

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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January 19, 2021  
Start: 10:04 a.m.  
Recess: 12:16 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing (Virtual Room 1)

B E F O R E: Jimmy Van Bramer  
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Laurie Cumbo  
D. Diaz  
Mark Gjonaj  
Francisco Moya

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

Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner  
Department of Cultural Affairs

Sheila Feinberg, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Cultural Affairs

Cheryl Warfield, Professional Opera  
Singer and Director  
More Opera

Jarrad Packard, Director  
Urban Indigenous Collective

Safe Harbors NYC

Don Christian Jones  
Public Assistance

Jerome Harris  
Music Workers Alliance

Alejandra Duque Cifuentes  
Dance NYC

Orietta Crispino  
Theater Lab Inc.

Lucy Sexton  
New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Christina Perry, Director of Development  
Chain Theater

Sheila Lewandowski, Cofounder and  
Executive Director  
The Chocolate Factory

Guy Yedwab, President  
Board of Directors  
League of Independent Theater

Amy Todoroff  
League of Independent Theater

Randi Berry, Executive Director  
Indie Theater Fund

Olympia Kazi, Founding member  
New York City Artists Coalition

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND  
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Members Moya  
3 and Diaz. Anyone else?

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sergeants, we're going  
5 to start the recording. PC recording is underway.

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

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Backup is rolling.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sergeant Leonardo, I  
9 will lead it to you.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Welcome to the City  
11 Council remote hearing for the Committee on Cultural  
12 Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup  
13 Relations. At this time, we ask that all Council  
14 members and Council staff please turn on their video  
15 for verification purposes. Please place any self and  
16 electronic devices to silent or vibrate to minimize  
17 disruptions throughout the hearing. If you have  
18 testimony that you wish to submit for the record, you  
19 can do so by sending it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).  
20 Once again, that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Mr.  
21 Chair, we are ready to begin.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
23 much. Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's  
24 hearing. I am Council member Jimmy Van Bramer, Chair  
25 of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and

2 International Intergroup Relations and we are now  
3 formally in session. I want to acknowledge that we  
4 are joined by Council member Francisco Moya and  
5 Council member Dharma Diaz of the committee and I  
6 will the additional member's as they arrive to  
7 participate in this important hearing. Of course, we  
8 are joined by Commissioner Gonzalo Casals from the  
9 Department of Cultural Affairs and we look forward to  
10 hearing his testimony very soon. Today we are  
11 addressing a very important topic. The impact of  
12 Covid 19 on New York City's artists in the  
13 perspective of working artists during the pandemic.  
14 This is our third Covid related hearing since the  
15 pandemic hit. On June 22nd, we held a hearing on  
16 DCLA, Covid 19, and cultural organizations in New  
17 York City and, on December 15th, we talked about the  
18 impact of Covid 19 on our cultural education  
19 programming in New York City. All the while, of  
20 hours, we pushed and were able to push the Open  
21 Culture legislation that I believe will be so helpful  
22 to so many. But the testimony from these hearings  
23 tell a story. We know that during the first months  
24 of the pandemic, 95 percent of art and cultural  
25 institutions New York City either canceled programs

2 with 88 percent modifying their programs and at least  
3 11 percent were unable to provide any services. The  
4 performing arts industry lost 70 percent of its jobs  
5 due to closures wall a number of performance and  
6 cultural venues, including the Creek in the Cave, a  
7 place that I love very dearly, have gone out of  
8 business altogether. These are not the only  
9 casualties. We know that while organizations suffer,  
10 the city's artists themselves largely bore the brunt  
11 of staffing threats and reductions and programs and  
12 services. Even before the pandemic, nearly 11  
13 percent of artists in New York City lived below the  
14 poverty line. And it is testimony from these  
15 previous hearings have stressed, artists are workers.  
16 I will that. Artists are workers. They bring  
17 revenue and value to our city. Their work needs to  
18 be valued and prioritized, yet, since the pandemic  
19 hit, our city's artists and performers, including  
20 DJs, arts educators, costume makers, musicians,  
21 comedians, too many have been left out in the cold.  
22 We rightly focused on restaurants, but society  
23 wrongly as focused on bailing out large corporations  
24 while we have not nearly done enough for working  
25 people which includes, of course, artists and

2 cultural community. Today we want to hear from the  
3 artists and what is the reality of being an artist in  
4 New York City today? What do artists need the most  
5 from this city? What happens been helpful? What has  
6 been not? Again, we know this pandemic has  
7 exacerbated issues for many artists that have existed  
8 for some time, but while many entered the years with  
9 a clear schedule of paid work, only to see income  
10 disappear in the span of a couple weeks. But, of  
11 course, we know that many artists did not even begin  
12 the year with a clear schedule of paid work. Artists  
13 bring credible revenue to the city of New York, but  
14 so much more. Looking forward, it is important to  
15 mention that, while we absolutely need more  
16 investment in the arts and artists, since March we  
17 have seen artists advocating for themselves in new  
18 and dynamic ways, building power through coalitions,  
19 grassroots funding and organizing, and the Culture at  
20 Three Call, the Music Workers Alliance. There are so  
21 many other examples of artists and building power.  
22 That is something that I hope continues well beyond  
23 the moment that we are all in. Today, in addition  
24 the hearing about and from artists, we are also  
25 considering two pieces of legislation. Intro 2194

2 related to requiring the Department of Cultural  
3 Affairs to study the real estate issues impacting  
4 cultural spaces and Intro 2195 related to  
5 certification of artists and the issuance of identity  
6 cards for certified artists. While 2194, in  
7 particular, dresses commercial buildings, I am happy  
8 that we are addressing real estate and the arts. We  
9 know rent is often the largest expense for artists in  
10 cultural venues and artists have stressed that the  
11 New York State eviction moratorium that ended last  
12 summer was not enough time. And also stressed that  
13 we speak to property tax relief for-- that would be  
14 very helpful to cultural venues and artists. We  
15 welcome this feedback and more. The legislation  
16 being heard today are just part of the work that this  
17 committee has done, along with Open Culture and along  
18 with the budget, Terry issues, and the hearings we  
19 have held to addressing the concerns of artists,  
20 particularly during this impossible, and possible  
21 time. I look forward to hearing more about the state  
22 of the arts and artists from the artists themselves.  
23 And, of course, we will also hear from Commissioner  
24 Casals with the Department of Cultural Affairs view  
25 on this including comments on the two proposed pieces

2 of legislation. Again, I want to thank all of you.  
3 We have spent a lot of time together over the last  
4 11+ years, but in particular during the pandemic in  
5 so many zoom calls and meetings whether it is Culture  
6 at Three or all of the meetings around Open Culture.  
7 And I want to thank all of you for your fight on  
8 behalf of the cultural community artists in the city  
9 which would be nothing without artists and the  
10 cultural community. So, thank you. I want to,  
11 before I turn this over back to our committee  
12 counsel, thank my legislative director, Jack  
13 Burnatawitz [sp?], who is also our cultural liaison  
14 and who has done incredible work with the cultural  
15 community and I know he has been the constant  
16 presence of the Culture at Three calls and was  
17 really, really helpful in the Open Culture  
18 legislative fight and I just want to thank Jack. My  
19 Chief of Staff, Mike Wallace, and, of course, our  
20 committee counsel, Brenda McKinney, who I will soon  
21 toss this to, but who worked incredibly hard on the  
22 Open Culture bill, as well. Kristi Dwyer, our policy  
23 analyst who is here and Aaliyah Ali who is our  
24 principal financial analyst for this committee. So,  
25 with that, thank you all and I handed over to Brenda

2 McKinney to issue the oath and give everyone all of  
3 the appropriate instructions on how we are going to  
4 proceed with this hearing. Brenda?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,  
6 Chair Van Bramer. So, we will start with going over  
7 some procedures and then moved to the oath of the  
8 administration. So, I am Brenda McKinney, counsel to  
9 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
10 International Intergroup Relations at the New York  
11 City Council. I am moderating today's hearing and I  
12 will be calling on panelists to testify. Before we  
13 begin, I would like to remind everyone that you will  
14 be on mute until I call on you to testify. After you  
15 are called on, you will be on muted by the host. A  
16 box will pop up asking you to accept it. Just a note  
17 that you will need to accept that to be on muted.  
18 Please listen for your name. I will periodically  
19 announce who the next panelist will be a by panel.  
20 Council members, questions will be limited today to  
21 five minutes and, Council members, please also note  
22 this includes both your questions and the witness  
23 answers. Please also note that we will not be  
24 allowing a second round of questions that today's  
25 hearing. For public testimony and for members of the

2 public, I will call up individuals in panels.

3 Council members who have questions for a particular

4 panelist should use the raise hand function in Zoom

5 and you will be called on after everyone on the full

6 panel has been called on to testify and completed

7 their testimony. For public panelists, once I call

8 your name, member of our staff will unmute you and

9 the sergeant-at-arms will give you the go-ahead to

10 begin speaking after setting the timer. So you can

11 begin after the clock is set and remember that, when

12 you are unmuted, box will pop up asking you to accept

13 the unmute. After public testimony-- or all public

14 testimony today will be limited to a two minute

15 clock. Two minutes. After I call your name, please

16 wait a brief moment for the sergeant-at-arms to

17 announce that you may begin before starting your

18 testimony. So, at this point, we will begin with

19 administration testimony. I will now call on the

20 following members of the administration to testify.

21 First, Gonzalo Casals. The Honorable Gonzalo Casals,

22 Commissioner at the Department of Cultural Affairs,

23 and Sheila Feinberg, Deputy Commissioner at the

24 Department of Cultural Affairs. I will deliver the

25 oath to both of you and after I will call upon each

2 of you individually to respond to the oath. So, if  
3 you can please raise your right hand in Zoom. Thank  
4 you so much. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
5 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
6 committee and to respond honestly to Council member  
7 questions today? Commissioner Casals?

8 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

10 And Deputy Commissioner Feinberg?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FEINBERG: I do.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. So,  
13 with that, Commissioner Casals, you may begin your  
14 testimony when ready.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Brenda, can I  
16 just-- Commissioner Casals, before you testify, I  
17 want to acknowledge that we have been joined by  
18 Council member Mark Gjonaj, as well. Thank you.

19 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Thank you. Before  
20 I start my testimony, Chair Van Bramer, we have known  
21 each other for many years, so I want to get a little  
22 personal here. I want to wish your mother a happy  
23 birthday. Elizabeth. I know--

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: she will be  
3 celebrating later.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

5 COMMISSIONER CASALS: No problem. Good  
6 morning, Chair Van Bramer, and members of the  
7 committee. I am Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner of the  
8 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, here to  
9 testify in regards to today's topic. I am joined  
10 today by the deputy commissioners Sheila Feinberg.  
11 No corner of New York City has been untouched by the  
12 pandemic. Collectively, we will be addressing the  
13 fallout from the public health crisis, the loss of  
14 life, and the economic devastation for many years to  
15 come. And while the glaring racial injustices that  
16 have been magnified by Covid 19 have been with us for  
17 generations, I also hope that the willingness to  
18 address these issues openly and to make real  
19 structural change will drive everything that we need  
20 to in the years ahead. Much of the same can be said  
21 about our cultural community and the artists who work  
22 within it. Culture is woven into our city's  
23 neighborhoods and, naturally, cultural groups and  
24 artists have suffered alongside their neighbors.  
25 They have struggled to stay healthy, to help their

2 communities, and often in quietly heroic ways, to  
3 keep producing work that engages with the current  
4 moment. Artists can help us make sense of a chaotic  
5 world, to come together and envision new futures.  
6 New York wouldn't be the vibrant place that it is  
7 without the artists who have lived and worked here  
8 for generations and to have ardent cultural programs  
9 and the response to our experiences and engaging in  
10 important ways, we need artists living and working in  
11 New York City. One powerful example of the essential  
12 role of artists playing in our city and community  
13 life is the city's public artists and residency  
14 program known as PAR. For this year's programs, the  
15 artists work with agencies is reckoning with the  
16 pandemic in inspiring ways. One of the PAR artists  
17 working with the Commission on Human Rights, Amanda  
18 Pino di Pacquia [sp?], created the I Still Believe in  
19 Our City. A campaign to address the anti-Asian and  
20 Pacific Islander and anti-black racism that the  
21 pandemic laid bare. The ongoing campaign kicks off  
22 on the corner of Atlantic Avenue Terminal in Brooklyn  
23 and presented passengers with images of their Asian-  
24 Pacific Islander and black neighbors with simple  
25 messages that face our problems head on and I quote,

