 in organizations run by and serving BIPOC people. I
11 will and by remembering a woman's testimony in the
12 first COVID hearing at the Council back in April at
13 the height of the horror. She said, why is it the
14 same communities dating back to red lining that are
15 hardest hit by these crises and when, at long last,
16 the people in those communities, when are they going
17 to be given when the time comes to figure out how to
18 recover? Let's build a new city with those voices at
19 the center of the conversation. Thank you so much
20 for the opportunity to testify.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
22 Lucy for your advocacy, your passion, and your
23 suggestion for a very good piece of legislation.
24 Which I just asked my legislative director to pursue
25 based on your testimony. And absolutely support the

1 transformation. I see that Council member Barron has
2 a question. I want to call on her right away.

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, Chair--

5 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Van Bramer. Thank
7 you. I just heard Artiste New York referenced in the
8 testimony, so I just wanted to give acknowledgment to
9 the great work that they've done while they were
10 functioning here and how they involved the community
11 at a very functional and grassroots level and we
12 certainly appreciate all of the work that they have
13 done. Presentations and how they have stimulated
14 children's minds. And I do want to just call
15 attention to the fact that we do have another arts
16 group that is doing and working here and that is the
17 Victory Music and Dance, directed by Nicole Williams.
18 They are doing a great job, as well. And I just
19 wanted to give them a shout out. Thank you.

20 LUCY SEXTON: Great. I just want to say
21 that the story that I was referencing was Catherine
22 and Bale Green Johnson when she founded Artiste New
23 York. She talked about that she was founding it
24 because there were so few opportunities for her kids
25 to take dance class or study without leaving the

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1 neighborhood. I'm very glad to hear about Victory
2 Music and Dance, as well. Thanks, Council member.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
5 Council member Barron. Majority Leader Cumbo?

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now. You
7 are still on mute, Majority Leader.

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I definitely want
9 to thank you, Ms. Sexton, for your presentation. I
10 too am very upset and disappointed and saddened by
11 the closing of Artiste New York. A phenomenal
12 organization and in a community that does not have a
13 plethora of organizations and is certainly you need
14 more cultural opportunities and expressions and it is
15 imperative and important that we make sure that the
16 organizations, as well as the leadership of those
17 organizations are sustained, held together, and
18 supported at all levels. The district like mine has
19 thousands of organizations that I am responsible for
20 supporting. So, it is important that we make sure
21 that, and organizations like Artiste New York and in
22 those communities are well supported and cared for
23 and nurtured, particularly during this time. So, I
24 certainly appreciate that and look forward to working
25 with you Chair Van Bramer on that legislation.

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

3 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Some really good
4 ideas are coming out of this hearing and, Assembly
5 member Roger Greene has said that demonstration
6 without legislation leads to frustration. So, it is
7 important that we keep these ideas percolating so
8 that we can make sure that those critical community-
9 based organizations sustain themselves.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: absolutely.

11 Thank you very much both Council member Barron and
12 Majority Leader Cumbo. Who is next?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL:

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much, Chair
15 Van Bramer. The last member of this panel will be
16 Patrick Jaojoco. Again, apologies for any
17 mispronunciation. Mr. Jaojoco, you may begin when
18 the Sergeant calls the clock.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

20 PATRICK JAOJOCO: No worries about that.

21 And thank you and good afternoon Chairperson Jimmy
22 Van Bramer, Commissioner Gonzalo Casals, and members
23 of the committee. My name is Patrick Jaojoco. I am
24 a first generation Filipino-American cultural
25 organizer and arts worker calling in from occupied

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1 land of Lenape and Canarsie people in Brooklyn, New
2 York. I am testifying today on behalf of arts
3 workers for black lives, and organizing body the New
4 York City artists and art workers seated from an open
5 letter of the same title released: June 3 now
6 dedicated to decolonization, abolition and
7 reparations in the arts economy and beyond. We are
8 here to demand equitable redistribution of public
9 funds to the most vulnerable arts workers and
10 divestment from NYPD cooperation and enforcement in
11 the cultural sphere. Black, indigenous, and people
12 of color arts workers disproportionately hold the
13 most precarious jobs in the arts as freelance artist,
14 entry level administrators, curatorial assistants,
15 teaching artists, front of house staff and more. We
16 are the lifeblood of New York City's cultural economy
17 and we face the multiple pressures of the present
18 COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent layoffs. A wall
19 along with historic systemic racism in the cultural
20 sector and in our day-to-day lives. The steps taken
21 by DCL they, including relief and support packages
22 have been complicit in materially prioritizing
23 institutional bottom lines in the interests of their
24 most senior leadership, while continuing to
25

