

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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APRIL 20, 2021
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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING VIRTUAL ROOM 2

B E F O R E: CHAIR JIMMY VAN BRAMER

COUNCIL MEMBERS: JIMMY VAN BRAMER
DARMA DIAZ
MARK GJONAJ
MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO
JAMES GENNARO
FRANCISCO MOYA

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

MELODY CAPOTE
ADAM ODESSE RUBIN
DOUGLAS DUBOIS-CARD SEBAMALA
DEBORAH COWELL
CHERYL WARFIELD
ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES
COURTNEY FRENCH
ADAM MCKINNEY
EVANS RICHARDSON
STEPHANIE CUNNINGHAM
ANA CHIRENO
FREDDY TAVERAS
RICHARD BURNS
LUCY SEXTON

2 SGT. SADOWSKY: Recording to the Cloud
3 also.

4 SGT. BRADLEY: PC recording is up.

5 SGT. PEREZ: Backup is rolling.

6 SGT. MARTINEZ: Excellent, thank you.

7 Good morning and welcome to today's remote New York
8 City Council hearing of the Committee on Cultural
9 Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup
10 Relations. At this time, would all panelists please
11 turn on their video. To minimize disruption, please
12 silence your electronic devices. If you wish to
13 submit testimony, you may do so via email at the
14 following address: testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank
15 you for your cooperation. We are ready to begin.

16 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.
17 Good morning everyone. I am Council Member Jimmy Van
18 Bramer, Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
19 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations,
20 and this important oversight hearing is now
21 commenced. Today, we are here to conduct an
22 oversight hearing on amplifying BIPOC and Clear
23 Voices in the Arts. While this is the Committee's
24 first hearing focused on specifically on this topic,
25 the Committee has held several hearings related to

2 the topic of diversity including our October 2020
3 oversight hearing on Black Lives Matter, anti-racism,
4 structural racism, and the Arts, and our September
5 17, 2019 oversight hearing on diversity in cultural
6 institutions and the New York City Department of
7 Cultural Affairs, workforce demographics, pilot study
8 findings results and next steps. We've also had many
9 meaningful additional hearings this past year in
10 particular focusing on this very important topic. I
11 think everybody here knows discrimination,
12 marginalization, and exploitation of black,
13 indigenous, and people of color and the LGBTQ plus
14 communities in the form in institutional inequities
15 are unfortunately, nothing new. It is important that
16 we not only change the narrative to center and lift
17 up voices of color and queer folks, but also work to
18 ensure that BIPOC and LGBTQ artist's work is centered
19 in the conversation. Additionally, we must ensure
20 that those in power's action near the conversations
21 being held. We've have now held several hearings
22 touching the devastating effects of COVID-19, the
23 pandemic, and its effect on the Arts in culture
24 sector. We all know here; it is the second hardest
25 hit with regard to employment loss after restaurants.

2 This sector continues to struggle and within it, some
3 groups much more than others, and yet, we all know
4 that any recovery, particularly a just recovery knows
5 that Arts and Culture must lead that recovery. Arts
6 and Culture practices are among the most impactful
7 way to effect social change, explore racial and
8 ethnic representations, reflect a community's history
9 and identity, and provide an opportunity to engage
10 diverse audiences in transformative learning, and
11 there is so much more the city can do to amplify
12 those voices and support these artists and cultural
13 organizations much more so than we are already doing.
14 I'm proud to have spent my career at the Council
15 fighting for equitable funding for artists and
16 organizations and last year, with history budget cuts
17 looming in the middle of the pandemic's worst days, I
18 gave it everything I had and will do the same this
19 year. I want to thank everyone who is sharing
20 testimony today and who is submitting written
21 testimony for sharing your stories and helping to
22 explain exactly why this is so important. Structural
23 racism exists in everything from a lack of diversity
24 in museum leadership to a potential lack of Arts
25 education opportunities in black and brown

2 communities, and even over a half a century after the
3 Stonewall Rebellion, we continue to fight for equity
4 and inequality for our LGBTQ plus brothers and
5 sisters. We must recognize and address systemic
6 racism and discrimination with improved systems and
7 practices developed for racial equity across all
8 fields and sectors and in doing, centralize the
9 voices of these communities. We are here today
10 because we truly believe BIPOC and queer voices in
11 the Arts provide transformational opportunities for
12 everyone. This is and should be a beginning and a
13 continuation of the discussion and the work that so
14 many of you have been involved for your entire lives.
15 So, I want to thank everyone for doing the work each
16 day as we work to create design equity into all
17 aspects of our public life and as the Council seeks
18 to understand and better amplify the impact of BIPOC
19 and queer voices within the cultural community and
20 beyond. We appreciate your passion, partnership, and
21 time. We'll also say that as we've held these
22 hearings, the discussions have been incredibly moving
23 and impactful and I thank everyone for sharing so
24 much of themselves during these difficult days and
25 these important hearings. So, I look forward to

2 hearing from all of you. I know we're going to start
3 with Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner
4 Gonzalo Casals who, I know, feels very strongly about
5 this, and I want to thank my Legislative Director,
6 Jack Bernatovicz; my Chief of Staff, Mike Wallace;
7 the Committee's Principal Financial Analyst Alyia
8 Ali; our Policy Analyst, Christine Druier (SP?); and
9 our Committee Counsel Brenda McKinney for all of
10 their work as well, and I should recognize my Council
11 colleagues. If I miss anyone, hopefully the staff
12 can text me, but I certainly see Council Member Darma
13 Diaz who is here. I thought I saw Council Member
14 Mark Gjonaj on the call, and if I scroll through the
15 boxes, I might see others, but as the hearing goes
16 along, I'm sure there will be more Council Members
17 joining us and we will recognize them at that time.
18 Yes, confirmation that Council Members Diaz and
19 Gjonaj are on the call at this moment. So, once
20 again, thank you all for being here and I will pass
21 it to Brenda McKinney, our Counsel to the Committee
22 to go through the formalities and the logistics of
23 how we're going to proceed from here.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
25 you so much, Chair Van Bramer and good morning

2 everyone. I am Brenda McKinney. As the Chair
3 mentioned, the Counsel of Committee on Cultural
4 Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup
5 Relations. I will be moderating today's hearing and
6 calling on panelist to testify. So, we're just going
7 to start with some administrative matters. So,
8 before we begin, I would like to remind everything
9 that you will be on mute until I call on you to
10 testify. After I call on you, you will be unmuted by
11 the host, and please note that if a box pop's up, you
12 have to accept the unmute. Please listen for you
13 name. I will periodically announce who the next
14 panelist will be. Council Member questions today
15 will be limited to five minutes, and Council Members,
16 please note this includes both your questions and the
17 witness answers. Please also note that we will allow
18 a second round of questions at today's hearing, but
19 these will be limited to three minutes. For public
20 testimony, I will call on individuals in panels.
21 Council Members who have questions for a particular
22 panelist for the public should use the raise hand
23 function in Zoom, and you will be called on after
24 everyone in that panel has completed their testimony
25 in the order that you raised your hands in Zoom.

2 Finally, all public testimony today will be limited
3 to three minutes. So, we will be using a three-
4 minute clock. After I call your name, please wait a
5 brief moment for the Sergeant at Arms to announce you
6 may begin, start the clock before starting your
7 testimony. We'll remind you of that throughout the
8 hearing. So, with that, we will move to the
9 Administration and then Administration testimony
10 portion of his hearing. So, I will call the
11 following Members of the Administration to testify.
12 Mr. Gonzalo Casals, Commissioner of the Department of
13 Cultural Affairs; Ms. Sheelah Feinberg, Deputy
14 Commissioner from the Department of Cultural Affairs;
15 and Ms. Pranita Raghavan, General Counsel from the
16 Department of Cultural Affairs. So, I will deliver
17 the oath to all three of you, and then I'll call upon
18 each of you individually to respond to that oath.
19 So, if you could please raise your right hand.
20 Camera, thank you so. Do you affirm to tell the
21 truth, nothing but the truth before this Committee
22 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions
23 today? Commissioner Casals.

24 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: I do.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
3 you. Deputy Commissioner Feinberg.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SHEELAH FEINBERG: I
5 do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
7 you, and General Counsel Raghavan.

8 GENERAL COUNSEL PRANITA RAGHAVAN: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
10 you so much. So, with that, Commissioner Casals, you
11 may begin your testimony when ready.

12 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASAL: Thank you
13 and good morning. Good morning, Chair Van Bramer and
14 Members of the Committee. I'm Gonzalo Casals,
15 Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of New
16 York here to testify on today's topic, amplifying the
17 BIPOC and queer voices in the Arts. I'm joined today
18 by Deputy Commissions Sheelah Feinberg and General
19 Counsel Pranita Raghavan. I believe in Cultural
20 Democracy meaning everyone has a right to participate
21 in the cultural life of the community, to see
22 themselves reflected in it and has agency to clear
23 and practice culture they define it. In New York,
24 culture needs to gather communities of all sorts. It
25 is a powerful connector, no matter where you are, but

2 for historically oppressed people like BIPOC and
3 queer New Yorkers, Art is an indispensable source of
4 community, uplift, and enrichment. The social impact
5 for the Arts study that my agency helped bring to New
6 York demonstrated that in underserved neighborhoods,
7 cultural aspects correlate with improved public
8 safety, health and education. Culture is important
9 to all New Yorkers, but for these communities that
10 have suffered from their case of low investment,
11 system racism and other forms of exclusion and bias,
12 the Arts are essential. This is why for years the
13 Department of Cultural Affairs has made it a top
14 priority to foster a more diverse, equitable, and
15 inclusive cultural sector. Starting in 2015 under my
16 predecessors, Tom Finkerbel (SP?), the agency
17 launched an effort to promote a more diverse cultural
18 workforce fostering a cultural workforce that looks
19 like the residences of our city including
20 historically under-represented BIPOC and queer
21 residences. It's a major step towards building
22 institutions that engage with, speak to, and reflect
23 the full beauty and breath of New York City's
24 communities. This effort has built on advocacy and
25 reform work stretching back decades. Early successes

2 of these of these movements include the establishment
3 of some of our city's first cultural specific
4 organizations like Study Museum and Hermoso del
5 Barrio. We're proud to follow in these footsteps
6 today as we work with cultural advocates and
7 organizers from every corner of the city. The data
8 and knowledge that we have collectively gathered in
9 recent years have been transformed into powerful
10 tools for change by the cultural workers who are
11 committed to driving progress. Many institutions are
12 increasingly understanding and embracing the role in
13 making change. The current NYC cultural plan
14 released in 2017 gave our sector an opportunity to
15 talk to thousands of New Yorkers directly about that
16 they need and want from their cultural community, and
17 it led to the creation or expansion of a number of
18 programs aimed at elevating BIPOC and queer voices in
19 the New York City Arts Community. Two such examples
20 include the Clear NYC Language Access Plan which
21 provided 36 non-profits with grants ranging from
22 \$5000 to \$25,000 in support of programing that
23 increases access to Arts and culture for those who
24 primary language is not English. The programs
25 represent 12 languages including Spanish, Chinese,