2 I am not your scapegoat, end quote. And black lives  
3 matter, to name just two. We need art and artists as  
4 much as ever. While they are simultaneously phase  
5 the incredible challenges alongside all New Yorkers.  
6 Over nearly a year of numerous conversations,  
7 observations, and surveys, we know that artists here  
8 in New York have been affected in profound ways that  
9 we are still working to fully understand. The  
10 Department of Cultural Affairs conducted a survey of  
11 the cultural community last spring. It captured the  
12 earliest weeks of the pandemic. Even then, the  
13 effects on artists were alarming. Artists employed  
14 by cultural groups bore the brunt of layoffs. Arts  
15 education organizations collectively reported  
16 decreases of over 2100 artists or 75 percent of  
17 artist staffing during this period. Other reports  
18 from around the same time produced dire findings.  
19 Brooklyn Arts Council surveyed and found that 80  
20 percent of artists said they were experiencing cash  
21 flow issues just weeks into the pandemic. The Center  
22 for Urban Futures report that art in the time of  
23 coronavirus similarly found that working artists had  
24 lost up to a third of their annual income just a  
25 month after the lockdowns began. These figures don't

1 even touch the physical and emotional toll the  
2 pandemic has taken on everyone, including artists.  
3 Thanks to our partnership with the city Council, the  
4 de Blasio administration the Department of Cultural  
5 Affairs have worked to the support the city's  
6 cultural community despite the bleak financial  
7 outlook. While the agency [inaudible 00:18:04] is  
8 down from its record height last year, it represents  
9 a robust investment by historical standards. Based  
10 on the findings of our Springs survey, we partnered  
11 with the Arts and Education Roundtable to set aside  
12 funds specifically to support arts educators. We  
13 also earmarked additional funds for arts groups and  
14 underserved communities hardest hit by Covid 19 and  
15 increase the funding for the five local art councils,  
16 are long time partners in providing funds directly to  
17 artists during the public program in all five  
18 boroughs. But we can't do this alone. We know that  
19 the need is far too great. Private philanthropy has  
20 also been a key partner. Through our survey and  
21 collected advocacy along with the Mayor's Office of  
22 Median Entertainment, New York City and Company, and  
23 others, we have also pushed at the state and the  
24 federal levels for the support of city cultural  
25

2 community needs. The most recent stimulus bill  
3 included \$15 million for Save Our Stages. This is an  
4 astounding achievement and what we can accomplish  
5 together when we speak with a unified voice in  
6 advocating for the important role in cultural place  
7 in our economy and in our community. I applaud all  
8 of our colleagues in the cultural community for  
9 fighting to make this happen. With a new  
10 administration taking the federal government, we will  
11 need to continue to operate in this collaborative,  
12 constructive way for the relief funding that we need  
13 and deserve. We appreciate the Council's leadership  
14 and advocacy for cultural community, too. We are  
15 already deeply engaged in working on the Open Culture  
16 program. We look forward to this program brings city  
17 streets to life while giving artists and arts groups  
18 opportunities to raise much-needed revenue later this  
19 spring. Regarding the legislation being presented in  
20 today's hearing, we are always happy to work with the  
21 city Council and cultural advocates on proposals that  
22 support artists in New York City. While we have some  
23 reservations about cost, timeline, and implementation  
24 of this proposed legislation, we look forward to  
25 discussing and working with you further. Thank you

2 for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions  
3 that you may have.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you  
5 very much, Commissioner Casals. And maybe you  
6 could-- because this is all about listening to  
7 artists and making sure that people like you and I  
8 have an open line of communication to the people that  
9 we represent and I know you and I both feel very  
10 strongly that our constituency are artists and  
11 cultural organizations. So, talk to me a little bit  
12 about how the department is communicating with  
13 artists right now, right? And receiving from artists  
14 and cultural workers and music workers their needs  
15 and priorities. So, how are you interfacing with the  
16 artists and making sure that you and the department  
17 and, therefore, as the primary representative of the  
18 Mayor to this community, that the artists are being  
19 heard in terms of where they are at right now.

20 COMMISSIONER CASALS: So, thank you for  
21 that question and there are two main ways in which I  
22 am personally doing this. You know, one is, of  
23 course, the survey we did in the spring. We are  
24 getting ready to do a second survey starting very  
25 soon and a couple of weeks. The survey is going to

2 be in collaboration with the New York Community Trust  
3 and then also with the councils and the five boroughs  
4 because, oh well we want to follow up on the results  
5 that we got on the first survey in the spring, at the  
6 same time, we want to expand a little bit, you know,  
7 the respondents. And by collaborating with the  
8 Council and collaborating with the New York Community  
9 Trust, we are going to be able to capture the  
10 universe that usually is not touched directly by the  
11 agency because of eligibility for funding and in that  
12 universe are artists and unincorporated organizations  
13 and artist collectives. So, that is going to be away  
14 in which we are going to get a little closer to  
15 understanding the reality of these individuals. At  
16 the same time, since I took over this position seven  
17 months ago, I have been through many of them on a  
18 weekly basis and what we call Listen In Sessions in  
19 which we get together with groups and we just sit and  
20 listen and understand where their needs are, where  
21 the priorities of the agency should be and we have  
22 done this normally with cultural organizations, but  
23 also with groups of artists. And, recently, we have  
24 set-- and I think you and I missed each other for a  
25 week. We sat with Dance NYC to really listen to

2 where the reality you saw and how we can work  
3 together and that is an example of that.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. No. I  
5 think we can't be on enough zoom calls and evidence  
6 where we are with artists, including Music Workers  
7 Alliance, the Dance NYC, Culture at Three, League of  
8 Theaters. Those are all some of the constituencies  
9 that I have sat down with. I do think, as was  
10 mentioned to me by someone who is in the room, when  
11 you are doing the survey, it probably would be good  
12 to ask all of your grantees to send it out to all the  
13 artists that they work with and to get in even deeper  
14 dive and broader swath of respondents. I do see that  
15 we have been joined by Majority Leader Cumbo. I want  
16 to recognize Majority Leader Cumbo with us and I will  
17 mention in the other colleagues on the committee who  
18 join us and maybe you can give us a little update on  
19 Open Culture. You mentioned it. I know I was on a  
20 call with several agencies as we are starting to work  
21 through that. But maybe from your perspective, you  
22 can get if ever you want inherent update on where you  
23 see it going or how you see it going.

24 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yeah. There is a  
25 lot of excitement for Open Culture to happen. I

2 believe it is going to be the leader think early  
3 March. There is a group across agencies and working  
4 with the city Council to fine-tune the processes and  
5 how that is going to work and I look forward to very  
6 soon to announce what those details are going to be.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. We  
8 certainly are engaged in that work and I know  
9 everyone is anxious to hear what the next steps are  
10 and how folks can start to actually access the  
11 application and plan events and, of course, there are  
12 some outstanding questions with respect to the  
13 application that we need to get back to focus on.  
14 So, I know in your testimony you were expressing some  
15 concerns on behalf of the administration as you are  
16 required to do, but can you talk to 21 94? Can  
17 certainly feel free to share any concerns the  
18 administration might have, but also just talk about  
19 your understanding of the real estate pressures that  
20 many of our cultural organizations face. Right? You  
21 know, those that have their own space, whether they  
22 rent or own or, of course, many of our organizations  
23 and artists do not have a permanent home, but are  
24 continually moving about and in desperate need of  
25 affordable space for either rehearsal or performance.

2 So, talk a little bit about your view about how real  
3 estate plays a role in impacting how art is created,  
4 who can create it, and who can participate in it.

5 COMMISSIONER CASALS: you know, and  
6 answer to that question, I am going to bring you back  
7 to the days in which I was working as a consultant  
8 for this agency for the cultural plan and I was on  
9 one of the many, many hearing sessions and listening  
10 sessions that we did and there was one, in  
11 particular, with artists in which the facilitator  
12 says, you know, what are the things that you need to  
13 thrive as an artist? Right? You know, and there was  
14 a list of them. Studio space, time, you name it.  
15 And then there was a question of what are the things  
16 that you need to survive as an artist, right? And  
17 affordable rent and health insurance. You know, job  
18 that pays. So, a lot of these issues, including the  
19 real estate issue not only for working, but also for  
20 living space for artists have been an issue for the  
21 sector for many, many years, if not decades. As I  
22 understand-- as we all see the city becoming more  
23 and more expensive to live, that the-- what we are  
24 looking to do is to add to this survey to add a few  
25 questions that would help us understand, you know,

2 how Covid has affected this issue a little more than,  
3 you know, than usual. But we were hoping that, to do  
4 our Covid survey first before we engage in the  
5 creation of a new report just because of financial  
6 staffing and resources.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And with  
8 respect to this specific piece of legislation, 2194,  
9 this is our first hearing on the issue and, of  
10 course, we are going to hear from the community  
11 itself on this issue in the legislation, but do you  
12 have any ideas on not just the concerns, but ideas on  
13 how it could be made better or what was Miss saying  
14 as we start this discussion on 2194?

15 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I think it is an  
16 issue that we should address had on. You know, the  
17 question-- as I said, you know, on my testimony,  
18 it's an issue of timing and resources. I think we  
19 should definitely, you know, data-- a government  
20 workspace on data and we should definitely try to  
21 connect either through a sort of report like the one  
22 that you're proposing, on another formatting  
23 collect-- understand collectively the impact of  
24 racing real estate values in our cultural sector.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I know you  
3 feel this and know this, but there is, obviously, a  
4 sense of urgency because we have already lost so many  
5 spaces and so many spaces are holding on, literally,  
6 just trying to survive. And, of course, there are so  
7 many issues around equity, right? And which  
8 communities have access and which communities do not  
9 and we know the answers to those questions. Do you  
10 want to speak briefly to 2195 and the idea around  
11 certification of artists and the issue of you know, a  
12 card that would allow artists to have a source of  
13 identity around that?

14 COMMISSIONER CASALS: Yes. I think that  
15 is a great idea. Again, you know, what I would like  
16 us to spend some time to figure out on how we do not  
17 reinvent the wheel. In a moment, the city is  
18 experiencing one of its biggest financial crises. It  
19 just gives me a pause to create yet another process  
20 that needs staffing and resources to support. I  
21 think there might be already ways in which this is  
22 happening in other communities and how that could be  
23 sort of mimicked were even added to that. And then,  
24 the one thing is that, while I understand the spirit  
25 of these designations, again, there are a couple of

2 things that just also give me pause and we would work  
3 with the advocates and with the city Council and we  
4 need to define it is sometimes it makes me anxious to  
5 give the power to the government to decide who is an  
6 artist and who is not. So, you know, ideas of  
7 certification, ideas of registration by, you know,  
8 one-- you know, by government, we should be careful,  
9 you know, with what that looks like and how it  
10 sounds. And, two, is I understand that this is a  
11 first step in trying to prepare artists to receive  
12 benefits from the government. Usually works the  
13 other way around. You know, a benefit is created and  
14 then it is defined, you know, how artists could-- I  
15 mean, artist or whoever the benefit is-- whoever is  
16 receiving the benefit, you know, how they become  
17 eligible. While I am not opposed to just turn the  
18 process around, I just want us to understand a little  
19 bit of the expectations, right? I just don't want to  
20 create a process or half of a process in which it  
21 creates expectations for artists and then nothing is  
22 happening.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. But I  
24 think we are--

2 COMMISSIONER CASALS: [inaudible  
3 00:33:33] Sorry. Go ahead.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No. Go  
5 ahead.

6 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I was just saying  
7 that you know me and you know we will be happy to  
8 collaborate in figure out a way to continue to  
9 support artists and cultural organizations.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. Were  
11 both in agreement that we certainly don't want any of  
12 those potential negative consequences to occur, but  
13 that idea really came from artists and advocates, so  
14 I'm anxious to see how we can both accomplish the  
15 goal and not have any of those potentially negative  
16 consequences result. I would ask our committee  
17 counsel at this point if there are any other Council  
18 members who have questions for Commissioner Casals on  
19 the topic with the legislation.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair  
21 Van Bramer. I don't see any hands raised. Just a  
22 reminder that--

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I see the  
24 Majority Leader's hand-- the Majority Leader has her  
25 hand clearly reason.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: In zoom. So, we  
3 will go to Majority Leader Cumbo. Apologies.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I apologize. My  
6 son's daycare was shut down for Covid today, so I'm  
7 trying to balance a lot of things. Commissioner, I  
8 just wanted to reiterate or just state the importance  
9 of the Open Culture program because, as you know, so  
10 many organizations are applying for their DC LA  
11 funding as we speak and so, in order for those  
12 applications to potentially use that as the basis for  
13 their grant, they would need to know more  
14 stipulations about how the program is going to  
15 function and how it is going operate so that they can  
16 meet those deadlines that are fast approaching. So,  
17 I just really just wanted to reiterate that, as well,  
18 and also to see how this program can coincide with  
19 the restaurants program so that these two things are,  
20 in some ways-- at some points, not always, but if  
21 there can be intersections.