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1 homogenize and insufficiently resource the lives of
2 the wage workers and lower income employees whose
3 labor undergirds this economy. I implore you all to
4 move away from discussing the arts as an abstract
5 idea and instead re-center artist and art workers,
6 particularly black and indigenous people of color and
7 low income workers. We ask that you publicly
8 acknowledge the complicity of DCL I and systemic
9 oppression, beginning with the material construction
10 of city funded cultural institutions on stolen land
11 with stolen wealth gotten from economies of slavery,
12 indentured servitude, and American imperialism. We
13 also ask that you defund all coordination of NYPD
14 contracts in accordance with the demands made by the
15 historic black led movements and uprisings in our
16 city. Finally, we ask that you publicly release date
17 of cultural institutions investments in local law
18 enforcement. In conclusion, it is imperative that
19 the DCL a and the cultural institutions of our city
20 take heed of these historic uprisings and pressures
21 of the COVID-19 pandemic as a moment to truly reckon
22 with the root causes of structural racism in our
23 sector and beyond, being the occupation of indigenous
24 land in history as an ongoing legacy of enslavement
25

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2 and imperialism. In order to move forward as a
3 cultural sector, we need to materially center the
4 voices and needs of BIPOC wage workers, not the
5 bottom lines of large institutions founded in
6 extractive economies. That's it. Thank you for your
7 time and I concede my time.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
9 much. You said an awful lot in two minutes and 50
10 seconds and incredibly challenging and powerful
11 testimony and I don't think Commissioner Casals is
12 free to weigh in, but may not want to. It is not
13 required to. But I appreciate everything you said,
14 Patrick and take it to heart. Commissioner Casals,
15 did you want to address any of that? No? Okay. But
16 I think you, Patrick, very much for joining us and
17 challenging us in those ways. Counsel, is there more
18 on this panel or--?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No, Chair van
20 Bramer. This is the last member of the panel, so if
21 we could just check for any other Council member
22 questions before we move forward? We are not seeing
23 any hands.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So, we will move to
3 the next panel. I will call the members of the panel
4 and then call you individually to testify. The
5 members of this panel will be Lisa Gold, Antonio
6 Serna, Alejandra Duque Cifuentes. I am so sorry.
7 Please excuse the pronunciation. And Nicole Touzien.
8 The first member of the panel will be Lisa Gold.
9 You may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.
10 Thank you.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

12 LISA GOLD: Good afternoon. Thank you.
13 My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive Director
14 of the Asian American Arts Alliance, or A4 for short.
15 We are a 37-year-old Brooklyn-based service
16 organization dedicated to ensuring greater
17 representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian
18 American artists and arts organizations and I want to
19 thank you, thank the Council and the Commissioner for
20 your work and for the opportunity to share my
21 testimony with you today. We all know that the city
22 has been rocked by the COVID pandemic and its effects
23 have disproportionately affected people of color.
24 The Asian American community has reported an increase
25 in unemployment from two and a half percent in

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1 February to 15% in May, the greatest rated increase
2 among all racial groups across the country. And I'm
3 not going to even get into the shameful spike in
4 anti-Asian racism and racist attacks on our
5 community. But I am going to call on the city
6 Council to acknowledge the deep loss affecting the
7 Asian American community and for the Council and the
8 Department of Cultural Affairs to discontinue its
9 practice of perpetrating an equitable funding to
10 Asian Americans, further exacerbating this crisis,
11 starkly revealed by the pandemic. Asian Americans
12 make up nearly 16% of the population of the city of
13 New York yet, in FY 20, an API serving organizations
14 received only 3% of program funding from the
15 Department of Cultural Affairs. In FY 20, the
16 average DCL IT program grant was about \$46,000. But
17 the average grant to an API organizations was only
18 \$31,000. So, I want to know why do we deserve 32%
19 less than other organizations. Why are we only
20 receiving 4% of grants when we make up almost 16% of
21 the population? So, I'm asking for equity. That's
22 all. No more, no less. I mean, I totally get that
23 the city has very hard budget choices to make, but
24 continuing to underfund Asian American artists and
25

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1 arts organizations on top of the devastating losses
2 our community is facing, it is just unconscionable
3 for a budget that was negotiated with the focus on
4 achieving equity, particularly for low income
5 communities of color. So, I hope that by being fully
6 transparent in funding decisions and through the
7 release of BIPOC funding statistics, that the city
8 Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs can
9 demonstrate its commitment to racial equity. And so,
10 I ask that funds be allocated equitably across the
11 city population and also publish those statistics
12 demonstrating that commitment. And also, I am going
13 to throw in a plug for the Communities of Color
14 Nonprofit Stabilization Fund because it is critical
15 to building capacity and ensuring that organizations
16 serving people of color continue to survive and
17 thrive. So, with that, I see my time. Thank you
18 very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
21 Lisa. I appreciate your testimony and, again,
22 challenging both the Council and the Department of
23 Cultural Affairs. I think one thing we absolutely
24 agree on is that the budget that we just adopted was
25 not fair and just and equitable and that is why I

