

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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February 28, 2018
Start: 10:11 a.m.
Recess: 12:52 a.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: JAMES G. VAN BRAMER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Joseph C. Borelli
Laurie A. Cumbo
Karen Koslowitz
Fernando P. Moya

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

Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

Katie Rubin, Community Engagement Events
Theater of the Oppressed NYC

Amaray Santos, Actor with TNYC

Debbie Officer, Book Review Editor
African Voices Magazine

Toya Lillard, Executive Director
Vibe Theater Experience

Isa Tuyung
Vibe Theater Experience

Ian Fields Stewart
Vibe Theater Experience

Ameya Biradavolu
Development and Communications Associate
Vibe Theater Experience

Simi Linton, Co-Directors
Disability Arts NYC Task Force, DANT

Susan Hapgood, Executive Director
International Studio and Curatorial Program

Assetou Sy, President
Malian Cultural Center

Caron Atlas, Director, Arts and Democracy

Charlotte Cohen, Director, Brooklyn Arts Council

Branka Duknic, Director, Queens Historical Society

Chris Wisniewski, Executive Director
NYC Schools Programs Studio in a School

James Reynolds, Studio in a School

Adam Jacobs, Kids Creative

Julia Lu, Director of Institutional Planning
Children's Museum of Manhattan

Chris Wisniewski, Executive Director
Studio in a School, New York City

James Reynolds, Studio in the School
Artist Instructor, PS 123, Harlem

Heather Harvey, Marketing Director
Dance Theater, Et Cetera

Rudolph Shaw, Caribbean-American Repertory Theater

Mark Degarmo, Director, Mark Degarmo Dance

Lutz Rath, Director and Conductor
Washington Square Music Festival

Indira Wataroo, Executive Director
Billie Holiday Theater and Restoration Art
Bedford-Stuyvesant Central Brooklyn

Laura Paris, AED
Coalition for Aesthetic Family Services, Arts and
Literacy, After-School and Summer Programs

John Senesco, Director of Middle School Programs
Coalition for Aesthetic Family Services, Arts and
Literacy, After School and Summer Programs

Christopher Massimine, CEO of the National Yiddish
Theater, Chair of Immigrants Arts Coalition
Trustee on the Alliance of Resident Theaters

Sita Chay, Violinist,
Altima Mariachi Band Flor de Toloache
Executive Director, Cosmopolis Collective

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

5

[sound check, pause] [gavel]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good morning

everyone [background comments] and welcome to the
first hearing of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations in
2018, and for the current term of the City Council.

My name is Jimmy Van Bramer, and I am thrilled to be
the chair once again for this committee. I have been
the chair since the first day that I was in the City
Council, and it is a great honor and privilege to be
the chair of Cultural Affairs and Libraries for all
12 years that I will be blessed to serve in this
body. I want to welcome to the committee Council
Member Joe Borelli who is here from Staten Island.

This is his first hearing, and I—contrary to rumors
did not do it specifically for Council Member

Borelli. I want to also mention that we have several
other hearings going on in the City Council at this
moment including a very important Parks Committee
meeting across the street. Other members are on

their way, but we want to get started because we have
the Commissioner, and we have so many folks who want
to testify on this important hearing. So, [gavel] we
are now formally in session. The topic that we're

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

6

going to be discussing today: Art as Resistance
State in Trumps America. As everyone here surely
knows in our democratic society freedom of expression
is paramount, and often it is the arts that make
manifest that vision lending form to our goals and
ideals. Art exposes and helps resolve issues of
social justice. As a cultural tool, art and culture
humanize and actualize the emotions, grievances and
fears of the disenfranchised. Art can elicit a
visceral reaction. It can shock and inspire action.
Art has the power to change the lives of young people
in particular. As a global cultural capital New York
City is home to a wealth of cultural amenities and a
thriving creative sector. Recognizing its importance
in our democratic society, the city has long been
committed to the preservation and enhancement of our
cultural sector. The Department of Cultural Affairs
works to create and expand access to public
programming, provide technical assistance, build
audiences and ensure that the arts and culture are
central to the city's economic vitality and equality
of life. The Department of Cultural Affairs in New
York City surpasses even the National Endowment of
the Arts as the largest arts funder in the country.

However, it is important to note particularly within the context of this hearing that one of President Donald Trump's first actions in office was to propose the complete defunding and elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (sic) and so many other things that we hold dear. Now, it's important to note that there are differing opinions about President Trump. In fact, Council Member Borelli is wearing his Donald Trump button on his lapel right now, and it's fair to say that we have very different opinions on the president and on much of what's happening in the country, but we will disagree today respectfully particularly with--amongst ourselves here in this room. But make no mistakes, I have been very clear in my very strong opposition to the president, but the Department of Cultural Affairs, of course, doesn't necessarily take a position on the president, but certainly has an incredibly important role in making sure that we beat back these attempts to destroy the arts and culture in this country. So, in addition to providing programmatic and capital support to local arts and cultural organizations, New

York City also has a history of successfully integrating the arts into the operations of city agencies and the delivery of city services. This includes DCLA's work with individual artists for the Percent for Art permanent public art program, and the Public Artists and Residents program. The department also supports New York City Artist directly and indirectly through various ongoing efforts as well as through local arts councils. Need to pause there and say that the City Council is very proud to fund the arts and provide so much of the funding that goes through the Department of Cultural Affairs. Now, such works are a testament to the power of art to affect positive social change: Writing, address and vocalizing social injustice in the world. I will continue to work with my colleagues in government to promote the arts and cultural and support artistic endeavors that aim to inspire and propel the ideals of open society forward. Now, today we want to hear about how art and culture have been employed in this era of political uncertainty. As a gay man, I am certainly aware of our history, and the role for example that Grand Fury played in the HIV-AIDS epidemic in the early days using art to inspire, and

also put pressure on then President Reagan among others to do what was necessary when they did not want to. We are doing the same today, and I'm interested in hearing from all of you in the cultural community about the ways in which you are responding, in which your organizations are responding not necessarily in a political way, but in a way that channels the outrage that so many people are feeling, and using art and culture to empower people to use their voice. The First Amendment is still in effect in this country. So, we also want to talk about how we integrate the arts into transformative programming and services, and we also want to learn about how the Department of Cultural Affairs intends to continuing utilizing the arts to effectively empower New Yorkers to live their truths in this moment, and to fight back against any and all attempts to silence their ability to speak out in this moment through art, through culture, through expression and through the right to organize, speak out and fight back. So, I'm thrilled to be an art of this movement. I was thrilled that we had a very powerful rally on the steps of City Hall less than a year ago. One of the biggest rallies we ever had with David Byrne and the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

10

Commission was there and lots of folks defending the arts not only in the city of New York but in this great country that we call home. So, with that, I want to recognize some of the staff who helped put this together, and we'll hear from the Commissioner, and hopefully engage in some lively discussions with-- with all of you and--and continue the work of resistance, and that is important to me. So, I want to thank my Chief of Staff who is actually not in the room at this moment, but he is just back from paternity leave, and we're thrilled to have Matt Wallace back and baby Gabriel. This is his first public shout-out. Is doing well, and I welcome a member to our City Council family, Andre Svega (sp?) my Deputy Chief of Staff and David Ginsburg our new Legislative Director. I want to thank from our committee here Aminta Kilowan and Chloe Rivera, Ali Alli, and also thank for stepping in and pinch hitting Malcolm Behorn (sp?) and Muzat Chaltery (sic) who are working with us as counsels for this hearing today. So, with that, we will swear in Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl from the Department of Cultural Affairs, and begin our testimony.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

11

LEGAL COUNSEL: Commissioner, if you'd
raise your right hand, please? Do you affirm to tell
the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
in your testimony before this committee, and to
respond honestly to Council Member questions?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I do. Should I
begin? Okay. Good morning Chair Van Bramer and
members of the committee. I am here today to testify
with regards to the [coughs] importance of arts and
culture to New York's social and civic fabric and to
DCLA's commitment to supporting cultural
organizations that engage all New Yorkers. I don't
think I need to convince anyone in this room that art
has the power to mobilize, to uplift and to bring us
together as communities. Art and culture have a very
special role in New York City in particular where
creative expression is a birth right, and an
essential part of our DNA. So, for New Yorkers it's
natural to turn to art and culture to through the
issues of the day. They're an important part of how
we communicate and connect with one another, and how
we understand the world around us, and there are
great powerful ways that arts can respond to specific
concerns and needs. We can ban together to support

our immigrant neighbors. We can stand up for free speech, we can defend the essential programs and funding that improve the lives of New Yorkers. As a non-partisan funder of arts and culture, DCLA strives to support our constituents in a wide range of ways. Following the 2016 presidential election, many non-profit cultural organizations expressed a need to offer support to their communities and advocate for themselves, but there was a great deal of nervousness as to what sort of actions are appropriate for non-profit organizations to be involved in. We heard questions such what constitutes political activity or is it permissible for a non-profit to be involve in electoral politics and more. In response, we organized a legal panel at the Ford Foundation last April for DCLA grantees. The program is called Non-Profits and the Pitfalls of Politics, navigating lobbying, political activity and First Amendment issues in 2017. It features legal experts who discuss the boundaries of lobbying and political campaign activity and the complexities of free expression, political criticism and censorship. One general takeaway from the event was that there's a great deal the cultural sector can do to advocate for

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

13

our communities and cultural organizations within certain limits. I encourage groups to carefully consider what these limits are for specific interventions and activities in consultation with legal experts. For the many organizations that don't have in-house counsel, in-house legal support, a number of groups offer relevant services including Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Lawyers Alliance and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. For our part, DCLA offers a wide range of programs, initiatives and support for all New Yorkers including some of our more vulnerable neighbors. Let me focus for a moment on immigration. As you know, we continue to partner with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to include cultural-cultural benefits as part of the IDNYC program, an initiative that reaches out to all New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status, homeless status, gender identity or other factors. Over one million IDNYC card—with over one million IDNYC cardholders, the card is a hit in large part thanks to our cultural benefit partners. These groups spans disciplines in boroughs. Some of them are probably in the room today. I know you are. You all have provided more

than a half million free memberships to IDNYC cardholders since 2015. Just as important, 77% of immigrant cardholders surveyed said they feel a stronger sense of belonging to New York City since they received their ID. We mad this happen together, and it demonstrates the inclusive values New Yorkers embrace. Another collaboration we have with the Office of Immigrant Affairs to support New York's immigrant communities to called Cyclenews. As part of DCLA's Public Artists and Residents Program, Cyclemeus has--was initiated by artist Tania Bruguera and a group of--and a group called Mujeres Movimiento. In an effort to build trust with immigrant residents in Corona, Queens and increase awareness of government services available to them, the Mujeres have been circulating through the community on bikes complete with uniforms and information materials they helped design. They also bring their community voices and understanding back to city government. It's a simple but profound way to use our--to signal our immigrant neighbor--to our immigrant neighbors that the city wants to establish connections based on mutual understanding and respect. When it comes to federal funding for the

arts, we unequivocally believe that public support for culture is a good thing. Just last month, the National Endowment for the Arts announced nearly \$6 million in funding for over 200 cultural organizations in New York City alone. DCLA funds many of the same groups giving them some of the resources they need to engage audiences and communities in every corner of the city. I was proud to join Chair Van Bramer and other local leaders to call for restoration of funding for the NEA, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute for Museum and Library Services last year. As part of these efforts, I also published an op-ed in Art News highlighting the importance of these funding streams, and we continue to highlight the need for—the need to #Save the NEA on social media. Yes, the funding remained in the federal budget last year. Sadly, these federal institutions were again targeted for elimination in the current presidential administration's proposed budget. Again, we will fight for their restoration. We have seen it demonstrated over and over that people living across New York and throughout the nation overwhelmingly value art and culture. A recent survey by the

