

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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December 15, 2020
Start: 10:03 a.m.
Recess: 1:46 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 3)

B E F O R E: James G. Van Bramer,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Laurie A. Cumbo
Darma Diaz
Mark Gjnoj
Francisco P. Moya
Joseph Borelli

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Gonzalo Casals
Commissioner of the Department of Cultural
Affairs

Sheelah Feinberg
Deputy Commissioner from the Department of
Cultural Affairs

Richard Hinojosa
Queens Theatre

Zoraida DeJesus
Wildlife Conservation Society's virtually
Discovery Guide program

Courtney J. Boddie
New Victory Theatre

Tricia Patrick
MCC Theater

Toya Lillard
Executive Director of viBe Theater Experience

Juan Carlos Salinas
Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning

Puiyan Taglianetti
Snug Harbor

Angel Hernandez
New York Botanical Gardens

Alejandra Duque Cifuentes
Executive Director of Dance NYC

Sophia Morris-Pittman
Dance Theater of Harlem

Erin Reid
Teaching Artist and a Museum Educator in New York

Casey Angelo
Groundswell

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Lucy Sexton
New Yorkers for Cultural and Arts

Alexander Kopelman
Co-Founder and President and CEO of the
Children's Arts Guild

Blair Reavis-Tyler
Ailey Arts and Education

Angeline Gragasin
Filipino American Artist based in Ridgewood
Queens

Asari Beale
Executive Director of Teachers and Writers
Collaborative

Kimberly Olsen
New York City Arts and Education Roundtable

Lulu Fogarty
Graduate of New York City public schools and
speaking on behalf of bridging education and art
together

Jessie Lee
Director of Operations at Statement Arts

Buzz Slutsky
Teaching Artist at the Leslie Lohman Museum of
Art

Melissa Diaz
American Museum of Natural History

Heather Maxon
Whitney Museum of American Art

Mia Nagawiecki
Vice President for Education at the New York
Historical Society

Luke Boyd
Director of Education Public Programs presenting
Dominique Hood's testimony

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Ali Abate

Director of Education at the Queens County Farm
Museum

Paula Heitman

Executive Director of Marquis Studios

David Lawson

League of Independent Theaters

David Shookhoff

Director of Education Manhattan Theater Club

Becky Leifman

Executive Director of CO/LAB Theater Group

Kati Koerner

Director of Education at Lincoln Center Theater

Nancy Kleaver

Executive Director for Dancing Classrooms

Carlota Santana

Director of Flamenco Vivo

Flannery Gregg

Associate Choreographer on Broadway and the
Rehearsal Director for Monica Bill Barnes &
Company

Jerry Korman

Music Director at National Dance Institute also
known as NDI

Carlye Echert

Community Engagement Director for Dance Parade

Judith Insell

Artistic Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble

Sidney "Dr. Dance" Grant

Executive and Artistic Director of Ballroom
Basics USA

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Andrew Roitstein
Director of Education and Community Engagement at
the Orchestra of St. Luke's

Laura Gravino
Director of Education at Bloomindale School of
Music

Andrew Chapman
Dance Education Laboratory, DEL

Julia Forman
Community Organizer and deeply involved in local
mutual aid groups in Western Queens

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SERGEANT LUGO: PC recording good.

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SERGEANT MARTINEZ: Cloud recording underway.

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SERGEANT PEREZ: Backup is rolling.

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SERGEANT JONES: Okay and Sergeant Leonardo, can you do the opening statement please.

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SERGEANT LEONARDO: Good morning and welcome to the New York City Council Remote Hearing on the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations.

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At this time, we ask that all Council Members and Council staff turn on their video for verification purposes. To minimize disruption, please place cell phones on silent. If you wish to submit testimony for the record, you can submit your testimony via email by sending it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

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

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Good morning everyone and welcome to today's hearing. It is an oversight hearing of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, which I am very proud to Chair. My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and the topic today is the Impact

1
2 of COVID-19 on Art and Cultural Education Programming
3 in New York City.

4 Before we get started, I want to recognize my
5 colleagues who have joined us, Council Members
6 Borelli, Gjonaj and Moya and I believe joining us
7 later today at some point in the hearing for the
8 first time will be the newest City Council Member D.
9 Diaz who will be joining our Committee and we welcome
10 her to this very important Committee and topic today.

11 So, our city's arts and cultural organizations,
12 our artists, our teaching artists have been really
13 devastated of course by the pandemic since March and
14 while culture and the arts have never truly closed,
15 the data does suggest that our broad and incredibly
16 important cultural sector, which includes arts and
17 education has perhaps been the second hardest hit
18 industry in the City after the restaurant and
19 hospitality industry. And we have been doing as much
20 as we can to support this sector. Obviously, we are
21 thrilled with the passage of open culture last week
22 and the editorial in the daily news today in support
23 of that legislation.

24 But we know there is a lot more to do and we are
25 certainly going to need a federal and state stimulus

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2 packages to truly make a big difference but today, we
3 want to narrow the focus to education and arts and
4 education specifically. Because it is too important
5 not to talk about arts and education.

6 We knew that teaching artists were at risk even
7 before the pandemic and so, it's not surprising that
8 teaching artists were laid off at disproportionately
9 high rates during the pandemic with a 78 percent
10 decrease in artist staffing within this cohort at New
11 York City based organizations leading up to May. And
12 research conducted last summer also indicates that
13 arts education organizations alone have shown income
14 losses of at least in the arear of 20 percent.

15 I would also add obviously the Department of
16 Educations arts and education budget was slashed
17 substantially. Many artists take teaching artists
18 roles due to the flexible schedule and additional
19 income that these roles provide but these positions
20 sometimes left New Yorkers in a vulnerable position
21 without benefits protections and structure. And of
22 course, with the pandemic, all of that has only
23 gotten worse.

24 Cultural education matters more than ever, not
25 just for the artists and educational cultural

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2 organizations but of course it matters for the young
3 people. The students and children who desperately
4 need the arts and culture in their lives particularly
5 right now.

6 The bottom line is that we believe, I believe,
7 and I think most New Yorkers believe that cultural
8 education is incredibly important to our youngest New
9 Yorkers and access to art and cultural education
10 yields positive outcomes on other academic subjects.
11 When arts and education are present, young people
12 have better outcomes generally speaking.

13 Needless to say, in this time, developing skills
14 that allow a young person to process stressful
15 situations like a pandemic, like an economic crisis
16 is incredibly important. Young people feel the
17 stress of this moment. Young people are also
18 experiencing some of the trauma of this moment as
19 much as their parents or caregivers or grandparents
20 maybe trying to shield them from as much of it as
21 they can. They feel it too. They know that we are
22 going through an incredibly difficult time and it is
23 incredibly important for them to be able to let some
24 of that go, express what they are feeling inside and
25 not keep it inside.

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2 Art and culture has the power to allow children
3 to express themselves, share their feelings and
4 hopefully release some of that stress and anxiety
5 that they are feeling. So, the arts and education
6 are more important than ever because of that. And it
7 is incredibly important that during this time of
8 disruption and anxiety, even a four-year-old child
9 painting a picture with their own hands is something
10 that could be incredibly therapeutic. Dance, music,
11 the creative arts bring joy and in these very, very
12 difficult times that's more important than ever.

13 So, we want to talk about art as a tool and the
14 cultural organizations and artists who do this work.
15 Who want to continue to do this work but who are
16 themselves being pushed out of this work. This needs
17 to be addressed. We know from the Pew Research
18 Center and other data that educational outcomes are
19 improved when young people have art and culture in
20 their lives.

21 So, once again, cutting arts and education
22 programs, decimating budgets and letting go of
23 something that should be actually enhanced can only
24 hurt children and the future of this city.

1
2 So, we look forward to hearing from Commissioner
3 Casals as always, about the Administration's
4 commitment to educational cultural programming and
5 arts and education, realizing of course that the
6 Department of Education itself is not here but
7 Commissioner Casals certainly can speak to the
8 Departments, his Departments efforts and the overall
9 impact of what we are seeing in arts and education.

10 This year has seen this horrific pandemic but
11 children are resilient but they cannot do it alone
12 and our city's young people, children, teaching
13 artists, educational organizations, arts and ed
14 programs, they need our help.

15 So, I look forward to the discussion and how the
16 Council can as ever partner with this Administration
17 to support all of the above. I want to thank all of
18 the folks from the community, the cultural community,
19 arts organizations, institutions, artists, teachers
20 who are joining us today. I know we have a robust
21 public testimony schedule and a number of experts in
22 the field and I am very hopeful that this oversight
23 hearing will produce good questions but more
24 importantly good results.

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2 So, I want to thank my staff, my Legislative
3 Director Jack Bernatovicz, Chief of Staff Matt
4 Wallace, our Committee staff Brenda McKinney who is
5 our Counsel, Christy Dwyer who is our Policy Analyst
6 and Aliya Ali who is our Principal Financial Analyst
7 on the Cultural Affairs and Libraries Committee.

8 With that, I am going to throw it back to Brenda
9 McKinney our Legal Counsel to go over the agenda and
10 the process by which we will conduct the hearing.
11 Thank everyone again and look forward to hearing from
12 Commissioner Casals.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
14 Bramer and good morning. I am Brenda McKinney,
15 Counsel to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
16 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations at
17 the New York City Council and will be moderating
18 today's hearing and calling on panelists to testify.

19 So, we will start by going over some procedures
20 for today's hearings. Before we begin, I would like
21 to please remind everyone that you will be on mute
22 until I call on you testify. After you are called
23 on, you will be unmuted by the host. Please note
24 there is a small delay when you are unmuted and a box
25 will pop up asking you to accept the unmute.

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2 Please listen for your name, I will periodically
3 announce who the next panelist will be usually in
4 groups of four. Council Member questions will be
5 limited to five minutes and Council Members, please
6 note that this includes both questions and witnesses
7 answers. Also, please note that today we will be
8 allowing a second round of questions at today's
9 hearing.

10 For public testimony, I will call up individuals
11 in panels. Apologies again, this is with four people
12 not for the Administration but for public. Council
13 Members who have questions for a particular panelist
14 should use the raise hand function in Zoom and you
15 will be called on after everyone on that panel has
16 completed their testimony. For public panelists,
17 once I call your name a member of our staff will
18 unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will give you the
19 go ahead to begin speaking after the timer has
20 started.

21 Please note again, a box may pop up for you to
22 click and accept that unmute. All public testimony
23 will be limited to two minutes. Today, we will be
24 using a two minute clock. After I call your name,
25 please wait a brief moment for the Sergeant at Arms

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to announce that you may begin before starting your testimony.

So, with that, we will now move to the Administration and that testimony part of the hearing and I will call on the following members of the Administration to testify. So, first we have Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs who will be delivering testimony and he is also joined by Sheelah Feinberg, Deputy Commissioner from the Department of Cultural Affairs.

So, I will deliver the oath to both of you at the same time and after that oath, I will call upon each of you individually to respond to the oath.

If you can please raise your right hand in the video. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before this Committee and to response honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner Casals?

GONZALO CASALS: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and Deputy Commissioner Feinberg?

SHEELAH FEINBERG: I do.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

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Commissioner Casals, you may begin your testimony

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when ready.

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GONZALO CASALS: Thank you and thank you Chair

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Van Bramer for your work. I couldn't agree more with

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you on the importance of arts and education. Having

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the better my career on that.

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Good morning Chair Van Bramer and members of the

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Committee. I am Commissioner Gonzalo Casals, here to

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testify today on behalf of the Department of Cultural

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Affairs regarding today's topic, The Impact of COVID-

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19 on Arts and Cultural Educational Programming in

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New York City.

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I am joined today by Cultural Affairs Deputy

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Commissioner Sheelah Feinberg. As you are aware, no

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realm of life in New York City has been untouched by

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the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. And our cultural

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community, which is the foundation for so much of

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what makes our city vibrant, healthy and alive, has

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been particularly hard hit. The effects span both

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the profound personal losses and suffering that so

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many New Yorkers experienced and the devastating

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financial losses experienced by our nonprofit

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partners.

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2 Back in the spring, we conducted a survey of the
3 financial impact, which found half a billion dollars
4 in lost revenue and thousands of layoffs and
5 furloughs. One particularly alarming data point
6 involved the impact on arts education organizations.
7 According to the report, these groups experienced the
8 most severe income losses a staggering 18 percent of
9 annual revenue within the first few weeks of the
10 pandemic. Our survey also found that some of the
11 greatest reductions to artist employment have come
12 from arts education organizations, which collectively
13 reported decreases of over 2,100 artists or 78
14 percent of artist staffing during this period.
15 Recognizing these extraordinary challenges, we're
16 committed to working with Council to support these
17 important organizations, which provide arts education
18 services to so many schools, childcare sites and
19 families across the five boroughs.

20 For one, we worked with the City Council on
21 guidelines for Cultural After School Adventures
22 program, known as CASA. We also worked with you to
23 adjust requirements for CASA to the realities of the
24 current moment, allowing funds to be used to serve
25 students learning at home through remote programming.

1
2 We also worked with City Council on guidelines for
3 organizations delivering blended and live programming
4 through the anti-gun initiative, Art as a Catalyst
5 for Change. This collaboration has kept public
6 programs, public funds, apologies, flowing to these
7 critical arts education programs. Nearly \$14
8 million to 170 organizations this year through CASA
9 alone.

10 My staff is working to process these payments as
11 quickly as possible. Given the radically altered
12 landscape and circumstances we're working under,
13 there is a slight delay in processing the funds but
14 we anticipate issuing payments starting in January.

15 We have also been providing arts education
16 organizations with resources to help them make the
17 transition to remote programming, through webinars
18 and resources posted online. I am excited to
19 announce that just yesterday we sent notifications to
20 over 1,000 cultural groups receiving \$47.1 million in
21 FY21 support through the Cultural Development Fund.
22 This included more than \$12 million added by City
23 Council at budget adoption. Nearly half of CDF
24 grantees provide services to a K-12 audience, so this
25 support is crucial for arts education.

We thank you for this critical funding and we were able to use this money to invest in some of the cultural sector's most urgent needs, including:

Across-the-board grant increases for all CDF recipients; grant increases for more than 600 groups working in low-income neighborhoods and areas most affected by COVID-19; boosts for the five local arts councils that will be passed along to individual artists and smaller nonprofits.

Importantly for today's topic, it also includes money specifically earmarked for arts education in two ways. First, through increased funding to 25 arts education groups. And second, funding for the Arts Educator Emergency Relief Fund, established by the Arts in Education Roundtable earlier this year. As I mentioned earlier, our COVID-19 impact survey found that arts education was particularly hard hit by the pandemic, just at the moment when New Yorkers needed their services the most. The Arts Educator Emergency Relief Fund, initiated earlier this year with contributions from the New York Community Trust and Booth Ferris Foundation, provided unrestricted grants to hundreds of arts education professionals who were hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

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2 We're thrilled to be able to support the
3 educators who are so critical to providing young
4 people with the extraordinary benefits of creative
5 engagement. The extraordinary staff at Materials for
6 the Arts program, which is beloved by arts educators
7 throughout the city, has made sure that their arts
8 education services continue to benefit educators and
9 students. The MFTA Education Center has transitioned
10 its in-person programs to online platforms. They
11 continue to host field trips, in-school residencies,
12 professional development courses, monthly public
13 events, artists-in residence and gallery exhibitions.

14 We also launched the MFTA Online Education Center
15 to support teachers and students with resources
16 during the pandemic. Thanks to the creative MFTA
17 team, the Education Center has served over 10,000 New
18 York City Department of Education students and over
19 1,000 teachers through 37 virtual field trips, 35
20 online residencies at over 20 schools and 9 online
21 professional development courses for DOE teachers,
22 all since the pandemic began.

23 We have been inspired to see how cultural
24 workers, despite the incredible stresses of recent
25 months, have remained committed to bringing cultural

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2 programming to New Yorkers. And arts education,
3 which has such a profound effect on youth and
4 families, is among the most vulnerable and most
5 important programming to support. We appreciate your
6 partnership in supporting these essential arts ed
7 programs and the people who make them possible and we
8 recognize the long road ahead toward full recovery.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on
10 today's topic and I am happy to answer any questions
11 you may have.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
13 Commissioner Casals for your testimony and I don't
14 see Council Member Diaz has joined us yet but I will
15 recognize her when she does.

16 So, like me, you outlined the devastating impacts
17 of COVID-19 on arts and education and arts educators
18 and teaching arts and the organizations that focus on
19 that. But I did want to take a moment because the
20 City Council's cultural initiatives, you mentioned
21 CASA and several others. It is incredibly important
22 to me and I think to the other Council Members to
23 know that that funding that we fought for and
24 allocated even in this very difficult budget, is
25 being used. It is being spent well and even if it is

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2 being done remotely in many cases, children are
3 seeing the benefits of CASA programming.

4 So, can you talk a little bit about how this is
5 happening, maybe some examples of CASA grants and the
6 extent to which both schools and the organizations
7 that receive CASA grants have adopted in this moment
8 to still provide invaluable afterschool cultural
9 programming and talk to us a little bit about that
10 because as you know, I fought really hard for years
11 to increase successfully the CASA budget and you
12 know, I know that there is some questions from folks
13 about is this still even needed, right, are we still
14 even able to do this. And so, talk to me and answer
15 both of those questions. Is it still needed and are
16 we able to do this?

17 GONZALO CASALS: I don't want to send the message
18 there but I can't believe somebody could ask that
19 question.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: People ask that
21 question.

22 GONZALO CASALS I know. Uhm, yes, I just, I must
23 warn you that CASA programs usually start in January.
24 So, what we have seen is we have allowed - working
25 closely with the City Council and changing the

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2 requirements, we had allowed cultural organizations
3 to receive CASA funding in FY20. Really have the
4 opportunity to people either a blended model in which
5 last spring they both did work online and in schools
6 as we were all trying to get a hand on how to
7 continue to work through the pandemic and we were
8 given the opportunity to change the scope and change
9 some of the requirements so they could continue to do
10 that work that we all think is so important.

11 What we did in advance the funds that were
12 announced yesterday and soon will be released, is
13 again work with City Council to inform on those and
14 participants of the CASA program that they could do
15 these online. That these don't have to be
16 exclusively an after school program that really use
17 these funds to do arts and education for both
18 children at home through online and again, as a
19 blended model.

20 I am not going to speak as a Commissioner now, I
21 can speak as you know, having worked in arts and
22 culture in 20 years, mostly in a location. CASA
23 program has been one of the most impactful programs
24 that I have ever participated in. Allowing us to not
25 only bring resources from cultural organizations to

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2 public schools across the borders but also connecting
3 families with those cultural organizations.

4 And as you said in your opening remarks, it is
5 not only about arts education doesn't only help deal
6 with trauma but it helps us make sense of the changes
7 that are happening around us and in a year, so much
8 change has happened. Not only for kids but also for
9 adults and programs like these are more important
10 than ever.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Commissioner
12 Casals. I do want to recognize Council Member Darma
13 Diaz who is the newest member of the Committee and
14 has joined the hearing for the first time. So,
15 welcome Council Member Diaz to the Cultural Affairs,
16 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
17 Committee.

18 So, yes, I just want to say in response
19 Commissioner that CASA is always critical. Will
20 always be important, is always worth fighting for and
21 the \$15 million that we secured this year is
22 incredibly important. Money well spent and I know
23 that schools, teachers and arts organizations are and
24 have been working to devise incredibly inventive ways
25 of providing quality arts education to students all

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2 across the five boroughs while we still have the
3 pandemic raging in the city.

4 Along those lines, you know, the DOE's arts
5 education budget received very significant reduction.
6 I realize that you are not the schools Chancellor but
7 I wanted to talk to you and ask you about how the
8 Department of Cultural Affairs interfaces with the
9 DOE's program. And in how you see this impacting the
10 children of the City of New York and what the
11 Department of Cultural Affairs, if anything, can do
12 to help support arts and education and mitigate the
13 effects of what was a fairly massive reduction to the
14 arts education budget for the DOE.

15 GONZALO CASALS: So, the Office of Art and
16 special programs at the DOE's, one of the many and
17 multiple ways in which an Administration engages with
18 cultural organizations and with public schools
19 through arts and education. There are multiple
20 agencies and the Mayor's Office continue to harness
21 on the power of arts and education to provide
22 services to New Yorkers.

23 In particular, for the Department of Cultural
24 Affairs, like I mentioned in my testimony, it was
25 important not only to me but to my staff to make sure

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2 that in a moment like this, based on the results of
3 the survey that we did in the spring to come out and
4 support in particular those organizations.

5 So, in addition to across the board, funding that
6 we did for – understanding that over 50 percent of
7 our work cultural organizations that – over cultural
8 organizations that we fund, over 50 percent of those,
9 they provide arts and education to public schools.
10 We wanted to make sure that they were supported with
11 across the board funding and over \$4 million to be
12 distributed across those organizations but in
13 particularly support organizations in hardest hit
14 COVID areas and in particular organizations that are
15 doing a lot of work with arts and education.