22 COMMISSIONER CASALS: I hear you loud and  
23 clear. One of the things I have been saying is that,  
24 unfortunately, this year not only is about  
25 distributing the funds that my agency always

2 distributes, but how can we help them in the  
3 organizations find ways in which they can spend those  
4 funds, right? You know, in the absence of having a  
5 venue. So, you know, Open Culture would be the place  
6 and I look forward to the city in the spring full of  
7 arts and culture and who knows? Hopefully, this can  
8 become a yearly tradition.

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Van Bramer, I  
11 don't see any other hands raised in zoom.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: This would conclude  
14 the administration testimony if we don't have any  
15 other questions from Council members.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. That  
17 sounds good. Thank you again to the Majority Leader  
18 for allowing her impossibly adorable son to be a part  
19 of the hearing today. Very, very special moment.  
20 Well, maybe more special for us, but sometimes a  
21 challenging moment for mom, but special for us. So,  
22 I know we want to really hear from the community, you  
23 know, first and foremost on what the reality is right  
24 now to be an artist in the city of New York and so I  
25 will thank Commissioner Casals for being here, for

2 his testimony, for his care and love to this  
3 community, but turn it over to the Council so we can  
4 hear from artists themselves about this moment and if  
5 they wish the pieces of legislation also be  
6 considered.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. Thank you so  
8 much, Chair Van Bramer. Now that we have concluded  
9 the administration's testimony, we will turn to the  
10 public testimony portion of this hearing. I would  
11 like to remind everyone that individuals will be  
12 called up and panels. So, for members of the public,  
13 please note I will call you up and panels of three or  
14 four. Council members who have questions for a  
15 particular panelist, please use the raise hand  
16 function in Zoom. You will be called on after  
17 everyone in the panel has completed their testimony.  
18 If you have questions for a particular panelist,  
19 again, at the end of the panel and for panelists,  
20 once your name is called, a member of our staff will  
21 unmute you and the sergeant-at-arms will give the go-  
22 ahead to begin after setting the timer. All  
23 testimony will be limited to two minutes today.  
24 Apologies. Please wait for the sergeant to announce  
25 that you may begin before starting your testimony.

2 So, we will begin with the first panel. I will call  
3 the names of the members of that panel and then call  
4 you individually. The first panel, panel one, will  
5 be Cheryl Warfield from More Opera, Jarrad Packard  
6 from Save Harbors Indigenous Collective, Don  
7 Christian Jones from Public Assistance Inc., and Chi  
8 Ause-- and please excuse any pronunciation and  
9 errors with my apologies. So, the first panelist in  
10 the first witness today from the public will be  
11 Cheryl Warfield. You may begin once the sergeant  
12 calls the clock.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 CHERYL WARFIELD: Good morning. Thank  
15 you, Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and  
16 members of city Council. I speak before you to  
17 provide insight from a mature performing artist  
18 Vantage on the impact of Covid 19 and my perspective  
19 as a working artist whose opportunities to work,  
20 interpret, and create have been decimated and whose  
21 economic value has depreciated since the pandemic. I  
22 am Cheryl Warfield, a professional opera singer and a  
23 long-standing member of three unions, including the  
24 American Guild of Musical Artists, AGMA, my parent  
25 union. I have performed at the Metropolitan Opera on

2 Broadway and throughout Europe. I produce innovative  
3 arts programming for underserved communities as a  
4 teaching artist and as the director of More Opera  
5 which I found it 20 years ago. I am here today to  
6 provide a name and a face to my story as an artist.  
7 I began producing Opera the year after 9/11,  
8 including opera concerts with full orchestra  
9 employing more than 40 local 802 instrumentalists in  
10 addition to the singers. My desire to create  
11 meaningful work for myself and others is great, but  
12 my ability to do this on a regular basis has had  
13 budgetary restrictions. Now, Covid 19 has taken away  
14 most performing opportunities that opera singers  
15 have, especially paid gigs. Further, the ability to  
16 practice our art, even in privately in coaching's,  
17 can put artists at risk. They are all are no  
18 auditions, no rehearsals, no chances to sing with  
19 others and most paid gigs fall under the less  
20 artistically satisfying construct of pre-recorded  
21 music. But what is most devastating and least  
22 quantifiable is the lost time and lost opportunities  
23 due to the cancellation of performances in 2020. For  
24 mature artists, this is devastating. While I have  
25 pivoted into online concertizing, it is not the same.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Expired.

3 CHERYL WARFIELD: Once the pandemic is--  
4 I will start to start over to rebuild my career, but  
5 need help to do that for myself and for other artists  
6 so that we can help to bring back our vibrant arts  
7 community while helping Covid impacted communities,  
8 as well. Thank you so much.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
10 Cheryl. We will come back to how we can be helpful  
11 in that.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. The  
13 next panelist will be Jarrad Packard.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time.

15 JARRAD PACKARD: [speaking foreign  
16 language] Hello, my relatives. My name is Jarrad  
17 Packard. I come from Ogallala, South Dakota and I  
18 live here in Brooklyn, New York. I am on the  
19 community advisory board of Safe Harbors of NYC.  
20 Safe Harbors NYC is a native theater company that  
21 creates, presidents, and promotes native specific  
22 theater, performance work, and training, education,  
23 and activism. I am also the director of strategic  
24 partnerships for Urban Indigenous Collective, a  
25 nonprofit focused on improving the health and

2 wellness of the indigenous community in New York  
3 City. To the committee, we are testifying before you  
4 today to inform you that our community does not have  
5 a dedicated theater performance or communal gathering  
6 space in New York City to present native specific  
7 performance work community interventions that are  
8 medical, social, and mental health related. We do  
9 not separate our performance theater or art practices  
10 from our medical, social, or mental health. We see  
11 them as interconnected interventions that support and  
12 inform each other in diverse ways. The connection  
13 between the two is paramount. They are  
14 interdependent. Our culture is our medicine. Dear  
15 committee, following is the solutions we ask for. A  
16 building space, specifically in lower Manhattan that  
17 would function as a community hub that will meet the  
18 following means: be it space for Native American  
19 community theater and performance which we can offer  
20 as an individual and collective container for native  
21 artists, performers, and community members together  
22 and connect, a space where we can conduct native  
23 specific feasts and ceremonies, as space where we can  
24 gather and express our cultural needs which are  
25 essential to our existence and well-being, and,

2 finally, where we can provide a culturally relevant  
3 health and mental health service for community  
4 members and community native artists. We lost to  
5 community members within the same family within a  
6 week of each other. Kevin Turant, Cochon Compi  
7 [sp?], and his stepmother Victoria Turant [inaudible  
8 00:43:51], both of whom were language and song  
9 keepers of our community. Once Covid 19 subsides and  
10 people can gather once more, we would like to have  
11 our own space where we can honor our relatives who  
12 were taken from us by this pandemic. In conclusion,  
13 we come to you and ask your support for a designated  
14 indigenous theater and communities' space in lower  
15 Manhattan where we could begin to resolve our  
16 historic and intergenerational trauma that has been  
17 exacerbated by Covid 19. Thank you for your time--

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

19 JARRAD PACKARD: [speaking foreign  
20 language] from my relatives. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.  
22 The next panelist will be Don Christian Jones.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

24 DON CHRISTIAN JONES: Hello. My name is  
25 Don Christian Jones. I am in interdisciplinary

2 multimedia creator and arts educator here in New York  
3 City. My creative activity for the past nine years  
4 is music performance and over 40 community-based  
5 murals has been informed by my concurrent work as a  
6 teaching artist and muralist in schools, shelters,  
7 probation centers, and, most extensively, on Rikers  
8 Island with incarcerated youth. In fact, the  
9 underpinnings of my work, its structure and content,  
10 are derived from those experiences. These include  
11 intergenerational, intercultural discourse, the  
12 unmaking of white sensibility models, supremacy  
13 models, and systems of disenfranchisement, and the  
14 implications of mass incarceration on black  
15 liberation. I am here representing Public Assistance  
16 which is a mutual aid network, research, design lab,  
17 and resistance hub which we found it here in Crown  
18 Heights on June 6 of last year. As an organizing  
19 base in response to the confluence of Covid 19 and  
20 global sociopolitical uprising, Public Assistance has  
21 both led and partnered a multitude of community  
22 initiatives since its inception, among them paid  
23 youth moral residency programs, public art making an  
24 open call radio programs, of free bike repair and  
25 refurbish initiative, a community French and garden,

2 toy and coat drives, hot meal care package  
3 distribution, and wellness workshops for collective  
4 care and resilience, in addition to our community  
5 program we may design, produce, and fabricate  
6 anything by our collected team of artists, makers,  
7 organizers, builders. Our capabilities include  
8 banners, sets, media for protests, murals, visual  
9 media, photography, video, garment design,  
10 sustainable green design. And, as of last week, we  
11 have been threatened with eviction. Yeah. So, the  
12 current property owners of Public Assistance, we  
13 operate out of a vacated laundry mat, notified us  
14 that they were going to begin construction on a new  
15 development, probably a gourmet supermarket within  
16 the next 20 to 50 days, leaving us really devastated  
17 and shocked and, you know, we are in like this crazy  
18 mode trying to sustain them figure out what to do  
19 next, but we are a beloved staple of this community  
20 already and we are going to fight to remain here. In  
21 solidarity with our neighbors. I could go on, but  
22 thank you for having us.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.  
24 Chair Van Bramer, we do not have any Council member

2 hands raised, if you have any questions for this  
3 panel.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, I see  
5 Majority Leader Cumbo's hand raised again, but I well  
6 ask a few questions and then pass it over to the  
7 Majority Leader Cumbo and you will let me know if  
8 there any other members of the committee to wish to  
9 speak, but I feel like Cheryl who has been before the  
10 committee a few times and speaks so powerfully and it  
11 is very painful for me to hear, you know, that you  
12 can't saying as much and certainly not in the way  
13 that we wish you could, but you were just getting to  
14 the point of talking about coming out of Covid and  
15 sort of getting back up to speed, if you will and  
16 what does that look like to you and how could the  
17 city be helpful to you, in particular, and then maybe  
18 even others in your field?

19 CHERYL WARFIELD: Well, first of all, I  
20 would like to say thank you to the people who I work  
21 with at Culture at Three. I wouldn't be here today  
22 if it were not for Culture at Three. They have  
23 embraced me as an arts administrator, albeit that  
24 More Opera is a very small organization. It's a  
25 grassroots organization and they have provided

2 amazing information to me. I didn't know anything  
3 about how to testify for Counsel prior to being a  
4 part of Culture at Three. And what I would like to  
5 see would be some kind of forum for individual  
6 artists that-- collectively that identifies those  
7 artists that perhaps are not a part of larger  
8 organizations. So, for example you know, I have done  
9 fundraising for my organization before. I have  
10 received some monies in the past from the Lower  
11 Manhattan Cultural Council, but I've never actually  
12 received any money directly from DCLA and really  
13 don't know exactly how to go about doing that and  
14 considering that my organization has been in  
15 existence for 20 years, that's a little bit  
16 unfortunate. And so, when I also here there are  
17 artists who are being brought in by DCLA, how do  
18 artists like myself and up on that list without  
19 knowing-- how do I find out about this? And so,  
20 somewhere through social media and everything we have  
21 to do more outreach.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.  
23 And I see a lot of folks agreeing with you, but that  
24 is helpful and I know DCLA is still on the call in  
25 some capacity. But, yes. We have got to do more

2 because there are behind you, Cheryl, probably  
3 hundreds, if not thousands, of artists who have small  
4 organizations that have just never been interacted  
5 with, right? Have never gained access to the system,  
6 don't know how to gain access to the system. They  
7 are just doing the work, right, raising some box year  
8 and they are enjoying it, but have no idea how to  
9 access-- and the city, DCLA, certainly needs to do a  
10 better job of bringing in folks and expanding this  
11 particular franchise.