American Alliance for the Museums found that 97% of Americans believe that museums are educational assets for their communities. For a survey we commissioned as part of Create NYC, the cultural plan, we found that 97% of New Yorkers believe that art and cultural are important to overall quality of life in New York City. That's within the margin error—of error of 100%. So, when we argue for the importance of investing in culture at all levels of government, we are confident we are delivering a message on behalf of all residents. Culture is important [coughs] for our growth as individuals, for the health of our communities and for a vibrant economy. We're inspired by the near unanimous support for culture from New Yorkers as well as the members of this committee, and we look forward to continuing our important work together. Finally, we are committed to upholding the fundamental right to free expression, which has been challenged on several occasions in recent months. One notable example was the call by some to revoke public funding for the public theater based on their production of Julius Cesar during last summers Shakespeare in the Park. The titled character bared a resemblance to the

current president. I'll repeat what I said then:
Threatening funding for a group base on artistic
decision amounts to censorship. We don't impede—
interfere with the content created by non-profits
that receive public support period. Thank you for
providing the opportunity to highlight these issues,
and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
much Commissioner, and I want to recognize we've been
joined by Council Member Francisco Moya of said
Corona, Queens, and welcome him to the community as
well. So, I wanted to talk about a few of the points
that—that you raised. If President Trump were
successful in eliminating funding for the NEA, NEH
and IMLS, how badly would this hurt the city of New
York? And I'm not just talking about dollars. I'm
talking about the assault on who we are.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: And by the
way, I think we have to add public broadcasting to
that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's right.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: That's a very
large funding. I didn't do my testimony, but I think
[coughs] so we estimated last year that the total—I

1 actually don't have the numbers with me, but, you
2 know, tens of millions of dollars of support will be
3 lost. The other thing I think everybody in the room
4 would agree often those are the first funders in to
5 projects. So, you start a project. You get a grant.
6 It may not be a huge grant from the National
7 Endowment for the Arts, but it puts a kind of stamp
8 on that program as something that's worthwhile that
9 has federal support, and it makes it so much easier
10 to raise lots of other money for those programs. It
11 happened to me again and again in my career when I
12 was on the other side of the table. The leverage of
13 those funds. I mean that is the moment you get that
14 stamp and that's a go. That project is definitely
15 going to happen, and you can go out and say we've got
16 NEA or NEH or IMLS support. It's fundamentally
17 important and it's leveraging far beyond the tens of
18 millions of dollars, but I don't want to
19 underestimate how important that money is also.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, talk about
22 the—the effect on artists and on cultural
23 organizations and on those in the creative class.
24 When we talk about what happened to the Public
25 Theater with funding being threatened and artistic

decisions are made to represent the president in a way that he or his supporters don't believe is flattering, what kind of chilling effect takes place amongst all of those who—who may be considering a production or a work that touches on the president or the current political climate. I'm interested in that because you obviously will hear from a lot of the folks behind you, but you also represent them.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah, I also just would like to mention first of all, that Julius Cesar is not a play that says overthrowing a tyrant is a great thing. I mean lots of bad stuff happens, as the Mayor has said, to all the people who were overthrown. So, it's a very complicated play. I'd also like to point out that Barack Obama look-alikes were cast as Julius Cesar numerous times or several times during his administration, but, you know, if—in that particular case, there were corporate sponsorships I believe that were withdrawn from the public. I think—I believe the Public Theater is here and maybe they could comment more on that, but it was controversy that—that, you know, those kinds of turmoil creates an atmosphere of fear in cultural organizations to touch on issues that are important

to touch on, and what we're saying is we believe that artistic decisions need to be made independent of--of that kind of external pressure to be healthy decisions.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, you mentioned immigration, which I know is important to Council Member Moya especially when you talked about his district, but I would argue--again, this is my personal opinion that immigrants in this country, people of color have been under assault and under attack by this administration in a million different ways. How do you think that is impacting cultural organizations run by people of color serving people of color, immigrant audiences? Obviously, I'm very proud that we in the Council created the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, the only funding stream that is specifically targeted towards organizations, cultural organizations, small cultural organizations that serve and--and produce work for immigrant audiences. But obviously, those communities that specifically are under assault, and you could argue that many communities are under assault right now, but none more so than immigrants and people of color. Talk

about that effect on—on organizations, cultural
organizations.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Well, I mean
so my experience has been—look, there are—I'm no—I—
I'm not here to comment on immigration policy or
anything like that, but that the sort of resiliency
and vibrancy of the cultural organizations in
immigrant communities becomes even more important in
situations where those are places where people can
come together in a safe space. You know, I visited
like dance groups within immigrant communities those
grassroots organizations many of which, by the way
are funded indirectly by Cultural Affairs through the
Arts Councils, not necessarily all getting direct
funding from us. But I think it actually—arts and
culture becomes even more important in those contexts
and I find a lot of resiliency and vibrancy in those
organizations.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, are we
seeing this level of activity rise? I mean where
we're seeing—are we seeing people in the cultural
community shrinking back and cowering or are we
seeing what I would hope is the reverse, which is
people actually becoming more activated fighting back

and not being afraid to produce the work that they want.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, I-look, I don't have statistics to back it up, but my anecdotal belief is that-that it isn't--New Yorkers are not backtracking that the embrace of diversity in cultural organizations is very high that that-I've seen that in relationship to diversity of staffs, boards, et cetera. The zoo, the Bronx Zoo just announced their first Latina Chairman of the Board yesterday. I think there's good things happening in all kinds of cultural organizations throughout the city, and I don't think there's any backing down on the basis of policy, federal policy. In fact, I-I do see the opposite.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And do you think that [coughs] any president who proposes to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities. I and the last corporation for public-Corporation for Public Broadcasting cares about the arts, understand the arts?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, I'm not-I don't make comments about-you know, any sort of

1 direct political candidacy or anything like that. I
2 support, and I'm very—we very strongly support the
3 idea that federal funding for arts and culture is—is
4 absolutely vital aspect of New York City's cultural
5 life, and we're going to fight for that. We are
6 fighting on the basis of the issue, not on the basis
7 of the candidate or the political—it's a political
8 position the issue. So, I take issue with that
9 issue. You know, I stood next to you and we
10 supported the National Endowment for the Arts. I
11 will do that again. This is not about political
12 candidates. I just wanted—that's as a commissioner
13 I'm here to represent the issue not the person.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely, and
16 as a Council Member I can say that anyone who
17 proposes to assault and destroy the arts is indeed
18 proposing to destroy the soul of the United States of
19 America. I want to recognize we've been joined by
20 Councilwoman Karen Koslowitz from Queens who has also
21 joined our committee in this term of office, and
22 because he came back into the room, I don't know if
23 you heard, I was thanking all of the staff and my
24 Chief of Staff Matt Wallace who has just returned
25 from paternity leave is back in the room. So, I want

to shout out his baby son Gabriel who is five weeks old, and his first public shout-out, Matt, the first of many we hope. Council Member Borelli.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Thank you very much. Just a quick question, Commissioner. What is the policy if groups funded by DCA or City Council through DCA if they are essentially part of the assault on free speech and—are discriminatory?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: You know, we believe in freedom of expression. I'm not sure exactly what the question is, but we don't get involved in artistic decisions one way or the other at cultural organizations, and as long as people are adhering to the laws, et cetera that we are—we stay clear of artistic decisions.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: So, in other words if—if you were determinative or there was a public discussion over one particular organization that received funding that was excluding people of a certain class, would that raise any red flags in your agency?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I think I'd, you know, I'd like to—you know, this would have to be handled on a case-by-case basis. If something was

brought to us that was illegal, of course, that would be of concern, and I'd talk to my lawyers and find out what action to take.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: In 2016, the-the Noble Maritime Collection, which is at Snug Harbor, and not-not the same board. It's a-I don't want to get the groups confused.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yep.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: They-they elected to invite and then uninvited an artist for a fundraiser they were having. The artists' work sell for \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000. It-by all accounts, it would have been a-a large windfall for a group that receives pittances compared to what we fund them.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Uh-hm.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: They didn't allow this artist because of his political affiliations. Is-is that-I guess in your view, is that sort of an assault on free speech?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: You know, I'd have to know the details. I don't know, they-if they're contractual arrangements or not. Again, something was an assault on free speech, if some law were broken, again I would talk to my lawyers and

find out what action to take. I don't know all the details. Of course, I know Noble quite well. I've been there many times.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, Council Member Borelli, and Tom, maybe you can talk also a little bit about some of the work that we're doing together because when we--when find fund the arts in the City of New York, we send a very clear message about our values, and our budgets serve our values and--and we value the arts, but also we'd like to think that we are the leader in this city in terms of culture and the arts for the country. Obviously we provide more funding for the arts than any other city in the United States of America. And--and again not a political question, but how do as a city through our funding and advocacy put pressure on the federal government and the Trump Administration to fund the arts to seek to destroy the arts as I would argue, I would argue they have been doing?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I mean so again some of the things that we've been doing, we--we express ourselves publicly in support of the public funding. Obviously we've don't this together, but I

think actually just sort of leading by example the idea that this administration in collaboration with the Council had had vibrant cultural budgets that, by the way, transcend administrations. There has been a gradual increase in funding from Giuliani to Bloomberg to de Blasio. So, you might say a conservative, a moderate and a progressive. In New York City, the values of our arts and culture have not changed. The Council has been steadfast in their support as has each of these mayors. So, I think that—that's an important thing to say in relationship to the federal government. I mean there was some-- [coughs]—there's been some back and forth about federal—about our budgets, our city budgets, et cetera with each of these administrations, but there's never been a thought by any of these mayors or City Councils to eliminate the cultural agency. I mean I just—the idea of even proposing to eliminate them. [coughs] I know it's my job also that I would be looking at that, but could you imagine if New York City proposed to eliminate the Department of Cultural Affairs, what would that say to the country, and what does it say to the country when we say steadfastly that we believe in arts and culture. We have a

partnership with our political establishment across--
across the aisle to support arts and culture. So, I
think part of it is just we're the next biggest after
the federal government. The federal government
overall is the biggest arts and culture public if you
include the Smithsonian and everything else, but
after that, there's no state, there's no city that
comes close to us. So, I think we have to lead by
example, and just say we believe in it, and that it's
a core value of New York City to support arts and
culture.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And how do we
particularly in this age of Trump make sure that the
undocumented among us are--are serviced by the arts,
are a part of the arts, are welcome when it comes to
culture in the arts, what are you and we doing as a
city to make sure that our values include supporting
all immigrants in--in our city?

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Well, I mean I
think there's two things, which--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing]
Yes, obviously

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: --really have
all been mentioned. One is, of course, you know, the

Cultural Immigrant Initiative, which has been the—a great addition by the Council funded all throughout the city, and the other is the IDNYC, and the IDNYC is a card that anybody can get as long as you prove—can prove that you live in New York City, and I think that that's been opening the doors for hundreds of thousands of people. The card itself had been, as I said well accepted by immigrant communities across New York City. So, I think again, that—that partnership and when—when I've gone around to other cities and talked about that, everybody has said that's an amazing success. No other card like this has been as successful in any other American city, and I think it's because of the folks back behind me, the arts and cultural community rallying around it, and making it a thing that, you know, you really should have if you love arts and culture, age, gender whatever. Immigration status aside, everybody wants to get it. A million people have it.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, my—my final questions unless any of my colleagues have questions for the Commissioner and then we're going to hear from some of these terrific organizations, which I thin will provide a lively discussion as well amongst

us all, but young people are, of course, impacted by this moment as well, and we always want to reach young people through the arts, you know, through arts and education, and through exposure to the visual and performing arts all the time, but this can be a scary time for a lot of people in this country, young people included and particularly if you think your family is being targeted by the president of the United States. How do you see this Trump moment impacting young people as it relates to the arts? I mean have you sensed fear amongst young people, and—and our cultural organizations reaching those young people and letting them know that they're safe and they're going to be okay, and part of the way that's going to happen is through expressing themselves through art and—and becoming empowered through this movement.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I mean so I've seen—I've witnessed the inclusion, you know, across lots of different barriers in arts education program at cultural organizations. I think it's also very important to say that arts education in the public school system has been well supported by the Council and the Mayor in the—in the last four years. I think

there are 340 more licensed arts teachers. I'm under oath so I'd like to say I think that's the number. It's over 300 more than there were four years ago. So, investing in those full-time licensed art education teachers in the--in the public school system has been important in integrating arts and culture. When we talk about our cultural institutions, we fund [coughs] you know, almost a thousand organizations. Sixty percent of those have arts education programs. The CIG alone has millions of visitors. I was just up at the--the Zoo. They have hundreds of thousands of New York City--I think 300,000 public school kids go to the zoo each year. That's inclusive. It--it opens the door to these cultural institutions at a young age, and I think that that's extremely important to continue all of that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much. Obviously all of that speaks to the importance of baselining our cultural funding as well because what would be a hearing with you and me if I didn't talk about baselining funding for cultural organizations, as another message to the president that we value the arts in the city of New York. So, unless my colleagues have any more questions for the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

32

Commissioner, I'm anxious to hear from some of our
arts groups and--and hearing what they're doing in
response to the Trump moment.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Okay, and I
just wanted to say that I--I serve on 38 boards as
part of my job, and I actually now have to run off to
a board meeting. So, I'd love to stay here, but I
actually have to go.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you,
Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Thank you so
much. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Now, we would
like to hear Katie Rubin from the Theater of the
Oppressed NYC, and Katie, are you testifying with
someone else?