16 And the way that we did that is we divided a few
17 – money for specifics arts organizations and then, it
18 was important for us while the Department of Culture
19 Affairs process is a little to complicated for an
20 individual artist to go through. We wanted to make
21 sure that our Board of Council and the Arts and
22 Education Grantee would have enough money to free
23 grant and support directly arts and educators.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And so the 25 arts and
25 education groups that received enhancements, could

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2 you talk a little bit about the process and you know,
3 what kind of organizations are getting additional
4 money and what is the total of that? You know, were
5 is that money going. Talk a little bit about all of
6 that because that is one of the ways in which you
7 took some of the additional funding that we have been
8 fighting for for years and were able to get into the
9 budget. You know, we kept most of that this year
10 against all odds. And so, while the DOE arts and
11 education budget was slashed very significantly, the
12 Departments budget and our cultural initiatives is
13 much much less but then how did you invest that money
14 and talk a little bit about what you hope to
15 accomplish with that. How much was it? What is the
16 process? Who is getting that funding? Which is
17 additional, right. I mean we are talking about
18 groups getting additional funding in this budget year
19 which is kind of staggering but obviously given the
20 losses, it is almost impossible to make up for what
21 people have gone through. But how meaningful is the
22 investment?

23 GONZALO CASALS: So, a couple things. First, I
24 just want to note that city funding overall has only
25 seen from last year an 8 percent cap, which as you

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2 said, in a moment like this it's almost not right and
3 we are thankful to the Council. Thankful to you and
4 to the Administration for their support for cultural
5 organizations in a moment like this.

6 As you said, there is uhm, well, there is a
7 specific pot of money as I mentioned that goes to
8 arts and education. It is 26 organizations, 25 is
9 the remote arts and education roundtable for that
10 very specific program and we are talking about three
11 quarters of one million dollars going specifically to
12 those organizations.

13 Half of that goes for the regrant program
14 directly to support teaching artists and the other
15 half has been distributed among the 25 organizations
16 in which we looked at organizations that are working
17 across the five boroughs. We are looking at
18 organizations that are working across disciplines but
19 also organizations that are working within BIPOC
20 communities and communities that have been hardest
21 hit by COVID. That is very specific about arts and
22 education. When you imply in your question, what we
23 need to keep in mind is that that's one of the
24 multiple layers of funding that organizations are
25 getting when they receive our grant.

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2 In addition to that again, over 600 organizations
3 that they do arts and education and our grantees have
4 received across the board, family increase which is
5 around \$4 million to be spread out across our
6 grantees and they also receive a total of \$12 million
7 specifically for organizations that are either
8 located or working in COVID, what we call hardest hit
9 COVID-19 areas.

10 I also want to add, not necessarily specific to
11 arts and education but in addition to the way that we
12 distribute the money, we tried to simplify the
13 process and to facilitate the access to public funds
14 through organizations and there are three things that
15 we committing is, this is the first time in the
16 history of the agency that we are allowing small
17 organizations, organizations under \$250,000 to enter
18 a multiyear grant. So, organizations received
19 letters yesterday saying that they are funded for
20 FY21. They are also going to be funded for FY22.
21 The level in which they are going to be funded of
22 course are tied to the budget for FY22 for arts and
23 culture in the City but at least there the
24 understanding that you are going to receive funds
25 from the Department of the Culture of Affairs.

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2 We also, we are allowing organizations until this
3 year where we are only contributing to 50 percent of
4 the total cost of the projects. We had increased
5 that 75 percent understanding that organizations
6 might have a harder time to finding matching funds to
7 support the project that we are giving the grant for.

8 And then of course, we, which has created a lot
9 of work for our agency but we are happy to also allow
10 organizations both for FY20 and FY21 to come back to
11 us with a change of scope from what their original
12 application was, it is a project to what they can do
13 in the midst of a pandemic.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And just to amplify
15 Commissioner Casals, you mentioned that overall there
16 is an 8 percent cut to the budget correct?

17 GONZALO CASALS: There is an 11 percent - if you
18 look at the adoption budget including the \$20 million
19 that was allocated by the City Council, there is an
20 almost 10 percent cap. If you look at just the City
21 F line, budget line, it is only 8 percent.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right and that is in
23 contrast to many budget lines that received 20, 30
24 even more percent reductions. Obviously, I advocate
25 for more funding for the arts and fought incredibly

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2 hard but that is a number that compared to many other
3 parts of the budget was much smaller.

4 So, materials for the arts, you know, the
5 Department is rightfully very proud of materials for
6 the arts and the work that they do. Obviously, we
7 have had a leadership change there as we have had in
8 a number of our organizations and institutions and we
9 just did an event last week with materials for the
10 arts where they donated thousands of toys and art
11 supplies that had been given to them and they chose
12 PS1-11 in my District which serves primarily Queens
13 Bridge and Ravenswood. And so, we were thrilled to
14 join them and see the faces of the children. It was
15 obviously done very carefully and very safely but I
16 did join MFTA there and the Principal, Principal Jag
17 who does an amazing job at PS1-11. And we were able
18 to talk to several of the children.

19 So, I just wanted to mention that because it was
20 an incredibly moving day for us but talk to me about
21 how MFTA is helping in this moment particularly
22 through a leadership change and it just got me to
23 thinking about some of the other leadership changes.
24 How are you experiencing that? I mean, how are we
25 navigating that space because it is an incredibly

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2 challenging time for these transitions to be taken
3 place. Obviously, there have been a number of
4 retirements or resignation changes and a number of
5 intern ED's or CEO's or artistic directors and
6 searches going on. You know, has that affected us in
7 any way?

8 So, the MFTA and then sort of related, sort of
9 the changes that are taking place. The disruptions
10 that are taking place, even at our institutions and
11 organizations.

12 GONZALO CASALS: A couple things and before we
13 move to that question, I want to bring forth
14 something that we need to say. While we are
15 extremely proud of that, the amount of the funds that
16 were distributed and we don't want to sound naïve and
17 I just want to make sure that we continue to
18 understand that this is only going to get us so far
19 and the damage that this pandemic has created is
20 larger as you said on your remarks than the city
21 itself. In combination with the City Council and the
22 Administration and in the absence of state and
23 federal support, we are going to be in a very dire
24 situation as a sector in New York City.

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2 Moving to Materials for the Arts, I am so happy
3 that we were able to help with PS1-11. That's one of
4 the many schools that we have been helping. I just
5 want to make sure people don't think that there is
6 any bias or you know, we don't have favorites.

7 And I have a lot of mixed emotions about
8 Materials for the Arts because it is an organization
9 that works at its best in moments of crisis, right.
10 And that we were able to do amazing work during the
11 pandemic but mostly because so many businesses and so
12 many organizations are closing and are going to be
13 back to us.

14 So, while its really sad to see so many places
15 donating stuff to us because of running out of
16 business, we are glad that there is some system like
17 Materials for the Arts to take on these donations and
18 really distribute them where they are needed.

19 One of the sort of assumptions that I want to
20 defy which is for the most part in normal years
21 people think that Materials for the Arts is just
22 theater. Nothing wrong with that, I am a huge fan of
23 you know, arts education and Materials and the
24 Department of Education teachers, they take a huge
25 advantage of that. We have seen going through the

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2 workhouse just a few weeks ago 300 trees were donated
3 to the city and not only the donation of the trees
4 but the delivery and the planting of those trees was
5 donated also and we were able to distribute those
6 among cultural organizations and the Parks
7 Department.

8 Just to give you an idea of how expensive the
9 program is. All the work has been done not without
10 challenge. We have our workers coming to through the
11 warehouse. We are still doing what we call curbside
12 pickup and just for the safety that are trying to
13 come and get donations for Materials for the Arts
14 staff and then, the transitions that you were
15 mentioning and our furious leader Material for the
16 Arts got a job and has to retire after over 20 years
17 working at the agency and in the meantime, our Deputy
18 Director has taken the reins and really make happen
19 all these donations and any other situation would
20 have been hard to take because of COVID.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, thank you very much
22 Gonzalo and a little bit lighter, I thought when you
23 said that many people think of MFTA as glitter. I
24 thought were going to say you are big fan of glitter
25 because I know I am.

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GONZALO CASALS: [INAUDIBLE 43:10]

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, yeah, I assume so
as one queer man to another, we can share our love of
glitter anytime. I do want to recognize I see
Majority Leader Cumbo, oh, sorry, before I do that
Gonzalo.

8

9

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11

GONZALO CASALS: No Chair, also we received over
60 sewing machines that we were able to also
distribute around different cultural organizations
and in New York.

12

So, I don't know how to sew but -

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14

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I don't know how to sew
either but they will be used. I do want to recognize
someone who I believe is also a fan of glitter,
Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo has joined us and thank
her for all things love of the arts and arts and
education obviously as the mother of a young child I
am sure incredibly important to her as well.

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So, I know we have a lot of folks from the public
who want to testify. I want to ask if any of my
colleagues have any questions for Commissioner Casals
and the arts and education realm and take a moment to
see if we have any folks. Brenda?

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. We do not
3 have any Council Member questions at this time. If
4 Council Members have questions, you can use the raise
5 hand function in Zoom please.

6 We are not seeing any questions Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. So, I think
8 Commissioner Casals, in the interest of time and
9 making all of our fantastic artists and arts
10 organizations and our advocates wait any longer to
11 share their experiences and thoughts on this. You
12 are free to go but I want to thank you for your
13 efforts and the agencies efforts and say that I know
14 that we all need to do more. There is an
15 unquenchable thirst and need for arts and education
16 and young people desperately need to experience the
17 arts and you know, I think that open culture is
18 getting a really good response and that's really
19 important because I think that isn't just about the
20 bill, which I think is really meaningful. But it is
21 also about an acknowledgement increasingly across the
22 city that not enough people talk about arts and
23 culture within the public policy realm and within
24 these government and elected officials spaces. And
25 hopefully that is changing and happening now.

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2 GONZALO CASALS: Thank you and Chair Van Bramer,
3 I thank you for your leadership and your partnership
4 and I look forward to continue to work together.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
6 Commissioner Casals. And with that, I will turn it
7 over to our Council Brenda McKinney who I think will
8 call the first panel.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
10 Bramer and before we call the first panel. I am just
11 going to go back to a few housekeeping matters. So,
12 now that we have concluded the Administrations
13 portion, testimony portion of this hearing, we will
14 turn to public testimony. I would like to remind
15 everyone that individuals will be called up in
16 panels. So, multiple people at one time.

17 For members of the public, please note that I
18 will be calling you up by name individually. Council
19 Members who have questions for a particular panelist,
20 should use the raise hand function again, as with the
21 Administration testimony in Zoom and you will be
22 called up after everyone on that panel is called up.

23 For panelists, once your name is called, a member
24 of our staff will unmute you once again and the
25 Sergeant at Arms will give you a go ahead to begin

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2 after setting the timer. Please note, a box might
3 pop up and you might have to accept that unmute.
4 There is a small delay. All testimony will be
5 limited to two minutes.

6 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you
7 may begin before starting your testimony. So, with
8 this, we will start with the first panel and those
9 present. Okay, just one moment please. Alright, so
10 we will call the first panel which is four members
11 starting with Richard Hinojosa – please forgive any
12 pronunciation as always. Hinojosa from Queens
13 Theatre followed by Zoraida DeJesus followed by
14 Courtney Boddie from the New Victory Theatre followed
15 by Tricia Patrick.

16 So, the first person to testify will be Richard
17 Hinojosa. Again, please excuse pronunciation. You
18 may begin when the Sergeant starts the clock.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 RICHARD HINOJOSA: Thank you. First, I would
21 like to thank Chair Van Bramer, the members of this
22 Committee and the entire New York City Council and
23 the Department of Cultural Affairs for your continued
24 support throughout this crisis of cultural
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1
2 institutions efforts to bring arts and culture and
3 arts education to our communities. Thank you.

4 We greatly appreciate your recognition of the
5 positive impact that culture institutions can have on
6 our communities. You know, even in times of loss,
7 isolation and economic strife, culture never closed.

8 Queens Theatre is a member of the city's Culture
9 Institutions Group and throughout the COVID-19 crisis
10 the CIG's have been committed to contributing to the
11 city and to New Yorkers by supporting public life and
12 public health and public service.

13 Now, you know when the schools closed back in
14 March, Queens Theatre, we had already started our
15 CASA program. So, I know the Council Member
16 mentioned on this previously and we immediately
17 jumped into action and we developed a plan to adjust
18 the curriculum to online programming. And our other
19 Queens Theatre had taken a huge budget loss at the
20 time of closure and the dedicated initiative funding
21 enabled us to move forward and redesign the CASA
22 program. Now, we started with professional
23 development workshops, PD workshops to help our staff
24 of teaching artists adapt to online teaching. We
25 came up with some great methods. We followed that

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2 with a PD workshop that we offered the Queens public
3 school teachers and we advised them on how they can
4 integrate applied theatre techniques into their own
5 online teaching. And our CASA students during this
6 time also, developed an original play with songs over
7 a couple of months and culminated that program in
8 public viewings of the Queens.

9 Then we took the lessons that we learned through
10 our CASA programs and we opened up all that into our
11 education programs to the public. We started with a
12 series of videos in four different languages
13 demonstrating fun theatre activities that the whole
14 family can do at home. You know, people are stuck at
15 home, so families could do these activities together.

16 Queens Theatre also offered family improv
17 workshops and musical theater summer camp and we also
18 did online meet ups and classes for senior citizens,
19 some of our most vulnerable and isolated citizens,
20 our senior citizens now.

21 All these programs are offered completely free of
22 charge.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 RICHARD HINOJOSA: And the CASA program in a
25 District 75 school and thanks to Mr. Moya in Mr.

1
2 Moya's district and we are starting two others in
3 January. And our experience with remote programming
4 has expanded our tool kit and we are looking forward
5 to once again offering CASA programs and we are
6 confident that we have multiple ways to deliver them
7 successfully.

8 And now more than ever our children are missing
9 their friends and their teachers and their classroom
10 spaces. We really must consider how we can make
11 their school days playful, free and collaborative
12 using the arts. Your continued support of arts,
13 education and culture will go a long way to healing
14 our communities and we are here as your partners.

15 So, we really appreciate your continued
16 commitment and engagement and we thank you for this
17 opportunity to share Queens Theatre has been adapting
18 during these challenging times. Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. We will
20 now move to the next panelist which is Zoraida
21 DeJesus.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 ZORAIDA DEJESUS: Yes, can you all hear me.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you, go ahead.
25

ZORAIDA DEJESUS: Okay, yes, hello. Thank you
Chairman Van Bramer and members of the Cultural
Affairs Committee. My name is Zoraida DeJesus and I
am a participant in the Wildlife Conservation
Society's virtually Discovery Guide program.

WCS is a member of the City's Cultural
Institutions group. Like many other cultural
organizations WCS was directed in mid-March by the
city and state to close all of our parks which
include the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central
Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo and Queens Zoo because of
the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also meant that in
person internship and volunteer positions needed to
quickly adapt to the new virtual world. Throughout
the COVID-19 crisis WCS and CIG's have been committed
to contributing to the city and working hand and hand
in supporting New Yorkers as it relates to public
life, public health and public service.

These last nine months have been incredibly
stressful and challenging with our world turned
upside down. As we are facing the uncertainty of
what the city will look like in the future and the
social inequities that many of us are being exposed
to. Programs being offered like the Discovery Guide

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2 program remain essential and relevant in nurturing
3 and fostering leaders for generations to come.

4 While our physical parks have been closed,
5 culture never closed its offerings. Being a part of
6 this program has provided a feeling insecurity and
7 belonging in time where most everything else is not
8 felt safe or consistent. I have made many good
9 friends, laughed a lot and found ways to channel my
10 creativity and passion into teaching and inspiring
11 others.

12 If I weren't a part of this program, I am
13 honestly not sure what else I would have done this
14 summer. I just feel so lucky to have had something
15 safe and meaningful to do. It is my hope that more
16 youth in New York City can have similar
17 opportunities. Recognizing the emergent challenges
18 we are facing as youth in New York City, WCS quickly
19 developed a response that include free counseling
20 services, weekly video chat and office hours with
21 counselors. Additionally, WCS has shifted its
22 newsletter sent to 3,000 youth to include information
23 about parks and closure, online events and activities
24 to further engage them and COVID-19 information and
25 resources related to our mental and physical health.

1
2 The youth to receive this information all
3 formerly either volunteered, work or intern at WCS.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 ZORAIDA DEJESUS: Lastly, in response to feedback
6 from the youth development person programming, WCS
7 pivoted all of our volunteer internship in skills
8 training programs to virtual platforms ensuring that
9 safety is prioritized while continuing to provide
10 coaching opportunities to youth.

11 We also had a large virtual discovery guide
12 program over the summer and as well as now having it
13 over the fall which I participate in. We also had
14 many skilled building workshops and career webinars
15 that many of our youth and staff attended during
16 summer.

17 We thank you for this opportunity to testify
18 today and for your leadership on behalf of the City
19 of New York during this crisis.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Zoraida and
21 you are a student in high school currently?

22 ZORAIDA DEJESUS: I am actually currently going
23 to reattend college in the spring.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Oh, wonderful,
25 congratulations.

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ZORAIDA DEJESUS: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You just represented WCS
incredibly well.

ZORAIDA DEJESUS: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, thank you so much
Chair and Courtney Boddie is the next witness.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we just have a
technical difficulty, one moment. Courtney J.
Boddie from the New Victory Theater.

COURTNEY BODDIE: Can you hear me?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you now
thank you.

COURTNEY BODDIE: My name is Courtney J. Boddie
Vice President Education School Engagement at the New
42 Victory Theater where we are committed to
performing arts being a part of everyone's life from
the earliest years on.

In the regular season, the New Victory partners
with more than 200 New York City schools, social
service agencies partner institutions to engage and
inspire 40,000 students in grades PreK-12 with live
international productions on our stage.

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2 Since March 16, 2020, the New Victory provided
3 weekly virtual content for educators and parents to
4 engage in the performing arts for the rest of the
5 school year. And in this school year, the New
6 Victory education program has transformed to be
7 completely virtual and is built to be as flexible as
8 possible for any learning model.

9 The performing arts are an incredible tool for
10 offering young people agency while sparking joy in
11 their learning. They are critical to social
12 emotional development of young people and the
13 performing arts help children process and understand,
14 express and empathize.

15 But the city is facing extraordinarily budget
16 choices which have led to a drastic cut in arts
17 education funding. We heard from our long time
18 partner schools that they want and need the New
19 Victory education program in their schools this year
20 but for the first time ever, they simply couldn't
21 afford the very modest cost. For this reason and
22 despite the organizations significant loss of
23 revenue, New 42 has made the New Victory education
24 programs completely free for New York City public
25 schools this year.

1
2 We know from our own research that participating
3 in the performing arts infuse young people with hope
4 and the ability to envision a brighter future and
5 what could be more important right now.

6 New York City Council has a crucial role in
7 working toward equity for all New Yorkers and the
8 cultural art sectors are your partners in this
9 responsibility. We will work with you and work with
10 us to serve all New York City students who deserve
11 everything we can provide.

12 Thank you so much to the New York City Council,
13 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
14 International Intergroup Relations for your support
15 providing time and space for these testimonies on
16 this incredibly important topic.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. That
18 concludes this panel. Oh, excuse me, we have one
19 more panelist, I apologize, Tricia Patrick.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: It might just – yes, I think
22 you remuted, if you can just – yeah, you should be
23 unmuted. Thank you so much.

24 TRICIA PATRICK: Thank you. Thank you to
25 everyone on the New York City Council Committee on

1
2 Cultural Affairs. My name is Tricia Patrick with MCC
3 Theater.

4 When the pandemic first struck and the doors of
5 our theaters closed and after telling casts of
6 several productions that they will no longer take the
7 stage, after telling our students that in our
8 afterschool program that we would no longer be able
9 to gather in person, that there would no longer be
10 any high fives or hugs after their online
11 performances, we asked ourselves, what is our role as
12 a theater company during these times? What are we
13 doing here?

14 Our youth company was in the midst of preparing
15 for their yearly stage production consisting of
16 original pieces that they write themselves. That we
17 move together in one cohesive show. The theme of
18 this past spring production was truth and for many of
19 them the process was challenging, revelatory and 100
20 percent reflection on themselves, their families, our
21 society and country as a whole.

22 But there was a mutiny in progress. Those who
23 had participated in this process before were
24 challenged by the fact that they would no longer take
25 a stage. We had discussions, we cheerleaded them, we

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2 championed them but in one impassioned plea during a
3 Zoom class, one of our students proved herself and
4 the entire mutiny wrong. Everyone there felt the
5 power of her words and everyone understood the
6 perspective that she was trying to share and why it
7 was important to her. The paradigm shifted because
8 we all realized in this moment that the medium
9 through which we tell stories is important but even
10 more important is that she could tell her stories.
11 That her voice could be heard and that she provided
12 the vehicle, the space in which she and they could
13 express themselves.