2 Korean, Russian, and American Sign Language and
3 serves audiences in all five boroughs. The CUNY
4 Cultural course which has placed over 600 CUNY
5 students in paid positions with cultural
6 organizations including more than 200 in the current
7 year, even with the widespread closures by the
8 pandemic. The program gives cultural groups access
9 to a diverse pool of talent at CUNY and give the
10 students and opportunity to gain their first
11 experience in the cultural sector paving the way for
12 long term positions. This (inaudible) joins
13 longstanding collaboration with the City Council to
14 invest in BIPOC organizations like the coalition of
15 the theater of color which in FY21 provided 3.74
16 million dollars to support theater groups of color.
17 The Cultural Immigrant Initiative which has been a
18 long champion by Chair Van Bramer is providing
19 another 6 million in the current fiscal year for
20 groups that are led by and worked with our city's
21 extraordinary immigrant communities. In the city's
22 permanent public art collection, we made strides in
23 commission and work by and about people that were
24 excluded for too long from our public spaces. A
25 recent internal review found that the agency has

2 commissioned 84 permanent artworks by or honoring
3 under-represented communities. This ranged from
4 Alison Saar's famous tribute to Harriet Tubman in
5 (inaudible) the upcoming monument to surely chill
6 some in Brooklyn. Other public art projects are
7 being restarted following COVID-related pauses. The
8 monuments honor and surely chills (inaudible)
9 monument have all been restarted. A city as diverse
10 as New York needs to have a public Art collection
11 that reflects the people who have shaped its history
12 and institutions. This year, public artists and
13 residency, or PAR, program integrates clearly
14 practice into municipal government, working in a city
15 government serving a majority of BIPOC population,
16 this service has naturally focused on engaging and
17 elevating this population. Two of the current
18 artists are working with the Commission on Human
19 Rights. Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya has now created two
20 powerful projects. The first launched last fall, is
21 called I Still Believe in Our City, a campaign
22 combating the bigotry against Asian and Pacific
23 Islander residents and letting everyone know that
24 they are an integral part of New York. The other
25 project, May We Know Our Strength, launched earlier

2 this month in the Meatpacking District invites sexual
3 assaults survivors to share their stories via website
4 which are then printed and woven into a larger paper
5 sculpture each evening at 8:00 p.m. and the
6 installations run through midnight. The artist hosts
7 a visual honoring the Asian woman murder in Atlanta
8 last month. Andrew Wagner, a photographer also working
9 with the Commission of Human Rights. He kicked off
10 this project last month with portraits of black
11 restaurant owners in Central Brooklyn by learning the
12 importance this community has and resiliency
13 throughout the pandemic. We know that culture is
14 critical to communities in need and especially in
15 times of crisis. In the spring of 2020, (inaudible)
16 conducted a survey of the pandemic's impact on our
17 cultural sector. The report found that smaller and
18 community-based groups were hardest hit, along with
19 teaching artists. So, we are directing additional
20 funds based on these findings, investing in groups
21 are crucial parts of their communities in a period of
22 tremendous need of uncertainty. We conducted a
23 follow up survey earlier this year, and results will
24 be released later this spring. There tends to be a
25 significant overlapping between smaller groups and

2 BIPOC organizations. Altogether, over 500 city BIPOC
3 organizations had budgets under \$250,000.00, half of
4 the (inaudible). This year, we have also moved
5 forward with reforms and efforts to make city funding
6 more equitable. This includes extending multi-year
7 funding to all guarantees to provide greater
8 predictability and stability and support, stream
9 lining the city of application, developing strategies
10 to recruit families that represent our city's diverse
11 population and incorporate an equity in city
12 priorities and criteria for funding. The agency's
13 primary role continues to be supporting and
14 advocating for the cultural non-profits that together
15 are the backbone of New York City's cultural
16 vitality. I would like for us to foster a more
17 diverse workforce and distribute public funds, more
18 equitable in the end, internet to support cultural
19 programing that captures (inaudible) and represents
20 all New Yorkers. Our cultural community has been
21 doing this work for years, and from this, we're
22 building on to make further progress, rather it's
23 working with cultural institutes group on strategies
24 to adopt equitable practices or increase in
25 investments in groups serving diverse communities

2 citywide. The program and the mission of these
3 organizations is where the real value lies for New
4 Yorkers. The last year has shown us once again how
5 essential culture is to our communities and it needs
6 the greatest support to be part of a holistic
7 approach to situations of systemic racism in this
8 investment. We're proud of the work we have done
9 with our collaborators including the City Council and
10 recognize how much further we have to go. We
11 continue to participate in active ongoing
12 conversations about how to move forward together to
13 have a better, more equitable cultural sector. Thank
14 you for the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to
15 answer any questions you may have.

16 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
17 Commissioner Casals for your testimony today and your
18 work. I want to recognize that Majority Leader
19 Laurie Cumbo has joined us and just start off by
20 saying thank you for recognizing the Council's work
21 and leadership on the CLT and Cultural Immigrant
22 Initiative, Coalition of Color, something that
23 Majority Leader Cumbo and I have continued to partner
24 on and fight for and I'm very proud of the Cultural
25 Immigrant Initiative which is the first funding

2 created for Immigrant run and led cultural
3 organizations. We got a particular emphasis on
4 smaller budget organizations and those are good,
5 positive steps, but of course, there is so much more
6 work to do to truly to issue the equity that we're
7 all looking for. So, along with your cat, who has
8 made an appearance, I see Commissioner Casals, I want
9 to ask you a couple of, you know, bigger questions
10 and then ask you a few more detailed questions, and
11 I'm sure Majority Leader Cumbo will have some
12 thoughts and questions as well, but when we think
13 about amplifying BIPOC and queer voices, what are the
14 biggest barriers to amplify those voices in your
15 opinion and now that you've been the Commissioner of
16 the Department of Cultural Affairs for I guess, a
17 year and two months or so, obviously through an
18 incredibly difficult time, but what barriers do you
19 see at the agency that you were once on the other
20 side of for many years in your career, but now the
21 agency that you helm and so, your thoughts on those
22 two particularly big overarching questions before we
23 get into some more specifics?

24 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Thank you
25 for that question, Chair Van Bramer. I believe that

2 for a (inaudible) we continue to live in a society
3 that occults white supremacy's values, and I'm
4 talking about the system as a whole, not necessarily
5 specific individuals. There's always going to be a
6 lot of work for not only demonstration in the
7 Council, but all of our cultural organizations to
8 continue to do work to amplify the voices these
9 cultural organizations and communities. The
10 challenges that we face individually or specifically
11 as an agency is very similar to the challenges to the
12 challenges that we face as we confront the recovery
13 of our city, right. This is a problem is bigger than
14 our city, it's bigger than each of us, and of course,
15 it's bigger than our agency, and in many cases, the
16 problems that arise and the lack of representation of
17 cultural specific organizations, organizations that
18 started by BIPOC and communities and queer
19 communities, unnecessarily solve with funds, right.
20 Always funding is welcomed by our cultural
21 organizations, but sometimes we need a shift in the
22 values that we uphold in our society. The agency is
23 going to continue to work to internally and
24 externally to continue to revisit our policies and
25 make sure that the access to public funds, the

2 barriers set, you know, are in the process of
3 accessing to public funds are being removed like some
4 of the ones I mentioned just now, but the work
5 continues and we're committed to do that for as long
6 as I'm here and for as long as this Administration is
7 here.

8 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: So, you know I think a
9 lot of folks know you, Commissioner Casals, and know
10 of your work and your affiliation with institutions
11 like (inaudible) and Museo and others and there are a
12 lot of folks who might think, well, Gonzalo is, you
13 know a queer Latin X, you know, wildly progressive
14 person who, you know, it might not get better of this
15 in terms of having a Commissioner who feels this, and
16 I guess the question is, as that person now in this
17 role, how much change do you think you can affect,
18 can you meaningful change things? Obviously, you
19 work with a Mayor and a City Hall and a City Council,
20 and so, it is not just you, I know that, but, you
21 know, maybe this is sort of an existential questions,
22 right, but, you know, I do think people are
23 rightfully so wanting, you know, more change, right,
24 and much more quickly, and much more equity because
25 there is so much inequity baked in to the system and

2 so, you thoughts on that, right, I mean, it's a big
3 ship to turn around, right, and you've been given
4 that task and can you meaningfully impact the system
5 while you're here?

6 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Yes, I
7 mean, that's a super big question with so many parts.
8 A couple of things, one is you don't only have to be
9 queer, Latin X, immigrant and I may add, you know, in
10 order to do this work and to believe in this work,
11 it's about the values that you uphold. Of course,
12 you know, I'm proudly subscribing to those identities
13 and to those communities allowing me to have much
14 more empathy for the situation in which many of these
15 communities are. I'd like to believe that this
16 Administration and in particular, this Mayor picked
17 somebody like me with not only the identities, but
18 the work that I have done as a Commissioner because
19 he upholds these values and supports these
20 communities and they're important to him, but again,
21 you don't have to, you know subscribe to a marginal
22 group or to a minority group in order to be doing
23 this work. What I've said, you know, is that most of
24 this work also has to be done and be taking the lead,
25 but those are like in the mainstream. In terms of

2 change, the ability to create change, you know, in
3 our infrastructure but also in a society that has so
4 much inertia, right, over 400 years of white
5 supremacy. I like to just point that out is
6 something very attainable, and you know, that we can
7 all see is just to go back six or seven years ago
8 when my predecessor, Tom Finkelparl install the
9 conversation from the perspective of City
10 Administration about looking at a diversity of our
11 sector, and that the impact that this had is not only
12 about, you know, the data that we collected that
13 nobody was surprised to see that there was a huge
14 inequity in terms of, you know, who gets to defund
15 Arts and Culture for New York City, but a
16 conversation has been installed and probably you and
17 I, we're having this conversation today, this
18 morning, because of you know, having my predecessor
19 and this Administration bringing these ideas of
20 equity, diversity, and inclusion to the forefront and
21 a lot has changed, right. Is it moving as fast as
22 society is moving, mostly in the last year and a
23 half? Probably not, but what is also important in
24 this issue is to be authentic, and some people talk
25 about the idea of moving at the speed of trust,

2 right, as a City Administration, we want to make sure
3 that every step that we make is a step that is
4 sustainable, that is meaningful, and that is done in
5 collaboration with the communities that we're trying
6 to serve.

7 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
8 Commissioner Casals. I see Council Member Jim
9 Gennaro has joined the hearing. I want to recognize
10 him, and also, I think that Commissioner Finkelpearl
11 deserves a lot of credit for beginning the
12 conversation. I also just want to recognize though
13 that Council Member Levin and I wrote the Cultural
14 Plan Law which produced the Create NYC work and I
15 believe has produced some incremental, but tangible
16 results in this area and ... (crosstalk).

17 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Excuse me,
18 Chair Van Bramer, if you allow me, I just want to
19 make sure we both are clear on these before anybody
20 else that asks, right. When I said that he started
21 the conversation, I said, you know, from the
22 perspective and from the platform of City
23 Administration, right, because I mean, there has been
24 a lot of people talking about these issues for many,
25 many decades before that happened.

2 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Yes, I understood that
3 already when you said that. So, I know that you said
4 that funding is just a part of this, and of course,
5 it is, but it is a very important part of this, and
6 there are many on this, in this virtual hearing who
7 will speak later and speak to some of these issues
8 and the inequities baked into the CDF formulas and
9 the constant tension, right, between the larger,
10 wealthier, sometimes whiter, organizations and you
11 mentioned it in your testimony, right, so you're
12 getting into making CDF itself, more equitable, and
13 what does that look like now, and how do we, going
14 forward, build a better system, right, and what plans
15 do you have right now to do that because I think that
16 that is still, as you know, an ongoing conversation,
17 and one that's really important to have. We've done
18 some things, and again, the Council takes the lead on
19 coalition of Views of Color, Cultural Immigrant
20 Initiative, some of our other cultural initiative,
21 but that is a relatively small piece of the funding
22 pie, and the CDF is so much of it, so maybe just take
23 that on as well.