KATIE RUBIN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. So, I
just see that note on your program. [background
comments] Oh, great. [background comments] Marie
Sander. Can we get that close? Alright and then is
it Debbie Officer (sic) from African Voices Magazine.
Would you like to join us on this panel, and
[background comments] Matthew Chavez. That's it.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

33

[background comments, pause] Yes, we're doing panels of four. So, there are two together and then another individual who is not with the Theater of the Oppressed. So, two together, and two solo, but all one community, right? Yes, you can sit there.

[background comments] We're going to go to a 3-minute clock for all of the members of the each panel going forward. Katie, why don't you two start us off.

KATIE RUBIN: [off mic] Thank you all.

MALE SPEAKER: Just push the button on this.

KATIE RUBIN: [off mic] There we go, yes. Thank you all for having us. My name is Katie Rubin from Theater of the Oppressed NYC, and I'm here with Amaray. So Amaray is going to talk a little bit more about a specific project that we did last year that was really focusing on toxic masculinity and challenging some of the things we're seeing from the president right now among young people, but I'll just say-I want to say a couple of things about what Theater of the Oppressed NYC is doing in this time. So, we work with communities facing discrimination to inspire transformative action through theater and

that has led us particularly in the last few years to do legislative theater, which Council Member Van Bramer has been a part of and championed, and something that we're working on right now is to—to grow Legislative Theater and creative advocacy as a toll for civic engagement, which we see as a really key need in the era of Trump both because many communities are not able to or vote or voting feels not useful at this moment. And so, our work is to bring together communities who are directly impacted by housing injustice, by homophobia, by poverty, by racism with legislators and policy makers to share the stories and actually creatively come up with policy together to share how policy is made and really expose the way that we need our Council members and our other city legislators and our government to be accountable to the people. So one thing that we did last year is publish a report on Legislative Theater, which we're now sharing around to convince folks of the power of art to impact policy and to engage people in democracy, and I also—and we registered—to the Commissioner's point, we registered as lobbyists, a lobbyist non-profit organization this year so, that we could really focus

on creative. And we've become a little passionate about the fact that arts organizations can do that, and should be able to—should know how to do that, and we thank the Lawyers Alliance for sharing that with us. And then another point I want to make about our current work to hold government accountable and be sustainable in this time when arts organizations are not sure of their future. Last year I'm not sure if— if you all know, but last year we purchased a space in Midtown. We spend 3-1/2 years holding the city, and a developer as JP accountable to a deal they made to have a 3,000 square foot space in Times Square be available for the theater. But the organization we purchased it in September for \$20,000, and we are now landlords sustainable. We have a space to rent out, and it's a big moment for us, and we've also made that space a sanctuary space so that all of our team knows how to protect our immigrant actors what we do and do not need to say if people come to our space, and we really feel like in the time of Trump and feeling like developers and business people have all the power, was really a coup for us to be able to hold—it took a long time to hold the developer accountable to it. It was an air rights deal that

they made with the city and—and also holding city government accountable and showing our whole community that city government does need to be accountable to deals they make that are supposed to benefit the people, and now our community feels like we have a space, a home. There's all kinds of activity happening there all the time. Do have 30 more seconds?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [off mic] Yes, you do. (sic)

KATIE RUBIN: Okay great. One more thing. I have so many things to say on this topic, but one more thing I want to say is in terms of funding, we are also recipients of the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. We work with immigrants in Queens and Astoria. We work with immigrants in Sunset Park, and I know that this was probably there's nothing to do about this, but something one of my staff said to me in preparation for today is that one thing that would help us particularly when NEA funding, which we also receive is, you know, unsure, but also some of our foundation funders are stretched thin because of everything that's going on, right? It's a tough time for funding. [bell] We're

still waiting for our Cultural Immigrant funding for this years, and generally, the way—how do we know that we are going to have the city funding that we've promised to do our work that we're already doing. I know that's a big issue, but it's something we talk about and we don't really know where to go with that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. Another reason that I love you, at the end of this testimony a pitch to speed up the funding that you've already been allocated. I love that. [laughter] So, thank you, Katie. Another reason why I'm a big supporter of Theater of the Oppressed--

KATIE RUBIN: [interposing] Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --NYC. We've been joined by Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo, the final member of the Committee on Cultural Affairs here. Do you want to have—do you want to speak next?

KATIE RUBIN: Yes. Amaray.

AMARAY SANTOS: Yes. Hello. My name is Amaray Santos. I am an actor from TNYC, and I would just like to talk to you briefly about what we do with the experiences in there. TNYC is a very magnificent organization born and raised here in New York City that targets school-school students such as

myself, and people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. In my experience TNYC it's a specific a troop that I've done last year targeted masculinity as you've heard earlier. The basic target of masculinity that we tried to portray to everyone, which we showed to not only adults, but also students and elderly and everyone and anyone who want to come to see was the image that you are supposed to portray since you are probably an age. The idea of your image is everything. That you are supposed to be this way, and that if you are not this way, it's wrong. What we also did was have our audience become actors as well. So, we didn't ask the audience but so many questions and they read them in a state of confusion and try to see if they are understanding of what is going on, and if they can in the society that they live in. Because of this it's much easier for them to come on stage and see if they could counteract what societal norms is doing. TNYC does this not only now, but has been doing this, and I believe that it's very important especially during now with Trump's reign. We all know and we all read Twitter how Trump reacts to people who are not for him. I don't need to tell you how Twitter is. I

also would like to say that as an actor at TNYC and not really being too knowledgeable of how everything works, it's refreshing and eye-opening to see how being able to do this without causing any uproar and violence and having good time feels, and the plugging in more funding in this part that companies like this should mass produced and mass spread not only in schools but anywhere else if--because anyone can become an actor, and I'm very grateful for that, and I did this in the--with 50 seconds left. Thank you.

[laughter]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah. Is that the first time you've ever testified before the City Council?

AMARAY SANTOS: Yes, this is my first time in City Hall, too.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Wow. Congratulations, and--and you didn't read, right? That was--

AMARAY SANTOS: All off my brain.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Wow.

KATIE RUBIN: But we're going to--we're doing to send--we're going to send you something. We're going to send you something.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No, I mean feel free to send us something, but that was one of the most impressive performances I've seen.

AMARAY SANTOS: Flattery will get you nowhere.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [laughter] So, thank you. That was terrific. I've seen Theater of the Oppressed perform many times and been part of the legislative events. They're terrific. It's a terrific organization, but thank you for your testimony today. [bell] [background comments] Debbie, would like to speak—speak next? A tough act to follow, but you can do it.

DEBBIE OFFICER: Hi. My name is Debbie Officer, and I'm Book Review Editor at African Voices Magazine, and I wrote something to present. I thought well, you know, I would just read it from, you know, I don't have your talent. So, I begin with a quote from Timothy Snyder author of Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the 20th Century. As they knew, Aristotle warned that inequality brought instability while Plato believed that demagogues exploited free speech to install themselves a tyrants. For more than 20 years African Voices Magazine has been the

sounding board for those who wouldn't be published or
have their photos, films or paintings viewed by
mainstreams artists. It has always been our
fundamental mission to give a platform to those who
would otherwise be silenced and even more so now. At
this period when there is so much uncertainty in our
society about funding for the arts, libraries and
education, we serve as a beacon for artists in the
African Diaspora and beyond. At a time when the
current resident in the White House seems hell bent
on dividing this beautiful country that I grew to
love as an immigrant girl, I know for sure that it
will be the dancers, musicians, writers, filmmakers,
photographers, painters, sculptors, and poets who
make sure we continue to rise. I now reflect on an
evening in a small Tuscan town several years ago when
I attended a fair with my oldest daughter. Someone
handed her a poster of Guernica. This was painted 81
years ago by Pablo Picasso as a tribute to the
freedom fighters during the Spanish Civil War. It
still stands as a symbol to me for—sorry, it still
stands—it still stands as a symbol to so many around
the world who will never bow to tyrannical regimes.
As inspiring as that moment was for me personally, I

think so many years later it's—it is imperative that arts organizations and individual artists continue to educate, advocate and use their work as a medium to motivate and inspire the public. As an immigrant, a writer and educator, a visual artist and a mother, I speak on behalf of African Voices Magazine today as an organization and as a voice in the resistance against censorship, defunding of the arts and tyrannical—and tyrannical and racially divisive government. In closing, I would like to dedicate this testimony to Elizabeth Catholic and Shirley Chisholm, two courageous women whose example should continue to inspire us all in the ongoing fight for equity and justice. And in the words of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, Solemn is the triumph of the people with the passage of their great victory. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That was terrific.

DEBBIE OFFICER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I definitely will use your line about the poets and the dancers and—and the writers.

DEBBIE OFFICER: Yes, and I actually—my daughter who is sitting behind me, my youngest, she was happy that I put dancers [bell] in. She's a ballerina. So, she wanted me to plug one for the dancers.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: How wonderful.

DEBBIE OFFICER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

DEBBIE OFFICER: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Matthew.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Hi. [coughs] Thanks for having me. I'm going to talk a little bit about a piece of work that I did as—I'm individual. I'm not part of any organization. I don't have any affiliation really of any kind. I'm just like a dude in the world. So, when I moved to New York in late 2015, one of my major goals was to help people to feel better about all the stuff that they feel bad about, and I soon realized that people feel good just by having a patient listener to talk to them, and so I started setting up a table with two chairs, and I have a sign that said 'Secret Keeper' and I kind of became New York's secret keeper for a time, and I listened to anyone that wanted to stop by, and this

is in various subway stations all over New York, and people would say things like, Oh, this is great. This is like therapy, and while I'm not a professional of any kind in that realm, people enjoyed listening to the subway therapist, and so, I leaned into it and bought a brown suit and a tie and— and I started setting up a pseudo fake office in subway platforms and especially in the—the transfer tunnel between the Sixth and Seventh Street and Avenues on 14th Street, and so, I did this for months in four-hour blocks. I tried to go out every week but, you know, like many artists in New York I was dog walking and bartending and hustling and trying to just make it. And, the length of our conversations actually made it very difficult to talk to more than ten people in a week or so. So, in the morning after the 2016 Presidential Election I wanted to reach a broader audience, and so on my way to my office in the subway I brought packets of sticky notes and I wrote on the wall behind me: Express Yourself. I don't know if people in the room or if the Council is familiar with this work, but at any given time from November 10th through December 16th there were tens of thousands of sticky notes on the walls of the subway

where people expressed themselves in a variety of different ways. And, you know, the response is pretty immediate and electric and thousands of notes were written on the first day, and then it continued on over time. You know, just in New York alone tens of thousands of people jumped at the opportunity to express themselves, and then I saw that project spread throughout the nation and in various places, and you can still it today. There's organizations in New York that have big sticky note walls and things like that. So, the goal of the project wasn't actually to amplify any messages or resistance, but it was to just benefit the people in my community. I wanted to be a conduit for the expression [coughs] of the people around me. Of course, my voice is failing right now, and what was great is that I helped t transform people's fears and uncertainties into something that was more positive, and it provided an opportunity for conversation and venue to have discourse about the injustices that we face, and how we can combat them. In short, you know, I would like to see more structures and support for individuals without any kind of organizational focus that can created the opportunity for individuals who

may be are in this area and need to go out and do
public work that's for the public.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. On
your last point absolutely we—we feel very strongly
supporting individual artists and creating more
funding streams for individual artists, but secondly
I want to thank you because obviously because I, too,
was well aware of the Sticky Note Resistance Project.
I went to see it, but I never knew the dude who
started it. So [background comments].