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1 voted against it. So, we will-- we need to do
2 better and you have every right and should hold us
3 accountable. So, Commissioner Casals and I am sure
4 will be talking about all of this anymore. Thank you
5 for being here in for speaking to also be
6 stabilization fund, but thanks.
7

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

9 Chair Van Bramer, I'm going to move to the next
10 panelist. That person will be Antonio Serna. You
11 may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

13 ANTONIA SERNA: Good morning, Chairman
14 Jimmy Van Bramer and Commissioner Gonzalo Casals and
15 members of the DCL A. My name is Antonio Serna. I
16 am the co-organizer of Museum Workers Happy Hour. It
17 was a happy hour created by you and for Museum
18 workers of New York City. Our goal was to bring
19 together Museum and cultural workers from across the
20 city to share our experiences, workplace improvement
21 strategies, and as a platform to empower rank-and-
22 file workers and how to help shape museums and
23 cultural institutions from the ground up. I am
24 testifying today specifically from the Museum Workers
25 Happy Our black, indigenous, people of color workers

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1 working group which focuses on the intersectional
2 conditions of BIPOC Museum workers, as well as the
3 needs of BIPOC communities. The situation has become
4 apparent that the an eternal mistreatment and
5 discrimination of workers of color inside
6 predominantly white institutions has gone from bad to
7 worse in these difficult times. It has been noticed
8 in the press and on social media by activist groups
9 like For the Culture, Change the Museum, Artists for
10 Workers, and To Decolonize This Place to name a few.
11 We have compiled a list of what we have been hearing,
12 seeing, and experiencing, but, due to time, I just
13 want to read one point. It's that some of these
14 institutions representing their community
15 organization relationships and DEI implementations
16 that were initiated by BIPOC workers who now have
17 been laid off and now there a few, if any, BIPOC
18 workers with institutional knowledge left at these
19 institutions. This equates into a loss of a
20 generation in the failure of DEI clean hands to
21 empower and protect workers of color. So, what needs
22 to be done? This new level of intensity calls for
23 urgent attention and immediate action from your
24 committee. Museums and cultural institutions both
25

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1 receive so much support from the citizens and we need
2 this racial discrimination-- this reciprocal
3 relationship between the community and these
4 institutions that was once 10 US is now shattered and
5 broken and requires impactful strategies, including
6 considering legal ramifications, assessing damages,
7 and imposing penalties to the full extent of the law
8 rather than slow-moving, superficial performative
9 changes in order to build a new. For one, we would
10 like a citywide review of DTI plans reviewed by an
11 external counsel. And we suggest the Council
12 decomposed of organizations historically rooted in
13 fighting racism, community members most affected by
14 cultural racism, and BIPOC rank-and-file Museum
15 workers. All with the support of the New York City
16 Commission on Human Rights. Such rooted
17 organizations might include NAACP, National Urban
18 League, and the Congress for Racial Equality. Due
19 to the situation--

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

22 ANTONIO SERNA: requires further
23 evaluation. But next we need to think about the
24 fight racism under the current COVID situation which,
25 as you all know, it has affected front facing workers

1 of color more than anyone within the city of New
2 York. As we re-converged this summer, it is been
3 obvious that many layoffs were in added emotional and
4 mental shock to many. For one, just a few years
5 back, some of these institutions had millions in
6 their endowments and were raising money, millions
7 more, to expand and rebuild their museums. But, for
8 some reason, they couldn't do the same for the
9 workers in such desperate needs. In any ethical work
10 environment-- and we should hope that the arts are
11 maintaining nothing less-- simple solutions could
12 have been implemented. These workers have been
13 unfairly terminated after decades of service in the
14 industry and so this, too, should be reevaluated.
15 And we feel that outspoken BIPOC workers and union
16 workers have been targeted unfairly under this
17 current situation. And, yet, we had the evening yet
18 to discuss how many workers were forced to sign these
19 nondisclosure agreements under such desperate
20 economic, physical, and mental pressure imposed by
21 COVID-19. What is that even legal? Certainly not
22 ethical. Conclusion. The diversity and culture that
23 New York City embodies is currently, to the point,
24 hasn't been truly represented or supported by CIG's
25

1 historically. For cultural institutions who have
2 value in the community they supposedly serve, they
3 should do more and care for the support of the
4 communities in which they inhabit. Which also
5 includes rank-and-file workers and their
6 institutions. In addition to reconciling the past
7 including cultural reparations which I brought up
8 many times before. The claimed diversity and
9 inclusion for the sake of publicity or to pause them
10 under this pandemic is not only disingenuous, but it
11 also propagates further exploitation of the
12 communities that these institutions occupy.

13 Respectfully, Museum Workers Happy Our and the BIPOC
14 Workers Working Group. Thank you.

15
16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
17 Antonio and I wanted to hear everything you had to
18 say. Very powerful and challenging and look forward
19 to hearing more from you and the working group.
20 There's some really good and constructive suggestions
21 in there, as well, as the call to justice. So, thank
22 you very much.