24 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Yes, there
25 are two aspects to these, right, you know, in

2 addition to the Council initiatives as I mentioned
3 and this ability for work, language access, and
4 social impact of the Arts, there are some ways in
5 which we're targeting different aspects of the
6 cultural sector in order to give them the resources
7 to continue to do the work that in turn, again,
8 impact, you know, the communities that we're talking
9 today about. At the same time, I think it's
10 important to understand, and overall, the barriers
11 that existed or continue to exist in order to access
12 public funds from, you know, the length and the
13 amount of time that it takes you to fill out an
14 application to apply for CDF to the way in which CDF
15 applications need to be submitted, and my team has
16 been doing this work for three years, really trying
17 to understand, you know, all those barriers, you
18 know, like in different initiative. I'm proud that,
19 you know, the first three that we established this
20 year had been received by the sector with great
21 enthusiasm. As I said, you know, smaller
22 organizations were not allowed to receive multi-year
23 grants until last year, starting this year,
24 organizations under \$250,000 which makes 50% of our
25 funding pool are able to receive multi-year grants,

2 and there is a back-and-forth conversation, right, if
3 you get a multi-year grant, that means that for two
4 or three years, you're going to be always at the same
5 funding level as opposed to as if you applied every
6 other year, you might have an opportunity to get more
7 funds. So, it's a little bit of a catch 22, what's
8 best or worse. We believe that, you know, knowing
9 how much money you're going to receive in the next
10 two or three years is much more important in moments
11 like these for sustainability. So, we went with
12 that, removing the requirement of organizations to
13 have to fill out the CDP and data Arts application at
14 the moment in which you are applying for funds
15 significantly cuts back on the amount of time that
16 one needs to spend filling out applications, and then
17 you know, adding specifically these two years,
18 instead of an adjustment for those that are working
19 with teaching artists and for those that are in
20 hardest hit COVID areas has been ways of, you know,
21 instead of a balance act, or making our city program
22 more equitable. We continue to work and to access
23 our program and there's going to be, hopefully, more
24 initiatives coming up down the pipe to continue to

2 make, again, access to public funds more equitable
3 and easier.

4 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you. I would
5 like to open the floor to my Council colleagues. If
6 anyone has questions or comments for the
7 Commissioners, feel free to raise you hand or the
8 Committee Counsel can let me know if anyone has any
9 questions for Commissioner Casals, and ...

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Sir,
11 we don't see any hands raised. If there any Council
12 Members that have questions for the Administration,
13 please use the raise hand function in Zoom.

14 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Okay, no questions
15 from my colleagues in the Council for Commissioner
16 Casals? Looks like you've answered many of the
17 questions, Commissioner Casals to folk's
18 satisfaction. I will ask you then, obviously, we're
19 in budget season and the Mayor has a proposed budget
20 and Council has responded to that proposed budget.
21 Now, the Council does raise Culture and Arts as a
22 priority in the budget and there's a lot of talk
23 about Federal stimulus money, the State budget. It
24 is needless to say, incredibly important to me, and I
25 know, Majority Leader Cumbo will be there fighting

2 for all things cultural in the Arts, but how do you
3 see the budget at this point from your advantage
4 point and discussions with the Administration. I
5 also want to recognize Council Member Francisco Moya
6 has joined us. I believe the entire Committee is
7 here, but maybe just share your thought on the
8 overall budget and rather or not, as some folks hope,
9 including myself, we might actually see a restoration
10 of some of the cuts that we saw last year, and maybe
11 even more funding for Culture and the Arts this year.

12 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS:

13 Unfortunately, and I feel I'm preaching a little bit
14 to the choir, you know, it's a little too early to
15 anticipate how the budget is going to look like. I
16 look forward also to the conversations with the
17 Council. I believe in this specific, which is Arts
18 and Culture. Everybody understands the important
19 role that our Cultural organization, our Cultural
20 workers we already have, not in the recovery of the
21 sector, but in the recovery of the city. The Mayor
22 has been out there making sure everybody get that
23 message that without the recovery of Arts and
24 Culture, New York City cannot come back. I look
25 forward to continuing to work with the Council, with

2 you, Chair Van Bramer, with the Majority Leader Cumbo
3 to make sure we arrive to a budget that really
4 supports our sector, and again, the recovery of New
5 York City.

6 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: I agree, and you
7 called her name and Majority Leader Cumbo, indeed,
8 has a question for you or a series of questions.

9 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: I was
10 surprised that the Majority Leader wouldn't have a
11 question.

12 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I try, I try. I
13 try, but I can't help myself. This is not
14 necessarily related to the hearing topic at hand, but
15 I am curious as we're on our way out, Council Member
16 Van Bramer and I, prior to you becoming the
17 Commissioner, had worked really hard on increasing
18 the percent for Art budget, almost doubling, almost
19 tripling it, I would say, and I wanted to know, you
20 know, given a lot of the challenges that we've had
21 with COVID and those sorts of things, have you seen
22 any; the goal of this was to really ramp up public
23 art projects in the City of New York, can you talk a
24 little bit about how public art and funding for that
25 has been impact as a result, I guess, your tenure,

2 COVID, before, and the future of where you see it
3 going?

4 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS:

5 Unfortunately, I don't have any specific numbers
6 because I wasn't prepared to talk about this.

7 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: But I'm
9 happy to tell you a couple of things ... (crosstalk).

10 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: And that can be
11 another hearing.

12 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Let me tell
13 you, and then we can always connect offline about
14 this if you have any questions. A couple of things.
15 I'm happy to report that the contracts for the
16 monuments honoring Tito Puente and Shelly Chisholm
17 have been fully signed and we're in the process that
18 is ongoing. I'm happy to report that after a long
19 pause due to COVID, the artist who is creating
20 Victory for Beyond Seams has received a contract.
21 She's reviewing that with her lawyer, and hopefully
22 as soon as we work out some of the details, we can
23 sign that, and the monument will be on its way. The
24 funding specifically for Person for Art is tied to
25 construction, so as construction starts coming back,

2 probably capital projects, we're going to see more
3 public art coming back, but we are also working
4 internally to make sure that that unit is supported
5 in a way that is significant. I'm happy to report
6 that we added one person to the unit to help with
7 community engagement, so the process of creating
8 public art and monuments for the city can be
9 supported by the people of our fellow New Yorkers.

10 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay. One of the
11 things that I had wanted to see as a result of that,
12 and I think that goes back to Council Member Van
13 Bramer's initial question. You know, with each
14 Commissionship, and yours is so limited in terms of
15 its timing, wants to usher in a new thing and I think
16 that one of the things that I really wanted to see
17 was that there be more of a partnership with the
18 percent for art program with our public plazas, with
19 our Parks Department, even potentially with our
20 schools and utilizing those opportunities to create
21 more public art forward facing with our libraries and
22 so many other spaces where the people have an
23 opportunity to have access to art. Also, public
24 housing has somewhat of a history of a relationship
25 with public art, and so, I think it would be really

2 exciting to see more relationships with agencies
3 connected to public art that have always kind of been
4 in these silos of Parks Department does public art
5 this way, it's separate from DCLA. DCLA doesn't do
6 public art necessarily with NYCHA, and NYCHA doesn't,
7 you know, to be able to integrate that so that public
8 art could be more accessible to the people of the
9 city of New York. My next question, as Council
10 Member brought up, the budget, how is Federal
11 Stimulus money impacting DCLA's budget and the
12 organizations that it serves? Has there been some
13 over-arching conversation about that now that there's
14 Congressional Federal money, there's also by-member
15 item, there's also funding as it pertains to Stimulus
16 money, is there discussion from the Administration
17 about how Stimulus money is going to directly impact
18 the Department of Cultural Affairs?

19 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: There are
20 some initial conversations about, you know, programs
21 that, you know, those funds would enable, and we of
22 course, as I sit at the table, I try to figure out,
23 you know, how we can take advantage of those funds,
24 but anyways, anyhow, more funds for the city means
25 more funds for all ... (crosstalk).

2 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

3 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Can I
4 finish?

5 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

6 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: Sorry, more
7 funds for the city means, you know, more funds for
8 all of the work that we do and we continue to work
9 towards the, again, the budget for next year, and I'm
10 confident that as I said before, the Arts and Culture
11 is going to continue to play a big role in the
12 recovery of our city.

13 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh, I guess, I'll
14 let that go. I don't really quite understand that
15 answer, but through other questions it will come up,
16 and I guess finally, which is what, again, Council
17 member Van Bramer brought up, as this is your final,
18 official years as the Commission, what do you feel
19 that you would want your legacy to be as a
20 Commissioner? So, for example, like Tom Finkelppearl,
21 the cultural plan, how ever people feel about it,
22 adding (inaudible) to the roster of CIGS and other
23 things might be things that he would be associated
24 with, what do you feel that you would want your
25 legacy upon completion as Commission to say it has

2 ushered in a specific element that had never existed
3 before?

4 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: That's an
5 interesting question. I think, you know, and
6 throughout my career, I always measure the outcome in
7 the process. It's not necessarily what you end up
8 doing, it's how you do it and how do you involve
9 others in doing it.

10 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

11 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS: I'm
12 extremely proud of how we all came together in such a
13 hard moment for our city and while we all played our
14 roles, at the same time, we together and we worked
15 together towards one goal which is how do we support
16 cultural organizations in the recovery of the sector,
17 but also how do cultural organizations help the
18 recovery of New York City, and being able to have an
19 open line of communication, working hand-to-hand and
20 shoulder-to-shoulder, not only with the Council, but
21 also with the sector and the many, multiple
22 committees and areas of the sector I think is what
23 makes me proud of the work that we have done and I
24 hope to continue to do, and I hope it continues

2 beyond the three of us being gone at the end of the
3 year.

4 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You certainly
5 have a future career on the political side, but I
6 appreciate your input ... (crosstalk).

7 COMMISSIONER GONZALO CASALS:
8 (Inaudible).

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You're good,
10 you're good, Commissioner, you're good. Alright,
11 I'll turn it back over to Chair Van Bramer.

12 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much,
13 Majority Leader Cumbo, and dropping the legacy
14 question to Commissioner Casals is something that a
15 lot folks are thinking about these days as Gonzalo
16 said, at the end of the year when all three of us are
17 gone, it's a little final, Commissioner Casals, but I
18 hope that all of us will continue to be champions of
19 Culture and the Arts and the values that we've all
20 been fighting for, even if we're not in these
21 identical positions at the end of the year, but
22 indeed, it's been an incredible partnership while I
23 had the opportunity to chair this committee and then
24 when the Majority Leader joined the Council, we had
25 an incredible champion of the Arts join in the

2 sometimes lonely fights and then of course, you,
3 Commissioner Casals, in all the work that you do.
4 So, thank you. There are obviously a million more
5 questions, and so much more work to do, but we have
6 many members of the community who are here to speak,
7 and we want to move on to the public unless any other
8 Council Members have any further questions for the
9 Commissioner and the Administration. If we do not
10 have that, I'll take a one-minute break and then we
11 will resume, Brenda McKinney with testimony from our
12 cultural community. Does that sound fair?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: That
14 sounds great, thank you.