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: I saw myself like that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Super cool that
we got to meet you today, and—and is it still on 14th
Street or is still up there.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: So, I continue to go out
and set up my office on occasion like after
Charlottesville, the event that happened there. I
did a project where I invited people to write letters
on larger sticky notes with lines, and so, I—I do—I
still do Sticky Note projects, but it's no longer at
14th Street Union Square, and it would never have
been allowed to. To be honest, I don't think I would
have been able to do it there in the first place if
that was the first location. Because I was doing it

somewhere else where there weren't regular, you know, people walking by that were a part of the MTA, they didn't really stop it from happening before it started.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I mean obviously you know, it's spread all over the-the country, but you probably don't know all the stories. [coughs] In a subway stop in my district in Long Island City, Queens, our girl scout troop set up their own display, and-and then the MTA took it down the next day, which created a huge problem for the MTA--

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Right. [laughter]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --and, um, because no one messes with the Girl Scouts.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And, um, and-and they were forced to put it back up again, and then it grew and the girls scouts took your-your project and-and made it--

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: [interposing] It's great.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --made it larger.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: So, before I open it up to any of our colleagues, I just wanted to ask everyone on the panel how the presidency of Donald Trump has impacted your work, yourselves and what are you hearing from your communities about the Trump Administration and all of that negativity that you talked about on Twitter, all of what I would argue there's a lot of hatred and divisiveness aimed squarely at—at communities like the ones that I represent, right, incredibly diverse communities. What are you feeling? How are you feeling? How is your work impacted by Trump, and—and what are you doing to resist?

DEBBIE OFFICER: Well, so I—I think that when we look at just—look at it as a Trump issue I think it's what we should look at is how—what fear does, you know, and so I think for us as a magazine at African Voices our concern, of course, is funding and, of course, reaching as many people as we can, which we are doing now through the Internet and so forth, and I think there is a real fear that the arts really are under attack, and they are. I mean, you know, the first thing to—I mean that everyone became aware of was the NEA cuts, the threat to cuts. You

1 know, the funds, and I think that it's—it's real for
2 people. I think for young kids it's scary. I mean
3 because they're made aware that library, you know,
4 funding may be cut and things like that. I remember
5 when RIF was around. I don't know if you remember
6 that program--

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

9 DEBBIE OFFICER: --and kids looked
10 forward to like going to the library every what,
11 three or six weeks or something, and they would get a
12 free book, and, you know, that was cut under Bush,
13 and then now other things are being cut. I think
14 there—there is real fear in communities, and I mean
15 it is in the arts because a lot of after school
16 programs are affected. You know, we're here in the
17 city where everything is about taking a test and, you
18 know, doing well in just the academics and so for
19 families it's a concern because, you know, arts and
20 that is something that we took a part of in African
21 Voices, and now that's, you know, one of our concerns
22 is to keep that program going.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely.

24 AMARAY SANTOS: As a young person here, I
25 would like to say that it is kind of on the scary

side and that actually it's also on the useful side because we look at Trump and we look at everything he does, any type of I want to say opposition to him, and how he takes it, and then it affects the art community because we can say oppositions any time that we feel like it, the First Amendment. As me personally affect—as affected by Trump and what he stands for, on a personal note I don't agree with a lot of things he says, or basically anything he says, but I still look at it as lesson, a lesson to which what we have done as a country as a unit together, what we have done, and then if this is what we've done, what can we do to remedy it or make it better? Because if we sit around do nothing, nothing is going to change. A great example of that is the new movement that is happening because of gun controls, and it just makes me very happy for my generation, you know, doing some stuff.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Have you ever thought of running for office? [laughter]

AMARAY SANTOS: See, you're not the first person to like say that to me, and I will tell the same person if I'm offered running for office, I say, hey, why not?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [laughter]

Well, let me just say it's rarely offered to you.

[laughter] Generally, you've got to fight to sit at the table, but we can hope in your case you'll just be offered the opportunity to sit here, but we every faith and confidence that should you want to do anything, you'll be able to achieve it based on what I've seen here today. Matthew, did you have something more to add?

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Sure. Since I was doing the work a significant amount of time before the election every happened, I talked to a myriad of individuals about how they were feeling, about the election, the upcoming election and all of these different things, and [coughs] I really [coughs] astonished by how after the election it wasn't so much that it was him specifically that was elected. It was just that something happened in New York and— and around the nation that destabilized a lot of people's trust in each other, and I had already set up a structure that was there to support dialogue with people of all different shapes and sizes within a specific setting where many people are walking by. So, you know, a lot of elements put together plus me

introducing writing into the project and moment
created for an explosion of expression, and a lot of
people felt like they needed to channel it somewhere,
and Subway Therapy at the time happened to be that
action that people could really grab onto. It was
colorful, it was—it was expressive, and in many ways
I think there was a lot of strength because I
personally was non-partisan, I wasn't pushing people
to say any specific thing, and so tens of thousands
of people instead of really focusing on the election
focused on connection and love and being together,
and creating something that made people be able to
soften, and then choose to harden and to fight
whatever foe they felt like they needed to at to--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. Do you
charge?

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: No, I actually have a
really [coughs] strict policy where I don't accept
even tips 'cause it, you know, I talk to all sorts of
different people in different economic classes. So,
if somebody in a suit hands me a \$20 bill, and
someone who's homeless that's walking up behind him
sees that, he might not—he or she—

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing]
Right.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: --might not sit down
with me, and I think that's not something I want to
do.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. Because a
subway therapist after the election of Donald Trump
in New York City if he or she charged would be a
millionaire right now.

DEBBIE OFFICER: Yeah. [laughter]

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: If I had a tip jar
[coughs] I might--might be doing pretty well.
[laughter/coughing]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: My colleagues
and now Council Member Cumbo and I don't know if
anyone else has any questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you. Thank
you all for your testimony. I just have one question
for you, Matthew. As an artist in this particular
climate and now, you mentioned a lot about the
hustle.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: So, what are some
of the organizations or how do you make a living

basically doing this type of work in this day and
age? Are there organizations, foundations [coughing]
benefactors, fundraisers or is it mainly in the
hustle and the grind that affords you the
opportunity to do your work?

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: For sure the hustle and
the grind afford me the opportunity because in that
way I am just absolutely fearless. There's no—I—I
have no fear like to come back earlier, I have no
fear because Trump is president that I will not
continue to do my work because I'm going to do it
regardless of—of organizational structure or if, you
know, I'm not—I'm not attached to an organization
that might not have funding any more.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: So, I just don't—like
that's not something I really think about. In terms
of money, you know, the project was so viral and
people were so interested in it that I did get a book
deal, which I—I got some money from, and so it's nice
as an artist to be doing work, and then get
recognized and then have some inflow of money, but to
be honest, I haven't really applied to anything that
I could probably get lots of, you know, I could

probably get money from different organizations within New York, but also I know that I want to support--in the future I'm writing a second book for--for young students in the middle school to be inspired to do work that's public and participatory that invited the community to congeal, and in that way if I am--am a supportive artist by all these different organizations, I don't know that I can passionately say you can do it by yourself with no one help you because I really do believe that--that if tons of individuals all felt like they could make a difference by doing something very specific--

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: --more people would do so, but there's a lot of focus on getting money and how to live and things like that that actually prevents people from going out and doing any kind of work.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Thank you/

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I had vision. I could see--I'm seeing like the Gates Project, and I'm seeing your Sticky Project, and I'm seeing somehow

them being able to come to life through a project
like the Gates--

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Sure

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: --a long time ago.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Yeah. I mean I would
love to collaborate. I'm interested in having
conversations about how to inspire young people to
have a voice that is as powerful and interesting as
yours. [laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Are you registered
with Department of Cultural Affairs with their
Percent for Art Program.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: No.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You should
definitely do that.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Than you.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, we'll
definitely stay in touch and find out how we can
connect you with DCLA and maybe the Arts Councils as
well who are somewhere in the room, some of the
artists councils.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Yeah, I didn't—I didn't write it on my statement, but if people want to contact me, they can email subwaytherapy@gmail.com or go to subwaytherapy.com or at subwaytherapy@instagram. All that fun stuff.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Very cool.

MATTHEW CHAVEZ: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much to this panel. Now, we have a group from the Vibe Theater Experience. Why don't we bring all of you up together to hear from the Vibe [background comments, pause] and you'll decide how you want to--

TOYA LILLARD: Sure. Good morning to you all. We have three short minutes and two prepared statements. So, I'll go very quickly. I'm Toya Lillard, Executive Director of the Vibe Theater Experience. If you've noticed--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing] You could—you could--technically, you have three minutes each. So, don't rush that--

TOYA LILLARD: Oh, awesome.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right?

TOYA LILLARD: Great. I am a woman of color running an organization that serves and young

women of color. I want us to all take a moment and not that. [laughs] And also I would actually ask you to look at a new study that came out by the Yancy Group that was funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, really studying organizations that are run by people of color. The conclusion was that cultural organizations run by people of color particularly here in New York City are under-resourced and underfunded, and we do a lot. I'm about to talk about it. So, I just wanted to start off with that message. Good morning. We are here from Vibe Theater Experience, a 15-year-old non-profit arts organization that works to empower underserved teen-aged girls to write and perform original theater, video and music about the real life issues that they face daily. Through writing and performance, our young women amplify their voices, speak truth to power and advocate for change in the way that young women of color are treated in schools, on the street and often in their own homes. Vibe uses the arts to give young women of color the tools to navigate a variety of barriers and challenges. Vibe recognizes our unique role as an arts organization that engages girls and young women of

color around the political, economic and the social issues that affect them most. We contribute to and advocate for a shift in the way that girls and women of color are perceived, and a stop to the way that they are shut out of schools, institutions and given few leadership opportunities. The arts and supports for organizations like—in support for organizations like ours is crucial in order to help fuel and support an artistic response from our youth to this current political climate here in Trump's America. As recent studies have highlighted, girls and young women of color are currently over-policed, under-protected and face more threats to their physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing than ever. They have a lot to say about what—what it's like to live in Trump's America, and we should all listen. I'm going to skip. Organizations like ours provide a sanctuary and a platform for the girls and young women who are most vulnerable. Our girls the stage like they need air because it is the only place where they can get, as we say, their nugget of free. Please support those who create intentional space for girls at the margin. [bell] Support the arts that

resists this notion of Trump's America. Trust and
believe girls and let them lead the way. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Amen. Yeah.

[laughter] are others going to testify on the panel
as well?

TOYA LILLARD: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.