12                   CHERYL WARFIELD: And I just would like  
13 you to know that there is so much more that I can do  
14 and other organizations like mine. We want to do it.  
15 We want to make things better not just for even  
16 artists, but for communities and I would love to--  
17 and I think that we can find innovative ways to  
18 create opportunities for artists to work again. To  
19 work and but also help build the community. And  
20 there is just so much that can be done not just in  
21 education. And then, when I hear-- you know, when  
22 the governor spoke about, you know, actually creating  
23 new spaces in midtown or downtown to make sure that  
24 artists have been used within these spaces and but  
25 not just the larger organizations. That they are

2 equal access for everyone. And I truly believe that  
3 we are now at a point where we are willing to open  
4 things up, so I'm very hopeful.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. Well, we  
6 could have our own hearing on the Governor's  
7 announcement to have a really big concerts that  
8 really big venues with really big millionaire  
9 superstar performers, and I love me some Amy Schumer,  
10 but I think at this moment we need to be much more  
11 concerned about Cheryl Warfield and not Amy Schumer.  
12 So, I just want to say thank you, Cheryl, and when  
13 you are able to belt out the students for the first  
14 time in a crowd--

15 CHERYL WARFIELD: [inaudible 00:52:39] you  
16 will allow me and you will record me singing happy  
17 birthday to your mother.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Now you just  
19 going to make me cry. So, yes. I would love that,  
20 but thank you. But I really want to hear you sing  
21 because you testified now a couple of times before  
22 the committee and I think it would be very good for  
23 the soul to just hear you saying. I do want to, to  
24 Mr. Jones, the testimony was very powerful and,  
25 obviously, the situation you currently find yourself

2 in is devastating to hear. And, look, I obviously am  
3 an elected official and I am in government and I  
4 understand that the mutual aid movement, which  
5 obviously support, but it is, at least for some,  
6 inherently a critique of government, right? And of  
7 the system and not seeking, in many cases, to work  
8 with or interact with or receive support from the  
9 very system that it is critiquing. So, just wanted  
10 test, you know, how are you fighting this and, you  
11 know, to what extent, you know, could or should the  
12 government be helpful, understanding that, you know,  
13 mutual aid in and of itself is a critique of the  
14 system, right, and in some ways does not seek to work  
15 with it?

16 DON CHRISTIAN JONES: Absolutely. I  
17 mean, that's really great question and I value you  
18 asking it. I think we have had, in the past week or  
19 so, we have had to do a lot of reconciling for  
20 ourselves as to the outlets or the means to getting  
21 somewhere, you know, out of this situation and we  
22 have just been referred extensively to the city in  
23 folks that, you know, members of our community  
24 believe in, including Ms. Cumbo. So, you know, I'm  
25 just taking the suggestions of our hyper local

2 community and I believe that there is ample room to  
3 still work together. This whole situation, it is  
4 alarming, but it is not unforeseen this lease. This  
5 very loose lease that we were kind of bullied into  
6 signing at the end of the summer and there was this  
7 risk of sudden termination, but we also are a safe  
8 haven for queer black/brown youth as we see these  
9 spaces disappearing fast or just being rare in  
10 itself. So it's just a precarious situation. I'm  
11 trying to provide safe space and brave space for  
12 already marginalized folks, so to think that we are  
13 kind of in this trepidation the situation with  
14 property managers who are kind of exercising like  
15 muscle tactics of-- what's the word? Intimidation.  
16 I am just trying to ensure the safety of this space,  
17 our physical space, but our bodies. Although we do  
18 here. All the programmatic efforts. All the tech  
19 and supply the materials that exist here. Sorry.  
20 Out the helps.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah.

22 DON CHRISTIAN JONES: [inaudible  
23 00:56:11] question and left reconciling, but I  
24 obviously believe in the work of many city workers.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. Well,  
3 thank you for the safe and brave space that you are  
4 building particular for queer youth of color. Right?  
5 I mean, that is incredibly rare to have those spaces  
6 and it just sounds like what you are doing there,  
7 both you and obviously the community, is amazing and  
8 should be maintained and protected. You mentioned  
9 Ms. Cumbo, so I feel like that is a perfect  
10 opportunity to bring the Majority Leader into the  
11 discussion to ask any of the panelist, but maybe also  
12 yourself.

13 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you. Just  
14 wanted to-- and I said, Council member Van Bramer,  
15 that DCLA was still on the call. On the zoom. I  
16 don't know if-- because we are doing it in our  
17 offices and I know that things have transitioned. My  
18 question to the DCLA and if we could-- if they are  
19 still not on the call, if the Council could follow  
20 up. It is due DCLA doing any kind of online how to  
21 apply for that DCLA upcoming grants? How do you get  
22 your paperwork in? Sort of a helpdesk. I think that  
23 is one aspect that we could just start the process  
24 and have other opportunities where people could weigh  
25 in if they need additional help and support in order

2 to strengthen their organization because an  
3 organization of the caliber that Cheryl has outlined  
4 should certainly be, with their years of service to  
5 the community, for consideration. And I would also  
6 recommend, Cheryl, as well, looking at your local  
7 arts councils as well as when I started my  
8 organization, MOCADA, I was very much supported by  
9 the New York Foundation For the Arts, as well. So,  
10 that is also someplace that I have gone to for your  
11 initial help, but my question, more specifically for  
12 Cheryl and then I want to get to the Don Christian in  
13 a moment. It's what are you doing on a monthly basis  
14 in order to make it? What does an artist who has  
15 been shot out of the entire process of performances,  
16 opportunities to present. How are you piecing  
17 together living every month?

18                   CHERYL WARFIELD: Thank you, Majority  
19 Leader.

20                   MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: And I don't mean to  
21 be so pers-- you know what I mean? But I think it  
22 would be helpful to know. If it is a little too  
23 sketchy, you don't have to get into it, but, you  
24 know, so you have to tell us all the secrets, but  
25 basically.

2 CHERYL WARFIELD: Actually, it is a part  
3 that I had to cut out of my two minutes. But I have  
4 actually the good fortune-- although I put it in my  
5 past, I do agree--

6 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I'm sorry. I'm  
7 going to beat myself.

8 CHERYL WARFIELD: I did not have the  
9 opportunity-- my father did not allow me to major in  
10 music in college. Interestingly enough, though,  
11 because of my accounting degree, that is actually  
12 how, when I still was in Ohio, was able to start my  
13 not-for-profit with the business acumen that I  
14 learned in school. And that is what has enabled me  
15 to, on a shoestring budget, to create some phenomenal  
16 art that looks like it may have cost a lot more than  
17 it did. But in terms of trying to make things now--  
18 well, first and foremost, as the primary  
19 administrator or my organization, that I do that on a  
20 volunteer basis. But I am fortunate enough that, as  
21 a teaching artist, I actually work with senior  
22 citizens and I also work with elementary school kids  
23 and I have been able to keep going and doing that and  
24 a couple of small side gigs that I have been able to  
25 do to make ends meet right now.

2 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: During this time  
3 you've been able to do those?

4 CHERYL WARFIELD: actually have had senior  
5 center in the Bronx that I work with. The Jazz Van  
6 Portland senior center. And it's not a lot of money.  
7 It only--

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Right.

9 CHERYL WARFIELD: probably less than a  
10 fourth of my rent each month. But between that and a  
11 couple of other side gigs-- actually work for the US  
12 Census Bureau 10 days a month.

13 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You go ahead,  
14 Cheryl. You're going to make it work. What about--

15 CHERYL WARFIELD: In fact, left another  
16 thing that I would love to do is to even work with  
17 artists talking about budgeting and how to keep going  
18 and how to stay afloat in times like this.

19 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Have you been able  
20 to qualify for unemployment or any of the types of  
21 programs that are out there?

22 CHERYL WARFIELD: So, two things. First  
23 of all, when I'm not working for the Census Bureau  
24 those 10 days a week, I do qualify for unemployment,  
25 but because it was freelance, it is one fourth of the

2 amount that most people get for unemployment.

3 Every little bit helps.

4 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: That's right.

5 CHERYL WARFIELD: And I also was able  
6 to get a very small PPP loan.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Oh, that's  
9 fantastic.

10 CHERYL WARFIELD: And, again, because  
11 I-- my bank was not doing anything to help with  
12 securing that loan and I got some valuable  
13 information during one of the meetings that helped me  
14 to be able to contact my bank and say the right  
15 things.

16 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You go ahead,  
17 Cheryl. You need a podcast or some sort. Thank you  
18 so much for sharing that and getting us that  
19 information. I really applaud your efforts. I know  
20 it is a really tough time, but, you know, the Culture  
21 Three really shows the power of community and what  
22 can come together when we share information amongst  
23 everyone and it helps the entire community. I wanted  
24 to ask Jarrad-- that I pronounce it correctly?

2 He's got to be on muted. Mr. Packard needs to be  
3 unmuted.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: There is a slight  
5 delay, but we are unmuting him.

6 JARRAD PACKARD: Thank you.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Oh, okay.

8 JARRAD PACKARD: Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry.

10 JARRAD PACKARD: Yes. Jarrad is how you  
11 pronounce the name.

12 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Jarrad. Are you  
13 familiar with the organization Amarinda?

14 JARRAD PACKARD: Yes. I've heard of  
15 Amarinda.

16 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I mean, I think it  
17 would be so powerful, when I'm hearing of your  
18 mission in hearing of their mission, the not to  
19 hear-- you know, there is also power in community  
20 and I think it would be really powerful to partner  
21 with them to kind of see what are they doing and what  
22 has been their experience in terms of advancing the  
23 work of the Native American community in New York  
24 City from a local not-for-profit indigenous space and  
25

2 voice. So, I just wanted to make that suggestion as  
3 one.

4 JARRAD PACKARD: Thank you.

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: And I will share  
6 that information in the chat so that you can follow  
7 up--

8 JARRAD PACKARD: Yes.

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: so that I can make  
10 a direct connection, as well.

11 JARRAD PACKARD: Okay. Thank you so  
12 much for that.

13 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Definitely. And,  
14 Don, I wanted to ask-- thank you so much for the  
15 work that you're doing. It is so great to put names  
16 and faces and places and work together. A few quick  
17 questions and I will also share my information, as  
18 well. What is the square footage of space that the  
19 organization is looking for? About.

20 DON CHRISTIAN JONES: So, you know, it's  
21 been like a whirlwind, but we even started looking at  
22 new spaces yesterday in the past two days. We are  
23 really hoping for like something street facing  
24 community facing for which people feel like invited  
25 and welcome to come consult with us, but ideally

2 something from like three to 4500 square feet. And  
3 we really also interested in more raw, industrial or  
4 alternative space. We don't want something that  
5 feels clinical feels like a community or work or like  
6 a school. We are really trying to embody a new  
7 vision or a new imagined space for what community  
8 movement, educational work can look and feel like.

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Now, are you all in  
10 a position at this point to start to receive  
11 governmental funding? Foundation and etc.?

12 DON CHRISTIAN JONES: I think, if we want  
13 to stay alive, we have to. Yes. Yes. And then,  
14 thus far-- We've gotten thus far solely off of  
15 private donations and micro grants. In the beginning  
16 of Covid, I was just like full force applying for  
17 everything and, you know, I am apt and have the  
18 agencies to do so, but I realize that so many of my  
19 peers don't or even have the access or language to  
20 get so much of the funding that we got just to get  
21 off the ground, but I think, going forward, we are  
22 really going to have to expand our model as to where  
23 those sources of funding come from or even space.  
24 But that is really what it is. We want to stay in  
25 solidarity with our neighbors because they have been

2 here longer than us. 10 years. But we also don't  
3 want to exacerbate or extend this really contentious,  
4 negative energetically like relationship with these  
5 property owners that don't want us here, but they  
6 want proximity to the movement and they want the tax  
7 write off. It just doesn't feel healthy.

8 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay. So, let's--  
9 it sounds like it's a fancy way of saying you're  
10 robbing Peter to pay Paul right now to get through  
11 the pandemic. And I appreciate that. But I do want  
12 to help. I don't have like an idea. There's not an  
13 idea and I go, oh, I've got the perfect place. I do  
14 have some ideas, but I would like to talk with you  
15 off-line to further explore. I think if we put our  
16 minds together we could find something together and I  
17 think with all three of these conversations, it's  
18 like it's the power of community and togetherness is  
19 definitely going to get us through. So, I am going  
20 to figure out how to share my information with you on  
21 the chat while I get this apple juice together for my  
22 son and we are going to make it happen. Thank you so  
23 much, Council member Van Bramer.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
25 Majority Leader Cumbo. Thank you, Cheryl, and I will

2 get your contact information through the Council and  
3 will figure out some way to have you record happy  
4 birthday to my mother, because I will see her later  
5 today and will happily show her that video as we zoom  
6 with my siblings later tonight with a cake for my  
7 mom. But thank you. And to the rest of the  
8 panelists, Jarrad and Don Christian, thank you very  
9 much. Much respect to both of you for all of the  
10 work that you do and being a part of this hearing and  
11 certainly, certainly hope, Don Christian, that the  
12 community is able to secure either the home you  
13 currently have or a new home and, with the assistance  
14 of whoever you choose to engage in that process.