15 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: And thank you,
16 Commissioner Casals. I'll be right back. All right.
17 So, we are back. Brenda, do you want to call the
18 first panel?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY:
20 Absolutely. Thank you, Chair, and I don't see any
21 other hands.

22 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Okay.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: So,
24 if we conclude the Administration portion of the
25 hearing. Just one more check for any other Council

2 Member questions, and no hands, so, we'll move on,
3 and then Chair, if we can just start with some more
4 housekeeping items before we call the panels. So,
5 now we will move to the public panel portion of the
6 hearing, and now that we have concluded the
7 Administration's testimony, I'd like to remind
8 everyone that as we call names, individuals will be
9 called up in panels. So, Council Members, as a
10 reminder, if you have a question for a particular
11 panelist, please use the raise hand function. You'll
12 be called on after everyone in that panel has
13 completed their testimony in the order that you
14 raised your hands, and for panelists, members of the
15 public, once your name is called, a member of staff
16 will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will give
17 you the go ahead to begin after setting the timer.
18 As a reminder, all testimony will be limited to three
19 minutes. We have a three-minute clock today per
20 individual, so please wait for the Sergeant to
21 announce that you may begin before starting your
22 testimony. So, with that, the first panel, in order
23 of speaking today will be Melody Capote from the
24 Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute,
25 Adam Odsess Rubin from the National Queer Theater,

2 and I apologize in advance for any mispronunciation
3 of names. Douglas Dubois-Card Sebamala from the
4 National Queer Theater, and Deborah Cowell, an artist
5 who is also working with Hi-Arts. So, we will now
6 call on our first witness who is Melody Capote. You
7 may begin once the Sergeant calls the clock.

8 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

9 MELODY CAPOTE: Good morning, Mr.
10 Chairman and Members of the City Council. My name is
11 Melody Capote, Executive Director of the Caribbean
12 Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute. I am
13 pleased to be here as an African descendent Latina to
14 learn my voice regarding systemic bias in the
15 Administration of Arts and Cultural funds. Before I
16 begin, I want to express my refusal to use the
17 Acronym BIPOC, as this term in itself erases our
18 identifies of Asian, black, indigenious, and Latin X
19 people. I come to tell you as clearly as I can that
20 the system for funding Arts and Cultural in the City
21 of New York is both inherently and systematically
22 biased against black, brown, native, Asian, people of
23 color, as well as against my queer brothers and
24 sisters. Let's be clear. Systemic racism does not
25 require a deep level of motivation by the

2 perpetrator. Edmund Berg said it best. "The only
3 necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to
4 do nothing". I speak now of the cultural
5 institution's group, or CIG, as it is known. The CIG
6 was created in 1876 in order to make New York into a
7 showcase of culture. By 1900, major institutions
8 like the American Museum of Natural History, the
9 Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Botanical
10 Gardens, the Bronx Zoo, and the Brooklyn Museum among
11 others were given lucrative leases for a mere
12 penitence, and of course, no institution of color was
13 even considered. Now, 150 years later, only three
14 institutions operated by communities of color have
15 been granted entrance into the hallowed halls of CIG.
16 This, City Council Members, is exactly what systemic
17 racism looks like. It just happens. We couldn't
18 find an indigenous or black institution qualified to
19 be a member of CIG. Should we ask or wonder why not,
20 or do we know the answer? I am not here to argue
21 that the CIG should be abolished. I am here to argue
22 that in order to address the systemic and inherent
23 biased cause by the way CIG has been funded, there is
24 a need for immediate equitable distribution, much in
25 the same way that phrase is used in divorce

2 proceedings. In order to fairly and equitably share
3 the largest that was created 150 ago, and when I say
4 created, I'm talking about each of those institutions
5 utilizing the services of native people, freed and
6 indigenous slaves whose contributions have now
7 memorialized ... (crosstalk).

8 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

9 MELODY CAPOTE: In little plots of land
10 throughout the city called the African burial
11 grounds. I respect most of the institutions that
12 belong to CIG, but the institution, itself, needs to
13 be reformed around the new and more equitable
14 paradigm. Consider this. That CIG institutions
15 lease property from the City of New York for in some
16 cases, \$1, and in other cases other token payments.
17 My institution, my Caribbean Cultural Center African
18 Diaspora Institute negotiated the purchase of a
19 firehouse from the city for \$1, and we raised and
20 invested \$10 million dollars into it. In order to
21 create the institution that exist today and for that
22 \$1, the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora
23 Institute is told that they, we cannot be a member of
24 CIG and receive equitable distribution of the CIG
25 funds. I leave you with this question. Are you

2 kidding me? Thank you for your time, and yes, black
3 lives do matter.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
5 you, Ms. Capote for your testimony. Our next witness
6 will be Adam Odsess, again apologies, Odsses Rubin
7 from the National Queer Theater. You may begin your
8 testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

9 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

10 ADAM ODSESS RUBIN: Good morning
11 everyone. My name is Adam Odsess Rubin, and I'm the
12 founder and Artistic Director of National Queer
13 Theater, New York's leading LGBTQ theater company.
14 With pride, we are staging our third annual Criminal
15 Queerness Festival outdoors and socially distant at
16 La Guardia Performing Arts Center in Queens and at
17 Lincoln Center. The Criminal Queerness Festival
18 provides a stage in our city to international and
19 immigrant LGBTQ artists facing censorship and
20 criminalization in their home countries. Our
21 festival represents the best of New York City,
22 embracing New York's diversity, protecting queer
23 refugees and asylum seekers and providing affordable,
24 high-quality entertainment to residents and visitors
25 across the city. However, we have lost almost all of

2 our funding for this vital program; \$50,000 from the
3 New York City Mayor's grant for cultural impact, part
4 of the Create NYC plan which vanished after the
5 pandemic budget cuts. How does the city decide to
6 cut cultural impact at a time when our cultural
7 institutions are threading with extinction, and our
8 industry faces 66% unemployment? We just became
9 eligible for DCLA funding, but the agency is not
10 accepting new competitive applications, and I wish
11 the Commissioner had stayed to hear this because it's
12 very hard for organizations like ours. Support for
13 Queer and artists of color from the City Council
14 means resources. We need more funding for our small
15 queer arts organizations and organizations of color
16 as we serve the city's most vulnerable residents
17 through grassroots community organizing. We know how
18 to support our communities best. We implore you to
19 properly fund our city's small queer and arts
20 organizations of color to bring about a truly
21 equitable environment that would assure artists can
22 flourish in the city, the queer and cultural capital
23 of the country. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
25 you for your testimony. Our next witness will be

2 Douglas Dubois-Card Sebamala from National Queer
3 Theater.

4 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

5 Douglas, you're still on mute.

6 DOUGLAS DUBOIS-CARD SEBAMALA: Thank you.

7 Good morning. My name is Douglas Dubois-Card
8 Sebamala, the Managing Director at National Queer
9 Theater. In this room, as in major theaters across
10 New York City, I am one among very few black, queer,
11 immigrant Managing Directors, if not the only one.
12 Our queer and BIPOC communities are hungry for
13 representation. We deserve a seat at the table,
14 decision makers, to shape the narratives of our
15 generations and generations coming after us through
16 community leadership and transformation of power of
17 theater. The formative years of my youth was spent
18 in Uganda, surrounded by anti-gay discrimination and
19 stigma. The government passed the Anti-Homosexuality
20 Bill of 2014 which called for a death sentence for
21 all gay people in the country. When I moved to
22 America, I was no stranger to police brutality. Our
23 communities experience major trauma every day with
24 unwarranted policing of people of color and brutal
25 shootings of unknown black men and women in our homes

2 and on the streets. We need your protection and
3 support. At National Queer Theater, we bring to the
4 floor experiences of queer and BIPOC artists through
5 social justice theater and theater education
6 programming. We want our voices to be heard, for our
7 stories to be told, and not told from single
8 narratives and perspectives, but through our
9 undiluted experiences as queer, black, indigenous
10 people of color in America, but that starts with you
11 giving us a seat at the table, this table by funding
12 our initiatives and all queer, BIPOC organizations,
13 you enable our work to uplift our communities,
14 contribute to our strive for equality through social
15 justice and programs against marginalization of our
16 people. I implore you to visit our website at
17 National Queer Theater, to support our festival that
18 starts on the 22nd to 26th of June, so that our
19 stories that have been censored in countries continue
20 to thrive among audiences who appreciate theater in
21 the five boroughs of New York City. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
23 you for your testimony. The last member of this
24 panel will be Deborah Cowell. Ms. Cowell, you may
25 begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

2 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

3 DEBORAH COWELL: My name is Deborah
4 Cowell, and I'm speaking on behalf of myself, my
5 partner, Katie Madison (SP?) and our community arts
6 network. When artist first looked to the star, the
7 result was astronomy and eventually travel to space.
8 The gift to us, May Genison (SP?). When the artist
9 looked to the human body, the result was medicine,
10 common cures. The development of the sciences was,
11 for the longest time, intrinsically attached to music
12 and poetry. It was through rhythm and song that
13 theory and science was with discipline taught and
14 remembered. We are here now talking about how to
15 save the arts as a direct result of systemic
16 compartmentalization of the human spirit. In 1984,
17 Mable Hampton (SP?) addressed the New York City gay-
18 pride rally and said, "I am proud of myself and my
19 people. I would like all my people to be free in
20 this world, my gay and my black people". Empirical
21 fact, black, queer artists are responsible for the
22 artistic and cultural impact of the Harlem
23 Renaissance, and yet, in 1923, the New York Aide
24 reported that the average black worker earned \$25 per
25 month and spent half to two-thirds of these monthly

2 wages on rent. The report also stated that black
3 tenants generally paid twice as much for rent as
4 their white New York counterparts. Nothing has
5 changed. Black and brown New Yorkers are paying
6 disproportionately more in rent in relation to their
7 wages than their white counterparts. We cannot live
8 in and then be expected to create in these
9 conditions. The Human Rights Campaign Foundation
10 published a study wherein they stated anti-
11 transgender stigma, denial of opportunity, and
12 increased risk factor compile to create a culture of
13 violence disproportionately impacting trans and gender
14 non-conforming people of color. We should not get
15 lost and any of us, is the fact that conversations
16 around the preservation of the Arts in New York City
17 resonate differently now because we are in the midst
18 of the 100 anniversary of the beginning of the Harlem
19 Renaissance. It's no small things that the
20 conditions of a pandemic and physical uncertainty are
21 also the same. At the very same time, the Museum of
22 Modern Art is aware of these times. It has no
23 problems displaying Art from that era on its walls in
24 rotating fashion which lets us know that somebody,
25 somewhere knows something about what this time is

2 reflected of. So, what are we going to do about it?
3 How are we going to make this better? New York City
4 is not teaming with artists the way it used to
5 because it is no longer affordable for somebody to
6 just live here. What we are acutely aware of in any
7 conversation having to do with putting funds back
8 into the Arts community is the enormous (inaudible)
9 in which the word Artist is consistent read as
10 synonymous for white, and whenever any mention of
11 black and brown peoples is made, it is essentially
12 lip-service. Inevitably one position gets set aside
13 for a whole bunch of people to compete for, and that
14 one person has to bear the weight of being the
15 standard bearer, and when they break, they are
16 usually an example of why these programs don't work.
17 The same holds true for any conversation about
18 queerness. The default is always to whiteness if the
19 conversation about queerness comes up at all, and it
20 is both depressing and enraging at the same time.
21 Because we are black women ...