23 ANTONIO SERNA: Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
25 Chair Van Bramer. The next panelist will be

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Alejandra Duque Cifuentes. Excuse me again. From
Dance NYC.

SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Hello. Thank
you for having me, Chair Van Bramer and committee
members and Commissioner. It is always a pleasure to
be in conversation with you all. My name is
Alejandra Duque Cifuentes and I am the executive
director of Dance NYC serving the dance industry and
sector here in the metropolitan area. I am a Queens
based worker, but we serve the entire city. I am
speaking to you on behalf of the dance workers, dance
organizations for a nonprofit entities that provide
dance services to the city and that nurture the
cultural sector. In the midst of a racial and health
pandemic and the necessary resurgence of the movement
for black lives, one of the most significant civil
rights movements of our generation, and the most
recent signing of the executive order 13950 by the
White House occupant, Dance NYC has been working
tirelessly to ensure that dance workers and
organizations, particularly those led by and serving
black, indigenous, and peoples of color, immigrant,
and disabled communities are supported and resourced.

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1 On June 22, I testified before this Committee and on
2 September 15 before city Council. And I called for
3 the committee to acknowledge the ongoing lasting
4 impacts of slavery and to establish and execute a
5 plan to address those impacts and repair the harm
6 done by establishing a commission for reparations for
7 past in continuing harms inflicted upon black and
8 indigenous people. From colonialism to slavery and
9 through food and housing red lining, mass
10 incarceration, and surveillance. We have also called
11 for the prioritization of funding of BIPOC arts and
12 cultural organizations and to provide necessary
13 legislation that addresses the needs that these
14 communities have, including rent relief, business
15 interruption insurance, and proper funding from the
16 Department of Cultural Affairs to be able to pay
17 artists living wages in a city that is experiencing
18 one of the most difficult affordability crises that
19 we have ever experienced. And that was true even
20 before COVID arrived. Each of these requests are
21 anchored in our organizational long-standing values
22 of justice, equity, and inclusion and the necessary
23 recognition that, as a community and city, we must do
24 more to ensure that our stated values drive us to
25

1 take concrete actions that result in material and
2 tangible benefits to communities impacted by white
3 supremacy. To act on these commitments this year
4 alone, Dance NYC has first examined the racial
5 impacts of our organizational practices internally.
6 We established and raised salary floors, provided
7 better benefits, time for rest, and the recognition
8 that justice work requires emotional labor that is
9 higher for black and indigenous folks and trans and
10 gender nonconforming folks than it is for white folks
11 and other members of the community. We have
12 disseminated over \$1 million in relief support to the
13 dance sector. We have launched an artist and
14 necessary workers campaign to recognize--

15
16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

17 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: a vital role
18 that artists play. We have collaborated with
19 organizations, created resource pages. We have
20 signed in created letters and hosted a weekly field
21 wide call for the dance sector to address the issues
22 particularly the impact of racism in our institutions
23 for the smallest of groups that don't have,
24 sometimes, time to join the Culture at Three calls or
25 to be in conversations readily with all of their

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1 different city officials. The time is now, you all.
2 We are losing institutions. I get emails daily from
3 organizations that are closing their doors, studios
4 that are closing their doors, workers that are
5 fleeing. We have a mass migration of cultural
6 workers leaving our city because they can't afford to
7 live here because we have not-- we have valued the
8 product of art, but we have not valued the artist
9 that make it. We are willing to pay huge ticket
10 prices to go to a show, but we won't invest in the
11 very lives of the people that allow that to be
12 possible. And so, I am here for the Committee to
13 surface these needs and to remind you of the things
14 that we have already asked for. Things that we have
15 already witnessed and to ensure that those things
16 come with concrete actions in the near future. Thank
17 you so much.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
20 Alejandra. Euro are a powerful leader of Dance NYC
21 and I love that you are from Queens, of course. I
22 want you to know that we wanted to introduce a piece
23 of legislation for a commission on reparations. That
24 has already been, apparently-- we are not first in
25 time as we say inside the Council. So, another

1 Council member has already proposed a piece of
2 legislation. But we do not know who has introduced a
3 that because the rules of the Council don't allow you
4 to know who was done that. But we certainly want
5 that to move forward. And, as you know, I can't
6 believe we haven't already moved forward with Open
7 Culture, our legislation that would dramatically
8 impact so many in the performing arts world because
9 I, too, see so many cultural workers moving and
10 leaving and so many organizations closing. So, it is
11 unacceptable. And we need to move on so many of
12 these pieces of legislation and so many policy
13 changes with the urgency that they require that you
14 would think that we all share. But, as we say, we
15 sometimes value the product more than the people.
16 And it is very frustrating to know that we haven't
17 moved on open culture and some of these other pieces
18 of legislation that you have talked about are in some
19 ways moving, but not with any kind of urgency that
20 the moment requires. Thank you, Alejandra, for
21 always being here and calling this out. It's very
22 important and thank you.