15 DON CHRISTIAN JONES: Thank you so much.  
16 If I might add, we are nonprofit just if that adds  
17 context. We are a formal 501©(3).

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. Which  
19 means you are eligible for funding if you choose to  
20 apply for it. So, I know that that is the choice,  
21 right? That is a discussion in the mutual aid  
22 movement, but whatever you choose to do, I support  
23 and if you do seek funding, you know, you should get.  
24 That is my opinion, but thank you. So, with that, I

2 will excuse this panel and ask the counsel to  
3 introduce the next panel.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,  
5 Chair Van Bramer. Just to preface the next panel,  
6 apologies again for any pronunciation errors and just  
7 to remind you that, at the end of all panels today,  
8 we will be calling for any witnesses that we have  
9 unintentionally missed. So, the next panel will be  
10 three members. This is panel two. I will call your  
11 names as a panel and then individually to testify.  
12 The members will be Jerome Harris from the Music  
13 Workers Alliance, Alejandra Duque Cifuentes from  
14 Dance NYC, and Orietta Crispino from Theater Lap Inc.  
15 So, the first panelist is Jerome Harris. You may  
16 begin when the sergeant calls the clock. Thank you  
17 so much.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

19 JEROME HARRIS: Thank you all present.  
20 I am Jerome Harris. I am testifying on behalf of  
21 Music Workers Alliance which is a volunteer  
22 organization of folks who work in the crafting and  
23 presenting of expressive sound. In December, we  
24 conducted a survey of music workers that we are in  
25 touch with about how the pandemic has been affecting

2 them. I have posted that survey results. The  
3 results on that survey to-- as written testimony to  
4 this hearing, so you should be able to access that  
5 there. I will use this time to speak to our thoughts  
6 on these bills. These two bills that are on this  
7 hearing's agenda. On Intro 2194, we very much favor  
8 the Department of Cultural Affairs conducting a study  
9 of the real estate issues that have led to the city  
10 losing cultural spaces and coming up with  
11 recommendations that would counter that loss. This  
12 has been-- you know, the loss of cultural spaces in  
13 the city, as I am sure you all know, has been, you  
14 know, problem for decades and, you know, it has been,  
15 in this period, it is certainly been leading to  
16 artists leaving the city or deciding to not come to  
17 New York City. You know, people are in Philadelphia  
18 and upstate towns and, you know, in the Hudson Valley  
19 and going to pop following going to Detroit. So,  
20 anything that, you know, the city can do to, you  
21 know, stanch that loss, particularly since that loss  
22 is probably being accelerated by the current  
23 pandemic. You know, we see--

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

25 JEROME HARRIS: Oh. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Did you want  
3 to finish up what you are saying, Mr. Harris?

4 JEROME HARRIS: Well, I did want to just  
5 mention our thoughts about Intro 2195 about the  
6 certification, you know, of artists. It has not been  
7 publicized what that certification is designed to  
8 enable in terms of city programs. We are very  
9 interested in finding out. We have some ideas along  
10 that line. We also are a bit concerned that DCLA's  
11 advisory commission, you know, in terms of its  
12 working on the certification criteria, that it may  
13 not adequately represent the views of performing arts  
14 professionals. You know, just looking at who is on--  
15 who is currently on the commission. So, this is  
16 something that we wonder about. And we also want to  
17 make sure that the certification in the  
18 implementation is made available to those who face,  
19 you know, barriers, you know, because of disability  
20 or lack of computer skills or a lack of savvy and  
21 navigating bureaucracies. You know, any of these  
22 impediments. And also the certified artist status  
23 must not be used as a cudgel for enforcing unjust  
24 social biases or personal vendettas as the city's old  
25 cabaret card regime, you know, decades ago, you know,

2 did. So, you know, that was used in that way. We  
3 just want to log those thoughts.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely.

5 Thank you very much, Mr. Harris, and I see Olympia on  
6 my screen. I don't know if you are speaking,  
7 Olympia, but okay. We want that energy that you  
8 bring to everything, as well. But thank you, Mr.  
9 Harris. All of those points are incredibly important  
10 and well taken and I think we are going to hear from  
11 some of the folks who really have been thinking a lot  
12 about this particular piece of legislation and what  
13 is hoped to be accomplished with that, but all of  
14 those warning signs are well taken and, obviously,  
15 have to be addressed before we would move forward  
16 with anything like this. Right? It cannot, in any  
17 way, isolate or harm artists who may not have access  
18 and, of course, how one defines an artist, it is in  
19 some ways very, very personal, very subjective, and  
20 there has to be a clear way of doing this that does  
21 no harm and only does good, so thank you and I being  
22 Alejandra is next, but I think, Brenda, do you need  
23 to call on her or how do we do that?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No. You can call  
25 on Ms. Cifuentes. Go ahead. Thank you, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Alejandra  
3 Duque Cifuentes.

4 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Yes. Well  
5 said. Am actually going to follow a very similar  
6 structure to my colleague here. We will submit our  
7 testimony and provide a lot of detail and data, but I  
8 want to provide some immediate reflections on the two  
9 pieces of legislation. First and foremost, the issue  
10 around rent is the one issue that we have identified  
11 that is equally impacting independent artists and  
12 organizations at the same time and so, addressing  
13 comprehensive rent relief, all kinds of ways in which  
14 legislation, tax breaks-- there is a variety of  
15 suggestions that we provided in our testimony, but  
16 putting our efforts in addressing rent issues will  
17 influence and change the landscape for independent  
18 artists and for artistic communities across the  
19 board. If we are trying to really break our heads  
20 like what is the one thing we can do, this is it,  
21 right? And so, one of the things in talking about  
22 rent is we know when we have seen, for example, with  
23 the CIG program, that when organizations get their  
24 space covered, right? When they don't have to be  
25 worried about where they are going to live and how

2 they are going to move in can they pay their  
3 electricity, etc., it creates the opportunity for  
4 them to thrive. We also know that historically the  
5 inaccessibility of land or property is the number one  
6 marker of injustice in terms of the relationship to  
7 the slave trade into the stolen lands of indigenous  
8 peoples. And so, we really want to address justice  
9 and we want to care for our cultural institutions in  
10 our artists. We have to address rent and we have to  
11 address land ownership in land care more than ever.  
12 In terms of the legislation to support independent  
13 individual artists and the artists certification, I  
14 think it is a-- actually, before I get to that, I  
15 think it is great that were trying to get data to  
16 understand how to support organizations and the issue  
17 in question of land and their spaces, but we have  
18 known this information for years. We know what  
19 people need. We can't keep saying we are going to  
20 gather data as a way to circumvent and like--

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time.

22 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: slowly build  
23 up to change. We are in a place-- you know, was  
24 Martin Luther King Day yesterday? We are about to  
25 have a new administration. We can't be leaning on

2 these incremental changes thing and hope for the  
3 better at the cost of the very people that we intend  
4 to serve. As we look at legislation 2195, I echo  
5 what my colleagues are saying around ensuring that  
6 whatever is created doesn't reinforce systems of  
7 oppression and biases, but there is present so  
8 historically across the world where governments have  
9 formal infrastructures that support artists. If we  
10 look at France, they have a program called [inaudible  
11 1:18:22] and that program creates the opportunity to  
12 provide access to unemployment benefits, all kinds of  
13 state and intentional support that allows those  
14 communities to thrive there. And so, there is  
15 precedents, historical precedents. A lot of  
16 countries do it where we can support artists. One of  
17 the things that I will say that is important about  
18 that is an thinking about reducing the labor that  
19 artists have to indoor when requesting financial  
20 support is how a system like this can move us in the  
21 direction of, and applications and in accessing  
22 grants. How we can streamline and create an  
23 opportunity for more communication across agencies  
24 and across where artists can act as both vendors or  
25 where also artists can receive financial support.

2 And so, I think there's a lot of opportunity for a  
3 program like this and, while the government should  
4 not legislate who is and is not an artist, the  
5 government has a mandate to support the use cultural  
6 workers and, in creating a system like this, I think  
7 it is an opportunity that, if we do it with the lens  
8 on justice connected to the very artists informing  
9 how that is developed and ensuring that we are not  
10 replicating their Eurocentric leanings and how we do  
11 it, that it is an opportunity for us to move in the  
12 direction of a formal structure of support for  
13 artists from the government. So, those are my two  
14 kind of main reflections to the committee as we think  
15 about both of these pieces of legislation and, in our  
16 testimony, we have, of course, provided a lot of data  
17 and specific recommendations. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Wonderful. Thank  
19 you so much. The final panel last for this panel  
20 will be Orietta Crispino from Theater Lab Inc.

21 ORIETTA CRISPINO: Hi. Thank you,  
22 Chairman.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

24 ORIETTA CRISPINO: and everybody. I  
25 totally second what Alejandra said, so I am going to,

2 you know, compact my testimony and say that, for 15  
3 years, Theater Lab has served to the community of  
4 performing artists with resources such as affordable  
5 spaces to create and present live works. Our  
6 signature white box spaces are flexible in nature and  
7 intimate in size, have been inspiring to create  
8 contemporary forms of presentations, welcoming new  
9 audiences to a very unique experience of art and  
10 gathering. In 15 years, I built two different  
11 venues. For seven years I was downtown on 14th  
12 Street and, from 2005 to 2012 and now since 2013, we  
13 moved to the Garment District, West 36th Street. We  
14 are led by a group of women artists. Creative,  
15 resilient, resourceful and we like to be a small  
16 nonprofit organization. Rent, property tax, and  
17 renegotiation with hourlies and with our landlord  
18 have been our main issues pre-and post-Covid. We  
19 need help to craft a new partnership with landlords.  
20 We cannot keep creating if we constantly fight. We  
21 need incentives to property owners leasing to artists  
22 and, in so doing, sharing the burden of the pandemic.  
23 Some points. One, property tax break. Possibly  
24 calculated proportionally to the duration of the  
25 lease, encouraging lengthier tendencies. Two year

2 leases are not a great help. Only through time can  
3 we really weave ourselves in the city fabric,  
4 creating community and impacting the lives of the  
5 citizens. Accessing and operating--

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

7 ORIETTA CRISPINO: is often predicated on  
8 the length of the lease. Two, eliminate the portion  
9 of property tax that is passed on to commercial  
10 tenants in Manhattan between 96 Street and Chambers  
11 Street that effectively raised our monthly rent last  
12 year by \$1000 and that the landlord is not willing to  
13 reduce, putting us at risk of closing. Three, assist  
14 with legal help and lease negotiation and technical  
15 needs for a safe, hopefully, reopening. How do we  
16 assess ventilation systems? Is there any way to  
17 share the cost of upgrading with property owners?  
18 Four, assisting in developing better maintenance  
19 practice by building private land-- including  
20 private landlords and sharing benefits from mixed  
21 city programs. Example. From my previous venue I  
22 was able to access as nonprofit, the Cool Roof  
23 program for the building we were leasing and had the  
24 roof coded for experimental green purposes for free.  
25 My old landlord is probably still benefiting from it

2 after I was gone. Five, access to capital for  
3 artists to help with purchasing real estate. We  
4 think that artist certification could be a help in  
5 starting the conversation. Thank you for listening.  
6 Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

9 Are there any other panelists on this-- I see you,  
10 Majority Leader Cumbo. Any other panelists on this  
11 panel?

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No, Chair Van  
13 Bramer. This is the final witness for this panel and  
14 Majority Leader has hand raised.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. I do see  
16 that. Do you want to go first in this round,  
17 Majority Leader?