22 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

23 DEBORAH COWELL: And also, part of the
24 LGBTQIA Plus community, what we say here should be
25 read from that perspective with that in mind first

2 because some of us remember what New York City used
3 to be like growing up surrounded by all kinds of
4 culture beyond Apple Stores, Whole Foods, and H&M.
5 We are tired of the conversations being a talking
6 point for the re-election of elected official all the
7 while being set up for our failure. So much of the
8 basic infrastructure that was in place that made it
9 possible for artist to thrive is now gone. It is
10 frustrating to watch New York City try to build up
11 tourism on a reality of what used to be. When De
12 Blasio was running for Mayor for the first time, one
13 of the promises he made was to establish affordable
14 housing for Artists. It's the reason many of us
15 voted for him. That promise has fallen by the
16 wayside. What we need is a plan for Artists that
17 provide spaces to create with a set deliverables
18 attached. They can be spaced out incrementally to
19 ensure that demonstration of progress is beneficial
20 for both the Artist, the programs supporting them,
21 and the rest of New York City. We cannot have this
22 discussion without talking about institutional
23 homophobia. We will not have this conversation
24 without coming out and saying point blank, all this
25 has become culture of the City of New York, and as

2 right as it makes us mad as hell because we should be
3 talking about so many other things instead. We have
4 to be talking about so many other things instead, but
5 here we are once again in demonstration of the fact
6 that we can do so many other things at the same time.
7 We just need to be doing better. A lot has got to
8 change. Thank you very much.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
10 you.

11 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Go ahead,
12 Brenda.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
14 you Chair Van Bramer, go ahead.

15 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: So, thank you very
16 much all for your testimony and your work, and you
17 challenge. I wanted to Douglas a question if we can
18 unmute Douglas about the funding that you do receive,
19 and where it comes from and your interaction with the
20 Department of Cultural Affairs, in particular in the
21 city funding streams if you will.

22 DOUGLAS DUBOIS-CARD SEBAMALA: Yes, I
23 would love to that, but I'm going to request that
24 Adam takes on the, Adam Odsess Rubin who is the
25 Artist Director, but I'll say that we recently

2 applied to the DCLA funding, but our previous
3 contributions have been coming in from individual
4 donors. We have a partnership with the Stonewall
5 Foundation and then Adam will speak to our other
6 streams of funding.

7 ADAM ODSSESS RUBIN: Yeah, thank you,
8 Douglas. So, last year, we were a subgrantee of
9 Dixson Place in the Lower Eastside and received the
10 Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impact for \$50,000 for our
11 annual Criminal Queerness Festival which is promoting
12 international immigrant LGBTQ artists. That program
13 was supposed to be renewable for a year to 2021. We
14 had to do our festival on Zoom last year. We're
15 doing it outdoors this year, and when we approached
16 DCLA about the second year of the program, they said
17 the program no longer exists because of pandemic
18 budget cuts. So, when we applied for DCLA funding,
19 just last week, I believe or the week before, they
20 said they're not accepting new competitive
21 applications, we're limited to City Council funding,
22 and this is our first year as a three-year-old
23 organization that we're eligible for DCLA funding, so
24 based half of our budgeting on being newly eligible
25 for DCLA funding, and this year, because of COVID,

2 they say that there is no DCLA funding for
3 organizations like ours, a queer, diverse
4 organization through, you know, as we approach pride
5 season, our busiest season of the year, we're
6 extremely underfunded and under-resourced by the
7 government.

8 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: So, that's really
9 disappointing to hear. You may or may not know, I'm
10 one of only four queer Council Members in the City
11 Council and you know, I will definitely speak to
12 Commissioner Casals and see, you know, what we can
13 do. Obviously, many of you spoke to the issues
14 around homophobia and the under representation that
15 the LGBTQ community faces in terms of funding. So,
16 that's particularly painful to hear in terms of your
17 experience with getting 50 and then having it pulled
18 and yanked right back, that's devastating. I'm sure
19 that's a fairly significant grant for you all, right?

20 ADAM ODSESS RUBIN: Yeah, you know, we
21 want to put money into the pockets of our artists who
22 are mostly queer, immigrant artists, especially as
23 people have been out of work for a year in theater
24 community, so as we try to bring back theater safely
25 and employee LGBTQ artists and especially queer

2 artists of color, we really need that government
3 support from the City Council and from DCLA in order
4 to get people back to work and bring back the Arts
5 and Culture to New York City.

6 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you. We should
7 definitely be in some communication, and Melody and
8 Deborah. Thank you, Melody. Obviously, you always
9 bring some truth and incredible passion, and you have
10 for as long as we've been doing this work in the same
11 space and you're always challenging all of us as you
12 should in calling injustice out at every turn. So, I
13 just want to appreciate you and the role that you
14 play here which is a particularly furious one, if I
15 may use that term, and Deborah, thank you very much
16 for your contributions here, and you know, we've had
17 hearings about the topic housing and security, real
18 estate pricing out of artists, particularly artists
19 of color and gender, but all of the those things that
20 you raised are real and important among others. So,
21 I want to thank each of you for being here. If there
22 are any other Council Members who have questions for
23 this panel, feel free to raise your hand. If not, we
24 will move on to the next panel and I'll throw it
25 right back to Brenda to facilitate.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
3 you, Chair Van Bramer. We're not seeing any hands
4 jumping in. Just checking one more time if any
5 Council Members have questions for the panel. We're
6 not seeing any hands, so we'll move to the next
7 panel. All right, thank you to our first panel. The
8 next panel, so, we'll move to panel two. That panel
9 in order of speaking will be Cheryl Warfield from
10 MORE Opera, Alejandra Duque Cifuentes from Dance NYC,
11 Courtney French from JCAL, and Adam McKinney from HI
12 Arts. So, we will call you one at a time, and again,
13 please wait for the Sergeant to call the clock before
14 you begin your testimony. I will now call on Cheryl
15 Warfield. Thank you.

16 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

17 CHERYL WARFIELD: Thank you, Chair Van
18 Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo, and Members of City
19 Council for the opportunity to testify. I am Cheryl
20 Warfield, an (inaudible) performing artist
21 (inaudible) Arts organization providing performance
22 and outreach to underserved (inaudible) in New York
23 City. I want to speak to you today to one, urge the
24 formation of (inaudible) to provide equity for BIPOC
25 and queer artists and artist-led organizations

2 rendering services to underserved New York
3 communities, but not eligible for DCLA funding. Two,
4 to change the grant awarding system to provide
5 greater equity and sustainability for BIPOC
6 programing. Three, to support increased funding for
7 CASA and SU CASA initiatives to underserved
8 communities, and four, to inform City Council that
9 artists and cultural organizations never stop
10 providing services during the pandemic and to
11 heighten awareness that many smaller organizations
12 like mine in the trenches increase services to help
13 our communities in this great time of need. The
14 reality is that under current funding models and
15 granting mechanisms, neither I as an independent
16 artist for over 30 years, nor my 20-year-old BIPOC
17 organization will see a penny of the multi-millions
18 of anticipated federal dollars that will be
19 distributed. There needs to be a more equitable way
20 to distribute City Council funds and I urge City
21 Counsel Members to identify all artists in their own
22 communities. Artists live in every part of New York
23 City, from Wall Street to unfortunately homeless
24 shelters. New York City needs a vision and a plan to
25 put artists back to work and provide a living wage to

2 pull artists out of the poverty level. Throughout
3 the pandemic, Arts and Culture has never stopped. My
4 organization pivoted to online programming and thanks
5 to Vance (inaudible) at the Bronx Opera and the
6 (inaudible) Cortland Senior Center Administration for
7 valuing and sustaining a senior chorus program that
8 originated through SU CASA, I have continued working
9 virtually with Bronx Seniors for over 13 months. Now
10 is the time for our leaders and government to be
11 forward thinking and to plan effectively for
12 reopening and stimulating the economy with Arts
13 initiatives, being mindful of new and pandemic-
14 related expenses for organizations and ...

15 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

16 CHERYL WARFIELD: Artist's pay to keep up
17 with inflation. New York has been advantaged by a
18 strong arts and cultural landscape for decades. Let
19 New York City be a guiding light for bringing back
20 culture by valuing all of its artists and cultural
21 organizations that's renewing and restoring itself to
22 its rightful place a mecca for worldwide culture.
23 Thank you.

24

25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
3 you so much for your testimony. The next witness
4 will be Alejandra Duque Cifuentes.

5 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

6 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: Thank you.
7 It wouldn't let me unmute. Hello folks. My name is
8 Alejandra Duque Cifuentes. I'm the Executive
9 Director of Dance NYC and I represent dance, artists,
10 workers, cultural organizations and businesses. I'm
11 coming to offer testimony really requesting things
12 that I've been requesting in multiple testimonies
13 across the past year and several years. First, to
14 acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of slavery
15 and settler colonialism by establishing and executing
16 a plan to address those impacts and repair the harm
17 down by establishing a commission for reparations for
18 past and continuing harms inflicted upon black and
19 indigenous peoples, from colonialism to slavery to
20 food and housing redlining, mass incarceration and
21 surveillance. Second to prioritize funding to black,
22 indigenous folks of the global majority, immigrant,
23 disabled, and LGBTQ plus Arts and Cultural
24 organizations in order to decenter eurocentrism and
25 white supremacy in main street New York cultural

2 representation in order to begin to undo the
3 prerogative and hurtful narratives and depictions and
4 associations with those communities and cultures. A
5 substantial investment is needed in order for those
6 organizations that authentically represent primarily
7 serve, are led by or founded by these communities to
8 thrive. Third, to establish funding to ensure that
9 BIPOC, immigrant disability, and LGBTQ organizations
10 and artists can own and properly maintain their
11 venues, buildings, and/or land recognizing land
12 stewardship and ownership as one of the most
13 significant ways to address systemic inequitable
14 distribution of resources. Four, to ensure that
15 funding streams created to support these communities
16 and cultural organizations are streamlined for multi-
17 year support providing expensive technical assistance
18 to facilitate the application process and award sites
19 that actually allow for the payment of dignified
20 wages to those Arts and Cultural workers, and lastly
21 and very importantly and timely, to ensure that
22 Federal relief funds that are received by the city
23 prioritize both in their allotment and in their
24 distribution mechanisms those communities and
25 especially independent Arts workers and small budget

2 organizations to ensure those most impacted by COVID
3 and continued systemic injustice are able to access
4 that needed support and services quickly. We cannot
5 have dense, difficult application processes that are
6 based on who is already getting funds, who is already
7 well connected, who already knows how to get those
8 funds because people are dying, our cultural
9 organizations are closing, our workers are fleeing
10 the city, and the communities that make New York City
11 great are going to disappear if we do not invest in
12 them. We know that our budgets are investment, and
13 not just a line item in the budget, but also ...
14 (crosstalk).

15 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

16 ALEJANDRA DUQUE CIFUENTES: The
17 mechanisms for how we distribute money are a
18 reflection of the values that we have as
19 organizations, as a city, and as a community. So, I
20 thank you all for listening, and I hope that to work
21 with you to establish some mechanisms for healthy
22 support of our communities.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
24 you so much for your testimony. Our next witness on
25 this panel will be Courtney French from JCAL. Mr.