23
24 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Thank you,
25 Chairman.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Van Bramer--

3 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I don't think that
5 we have any Council member questions. We are going
6 to move to the last member of this panel which--

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: is Nicole Touzien.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

10 NICOLE TOUZIEN: Thank you. Good
11 afternoon, Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo,
12 Commissioner Casals, city Council and committee
13 members and colleagues. My name is Nicole Touzien
14 and I am the newly appointed executive director of
15 Dance Wave. Dance Wave is a nonprofit organization
16 that provides access to a community dance experience
17 that encourages individuality and whole person
18 development throughout New York City and beyond. Our
19 approach promotes an inclusive environment for all
20 ages, abilities, sexual orientations, racial, and
21 socioeconomic backgrounds. We are proudly entering
22 our 26th year of service serving over 6000 New
23 Yorkers each year and nearly 4000 more through our
24 virtual classes and events. I am testifying today to
25 share some updates about Dance Waves' commitment to

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1 and work towards racial equity under new leadership.

2 Like many other organizations, we believe in and

3 issued a public statement in support of Black Lives

4 Matter and named ourselves as allies to black

5 communities who have been harmed by institutional

6 racism and violence. We outlined our next step to

7 engage with the young people in our organization and

8 to give them the space to share their thoughts and

9 emotions and equally support their voices in

10 advocating for change. While we know there is so

11 much more to do, we are living out our promise daily.

12 Programmatically, Dance Wave is prioritizing racial

13 equity as a central tenant. Our curriculum, race in

14 dance, uses dance as a medium to support critical

15 conversations with youth, helping students to process

16 and embody difficult topics like racial bias,

17 systemic racism, and privilege in a way that is both

18 empathetic to other and relevant to their own life

19 experience. Our Dance Wave company program goes well

20 beyond pre-professional dance training prioritizing

21 restorative practices as a mainstay and focusing on

22 equity, advocacy, and wellness. Our youth leadership

23 council, in partnership with the Mayor's Office,

24 empowers youth to become civically engaged leaders

1 tackling issues like racism that directly impact
2 their communities. Organizationally, anti-racist
3 pedagogy is a core part of our educator training
4 which is a yearly requirement for our teaching staff
5 and an open program for professionals in any field
6 and in any stage in their career. Administratively,
7 Dance Wave engages its staff in regular equity
8 meetings to discuss, unpack, and investigate our
9 actions. Whether it be curriculum design, hiring
10 practices, professional development, there's no topic
11 off limits. We recognize that these efforts are
12 important and are one small contribution to the
13 dismantling of systemic racism and the arts. Being
14 an anti-racist organization is an ongoing process and
15 one that I am committed to advancing as Dance Wave's
16 new executive direction. Thank you so much.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you so
19 much. We love Dance Wave and have been there.
20 Terrific. Congratulations and thank you for your
21 commitment to the work that we are all talking about
22 here today.

23 NICOLE TOUZIEN: Thank you very much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So, Chair Van
25 Bramer, if there are no Council member questions--

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1 we are not seeing any hands. There are no questions
2 for this panel. We will move to what will be our
3 final panel of witnesses. Those four witness will
4 be-- again, apologies for any mispronunciations.
5 Yazmany Arboleda, Nakisha Hamilton, Marina Ortiz.
6 Again, apologies. And I do not think the final
7 panelist is here, so it will be those four. Thank
8 you. If we missed anyone, we will also check at the
9 end of the hearing, but we are moving to our final
10 panel. So, Yazmany Arboleda, you may begin when the
11 Sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

12
13 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

14 YAZMANY ARBOLEDA: Good morning, Chair Van
15 Bramer, Commissioner Casals, and all your present.
16 My name is Yazmany Arboleda. My pronounces are
17 he/him/his. I identify as queer and as Latin X and
18 I'm the artist in residence with the Civic Engagement
19 Commission in partnership with the city's Department
20 of Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity
21 to testify today. The public artists in residence,
22 of PAIR program is inspired by the work of [inaudible
23 03:29:05 who was names the artist in residence for
24 the city's Department of Sanitation in the 70s. her
25 goal was to erase the stigma of being a sanitation

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1 worker and to make the city look with new eyes at
2 it's waste and waste workers, essential workers as
3 they were not called yet. I am honored to be a
4 member of this artistic tradition and I cherish my
5 role as the artist in residence for the city's civic
6 engagement commission. It is a great responsibility
7 to take on this position at such a crucial time
8 during the Black Lives Matter movement, the global
9 pandemic, and an election so consequential to the
10 path which this country and city will walk. I
11 believe that art and artists have a unique and
12 essential role to play in bringing all New Yorkers
13 together helping us both understand and address
14 systemic racism so powerfully denounced by the Black
15 Lives Matter movement. Disparities in educational
16 opportunities, and environmental hazards, economic
17 instability, unequal access to healthcare, solving
18 these issues will only be possible if we managed to
19 rally our fellow citizens behind a shared
20 understanding of the challenges some of our brothers
21 and sisters face and inspire the civic engagement
22 that is the cornerstone of meaningful and lasting
23 change. And that is why I am particularly excited by
24 the bold ambition of the Civic Engagement Commission.
25