18 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I just wanted to  
19 say--

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

21 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I just wanted to  
22 say-- I mean, I don't know how appropriate it is,  
23 but I am always so inspired and excited by the DC LA  
24 hearings. It's kind of my way to reconnect and this  
25 is a bit out of order, but it's like a lot of this

2 passion and energy that I am hearing right now, you  
3 know, Council member Van Bramer are both term  
4 limited, so this is our last year, but this type of  
5 fire and energy and passion has to go on in the next  
6 Council. I don't really know if there are  
7 professionals that have decided to run and entered  
8 into that realm, but the only way to really ensure  
9 the type of change that you want to see is to have  
10 people directly from the field into this because it  
11 is a different way of thinking. It's a different  
12 language. It's a different sensibility. You know,  
13 it's late, but I am still seeing people jump into the  
14 race from citywide office all the way down every  
15 single day. So, you know, this type of advocacy and  
16 passion has to continue and it has to continue with  
17 the types of passion and energy that I'm hearing on  
18 this call right now. So, if you haven't thought  
19 about it, think about it. I am very concerned about  
20 what will happen with a lot of the games that Chair  
21 Van Bramer and myself have made in this Council.  
22 It's funny, but it's not funny. Any time we step  
23 into a room and people of kind of already decided  
24 what is going to be, they will say, oh, God. Here  
25 comes Jimmy and Laurie. Okay. We've got to put the

2 arts and. Where do you all see the arts? How do you  
3 want it to be? And, in my capacity as the Majority  
4 Leader, it is different because now Jimmy is fighting  
5 for the arts and I have to really back in a little  
6 bit, so it's like this weird kind of, you know--  
7 it's this weird kind of energy and space, but I also  
8 wanted dad to Alejandra, I'm really feeling a lot of  
9 what you said and you're probably going to be like,  
10 oh, my goodness. You don't know this already, but I  
11 think, as this is our last year, and what you all  
12 were testifying, it would be wonderful to have a  
13 document that puts together the best practices  
14 throughout the world and maybe throughout the nation  
15 where you have seen these types of examples and how  
16 they have actually and specifically worked. Because  
17 we may have a lot of good ideas, but the beauty of  
18 seeing practices that have worked in other countries  
19 or other nations is that they have worked it out.  
20 So, like for example, maybe some of the things are  
21 based off of a hotel tax. Maybe some of the things  
22 are based off of a referendum that they put on the  
23 voting ballot that says X, Y, and Z. Like we can  
24 have that type of documentation of best practices and  
25 how those best practices are functioning throughout

2 the world or throughout the nation. It gives Chair  
3 Van Bramer and myself a real opportunity to create  
4 legislation or maybe even budget priorities for how  
5 we implement some of these things in our last year.  
6 But even if we don't bring these things over the  
7 finish line, it's so important to begin to put these  
8 ideas out because, most importantly, we want to see  
9 that the arts are no longer considered a fringe  
10 benefit of New York City and I don't know how to  
11 stated anymore clearly for the people throughout the  
12 city, that it is the backbone of our financial  
13 economy. If you can't understand anything else,  
14 understand the economics of it which seems to be  
15 something that people understand. So, you know, if a  
16 document or discussion through Culture Three could  
17 begin to say we want to put together this best  
18 practice document, that would be so powerful. Thank  
19 you.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very  
21 much, Majority Leader. And we've talked about this a  
22 few times and, you know, when I listen to Alejandra  
23 and some others, I get fired up, too, and  
24 automatically start thinking, boy, I hope Alejandra  
25 runs for office one day and because it's so true that

2 we need people-- and I realize that government is  
3 not for everyone. People are right to be incredibly  
4 frustrated by the structural inequities that exist,  
5 but we make it better, however painfully  
6 incrementally when artists and people who care about  
7 the arts are in government. When we're not, there  
8 are very, very few people willing to fight for the  
9 arts and artists and I have been in the Council for  
10 11 years. I am the Chair of this committee for all  
11 11 years and I can tell you that when the doors are  
12 closed and the press aren't watching and people are  
13 fighting, there aren't that many people who fight for  
14 the arts and that's why you need people like Laurie  
15 and myself who have a history with the arts before we  
16 got elected that are more willing to fight, right,  
17 and who will go to great lengths to fight. So,  
18 this--

19 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Run, Alejandra.  
20 Run. I didn't want to say it, but, girl, run.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And there are  
22 so many others--

23 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You can still  
24 dance, but run.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There are so  
3 many others. You know, Sheila Lewandowski is very,  
4 very active in western Queens and so many others, but  
5 I mean it. We need folks. And even if folks aren't  
6 going to run in this cycle, but to be engaged, right,  
7 to be engaged in your community civically,  
8 politically, and, again, people have talked about  
9 having an umbrella organization for artists and arts  
10 groups, like New Yorkers for Parks or other things  
11 like that that can actually-- and I know that there  
12 are individual organizations that do this, but have  
13 forms, have questionnaires, as candidates where they  
14 stand on issues affecting artists before they get  
15 elected so they are at least thinking about these  
16 issues because so many don't even think about them.  
17 I will just say lastly, Mr. Harris, Alejandra Duque  
18 Cifuentes-- and, yes. I say that correctly. I'm  
19 very proud I live in Queens and have a challenging  
20 lastly myself, so I feel like it is important to get  
21 people's names right. And, Orietta, thank you. All  
22 of you. Yes, to Alejandra's point, it is not new to  
23 us that the inequities and the power structures favor  
24 landowners, landlords, big real estate, and the  
25 horrific effects that has on communities including

2 cultural communities and a steady can seem like a  
3 very small and incremental step when faced with a  
4 crisis that we are faced with. I agree with that.  
5 We can push for that bigger structural change and we  
6 are and I certainly am in many ways on the political  
7 side, but, you know, this is something that is  
8 important for us to at least get people to focus on,  
9 talk about, acknowledges the root of so many of our  
10 problems, right? Rent and the inability, again, for  
11 people to produce and exist. To simply exist.  
12 Right? It's threatened because of the land ownership  
13 and structural inequities that exist. So, I just  
14 want to acknowledge all of that and I definitely feel  
15 that and supported. And just like Laurie said, you,  
16 too, get a lot of energy from these calls and feel  
17 fortified, again. You are so right and so good and  
18 so strong. So, thank you. Does the Majority Leader  
19 wish to speak again? Yes.

20 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Yes. I just want  
21 to say I apologize. I can't figure out how to start  
22 a chat, so my email address is just my name at Gmail  
23 so that I can just get it right to my personal. So,  
24 if there was further communication and you didn't see  
25 it come up in the chat, it's because I-- don't

2 judge. It's because I don't have any capacity to  
3 figure out how to do that right now, but it is just  
4 Laurie [cumbo@gmail.com](mailto:Lcumbo@gmail.com). Or LCumboCouncil.NYC.gov, but  
5 it would be better if you just send it to my personal  
6 email address. I've got to go to online circle time  
7 with my son. It's only a half-hour. I hope to come  
8 right back, but I would really enjoy to hear from  
9 each of you and, if the hearing is still going on, I  
10 will be back. So, thank you so much, Council member  
11 Van Bramer. This is great. Again, definitely  
12 consider running for office. If there are  
13 individuals out there want to do it, we need that  
14 fire. We need that energy. Run, Alejandra, run.  
15 Okay. I will see you all later. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And, committee  
17 counsel, do you want to go to the third panel?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Thank you so  
19 much, Chair Van Bramer. So, this concludes panel  
20 two. We will now move to panel three. The panelists  
21 there will be three witnesses on this panel. First  
22 is Lucy Sexton from New Yorkers for Culture and the  
23 Parts followed by Christina. From Chain Theater,  
24 and, third, Sheila Lewandowski from the Chocolate  
25 Factory in Queens. So, again, we will hold questions

2 to the end of the panel. The first panelist is Lucy  
3 Sexton and you may begin when the sergeant calls the  
4 clock. Thank you.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

6 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer,  
7 Majority Leader Cumbo, members of city Council for  
8 hearing my and so many others testimony. My name is  
9 Lucy Sexton. I am proud to head New Yorkers for  
10 Culturing Arts, citywide coalition of cultural groups  
11 and artists and cultural workers from across the  
12 city. The damage of Covid to every artist, cultural  
13 worker, an organization has been immense. It is  
14 equally important to remember that the ability of  
15 artists, cultural workers, and cultural organizations  
16 to survive in the city prior to Covid was already  
17 fragile. Last year at this time, New Yorkers for  
18 Culturing Arts did a series of cultural good meanings  
19 in each borough. Affordable living in workspace were  
20 consistently a top priority. As we consider these  
21 two intros, it is important to focus on the goals.  
22 Intro 295, the process for certifying or I would  
23 suggest, registering artists and cultural workers  
24 should aim to do three things: one, make it more  
25 possible for artists to live and remain in New York

2 City. Two, create a pathway for artists to rise up  
3 in every community in the city. Three, state clearly  
4 that New York City values its artists and cultural  
5 workers. While the creative economy is a huge driver  
6 for New York City, and employees and overly white  
7 workforce. We need to create pathways for lower  
8 income kids in every neighborhood to consider  
9 entering the field so they have access to the jobs in  
10 the nonprofit and for-profit cultural sector later  
11 on. Can a registry do that? It might help. It  
12 would allow the city to offer perks and services.  
13 Some of those might include free or reduced admission  
14 to cultural events and institutions, creation of an  
15 email list for the city councils Committee on  
16 Cultural Affairs to announce hearings, budgets,  
17 discretionary funding, and legislation to its core  
18 constituency engaging them in the creation of future  
19 policy and funding. Private companies could offer  
20 perks to those on the registry, as well. Say, with  
21 theaters need to pay for houses or free opening-day  
22 museum exhibitions or reduced price Broadway tickets.  
23 Also, more ambitiously, it could provide access to  
24 affordable housing in workspace, access to subsidized  
25 healthcare, tax relief. Imagine an accomplished

2 salsa musician in Queens who makes their living  
3 working in restaurants is able to register and  
4 receives some of these perks. It not only helps that  
5 person, but let's their kids and their community no  
6 that--

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time.

8 LUCY SEXTON: artistic practice is  
9 valued and rewarded. Imagine a young person with a  
10 degree in dance trying to carve out a living in the  
11 city who is welcome to do that workforce with this  
12 registry and is able to engage in more of the city's  
13 cultural activities because of it. Imagine an artist  
14 being able to use the registry data access healthcare  
15 and therefore to consider raising their families here  
16 and be able to raise their family here. I realize I  
17 am dreaming, but mindfully creating this mechanism  
18 now could lay the groundwork for these dreams going  
19 forward. Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. The  
21 next panelist will be Christina Perry. Thank you.

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

23 CHRISTINA PERRY: Good morning. My name  
24 is Christina Perry and I am the director of  
25 development of the Chain Theater located in Speaker

2 Johnson's district. We were formerly in Council  
3 member Van Bramer's district. We operate two  
4 theatrical venues on 36th Street and want to thank  
5 you for this opportunity to speak regarding Bill  
6 2194. Also, as the League of Independent Theater, I  
7 want to go on record and support the statements that  
8 will be made by LIT member [inaudible 1:39:19] and  
9 Amy Todoroff. We strongly urge the Council to  
10 explore offering tax incentives to landlords who  
11 offer a minimum of 10 year lease to the nonprofit  
12 theatrical spaces and require that the savings be  
13 passed on to the tenants. Now, I understand that  
14 reclassification is a really challenging process, yet  
15 we believe this will ensure sustainability and  
16 longevity of art spaces throughout the five boroughs  
17 while incentivizing landlords to maintain and create  
18 theatrical space in their buildings. We obviously  
19 support this offer for other art sectors. Theater is  
20 simply the industry I can best address. So, in a  
21 post-Covid world, it is very likely that performance  
22 venues will phase numerous requirements from unions  
23 with respect to ventilation and these necessary  
24 capital improvements will be burdensome for both  
25 nonprofit theaters and the landlords. NYC small

2 theaters are place is where the most difficult  
3 stories are told and if there was ever a need to  
4 address difficult stories, now is the time. New York  
5 City's small not-for-profit theaters provide numerous  
6 training opportunities for youth, seniors, and  
7 residents of all five boroughs while driving positive  
8 foot traffic in businesses, to stores, restaurants,  
9 taxis, the subway. Our international film Festival  
10 alone brings in hundreds of artists who don't live in  
11 New York City who then frequent and support our local  
12 economy by staying in hotels who we create  
13 partnerships within the countless bars and  
14 restaurants they frequent during their visit. In  
15 addition, many theaters like ourselves have invested  
16 in significant improvements and renovation to the  
17 spaces we occupy. We improve the spaces and  
18 neighborhoods we reside and so we are only improving  
19 it. I will close with this.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

21 CHRISTINA PERRY: A Margaret Meade quote I  
22 recently came upon. Never doubt that a small group  
23 of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the  
24 world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.  
25 So, thank you, Councilman, for this opportunity.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

3 Our next and final panel is for this panel will be  
4 Sheila Lewandowski. You may begin when the sergeant  
5 calls the clock. Thank you.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