2 French, you may begin when the Sergeant calls the
3 clock.

4 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

5 COURTNEY FRENCH: Thank you and good
6 morning. I am here today to give testimony about
7 amplifying the voices of BIPOC and queer communities
8 in our cultural institutions. I come to you today
9 inspired by the philosophy of ubuntu. I am because
10 we are. We are a city of expanding convergence of
11 diversity, multiple languages, angulating
12 perspectives, and a fierce hunger to be heard. Black
13 indigenous of color and queer voices can be found on
14 stages, in front of cameras, behind microphones, and
15 even in Executive offices. What is not readily
16 accessible are opportunities to decide what content
17 populates our airways. Theater, TV, cinema, and
18 there mere digital gateways we have all grown to
19 accept as standard mediums. My name is Courtney
20 French. I work in the Arts, Culture, and Education
21 industries for over the past 20 years. I'm a dancer,
22 choreographer, writer, educator, and currently the
23 Artist Director for the Jamaica Center of Arts and
24 Learning. The initiative I would like proposed is
25 based on a pilot program initiated with the help of

2 the New York Community Trust partnership with the
3 Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning called Building
4 Equity. Building Equity was developed as a two-year
5 program that creates an advisory counsel made up of
6 queer, black, indigenous, and people of color with
7 countless task of creation of presentation of
8 programmatic ideas and advances that are directly
9 driven by their collective cultural and community
10 interests. The Council works directly with the CIG,
11 in this case, the Jamaica Center for Arts and
12 Learning, or JCAL. JCAL provides all material
13 support, access to creative space, technical
14 assistance, marketing and promotions, stipends, and
15 administrative assistance. All of this is done, of
16 course, with the help of funder, in this case, New
17 York Community Trust. The programs created through
18 the Council have gone in directions we never dreamed,
19 of films, on the essentially the invisibility of
20 indigenous population in the city, exhibit on queer,
21 South Asian arts, and electrism tying of culture.
22 Actually, topics we would have never explored had it
23 not been for this particular Council. It is my
24 professional experience that programming generated by
25 these institutions are often called on what is

2 considered the norm, whatever was done last year and
3 the year before that. The lineage of programming can
4 be traced to a time when the Eurocentric ideal or
5 white dominant culture was only the lens through
6 which art was seen. There was not too much room for
7 other voices. It is imperative that we take a
8 revolutionary turn and develop more funding streams
9 to programs that are driven by the voiceless and
10 underserved. We are here today standing with
11 freedoms and liberties that many before us didn't
12 have, some of whom we don't know, have never
13 celebrated, but did the work quietly and often ...
14 (crosstalk).

15 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

16 COURTNEY FRENCH: We are who we are today
17 because of them. I close as I begun. I am because
18 we are. We must amplify the voices of black, queer,
19 and indigenous people of color in our community.
20 Thank you. My name is Courtney French.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
22 you for your testimony. We have one more witness on
23 this panel. The last witness will be Adam McKinney
24 from HI-Arts. Mr. McKinney, you may begin your
25 testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

2 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

3 ADAM MCKINNEY: Good morning. I am Aaron
4 L. McKinney, Interim Executive Director of HI-Arts,
5 located at El Barrio's Art Space, PS-109 in East
6 Harlem. Charlie Small's (inaudible) for one of my
7 favorite musicals, the Wiz. It begins, "When I think
8 of home, I think of a place where there's love
9 overflowing". I would add that when I think of home,
10 I think of a place where I am safe to be my full
11 self, but where can black, indigenous, Latin X,
12 Asian, other people of color, queer, and other
13 historically marginalized artists call home? Are
14 there enough safe spaces that allow these artists to
15 bring their full selves to their art? HI-Arts is one
16 of those safe spaces, both literally and
17 metaphorically for marginalized communities to share
18 their stories. We are a leading cultural hub within
19 the urban arts movement. For over 20 years, we have
20 provided unique development opportunities to artists
21 of color, always placing issues of equity and social
22 justice at the forefront. We invite our artists to
23 bring their full selves and our staff to do the same.
24 While many organizations only devote resources to
25 late-stage work, we invest in the development phase

2 of artistic creation rather than a final product.

3 For artists of the global majority, especially those

4 in hip-hop and in the urban arts, this kind of

5 support is rarely afforded. Development takes time.

6 Our artists need this time with pay. Additionally,

7 we work with our artists to design residencies that

8 are tailored to their specific needs. Many are used

9 to catering to the static or structural norms of

10 white-led institutions. HI-arts residency divert

11 this structure asking artists to tell us what they

12 need and providing it. We have heard time and again

13 from our artists that this sets us apart from many

14 other institutions. I want to take a moment to

15 discuss this word, institution. There have been long

16 tensions between artists and institutions. For many,

17 these power dynamics reached a breaking point in this

18 past year. There are countless stories, some

19 documented, mostly undocumented of artists who

20 comment they never want to work with an institution

21 again. The trickle-down system from institutions to

22 artists isn't working and the safety net is fragile

23 at best. The COVID pandemic highlighted these

24 failures that we know are not new. In 2020,

25 Americans for the Arts found that 62% of Art and

2 Cultural workers were unemployed and more than 69%
3 were black, indigenous and other POC. As leaders of
4 organizations, as leaders in government, we need to
5 provide direct financial support to our artists and
6 cultural workers during this emergency and on an
7 ongoing basis. For me, it will always be about
8 process over product, artists over art, human being
9 over funded deliverable. When our residency's
10 exhibits and productions are over, it means
11 everything when artists tell us that they felt loved
12 and supported rather they want to work with HI-Arts
13 team again. Developing those relationships with and
14 building pipelines for historically marginalized
15 artists is the reason why we do what we do. We thank
16 Chairman Van Bramer and the Members of the Committee,
17 Commissioner Casals, and DCLA and the City at Large
18 for its partnership. Let's work harder, provide
19 resources, and continue to make New York home for
20 these artists. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
22 you for your testimony ... (crosstalk)

23 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you, oh sorry,
24 sorry Brenda.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY:

3 (Crosstalk) Chair Van Bramer.

4 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you to all of
5 the members of this panel. Alejandra, I just want to
6 say I support the Commission on Reparations
7 Legislation that you spoke of. Council Member Inez
8 Barron has introduced a Resolution along those lines.
9 I think there are some other as well, and I just
10 checked to make sure that I was a co-sponsor of the
11 Commission of Reparations that Council Member Barron
12 has proposed. So, thank you for raising that today,
13 and I am officially signed on as a co-sponsor of
14 that, and I just want to thank everyone on the panel.
15 Courtney French for your work in Queens. Obviously,
16 we greatly appreciate JCAL and all that it means to
17 this borough, and to everyone who serve and work, and
18 you know, I was thinking as all of you were speaking,
19 Aaron, Cheryl, who said sat at our hearings before,
20 you know, we've been talking a lot about these issues
21 this past year, and sometimes, it feels very
22 frustrating, I'm sure, for Alejandra and Cheryl in
23 particular, who have been here many times; obviously,
24 Melody as well, but I do feel like we need to keep
25 talking about this and having hearings about this

2 because if we don't, you know, it just doesn't get
3 spoken about, right. It just doesn't even make it
4 into the dialogue here at the Council in the ways
5 that it needs to be. So, I just appreciate your
6 persistence in coming and in speaking truth to power
7 all the time, and I thank you all, and Cheryl, thank
8 you again for the incredible gifts you gave to my
9 mother, which was incredibly generous and sweet. So,
10 I think we have no other questions or comments from
11 Members, but thank you, and Aaron, this is the first,
12 I believe, we've met, at least in this bizarre
13 virtual world capacity situation, but your energy
14 came through very profoundly and thank you for your
15 work. I was once there many years ago, but I greatly
16 appreciate everything that you brought to the hearing
17 today. Thank you all.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
19 you so much, Chair Van Bramer, and also to the
20 members of the panel. So, we will now move to panel
21 three, and I'll read that panel in order and then
22 call you individually. The members of panel three
23 will be Evans Richardson from the Studio Museum in
24 Harlem, Stephanie Cunningham from Museum Hue, and Ana
25 Chireno from El Museo del Barrio. So, we will next

2 move to Evans Richardson. Mr. Richardson, you may
3 begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

4 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

5 EVANS RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair Van
6 Bramer and the Members of the Committee on behalf of
7 the entire board, staff, and extended community of
8 the Studio Museum in Harlem. I want to express our
9 sincere gratitude for inviting us to participate in
10 this critical conversation on amplifying BIPOC voices
11 in the cultural sphere. My name is Evans Richardson,
12 Chief of Staff at the Studio Museum in Harlem where
13 for over half a century, we have committed ourselves
14 to the study, presentation, and conservation of the
15 work of artists of African descent. In the 52 years
16 since our founding, our mission has been to uplift
17 our community and bear witness to black life through
18 art and culture. The Studio Museum is a proud member
19 of the Cultural Institutions Group and as such, is
20 committed to supporting the public health, public
21 life, and public service of all New Yorkers and of
22 the city itself. Our commitment to the art and
23 artists of African descent has only deepened since
24 March 2020 when the museum made its transition to
25 remote work. Today, I want to celebrate for a few

1 moments, the accomplishments of BIPOC organizations
2 of which the Studio Museum is just one example, who
3 have been able to create new opportunities for
4 audience engagement and amplify the voices of artists
5 across the five boroughs and indeed the world. One
6 example of this work is the Museum's Iconic Artists
7 and Residence Program envisioned by artist, William
8 I. Williams. This is the program from which we get
9 our name. This program gives emerging artists an
10 unparalleled opportunity to develop their practice in
11 an 11-month residency and culminates in annual
12 exhibition. The program has supported over 150
13 artists who have gone on to highly regarded careers.
14 Individuals selected for the residency receive
15 institutional guidance, professional development, and
16 research support. On December 10th, we were thrilled
17 to open our annual artists and resident's exhibition,
18 this longing vessel, at MoMA PS1. In its second
19 year, this collaboration with the fellow CIG provides
20 a promising model and exciting opportunities for
21 cross-institutional programing and audience building.
22 This year, we were also thrilled to present Chloe
23 Bass Wayfinding in Harlem's St. Nicholas Park, a
24 collaboration with NYC Parks and a part of our in
25

2 Harlem initiative. This exhibition took place from
3 September 2019 through 2020. The exhibition, made up
4 of site-specific sculptures explored the structural
5 and visual vernacular of public Wayfinding signage,
6 resonated with viewers even as we remained physically
7 distant. Massive sculptures activated in eloquent
8 exploration of language, both visual and written
9 encouraging private moments of private reflection in
10 public space. I also wanted to mention another
11 program called Find Art here, a collaboration that
12 has taken our collection and high-quality
13 reproductions of works from our collection and put
14 them in public spaces such as NYCHA public housing
15 complexes and New York City public schools. Most
16 recently, we worked with the grant houses to install
17 a reprint of Henry ... (crosstalk).

18 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

19 EVANS RICHARDSON: How I got over.

20 Despite the challenges of the current moment, we
21 understand that the artists the Studio Museum works
22 to amplify will both reflect and shape this time,
23 placing our history in a global context for future
24 generations. We hope the outcome of our collective
25 work in this moment will be an affirmation of the

2 sanctity, complexity, and beauty of black life and
3 humanity. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
5 you so much for your testimony. The next witness on
6 this panel will be Stephanie Cunningham from Museum
7 Hue.