ISA TUYUNG: Hi. My name is Isa Tuyung
(sp?) and I am testifying as participant of Popular
Experience. Do you want true democracy? Do you
truly want outspoken people who value their own
perspectives and are socially active representatives
within our massive constituency groups? If you
answered yes, then you want arts programs around like
the ones I've been exposed to. Vibe Theater
experience fostered a connection between myself and
adults that I hadn't had prior as a youth. When I
joined Vibe, I was treated as a contributor, as an
educator of my unique perspective, and as an equal.
How many of us grow up and try to undo the emotional
and mental damage that we've experienced as youth?
Damage that we weren't even conscious of accumulating
due to the social structure that leaves teens on room
to express atrocities that have been committed

against them both knowingly and unknowingly by well meaning parents, teachers, mentor, neighbors, friends and peers. Programs like Vibe have called me to speak on my struggles. Vibe has called me to speak on my opinions, and turn myself inside out for the world to see. With each Vibe program that I have attended, with each session I've experienced in every encounter with younger Vibe girls, I've become more and more eager to share with society. I've become more inspired to, and this theater making company calls me to. Vibe has worked with me and young women just like me to shed light on perspectives we hold. Vibe proves platforms for us to display our contributions to society, and a space that respect our individuality. What a real way to foster authentic contributions—contributors in our society. Vibe helps us to hold our individuality as we shine our inner lights in every situation we enter, and that is the truth.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

IAN FIELDS STEWART: Good morning. My name is Ian Fields Stewart. I use they, them, their pronouns, and I am a black, Queer, Transgender storyteller working at the intersection of theater

and activism. With Vibe Theater experience, I work as a program manager and teaching artist where I've had the pleasure of working with every single person sitting here in many different capacities, and I wanted to speak today of not only the importance of centering women of color in the work that we do, but also the importance of centering and remembering those trans and gender non-conforming youth who are also part of this particular movement. Vibe has been instrumental in my own development as an artist, an individual and as a speaker not only in its belief in my ability to lead, but also in its assurance that I am valid, that I am needed, and I am necessary to the process of creation and development. The theater is a space where we can imagine and project the future as we wish to see it. Art itself is that as well. When we tell stories to each other, the way that—the way that I—the way that I in my activism that I see theater and activism and storytelling specifically is I see racism, sexism, transphobia, classism, all the many isms that you can think of. As a series of stories that we have verified throughout history to the detriment and oppression of other. I see Vibe Theater experience and many other organizations where

I tell stories as the way for us to tell new stories that insert, re-envision, and disrupt the common narratives that we have formed around the bodies of marginalized people. I think that cutting funding for such organizations, and cutting—cutting for anyone who would seek to tell stories that empower and uplift and include rather than tweets that may exclude are—is an unwise decision, and that's all I have to say.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

AMEYA BIRADAVOLU: Hi. I'm the Development and Communications Associate at Vibe, and—oh, Ameya, and I mean I'm—I think I'm going to keep it very short. I think funding is—I mean funding is essential to our operations and we're all run by women of color, and I think understanding that—so, I worked in a lot of different non-profits, been involved in different non-profits through growing up, and I think it's important to highlight the fact that our work is not just sort of serving participants, but actually making meaningful change with each person we work with, and part of that I think is representative in our leadership structure. And when we talk about funding our organization

really relies on funding to just keep us going, and really make sure that we keep doing the work we're doing and providing sort of not just, you know, a program in high school, but also sort of long-term sustainability with the people we work with so that they can also enter into positions of leadership. I think that's something that we also should talk about that like the work we're doing is not just for each individual and their healing process, but also systemic in actually changing—concreate change. And when we talk about the Trump Administration, I think looking at our organization and the fact that we kind of need funding to keep going and that that funding will create at least in the work we're doing, you know, new leaders and new leadership, and it's not just—you know, I worked with other non-profits who sort of skewed statistics or skewed demographics to sort of present themselves in a certain way, and that's not the work we do. The work we do is actually making sure that each person we work with has a chance to create change. And for example, we've had sort of students that we worked with, you know, perform in front of their schools and change policies at their schools regarding head wraps,

regarding different things that were discriminatory,
but also maybe not recognized by the school
administration as discriminatory. So, like thinking
more broadly about sort of a systemic change that we
do, and the importance that our funding does to even
just hire staff, and really keep us like on the
ground moving.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

First of all, [coughs] listening to this panel and
the panel before, I can't help but keep thinking in
my head God I love chairing this committee. I love
chairing the Committee on Cultural Affairs and
Libraries. I love this community, and if you had
never heard of Vibe until the four of you came up
onto this panel, I'm sure that every single person
leaving here thinks, Wow, that is an amazing
organization. Those are some fierce women, and
[laughter] this is an amazing place that's doing
amazing work, and I'll just stipulate that whatever
funding you're getting is not enough.

TOYA LILLARD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And you need and
deserve more because obviously the [bell] impact that
you have—I think that means I'm cut off, right.

TOYA LILLARD: No, that was the last of
Ameya's time.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I don't know.
The Chair gets to talk as long as they want, but
seriously, it's just amazing and—and really
empowering to hear the voices and obviously as a
member of the LGBTQ community, I'm always
particularly thrilled to—to see the trans community
included in a meaningful way, you know, present,
visible, vocal and—and so thank you all for that as
well. It means a lot to me personally and I know to
every single person here, but you reinvigorate me
when I hear your stories because I think all of use—I
wont say all of us—a lot of us in this moment of
Trump are, you know, constantly searching for that—
that nugget, right, that sort of allows you to be
hopeful.

TOYA LILLARD: Uh-hm.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That—that—that—
promises a better tomorrow than today is, and—and I
said this at an opening of the Second Stage Theater,
right, that it's really art and culture performance,
the spoken word, whatever that actually sustains us,
and is going to sustain us through this period, and

allow us to get to that better day, which is not just the transition for the Trump Administration, one might hope, but to actually to more systemic change right this beyond just removing the president. So, with that I'll ask if any of the other panelists have a question?

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: [off mic].

TOYA LILLARD: Thank you so much. We want to thank Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo for believing in us from the start.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: Have you all had an opportunity and just let me—I echo the sentiments of all my colleagues. This is so wonderful to see you here today. Have you had an opportunity to do work specifically around quote/unquote Trump America in the sense of to do theater, to do programs, and have you found that it has been difficult to get funding to do that type of work? And also, with some organizations outside of the arts, I would say that some organizations because of the threat to their funding, individual contributions have—have gone up. Have you found that individual contributions have gone up as people have started to say let's take funding and support of the arts into our own hands.

Our organizations, foundations beginning to conserve supporting the arts because of the Trump America, or what are you experiencing and what type of work have you all done around this?

TOYA LILLARD: Quite frankly, our foundation support has gone up, and our biggest supporters support the way that we're moving forward, which transparency investing in young women of color in terms of being the next leaders of this organization and in the world. Individual giving has gone up. We've always struggled with individual giving because or community of supporters is people of color who tend to have less cash right. Individual giving has gone up. We ran a very successful campaign where we raised \$10,000 and it was mostly through Facebook. The one area where we continue to struggle, which is probably understandable is corporate support. So, that has not improved with Trump's America, but we are encouraged that foundations understand what we're up against. We—we can tell the truth. We can be who we are, bring our authentic selves to the table, and really advocate for change in a way that helps us grow as an organization. So, yeah, it's—it's a mixed

bag, but I feel very good moving forward about how we're growing the organization and the support that we've been able to garner. We just got New York Women's Foundation support, which is super important for the work that we do, and it's all because we've been doing these shows that have been responding very specifically and the girls write every word uncensored, and we do them in schools, in communities, on stage at places where people pay to go see theater, real professionally mounted productions, and I think people have responded positively.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: And just one final question: What's next for your organization? What is the next stage? What is the--what is the vision, the long-term and that could be--that could go on and on, but just kind of like we ideally would like to--?

TOYA LILLARD: Ideally I would like to talk myself out of a job. I would like to see these young people run the organization. Seriously, it's time, you know, time is up on people who are of a certain age running organizations on behalf of young people with no connection to young people. It's time to give it up, and I want to work hard in the next

couple of years to raise a lot of money to turn this organization over to the young people who will take it to the next level, which includes intentional programming for gender non-conforming youth of color, which includes being in more schools, which includes really doing more advocacy work and changing the way that young women of color are seen.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I did that very thing. I created my organization, ran for office, and turned it over to them, but that's about the--

TOYA LILLARD: [interposing] Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: --only way you'll be able to turn it over. So, consider it.

AMEYA BIRADAVOLU: Yeah. [laughter] Thank you. I just wanted to add like we're part time, and we're, you know, we're trying to create sustainability, and there's only so much you can really do as a part-time employee, and so, really jumping off of what Toya said, our statistics, our work is there, so we can get funding from foundations because we're honest and we actually have like proof to back up our honesty, but yeah, corporate support is hard, and even individual donors it might go up, but I think right now people are trying to sort of--

are freaking out about foundation and government support and really trying to move into individuals and corporations, and that's something we're doing, but obviously that's a very like hard transition, and someone mentioned earlier like NEA funding is kind of one of those stamps that helps you move into other fields, and so I think when we're talking about funding sort of in corporation and individual giving that's sort of the way we're transition, but also when we're talking about goals for our organization, we're really trying to think about what ways can we spend the money to actually create like capacity and sustainability. And so part of it is just salaries. Like we're not—we're really doing the work without necessarily doing it for money, and that's very, very hard when come from communities that don't have wealth. And I think that's really important to say because, you know, and connections, too. You're talking about like if you don't have wealth or connections, how can you really take a job that underpays you especially for the qualifications that you have.

TOYA LILLARD: That's exactly what I did.

[laughter]

IAN FIELDS STEWART: Someone—someone mentioned the hustle earlier, and I think that this organization is—is an embodiment of that of like yes we—yes we have so many opportunities and—and wonderful things are happening, but we are also individuals who have not only, you know, Vibe to think about, but also like our—our lives outside of that, our lives as performers, our lives as activists, our lives as just people who are trying to exist in New York City and pay the rent that's due every month, you know, but just to add to what I was saying—they were saying.

AMEYA BIRADAVOLU: Programming.

IAN FIELDS STEWART: Oh, and for programming as far as the specific programming that we are heading into, as Toya said we are—we are in communications to develop more staff trainings for—around culturally specific—culturally specific work that is centered around trans and gender non-conforming youth, but also developing programming for that community as well. We have an opportunity to—that we won't speak to quite yet because nothing has been signed, but an opportunity that will helpfully take work that was produced last year and bring it

the place that the—that the work was based off of,
and hopefully that will be an opportunity for the
young women to travel outside of New York for the
first time for many of them. There—there's so—
there's so many exciting things happening as long as—
as well as our continued programing of creating
theater and work that is centered around the issues
that affect these young women in a uncensored space.

TOYA LILLARD: And all with one full-time
staff member. So, we again want your support more
than ever.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Very
inspiring. You have made the most of your 12 minutes
here. Thank you.

TOYA LILLARD: Thank you. [laughs]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
much to this panel. Our next panel--

IAN FIELDS STEWART: [interposing] Thank
you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Karen
Atlas from Arts and Democracy and NOCD; Simi Linton,
I believe from Disability Arts NYC; Susan Hapgood,
ISCP; and Abou Farman from Art Space Sanctuary. Are
all four of you with us? I think so. [background

comments, pause] Are we ready? Who would like to go
first? Yep, you're up.

MALE SPEAKER: Push the button on there.

SIMI LINTON: Push the button.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There you go.

SIMI LINTON: Okay. Good morning and
thank you for this opportunity. My name is Simi
Linton. I am one of the co-directors of the
Disability Arts NYC Task Force known as DANT. We
are an activist and policy shaping organization
committed to fostering disability artistry in New
York City. Our testimony outlines ways to consider
the roles of disabled artists and disability artistry
in any endeavors emanating from this convening. I've
housed that in six points: Disabled artists have
articulated through our work resistance both to the
dominant cultures' definition of our lives and
resistance to our social positioning. Therefore, we
are adept at deploying art to both disrupt and upend.

Number 2: Further, we have articulated
how metaphors and imagery of disability are used to
taint and demean people. These are useful
perspectives to share with art world keen on
resistance.