7 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Hello. My name is  
8 Sheila Lewandowski, cofounder and Executive Director  
9 of the Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island city  
10 Queens. We are in Council member Van Bramer's  
11 district. So, thank you, Chairman Van Bramer,  
12 Majority Leader Cumbo, and the committee for the  
13 opportunity to testify. I've submitted testimony.  
14 I'm going to jump ahead to my suggestions. They  
15 mostly deal with land use because of the time. But  
16 just to frame some stuff, Chocolate Factory has  
17 existed in different forms in four different spaces  
18 and we are not unusual in that we are artist led, art  
19 is founded, but we are unusual in that we have  
20 somehow managed, through a lot, too, with the city of  
21 New York and Council members help, to get a building  
22 which will be our permanent home. I am also first  
23 vice chair of my community board and have learned a  
24 lot about land use staff through-- and  
25 overdevelopment in doing that. So, I'm going to jump

2 right in. I believe that city planning should be  
3 revamped and restructured. City planning should have  
4 a vision for sustainable, livable communities that  
5 includes cultural spaces, that includes community  
6 centers, school seats, parks, gardens, medical  
7 facilities, supportive housing for people and  
8 families in need, public alternative transportation  
9 accessible for all. I believe that HPD should  
10 redefine what housing is and what affordability is  
11 from the perspective of those needing affordability  
12 and not from a definition of what is market. That  
13 term has only come to mean can't afford the asking  
14 price. And it is driven by the seller's not the  
15 buyers and renters. This would help artists, many of  
16 whom remain low income, to remain in their  
17 communities and remain part of the city. I believe  
18 that the term community give back, use real estate  
19 with developers and negotiating with what they should  
20 provide for the community when they are asking for  
21 variances that make their projects more profitable  
22 should be eliminated and replaced with the city  
23 providing the developer with options to include as  
24 permanent venues for the community from a checklist  
25 of needs that city planning as is necessary for every

2 community, as I stated earlier. In this community  
3 facilities that should be part of the development  
4 permanently.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Keep going,  
7 Sheila.

8 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Just like the  
9 variances are. They get a permanent profit. We  
10 should get a permanent community facility. They  
11 should not make profit on the community facility.  
12 Those rents should be at cost because it is for their  
13 tenant and for the entire community. Going to go  
14 real fast on these last few. The city should have an  
15 agency to assist nonprofits like community centers  
16 and cultural centers to navigate real estate. There  
17 should be a pipeline for permanence that will be  
18 not-- that will be for all. But if the city know  
19 that culture and the arts are essential for humane,  
20 equitable, innovative diverse, sustainable, and  
21 vibrant communities, then the city must be more  
22 proactive in the planning and development of these  
23 permanent facilities. Property tax structure should  
24 allow for tax exemption or spaces dedicated to  
25 nonprofits and art venues as part of a long lease.

2 What other people said. And commercial rent  
3 regulation should be brought back to New York City  
4 for nonprofits and small businesses. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
6 Sheila. And I proud to represent you in the New York  
7 City Council and proud of our work together over the  
8 last 11 years. And if you haven't already emailed me  
9 that personally, will you? Because I strongly agree  
10 with all that you just said and we have to  
11 fundamentally re-- reorient how we plan and how we  
12 build and that means abolishing the current system  
13 and reimagining a new way in the centers, community,  
14 and people. So, absolutely agree with that. And,  
15 Lucy, I just want to say thank you. I know there are  
16 a number of fierce women behind Culture at Three,  
17 but, you know, you heard Cheryl speak about what it  
18 has meant for her and I know it has meant for so many  
19 other people. And, Christina, I'm glad you are  
20 thriving, but we certainly miss you and Queens, but  
21 appreciate the struggles that you have had, but, like  
22 so many other people in this call, simply make it  
23 work and make it happen. But we need to do more to  
24 make sure that everyone can be successful. I also  
25 just want to recognize that Council member Dharma

2 Diaz, you know, remains in the hearing from Brooklyn  
3 and we want to thank her for listening to all of you,  
4 as well. So I want to give the Council member a  
5 shout out because everyone is making reference to me  
6 in the Majority Leader, but Council member Diaz,  
7 thank you for listening to all the artists. So, with  
8 that, that ends this panel and we will go on to the  
9 fourth panel and I think there are only five. So, we  
10 have a fourth panel and a fifth panel.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Than you, Chair Van  
12 Bramer. And that's correct. We have two panels  
13 left. We will check at the end of the hearing. The  
14 next panel has three members. I will call the names  
15 of each panelist and then call each individual  
16 witness. The next panel, panel four, will be Guy  
17 Yedwab. Apologies again for any mispronunciations.  
18 Amy Todoroff and Randi Berry. So, Guy Yedwab from  
19 the League of Independent Theater, you may begin when  
20 the sergeant calls the clock.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

22 GUY YEDWAB: Thank you to the Committee  
23 for the opportunity to testify today. I am president  
24 of the Board of Directors of the League of  
25 Independent Theater. We are an advocacy organization

2 representing those who work in or run small  
3 grassroots theaters across all five boroughs of the  
4 city. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to  
5 discuss how small arts, culture, and community venues  
6 are being displaced across New York City, especially  
7 during this current pandemic with nearly a full year  
8 of background owed in a lack of rent relief that is  
9 only going to accelerate this process. While studies  
10 can generate new information on this topic, we agree  
11 with Dance NYC that we already know so much about  
12 this problem. In the wake of the 2008 financial  
13 crisis, the League of Independent Theater proposed a  
14 property tax abatement to incentivize landlords who  
15 rent to nonprofits and keep their rents affordable.  
16 We secured letters of support from all 12 Manhattan  
17 community boards. They knew what we already know.  
18 That given the choice, landlords will pursue the most  
19 profitable use per square footage available to them.  
20 We need an incentive to get more landlords to choose  
21 culture over banks and luxury coffee shops. We  
22 already know that in the last decade since that  
23 campaign, over 70 theater venues have permanently  
24 closed. In 2017, following your legislation, the  
25 Department of Cultural Affairs created the cultural

2 plan. As the Commissioner noted, hundreds of artists  
3 across the city spoke about what we already know.  
4 That we need long-term affordable workspace and  
5 housing and that people's cultural plan that was  
6 released in response spoke even more specifically to  
7 those needs and solutions. In 2019, the Mayor's  
8 Office of Media and Entertainment released a study on  
9 small theater. The study found what we already know.  
10 That the largest challenges facing the community were  
11 all related to physical space. Access to theaters,  
12 operational spaces, and theater closures. I believe  
13 that, based on what we already know, we can take  
14 action. Past protections like commercial rent  
15 stabilization create incentives like a property tax  
16 for landlords to get them to bring those spaces in  
17 and keep them affordable. And I know that the  
18 Council member Cumbo had to step away, but we also  
19 want to assure that the League is going to be hosting  
20 its endorsement process for city Council offices this  
21 year, so we are going to do what we can to make sure  
22 that this enthusiasm continues into the next term.  
23 Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

25 The next panelist will be Amy Todoroff. Thank you.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

3 AMY TODOROFF: There we go. Hi. The  
4 League of Independent Theater is an all volunteer  
5 coalition formed in 2008 in response to this space  
6 loss emergency and in those 13 years since, the  
7 situation has deteriorated, as we just heard from  
8 Guy. Covid has only highlighted what we already  
9 know. Artists are forced to scramble for an ever  
10 dwindling supply of rehearsal, work, or performance  
11 space and, when they can find it, they can't afford  
12 it, despite these powerful advocates like Orietta who  
13 is doing what she can to support us. They also can't  
14 just afford to live their lives in New York. The  
15 inevitable result is that artists are fleeing New  
16 York City and creating art centers in Tempe, Arizona,  
17 Houston, Texas, and Mount Carmel, Illinois. In order  
18 to confront the systems that led us here, we need to  
19 do an accounting of lost space that starts with the  
20 independent theater artist in New York City, built  
21 upon the great work already being done by the Indie  
22 Theater Fund, the Music Workers Alliance, Dance New  
23 York City, and others. So, Manhattan Theater Source  
24 in Greenwich Village has sat empty for the last  
25 decade. It is a zombie building and Safe Arbors has

2 no space. How does that happen in New York City? We  
3 need commercial rent stabilization. We need to  
4 attract developers that get a tax break for promising  
5 community arts space, but never deliver and we need  
6 tax incentives and other creative ideas like we heard  
7 from Sheila for those who rent to nonprofits,  
8 particularly those led by the global majority  
9 population. We need to keep artists in New York City  
10 with real action. We have a lot of questions about  
11 an artist certification process. Can artist  
12 certification provide access to free or low-cost  
13 healthcare? That would radically change the way  
14 artists get to live in New York. Can we get  
15 preferential con Ed rates for artist run venues? Can  
16 you build a new WPA from this artist workforce? Can  
17 you expand to the already existing city spaces--

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

19 AMY TODOROFF: program to give  
20 certified artists free access to the dormant city  
21 space or after hours when these cities spaces aren't  
22 in use? One last point. New York City likes to  
23 think of itself a theater city. It is part of our  
24 identity. But if we're honest, the city has always  
25 been hard on artists. We look at these legends like

2 Joe Pabb and Ellen Stewart, but even Joe Pabb got  
3 arrested and Ellen Stewart was shut down. You  
4 survived here. But the reality on the ground for  
5 artists is more dire today than it has ever been in  
6 India artists just start surviving. To make it work,  
7 make it happen hustle just isn't good enough anymore.  
8 So, without serious intervention, this generation is  
9 already taking their talents out of New York City and  
10 building are in Mount Carmel, Illinois. Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

12 The final member of this panel is Randi Berry. You  
13 may begin when the sergeant calls the clock.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

15 RANDI BERRY: Thank you for allowing me to  
16 speak today, everyone. My name is Randi Berry. I am  
17 the Executive Director of the Indie Theater Fund and  
18 Indie Space. We serve that indie community in the  
19 five boroughs with grants, free real estate, advisory  
20 and consulting services, and we offer an emergency  
21 fund that provided grants to artists during Covid.  
22 We also consulted with over 60 venues during Covid on  
23 how to stay in their spaces during this very  
24 difficult time. Indie Space utilizes our large  
25 network of real estate professionals to offer free

2 advisory and consulting services to our community.

3 We give artists the tools they need to craft

4 favorable leasing arrangements for themselves with

5 their landlords and to move them into more

6 sustainable relationship with their real estate. We

7 are thrilled the Council is considering new ways to

8 address the real estate challenges, but the most

9 under resourced and historically excluded artist and

10 venue space in New York City. However, we know, as

11 everybody else has mentioned, number of studies have

12 already been conducted on the subject and we hope you

13 will refer to those completed studies and experts

14 rather than spending another year before moving to

15 radical action for change. How many more spaces will

16 we have lost while we are conducting a new study?