8 STEPHANIE CUNNINGHAM: Thank you.

9 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

10 STEPHANIE CUNNINGHAM: Thank you and
11 thank you, Chair Van Bramer and Commissioner Casals
12 for your work and advocacy and members of the City
13 Council. My name is Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham,
14 I'm the co-founder and Creative Director of Museum
15 Hue, an Arts organization dedicated to supporting
16 hundreds of museum professionals in various cultural
17 institutions across New York City's five boroughs.
18 Museum Hue was specifically created for the
19 advancement of black, indigenous, and people of color
20 throughout the field. Museum Hue joins colleague
21 advocates working across creative disciplines in
22 thanking the Committee for your leadership,
23 especially during this time. The Arts play an
24 essential role in cultural and social life across New
25 York City. The Arts is how we all tell our stories,

1 preserve our heritage, interpret the past, and
2 imagine our future. It is a tool black, indigenous,
3 and people of color have used to both amplify and
4 transcend the oppression, injustices, and
5 impoverishment of our communities that are present in
6 the very moment. The Arts are used to enrich our
7 lives daily and has also been used as strategy for
8 community building and as a form of resistance. The
9 Arts are an essential part of liberation and have
10 helped to paint a fuller, more vibrant portrait of
11 New Yorkers across the city, and beyond this cultural
12 impact, the Arts sector is also essential to New York
13 City's economy, generating GDP, stimulating jobs, and
14 contributing taxes. The Arts and Culture sector is
15 the number one driver of tourism to the state
16 generating \$110 billion in economic activity
17 according to the controller's report in the creative
18 economy. It highlights that the vastness of the
19 cultural sector with nearly 400,000 jobs has changed
20 the framework of the city, but due to the pandemic,
21 Arts venues were forced to close and cancel programs
22 due to COVID-19. So, in order for the vibrancy that
23 is New York City's Arts and Culture to be revived, we
24 need the support of the City Council. We know that
25

2 black, indigenous and people of color Arts
3 organization have been disproportionately impacted.
4 Our Arts and Culture eco-system needs funding to
5 ensure the survival. So, I'm recommending that the
6 City Council fund initiatives for Arts organizations
7 led by and censoring black, indigenous, and people of
8 color, provide necessary funding in order for us to
9 continue to support black, indigenous, and people of
10 color, recognize the critical work and critical needs
11 of black, indigenous, and people of color's Arts
12 organization, and within the budget of Arts and
13 Culture, there needs to be a portion dedicated to
14 black, indigenous, and people of color's Art
15 organization. Museum Hue advocates for a vision ...
16 (crosstalk).

17 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

18 STEPHANIE CUNNINGHAM: Museum Hue
19 advocates for a vision rooted in racial equity and
20 sustainability for the Arts and Culture industry.
21 City budget and funding are needed so that Arts and
22 Culture can continue to thrive in a city known and
23 celebrated for its Arts and Culture. As a lifelong
24 New Yorker and museum professional, I know firsthand
25 the impact of the Arts and Cultural field. Censoring

2 black, indigenous, and people of color's experiences,
3 perspectives, practices, and pedagogy creates
4 pathways to greater recognition and representation.
5 Visual imagery is a change agent for narratives of
6 black, indigenous and people of color's life that can
7 affect our perceptions of justice, reshaping our
8 understanding of society, and at a time when we are
9 increasing called upon to address race, the emergence
10 of black, indigenous, and people of color's Arts
11 organization embody racial justice. They are sites
12 for the negotiation and expansion of racial histories
13 and racial justice. Each serve as a focus point for
14 wider ideological questions over the continued
15 significance of race in America. They are
16 continuously offering dynamic sites for the ongoing
17 struggle for rights and racial justice, addressing
18 the multilayered issues of race from the interpreted
19 and structural levels. Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
21 you so much for your testimony. Our last witness on
22 this panel will Ana Chireno from El Museo del Barrio.

23 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

24 ANA CHIRENO: Thank you, Chair Van Bramer
25 and the entire Cultural Affairs Committee for the

2 opportunity to present today. I'd also like to say
3 that I'm honored to be part of this distinguished
4 panel. Evans and Stephanie, I think the work that
5 your organizations are doing and yourselves are
6 amazing. My name is Ana Chireno, and I'm the
7 Director of Government and Community Affairs at El
8 Museo del Barrio. As a native New Yorker, Afro-
9 Latina, and daughter of immigrants, it's a distinct
10 honor to be able to speak on the chosen topic.
11 Firstly, El Museo is one of 34 organizations within
12 the CIG, the cultural institutions group that are
13 located on city property. Throughout the pandemic,
14 CIGs have remained committed to providing free
15 offerings for nearly 10 million individuals. El
16 Museo is also a member of the Latin X Arts Consortium
17 of New York, a peer network dedicated to knowledge
18 exchange, resource sharing, and collective action
19 towards systemic change. El Museo del Barrio, an
20 anchor of the East Harlem community has a 50-year
21 grassroots legacy of amplifying Puerto Rican and
22 Latin X voices in the Arts. In fact, addressing the
23 lack of representation of Latin X artists in the
24 mainstream art world was a main catalyst for El
25 Museo's creation. Recently the art world has taken

2 steps towards addressing stubborn lack of (inaudible)
3 and its staffing audiences in content, but the work
4 of culturally specific institutions like El Museo is
5 still necessary and worthy of support from the City
6 Council now more than ever. A national survey found
7 out Latin X artists represent only 2.8% of artists
8 and museum collections in the US, 2.8%. For
9 comparison, the 60 million Latin X people in the US
10 are 18% of the population according to the census
11 bureau, 2.8% versus 18%. In New York City, we
12 represent almost 30% of city residents, so there's
13 still work to be done. Most recently at El Museo del
14 Barrio, we continue to amplify Latin X voices which,
15 by the way, include black and queer Latin X voices
16 with a recent exhibition, "Estamos Bien, La Tienal
17 2021", the museum's first ever, national large-scale
18 survey of contemporary art featuring more than 40
19 artists. Art writer, Barbara Calderon, when
20 reviewing the show for Art Net mentioned that La
21 Trianal shows how much latent and under-recognized
22 talent there is in the field. The exclusion of Latin
23 X art from relevant art conversations is a reality.
24 That persistent exclusion in museum collections,
25 galley shows, etc, is a running testament to the need

2 for surveys like El Museo's, she continues. The
3 collected works are by a glimpse into the range of
4 Latin X art. The curators have outlined communal
5 needs for doing justice to express. It's up to the
6 rest of the art world to respond. I would add two
7 last barbarous last words that it is also up to our
8 partners in government to respond by supporting the
9 organizations that are correcting the art cannon so
10 that it more accurately reflects the beautiful
11 (inaudible) of who we are as a city and a nation ...
12 (crosstalk).

13 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

14 ANA CHIRENO: We need your support to
15 continue doing this work. I don't need to tell this
16 Committee that Arts and Cultural Organizations will
17 play an essential role in our recovery, but I would
18 be remissive if didn't mention that without
19 intensified support, many organizations may have to
20 close their doors permanently. This is especially
21 true for arts organizations led by and serving
22 communities of color that have been historically
23 underfunded. The (inaudible) in 2015 study of
24 diversity in the arts that the 20 largest mainstream
25 organizations have a median budget of \$61 million,

2 and the 20 largest organizations of color have a
3 median budget size of \$3.8 million, so quote the
4 foundation, this difference of 16 times in median
5 budget size is a glaring illustration of disparity.
6 Additionally, many funding opportunities such as the
7 Federal SDOG and PPP grants are not a level playing
8 field, and the other shut out small non-profits or do
9 not address barriers to applying such as needs for
10 technical assistance which especially effects BIPOC
11 organizations. We also need to be supportive as a
12 ramp up or reopening, and as we are now operating
13 massively decreased revenue streams with an uncertain
14 fundraising future. It's time to acknowledge and
15 truly honor the diversity of artistic expression in
16 excellent in our city and provide critical funding to
17 organizations and communities that have made a
18 significant impact on our cultural landscape despite
19 historically limited resources. We look forward to
20 working together to ensure adequate funding for the
21 entire arts sector and search for innovations that
22 guarantee equitable funding in the future. Thank
23 you.

24 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you and thank
25 you to everyone on this panel. Evans, thank you for

2 the partnership with MoMA PS1 which is in my District
3 and we're very, very thrilled to see the
4 collaboration there. Incredible, and of course, you
5 know, we love Studio Museum Harlem, and Museo as
6 well, and thank you Stephanie, all of you, but
7 Stephanie in particular for talking about the need to
8 develop more and increase the existing funding
9 streams that we do have that are dedicated to black,
10 indigenous, and people of color and queer-led
11 organizations. The Commissioner talked a little bit
12 about some, I talked a little bit about some. I've
13 got Coalition of Various Color, the Cultural
14 Immigrant initiative, but those are very small
15 pockets relative to the larger funding picture and
16 the Commission also mentioned some other attempts and
17 I think some good stuff where there's some equity
18 built in, but clearly, we're just touching the
19 surface, right. We're just starting, so I appreciate
20 all of the work that you all do and for being here
21 today to remind us of the work ahead.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
23 you. Chair Van Bramer, we don't have any hands raised
24 from other Council Members. So, if you're okay moving
25 to the next panel, we can move to panel four. This

2 will be final panel for this hearing today. So, as
3 with the previous panel, we'll read all the names of
4 the panelist and then call people one-by-one. You
5 may begin testimony after the Sergeant calls the
6 clock. So, thank you again for panel three and our
7 other panels, and we will now move to our final
8 panel. The members of the final panel will be Fredy
9 Taveras from the New York Historical Society, Richard
10 Burns, also from New York Historical, and Lucy Sexton
11 from New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts. So, Mr.
12 Taveras, you may begin your testimony when the
13 Sergeant calls the clock.

14 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

15 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: I think Freddy needs
16 to be unmuted. There we go.

17 FREDDY TAVERAS: Dear Members of the
18 Committee of Cultural Affairs and everybody else
19 here. I am Freddy Taveras. I'm the Executive Vice
20 President and General Counsel of the New York
21 Historical Society Museum and Library. Thank you for
22 the continued support and continued service to the
23 Arts and Cultural community in New York City,
24 particular during these challenging times, and thank
25 you for the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf

2 of the New York Historical Society. New York
3 Historical aims to be an active, accessible community
4 resource and destination for audiences typically
5 underserved by cultural institutions. Some of our
6 past exhibitions include Art as Activism, which
7 showcased protest art from the 1930 through the 1970s
8 including that of the Black Panther Movement; Nueva
9 York, which told the history of the Latino presence
10 in New York from the 1600s to World War II, and
11 Chinese American Exclusion Inclusion, which explored
12 the centuries long history of the Chinese immigrant
13 experience. Our groundbreaking traveling exhibition,
14 Black Citizenship in age of Jim Crow will be on view
15 at the Pull-up Texas State History Museum in June.
16 Our aim is to ensure our museum professionals hail
17 from a wide range of backgrounds so we can create
18 museum programming that highlights under recognized
19 stories, challenges, hegemonic historical narratives
20 and enriches public understanding of our shared past.
21 In addition to our diverse staff, our Frederick
22 Douglas Council and Women's History Council
23 authenticity groups promote deeper discussion and
24 engagement by encouraging support for programming
25 that enriches and advances the knowledge and

2 documentation of black history and women's history.

3 To ensure BIPOC and queer voices are included in

4 museum conversations, the New York Historical Society

5 has assembled recently an inclusion diversity equity

6 and accessibility committee open to all employees.