Number 3: Disabled artists share with many other artists an acute awareness of the use of art as resistance to combat the virulent forms of racism and misogyny that have particular currency in this moment. However, we bring a unique perspective to resistance to other underlying ideologies, which have been given new errings of late such eugenics, utilitarianism and notions of worthiness that affect us all.

Number 4: Disabled artists are marginalized in the arts world and are also marginalized in conversations about diversity and underrepresentation. We are, therefore, concerned that coalitions built to develop artistic response to the political situation will not include disability arts expertise.

Number 5: The disability community is looking for allies from outside our constituency who can support our resistance to particular threats to disabled people's safety and rights, in particular the cut-cutback in Medicare and the demonstrations outside of Mitch McConnell's Office as-as witness to that, and also the recent deliberations over the bill HR 620, which passed in the House and is on the way

to the Senate, which will erode key elements of the
Americans with Disabilities Act. Therefore,
jeopardizing our rights and our freedoms. [bell]
There's more and I will leave this testimony.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You have one
more point, right?

SIMI LINTON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You're free to
say your sixth point.

SIMI LINTON: Okay. As in the example
above at Mr. McConnell's Office where disabled people
resisted arrest and were dragged out of their
wheelchairs by police, or the 1990 Capital steps
crawl where disabled people dragged themselves up the
80 marble steps of the capital to demonstrate for our
rights. We have honed a form of art as resistance
that can lend flavor and meaning to broader
endeavors. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Boy, am I really
glad I—I asked you to finish that. That was very
powerful. Thank you.

SIMI LINTON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Who wants to go
next? You go? Yep.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

77

SUSAN HAPGOOD: Thank you, Committee
Chair and Council Member Van Bramer and Council
Members Borelli, Cumbo, Koslowitz and Moya for the
opportunity to testify today. I am Susan Hapgood
Executive Director of the International Studio and
Curatorial Program. Over the past year it has been
extremely empowering to present art that expresses
refusal to comply with and accept the views of the
current presidential administration. Art's ability
to communicate, to inspire people to think
differently contributes to bringing about change.
The International Studio and Curatorial Program in
Brooklyn is the fourth largest arts residency program
in the world. We are situated in a neighborhood of
heavy industry intermixed with residential blocks.
Inside ISCP, as our non-profit organization is better
known, we are surrounded by artists and curators from
all over the world including New York City. We are a
highly diverse bastion of resistance individually and
communally. Throughout the year we organize
exhibitions and public lectures bringing together a
range of viewpoints for a diverse public. Rather
than speaking in the abstract, though, I want to
offer three examples from our recent programs where

art is used to catalyze resistance. The first example is a public performance in early 2017 by an alumna who is an Iranian artist name Gazelle who performed about coming into the United States from Iran. He long planned art exhibition at ISCP coincided perfectly and not in any way planned with Trumps travel ban prohibiting visitors from six largely Muslim countries. She arrived a few days after the unconstitutional ban was first lifted seemingly miraculously at that time for us and performed a riveting work about horrible personal experiences with our country's immigration officers. Gazelle's art made the inhumane ripple effects of the president's xenophobic actions crystal clear and immediate. Storytelling essential to my sense—second example, too. We are working with the Mexican born New York based artist Pablo Helguera on a social practice project happening at Los Sures a housing advocacy organization in Williamsburg. Helguera invited DREAMers, immigrants who came to this country illegally as minors to come to workshops to tell stories to each other and to the public. Here, art literally gives a voice to immigrants to tell the stories that nobody has heard, and that they haven't

had the chance to tell. Resistance to Trump's revocation of DACA is central to the work articulated by immigrants who were promised a pathway to citizenship that is now severely threatened. Here again are—is a bridge from the personal to the political, and next week Dutch artist and ISCP Aluma Jennifer Tee has been invited back for a solo exhibition. At the opening on Tuesday night next week the artist will stage live readings in six languages on the subject of resistance that are adapted from—were taken from books dating from 1850 to the present, and selected in collaboration with the British poet Jane Looie. The exhibition responds to current political upheaval in Europe, the U.S. and beyond—[bell] a few seconds, and aims to bring about personal and social change through positions or resistance. We are proud as an arts institution to organize international programming that fosters communal, humanitarian and political awareness, dialogue, action and change during this extremely challenging time. In particular, we take issue with restrictive immigration policies, and we celebrate the city's Cultural Immigrant Initiative. All of ISCP's public programming is supported by

funding from City Council District 34 and the
Department of Cultural Affairs, and we could not do
our important work without your support and
encouragement and we thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very,
and as I said before, the Cultural Immigrant
Initiative is-is one that I created with the former
Speaker, and something I am so incredibly proud of,
and when folks come before this committee in various
ways and talk about it, and demonstrate how it's
helped, it makes me feel really good like I've done
something well here in the City Council. So, thank
you. Karen, do you want to go next?

Well, you knew I was going to say good
things about the Cultural Immigrant Initiative right.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

CARON ATLAS: I'm Caron Atlas. I direct
Arts and Democracy and our mission is to engage the
power of arts and culture to further participation in
social justice, and so we are involved in many
resistance activities. It's-art does many things.
Just a few days after the election, we had our
Cultural Organizing Workshop, and I think that what
art did there was it just-we were paralyzed. People

were paralyze and in despair, and it revived our
spirits and gave us strength for the fight ahead. A
year later the workshop was very different. We were
strategizing. We were building power and we were
thinking about ways to direct art strategically.
It's really important in our work that we collaborate
with activists in our neighborhoods and across the
city and across the country. In our neighborhood we
are play playing a leadership role in Get Organized
Brooklyn, which is led by Council Member Brad Lander,
and we were co-sponsor of a civic participation
festival. We're also with support from the Cultural
Immigrant Initiative doing programs in the
Bangladeshi community of Kensington, and the first
thing we did right after the election was to have a
get-know your neighbor dinner, and we felt like it
was important for immigrants in that community to get
to know their neighbors—their neighbors who were all
the different folks that live in that neighborhood so
they can have each other's backs and be resources for
each other and we continue to use arts and culture to
support immigrant rights. Citywide I also direct
naturally occurring cultural districts New York and
we had a learning exchange where we invited

immigration activists to really talk with us about how arts and culture could support activism related to immigration and Arts Based Sanctuary--and you'll hear more from them soon--was part of it and they're putting forward a call for the Department of Cultural Affairs Department of Cultural Affairs to support a sanctuary summit in both arts and democracy and OCD support that call. Also, we work nationally, and it's very important we think now to reach out to progressives in other states, and to support each other and our work, and so in particular in the U.S. South, we've been working with our colleagues there and inviting them to New York and bringing New Yorkers to their states to work. We also are a member of a nation network called Magnet, which is fighting around media justice and specifically not neutrality. So, the last thing I just want to kind of emphasize is that for those of us who are in this for the long haul, we have to remember that we're fight--what we're fighting for and not just what we're fighting against. It can be exhausting to just be reacting, and we need to be movement building, and we need to remember that these fights started long before the election that we need to keep fighting to

undo racism, [bell] and we need to keep fighting to build the leadership of the people in the communities most impacted, and I'll leave—I'll end with one last thing. I think you can see today and hear from people what amazing work is happening in the cultural community related to civic participation, and I think the city should formalize some structures to really include arts and culture as part of civic participation efforts. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you and— and again, I—I know that not everyone shares the same reaction to the election, or had the same initial experience, but you telling the story of that first convening after the election, and it being a very different experience. One was really about sort of picking people up off the floor, and—and reminded me of the town hall that I had in Queens, our version of Brad's thing we call Queens Values and get over a thousand people come to a town hall a week or two after the election, and as I was talking at the microphone, I could look out over a thousand people, and I could see a lot of people crying. And then I had so many people after that tell me that that convening hearing other people speak sharing

thoughts, ideas was the beginning of their recovery.
But before they had actually had that moment of
fellowship, there was no hope, and—and I think your
experience as well, art and fellowship is the way
that folks have been able to transition to now really
fighting incredibly hard. Next.

MALE SPEAKER: Thank you. So this, I'm
going to be reading this [coughs] on behalf of a
couple of—a few organizations which include Modern
Arts Based Century, and also NOCD New York, No Longer
Empty, Dance NYC, Judson Arts, Dreaming Art
Playground, Some Belong to Net (sic) Arts and
Democracy Center for Art and Activism Fourth Arts
Block, and Downtown Arts and the Point. And as you
mentioned today and other have, too, immigrants in
general and specifically community members with
precarious status have been a direct target of
attacks by the federal administration and ICE, has
worked really hard to sew fear in our communities,
arresting—detaining people without waring and with
impunity. And as we've seen in recent cases, people
who speak out, cultural organizers and activists get
targeted as well, and we feel strongly then that the
city's cultural institutions can be an important

voice in the struggle to keep these communities safe,
and aside from providing important cultural
resources, museums and libraries can be sites for
building much needed solidarity. Arts based
sanctuary along with the new Sanctuary Coalition and
other groups have been organizing institutional
trainings to provide guidance and strategies on how
to manage the situation, how to be prepared and
committed and how to organize safe spaces, and that
our model had been very successful in raising
awareness, changing policies and putting into place
practical measures. So, we invite the Department of
Cultural Affairs to consider organizing a Century
Summit for all Cultural organizations and libraries
to discuss these matters with the specific request to
provide institutional training to the attending
organizations, and (b) to provide information on what
art and cultural sanctuary spaces could do and how
they might declare themselves sanctuary-sanctuary
along the guidelines provided by arts based
sanctuary, and there's a list of guidelines, which I
won't go into, but their list—they're on the—on the
sheet that's been passed out. So, and we're all

ready and committed to collaborate with the DCA and
other city offices to make this happen. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you and
obviously—I don't know if DCLA is still in the room
but we'll make sure they're aware of your—your
testimony as well. Thank you all for being here and
for your testimony and for sharing your stories with
us. I want to call up the next panel. Patricia
Parker from Arts for Arts; Charlotte Cohen, from the
Brooklyn Arts Council; and Branka Duknic from the
Queens Historical Society, Assetou Sy [background
comments] Malian Cultural Center. You think I've got
everyone there. We should sort of do this as a team
I think right here. [background comments, pause]
Okay, thank you very much, and we're going to be a
little tighter on time going forward because we have
another hearing coming in at 1:00 and so [background
comments] if I could just ask everyone to be as
concise as possible. You've waited for a long time,
and I want to thank you for that, and know that you
have our undivided attention for the duration of the
hearing and I want to thank Council Member Borelli
for—for sticking with us and hearing from so many

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

87

folks. Who would like to begin? We can start on my
right, your left.

ASSETOU SY: [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Is it on, the
red light? Just push the little button there.

ASSETOU SY: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There you go.

ASSETOU SY: My name Assetou Sy, and I'm
the President of the Malian Cultural Center. I'd
like to read my statement.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sure, of course.

ASSETOU SY: Okay, okay. Malian Cultural
Center and usually we have a—I—I have several other
Educative Director. We are 501-a 501(c)(3)
organization devoted to issue that faith women and
children through the medium of the Malian Cultural
Center. We provide program for audience in New York
City to the West African artists and cultural
competency. Once becoming acquainted, much of the
developed cultural attrition that exists in this
city. We administer after school programs for
elementary and middle school students. We hold
indoor and outdoor performance events to introduce
and share Malian and West African culture attrition,

Black elder public forum and events. This event exists as in giving voice and super (sic) to many social issues including female genital mutilation. In today's environment cultural-culture and especially African and it is Diaspora culture are more important than ever. The entire culture landscape of the American enterprises has been challenged and devalued. The modern day incorporation of African divide-development culture-okay-as significant and valued kind of and should not have its importance diminished. This has already been taking to be recognized-recognized. I will articulate a few of the broad strokes of culture and written to African divided culture contributions-contributions and importance. Culture is the treasury of knowledge, which is essential for physical and intellectual in the stance of human being. Culture preserves knowledge and health. Its transmission from generation to generation through languages. The preservation and accumulation of knowledge is defined [bell] situation. It also defines what we eat, drink, wear, when we laugh, weep, sleep, love, what work we do. Whatever we got we work cheap. What

knowledge we realize happens, what poetry we receive—we recite—we recite. [background comments] I have.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Your time has expired. How much more do you have?