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1 Since I spent my career engaging communities around
2 the world through the co-creation of art. In a
3 project called Coloring Faith all over can you,
4 people of different Faith United to paint their
5 houses of worship, mosques, temples, synagogues,
6 churches yellow together in the name of love. The
7 sculpture spoke with people from different
8 backgrounds standing together and pathways between
9 new friends were built. Another project, the Future
10 Historical Society, and Fort Greene, Brooklyn and in
11 partnership with [inaudible 03:30:52] a multi-
12 generational collection of storytellers joined
13 together to create a neighborhood archive that honors
14 histories of Fort Greene changing community while
15 transforming its vision towards the future. Its
16 retired segregation, as an artist in residence for
17 the integrate NYC youth led organization, the youth
18 led organization that stands for integration and
19 equity in New York City schools. We through a
20 retirement party for segregation on the 65th
21 anniversary of Brown versus Board. We created a
22 newspaper that outlined improvements to New York
23 City's segregated school system and passed it out in
24 all five boroughs before converging in Times Square
25

1 that afternoon. Through these art interventions, my
2 young collaborators showed that students can be
3 designers of solutions, advocates for transformative
4 policy, and visionaries for a more just future. It
5 is one of the major tenants of my practice that art
6 is a universal process through which we bring about
7 real change in progress, expressing our shared--

8
9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

10 YAZMANY ARBOLEDA: envisioning new
11 possibilities and helping make those ideas a reality.
12 For me, art is a verb. The whole premise of PAIR is
13 that artists think differently and have the power to
14 model new approaches to civic work. Artists who are
15 working together to address systemic racism,
16 disenfranchisement, and other matters of social
17 justice are key to bringing the divide between the
18 cultural sector and civic life, which I think is
19 where real change can happen. New York City is
20 always been a beacon for progress and renewal. At
21 this time of great hardship and profound change, I am
22 proud to join others, artists, and citizens alike in
23 fighting the racism that is the antithesis of the
24 very idea of New York. Thank you.

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1
2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you
3 for your testimony. Very powerful. And we certainly
4 appreciate the inclusion of queer voices in this
5 hearing in addition to Commissioner Casals and
6 myself. So, thank you very much for that. And we
7 will go on to the next one.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
9 Chair Van Bramer. The next panelist will be Nikiesha
10 Hamilton.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

12 NIKIESHA HAMILTON: Good afternoon,
13 Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, other city
14 Council members and Commissioner Casals. My name is
15 Nikiesha Hamilton and I am the CEO of a Funny
16 Creative Studios. Thank you for the opportunity to
17 testify today. I created A Funny Creative Studios
18 after I left the Brooklyn Museum because I
19 experienced and witnessed racism. I wanted to focus
20 on black community culture development since I
21 observed that there is a lack of structural support
22 to sustain black arts and culture. COVID-19 and this
23 revolution only heightened my concerns. As black
24 people continue to fight to stay alive in America, it
25 begets the question how do we protect the black

1 cultural legacy? Black people are unable to have
2 that agency and access to the resources necessary to
3 develop their own cultural discourse. Racism is a
4 culture and, from my personal experience, some
5 cultural institutions do play a role in preserving
6 it. The structural violence that occurs within these
7 institutions impacts our communities. How can black
8 people safely enter these organizations and work
9 there? I experienced pay inequity, lack of
10 antiracist leaders, silencing of my voice which led
11 me to be pushed out, and, finally, witness the
12 propagation of paternalistic racist discourses about
13 our community. DIA as a tool is not enough to fight
14 these issues. New York City's most powerful export
15 has always been culture and black people have been
16 ghostwriting New York City culture for years, yet we
17 are constantly disrespected by some of these cultural
18 leaders that UM power. I challenge all of you to
19 create policies and procedures that can effectively
20 combat the cultural imperialism that is happening
21 within our communities. I propose that large
22 organizations submit to city government community
23 impact assessments if they are seeking government
24 funding for their needs. This is to examine whether
25

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1 they are providing equitable access to their
2 institutions for surrounding communities. We should
3 encourage them to engage local businesses and local
4 creatives to do projects to expand local economy. We
5 can diversify streams of funding for organizations of
6 color to develop their programs, operations, and
7 fundraising. We can also have large art institutions
8 Institute community advisory boards and/or have at
9 least two seats on their board that community members
10 can serve on. As I saw at the Brooklyn Museum, there
11 is a lack of community representation in leadership
12 spaces. We can also create equal friendly community
13 centers that can host local organizations that are
14 currently losing spaces due to COVID-19. If we have
15 spaces like these throughout the five boroughs, they
16 can serve as steam community centers. Finally,
17 community members should have a say who leads
18 organizations--