7 New York Historical is committed to amplifying BIPOC

8 and queer voices, not only at the museum, but in the

9 Arts and Culture field in general. As such, since

10 2019, we've been partners with the City University of

11 New York's school of professional studies to offer a

12 very successful Master of Arts in Museum Studies

13 Degree program. It's a unique collaboration designed

14 with the goal to diversify the city's museum

15 workforce and address the needs of our increasingly

16 diverse museum-going public. The Master's program

17 was launched to address the pervasive lack of

18 accessibility and inclusion in the American museum

19 leadership staff working towards generating an

20 equitable and sustainable cultural workforce of

21 tomorrow. The program is specifically structured to

22 attract these students from non-traditional academic

23 backgrounds ... (crosstalk)

24 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

25

2 FREDDY TAVERAS: And we are pleased to
3 offer scholarship funds for qualifying students. In
4 closing, I can't not say this. New York Historical
5 has and continues to partner with the American LGBTQ
6 Plus Museum to bring forth plans to construct the
7 city's first major museum dedicated to LGBTQ Plus
8 history and culture. This new museum will be housed
9 in a dedicated floor of the New York Historical
10 Society's planned expansion which has received
11 generous funding from the City Council and the
12 Administration in the last two fiscal years. This
13 partnership represents a vital part of our
14 institutional mission, and we look forward to
15 offering robust programing on LGBTQ Plus history and
16 culture to New York City. Thank you very much. I'll
17 pass it on to the next speaker.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
19 you so much for your testimony. The next speaker
20 will be Richard Burns. Mr. Burns, you may begin your
21 testimony when the Sergeant calls the clock.

22 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

23 RICHARD BURNS: Hi there. My name is,
24 indeed, Richard Burns, and I am the Chair of the
25 Board of the Developing American LGBTQ Plus Museum.

2 It's a museum to come of history and culture here in
3 New York City. The concept of a queer history museum
4 in New York has been talked about for over 20 years,
5 and there have been a couple of efforts that have
6 come and gone. Elsewhere around the world, there is
7 a significant LGBTQ history museum in Berlin, there
8 is an effort underway in London called Queer Britain,
9 and there are small LGBTQ history museums already
10 opened in San Francisco and in Fort Lauderdale. In
11 addition, there are numerous LGBTQ archives around
12 the country. The one archive in Los Angeles is the
13 older and largest, while here in New York City, we
14 have Lesbian History archives in Brooklyn, the LGBTQ
15 archive at the LGBTQ Community Center and the
16 archives at the Cornell Sexuality Collection in
17 Ithaca. In 2017, about five years ago, a group of
18 LGBTQ activists came together to begin conversations
19 to create a museum here in New York City, and our
20 first decision was to assemble a team that reflects
21 the true diversity of New York's queer communities
22 before any specifics or visioning got started. With
23 early seeds support from the New York City Council
24 and the New York Community Trust, pro bono legal
25 support from the law firm Brain Cave (SP?) we were

2 able to secure our museum charter from the New York
3 State Board of Regents in 2019, and we engaged the
4 museum planning firm consulting to do deep research.
5 What does our communities need and want in a queer
6 history museum? There were interview with LGBTQ
7 historians, academics, leaders around the country,
8 focus groups in English, Spanish, and Russian and in
9 all five boroughs talked with museum leaders and
10 experts and we engaged a consumer research firm to do
11 an online survey of over 40,000 LGBTQ people. We
12 incorporated data from NYC GO on LGBTQ traveler to
13 New York, and all of this came together to create a
14 vision for a queer museum here in New York City. Our
15 goal is to create a museum for people who might not
16 be comfortable in traditional museums in New York.
17 We wanted to be both physical and digital home to
18 school children and researchers, New Yorkers and
19 tourists. Museums can take a long time to happen,
20 and so in late 2019, we developed our partnership
21 with the New York Historical Society. New York
22 Historical Society President, Louise Mirrer and her
23 team have very generously agreed to incubate our
24 museum effort and we hope that's the case for many,

2 many years. We're working now with curators at the
3 Historical Society ... (crosstalk).

4 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

5 RICHARD BURNS: And our first
6 programming. We've undertaken this effort with a
7 volunteer board of directors of 24 activists and our
8 team includes folks who have helped create the New
9 York City Aids Memorial Park, the designation of the
10 Stonewall National Monument by President Obama and
11 the LGBTQ Community Center. All of these efforts are
12 not simply to record, explain, and celebrate, and
13 commemorate the stories and struggles of our people
14 and the path to change that we've all made together.
15 Our goal is really to inspire rising generations with
16 these histories to future activism. All the progress
17 that we, as people, have achieved is very, very
18 fragile and is under assault around the country by
19 the right wing. Rising generations need to have
20 access this history so that they can lead forward,
21 arms with the lessons, mistakes, and victories that
22 we, older folks have lived. We thank the Council for
23 its strong support and asked for continued support.
24 New York is the right place, the right home for this

2 museum, this springboard for activism towards justice
3 and equality. Thanks very much.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Thank
5 you so much for your testimony. We have one more
6 witness, and one more panelist. As a reminder, we
7 will check for anyone that we inadvertently missed
8 after this panel. So, if you have not heard your
9 name, don't worry. We will check afterwards, but the
10 final member of panel four and our final witness is
11 Lucy Sexton from New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts
12 and the Daily Culture of (inaudible). Ms. Sexton,
13 you may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

14 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

15 LUCY SEXTON: So, ominous, the final
16 witness. Thank you very much. I am Lucy Sexton of
17 New Yorkers for Culture and Arts. Thank you, Chair
18 Van Bramer and Members of the City Council for this
19 important and urgent hearing. When we talk about
20 raising the visibility of BIPOC, queer, and other
21 marginalized artists, we have to talk about money.
22 It is this historical and intentional underfunding of
23 black and immigrant communities that makes those
24 voices so hard to hear. It is the long-held fear of
25 funding radical queer voices that keeps them out of

2 the mainstream. I think we need to talk about a
3 reimagining of New York City, one with Arts and
4 Culture supported in all communities, one that
5 invests in the economic and emotional recovery of
6 every neighborhood, one that raises up the voices of
7 those still suffering all kinds of oppression. It is
8 time to be bold with our budget and intention with
9 laying the groundwork for an equitable, just,
10 diverse, and thriving city. The benefits of Arts and
11 Culture extend far beyond economics. As I've said,
12 in many hearings, data shows that neighborhood with
13 cultural assets have improved outcomes in education,
14 aging, mental health, youth engagement with criminal
15 justice, community strength, and safety. Yet, what
16 are the neighborhood lacking in cultural assets, even
17 before the pandemic? Economically disadvantaged and
18 historically black, brown, and immigrant sections of
19 our city. Arts East New York, one of the few
20 cultural organizations in Eastern Brooklyn has
21 closed. We must direct investment to those
22 neighborhoods now if we are to lift up the voices of
23 those communities. We are at a pivotal moment in our
24 city's history. As we emerge from this crisis, a
25 crisis that has devastated the cultural sector across

2 the board, we must not simply refill the buckets of
3 funding that existed before. We must find new ways
4 for funding to flow. In recent years, the Council
5 has worked hard to increase the support of culture
6 and we are grateful. Right now, Arts and Culture are
7 hanging on by a thread. Most cultural organizations
8 remain partially or wholly shuttered. More than half
9 our workforce remains unemployed and the
10 organizations most at risk are the ones most
11 dependent on public funding, organizations
12 disproportionately led by and serving BIPOC
13 communities that have been hardest hit by all aspects
14 of this crisis. I'm asking that we intentionally
15 invest in parts of our eco-system most likely to
16 disappear. We can do this by existing structures
17 like providing long overdue stability for the
18 coalition of theaters of color by baselining its
19 funding, the uncertainty of funding year-to-year is
20 destabilizing to its 52 member organizations. I will
21 also add my support of Melody Capote's call to expand
22 the (inaudible) many more black, Latin X, Asian, and
23 (inaudible) organizations. We must also find new
24 (inaudible) initiate and forward ... (crosstalk).

25 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

2 Lucy SEXTON: We cannot come out this
3 terrible with a cultural landscape that is more
4 white, more homogenous, and more centralized than it
5 was before. We need to act decisively to fund and
6 lift up voices in every community of our city. Thank
7 you.

8 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much,
9 Lucy, and as the final witness, I appreciate you
10 delivering such powerful testimony as always and your
11 leadership of a really diverse community that doesn't
12 always agree on how we move forward, but you play a
13 real instrumental role in keeping us all together,
14 and I want to thank the New York Historical Society,
15 Louise has done some great things with that
16 institution and I think the partnership with Richard,
17 you and your organization is brilliant on so many
18 levels and so, and so needed, and I really, really
19 hope we can make this happen, and do it as quickly as
20 possible. There does need to be a museum for the
21 telling and sharing of LGBTQ and queer history, and
22 this seems like a really, really terrific way to
23 accomplish it and get it done. So, thank you Richard
24 for you and your team and obviously your long history
25 of activism on behalf of LGBTQ folks including, as I

2 mentioned to you, you know, privately while you
3 didn't know it, when I came out of the closet as a
4 gay 19 year old with no where to go, I found the gay
5 and lesbian of New York at the Center and that safe
6 space allowed me and lot of other queer youth to find
7 a home, right, and also in that building to be
8 exposed to act up and Queer Nation and all of his
9 amazing activist I was intimidated by, but who I
10 often sat in the back of room and listened to and
11 learned from, and that's sort of the beauty of the
12 Center, right, and that period of late 80s and early
13 90s when so many people were dying of AIDS and there
14 were still so many young people who were at
15 (inaudible) Martin and you know, so many black and
16 brown queer kids and trans youth who also had a few a
17 place to turn to, but new work at the Center is much
18 appreciated, and I just want to say that for the
19 record cause it meant a lot to me in my early life,
20 and also to so many others. So, so thank you all for
21 being here. Thank you, Lucy, thank you Melody. I
22 see you staying through to the end and listening to
23 all of this, and needles to say, I support a more
24 inclusive and diverse CIG, and more additions, but we
25 will continue that battle and Lucy, yes, money does

2 matter, and what we do with it matters, and where it
3 goes matters, and so we have to make sure that we're
4 doing the right thing. So, with that, I will thank
5 all of you. We have a few more months until this
6 particular budget is adopted, and yes, it will be the
7 last one that I will be the Chair of Cultural Affairs
8 for, and the last one that Majority Leader Cumbo will
9 be a part of as a Member of the City Council, but we
10 will all get to fight one more time together on
11 behalf of all of the things that we care about. So,
12 thank you, and I think Brenda will go through some of
13 the logistics to close us out, but after that, we
14 will adjourn the hearing.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BRENDA MCKINNEY: Yes,
16 thank you so much, Chair Van Bramer, and thank you
17 everyone for your testimony. At this point, we have
18 concluded the public testimony portion of our
19 hearing; however, if we inadvertently missed anyone
20 that would like to testify, please use the Zoom raise
21 hand function now. Raise your hand and we will call
22 on you in the order that your hand is raised. So,
23 we'll just take a moment, if anyone is logged in and
24 we inadvertently missed you. Chair, we are not
25 seeing any hands. So, at this point, we have

2 concluded the public testimony portion of this
3 hearing.

4 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Great. Thank you very
5 much. This hearing is officially adjourned.

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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 June 6, 2021