ASSETOU SY: Just one read.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.

ASSETOU SY: Okay, cultural defines attitude, values and groups our measure of goodness and desirability of different true culture lessons. WE are socialites on those—those values. Culture decides our career choice and makes it imitation on our choice. Some may define—others may find other outlets. Culture provides behavior confidence. It directs and defines individual behavior. It provides personality. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

ASSETOU SY: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We'll 1 just go right down the line then.

PATRICIA PARKER: Hi. I'm Patricia Parker. I'm the Founder and Director of Arts for Art, I did that. I started about 23 years ago. I present mostly avant-garde jazz, but in all the—in all the disciplines we define it as not only the

music, but the dance, the poetry, the visual arts.

It's built around—the idea of avant jazz or free jazz or whatever you want to call it because no one likes any names in this music that I present, but it's mostly our African-American. We've struggled with this because people prefer it if it's all African-American or if it's mostly white with one or two.

Those are acceptable. When you really—well Arts for Art is I would say 75% of our six—it depends a bit, but over 50% certainly and many times more—much more than that it's African-American. So, we struggle with that, but the first year that—that we started it, we—we—we didn't have any money. I had—I had no training as an arts administrator. I'm a dancer who presents music. So, you know, I'm special, and—but I looked around at the—we had—there was a group of musicians that we were meeting with, and I said: We are our own resource. We don't have any money yet, but we are a resource, and then I knew one of the musicians actually had money. So, I told him one of his—one of his gifts is his money, and so he gave me some. It was \$2,500, and we did a 5-day festival with like 5 times—about five groups a night. I guaranteed everyone money much more than I had, and—

because I knew—I had this feeling, I knew we were going to succeed and we did, [bell] and that was 23 years ago, but it was based on this concept of we can do it. It was also based on a con—did it—?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That—that means the time is up.

PATRICIA PARKER: It says two minutes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No, no, we're going to—and so your—your three minutes expired and—and now they're setting up two minutes for the next person.

PATRICIA PARKER: Okay, I did three minutes already?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes. It goes by very fast.

PATRICIA PARKER: You can tell me that.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It goes by very fast.

PATRICIA PARKER: Alright, alright, we--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing]
I'll just ask you to wrap up with one concluding thought.

PATRICIA PARKER: Alright now we're—now we have Arts for Art the Vision Festival, which is

built in--then there's no difference between really creative art and telling the truth. So, we--we defined the music and the art and the social--and the call for social justice. These are all interrelated things. Inside the music and the art itself is the sense of freedom--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah.

PATRICIA PARKER: --and that's what we bring, and then we bring it to the streets through Arts for--Artists for a Free World, which is a marching band, with the sound of resistance.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely. All of this is true, and wonderful. I thank you for your passion. Unfortunately--

PATRICIA PARKER: [interposing] A little piece.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --unfortunately it's three minutes and then two minutes goes by really quickly, but--but it matters and--and I appreciate your. So, we're going to move onto the next panelist and again we are in a race against a very important hearing that's going to take place here about sexual harassment and a package of bills. I'm proud to have one of those bills. It's going to

be taking place here at 1:00. So, we're going to try
and go a little bit faster if everyone can work with
me. Thank you.

CHARLOTTE COHEN: [off mic] I'm
Charlotte Cohen, Director --

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing] Is
your light on there?

CHARLOTTE COHEN: Yep. Is it on now?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

CHARLOTTE COHEN: I'm Charlotte Cohen,
Director of Brooklyn Arts Council. Thank you for
hearing my testimony today. How do we resist and
respond in these times? We must trust artists. I
made that statement at a public art symposium in Hong
Kong last week, and an artist who has been incredibly
courageous in his public art protests to the
government there responded: Don't ever trust
artists. You can't trust us to do what we say we're
going to do. In those two perspectives we have our
answer: Trust artists to do the unexpected.
Brooklyn Arts Council has always been committed to
supporting artists no matter what there-form their
work takes by providing services that strengthen
their careers and finding ways for it to reach the

public. This support ensure that they are able to
create artwork at the grassroots level meeting and
engaging communities locally and making the work
accessible, relevant and meaningful. When New
Yorkers have the chance to develop and share their
artistic voices the voices of the individual grows
clearer and simultaneous the voice—simultaneously the
voice of the community becomes stronger. Now, more
than ever it seems that this work is necessary. The
arts help provide both clarity and solace in
challenging times, create communion instead of
divisiveness, and give expressions to thoughts and
fears that bind people across a wide spectrum of
backgrounds, and life experiences as we've been
hearing today. I want to thank the City Council for
your leadership in delivering the city first Cultural
Plan, Create NYC, an important step toward examining
and prioritizing the city's critically needed support
for arts and culture. It's of great interest was the
SIAP Report that proceeded the Cultural Plan that
demonstrated with data [bell] what we've witnessed
and known in our hearts all along that the arts
improve lives and communities. BAC is proud to
partner with the Council on your cultural

initiatives, and as I learned first hand in Hong Kong, the eyes of the world look to New York City as a cultural capital and what we do here resonates around the world, and I just want to—hope that you'll join us at our grant celebration at Brooklyn Borough Hall on Wednesday, March 21st [bell] to help us disburse almost half a million dollars—oh, over half a million dollars in those much needed—needed and much appreciated funds. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you so much for several parts of that. First of all reminding us to trust artists. We heard before from Vibe about the importance of trusting women and black girls, and some of the other voices that don't get listened to, heard or trusted, and also the invitation is great, but also I'm really proud, of course, that we fought for a real increase in funding for our five borough wide arts councils that now gets to go to individual artists and other groups throughout—that \$1 million increase that we fought for—I fought for really hard because, as you know, I was past president of the Queens Council on the Arts before I got elected to the City Council. So,

speaking of Queens, our next to the last panelist on
this panel.

BRANKA DUKNIC: Yeah. Hi. I'm going to
see if this works. Great. Before I start, thank you
for pronouncing my name correctly. It's pretty hard
to do that. So, my name is Branka Duknic, and I try
to run the Queens Historical Society for now 50
years, but we're trying and striving to do more than
that. We're striving to be a community hub with only
staff members. I'm the only full staff. There's two
part-times, and plenty of interns. Some of them are
documented. Some of them are undocumented
immigrants, one of which actually got her DACA
status. So, we're happy about that. We celebrated
that yesterday. The Queens Historical society—I'll
just be brief—QHS tries to document and present the
borough's history but we also deal with present
issues throughout Queens. So, with exhibitions,
community outreach and school programs to Title 1
schools, we really strive to bring out the best of
what Queens has to offer. Again, with contemporary
history, and also art. So, in the past few years,
again, we were trying to sort of renew what, you know,
the concept of historical societies and historical

1 museums really are. We try to bring out and with
2 your—with your help we're going to try to do that
3 even further. The outstanding women of Queens. For
4 example, women that people are not really familiar
5 with like astrophysicist Lisa Randall that lived in
6 Fresh Meadows, or Grace Lee Boggs with Jackson
7 Heights or, of course, everybody knows Betty Friedan.
8 We try to bring out through our exhibitions and
9 community programs more information about these
10 women. Also, this fiscal year and the past few years
11 we've tried to bring out immigrant voices of again
12 documented and undocumented immigrants through their
13 self-expression specifically Corona and Jackson
14 Heights, and we're really hoping to do that in in
15 other areas where we interview these specific
16 individuals let's say, and they talk about their
17 experiences with human rights violations [bell] and
18 so on. I'll be very brief. Two art exhibitions I
19 would point out, you'll see everything in the
20 pamphlet, hopefully. Again, we're kind of worried
21 about the current political climate in which we might
22 not get funding, and which one of it is soil and
23 tongues, and it deals with different immigrant
24 voices, in this case voices of racism and xenophobia
25

through visual arts. Vietnamese Americans, Afghani Americans and many, many other artists we'll feature through this sort of interactive exhibition. They're art, and again we need your support. So, there's not enough for two minutes. So, we hopefully will be able to accomplish our projects and--and talk more about their voices in the next upcoming--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing]
You did great. You squeezed about five minutes into 2-1/2.

BRANKA DUKNIC: Oh, gosh. [laughs]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, it was amazing. All of you were terrific. I do want to say a special note to you. It's great to see you. I didn't know you were coming today--

BRANKA DUKNIC: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --but obviously I am--I am a Queens resident, and represent a district in Queens. I love all of our cultural organizations equally and all of our boroughs equally, but I did happen to look at your newsletter just yesterday--

BRANKA DUKNIC: [interposing] Oh, great.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

99

1
2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --in the office.
3 So, for anyone who wonders if you send me your stuff
4 do I look at it? I do.

5 BRANKA DUKNIC: Yes, great.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And--and--and I'll
7 prove it because I had not seen the new logo, and I
8 was very impressed with the new logo, but I love the
9 newsletter.

10 BRANKA DUKNIC: Thank you. Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I mean, it-it-
12 you know, I was a member of the Queens Historical
13 Society. I'm not sure I'm a paid member right now,
14 but I-I love the Queens Historical Society--

15 BRANKA DUKNIC: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --and--and, you
17 know, it's gone through various challenges over the
18 years shall we say--

19 BRANKA DUKNIC: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --but when I saw
21 your newsletter and I-I went through all the
22 invitations, the newsletters like I do like once or
23 twice a week, you know, and I--and I stopped on your
24 newsletter because I was like wow this is beautiful.

25 BRANKA DUKNIC: Yes, thank you.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

100

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It was glossy.

It was—it was different than I've seen it in the
past, for example. So, (a) I just want to say that
to you to encourage you to keep going and keep
building the Queens Historical Society, and that's my
Chief of Staff Matt Wallace right there--

BRANKA DUKNIC: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --and you should
ask us for money--

BRANK DUKNIC: [interposing] Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --this year and--

BRANKA DUKNIC: [interposing] Thank you.

[laughs]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --and—and make
sure that—that we're doing everything we can to
support your work because I love what you doing at
the Queens Historical Society.

BRANKA DUKNIC: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I also
encourage everyone else to send me your stuff because
I rea it and I look at it.

BRANKA DUKNIC: Great.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, thank you
very much to this panel. Our next panel Chris

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

101

Wisniewski from the Studio in a School, and are you bringing James Reynolds with you from Studio in a School, and then we have Adam Jacobs from Kids Creative and Julia Lu from Children's Museum of Manhattan. [background comments, laughter, pause] Thank you so much for staying for those of you who have been waiting in the wings for a while, and we apologize. We are on a 2-minute clock, and we're going to try to be as faithful through that as we can. So, with that, Julia, why don't you start. Thank you.

JULIA LU: Good morning. First, thank you, Chairman Van Bramer and committee members for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Julia Lu, and I'm Director of Institutional Planning for the Children's Museum of Manhattan. Although our name only mentions Manhattan, we work in the five boroughs. We're grateful for the Speaker, the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs for the commitment to the arts. Your support is essential to our work at the Children's Museum. For more than 40 years we have ensured children learn to celebrate diversity, embrace differences, and treat others with respect. The arts experiences we offer

provide the freedom and safety for children to express themselves. Recently, children have placed wishes on our wishing tree hoping for no guns. After the 2016 election, parents and media fought our Council on how to talk to children about the election results. We're proud of our roles as trusted institution that gives children and families the opportunity to explore through the arts. Resistance can be defined as the ability not to be affected by something especially adversely. The museum chooses not to be negatively affected by what is going on in our world. More than ever, we are committed to doing what is right for children. The arts play many roles in our lives, culture and politics. They comfort and challenge, they educate and inspire, they engage us emotionally, intellectually and physically. Through the arts we experience perspective. There are magic threat, and majesty empowers us to resist the belief of a single world view or a solitary set of ideas. The museum's work is grounded in research show that the years from birth to age eight are critical years for developing positive social and emotional skills. Children are learning about self-worth, self-control, racial awareness and the

complexity of the world. The arts help children make sense of it. [bell] Everyday our young visitors delight in our programs at the museum and in shelters, libraries, schools, Head Start centers and hospitals citywide. I'd like to highlight innovative work we're doing with the Department of Homeless Services, which has been going on since 2014.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: If you could do that briefly. I am actually familiar with the program, of course, but---

JULIA LU: [interposing] We've got three sites in Queens.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Tell me those three sites in Queens.