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

21 NIKIESHA HAMILTON: now, conclusively,
22 I hope you strongly consider my thoughts I share with
23 you today. Black creativity has been key to the
24 black survival in America and how we conceived
25 freedom from this oppressive systems. In the words

1 of Claudia Jones, the Peoples art is the genesis of
2 their freedom. That being said, if we do not
3 contribute to the sustainable growth of black culture
4 in our community, then we are serving in the
5 extinction of the black imagination and culture.
6 Thank you for your time and I am more than happy to
7 continue this conversation.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
10 much, Nikiesha, for being here and for sharing that
11 and for challenging us all. And I don't know what
12 other people screens look like, but, right now, on my
13 screen is yourself, Nakisha and Antonio and Patrick.
14 And I feel like the three of you came with a lot of
15 heat and a lot of fire. And challenge and
16 accountability. You know, I like the fact that, of
17 course, we have many of the folks who we
18 traditionally hear from these committee hearings and
19 they are here. And I think it is important that they
20 be challenged and held accountable, too. But I
21 particularly like that this particular hearing has
22 brought out please voices that we don't traditionally
23 hear from in terms of our, you know, state
24 representatives or cultural leaders and the three of
25 you are still on my one screen in front of me and I

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1 appreciate the real challenge that the three of you
2 separately, but in some ways continuously pose to us
3 in leadership positions. So, thank you for that.

4 And someone texted me in the middle of this that we
5 should have this hearing annually. That this should
6 be a must and that we should absolutely have a black
7 lives matter hearing at this Committee every year.

8 We certainly will certainly as long as I am the Chair
9 and hopefully the next Chair will do so, as well.

10 But this is too important not to be talking about all
11 the time. So, I don't know if there are other
12 speakers, but I will ask the General Counsel-- the
13 committee counsel to call the next speaker if there
14 is one. Yes.

15
16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,
17 Chair Van Bramer. The next panelist is the last
18 witness that we have on our list. We will check for
19 other witnesses. If there is anyone else that we've
20 missed after this panelist, but we will now call
21 Marina Ortiz. Ms. Ortiz, you may begin when the
22 Sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ATMS: Time starts now.

24 MARINA ORTIZ: Thank you. This is
25 Marina Ortiz. I am the founder Beats Harlem

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1 Preservation. My apologies. I don't have a fancy
2 bookshelf behind me and you really don't want to see
3 what is going on here. But thank you also, Gonzalo
4 Casals, for always making yourself available at least
5 to me because we go way back. And everything-- and
6 I want to acknowledge and thank Vinnie Bagwell and
7 Councilwoman Inez Barron for their words and,
8 basically, they have said everything there is to say
9 about this failure to get the replacement for the
10 Sins the statue going. And so, we've already heard
11 of them at these hearings before in person and via
12 zoom and it's always been the same thing. I
13 understand and respect that, you know, basically, we
14 are not the ones who can make this happen, right?
15 So, I just need to know who is the one that can make
16 it happen and invite them to come back to a hearing
17 like this because I am, basically-- we have the
18 murals which are amazing. The Black Lies Matter
19 murals. They just popped up just like that. So,
20 somebody obviously picked up the phone and made it
21 happen and, boom. It happened. I don't know how
22 much it cost. I'm not going to ask. Not even I
23 don't care because they are beautiful and they are
24 something that we need right now in this city. So, I
25

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1 just want to stress that and say that I'm going to
2 keep pushing for Vinnie Bagwell's Black Victory
3 installation to move forward. And just to let you
4 know a little more about-- So, as Council member
5 Rosenthal mentioned, we were at a press conference
6 held by medical students and doctors from Mount Sinai
7 representing Equity Now at Mount Sinai and we were
8 supposed to have the press conference speaking out
9 around sexual harassment in that institution. In
10 front of the platform where the sins statue was. But
11 we were removed by Park security. And we're talking
12 about Park security who came-- the kind that have
13 arms. Okay? So, they were like flabbergasted and
14 upset that there were a group of mostly women and
15 women of color standing in front of the platform that
16 had formerly honored Sam's. We explained to them
17 that the Councilwoman was on her way. That the
18 Public Advocate Jumaane Williams was on his way, but
19 that wasn't good enough. They called into whoever
20 they called into downtown at 65th Street and they
21 told us we still had to move. So we moved the event
22 across the street. And the reason why I point that
23 out is because East Harlem-- our outdoor heart works
24 are places where we gather and they are cultural
25