14 The power of telling a story through whatever
15 medium we can. Over the summer, MCC also held
16 meetings for our current students as well as our
17 alumni in order to provide a forum through which we
18 could discuss the social justice movements that were
19 taking the streets and the racial uprising that were
20 taking place all across -

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 TRICIA PATRICK: Thank you. Fast forward to this
23 fall, MCC and a coalition of arts organizations
24 galvanized in order to provide a virtual afterschool
25 program fair. We wanted to ask ourselves or

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challenge ourselves with creating a platform through which students from all across the city could locate and connect with an afterschool program. There is still a need for these students to connect with afterschool programs. The need is so rich that our program is as full or almost as full as it was in the past and our teachers continue to echo that. Their attendance is up and the engagement is up when our teachers are in the classroom.

Thank you so much for providing this forum and for providing a way for us to connect in discussing these programs.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. That was incredibly powerful testimony about the absolute necessity for arts, education and afterschool programming to most of the ability to adapt and meet that need. Because we all know that young people so desperately need that and it is good to hear from all of you, Courtney as well at New Victory, who now I don't see on my screen but I think hopefully here listening and there you are. Now I see you. And Richard and Zoraida, who I must say has the coolest headset of any headset I have seen in the thousands of Zoom hours that I have logged in the last nine

1
2 months. But also incredibly powerful testimony
3 Zoraida on behalf of the Institution.

4 And you know, I just want to you know, just say
5 again, thank all of you because culture never closed
6 but you know, the arts and education efforts that are
7 going on even virtual and what is able to go on in
8 person is so incredibly important but it is also
9 important to let people know that it is happening.
10 Because a lot of people are under the false
11 impression that this work has stopped. That it is
12 not happening and so, therefore if it is not
13 happening, it doesn't need to be funded. It doesn't
14 need to be supported, right, we can shift this money
15 into other places and other spaces but we are here to
16 and you are here to let the Council and the world
17 know that in fact this work is happening. And it is
18 incredibly valuable and it is more important than
19 ever to fund it.

20 So, with that, I just want to say thank you to
21 all of you for what you are doing and what you
22 continue to do for young people in our city. So,
23 thank you.

24 With that, I will throw it back to the Counsel.
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
3 Bramer. We will just check for other Council Member
4 questions before we move to the next panel. And if
5 Council Members have questions, just a reminder to
6 please raise your hand in Zoom. We are not seeing
7 any questions.

8 So, we will move to the next panel. So, again,
9 we will be calling up panel four and Council Members,
10 if you have questions, please save them for the end
11 of the panel but we will call up all four names now
12 and then individuals one by one.

13 So, the next panel will be Toya Lillard, Juan
14 Carlos Salinas from the Jamaica Center for Arts and
15 Learning, Puiyan Taglianetti from Snug Harbor and
16 Angel Hernandez from the New York Botanical Gardens.
17 So, the next witness will be Toya Lillard. You may
18 begin once the Sergeant calls the clock.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 TOYA LILLARD: Good morning. My name is Toya
21 Lillard and I am proud to be the Executive Director
22 of viBe Theater Experience. I am speaking to you
23 from Brooklyn New York where viBe is located on the
24 unseeded land of the Lenape people.
25

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2 viBe is an organization that centers the
3 narratives, lived experiences and genius art of Black
4 girls, young women and gender expansive youth in New
5 York City and now beyond. Before COVID-19 we know
6 that Black girls were facing school pushout. Were
7 facing adultification bias and were facing a host of
8 other issues that created barriers to their
9 advancement and fulfillment.

10 As was noted, in the October 2020 New York Times
11 article, Black girls are now seen as the most at risk
12 group in the United States. In New York City, Black
13 girls in elementary and middle school were about 11
14 times more likely to be suspended than their White
15 peers in 2017 according to a report from the
16 Education Trust of New York, a research and advocacy
17 group.

18 Since COVID-19 we have not seen an end to the
19 discriminatory disciplinary practices that impact the
20 lives of Black girls and young women. This adds to
21 the aforementioned disruption and anxiety that all
22 children are facing due to COVID-19. At viBe, a
23 theater company, we endeavor to provide a sanctuary
24 for Black girls and young women who have been pushed
25

1
2 out of school and who do not find their homes a safe
3 space for them to express themselves fully.

4 The cancellation of the Summer Youth Employment
5 program for example, was devastating for our girls
6 who relied on that income to help their families.

7 So, pivoting for our organization has meant a lot.

8 It has meant that we have gone beyond the page or the
9 stage to offer paid stipends to all participants.

10 Mental health services to our staff and our
11 participants. Community care offerings like yoga and
12 movement.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 TOYA LILLARD: Uhm, to supplement the offerings
15 that we have. And so, we are asking for support and
16 attention to be given to organizations that are
17 meeting the needs of their communities beyond the
18 page, the stage and how the arts can help facilitate
19 that. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The next
22 witness will be Juan Carlos Salinas from JCAL.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 JUAN CARLOS SALINAS: Hello everyone, Council
25 Members. My name Juan Carlos Salinas, I am the

1
2 Director of Education at Jamaica Center for Arts and
3 Learning, part of the city's 34 member cultural
4 institutions group.

5 Throughout COVID-19, JCAL has demonstrated its
6 unwavering commitment to our city to three pillars of
7 support. Support for public life, public health and
8 public service. This hearing is to illuminate COVID-
9 19's impact on art and cultural educational
10 programming in our city. Here I could simply tell a
11 tragic tale that the emergence of a deepening of the
12 global pandemic has been devastating to our nearly 50
13 year old institution. Certainly it hasn't been easy.
14 Our pioneering school of the arts, the award winning
15 cornerstone of our mission can't operate quite as it
16 did before with dozens of classes serving hundreds of
17 young people all year long. But from the moment
18 COVID-19 entered our vocabulary, JCAL never once
19 blinked. Within hours of the shutdown, we paid our
20 small army of teaching artists to develop and deliver
21 arts focused high quality online pop up classes that
22 were free for everyone and market specifically to
23 students across Queens.

24 Then, with our new senior leadership at JCAL
25 starting this last July, we rolled out a

1
2 comprehensive community first, digital first season
3 and program. For example, our South East Queens gym
4 fest features seven bands for a three hour socially
5 distanced concert on the lawn of the Jamaica
6 Performing Arts Center. Our census were funded by
7 the grant from the New York Community Trust was
8 linked to five more outdoor events, all with arts
9 education themes.

10 Our Thursday night Jazz series generally
11 supported by former Council Member now Queens Borough
12 President Donovan Richards as well as the full Queens
13 delegation to the City Council has been live streamed
14 monthly from JCAL to its social media platforms
15 attracting 100 people per live concert and thousands
16 of youths in playback.

17 Our 11th annual Making Moves Dance Festival
18 funded partly by the New York State Council on the
19 Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts and
20 private sources was proudly fully online. Eleven
21 dance companies total, each governing hundreds of
22 audience members. JCAL launched a virtual book club
23 in South East Queens that attracted dozens of signups

24 -

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 JUAN CARLOS SALINAS: And there is more. Despite
3 COVID-19 hitting JCAL very hard financially, it will
4 not ever stop our institution from finding,
5 fulfilling and amplifying its mission. We can only
6 hope that Council Members continue to support our
7 crucial, critical high energy institution like ours
8 in the future. Thank you Council Members.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The next
10 witness will be Puiyan Taglianetti and again, please
11 excuse any pronunciation errors from Snug Harbor.
12 Thank you.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 PUIYAN TAGLIANETTI: Good day Speaker Johnson,
15 Chairperson Van Bramer and members of the Committee,
16 my name is Puiyan Taglianetti and I am the Visitors
17 Services and Education Coordinator at Snug Harbor
18 Cultural Center and Botanical Garden.

19 I will testify to the impact of the COVID-19
20 pandemic on the Cultural Institutions Group, the
21 CIG's and on Snug Harbor's programs and services.
22 Snug Harbor is a proud member of the CIG's, a
23 coalition of 34 cultural organizations who share a
24 public private partnership with the City of New York
25 and are located at all five boroughs.

1
2 During this pandemic, the CIG's have provided
3 central programs and resources to advance and support
4 public health, public life and public benefits. Snug
5 Harbor's challenges in the face of COVID-19 are
6 shared by many across the arts and culture sector.
7 My position supports volunteer programs in school
8 based learning, services that directly benefit the
9 public health and life of our communities. Snug
10 Harbor provides critical life sciences education to
11 New York City public school students servicing over
12 30,000 annually, 60 percent from Title I schools.

13 We serve the children of frontline workers at a
14 regional enrichment center remotely and in person we
15 provided hands on transformative learning
16 experiences. With the support from the City Council
17 through a greener NYC, Snug Harbor provides green
18 education and workforce development opportunities on
19 our heritage farm, on our ten acres of state map
20 wetlands and across our 83 acre campus.

21 Participants gained hard and soft skills while
22 developing a peer community and addressing community
23 needs. Although Snug Harbor's grounds have remained
24 open throughout this pandemic, we had to pause in-
25 person programs in the spring. We created virtual

1
2 programs with Wagner College, City Access New York
3 and the Department of Education's Work, Learn, Grow
4 students. At the conclusion, the students will have
5 gained necessary academic skills and Snug Harbor will
6 have the first draft of a volunteer management
7 handbook. Following city guidelines, we restarted
8 in-person programs in September. Participants from
9 the Department of Probations Youth Frat program,
10 Lifestyles for the Disabled, Hope Church and New
11 Adventures Charter School work side by side on
12 environmental stewardship and advocacy.

13 We launched a Snug Harbor Youth Volunteers
14 Initiative in partnership with City Universities
15 Powell School of Global and Civic Leadership pairing
16 local high school students -

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 PUIYAN TAGLIANETTI: With CUNY graduates in
19 environmental stewardship.

20 Snug Harbor and the CIG's know the unprecedented
21 financial challenges facing our city. Please, do not
22 overlook the critical role that our organizations
23 play in supporting public health, public life and
24 public benefit in our communities. Let us work
25

1
2 together to bring New York back better and more
3 vibrant than ever. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The last
5 member of this panel is Angel Hernandez from the New
6 York Botanical Garden.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: Good morning Chairman Van
9 Bramer and members of the Committee on behalf of the
10 New York Botanical Garden NYBG. Thank you for
11 letting me testify today and for all your hard work
12 in supporting our city's thriving arts and culture
13 community, especially during these unprecedented
14 times.

15 As we grapple with the continuing effects of
16 COVID-19, arts and culture become even more crucial
17 to the coping and recovery of its worried citizens,
18 despite any setbacks, our city's cultural
19 institutions continue to serve through remote and
20 safe in-person programming because culture never
21 closes. NYBG is a member of the City Cultures
22 Institutions group. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis,
23 all CIG's have been committed to contributing to the
24 City and to New Yorkers by supporting public life,
25 public health and public service.

1
2 In a realm of public health, the garden stepped
3 up at the onset of the pandemic to feed the Bronx in
4 a healthy way by donating thousands of pounds of
5 fresh produce to neighboring charities in public
6 schools. Also, NYBG created eight food hubs
7 organized by groups of community gardens throughout
8 the borough.

9 In the realm of public life, NYBG is a cultural
10 and educational anchor for all in the Bronx
11 community. Since given permission to welcome the
12 public back in July, NYBG began to offer any Bronx
13 resident and healthcare worker free access, totaling
14 tens of thousands of visits so far.

15 Lastly, NYBG's efforts in the realm of public
16 service, were demonstrated when garden staff
17 immediately shifted into free remote programming at
18 the onset of the pandemic. Our innovative online
19 programs covered diverse topics of discussion,
20 ranging from the intersection ally of history and the
21 LGBTQ community in botanical research and sciences to
22 the reconsideration of the conscious omission of
23 Black knowledge of the natural world.

1
2 Also, all of our school programs have been
3 modified to be conducted virtually. Yet, all these
4 free online programs can maximize -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS:

6 ANGEL HERNANDEZ: For diverse audiences without
7 adequate broadband access. Especially for our low
8 income communities. With a growing trend in online
9 programming and socially distant learning, getting
10 everyone connected online must be a topic of ongoing
11 work by the Mayor and City Council. Thank you very
12 much.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, yes Angel, thank you
14 for bringing up that incredibly important piece of
15 this, which doesn't get nearly enough attention and
16 we can do all the online programming in the world but
17 if there isn't a complete and total access and equal
18 access then we are still not doing our jobs.

19 So, needless to say, the Administration could do
20 more to fix this right away and should and must. I
21 want to thank all of you. I did want to go back to
22 Toya Lillard just because very compelling testimony
23 and viBe's mission is incredibly important and do you
24 have online programming? What is your situation in
25

1
2 terms of your ability actually project out that
3 mission and serve your constituency?

4 TOYA LILLARD: Thank you so much for the
5 opportunity and for your question. Yes, we did what
6 people are calling pivoting but what we had to do
7 first was do a needs assessment for our young women
8 and their communities because we are in Brooklyn and
9 as you all know, March and April were horrifying
10 months particularly here in Brooklyn and the
11 communities that we serve.

12 So, based up on what our young women said, they
13 needed the programming because their homes were not
14 sanctuaries. They were under tremendous pressure. I
15 didn't think it was possible to create theater
16 virtually. I just didn't and it was them and our
17 staff who really convinced me of the possibilities.
18 Our girls had already been doing things virtually and
19 had been imagining a virtual world and had already
20 been initiated into this idea.

21 So, they helped us to pivot. They helped us to
22 deepen our engagement and also, made it possible for
23 us to offer these programs nationally now since we
24 are virtual. So, before, you would need to be — come

1
2 to Brooklyn now we are reaching girls that would
3 never have been able to participate in our programs.

4 The second thing is, when the Summer Youth
5 Employment program was cancelled, it was our girls
6 that let us know how devastating an impact it was and
7 that they not only couldn't they - they couldn't
8 participate in our virtual program anymore but they
9 were really worried about getting out there and
10 finding jobs. Which made us again pivot and become
11 even more expansive and find the money to not maybe
12 match what they would have been paid by SYEP but come
13 very close to it and also, I want to just shout out,
14 we are proud members of the Coalition of Theaters of
15 Color and the high quality theater that we produce
16 has made it worth it. And so, our young women, the
17 training programs that we were able offer, still
18 maintaining them and becoming again even more
19 expansive reaching more young women.

20 So, by really asking them what they needed and
21 wanted. By engaging our community partners and the
22 folks that trusted and believed our work and also
23 through the hard work of our young staff. We were
24 able to change our organization forever. Some of
25 these things will stay being institutionalized. For

1
2 example, full health benefits for all staff, no
3 matter is you are part-time or full-time.

4 We are an organization staffed and run by Black
5 women. It is important as you know, in this
6 environment to think about our mental health, our
7 physical health and to be expansive and to think of
8 the arts as being also expansive and being able to
9 provide community care. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you and you are
11 relatively new members of CTC? Op, can we unmute
12 Toya?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We are unmuting, sorry, one
14 second.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: One moment. Oh, she should
17 be unmuted.

18 TOYA LILLARD: Yes, we have been members of the
19 CTC since 2015. Shout out to Majority Leader Laurie
20 Cumbo for making that happen for us. So, yeah, it's
21 been about five years.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's great and the CTC
23 was virtually only cultural budget item not cut this
24 year as you know and the Majority Leader and I fought
25 really hard in the budget negotiating team to make

1 that. So, the program as you know has been greatly
2 expanded. It should be expanded even more and not
3 cutting a budget is - well, that is a success. It
4 shouldn't be the baseline of what we are looking for
5 right, we should be expanding these budgets
6 particularly a budget line like this that is the only
7 one of its kind in the City of New York and serves
8 incredibly important organizations like yours.

9 So, thank you for the work and illuminating all
10 of us. And thank you to Juan Carlos and JCAL for
11 that energetic fierce representation of a great
12 Queens organization that I love and Puiyan at Snug
13 Harbor and of course Angel.

14 So, with this panel, thank you very much and I
15 will turn it back to our Committee Counsel.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair. We
17 will just take one second and check if there is any
18 other Council Member questions, please use the raise
19 hand function. We are not seeing any questions for
20 this panel.

21 So, we will conclude and move to the next panel,
22 thank you. The next panelist will be Alejandra Duque
23 Cifuentes, Sophia Morris-Pittman from Dance Theater
24 of Harlem, Amanda Adams-Louis and Erin Reid. So, Ms.
25

1
2 Cifuentes from Dance NYC, you may begin once the
3 Sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Hello, apologies, I
6 was having technical difficulty.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We hear you, thank you.

8 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Great. Hello,
9 Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer and folks in City
10 Council. Thank you so much for having me here today.
11 My name is Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, I am the
12 Executive Director of Dance NYC and on behalf of
13 Dance NYC, a service organization which serves over
14 5,000 individual artists, 1,200 dance making entities
15 and many, many nonprofit organizations and for-profit
16 folks in the New York City Metropolitan area.

17 We are so very grateful that there is a hearing
18 that is happening specifically on arts education.
19 Really, we are calling and requesting for the city to
20 continue to provide sustained and dedicated funding
21 to support arts and education in schools and
22 communities, including quality arts education for
23 every child and every school.

24 For budget cuts, either present or future to not
25 fall disproportionately on the Department of

1
2 Education, Department of Youth and Community
3 Development and the work that so many of the
4 different cultural organizations are doing in
5 relation to the Department of Education. And for the
6 City to continue to allow flexibility with the
7 Cultural After School Adventures programming,
8 particularly in response to the pandemic.

9 And less obvious, for the City to support the
10 dense specific COVID-19 guidelines that we are
11 putting forth that right now, the current reopening
12 guidelines do not provide guidance to dance studios
13 and education spaces that has been either forced to
14 remain closed or haven't gotten enough information,
15 so that they can reopen safely.

16 What we do know however, is that dance and
17 culture has not stopped throughout the pandemic.
18 Even folks that have not been able to come in person,
19 have continued to provide quality dense education to
20 communities for students, for parents. We can't tell
21 you the number of parents that we get calling us or
22 emailing us asking where in their local communities
23 they can find spaces of -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Dance education or
3 arts education. And so, in this moment, we are
4 really just asking for a continued support. We need
5 educators in every school. We cannot continue to
6 bleed out this aspect of the work that the arts and
7 cultural sector does. So, many dance businesses and
8 organizations also depend on their contract with DOE
9 to continue to support their workers and communities.

10 And so, we are just really pushing for continued
11 focus on education as a key component of the cultural
12 backbone of the city and the relationship that arts
13 education has with so many other city agencies and so
14 many other businesses and industries that further
15 support the workforce and our local communities.

16 Thank you so much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Our next
18 panelist will be Sophia Morris-Pittman from the Dance
19 Theater of Harlem.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 SOPHIA MORRIS-PITTMAN: Greetings New York City
22 Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
23 International Intergroup Relations.

24 Dance Theater of Harlem is a world renowned
25 classical ballet company and school founded by the

1
2 late Arthur Mitchell who was the first African
3 American to be principal dancer in a major ballet
4 company. Mr. Mitchell shifted the paradigm of the
5 dance industry and paved the way for dancers of color
6 to have access to ballet. He made ballet inclusive.
7 This has projected the organization as a cultural
8 cornerstone of the performing arts.

9 DTH as its formerly known has engaged in arts
10 education with the New York City public school system
11 now for almost 50 years. However, like many other
12 organizations, we too have been effected drastically
13 by COVID-19. Due to budget cuts, we have had to
14 layoff teaching artists and other part-time staff and
15 we have cut back drastically our direct services to
16 schools, students and the community when they need us
17 the most.

18 So, we implore you to fund arts education. Arts
19 education is essential work. It helps children to
20 thrive socially. Youth that are connected to other
21 children are happier, they are less anxious and have
22 more fun and NYU and health center. Move with
23 exercise also improves depression and anxiety
24 symptoms. It releases feel good endorphins. It
25

1
2 takes your mind out of worries and you gain self
3 confidence and it helps one to cope.

4 We cannot cut back on physical and the emotional
5 nourishment of our children. Arts education is
6 essential. Arts education is reasonable. Arts
7 education is about physical, mental and emotional
8 sustainability.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 SOPHIA MORRIS-PITTMAN: Let's take care of our
11 children. Thank you. I am Sophia Morris-Pittman,
12 Arts Education Manager for Dance Theater of Harlem.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
14 testimony. The next panelist will be Amanda Adams-
15 Louis.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 AMANDA ADAMS-LOUIS: Thank you. Good morning
18 City Council members. Good morning Council Member
19 Van Bramer, thank you for your leadership on this
20 issue. My name is Amanda Adams-Louis and I am a
21 teaching artist. I have worked with New York City
22 high school students and facilitate a professional
23 development workshops for high school teachers in
24 remote learning and digital media since March 16th.