17 What we already know. Commercial rent stabilization

18 is key to not for profits being able to operate in

19 New York City. Rent support and cancellation for

20 those impacted by Covid with mortgage support, as

21 well, is the only way that we will avoid more

22 permanent closures. Consistent financial support on

23 the city and state level and creative ownership in

24 partnership structures lead to sustainability. We

25 can use more city-owned properties that are not being

2 fully utilized. We can track community facilities  
3 space usage and hold landlords accountable who are  
4 not making legal use of the space for their  
5 community. We offer tax incentives that are assigned  
6 to the not for profits. I think this is a key  
7 important difference. The tax incentive goes with  
8 the not-for-profit, so it benefits the landlord with  
9 reduced property taxes, but it follows the not-for-  
10 profit wherever they rent, giving the power to the  
11 not-for-profit rather than the building owners. We  
12 activate spaces with art, making it more financially  
13 beneficial for owners to actually use their space  
14 then to keep it empty. Investing community land  
15 trust allowing artists to begin to own a stake in the  
16 properties that they dedicate their lives to  
17 building. Thank you so much for this opportunity to  
18 submit this testimony. Indie Space would love to  
19 work with the Department of Cultural Affairs and the  
20 Council to explore all the various options and  
21 opportunities that are available to indie theater  
22 makers. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
24 all. And I just want to say a couple of things to  
25 LIT who, I think, in my mind, or among the most

2 politically engaged arts organizations and  
3 collectives in the sense that you do have these forms  
4 and questionnaires and you mentioned Council members,  
5 which is great. You didn't mention Mayoral or other  
6 things, but I think it is important and I'm sure you  
7 are doing that also, right, because what made me  
8 think of that is that what everyone here is saying  
9 should not be considered radical, but to many people,  
10 what you all are proposing is radical, right?  
11 Because it is such a dramatic shift from where we are  
12 now and where we been. And the only way to make it  
13 less radical is to elect more people who actually  
14 don't think it is radical. You think that all of  
15 these changes are long overdue and have to happen.  
16 And that is not so radical anymore, right, because  
17 some of these-- virtually all of these discussions  
18 that have been behind-the-scenes only for many people  
19 to say that that is completely unrealistic. That is  
20 completely not doable. That's completely to radical,  
21 right? And you need critical mass and decided to  
22 actually be able to change or such critical mass  
23 outside that people are forced to do things. So, I  
24 just want to make sure because the power of the Mayor  
25 is great and can, if we have a Mayor who cares deeply

2 about the arts and arts organizations, and I mean  
3 like grassroots arts organizations, right? Because  
4 we-- In my 11 years, we by the not had that kind of  
5 leadership from the Mayor or had the Mayor who liked  
6 the arts, but the elite in the art world, right?  
7 Primarily. So, either way, we haven't had what we  
8 desperately need which is people focused on, right?  
9 And that is yet to happen. So, I just wanted to say  
10 all of those things and I believe Council member Diaz  
11 has a question, so I want to call on Council member  
12 Dharma Diaz.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DIAZ: No. It's actually  
14 not a question. It's actually more of a comment, if  
15 I may. I just want to share with you the gratitude  
16 that have experience today and share with you that I  
17 am committed, as my colleagues are sharing that they  
18 are reaching their tenure and I am coming in as a  
19 member and excited to bring in my vision for art and  
20 culture. Part of my plan is to bring in a  
21 multifaceted museum into the district. As the  
22 education advocate, one of the most recent schools  
23 built in my community is equipped for theater and art  
24 space. So, just know that, as I said, so you are  
25 transitioning, I welcome the opportunity to engage

2 further with those that are speaking today. I am  
3 about deliverables and I want to continue, as you  
4 phase off, I want you to pass the baton to me, you  
5 know, because it is about deliverables. You know, in  
6 junior high school, Mr. Shurer was my drama teacher  
7 who is no longer with us and for. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
9 Council member Diaz, yes, it is good to hear that we  
10 have Council members be on the Majority Leader and  
11 myself who care about this community and will fight  
12 for it. With that, let me ask the counsel to call  
13 the last panel.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,  
15 Chair Van Bramer. So we are calling the final panel  
16 and, again, we will call for any witnesses that we  
17 inadvertently missed at the end of this panel. The  
18 last members to testify on this panel, there are only  
19 two. Again, we will call others if we missed anyone.  
20 Ryan Gillam from Fourth Arts Block and Olympia Kazi.  
21 Thank you and, Ryan Gillam, you may begin when the  
22 sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

24 RYAN GILLAM: Hi, everyone. I'm Ryan  
25 Gillam from Fourth Arts Block. I've been a working

2 artist and arts educator for four decades in the  
3 lower East side. I am also a cofounder and currently  
4 the Executive Director of FAB. I want to respond to  
5 the real estate study proposal by sharing a few  
6 things we have learned on East Fourth Street. So,  
7 FAB was founded 20 years ago as an anti-displacement  
8 initiative by a coalition of artist and community  
9 leaders in order to prevent the eviction of cultural  
10 groups from city-owned buildings on East fourth  
11 Street between second Avenue and Bauer. We organize  
12 successfully and eight properties were transferred to  
13 local groups for one dollar each. The new owners  
14 were mostly small organizations with budgets of  
15 250,000 or less. Two thirds of them led by artists  
16 of color. Ownership is transformed our  
17 organizations. I believe some of the core principles  
18 that made it possible the success on Fourth Street  
19 where the equity was built in from the beginning that  
20 we were both a cluster and a collaboration which is  
21 particularly critical for sustaining smaller  
22 organizations and that we were active and deeply  
23 connected to our neighborhood. I also want to make  
24 one recommendation today to the city which is to  
25 build out and make better use of what already exists.

2 An example, FAB's Dance Block program is created  
3 because rehearsal studios on our block were going  
4 unused during the weekday hours. Studio owners  
5 didn't have the capacity to manage a robust rental  
6 program, so FAB raised funds test staff and subsidize  
7 the program. Dance Block operates now in five  
8 studios and three buildings and serves more than 400  
9 choreographers a year with \$10 an hour rehearsal  
10 space. We need to keep looking at what resources  
11 exist within the field and how they might be better  
12 used to support artists and, finally, if we want the  
13 city to take a bigger role in arts and culture, we  
14 need more capacity at DCL A. We need an agency that  
15 is truly empowered and has the resources to make real  
16 change happen. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much  
18 for your testimony. The final panel last and the  
19 final witness for this hearing-- again, we will  
20 check for anyone we inadvertently missed, will be  
21 Olympia Kazi.

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

23 OLYMPIA KAZI: Hi. Can you hear me?  
24  
25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.

3 Thank you. And you can begin when the Sergeant calls  
4 the clock.

5 OLYMPIA KAZI: Perfect. Okay. Is  
6 Olympia Kazi. I am a founding member of the New York  
7 City Artist Coalition in the Music Workers Alliance  
8 and I have been working with so many of you on this  
9 call it is like, you know, gathering back. So, I  
10 want to talk about the three legislations that are  
11 proposed today, but I also want to make sure that our  
12 elected officials don't feel that they are off the  
13 hook. You guys have a few more months and you can  
14 pass legislation. So, let's be honest. What is  
15 happening around the real estate, we know it is rent.  
16 Everybody told you it is rent, it is rent, it is rent  
17 and that is Intro 1796 about commercial rent  
18 stabilization. It already has 12 cosponsors. Used  
19 to have 13 because Rafael Espinal moved, so now  
20 Council member Diaz, it's great that you're here  
21 because you need to become a cosponsor again. And we  
22 need to pass commercial rent stabilization because,  
23 guess what? Arts spaces are commercial tenants and  
24 for the people that are being harassed in Crown  
25 Heights, they should be aware that there is a

2 commercial tenant [inaudible 02:04:00] legislation in  
3 that they can access commercial lease assistance in  
4 the can go against the landlords that has been  
5 harassing them. So I feel that it is very important  
6 in this moment of crisis that you pass progressive  
7 legislation and you enact progressive policies. So  
8 you hear from Ryan. Community land trusts work, so  
9 that's what you should be investing in right now.  
10 The city. The DCLA. That is what we need to be  
11 doing right now. In this crisis, there is going to  
12 be a lot of real estate that is going to default and  
13 it should go to predatory investors. It should be  
14 taken by the city and reformed into community land  
15 trusts and given to communities, artists, and others  
16 who need it. I believe we need universal solutions  
17 for issues like rent, healthcare, housing. These are  
18 things that are not artists alone. And then we need  
19 some things that should be only for artists and art  
20 annuities., But that is not an ID. I found that is  
21 a misguided idea. I know that it feels like a good  
22 thing to have at a--

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time house expired.

24 OLYMPIA KAZI: certain point, but as  
25 someone will also serve on land use and zoning from a

2 community board is seen what is happening in Soho  
3 with that area that was supposed to have high deed  
4 artists, it is really a Pandora's box. So, I feel we  
5 should first-- and is, actually, the Commissioner  
6 suggested, come up with what are the services that we  
7 want to give? What are the infrastructures that  
8 artists need that is, you know, artist specific. We  
9 are not talking about housing and other issues that  
10 we feel as the community, as a society that we should  
11 address and then an affordability crisis, but we  
12 should avoid the trap that that would be. In my last  
13 thing just because, you know, I have so many ideas  
14 and you all know me. You've heard it before. I'm  
15 going to even submit the written testimony, but,  
16 basically, WUPA is what we need right now because we  
17 do have a super majority at the state. We got the  
18 Senate and that thing is some sort of enhanced  
19 unemployment will be happening. Eventually the  
20 Governor will need to act on rent relief because we  
21 need to have something. But what we do not have  
22 yet-- and you should be using the federal-aid money  
23 that we will get at the city level, is to put artists  
24 back to work in arts spaces capable of producing new  
25 work because it is going to be three to five years

2 for what we are hearing in studies before the city  
3 can restart its economy. And so, we cannot afford  
4 for three to five years artists to be hand to mouth  
5 and just have unemployment to pay the rent. We need  
6 new works produced that is why we implore you to do  
7 WUPA style kind of ideas of important. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,  
9 Olympia, who always comes in with such energy and  
10 passion and good ideas. I just want to say a few  
11 things. Number one, I am one of those cosponsors of  
12 commercial rent control and very much believe in  
13 that, as well as the Small Business Jobs Survival Act  
14 and all of those pieces of legislation that too few  
15 people are supporting, right? And that is a problem.  
16 I do want to talk to DCLA capacity which someone  
17 raised and that is really important, right? Because  
18 I have had a front row seat to the three  
19 commissioners now and two Mayors and, you know,  
20 everyone knows I have a long personal friendship with  
21 Gonzalo Casals and believe him to be amazing. I had  
22 great respect for Tom Finklepearl and [inaudible  
23 02:07:48] before him. But we need an empowered DCLA.  
24 We need a well resourced DCLA. We need the DCLA  
25 Commissioner to have access to the Mayor and to have

2 the support of the Mayor because all the best  
3 intentions, you know, can be stopped if there's no  
4 access, there's no resources, and there's no power.  
5 And I'm not saying that that's the situation that we  
6 find ourselves completely, but I do believe that  
7 Commissioner Casals and the DCLA need more resources  
8 and would be able to do more with that and we  
9 definitely need whoever the next Mayor of the city of  
10 New York is going to be, to empower this agency to  
11 truly meet the needs of this community. And that is  
12 a really big deal and we just have not had that.  
13 We've done some good things, but we just haven't had,  
14 you know, a Mayor who is truly driven by this and who  
15 is truly, truly engaged and so that is absolutely  
16 imperative and, Olympia, I am with you on the CLT's  
17 as well. Again, like I said, you know, we are still  
18 in a place-- which is crazy-- that so many of these  
19 proposals are considered radical and we have got to  
20 fundamentally shift where government is at and shift  
21 the balance of power, right, away from landlords and  
22 real estate which is where everything is so centered  
23 still today. And that has horrific consequences for  
24 everyone here, but also millions and millions of  
25 people beyond this call. So, thank you to all of you

2 for being here today. I think the Council will make  
3 a last call to see if we have missed anyone, if  
4 anyone else has yet to testify. But I think this is  
5 a good first discussion on the two pieces of  
6 legislation and I get the urgency of the moment.  
7 Trust me. I know that this is not a time for small  
8 and slow measures. But so much power rests in the  
9 Governor's hands, as everyone here knows, and with  
10 Covid, he has even more power than he ever did.  
11 Right? There was a consolidation of power early in  
12 the pandemic and as long as we still have emergency  
13 orders, the Governor has even more outsized power  
14 and, obviously, the Mayor has a lot to say about  
15 these things, as well. So, but we will keep  
16 fighting. So, with that, let me just throw it back  
17 to the Council and thank all of you for being in this  
18 fight.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much,  
20 Council member Van Bramer. And as the Chair  
21 mentioned, at this point, we have concluded public  
22 testimony. So, if we have inadvertently missed  
23 anyone that would like to testify, please, at this  
24 time, use the raise hand function in zoom and we will  
25 call on you in the order your hand is raised. So we

2 are watching the panelists. We are not seeing any  
3 hands, so one last call for anybody that we  
4 inadvertently missed. Chair, I do not see any hands  
5 raised, so at this point, if this does not change  
6 right now, we have concluded public testimony for  
7 this hearing.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Thank  
9 you very much, Brenda. You're always so thorough in  
10 that last portion making sure that we have not missed  
11 anyone. And I do wish that it will happen soon  
12 enough that we resume these hearings at city hall and  
13 we can actually see some of the folks on this call  
14 again in person. I also just wanted to say that  
15 while my term ends December 31st, I am not done and  
16 still very much here as a fighter for this community  
17 for the duration of my time as a Council member and  
18 whatever comes in the future, I am one of you and  
19 will always be one with you in the fight. So, thank  
20 you for everything you do and bring to this hearing  
21 and to this city and, with that, unless Brenda tells  
22 me I shouldn't, I will adjourn the hearing and,  
23 Cheryl, I have not forgotten the happy birthday wish  
24 to my mother. I have your personal information and I

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND  
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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2 will be texting you and we will work that out

3 offline. Thank you all very much. Have a great--

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date February 11, 2021