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1 centers for us. For those of us who can't afford to
2 have a roof over our heads when we do and honor our
3 ancestors, when we play our music, when we celebrate
4 important dates in our history. So, that platform
5 has already been--

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

8 MARINA ORTIZ: designated as the
9 cultural center and we really don't want to be moved
10 from it. So, that is one. The other second is when
11 will the Roosevelt statue be taken down and, you
12 know, were talking about all kinds of monuments.
13 There still others that we need to address and I am
14 wondering about that. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
16 much. I think the first question you posed in terms
17 of who needs to make the phone call, I think, is the
18 Mayor wants something to be done and there is a sense
19 of urgency around it, it gets done in the city,
20 generally speaking. You know, that is the main
21 driver in some of these questions just as much of the
22 discussion earlier with Vinnie, I think, boils down
23 to that, as well. Commissioner Casals, obviously,
24 has a role to play, but is not able to make the
25 Office of Management and Budget release funding. The

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1 Mayor can do that. I don't know, Commissioner
2 Casals, if you have an update on the Roosevelt statue
3 or anything else you may want to add in response to
4 Marina. Can we unmute, Commissioner Casals?
5

6 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Two things.

7 Regarding Roosevelt, my understanding is this is
8 something that the museum is going to take care of.
9 In my understanding is they are doing some studies of
10 how to remove it because it is not only the monument,
11 but it is the pedestal and that involves part of the
12 building. Hopefully, we are going to hear soon on a
13 date. And then, in closing, to answer your question,
14 Marina, which I know that I am preaching to the
15 choir. But, you know, the ones that can make things
16 happen is everybody that's on this hearing. Right?
17 The idea of the theory of changes that you make sure
18 that you put people who hold the same values as you
19 have empower and then that you create enough
20 pressure, you know, for that person to be able to
21 create the change. Right? And if there is an
22 example of that, it's at this hearing today. I want
23 to thank you all for participating in the hearing and
24 I just want to pass it back to Chair Van Bramer.
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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
3 much, Commissioner Casals. I had one last question
4 come to me through text. Maybe you can give us an
5 update on the status. It is Weeksville officially a
6 CIG or is it still in process?

7 COMMISSIONER CASALS: No. It is
8 officially a CIG. There was supposed to have been,
9 in early March, there was supposed to be sort of a
10 ceremony and because of [inaudible 3:45:09] got
11 pushed back, but they are already a CIG.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: All right.
13 Officially a CIG. Counsel, otherwise, I will call
14 this hearing to a close.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Chair, let's
16 do one more check quickly. So, just before we move
17 on, just to double check that there are no more
18 questions for this panel, we are not seeing any
19 Counsel member hands, so we will conclude this
20 paneling, at this point, we have concluded public
21 testimony. However, if we inadvertently missed
22 anyone that would like to testify, please use the
23 zoom raise hand function and we will call you in the
24 order your hand is raised. And we are just taking a
25 moment and were not seeing any hands. Okay. We are

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1 not seeing any hands. And as a reminder, you can
2 also submit written testimony if you did not up to 72
3 hours after the start of the hearing. It can be
4 submitted to testimony@Council.NYC.gov. If you did
5 not submit testimony when you registered for the
6 hearing on our site, you can also email it to that
7 address or contact us and we are happy to help with
8 that. At this point, we have concluded the public
9 testimony for the hearing. Chair Van Bramer, I will
10 hand it back to you. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. I
13 think this is one of the most important hearings we
14 have ever had in terms of the diversity of voices and
15 those who are challenging as and holding people
16 accountable and speaking from outside some of the
17 traditional cultural channels, right, that we often
18 hear from. So, I am really glad that we called for
19 this hearing and made it happen and we will also
20 certainly next year, my last year as the Chair of
21 this committee, we will commit to doing this hearing
22 again so that we can measure progress and have a
23 level of transparency and accountability. So, I want
24 to thank Commissioner Casals for joining us for all
25 four hours of the hearing. Majority Leader Cumbo who

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1 was wildly praising and snapping fingers. I see. I
2 think you. I thank you. And, most importantly, to
3 all of the artist in all the cultural workers
4 including all of those voices who are challenging the
5 power structures that exist in the very powerful
6 leaders of cultural organizations and including those
7 of us who are in positions of power, I know it is not
8 easy, but it is incredibly important. So, I want to
9 thank all of you for being here and for participating
10 and I thought I saw-- if I am missing any other
11 Council members, but thank you for being here. All
12 the voices for being here. There is a lot of
13 legislation potentially that came out of this
14 hearing. A lot of really good ideas to follow up on.
15 I know that we are already moving in talking about
16 some pieces of legislation that came out of this
17 hearing and I know that all of you will continue your
18 work in making sure that we all honor black lives and
19 make sure that everyone always, every day, not just
20 in the moment believes and makes real that black
21 lives matter. So, thank you all for being a part of
22 this and we are--
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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 November 12, 2020