1
2 I am here to testify today to highlight how
3 teaching artists can be critical partners to the city
4 and the students in rebuilding our city and
5 empowering and supporting our young people through
6 this difficult time. I would like to start out by
7 echoing the words of my students and sharing direct
8 testimony from them. Unfortunately, they couldn't be
9 here today because they are in class.

10 Very grateful for high school to art school,
11 Queens Council on the Arts for giving me and my peers
12 the opportunity to grow and learn from portfolio
13 reviews. They make sure that we are focused on the
14 right things in the college process and that's
15 testimony from Carlos Rivera[SP?] Senior at Frank
16 Sinatra High School.

17 CUE Arts Foundation provided a smooth transition
18 from in-person to online activities. While NYC had
19 been put on hold, CUE hadn't because of detailed
20 instruction and consistent guidance from my teachers,
21 I was capable of producing my best work in the middle
22 of a pandemic. Aurora Adalgo[SP?], a senior at the
23 high school for Construction Trades, Engineering and
24 Architecture.

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As I said before, my name is Amanda Adams-Louis, I am a Teaching Artist and in March, my colleagues and I at the CUE Art Foundation in Queens Council on the Arts transitioned our education programs from in person to remote learning without disruption. In fact we spent the weekend of the 16th transitioning moving supplies and making sure that we were able to provide materials for our students and set up the digital tech remote learning to echo Toya Lillard's. We did a needs assessment to check in with our participants and to also echo Angel Martinez, we made sure and figured out ways to ensure that all of our participants had broadband access.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

AMANDA ADAMS-LOUIS: Thank you for your time. Thank you for your leadership. I urge you to continue providing funding for city organizations and cultural institutions that deliver direct services to New York City's young people. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. You didn't get cut off there Amanda, did you? You got to say everything you wanted to say?

1
2 AMANDA ADAMS-LOUIS: I got cut off but in the
3 interest of the other participants on the call, I am
4 ending.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. You are very
6 kind. I am going to come back to you anyway and ask
7 you a couple questions.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you Chair, and
9 thank you so much. We have one more panelist on this
10 panel Erin Reid. You may begin when the Sergeant
11 starts the clock.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

13 ERIN REID: Hi all, my name is Erin Reid. I have
14 been a Teaching Artist and a Museum Educator in New
15 York for over three years. In the Urban Museum of
16 Art and the Tenement Museum I am completing my
17 master's in K-12 art education to continue this work.
18 Thank you for this opportunity to be in conversation.
19 I really just want to ground my statements in the
20 reality that COVID-19 continues to disproportionately
21 impact Black indigenous and people of color due to
22 racism instructional inequities in our healthcare,
23 housing and criminal punishment systems or to name a
24 few and of course as we have heard today, arts and
25 cultural education is not immune to structural racism

1
2 and this past year has highlighted this truth in
3 sharp relief, mass layoffs in the arts. While
4 significantly arts education as we have heard have
5 been hit BIPOC cultural workers the hardest. And
6 preexisting budget inequities have soared in this
7 crisis and left art organizations centering BIPOC
8 communities even more vulnerable than before.

9 Within museums and cultural institutions BIPOC
10 workers tend to be the most represented with a front
11 facing staff. So, education but also visitor
12 services security shop staff. Positions which are
13 usually among the lowest paid work and the most
14 precarious labor. From my experience as a former
15 educator at the Tenement Museum the layoffs of the
16 entire part-time staff in July gutted a majority of
17 workers of color and it left behind an institution
18 that is overwhelmingly White. There are no longer
19 any educators of color on staff at the Tenement
20 Museum today.

21 And this is an institution that see's thousands
22 of student every year, most of whom are students of
23 color learning about history. The story is similar
24 at cultural institutions across the city.

1
2 So, I implore you to advocate for increased wages
3 and benefits for part-time and front facing arts
4 education staff and continue to prioritize funding to
5 arts education programs and institutions that serve
6 predominantly people of color. It is unacceptable to
7 me that the budget distribution between boroughs
8 remains so uneven and that generates a lack of access
9 to arts for our most vulnerable students.

10 And lastly, I just want to salute our educators
11 across the city for our ability to use creative
12 thinking and to strategize new and innovative ways to
13 reach our students.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 ERIN REID: As we have heard in so many of the
16 testimonies today our adaptiveness and flexibility is
17 what makes art educators who have been most well
18 positioned to deal with a crisis of this magnitude.
19 In particular, it the continued resilience and
20 radical capacity for imagination of BIPOC cultural
21 workers and art educators that keeps us afloat and
22 New York City needs our voices and our ideas. Thank
23 you so much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Chair Van Bramer.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Op, a little feedback
3 there. You can hear me though right?

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you. Thank you
5 Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Thank you
7 Erin for that very powerful testimony and I had
8 already been thinking this but if you have been
9 following along, most of the people who have
10 testified so far are in fact women of color who are
11 helping to lead this fight. And I am grateful for
12 that and thrilled to see so many folks here. And I
13 want to thank you and Amanda as well, who is still
14 there right? Yes. A teaching artist and ask Amanda
15 because you mentioned Queens Council and the Arts, is
16 that how your work is funded in part? Are you a
17 grantee or what is the relationship between your work
18 and QCA?

19 AMANDA ADAMS-LOUIS: I am a part-time staff
20 members at QCA. I am one of the Co-Instructors for
21 the high school to art school program. A program
22 that prepares first generation low-income and
23 underserved youth to apply to art schools and
24 colleges and develop portfolios and last year, we
25 raised in collaborative with students to garner \$3.5

1 million in scholarship money for young people
2 attending college.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's pretty awesome
5 and I just want to thank you and I think you know, to
6 Erin's greater point, which is absolutely correct in
7 terms of equity and funding to organizations and
8 access. You know, we haven't as a city gotten there
9 but there have been somethings that we have pushed at
10 the Council. One is to dramatically increase funding
11 for the Coalition of Theaters of Color and make sure
12 that that budget was untouched this year when
13 everything else was getting wacked. And I voted
14 against the budget because I thought we should defund
15 the NYPD and reallocate that funding elsewhere but
16 one of the other things that we have done the last
17 couple of years is dramatically increased funding to
18 the Five Boroughwide Arts Councils. So, that we
19 could actually reach individual artists in the
20 boroughs. Many of whom are BIPOC artists and
21 educators.

22 So, it is just good to hear Amanda your story and
23 you know, the Arts Council's are doing some good work
24 with that increase in funding. Obviously I am a
25 proponent of increasing all of that and again, you

1
2 know, Erin, we have not fixed this structural problem
3 by any measure but I do think Commissioner Casals you
4 know, is someone who knows this issue, feels it
5 personally and would like to work on getting
6 something done but my only political point is we are
7 going to have to elect a Mayor who is really
8 committed to the arts and really committed to equity.

9 And I think that's when you are going to really
10 start to see movement with a newly empowered and
11 progressive City Council that you know, can move the
12 issue. Part of that is also and this really will be
13 my last political point, is making sure that we have
14 elected officials who care about the arts, right.

15 And who we are really actually asking people you know
16 not just their positions on transportation and
17 education but what is your position on the arts, arts
18 and education funding, equity in cultural funding.
19 You know, making sure that we are doing all the
20 things that we need to do.

21 So, I would just say that and I will get off of
22 my political soap box for a second but thank you Erin
23 for centering us in the way that you just did and
24 Alejandra I think is still here. You are a fierce
25

1
2 advocate for Dance NYC and the dance community and
3 really, really, really respect your work.

4 And Sophia, who I don't see immediately on the
5 box but just want to – oh, there you are. I do see
6 you. Thank you very much Dance Theater of Harlem is
7 an amazing organization. It pains me to hear you
8 talk about reductions of any kind in the work that
9 you do but you know, I am hopeful that we will be
10 able to be as resilient as possible but too much is
11 being asked of you. And too many sacrifices being
12 asked of artists, arts organizations particularly
13 communities of color.

14 So, with that, I just want to thank all of you
15 for your work, for being here and for representing
16 your communities and artists and the young people
17 that you serve most importantly.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
19 Bramer and members of the panel. We are just going
20 to check for Council Member questions before we move
21 on from the panel.

22 And we are not seeing any Council Member
23 questions. So, if there are none, we will move to
24 the next panel. Thank you.

1
2 Alright, so we will call the next four panelists
3 and then individuals by name again. So, the next
4 panel will be Casey Angelo from Groundswell, Lucy
5 Sexton from New Yorkers for Cultural and Arts,
6 Alexander Kopelman from Childrens Art Guild and Blair
7 Reavis-Tyler from the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation.
8 So, Casey Angelo, you are the next witness and you
9 may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock. Thank
10 you so much.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 CASEY ANGELO: Thank you to the City Council for
13 the opportunity to testify in support of arts
14 education. My name is Casey Angelo and I work at
15 Groundswell Community Mural Project in Brooklyn.

16 Groundswell is a nonprofit community arts
17 organization that engages youth and creative
18 processes to inspire community engagement, racial
19 justice and social change. Over the past 25 years,
20 Groundswell has served over 7,000 young people and
21 the completion of over 600 murals and works of art
22 across the five boroughs. Groundswell is current
23 offering an array of free remote arts programming and
24 professional development for artists and educators
25 and we remain committed to responding to the emerging

1
2 needs of the communities we serve. In fact, in the
3 face of SYEP cuts this past summer, we stepped up and
4 provided stipends to our participants. Within and
5 beyond the pandemic, issues around space, a rasher
6 and gentrification are threats to the safety and
7 security of many New Yorkers. We know that the act
8 of uplifting and centering unheard voices through
9 arts and culture helps build and rebuild healthy
10 community life.

11 Groundswell is ready and eager to take proactive
12 steps toward that end but we cannot do it without
13 your support. In order for this to happen, the DOE,
14 DCA and DYCD needs sustained and dedicated funding
15 for CASA and CDF fact programs.

16 In a time of crisis, let us not perpetuate a
17 White supremacist culture by divesting from the
18 already underserved and undervalued members of our
19 communities. Indeed, programs that foster mental
20 health and community rejuvenation should be the last
21 cut not the first.

22 With your continued support, Groundswell will
23 continue to support the path to a just world through
24 the social and emotional health of young people and
25

1
2 we know that arts and creative engagement is vital to
3 this process.

4 Thank you for your time and for your leadership.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The next
6 panelist is Lucy Sexton.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you Chair Van Bramer and
9 members of the City Council for hearing my and so
10 many others testimony and thank you in the entire
11 City Council for all the care and work you have been
12 doing for our city in this crisis.

13 My name is Lucy Sexton, I am proud to head New
14 Yorkers for Cultural and Arts. A citywide coalition
15 of cultural groups of every size from every
16 neighborhood. The damage of COVID to every artist,
17 cultural worker and organization has been immense.
18 And the damage to arts education among most serious.

19 There have been many studies on the impact of
20 arts and cultural education in schools. Last year an
21 article in the times detailed the many ways that arts
22 integrated into the curriculum improved outcomes.
23 From the article I quote, "the arts can be a source
24 of joy in a child's day and also come in handy for
25 memorizing time tables. Neuroscience suggests that

1
2 arts education can play additional important roles in
3 how children learn." Dr. Marial Hartman[SP?] said,
4 we found that biggest difference with children – the
5 biggest difference in outcomes with children at the
6 lower level of achievement. Could this be at least
7 one lever for closing an achievement gap. I think
8 so.

9 This fall the Brookings Institute did another
10 study affirming other benefits of arts and education.
11 There were upticks in standardized test scores,
12 reductions in disciplinary infractions and marked
13 increases in compassion for others. To quote from
14 that research, increases in arts learning positively
15 and significantly affect students school engagement,
16 college aspirations and their inclinations to draw
17 upon works of art as a means for empathizing with
18 others.

19 So, a crisis for arts and culture and education
20 is a crisis for our kids and a crisis for our city.
21 As you will hear from many others today, it is also
22 crisis for artists to teach. An NPR show this
23 morning detailed the devastating impact on artists
24 livelihoods. I also want to lift up the critical
25

1
2 work of the Office of Arts and Special Projects at
3 the DOE in making arts in schools be effective.

4 So, many have noted that New York City has the
5 most segregated school system in the country,
6 shocking.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 LUCY SEXTON: The inequity plays out when it
9 comes to arts and culture for school children with
10 the wealthiest Whitest schools providing PTA funds to
11 pay art teachers and the poorest schools in Black and
12 Brown neighborhoods going without. So, as you
13 struggle during this time of crisis and upheaval, we
14 ask that you break with the past. Instead of cutting
15 arts and culture first, instead of slashing arts ed,
16 instead of abandoning those neighborhood hardest hit,
17 we ask that you imagine a city where every kid in
18 every neighborhood deserves the educational benefits,
19 the dignity, the healing and the joy that culture
20 provides. Thank you so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Lucy. I just
22 want to — before we hear from the next panelist, you
23 know chime in that when we were negotiating the
24 budget in June and I heard about the Department of
25 Education arts cuts, you know, I spoke out against

1

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and then spoke to the Chancellor and others and I

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know he cares about equity but you know, we know that

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our public school system is mostly children of color.

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And if you cut arts and education, you are by

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definition depriving young children and students of

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color the opportunity to have access to these

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programs. And so, it should be the last thing that

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gets cut. And you know, obviously the Mayor and the

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Department with through with significant cuts to the

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Department of Educations arts and ed budget.

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The Council as you know, was much more successful

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in beating back cuts and obviously, you know, that's

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my job to lead that fight as the Chair of this

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Committee but you know, I agree with you and you know

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again, not to get to political but there were lots of

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reasons why I voted against the budget but this is

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one of them. We had our priorities backwards and cut

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incredibly important programs and uhm, funded some

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things that we shouldn't.

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LUCY SEXTON: And just to underline that those

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cuts are not equal right because my kids go to school

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in Manhattan and the PTA raises money for those arts

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teachers. So, we don't suffer that loss. Kids in

25

1
2 the boroughs, kids in communities of color do suffer
3 it, so.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Someone who is at PS-111
5 last week and I talked about PS-111 next week. I am
6 acutely aware that there are some schools in my
7 district that have the ability to have significant,
8 not insignificant but significant fund raising as you
9 mentioned towards the PTA activities which then often
10 are you know, funneled into additional programs and
11 services. And then there are schools that do not
12 have that ability and that is fundamentally you know,
13 unjust and inequity that is real and it is why we do
14 put additional resources into some of our schools
15 that are - you know, that just don't have those
16 abilities.

17 So, trust me, I have experienced that personally
18 and have done all I could to adjust that but that is
19 reality Lucy.

20 LUCY SEXTON: Thanks Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: The reality that has to
22 be changed. Sorry, next panelist.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
24 Bramer. The next panelist again will be Alexander
25 Kopelman from the Children's Art Guild.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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ALEXANDER KOPELMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you Chair Van Bramer and Committee members. It is an honor to appear before you today and thank you so much for taking up this important issue of arts education during the pandemic.

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I want to take a moment to acknowledge how honored I am by being amongst so many dedicated and passionate arts educators and artists. It is a real uhm, it's a pleasure for me.

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My name is Alexander Kopelman, I am a Co-Founder and President and CEO of the Children's Arts Guild. The Guild is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children harness their creativity to transcend limiting expectations and to explore and develop their authentic selves. We are based on the lower east side of Manhattan and we work with children primarily in District 1 schools through afterschool programs and serving a very diverse community.

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When schools closed on March 16th, we quickly shifted to offering programs online and almost immediately noticed a disturbing pattern. Children who are attending online programs tended to be

1
2 primarily from higher income families. When we
3 inquired among members of parent community, families
4 with limited economic resources reported a variety of
5 barriers to having their children participate. These
6 included living conditions not conducive to learning,
7 lack of access to technology and connectivity and
8 most importantly parents inability to help their
9 children and stay engaged.

10 This observation has been corroborated by
11 educators with whom we work through professional
12 development programs. Throughout the past nine
13 months, teachers have been reporting to us how the
14 pandemic has exacerbated the effects of socioeconomic
15 inequalities for their students. As schools and
16 organizations like ours adapted distance learning, we
17 are in danger further widening this gap between
18 children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. We
19 call on the Council and the Administration to
20 allocate funding to ensuring that online arts and
21 cultural education is accessible to all children.

22 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on
23 this important issue and for working to ensure
24 children benefit from arts education.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much. Is
3 that this panel?

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: There is one more panelist.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, got it.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The last member of this panel
7 is Blair Reavis-Tyler from Alvin Ailey.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 BLAIR REAVIS-TYLER: Hi, good morning everyone.
10 Again, my name is Blair Reavis-Tyler and I work with
11 Ailey Arts and Education and community programs with
12 the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation. I am also a
13 graduate of the Fordham University in Albany a
14 Bachelor of Fine Arts Program and on behalf of my
15 organization, I would like to thank the New York City
16 Council members for your continued support across
17 several program areas and for selecting Ailey as a
18 cultural provider for the Cultural After School
19 Adventures program. Through the CASA grants and
20 other funds awarded to Ailey by the Council, our
21 2020-21 school partners are very excited and deeply
22 grateful for the opportunity and financial support to
23 participate in our remote virtual programs.

24 Our community partners have expressed feedback
25 that the arts have been and will continue to be a

1
2 critical outlet and resource for their youth
3 especially during the era of COVID-19. One of our
4 long time school partners commented that DOE's budget
5 cuts led to their students feeling upset that they
6 might not be able to dance with Ailey this year.

7 A school principal has shared with us the
8 following quote in regard to being able to conduct an
9 Ailey residency remotely this year. "I am so happy
10 to hear that the residency can continue and I know
11 that our students will especially enjoy having this
12 opportunity for connection and enrichment." From the
13 Principal of PS-344X and Park Neighborhood School and
14 that school is a CASA participant.

15 The Council's commitment to equity in arts
16 education is a leading factor in Ailey's annual reach
17 each year. Our average number of students in New
18 York City DOE schools who participated in Ailey's
19 programs over the past two years is just over 6,000
20 students reached annually. However, the impact of
21 the pandemic on schools has resulted in fewer schools
22 that are able to support arts education programs and
23 we are unsure if we will be able to reach 1,000
24 students this year an 83.5 percent reduction in the
25 number of DOE students served. Disruption to our

1
2 programs and the discrepancy in the number we may
3 reach this year could result in negative effects on
4 those students missing out.

5 The stress of the pandemic is having-

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 BLAIR REAVIS-TYLER: Is having dramatic effects
8 on New York City students. Such severe changes to
9 ones security and wellbeing can overwhelm a persons
10 coping responses, in turn impacting motivation and
11 energy level in class.

12 The arts provide creative coping tools and space
13 for social support that buffer against traumatic
14 stress. New York City youth need the arts to nurture
15 their emotional and physical wellbeing as well as
16 reinforce the principles they learn throughout their
17 academic journey's and so, we are counting on you
18 Chairman Van Bramer and the City Council and we are
19 counting on your continuing to help to maintain a
20 strong support network for arts education programs.

21 Thank you for your time.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
23 Blair and if you could unmute Blair because I am
24 going to ask Blair a couple of questions. So, the 83
25 percent reduction is a result of the DOE arts and

1
2 education cuts right? Because I assume that most of
3 your CASA grants were continued and you will be able
4 to do that programming?

5 BLAIR REAVIS-TYLER: Well, we did receive the
6 CASA grants, which is incredibly amazing to have
7 received it this year. We weren't sure what the
8 outcome would be but given — once we received that
9 news, we have been reaching out to the schools to
10 start to facilitate the programs and start our
11 planning process and we are finding out that the
12 capacity of some of the schools that have been
13 awarded the grants, it's looking like some schools
14 are luckier and have more of a capacity to be able to
15 host a program with as many requirements as the CASA
16 program. We are waiting — we are working with our
17 development office to find out if we have any
18 flexibility with the restrictions and requirements of
19 the grant to see whether or not or how much leeway we
20 have to work with the school to kind of accommodate
21 their shifting learning models. But so far, I
22 believe we have got nine or ten awards and so far,
23 it's at this point in the year, we are working with
24 about four who have been awarded that grant, which is
25 amazing. Which is incredibly amazing but again, it

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is certainly at this point in the year, fewer than we normally would. So, at this point in the year with the end of the first semester, there are fewer students being served at this point but we are very hopeful about the remainder of the year and will continue to work with our schools that haven't started yet and see how we can be flexible and just work to accommodate their schedules and their capacity.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, well, I hope you will reach out and we can maybe work you and the Department of cultural affairs and the City Council to make sure because this is a Council Cultural Initiative, that everyone is as flexible as possible to allow you to access the grants that you have been awarded, nine or ten.

I know that I of course allocate a CASA grant to Alvin Ailey so that PS-111, the school in Queens Bridge has the program and if there are any issues with that program, please let me know.

BLAIR REAVIS-TYLER: Certainly.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Because you know and I never get tired of telling this story but in the first year that I was a City Council member, one of

1
2 my first school visits was to PS-111. They have a
3 beautiful dance studio in PS-111 but the principal at
4 the time informed me that there was no programming
5 available in that beautiful brand new dance studio
6 that had been privately funded.

7 And so, that's why I awarded Alvin Ailey a CASA
8 grant to activate that space and to make sure that
9 the children at that school would also be able to see
10 ballet dancers who looked like themselves at PS-111
11 and the first year that I went to the end of the
12 program, you know, at the end of the year, Ailey had
13 the children perform what they have learned all year
14 in the auditorium and I went and it was a beautiful
15 performance and at the end, they offered the
16 opportunity for all of the children to do freestyle
17 performance. They could dance on their own at the
18 very end. And most of the kids were a little shy and
19 a young woman who was in the middle school danced and
20 was amazing and afterwards, I went up on the stage
21 and saw the kids and I said to her, you were simply
22 amazing and it was brave and great.

23 And the principal pulled me aside and she said
24 that young woman who you spoke to at the very
25 beginning of this year was going through some very,

1
2 very traumatic things in her life and was not doing
3 well in school and not responsive but we got her
4 enrolled in the Ailey program and you can see that
5 her participation in this program has changed her
6 life.

7 We followed that young woman through high school
8 and through graduation. I believe that that program
9 saved her life. Absolutely changed her life and so,
10 it is incredibly important to me that the Ailey CASA
11 program continue at PS-111 and again, if there are
12 any issues, please, you know, reach out to me
13 directly.

14 BLAIR REAVIS-TYLER: Certainly. Uhm, I am sure
15 you will be happy to know that we are in the process
16 of confirming scheduling with PS-111. So, they are
17 on track to begin in the second semester.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great.

19 BLAIR REAVIS-TYLER: Thank you for your
20 leadership on this cause.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No, I absolutely, I love
22 it. I love Alvin Ailey. I love PS-111 and I love
23 this program and thank you to everyone. Groundswell,
24 again, does amazing work and Lucy, thank you for all
25

1
2 of your leadership on all things culture and the arts
3 and Alexander as well. Thank you to all.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
5 Bramer. So, this is the end of the panel. Before we
6 move to the next panel, we will just do one last
7 check for Council Member questions, if there are any
8 other Council Members. We are not seeing any hands,
9 so we will move to the next panel.

10 Again, we will call four names followed by
11 individual names. The next panel will be Angeline
12 Gragasin, and again, please excuse any pronunciation.
13 Asari Beale, Kimberly Olsen and Lulu Fogarty.

14 So, the next witness will be Angeline Gragasin.
15 You may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 ANGELINE GRAGASIN: Thank you to the Committee.
18 My name is Angeline Gragasin and I am a Filipino
19 American Artist based in Ridgewood Queens. I am also
20 the Co-Founder and Director of a grassroots community
21 organization called Happy Family Night Market. An
22 annual festival that celebrates the Asian diaspora
23 through food, art and education. Our
24 interdisciplinary programming consists of food, film
25 and live music festivals, sites specific in

1
2 participatory art works, hands on craft and culinary
3 workshops. A marketplace for artisans and
4 publishers, comedy and drag performances and panel
5 discussions on cultural assimilation and
6 appropriation.

7 We create value for our community by centering
8 Asian voices and challenging colonial notions of
9 Asia. We provide cultural representation as a form
10 of social justice. Since 2018, we have supported
11 over 300 artists, 80 speakers and educators and 30
12 chefs and drawn nearly 4,000 attendees. The pandemic
13 shutdown forced us to postpone our annual festival
14 indefinitely. Eliminating 100 percent of our income
15 for the 2020 Fiscal Year. Our business model and
16 strategic plan was rendered null and void and because
17 we had declared a loss on our 2019 tax return, we
18 were ineligible for a PPP loan to cover our expenses.

19 I lost my entire nine person team to the economic
20 pressures of the pandemic who were forced to abandon
21 this project in search of full time employment with
22 established corporations who could offer a
23 competitive salary.

24 I myself, have been staying afloat these past
25 nine months by collecting unemployment benefits as a

1
2 self-employed small business owner. Despite these
3 challenges during the pandemic, I have managed to
4 grow our audience, recruit a new team of volunteers
5 and pivot from live to digital programming.

6 For small arts and cultural organizations like
7 mine, we urgently need the city's support. We need
8 right now, zero percent interest loans or low-
9 interest forgivable loans of up to \$50,000 to start
10 up founders exclusively in the arts and cultural
11 sector who serve underrepresented communities and in
12 the future, grants and subsidies to cover long term
13 leases for office space, rehearsal and performance
14 space.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 ANGELINE GRAGASIN: Commercial kitchen space as
17 well as street permits and licenses for large scale
18 public art projects. Thank you for your
19 consideration and support.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
21 testimony. The next panelist will be Asari Beale
22 from Teachers and Writers Collaborative. Thank you.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.
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ASARI BEALE: Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to present testimony in support of arts education.

My name is Asari Beale and I am the Executive Director of Teachers and Writers Collaborative. As one of the first writers in the schools programs and the country, Teachers and Writers is partnered with New York City public schools to increase access to the literacy arts for over 50 years, offering innovative creative writing programs taught by poets, playwrights , novelists and other professional writers.

We also offer arts program for seniors and resources for teachers. We are based in Brooklyn and serve communities throughout the city. The pandemic has changed everything about the way we operate. In terms of funding, we anticipate a loss of over 70 percent of revenue from Department of Education contracts due to cuts to school budgets and initiatives like College Access for All. Through which we used creative writing as a tool for college readiness. Their loss represents about one-fifth of our operating budget. We are still uncertain about funding from other sources such as the Department of

1
2 Cultural Affairs, although I hope to find a letter
3 waiting for me when I return to my office.

4 The immediate impact of this loss is a reduction
5 in the number of programs we are able to offer and
6 the number of students that we serve. With each
7 school operating in different configurations of in-
8 person and remote learning, the logistics of
9 partnership are straining our staff and our
10 organizational resources.

11 There is a silver lining to all of this. Since
12 March, we successfully transitioned all of our
13 programs for youth and older adults to offer them
14 remotely. Our programs continue to offer students
15 the social and emotional learning that is so needed
16 right now. They have high attendance rates and get
17 students excited about showing up in the remote
18 learning space to write poems, plays and stories.

19 Our remote senior programs including a story
20 telling workshop for visually impaired seniors are
21 well attended and create vital social networks during
22 this time of isolation. In short, our programs are
23 still doing what they have always done.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
25

1
2 ASARI BEALE: Increase access to the arts, build
3 community and empower the voices of our youth.

4 Arts education programs like ours are needed in
5 New York City more than ever. The City Council can
6 support our work by championing arts education,
7 ensuring funding for the arts through the Department
8 of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs and
9 including City Council initiatives like CASA and SU-
10 CASA.

11 I know that City is in crisis but I believe arts
12 education organizations like ours can be a resource.
13 We can help with the most critical problems students
14 and schools are facing this year, such as teacher
15 shortages, social emotional learning needs and
16 student absenteeism. We can improve the quality of
17 life for seniors who are sheltering at home and we
18 can continue to create jobs for teaching artists who
19 are at the heart and sole of arts and culture in New
20 York City. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
22 testimony. The next panelists, we have two more on
23 this panel, will be Kimberly Olsen from New York City
24 Arts and Education Roundtable.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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2 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Thank you Chair Van Bramer, the
3 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Commissioner Casals
4 and the staff at DCLA for your leadership and
5 commitment to arts education. Also, congratulations
6 on the passing of the Open Culture Bill.

7 My name is Kimberly Olsen and I am the Executive
8 Director of the New York City Arts and Education
9 Roundtable and a proud Long Island City resident.
10 The Roundtable is a service organization that builds
11 its efforts around the values that arts are essential
12 and that arts education is a right for all New York
13 City students. Our 120 plus member organizations
14 have worked in long standing partnership with the DOE
15 to ensure that every child has access to quality arts
16 learning.

17 We acknowledge that our great city is in crisis
18 but we at the Roundtable believe that the pathway
19 forward includes investment in arts education as part
20 of the city's recovery. The cuts to arts education
21 programs have not only stripped away much needed
22 resources from our young New Yorkers but jeopardize
23 the livelihood of thousands of artists and cultural
24 workers. Earlier this year, the Roundtable
25 administered a relief fund to education, cultural

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2 workers in the arts impacted by COVID-19. 80 percent
3 of those applicants had been furloughed or laid off.
4 85 percent had estimated their 2020 annual income to
5 be under \$30,000, well under New York City's poverty
6 threshold. We are grateful for the support we have
7 garnered from the Department of Cultural Affairs to
8 engage in another round of relief funding to support
9 these highly specialized workers.

10 As we rebuild from these dual pandemics,
11 investment in cultural partnerships put artists to
12 work in communities and drives movement towards a
13 more equitable education system. We seek City
14 Council's help as the field of arts education fights
15 its way through this time of economic strife.

16 To rebuild and sustain arts education programs,
17 we believe the City must reinstate a DOE systemwide
18 per capita funds for arts learning a kin to the
19 project arts program. Increase accountability around
20 arts learning in schools by mandating that every
21 school includes the arts as part of their
22 comprehensive education plan. Offer a one year
23 extension to cultural organizations with MTAC
24 contracts expiring between March 2020 and June 2021.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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2 KIMBERLY OLSEN: With a suggestion that an audit
3 of the conflicting system be conducted after the
4 pandemic and also restoring cuts to arts services at
5 the DOE and CASA programs in the FY22 budget.

6 Now in partnership with OASP and certified arts
7 teachers, our cultural partners are ready and able to
8 continue working with schools and students. Thank
9 you so much for your time and consideration.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Chair Van Bramer
11 did you have – we have one more panelist.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No, we will listen to
13 all four and then I will have some thoughts.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you. Uhm, the
15 last member of this panel will be Lulu Fogarty from
16 Bridging Education and Art Together.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 LULU FOGARTY: Thank you for your time. I am
19 Lulu Fogarty; a proud graduate of New York City
20 public schools and I am speaking to you on behalf of
21 bridging education and art together. An arts
22 nonprofit and registered DOE vendor that provides
23 arts programming to New York City's youth and people
24 with disabilities.

1
2 Since our founding in 2009, we have impacted 2000
3 students, most of whom come from under resourced
4 communities and nearly half of our participants have
5 a physical and or cognitive disability. I urge you
6 to recognize what New York State Education Law has
7 clearly stated for years. That arts education is
8 essential and it must be adequately funded.

9 Engagement in the arts is critical to youth
10 development. The collaboration necessary for art
11 making builds foundational life skills such as
12 critical thinking, problem solving, team work and
13 empathy.

14 Even before the COVID crisis, schools and
15 organizations serving people with disabilities and
16 under resourced youth could not fund arts programs
17 adequately. What is worse is that recent reports
18 from the Washington Post and the New York Times
19 indicate that students with disabilities are losing
20 social and academic skills they acquired before
21 school closures began. This skill loss will only
22 continue if arts education remains underfunded.

23 In March, we lost every school partnership that
24 we had. Not because of dimming interest from the
25 schools but because of budget cuts and mandated

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2 spending freezes from the DOE. Nonetheless, we
3 pivoted our instruction to virtual platforms and
4 struck new partnerships with disability service
5 organizations, who brought our programs to 700
6 participants this year.

7 But we are here today on behalf of the hundreds
8 of New York City Youth in schools that need our
9 programming but lost access in March. Now, is your
10 opportunity to ensure that city's public schools can
11 finally contribute to the holistic development of our
12 youth through art. We owe it to our students.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 LULU FOGARTY: Thanks to everyone on the
15 Committee for Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
16 International Intergroup Relations for your time.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Lulu and to
18 everyone on the panel and it is devastating testimony
19 Lulu to hear that all of those contracts you know,
20 were severed and all of the funding was cut. You
21 know, we have to as a city and as a society come to a
22 place, a better understanding about the value of this
23 so that even in a pandemic, even in a crisis, this
24 isn't something that is seen as something we can do
25 without and the long term consequences of the actions

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2 that this Administration and this Department of
3 Education have taken will be failed for a long time
4 to come as you indicate, right. That it is almost
5 impossible in some cases to make for the time that is
6 being lost and the programming that is being lost and
7 the enrichment that is being lost. And the
8 engagement that is being lost particularly for some
9 children.

10 And Kimberly, thank you for all the work that you
11 do and the recommendations that you always bring to
12 this and we will be obviously talking with the
13 Chancellor and the Administration about all of these
14 things. Sorry.

15 And Angeline, there are so many things going on
16 in Ridgewood that are exciting and this is yet
17 another one. My husband and I watched a program that
18 benefitted the Ridgewood Tenants Union a couple of
19 Sunday's ago. A comedy show and some other things
20 and appreciate your work and we absolutely should be
21 doing all the things that you talked about in terms
22 of interest free loans but really grants, right and
23 real direct support in addition to what we already do
24 as a city and the permitting process that you
25 mentioned. Obviously, we hope that open culture is

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2 the very beginning of a broader open permitting
3 system and outer performance program and like I said,
4 to start that but I appreciate the work that you are
5 doing and around Ridgewood and all of you for what
6 you are doing and fighting for.

7 Obviously, I agree and we need to continue with
8 this fight and right some of the wrongs that happened
9 in this most recent budget and get the Department of
10 Education to a better place and understanding the
11 value of these programs and then of course the City
12 budget needs to reflect that as well. There should
13 have been no cuts to CASA. I certainly forcefully
14 fought that and it would have been much worse had we
15 not fought back but there should have been no cuts.

16 So, that's all I will say to that and throw it
17 back to our Committee Counsel.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair. We
19 are just checking quickly for Council Member
20 questions. If there are any Council Members that
21 have questions, please use the raise hand function in
22 Zoom.

23 We are not seeing any questions but before we
24 move to the next panel, we also just wanted to remind
25 everyone that you can submit written testimony up to

1
2 72 hours after the hearing. So, if there is anything
3 that you would like to add to your testimony if you
4 did not submit written testimony and would like to or
5 you did not submit testimony today, please remember
6 you can submit testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov
7 through 72 hours after the start of the hearing.

8 So, now, we will move to the next panel which is
9 panel six and call the next four members. First we
10 have Jessie Lee followed by Buzz Slutzky from the
11 Leslie Lohman Museum of Arts, followed by Kimaada Le
12 Gendre. I apologize again for any pronunciation
13 errors and Adrian Benepe from the Brooklyn Botanic
14 Garden. Okay, if all members are signed on, Jessie
15 Lee, you may begin your testimony when the Sergeant
16 calls the clock. Thank you.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 JESSIE LEE: Hi, my name is Jessie Lee. I am a
19 Director of Operations at Statement Arts. A
20 nonprofit in New York City providing a performing
21 arts education visual and performing arts education.

22 We have of course an afterschool and summer
23 program as well as a college, a readiness program
24 from 3rd grade to college students and a lot of alums
25

1
2 come back to us as well as they go through the
3 college life and get ready for their career.

4 We have been able to transform ourselves all our
5 performing arts programs in summer and the fall in
6 virtual world and I don't know how we did it but we
7 did it and the other thing that we have done, when we
8 created this program this year, I fully created, it
9 wasn't redoing it. It was literally recreate the
10 program that we didn't have before. That we spoke to
11 students and parents. We also spoke to the teaching
12 artists and school teachers that we partner with and
13 throughout the you know, city constantly asking a
14 question. What are the things we need? What are
15 things that we didn't have before that emerge because
16 of COVID-19?

17 One of the issues that came up was about creating
18 a sense of a community. Creating our platform or
19 space where the students just share their challenges
20 and issues, their struggles. And those are the
21 things that was a much needed and that turned it into
22 our, one of our programs result which is part of a
23 design lab and studio where students can come and
24 express their creativity and produce a performance or
25 produce a video, anything like that.

1
2 So, we were even able to do virtual cabaret in
3 November. All of these came from the students
4 feedbacks and their desire to be part of the creative
5 projects and activities they are lacking in. And one
6 of the biggest things that we hear from the students
7 are that they want a space in place they can actually
8 work on these things that are interesting to them.
9 They are able to use as a creativity project and
10 activities as outlets of how to deal with their
11 mental issues and social emotional issues and things
12 like that.

13 The one thing I would like to say is that we are
14 talking about our program more, one of the things
15 that I would like to bring up is that when there is a
16 huge issue with the funding that we are almost every
17 month, there is a one or two funding -

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 JESSIE LEE: That either they stopped funding us
20 or they are reducing funding. The other thing that I
21 would like to bring up is a couple of things that we
22 need. One, is a digital equity. One of the biggest
23 challenges again, many people said about it, the
24 device issues, that they don't have a space. They
25

1
2 literally work in bathrooms at times and they have
3 internet access and some other issue.

4 The last issue that we really need help is that,
5 if we can get more data and metrics, information that
6 is readily available as things are moving fast, those
7 are the tools and resources that we often use to get
8 more resources, more funding. So, those are another
9 last thing that we really need from many different
10 communities, especially from the City if that is
11 something that they can support.

12 Thank you very much for the opportunity today. I
13 am really, really grateful for being able to be here
14 and just sharing what is going on underground with
15 the students and parents and our teaching artists.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Our next
17 panelist will be Buzz Slutsky from the Leslie Lohman
18 Museum of Art.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 BUZZ SLUTSKY: Hello, thank you to the Council
21 for the opportunity to present testimony in support
22 of arts education. My name is Buzz Slutsky and I am
23 a Teaching Artist at the Leslie Lohman Museum of Art.

24 Before the pandemic, the teaching artists of
25 Leslie Lohman developed intersectional residency

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2 curricula and visited gender sexuality alliances of
3 NYC public schools –sorry, middle schools and high
4 schools. During our visits we shared images and
5 stories from queer art history, especially the AIDS
6 movement and the Stonewall Rebellion and created
7 space for them to make art in those traditions. In
8 effort to show youth that making art can be a way of
9 fomenting liberation and change the conditions that
10 effect queer people.

11 The GSA visits helped students learn new identity
12 words that they had never heard before and it was
13 powerful to watch youth transform from timid and
14 scared of being found out to being proud, empowered
15 and opened up through feeling connected to history
16 and community.

17 As a nonbinary and transgender person, who never
18 met a single out transgender person until adulthood,
19 it is amazing to see how my mere presence can show
20 you that it is possible to be a self-actualized
21 adult, an artist and be a transgender and nonbinary
22 person.

23 In March, once it was clear that it wasn't safe
24 to work in schools, we had a difficult time reaching
25 teachers that were GSA advisors who still had energy

1
2 to work with us remotely on top of the grueling
3 nature of their online jobs. Because of parental
4 homophobia and transphobia, it can be hard to connect
5 directly with students especially if they are not
6 out.

7 Our other ongoing work such as providing museum
8 tours and PD opportunities for teachers also became
9 obsolete. Without continued sources of funding, it
10 was impossible to strategize to find ways of working
11 to connect with LGBTQ youth. The team of teaching
12 artists decided to put our little lost tiny bit of
13 funding into creating a series of captioned videos in
14 Spanish and English called Queer Art TV.

15 In which we engaged with works from the museums
16 collection and encouraged viewers to make our work in
17 the spirit of these works similar to what we would be
18 doing with youth in the GSA's. While this was an
19 exciting direction, it still doesn't reach youth to
20 the extent that it did before the pandemic.

21 On September 15th, 25 percent of the museum staff
22 was laid off including a curator and archivist, a
23 senior staff member and most of the staff members of
24 color. In addition, the Director of Education was
25 laid off in May. These Council left a shell of the

1
2 former staff to juggle multiple jobs. I fear that if
3 the museums educational programming or the museum
4 itself, it fails to survive. A generation of
5 students won't learn about their queer and trans
6 ancestors like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera
7 and won't see themselves reflected in art history and
8 will miss out on experiences that could save their
9 lives.

10 Thank you for your consideration and support.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
12 testimony. The next panelist will be Kimaada Le
13 Gendre.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 KIMAADA LE GENDRE: Good afternoon Chair Van
16 Bramer and members of the Committee. My name is
17 Kimaada Le Gendre and I am Head of Education at the
18 Queens Museum.

19 Thank you for your continued support of arts and
20 culture during these difficult times and thank you
21 for the opportunity to testify today.

22 Like many other members of the GIG, the
23 operations of the Queens Museum was significantly
24 impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. After we shut our
25 doors, we were faced with many challenges, including

1 programming to the public and meeting payroll.

2 Despite this, we continued to offer essential
3 programs and resources to advance and support public
4 health, public life and public benefit for our
5 constituents.
6

7 Despite significant loss in revenue and steep
8 cuts to programming, we were still able to move
9 forward with a full sweep of multilingual educational
10 and cultural offerings including our Queens Teens
11 program. Where teens had the opportunity to create
12 art, discuss social justice, practice self-care and
13 attend various workshops and events.

14 This group has now grown in size from 30 teens
15 from Queens prior to the pandemic to 120 teens from
16 across the five boroughs and Long Island since the
17 pandemic. Participants created a stay at home guide
18 featuring art making and self-care prompts. Most
19 recently, our teens created a civic engagement guide
20 to help both younger and older teens become active
21 and involved in civics in their local communities.

22 Our staff and teens regularly volunteer at the
23 food pantry we serve onsite with [INAUDIBLE 2:23:33]
24 and Together We Can Community Resource Center where
25 we have served thousands of families since June.

1
2 Queens Museum will continue to look at this recovery
3 through the lens of arts and culture as we strongly
4 believe that a healthy cultural life will be an
5 important part of the recovery and wellbeing for our
6 communities.

7 Thank you to the Committee for this opportunity
8 to testify. Queens Museum looks forward to our
9 continued partnership.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 KIMAADA LE GENDRE: With the Council and value
12 your leadership through this crisis. Thank you so
13 much.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
15 testimony. The final witness on this panel will be
16 Adrian Benepe from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. You
17 may begin your testimony when the Sergeant calls the
18 clock.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 ADRIAN BENEPE: Thank you Chair Van Bramer and
21 Committee Members including I saw, Majority Leader
22 Cumbo whose district encompasses the entire Brooklyn
23 Botanic Garden.

24 I am Adrian Benepe, President and CEO of the
25 Brooklyn Botanic Garden. BBG is a vital practitioner

1
2 and proponent of informal inquiry based science
3 education. Our children's education programs invite
4 both casual visitors and program participants to
5 practice scientific skills and concepts for the
6 exploration of plants.

7 BBG's dozen plus education programs comprise a
8 ladder of learning that engages participants of all
9 ages and hands on experiences that meaningfully
10 connect them to the world of plants. More than
11 26,000 people were served this year so far. Although
12 in-person programming was suspended for the spring
13 and summer when we were closed for four months, we
14 quickly pivoted to new and adaptive virtual services
15 including E-News letters with plant based activities
16 sent to Discovery and Children's Garden families.
17 Participation and WNET Groups Cap TV, a national
18 public television series, online training and
19 horticulture, cooking and science who are 50 garden
20 apprentices. A Project Green Reach, that's our
21 school program curriculum website featuring plant
22 based lesson plans and activities for K-8 teachers.
23 Inquiry based professional development for teachers
24 at the Brooklyn Academy for Science and Environment

1 and participating in Urban Adventure schools and
2 more.

3
4 As for the New York Botanical Garden, our
5 children's garden was turned into a farm. We
6 provided more than 1,200 pounds of food for needy
7 families in our communities. Our education team
8 continues to develop and adapt programming for the
9 schools, students and teachers who depend on the
10 gardens education information services and we have
11 piloted virtual field trips this fall.

12 Staff educators teach student live from the
13 garden or their homes, meeting classes on the schools
14 preferred and remote learning programs. And schools
15 that opt for asynchronous programming, students watch
16 videos filmed on the gardens consummatory's and
17 greenhouses.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 ADRIAN BENEPE: And follow BBG curriculum guides.
20 The garden has focus on promoting virtual field trips
21 to Title I schools via project reach and District 75.
22 The education team has also worked to ensure our
23 curriculum remains hands on by mailing hundreds of
24 science based activity kits including plants to
25 program participants.

1
2 I want to say how inspired I have been by hearing
3 all the stories of my colleagues in this business
4 facing the challenges and surrounding them. We
5 remain committed and we appreciate the City Council's
6 steadfast support so that we can emerge a whole lot
7 stronger under this pandemic. Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.
9 Always good to see you Adrian and good to hear that
10 BBG, which obviously was able to welcome some folks
11 onsite. You know, it was also going virtual and
12 letting folks who couldn't or didn't feel comfortable
13 or for whatever reason didn't have access, still able
14 to partake in the programs and the grounds even
15 virtually, which is so important.

16 And Kimaada, thank you. You know how much I love
17 Queens Museum and was out there with all of you I
18 guess a couple months ago and saw some of the amazing
19 work that you talked about and the pantry and all of
20 those young people. You know, I could not have been
21 more proud of the Queens Museum and what I saw that
22 day.

23 And I think, I don't know if Buzz is still with
24 us but very much appreciate the testimony from Leslie
25 Lohman and was saddened to hear about the extent of

1
2 the layoffs there. Although obviously we are aware
3 of layoffs at most of our organizations and
4 institutions but you know, also interested in the
5 challenge and maybe you can unmute Buzz briefly
6 because as someone who identifies as queer, as a gay
7 man, you know and it was not out in high school.

8 But the work that you do in going into schools is
9 terrific of course and meeting with GSA's and the
10 Advisors and the students but as you spoke it
11 occurred to me just how difficult that might be able
12 to do online because some of the young people who may
13 not be out are of course, sometimes safer in school
14 in a group like a GSA with someone like yourself.

15 You know, talking with them but if they are on an
16 iPhone or an iPad or a laptop in the house where they
17 are not out, that could be incredibly challenging
18 right.

19 So, you know, what has that experience been like
20 and does that make your online work even that much
21 more challenging?

22 BUZZ SLUTSKY: Yeah, I also forgot to mention, I
23 remember when you were speaking that initially we
24 were starting to make what we were calling activity
25 kits that were sort of like lesson plans that can be

1
2 transmuted virtually. I think it is just hard
3 because we just don't have the — you know, allies of
4 the teachers available to us, to the same extent that
5 we did before the pandemic but I think part of the
6 issue is that if we don't have funding to continue to
7 meet online than it is hard to strategize of how to
8 connect with students but I think you are totally
9 right. That there is a lot of barriers for us to
10 reach students and I think we were starting to get
11 excited about media that can be kind of sent out or
12 maybe like some sort of web presence. Things that
13 youth can access without maybe parents hearing them
14 speak out loud. Something that they could do on
15 headphones.

16 Yeah, I hope that answered your question.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, no, uhm, and yeah,
18 so we should just stay in touch. I mean, obviously
19 you know I care a lot about Leslie Lohman as I do
20 everyone but that program specifically working with
21 queer youth. You know, they are few and far between
22 and so, it is really important to support them and
23 just because you mentioned the name of Sylvia Rivera,
24 one of the greatest nights of my life was being in
25 jail. In a jail cell with Sylvia Rivera for 24 hours

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2 because we were all arrested in March of 2000 trying
3 to march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade on 5th
4 avenue which at the time did not allow queer people
5 to march with our banner and Sylvia Rivera and I were
6 thrown into the same jail cell and spent the night
7 talking in a jail cell.

8 BUZZ SLUTSKY: Amazing story. Thank you for
9 sharing that.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, it is one of my
11 best activist stories. Before I got elected to the
12 City Council, so thank you Buzz and Jessie Lee, thank
13 you very much for your perspectives as well.

14 Thank you to this panel and I will throw it back
15 to our Committee Counsel.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
17 Bramer and to the panel. We will just check for
18 other Council Member questions before we move on. If
19 there are Council Members that have questions, please
20 use raise hand, the raise hand function.

21 We are not seeing any, so we will move the next
22 panel. The next four panelists, panel seven will be
23 Melissa Diaz, Heather Maxson, Mia Nagawiecki and
24 Dominique Hood.

1
2 So, the next witness will be Melissa Diaz. You
3 may begin once the Sergeant calls the clock. Thank
4 you.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We are just checking again
7 for Melissa Diaz.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: She is there, do you see
9 her?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yeah, you might have to hit
11 accepted on mute. You actually have to accept it.

12 MELISSA DIAZ: I got it.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There you go.

14 C Got it, thank you. I am Melissa Diaz, good
15 afternoon Chair Van Bramer and Committee Council. I
16 am from the American Museum of Natural History and I
17 would like to thank you for your unwavering support
18 throughout the years especially now as our cultural
19 community faces the challenges of COVID-19.

20 For cultural institutions like the Museum of
21 Natural History, the closure of building meant that
22 within a matter of days, we had to make dramatic
23 changes to how we operate and how we reach the
24 public. It was a sudden halt for a place typically
25 so full of students, families, life and joy but we

1
2 remained focused on our mission of science education
3 for all.

4 I would like to provide an update today about the
5 Urban Advantage program which is the largest
6 formalized middle school science education
7 partnership program in New York City as well as in
8 the country. It was founded in 2004 in partnership
9 with the city and despite economic downturns and
10 other emergencies, it has continuously evolved to
11 meet the needs of teachers, students and families in
12 every council district and it is still serving those
13 communities today.

14 We are in our 17th year and it is a program that
15 is designed to support the teaching and learning of
16 science through a partnership with the Council, the
17 Department of Education and eight of the city's
18 science based cultural institutions including the
19 Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Bronx Zoo, New York
20 Aquarium, the New York Botanical Garden, the Hall of
21 Science, the Queens Botanical Garden and the Staten
22 Island Zoo.

23 We are all members of the cultural institutions
24 group and we remain committed to public health,
25 public service and contributing positively to public

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life despite the tumultuous year. As school communities evolve to meet the needs of the new teaching and learning environment, so did Urban Advantage. Moving courses online in as little as one week and shifting our entire catalogue online by mid-March. In a matter of days we transformed the Urban Advantage model to serve hundreds of teachers remotely who count on the program for high quality professional development.

As our doors closed, we continued reaching more than 46 percent –

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MELISSA DIAZ: In New York City public schools. Providing intensive professional development for educators and administrators. Inquiry promoting scientific materials and equipment, free access to partners institutions and educational outreach to parents and administrators.

Currently, we are serving over 63,000 middle school students and 700 middle school teachers as well as 63,000 students – I am sorry, 6,300 students in elementary schools.

I would like to thank you for supporting us and for all of us who collaborate on the Urban Advantage

1
2 program. It is one way the Council has continued
3 supporting the teachers, parents and students who
4 have overcome these months of instability and since
5 then, we have continued to offer vouchers to families
6 who come to the museum on their own.

7 I would like to thank you all for your support
8 for Urban Advantage over the years and if you haven't
9 yet, I encourage you to come and visit us. Thank you
10 for your leadership and of course, I welcome you
11 questions.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. We will
13 move to the next panelist and then accept questions
14 after the panel. The next witness will be Heather
15 Maxon from the Whitney Museum of American Art.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

17 HEATHER MAXON: Hi everyone. Hi, I am Heather
18 and I am the Director of School Youth and Family
19 programs at the Whitney Museum. Thank you Chair Van
20 Bramer and members of the Committee for hosting us
21 today.

22 After the Whitney closed temporarily in March, we
23 worked quickly to adapt programs, collections and
24 exhibitions to be available online. And to ensure
25 that while our doors were temporarily closed, the

1 spirit of the Whitney remained open to all. With
2 respect to our K12 programming, we started offering
3 free field trips for New York City public schools in
4 1983, a program that typically serves over 20,000
5 students a year.
6

7 In response to teacher interest and need, in
8 March, we pivoted quickly and began to offer free
9 online field trips. Between last March and now, we
10 have held more than 463 virtual classes for city
11 schools, serving over 9,300 students from 169
12 schools.

13 We expect many more and hope that many more
14 requests come in the new year. We have also done a
15 major outreach project identifying and reaching out
16 to schools in the areas hardest hit by COVID. One
17 thing we are really proud of is that we have been
18 able to keep our teaching artists, who we call museum
19 educators employed through this time.

20 I have a testimony to share from Julie
21 Ronios[SP?] a Visual Arts Teacher at the Lower
22 Manhattan Arts Academy. A school that has partnered
23 with the Whitney since 2015.

24 She says, how does one teach art making let alone
25 equitably when kids don't have materials or space to

1
2 make art? What I do know is that the Whitney tossed
3 me a life preserver. They got in touch and asked if
4 I wanted to have some online field trips with my
5 kids. I jumped at the opportunity. We meet every
6 week online, hang out and let art do what art does
7 best, help us explain to ourselves the world we live
8 in.

9 We are also continuing to offer our successful
10 afterschool programs for New York City teenagers, art
11 making classes and artist talks as well as free
12 weekend programs for families. And I just wanted to
13 thank you so much, we are so grateful for the City's
14 support of the cultural community and arts education
15 during this difficult time.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The next
17 panelist will be Mia Nagawiecki.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 MIA NAGAWIECKI: Thank you. Hello Chair Van
20 Bramer and Committee on Cultural Affairs. I am Mia
21 Nagawiecki, Vice President for Education at the New
22 York Historical Society. Thank you for the
23 opportunity to offer testimony today about how COVID-
24 19 has effected the New York Historical Society and
25 how our services have continued throughout this time.

1
2 Thanks in no small part to the vital support of
3 the Department of Cultural Affairs and the City
4 Council, so thank you.

5 This has been a challenging year and we are
6 continuing to feel the consequences of our temporary
7 closure. Attendance was expectedly low in Fiscal
8 Year 2020 and the effect of income loss on our
9 operating budget has been so severe, excuse me, that
10 we have been forced to implement staff reductions and
11 furloughs across every department.

12 Despite these difficult setbacks, New York
13 Historical has remained committed to its core mission
14 of education. In response to school closures, we
15 launched history at home on March 23rd, turning our
16 slate of K12 programming into virtual offerings.
17 Under history at home, social studies enrichment
18 lessons have been transformed into free weekly
19 virtual sessions tailored to all grade levels.
20 Museum based field trips are now offered as virtual
21 tours during which museum educators lead classed
22 through our digital exhibits. Teens and teacher
23 programs have moved online as well, quickly adapting
24 to remote workings sessions.

1
2 Additionally, our flagship academy for American
3 democracy program, which engages six grade classes in
4 the history and evolution of democracy has been
5 converted to an online format with interactivity and
6 art making. To further assist parents and teachers
7 at home, New York Historical's robust curriculum
8 guides are freely accessible online.

9 Finally, our children's history museum is
10 providing engaging remote activities for young
11 families as counterparts to curriculum based
12 learning. Together, these measures have allowed us
13 to provide direct cultural education services to more
14 than 61,000 teachers, students and families since the
15 pause began and will continue until our in person
16 services can resume.

17 In this time of Fiscal uncertainty, we remain
18 grateful for the city's investment in cultural
19 education and we thank you and your fellow City
20 Council Members for your exceptional service. Thank
21 you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. There is
23 one more witness on this panel and we will move to
24 that witness now. Dominique Hood from Historic
25

1
2 Richmond Town. You may begin when the Sergeant
3 starts the clock.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 LUKE BOYD: Good afternoon Chair Van Bramer and
6 Members of the Committee. My name is Luke Boyd, I am
7 the Director of Education Public Programs at Historic
8 Richmond Town. I am here to present Dominique Hood's
9 testimony on his behalf. He has since tested
10 positive for coronavirus.

11 My name is Dominique Hood and I am an Educator at
12 Historic Richmond Town. Historic Richmond Town is a
13 proud member of the City's cultural institutions
14 group and the arts and culture fabric of our great
15 city. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, CIG's have
16 been committed to contributing to the City and to New
17 Yorkers by supporting public life, public health and
18 public service.

19 Since March, many of the everyday people whose
20 lives we chronical at Historic Richmond Town are
21 visiting public, have found solace and a breath of
22 fresh air amongst our fields and forested areas along
23 Richmond Creek.

24 Though our site has remained open as a historic
25 village park for passive visitation, in person

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programs snarled to a halt. This change was no more evident then this past summer when Historic Richmond Town's beloved apprentice program was cancelled. For over eight decades, young people that experienced the past in a profound way at our site, tasting bread made in the oven by their own hands. Feeling the heat flowing off a hot iron as a Blacksmiths hammer swung upon it. Smelling the fresh smell of wood cut by a carpenter.

Out of caution and safety amidst the pandemic, this experiential program had been reticent with hands on learning as our dominant approach, how could we bring that authenticity to our public in a time of isolation and risk? In response, we launched a virtual apprenticeship program in which I was invited to play a part.

I witnessed a young virtual apprentice build an intricate basket from a kit that we made and provided for them and by their own hand in their own home, guided by an educator on the other side of a screen. We witnessed nothing but joy and pride upon their face upon the completion of this project.

This work we love can persist, can adapt and grow beyond this pandemic if only there are those who are

1 willing to fight for it. Investing in our cultural
2 institutions during this time -

3
4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 LUKE BOYD: When arts and culture need it most,
6 will ensure that we will have the tools needed to
7 expand necessary public engagement in government and
8 in the culture sector, we share a common calling of
9 service to our fellow citizens.

10 I submit this testimony in the name of that
11 service and implore the powers that be to provide it
12 with the resources it requires and deserves. Thank
13 you very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Luke. I
15 abandoned that woodworking shop a couple years ago
16 with Council Member Matteo and appreciate your
17 testimony and Mia, Heather and Melissa. You know,
18 big fans of all of the work and the institutions that
19 you represent and grateful that you are able to do as
20 much as you are currently able to do on behalf of the
21 people who are sitting here, particularly the
22 children.

23 So, thank you very much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair Van
25 Bramer. We do not have any other Council Member

1
2 questions for this panel. So, we will move to the
3 next panel. The members of the next panel or panel
4 eight will be Ali Abate and again, please excuse any
5 pronunciation errors. Paula Heitman, David Lawson
6 and David Shookhoff.

7 So, the next witness will be Ali Abate. You may
8 begin when the Sergeant calls the clock. Thank you
9 so much.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

11 ALI ABATE: Good morning. My name is Ali Abate,
12 I want to thank Council Member Van Bramer and the
13 Department of Cultural Affairs for this opportunity
14 in their ongoing support. I am the Director of
15 Education at the Queens County Farm Museum and I
16 would like to share with you how Queens Farm impacts
17 our city and how we have been effected and have been
18 adapting to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

19 Queens Farm is one of the longest continuously
20 farmed sites in New York State with a 323 year legacy
21 of growing food in New York City. We are a 47 acre
22 historic site and urban farm. We pride ourselves as
23 a site that is open daily and free to the public for
24 354 days of a typical year. Pre-COVID we serve over
25 400,000 visitors annually through school field trips,

1
2 public events and daily visitor ship and in a non-
3 COVID year over 100,000 of those visitors are
4 students who participate in our acclaimed school to
5 farm education program.

6 These students come from every New York City
7 Council district in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan
8 and Queens and often their visit to Queens Farm is
9 their first visit to a working farm. Queens Farm
10 serves 54 percent of Queens elementary schools that
11 serve NYCHA communities, 51 percent in Manhattan, 40
12 percent in Brooklyn and 36 percent in the Bronx.

13 The deepest impacts to our organization due to
14 the pandemic are felt by the loss of our in-person
15 education. Over 106,000 students were not able to
16 visit us this year. That's based on previous years
17 attendance and were on track to head in that
18 direction had we not closed. 113 program dates have
19 been lost since the start of COVID and those are days
20 when field trips would have taken place. Over 400
21 hours of educational time are lost and we have
22 suffered staff reductions totaling 61 percent of our
23 staff that have been unemployed due to loss of
24 programs.

1
2 Revenue loss from the loss of these programs
3 totals about \$1 million. These numbers represent a
4 huge loss for our city. Loss enrichment
5 opportunities for students, teachers and parents and
6 loss opportunities for outdoor learning in a unique
7 environment that supports classroom learning, child
8 development and connection to nature and promotes
9 healthy eating and wellbeing.

10 They also represent a massive loss for our
11 dedicated staff of educators who benefit from and -

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 ALI ABATE: Sustain themselves as professionals
14 in arts and culture from this programming and who are
15 suffering the financial burdens of lost employment.

16 What we have done in response has been a
17 combination of virtual programming at a much reduced
18 amount of in-person programming. We have created
19 virtual learning through social media, that we began
20 as early as March 23rd and had over 200,000
21 impressions while the Farm was closed to the public.
22 We create remote curriculum support for teachers
23 through resource guides and converted curriculum that
24 they could use. We have done synchronous and
25 asynchronous virtual tours for schools and provided

1
2 outdoor experiences for the programs that could
3 travel to us once we reopened as of August 2nd. We
4 have maintained our CASA connections by preparing the
5 virtual opportunities in at home off screen
6 activities for students and are getting ready for our
7 CASA partnerships that will be starting up this year.

8 And one of the biggest impacts I think we had
9 during the entire pandemic was a farm camp that we
10 were able to offer in partnership with common point
11 themes this summer for seven weeks of programming for
12 small pods of students that provided hands on farm
13 activities and we saw through these programs of power
14 farm education and how grateful our students and
15 families that participated were for this program.

16 Thank you for this opportunity and your time. We
17 look to the Council to help us in bridging these
18 losses during this time of continued uncertainty and
19 as were heal and move towards a hopefully healthy and
20 brighter future.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
22 Our next panelist will be Paula Heitman from Marquis
23 Studio. You may begin once the Sergeant starts the
24 clock.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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2 PAULA HEITMAN: Good morning. My name is Paula
3 Heitman, I am the Executive Director of Marquis
4 Studios. A nonprofit arts education organization
5 that has been providing arts programming to New York
6 City public schools in all five boroughs for over 40
7 years.

8 Thank you to the Committee for holding this
9 hearing today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak
10 on behalf of Marquis Studios, its staff, teaching
11 artists, the students and teachers we serve. I would
12 also like to take this opportunity to amplify our
13 gratitude for the support from City Council via the
14 CASA program. We are able to provide high quality
15 arts programming to dozens of schools because of this
16 support and we thank you.

17 Has many have stated before me, the impact of
18 COVID-19 on our organization has been tremendous.
19 Were it not for the relief aid which we received
20 through the federal CARES ACT; it is likely that we
21 would not be here today. The funding we receive from
22 the Payroll Protection Act, allowed us to keep the
23 majority of our staff and teaching artists working
24 while we shifted our programming to online. Which
25 was a monumental task that none of us were prepared

1
2 for or had training or experience to do but as
3 creative people, we found a way.

4 Our goal and our mission throughout last spring,
5 this summer and this fall was to find a way. That is
6 our motto, find a way. The question was never if we
7 would be able to provide arts programming to our
8 schools but how we would provide arts programming to
9 our schools.

10 It has not been easy in fact; it has been quite
11 painful. As in order to manage our budget in a way
12 that would allow us to stay committed to our schools,
13 we had to make hard decisions about our staffing and
14 our teaching artists rosters. We had to furlough
15 many people and layoff some as well. And the biggest
16 reason for this is cash flow issues. Last spring, we
17 were not able to predict when or if we would receive
18 payment for programming we delivered remotely.
19 School budgets were in fact frozen. City funds were
20 delayed and yet, we found a way. As we believe
21 deeply that the arts are essential.

22 In closing, I would like to share a statement
23 from the Principal of one of our partnership schools,
24 Chris Reda, the Principal of PS10X, a District 75
25 school and a CASA recipient.

1
2 Chris says, for our students participating in
3 remote learning, access to materials in the home has
4 been limited. Exposing the inequities that our
5 students and their families face. All children
6 should have the ability to express themselves while
7 being provided the tools and support to do so. The
8 arts is a substantial force in the growth for every
9 student. Children with special needs can realize
10 that they too have a place in society in their homes
11 and in their communities to express themselves to the
12 best of their individualized ability.

13 I thank the Committee, Council Member Van Bramer
14 for providing this opportunity to hear from arts
15 organizations across New York City. Thank you so
16 much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next panelist
18 will be David Lawson from the League of Independent
19 Theaters.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 DAVID LAWSON: Thank you to the Committee for the
22 opportunity to testify before you today. My name is
23 David Lawson, I am here to testify today as a member
24 of the League of Independent Theater and as an Arts
25 Educator.

1
2 The League is an advocacy organizer for those who
3 work in small theaters or nontraditional spaces.
4 Like myself, many arts educators also work in
5 creating professional theater. The abrupt shutdown
6 of the theaters, professional performances and
7 classes hit us from all sides.

8 For the past few years, I have been independently
9 teaching classes where students write and perform
10 their own one person shows. Many of my students have
11 gone on to perform their work at theaters, comedy
12 clubs and universities all around New York City and
13 across the nation. Many arts educators like myself
14 rely on renting rehearsal studios to provide our
15 classes. Earlier this year, Simple Studios, the
16 rehearsal space where I would teach my students,
17 closed after over a decade in business.

18 Simple Studios was by no means struggling before
19 the pandemic. Every time I was there, it was packed
20 full of arts education classes and professionals,
21 rehearsing productions and it is not just Simple
22 Studios, Shetler Studios, Champion Studios, Chelsea
23 Studios and Space Works were all rehearsal spaces
24 that have permanently closed, each one serving
25 thousands of artists and educators.

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These spaces are closing because commercial rents have been out of control for years. That's why I am asking on behalf of Community Arts Educators, like myself and so many other great folks who have spoken today for City Council to pass Introduction 1796, which would create a commercial rent stabilization board to ensure that rehearsal space and theaters have a future in this city. I call upon the members of this Committee to Co-Sponsor Introduction 1796 and call for a hearing now. Thank you all so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. The final member of this panel will be David Shookhoff from the Manhattan Theater Club.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

DAVID SHOOKHOFF: Thank you so much. Good morning I am David or good afternoon. I am David Shookhoff, Director of Education Manhattan Theater Club. Calling from the historic lands of the Lenape Munsee peoples, thank you Chairman Van Bramer and Committee Members for this opportunity.

Founded in 1989, MTC education was the first education program created by a major theater company in New York City. Since then, we have been providing programs, robust programs to high schools in all five

1
2 boroughs combining classroom instruction and play
3 writing residencies with attendance at plays in our
4 theaters.

5 We have focused in particular on students in
6 alternative schools including detained and
7 incarcerated youth on Rikers Island at Passages
8 Academy and elsewhere. With the shutdown last March,
9 MTC education pivoted to remote formats, just two of
10 many examples, our student monologue challenge
11 invited students to submit one minute monologues,
12 some of which we published on our website. Stargate
13 Theater, our summer theater company for young men
14 with a history in justice system involvement went
15 digital, culminating an original video play that
16 received more than 15,000 views.

17 Our school partnerships are now all remote.
18 Teaching artists visit classrooms virtual and in new
19 matinees, our work centers on videos of past MTC
20 productions. To be sure, we have encountered
21 substantial cutbacks and challenges. Among them,
22 navigating the switches between hybrid and all remote
23 attendance and crucially echoing other witnesses
24 insecure or nonexistent internet access for
25 significant numbers of students, especially those

1
2 from under resourced communities and in detention
3 centers. Nonetheless, we have successfully completed
4 several residencies and will continue to do so
5 throughout the year. I am however concerned about
6 the prospect of severe budget cuts which will impair
7 schools ability to meet even the modest, highly
8 subsidized fees we charge, which we have reduced this
9 year to help our partner schools.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 DAVID SHOOKHOFF: I urge the City Council to make
12 arts access in schools more equitable and ensure that
13 funding is not affected disproportionately by the
14 inevitable general budget cuts. Thank you so much
15 for the opportunity to testify.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you David. They
17 don't have to inevitable and hopefully we can
18 successfully fight them back and envision a different
19 way to do budgets in the City of New York. And to
20 David Lawson and LIT, boy have I been on the phone a
21 lot with LIT leadership over the last couple of
22 weeks, which I appreciate and we have a long
23 relationship. And I am a big supporter of commercial
24 rent control and also the small business job
25 survival. Both of those bills should move and would

1 help our community an awful lot and very painful to -
2 I mean, I know these things because I am of this
3 world and am in this space with all of you so much
4 but when David, you talk about those rehearsal spaces
5 that are closing and Paula, you are talking about the
6 staff losses at Marquis and it is just very, very
7 deeply painful but I am grateful that you continue
8 that.

10 And we love the Queens County Farm Museum of
11 course and the programs that go on there and thank
12 you very much Ali for your work and just lastly,
13 David Shookhoff just talked about programs, virtual
14 programs for those who are incarcerated at this
15 moment and I just want to thank you for raising that
16 and mentioning that. We talked about a lot of
17 different communities that are being served. A lot
18 of underserved communities and programs and services
19 for those who are incarcerated are very important and
20 our libraries. Chair of Cultural Affairs and
21 Libraries, libraries do a lot of work in and for
22 those who are incarcerated. Very important that arts
23 programming reach those communities as well.

24 So, thank you all.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Van Bramer.
3 We have no other Council Member questions, so we will
4 move to the next panel. I will read the four names
5 of panelists followed by individual witness names.

6 The next panel will be or panel nine, Becky
7 Leifman, Kati Koerner, Nancy Kleaver and Carlota
8 Santana. The next witness, the first member of that
9 panel is Becky Leifman from CO/LAB Theater Group.
10 You may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 BECKY LEIFMAN: Hi, my name is Becky Leifman and
13 I am the Executive Director of CO/LAB Theater Group.
14 A nonprofit that offers individuals with
15 developmental disabilities at creative and social
16 outlet through theater arts.

17 We recognize that this city is in crisis and we
18 are grateful to have the time to speak with you
19 today. CO/LAB like so many arts organizations
20 transitioned our in person classes from a rehearsal
21 studio to Zoom classrooms. We are happy to report
22 that we have maintained the majority of our
23 participants, teens and adults with developmental
24 disabilities. Much of this success is due to the
25 flexibility of funders such as the Department of

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2 Cultural Affairs, who allowed for grantees like
3 CO/LAB to reallocate performance costs towards
4 digital programs.

5 These past nine months we have seen huge
6 inequities in our participants, some have access to
7 high quality technology and some breeze through a
8 class with unreliable internet. We have seen many of
9 our partner organizations, day-hab centers, schools,
10 nonprofits struggle as they reallocate their arts
11 funding to COVID precautions.

12 Unfortunately, many have not been able to partner
13 with us this season due to financial strain. We have
14 listened to our participants share their grief as
15 family and friends are passing away and sharing their
16 anxieties around vaccine progress and distribution.

17 On a positive note, we have seen our roster of 22
18 teaching artists brilliantly reimagine what it means
19 to be an arts educator. They brought compassion,
20 innovation and joy to our programs. After the age of
21 21, mandated, creative and social services for people
22 with developmental disabilities drops as they leave
23 the school system. Please invest in the arts as you
24 continue New York City's COVID-19 response.

1
2 New Yorkers like our participants need it now as
3 a creative and social outlet and will need a post
4 pandemic to process the grief, trauma and rebuilding
5 process. Our field is willing to help you think of
6 creative solutions. Thank you for your time.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Our next
8 witness is Kati Koerner.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 KATI KOERNER: Hi, my name is Kati Koerner and I
11 am the Director of Education at Lincoln Center
12 Theater. Thank you so much to Chair Van Bramer and
13 the entire Committee for the opportunity to testify
14 today.

15 So, although Lincoln Center Theater is dark, our
16 education programs are going strong. This year, we
17 will provide online theater education services to
18 more than 2,800 students and 28 New York City public
19 middle and high schools in 15 City Council Districts
20 around the city.

21 LCT is reaching students and teachers through a
22 combination of prerecorded and live online content.
23 The centerpiece of our efforts this fall, just as an
24 example, is a website devoted to one of our
25 productions, Dominique Morris's[SP?] play pipeline

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2 about race and schools. Which is really supposed to
3 be a one stop shop for students to watch a video of
4 the show, access activities and contextual
5 information about issues related to school
6 segregation and also serve as a spring board for our
7 teaching artists to follow up to create the spoke
8 work for each participating class.

9 So, the key is really maximum flexibility. Each
10 of our school partners has its own schedule, its own
11 balance of live and prerecorded content. Its own
12 challenges with attendance and student access to the
13 internet and to technology.

14 Serving English as a new language students,
15 recent immigrant students, is a core part of LCT's
16 education work. Our partner schools are gravely
17 concerned about language loss among ENL students and
18 see the arts as a key way to encourage those students
19 to show up online and to speak up in class.

20 So, like with all teaching right now, the job of
21 a teaching artist has changed completely. It now
22 requires more planning time, time to film and edit
23 lessons and put them on line. Respond to student
24 work and learn the necessary skills to teach
25 effectively online and with that, with those added

1
2 demands come frankly added costs for cultural
3 organizations.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 KATI KOERNER: The City Council can support arts
6 education through its continued advocacy and
7 oversight and thank you so much again to the Chair
8 and the Council and this Committee for your
9 leadership on this important issue.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
11 testimony. Our next panelist will be Nancy Kleaver
12 from Dancing Classrooms.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 NANCY KLEAVER: Good afternoon Council Member Van
15 Bramer and Committee members. My name is Nancy
16 Kleaver, zooming in from Woodside Queens on the land
17 of the Munsee Lenape and Canarsie peoples. I am the
18 Executive Director for Dancing Classrooms, a 26 year
19 old organization that cultivates life skills in young
20 people through the art and practice of social dance.

21 We are to my knowledge, the only nonprofit solely
22 dedicated to teaching social and partner dances from
23 around the world to children in New York City.

24 In 2019, pre-COVID, we were on track to serve 150
25 schools across every borough and almost 17,000 New

1
2 York City public school students. When the pandemic
3 hit as all of my colleagues have been saying, we
4 pivoted almost immediately producing free dance
5 experiences for our teachers and bringing on our
6 weekend programs to Zoom. Thanks to emergency
7 funding from amazing sources like New York Community
8 Trust and individual donors and our incredible
9 teaching artists, we were able to translate our
10 intensive dance residency for 4-8th graders into a
11 remote learning offering called Dancing Classrooms
12 Homeroom Addition and pilot it with long time school
13 partners for free.

14 11 schools and 33 classrooms, representing all
15 five boroughs invited us to offer Homeroom Addition
16 and what we found was extraordinary. Not only can
17 children learn social and partner dances over video,
18 they can focus. They can collaborate, reflect on
19 their feelings, show real progress towards social and
20 emotional learning and dance learning goals we have
21 for our in-person work as well.

22 Like most of our peer organizations, we are not
23 just a vendor or a program, we become part of the
24 school family and part of their identity. This makes
25 our role even more critical now I believe. When

1
2 children are experiencing such loss and all their
3 routines are out of whack, we, the arts community can
4 be a beacon of hope. Something familiar and exciting
5 to look forward to.

6 So, this fall, in addition to honing Homeroom
7 Addition, we have created fully synchronous hybrid
8 and -

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 NANCY KLEAVER: Version of our residencies. We
11 offer free dance classes for educators. We are
12 partnering with City Council members through CASA and
13 CII funding and community-based organizations to
14 bring our programs to the afterschool spaces.

15 In a normal year we would be working with 50
16 schools but right now, we are projecting to work with
17 20 and even reaching one-fifth of our services this
18 year is proving to be a herculin task.

19 I will have to submit the rest of my written
20 testimony but basically you know, I implore City
21 Council and the Department of Education to do what
22 you can to really ensure that everyone at the
23 Department of Education understands that arts
24 instruction must continue as a part of every child's
25 academic program.

1
2 It is not a frill. It is not something nice to
3 do. It is a New York State mandate. That has not
4 changed because of the pandemic, it has only become
5 more urgent. Thank you so much for your leadership.
6 We are here waiting in the wing, ready to leap into
7 action. Please help us help them.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. The final
9 member of this panel will be Carlota Santana. You
10 may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock. Thank
11 you.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

13 CARLOTA SANTANA: Thank you. Yes, my name is
14 Carlota Santana and I am the Director of a company
15 called Flamenco Vivo. A multicultural dance and
16 music and Hispanic company. What I do want to say
17 more than anything is that I prepared my little two
18 minute speech awhile ago, a couple of days ago and
19 now that listening to everyone, I just want to say
20 ditto and thank you for everybody else's very, very
21 powerful statements.

22 I would like to just tell you a little bit about
23 our company and say ditto to everybody else's. I am
24 repeating myself, powerful statement.
25

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2 So, we are a company 35 years old. We have been
3 doing arts and education for 35 years. We are
4 mixture of Gypsy Latino, Arabic Latino, African
5 cultures. We take all those cultures into the
6 classroom and teach kids about culture, about pride
7 and about discipline. In a usual year, we reach
8 about 20,000 students K-12. This year at starting at
9 COVID, we went virtual. I have a bunch of teaching
10 artists that surprised me how quickly they got into
11 the virtual teaching and we are in schools right now
12 and we are just with support of the DCA, starting
13 some schools in the Bronx to do our virtual teaching.

14 Thank you to everyone. Thank you to the whole
15 Committee and everybody I have heard today. I see my
16 time is running out. We have had a lot of good
17 support from the City, from the state, from NEA and
18 thank you to everyone. Ole-

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
20 Carlota and I agree that collectively, this is a very
21 powerful statement right, to have dozens and dozens,
22 this is our ninth panel I think and we are going onto
23 the tenth panel. Dozens and dozens of people and
24 organizations and artists who care so much about this
25 and who against all odds are continuing to provide as

1
2 many services as they can to children who desperately
3 need them.

4 Nancy, thank you very much for your work. It was
5 great to see you and the organization that you now
6 lead and Kati, I don't know if she is still here but
7 thank you. Of course, sad to hear anyone say you
8 now, Lincoln Center, the stages are dark but
9 certainly glad to hear that education programs
10 continue and that goes for any stage that's dark in
11 the City of New York right now. It is just
12 devastating.

13 And Becky, thank you as well, if Becky is still
14 there. Yeah and appreciate everything that all of
15 you have had to say and it is kind of you Carlota to
16 say that the city, state and federal governments have
17 done a lot. We can do more and we should do more and
18 that's our job right, is to keep fighting for this
19 community who has continued fighting through this
20 unbearable time, including drastic reductions and
21 support.

22 So, thank you all for continuing your work.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Van Bramer.
24 We do not have any Council Member questions, so we
25 will move to the next panel.

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2 The next four members of the panel will be panel
3 ten Flannery Gregg, Jerome or Jerry Korman, Carlye
4 Echert and Judith Insell. Mr. Gregg, Flannery Gregg,
5 you are the next witness and you may begin when the
6 Sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

8 FLANNERY GREGG: Thank you to the Committee for
9 having me. My name is Flannery Gregg and I am an
10 Associate Choreographer on Broadway and the Rehearsal
11 Director for Monica Bill Barnes & Company. A small
12 dance company based in the city.

13 Through the dance company I have had the
14 opportunity to work with the Hunter College Dance
15 Department. In 2019, 1,600 students performed with
16 us at the Fall for Dance Festival at City Center and
17 they nailed it. It was the largest stage the
18 students had ever performed on.

19 Since the pandemic hit, the students and I
20 adapted our graft for the online world by developing
21 a virtual show called Keep Moving. Our Choreography
22 was layered with audio of the students describing
23 challenges. How they continue to dance in their
24 families living rooms or in their basements next to
25 the washing machine.

1
2 Without any housing or financial support, many
3 students have had to move away from the five
4 boroughs. Some students are working on the
5 frontlines of their supplemental jobs. The only
6 thing keeping us together are opportunities to
7 continue working together. Currently, I only qualify
8 for the minimum amount of unemployment, \$184 a week.
9 I have to rely on teaching opportunities as a source
10 of sustainability to stay and live in New York.

11 The dance company has been able to pay the
12 students and myself for our time. Small dance
13 companies and freelancers urgently need access to
14 long term funding from the city to support
15 connections between students and professionals. This
16 is crucial for students to grow and artists to
17 sustain.

18 While the Open Culture program will allow shows
19 to go on in New York City streets, dancers will still
20 need safe and supportive outdoor spaces to rehearse.
21 Such as weather proof venues with proper flooring. A
22 more sustainable option for us is going to be
23 virtual. Small dance organizations and freelancers
24 need affordable access to digital tools and platforms
25 to promote and perform online. If NYC can build

1
2 sustainable, virtual performing arts platforms,
3 artists and audiences are not limited by geography.

4 We need free internet for all New Yorkers, so
5 dance students and audiences regardless of their
6 socioeconomic backgrounds can attend virtual classes
7 and performances.

8 My Broadway gig was put on pause in March but I
9 have been able to teach emerging performing artists.
10 The city as we know it will not exist -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 FLANNERY GREGG: If artists and students continue
13 to be sidelined in COVID-19 recovery. Thank you for
14 your support.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony
16 and I apologize also for the name.

17 FLANNERY GREGG: No worries.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: So the next panelist will be
19 Jerome Korman.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 JEROME KORMAN: You can hear me?

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yeah, we can hear you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.
24
25

1
2 JEROME KORMAN: First of all, I just want to say
3 what an honor it is to be in this esteemed company.
4 Thank you very, very much.

5 Good afternoon, my name is Jerry Korman, I am the
6 Music Director at National Dance Institute also known
7 as NDI headquartered in Harlem. In 1976 ballet star
8 Jock Dombros[SP?] founded NDI in the belief that the
9 arts have a unique power to engage and motivate
10 individuals towards excellence. Ever since NDI has
11 transformed the lives of more than 2 million
12 children.

13 First, let me say in this time of crisis NDI is
14 here standing with New York City, standing with our
15 school partners, standing with our young dancers.
16 Partnering with our schools has never been more
17 complicated but it has never been more necessary.

18 Across the board the principals in our schools
19 have told us that the students need music and dance.
20 They need all the arts more than ever. Sadly, due to
21 scheduling and school finances, NDI is not presently
22 serving all of our usual 42 schools, which has
23 significantly impacted our organization, our teaching
24 artists and most importantly, the students.

1
2 Arts education is essential, essential. Dance is
3 an important language on its own but dance through
4 NDI, always accompanied with live music, even in the
5 Zoom paradigm also supports the social and emotional
6 wellbeing of our students.

7 NDI has a role to play in the schools right now
8 and we are continuing our work through a lens that
9 puts racial equity and social justice front and
10 center through training, hard conversations and
11 implementation. If 2020 has taught us anything, it
12 is that New York City needs to access its heart and
13 soul, so we see each other as equal and catch those
14 that fall through the cracks. The arts are the
15 perfect vehicle to support this work.

16 Whatever the city needs to do to help support
17 arts education and keep the arts alive, it is time to
18 act. What will the consequences be if children do
19 not have access to arts education during this time of
20 crisis, when the ability to express -

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 JEROME KORMAN: Is more important than ever. If
23 New York City allows the gap of inequity to widen, so
24 that only children of financial needs have access to
25 learning in and through the arts and personal

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2 development, empathy, exuberance, emotional
3 engagement and healing that only the arts can
4 provide, what does this mean for our future?

5 I just want to say once again thank you very much
6 for the opportunity. NDI is alive but struggling and
7 we look forward to serving our schools as much as
8 possible. Thank you for your time.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
10 The next panelist will be Carlye Echert.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 CARLYE ECHERT: Hello, can you hear me?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you yes, thank
14 you.

15 CARLYE ECHERT: Thank you. Thank you Chair Van
16 Bramer and members of the Cultural Committee for
17 hearing my testimony today as a representative of
18 Dance Parade. My name is Carlye Echert and I am the
19 Community Engagement Director for Dance Parade.

20 My responsibilities are to coordinate year around
21 dance education outreach in schools and community
22 centers across the boroughs, which culminate in the
23 annual dance parade on Broadway and Festival and
24 Tompkins Square Park.
25

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2 Although the 14th annual parade and festival were
3 preempted last May due to COVID, we did manage to
4 launch an interactive festival which was attended by
5 more than 6,500 people. Attendance was considered
6 good for an online event; however, we believe that
7 live performance in the streets and public parks is
8 vital to awakening the human spirit and helps build a
9 more equitable and vibrant society.

10 After halting programming that began in February,
11 a portion of our weekly dance residencies
12 transitioned online and were offered free for
13 students April through September including
14 residencies taught in Mandarin, launched under an
15 award from Create NYC Language Access Fund.

16 We had to bear considerable expense to get Zoom
17 working, acclimate our teaching artists to remote
18 teaching platforms and overcome access and technical
19 challenges for our students. We applied for several
20 emergency grants from private foundation, received
21 some financial assistance for 3 of our 15 teaching
22 artists but failed to receive support for the
23 organization.

24 We also applied for PPP but as our organization
25 is facilitated by mostly independent contractors, we

1
2 are not eligible. We did however get a 30 year
3 \$75,000 SBA loan and have spent down half of it.
4 This fall, we have had to suspend online classes due
5 to financial hardship but will resume in February
6 with DCLA CDF programs and hopefully CASA and SU-CASA
7 residencies as well.

8 We are currently planning both a live event and
9 virtual event as it is not clear whether a live
10 parade and festival will be possible on May 22nd.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12 CARLYE ECHERT: Either way, our 2021 theme will
13 be Dance Brings us Together. Through our continued
14 efforts and experiences of this time, we greatly
15 acknowledge that the health risks to all New Yorkers
16 pledge to continue strict virus free safety protocols
17 and are grateful to the DCLA and for the Council
18 Members effort to support the cultural sector. Thank
19 you very much.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
21 The last member of the panel will be Judith Insell
22 from Bronx Art Ensemble.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 JUDITH INSELL: Chair Van Bramer, honorable
25 members of the City Council, thank you for allowing

1
2 me to speak today. My name is Judith Insell and I am
3 the Artistic Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble.

4 Pre-pandemic Bronx Arts Ensemble provided
5 contracted services to 40 plus NYC Department of
6 Education schools annually in the Bronx presenting
7 culturally responsive arts education in four arts
8 disciplines of music, dance, theater, visual arts to
9 upwards of 5,000 primarily BIPOC Bronx students and
10 employing 60-80 primarily BIPOC professional teaching
11 artists. This past spring, BAE successfully modified
12 its curriculum, making it possible to present
13 students with more than 25 courses online.

14 Currently, we are only serving 6 public schools.

15 This has required BAE to terminate the services of
16 approximately 80 percent of our teaching artist staff
17 and puts our entire arts education program in
18 jeopardy of shutting down in the coming spring school
19 semester.

20 Our current status is a result of the deep
21 budgetary cuts that the DOE has imposed on what it
22 had deemed in the spring to be the nonessential
23 service of arts education. Bronx Arts Ensemble
24 urgently asks the City Council to aid the DOE,
25 normally a willing partner in restoring the budgetary

1
2 funds needed to reengage thousands of public school
3 students with the previously employed thousands of
4 professional teaching artist systemwide.

5 We know that our currently unemployed teaching
6 artists and our former students are suffering and we
7 also know that if there is to be a future for
8 culturally diverse art making in New York City, we
9 need to ensure that our most underserved populations
10 of Black and Brown students have access to arts
11 education.

12 And on a personal note, I would like to add, I
13 would not be the professional musician that I am
14 today if it were not due to -

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 JUDITH INSELL: Public school access to arts
17 education.

18 Thank you again for allowing me to present my
19 statement today.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Judith, thank you very
21 much for your testimony and for that story. And a
22 reminder of how important this is and to all the
23 panelists as well and it was forwarded to me, I know
24 Gothamist is up with a story since this hearing
25 started. Obviously it had been in the works for a

1
2 while but about New York City's 4,500 teaching
3 artists having been incredibly hard hit by the DOE
4 cuts of \$21.5 million towards education.

5 So, just devastating to all of us but I thank you
6 for your persistence and hope that that dance parade
7 can happen in May but if not, it will take place
8 again.

9 And with that, I just want to say thank you and I
10 hope folks – it is great to see so many dance, I just
11 wanted to say also. There is so many dancers and so
12 many dance artists and organizations that are part of
13 this today and I am really thrilled to see all of you
14 here and thank everyone for their testimony and being
15 part of this community. And I know we have one more
16 panel, is that what I am told?

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank is correct Chair, one
18 more.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. The five who are
20 last, thank you for waiting. All of you, thank you
21 for waiting so long to give your testimony but I am
22 here listening to every single one of you, no matter
23 who winds up being the last of the 50 or so people to
24 testify today.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair. So,
3 we will call the final panel and just a reminder that
4 we will do a sweep at the end. If we have
5 inadvertently missed anyone, don't worry, we will
6 check and there will be an opportunity to testify if
7 we didn't call your name.

8 Also a reminder, that you can submit written
9 testimony and we will give that address again after
10 this panel. So, the final panel will be – again, I
11 will read all the names and then each individual
12 witness. Sidney "Dr. Dance" Grant, Andrew Roitstein,
13 Laura Gravino, Andrew Chapman and Julia Forman.

14 So, the next witness will be Sidney "Dr. Dance"
15 Grant and you may begin when the Sergeant calls the
16 clock. Thank you.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 SIDNEY "DR. DANCE" GRANT: Okay, good afternoon
19 Chair Van Bramer, esteemed Committee and glitter
20 lovers everywhere. I am Sidney "Dr. Dance" Grant
21 Executive and Artistic Director of Ballroom Basics
22 USA and no stranger to the City Council having spoken
23 at a variety of Council and Borough testimonies with
24 our students actually performing our dances and the
25 manners that make the movement matter so much.

1
2 We are so proud to say that we are a vivid
3 example of the funding success that you have all
4 fought so hard for. Our FY20 CASA funding award from
5 Council Member and now Queens Borough President
6 Donovan Richards, enabled us to create one of the
7 very first outdoor dance events in NYC. Our powerful
8 parity, the Mock Corona Rana on Rockaway Beach.

9 Council Member Moya, if you are still here, your
10 generous CII funding enables us to do the same in
11 Queens at the end of June, where willing students and
12 parents from three partner schools in your district
13 came together with masks and gloves to dance the Mock
14 Corona Rana in Corona Park. It was literally the
15 first time they saw one another since the crisis
16 began in March and many said it was the highlight of
17 their school year.

18 Council Member Borelli, we were proud to have
19 extended an invite to you in your office this past
20 August for our social distance dancing in La Tourette
21 Park and in September, we were the first arts
22 organization in New York to engage onsite in Staten
23 Island on the very first day of school in your
24 colleague Debbie Rose's neighboring district.

1
2 She attended our special event, showed everyone
3 how she does it and actually posted a You Tube Mock A
4 Rona Challenge to the Speaker Corey Johnson, who I
5 had the good fortune of dancing with exactly one year
6 ago this week at our organizations performance with
7 students whose work was so generously awarded
8 discretionary funding from Council Member Daneek
9 Miller, whose Holiday Toy Fair we were thrilled to
10 participate in.

11 And Commissioner Casals, even though you are not
12 here, you would be proud to learn that in addition to
13 swing and merengue, the students performed a dazzling
14 [INAUDIBLE 3:27:22].

15 I have met with principal, excuse me, with
16 Council member Gjonaj's office for CASA funding -
17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 SIDNEY "DR. DANCE" GRANT: And Majority Leader
19 Laurie Cumbo. We had a chance meeting in the
20 elevator in the hallway at 250 Broadway. So, you all
21 know how much - how passionate we are about the
22 education and etiquette ballroom, Latin and line
23 dance provide New York City school children.

24 In closing, I would like to thank Mr. Van Bramer
25 once again for continuing to fight so hard for arts

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funding. He brought up research about how educational outcomes are enhanced when children have arts education experiences to compliment their learning. It bears mentioning that COVID-19 has statistically increased depression, isolation and even sadly abuse. Therefore, I whole heartedly agree with you sir that we must provide these vital arts opportunities to uplift and inspire kids and I hope that you and your colleagues will recognize that FY22 funding is so critical to making that happen. Because energized, entertaining, arts education is always a worthwhile investment for the future. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sidney, we have met many times. You have testified many times and I was kind of wondering if your next level energy and excitement was going to actually come through on Zoom and I am happy to report that it did.

SIDNEY "DR. DANCE" GRANT: Well, I thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, I mean, almost four hours into the hearing, you brought it. So, thank you for never, ever disappointing.

SIDNEY "DR. DANCE" GRANT: My pleasure sir.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, thank you so much.
Our next panelist will be Andrew Roitstein, you may
begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

ANDREW ROITSTEIN: Hi everyone, it is great to
see you all here and great to see so many community
collaborators as well. Thank you Chair Van Bramer
and members of New York City Council for your
continued support and for this forum.

I am Director of Education and Community
Engagement at the Orchestra of St. Luke's, which
provides free educational concert series each year
and run the youth orchestra of St. Luke, which is
also known as YOSL. YOSL is an afterschool program
that partners with public schools in the Hell's
Kitchen neighborhood to offer free instrument and
music lessons.

Before the pandemic, we had 140 students enrolled
at PS111 in Manhattan. PS51 and PS212 and Police
Athletic League. YOSL has continued to offer online
music lessons to our returning music students and one
parents email says, it means the world that you are
continuing to provide caring, excellent instruction
for Liam and for the other YOSL students at this

1
2 time. Having his cello here and being able to
3 continue with some sense of normalcy is soothing.

4 Normalcy is a word that we are hearing a lot from
5 a lot of our parents and our kids, you know,
6 throughout the last 8 months. While we have been
7 able to focus on retaining our students from previous
8 years to enhance their self-expression and creativity
9 through music, we are aware of the many younger
10 students throughout the city who are not yet able to
11 start an instrument at this time due to the public
12 health crisis that we currently face.

13 YOSL thrives on our partnerships with performing
14 arts teachers at each school and this year it is
15 clear that they need more support. The time that
16 public school music teachers dedicate to helping
17 programs like YOSL, recruit new students and follow
18 through on the wellbeing of our current students is
19 currently very limited. With further support for
20 arts programs in schools, we will again be able to
21 work more closely with our public school partners as
22 they begin – as we all begin to rebuild the next
23 creative generation.

24 That's all I have for today but thank you all so
25 much for your consideration and continued support.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next panelist
will be Laura Gravino.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

LAURA GRAVINO: Good afternoon and thank you for
providing this opportunity to present Bloomingdale
School of Music's impact of COVID-19. My name is
Laura Gravino and I am the Director of Education at
Bloomindale School of Music located by the Columbia
University campus serving the Upper West Side
community since 1964.

We serve students ages 8 weeks to 80 years old
reaching well over 1,000 constituents on an annual
basis through music opportunities and last year we
awarded \$236,000 in financial aid and scholarships.

In March 2020, we made the decision that we would
follow the DOE's lead and close our physical doors.
We quickly focused on our faculty members to find out
if they were ready and able to teach online. Many of
them who had lost other income through performance
work stepped up to use their own equipment to teach
lessons. We reached out to our students to confirm
that they would continue lessons and classes with us.
We shifted our partnership work to online platforms
to keep continuity for students both in school and

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2 adults in retirement. We are able to retain 88
3 percent of our student population in spring 2020 and
4 62 percent for Fall 2020. The work that went into
5 transitioning to online learning was difficult but it
6 was an important step to keep a sense of normalcy for
7 our community at large.

8 The arts and cultural education sector is facing
9 unprecedented challenges and Bloomingdale is no
10 exception. The COVID-19 health crisis has forced
11 numerous cancellations but has made clear the extent
12 to which organizations like Bloomindale School are an
13 essential part of our community, but we are not
14 receiving enough support from the city to sustain
15 them in the medium or long-terms. We need your
16 support by advocating for the necessity of arts
17 education during this pandemic. We need your support
18 by providing our school leaders with the resources to
19 continue working with arts partners. We need your
20 support by restoring all of the arts education
21 funding that has been cut.

22 Support for organizations like ours in this
23 trying time can help ensure that we continue to
24 provide high level music education to our community
25 no matter the personal economic situation of our

1
2 students. The arts and arts education community
3 needs you right now, so that we can be there for you
4 in the years to come.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
6 testimony. Our next panelist is Andrew Chapman who
7 is the second to last witness. Thank you.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 ANDREW CHAPMAN: Thank you Committee for this
10 hearing. I work for Dance Education Laboratory, DEL.
11 Our motto, Dance for Every Child. DEL brings life
12 changing dance education to New York City public
13 schools. While supporting our students and our
14 incomparable roster of expert teaching artists.
15 Offering them an array of professional development
16 training workshops and employing freelance artists as
17 workshop facilitators, myself included.

18 Our DOE contract this year dropped from \$260,000
19 to \$35,000. A grant from the New York City Community
20 Trust allowed DEL to continue programming virtually
21 albeit at less than half of our pre-COVID capacity.
22 Not all arts ed programs are so lucky or as
23 financially secure. Most of all, programs in New
24 York City public schools.

1
2 Of the \$34 billion DOE budget for this year, a
3 mere .04 percent has been allocated to bring quality
4 arts education to 1.1 million students. 72.8 percent
5 of whom are economically disadvantaged as defined by
6 the city and will be hard pressed to gain
7 extracurricular access to the arts.

8 Personal stories have great impact on your
9 Committee and nothing feels more personal than the
10 future of this City, a future assured by children
11 raised with a financially sustainable arts education.
12 Remember, arts education is not only about joy and
13 mental health, it is about thinking outside the box
14 and also knowing how to design the box, build the
15 box, decorate the box, dance around the box and make
16 that box a musical instrument. It is about
17 interdisciplinary and transferable skills that these
18 kids will have for the rest of their lives.

19 Radical policy can secure post COVID recovery and
20 sustain this future for arts ed programming. I am
21 calling on this Committee to advocate for an arts
22 education budget yearly standard of .25 percent of
23 the DOE budget. This quarter of a percent overall
24 budget initiative will hire more arts faculty,
25 provider essential resources for school programming

1
2 and help support organizations like DEL and the
3 organizations here today in our ongoing mission to
4 bring the arts to every child in New York City.
5 Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. Our final
7 member of the panel and final witness before we check
8 for anyone we have inadvertently missed, will be
9 Julia Forman. Julia Forman, you may begin your
10 testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock. Thank
11 you.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 JULIA FORMAN: Hi, I thank everyone so much for
14 being here and to the Committee and to Council Member
15 Van Bramer for holding this hearing.

16 I don't want to echo too much of what people have
17 said before me because I think Andrew just put that
18 beautifully. Uhm, I am an Artist Admirer and a City
19 Council Candidate for the 2021 election but I am
20 actually here wearing a hat of a Community Organizer
21 and someone who has been deeply involved in our local
22 mutual aid groups in Western Queens.

23 One thing that I have seen is that people are
24 able to think so far outside the box to find
25 solutions to these brand new problems that we are

1
2 facing during COVID. I think Council Member Van
3 Bramer did that when he proposed open culture and we
4 will see that starting in March but there are so many
5 other ways that we can take the lead of the community
6 organizers who have been figuring out ways to solve
7 problems this entire pandemic.

8 For one, I believe that we have been hearing from
9 each and every person testifying at how much a
10 students mental health is impacted by their ability
11 to express themselves creatively. Because of that, I
12 think that we need to explore opportunities of
13 funding that go outside the Department of Cultural
14 Affairs that go outside of the Department of
15 Education.

16 Look at things like the Department of Health.
17 Look at things like agencies that have shut down and
18 they have a supplies budget that is not being used
19 because everyone is working from home and use that
20 money to get students the resources that they need so
21 that they can participate in each of the amazing
22 programs that we have heard described today.

23 I think that this is a critical point. I think
24 that we owe a lot to our students who have lost out
25 on many opportunities. Who are struggling just as

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2 much as every adult if not more and I implore this
3 Committee to be the leader to lead the Council and
4 this Administration into that creative thinking and
5 figuring out ways that we can invest in our students,
6 invest in our children. And look at any way that we
7 can you know, dig between the couch cushions of our
8 city agencies to find money to help them. Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much. That is
10 our final witness. Chair Van Bramer, do you have any
11 questions for the panel?

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Uh, do you want to make
13 a sweep of the room so to speak and then I will
14 address the panel and give my closing remarks.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Will do, thank you so much
16 Chair. So, at this point, per the Chair, as the
17 Chair mentioned, we have concluded public testimony
18 and all of the panelists. However, if we have
19 inadvertently missed anyone that would like to
20 testify and is logged into Zoom now, please use the
21 Zoom raise hand function and we will call on you in
22 the order that your hand is raised.

23 So, if we have inadvertently missed anyone,
24 please raise your hand in Zoom using the raise hand
25 function.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, if you see anything,
3 you will let me know. Brenda, until then, I will
4 start addressing the panel. Julia, thank you so very
5 much and as you know, the Committee staff randomly
6 chooses the order. Certainly, a constituent of my
7 district is very, very important to me as was Nancy
8 Kleaver and several other constituents who were part
9 of this hearing today.

10 So, I thank you for waiting and we saved the best
11 for last but I appreciate your ideas. I do agree
12 with you that the Mutual Aid Movement and really
13 community led responses to the pandemic teach us a
14 lot about what is possible beyond the traditional
15 government venues. Government will still be
16 important and government funding will still need to
17 be there for the arts but I agree with you that there
18 are other ways in which to support the arts and I
19 appreciate your thinking about these issues
20 thoughtfully and constructively and caring about this
21 issue and this community.

22 And Andrew, I think this is the first time I can
23 remember, at least you speaking before the Committee.
24 You had a lot of really great ideas. I appreciate
25 the budget analysis and the suggestion about what the

1
2 baseline should be. I also appreciate that you
3 finished right at the zero mark. It was almost as if
4 you were a performer and an artist and new your mark.
5 And Andrew thank you as well. It is a great
6 organization that you represented today and I think
7 our other panelist has already gone but I praised his
8 energy in the segment earlier.

9 So, I want to thank everyone for being here. As
10 I mentioned, this is a topic that deserves as much
11 attention as possible and this Committee has remained
12 very active and very focused during the pandemic,
13 pursuing not only a budget that we could appreciate
14 in terms of the arts and minimizing the damage that
15 others may have thought necessary. But we absolutely
16 need to sustain and increase budgets but we also need
17 creative legislative solutions like Open Culture and
18 several other bills that we have in the pipeline but
19 then we also need to think outside the box. The box
20 is Andrew, to quote you, you were doing sort of the
21 whole box thing going on there. With outside of the
22 box is the traditional budget structure and even the
23 traditional legislative structure to address this
24 communities dire needs, right. Few communities have
25 been devastated like the arts, like artists, like

1 culture in very unique ways and in a very vulnerable
2 place.

3
4 The arts and culture always underappreciated but
5 particular during crisis. When people think you
6 know, that's a luxury, in good times and bad times,
7 we can do without that and this Committee and my work
8 is all about fighting that back and letting people
9 know that this is as important than ever.

10 And of course, just to end it where we began it,
11 right. The children of New York City's public
12 schools, most of whom are Black and Brown, many of
13 whom are immigrants with children of immigrants.
14 Many of whom come from families that don't have a lot
15 of money. Desperately deserve and need arts in their
16 lives and arts as a part of their education and that
17 is our collective work.

18 So, this hearing was helpful, instructive and
19 enlightening and now we continue the work of making
20 sure that the entire City of New York appreciates
21 what we all talked about here today and move on some
22 of the suggestions.

23 So, with that, thank you and unless the Committee
24 Counsel Brenda McKinney, thank you for being here
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COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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with us for almost four hours. I will call this
Committee hearing adjourned. Thank you everyone.

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 January 25, 2021