JULIA LU: We've got a site in Council Member Dromm's district, Daneek Miller's district, and Donovan Richard's district.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. That's terrific.

JULIA LU: But serving all New Yorkers is important. We resist by treating all New Yorkers as equals regardless of their names. We're opening two new shelter sites next month, and would be delighted to offer you a tour.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sure.

JULIA LU: Let—I'll follow up--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [interposing]

They're opening new shelter sites--

JULIA LU: In partnership with DHS we're going to go in there and do physical transformation and deliver programs and host Families for Free at the Museum, and they're given a free membership so that they can return any time that they'd like to.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great, great, but the museum is not running a shelter or-or-right.

JULIA LU: No, we-we don't run a shelter.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, right.

JULIA LU: This is why DHS is such a vital partner with us.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. Okay,

um--

JULIA LU: [interposing] So, we--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I—I want to go to our next panelist just because we're-we're--

JULIA LU: [interposing] Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --sort of moving along. I apologize. Chris and Mr. Reynolds.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

105

CHRIS WISNIEWSKI: Well, thank you for having me today. I'm the Executive Director of the Studio in a School in New York City, the largest visual arts education in the city, educational organization in the city. We hire and train professional visual artists like James to teach art in schools and publicly run daycare centers in all five boroughs serving over 30,000 students each year in nearly 200 schools and sites prioritizing communities of high economic need and schools where there is no art teacher. The children that we work with at Studio are largely part of those communities that have been most deeply affected by some of the more troubling political changes and debates we have experienced over the past year. Most live in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Many are immigrants or the children of immigrants. A significant percentage of the students we serve live in transitional housing, and many are students with disabilities. We observe that many of these young people have experienced trauma, and live with a high level of stress and anxiety. In a political environment where we have ongoing heated debates about economic policy and immigration, I often wonder

who is speaking for these young people, and it's in this context in which I would like to argue that one important aspect of our work is to provide an outlet for creative expression, agency and validation for these young people, and chance for them to depict the world as they see it. When you put a paint brush or an oil pastel in the hands of a young person, you are giving them a chance to speak for themselves. We see this in the experience of a 4-year-old girl at a pre-K class in Queens who just last week made a collage depicting her family's weekend trip to the park. She speaks only in Spanish, and so her artwork provided here with a rare moment of communicating with the other students in her class. We see this in the drawing of the American flag made by Jade a 4-year-old in Bedford-Stuyvesant who was inspired to make her drawing because as she said, I don't know if we'll be able to stay in this land. We see this in the experience of Alberto, a second grader in the Bronx also a recent immigrant. Alberto-Alberto rarely spoke and according to his classroom teacher gave up on work easily. Then, his artwork was selected [bell] for Studio in a School show at a gallery in New York City and it became a turning point for him,

changed his entire educational pathway. These are the examples that reflect the reality we encounter everyday in schools and community-based organizations in the city, and we appreciate the support of our work that we receive from the city and the Council.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

JAMES REYNOLDS: Good afternoon. My name is James Reynolds and I've worked at Studio in the School since 2004. It's an honor to be here before the Cultural Affairs Committee today, and it's also an honor to be able to stand students at PS 123 in Harlem where I work as a full-time Artist Instructor for Studio. They are interested and engaged. Our young artists look forward to the moments in the studio where they're able to observe, question, problem solve, collaborate and synthesize their wildest dreams and ideas through the creation of art. In art they are called upon to transcend the realities of income inequality and immigration. They're able to envision a brave new world where they are the arbiter. They value the art education. They value that art education grants is a akin to air during this or any other administration because these young brilliant minds want to know that their

thoughts, their beliefs and their ideas not only
count, but that they can make a difference, and that
is really what we're working to facilitate everyday.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.
Thank you for your work.

JAMES REYNOLDS: Thank you.

ADAM JACOBS: Hi. I'm Adam Jacobs. I'm
the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Kids
Creative and we provide the Arts Education programs
throughout New York City. I'm going to just talk
about a few points. One is funding. The—we received
two—two of our largest funding sources, our Federal
21st Century Community Learning Center grants. In
the last two proposed budgets, those have been cut
entirely. So, not just NEH run out (sic) this
Education Program and—and would cut our—a majority of
our funding at that point. It's for 750 children in
East Harlem in the Bronx. The second point is that
we—we do get CASA Funding, we do get city funding,
but—but federal funding is at that level the—the
largest opportunity to—to serve that many people.

[bell]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I—I—I—I think—

MALE SPEAKER: [interposing] You could
keep going.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You could keep
going.

ADAM JACOBS: Okay, great. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

ADAM JACOBS: The second point is that
one of our big main rules is that there's no teasing
or fake teasing. We take-talk to our students and
our staff about how to not fake tease. Fake teasing
is essentially somebody decides that they feel like
they're being teased. When we look at what's
happening on Twitter—I'm just going to put that one
out there that the—that it's really difficult to
discuss peaceful conflict resolution with the
current—with the current landscape. The third point
is that I was speaking to my—my wife this morning as
I was coming here. She's an organizer with the
Woman's March, and she's actually organizing a
walkout on March 14th and the thing that I didn't put
in here we are a positive proactive peace education
organization. So, we work with students to try and
identify a conflict before they become violent, and
so I don't have anything about gun violence in my

testimony. I've been working in schools for 18 years. The idea of being equipped with a gun is scary. It doesn't make any sense, and our students don't know how exactly to-to work with that as well as a lot of the work that we've been doing is based in communities that have been dealing with gun violence for a very long time. We try to approach the systemic oppression that's in our-our schools, the de facto segregation that's in our schools, and I'll just tell you a quick story. In the summer--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Say it quick because you--

ADAM JACOBS: [interposing] Oh.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --you were deprived of your appropriate beep, but it just went off here. So--

ADAM JACOBS: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --I am your alarm.

ADAM JACOBS: Well, it's-it's a very good story. Our kids make up plays. That's what they do. They made up a play in the summer of 2016 during the election time of a-an individual who won an election. His name is Pier Mart(sp?) Delano, and he won. He

decided to get rid of all color. He said that black and white is the way to go, that color divides, and our student were really just trying to express the fear that they had had even before the election took place. It was a really engaging story, but also really telling of what their concerns were, and at the end he decided that he was color blind, that he—he actually could not understand what he couldn't see.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, I appreciate all of you. This was our sort of kids and the arts panel. So, your work is incredibly important, and obviously when we talk about the current moment and how art and culture are helping to both create resistance and/or to ensure health and overall wellbeing of the people. Obviously children are the most important of that group. So, thank you all for all the work that you do. I'll excuse this panel and the next panel Mark Degarmo. It looks like Lutz Rath, and [background comments] Martha Bowers from Dance Theater, et cetera, Tom Van Brundt, and Rudolph Shaw from the Caribbean-American Repertory Theater. Is everyone here still? Yep. Alright.
[background comments, pause] And we have two more

panels after this. Alright, who wants to start?

This time we'll start left to right, my left.

HEATHER HARVEY: Okay. Hi. I'm actually Heather Harvey, the Marketing Director at Dance Theater, et cetera. I'm here on behalf of my friend who had to step out for a development meeting. So, thank you for this opportunity to testify on art as resistance. Martha is the Executive Director and Founder of Dance Theater Etcetera, a cultural organization based in Red Hook. As each day brings new challenges from the White House, I think the most important work we can do as artists is refuse to accept the current state of politics in our country as the new normal, and keep informed about what policies are forming and legislation being enacted to think strategically about our responses. Dance Theater Etcetera or DTE for short is addressing the urgent need for resistance in three ways. First, we work internally to recommit to our core values, and have allocated resources and time to trainings for staff, board and our teaching artists on understanding and undoing racism in our work.

Secondly, through our school and community based arts education programs, we challenge our students to use

their acquired art skills to think critically about the issues impacting their lives. And address those issues through their creative work. We aspire to helping create a new generation of engaged and informed citizens and artists, and third, we produce arts events such as our annual Red Hook Fest, a free two-day performing arts festival that features socially aware artists, showcases resources offered by local non-profits, and encourages cross-sector socializing in a rapidly gentrifying community that is home to Brooklyn's largest housing projects. This year the festival's theme is artists as activists. We are embedding artists and local community organizations to lead workshops that ask the question: What does engaged citizenship mean? We as a New York City arts organization are proud to stand with our New York City Council in resistance to the Trump's-to the Trump Administration's many dangerous policies. We encourage you to continue supporting all of the non-profit cultural organizations that provide safe, creative spaces where we help develop the next generation of artists and citizens. Additionally, it would be helpful if the Department of Cultural Affairs could provide webinars and detail the rules

and regulations governing non-profits with regard to
political activity. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

RUDOLPH SHAW: Yeah. Rudolph Shaw from
the American Repertory Theater. Thank you for having
us here. I'm going to just read a few thing that I
have here in the interest of time. We recognize that
such movements like the Black Lives Matter and the
LGBTQ gains have been broadsided by the policies of
the Trump Administration. Historically theater arts
have enabled social expiration that can dismantle the
suffocating from this and of an authoritarian
administration. In this current environment the
theater arts are needed to stimulate independent
thought, create positive discussions about human
existence and political engagement. In that light,
our company Caribbean-American Repertory Theater is
grateful for the support that we receive from the
City Council particularly Councilman I. Daneek Miller
for the Cultural Immigrant Initiative Award, which
enables us to create awareness and celebrate the
various cultures in our community, and through this
type of award, we've been able to do a work called
Vivalizing (sp?) in collaboration with the Viva

Foundation of South Africa to bring—to use his words,
to inspire the youths in our community. The big
problem we've had is immigration issues thereby this
current administration denied visas to the artists
that we were collaborating with from South Africa,
and they couldn't counsel with them. Couldn't get a
full work. A lot of work we're doing is *Haitian Tune
of God*, which we did several years ago when they had
the earthquake. We are now redoing that work to
inspire the immigrants in our community. We have a
very large immigrant population, and it's—I'm not
aware because Echoes from the Diaspora whereby
members of our workshops they write stories based on
their immigrant experiences, and they're likely the
performers. I'm not going to say too much. We just
want to encourage the City Council to keep on funding
us, [bell] and give us the opportunities to empower
the youths in our community.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
much for your work, and for shouting out the Cultural
Immigrant Initiative again, which is really terrific,
and I'm glad that Council Member Miller is so
supportive--

RUDOLPH SHAW: [interposing] Yes.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

116

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --of your
organization.

RUDOLPH SHAW: Thank you.

MARK DEGARMO: Hello. My name is Mark
Degarmo. I'm here as Director of Mark Degarmo Dance,
we've just celebrated our 30th anniversary as an not-
for-profit in New York City. Also as a vendor for
the New York City Department of Ed. I'm just going
to jump off of what I wrote because it was way too
long, but a couple of highlights. I think—I want to
thank the President actually for sort of revealing
the dark underbelly of our soul of the American USA
soul. I was just working on some projects in Mexico
City, and Quebec City, and which is interesting to
see the international outrage of our colleagues and
both ends. At Mexico there's a little more humor:
Build your wall. Keep your crazy Americans and your
guns to the north, but in—in Canada a real socialist
country there was really outrage about how could you?
Where is it going? We're terrified. So, I want to
talk a little bit about our basic partnership program
called Partnerships in Literacy Through Dancing
Creativity that we've been bringing for 20 years to
New York City public schools fairly much free of

charge. I think the Council Members are well aware that New York City's DOE is the third most segregated big city system in the country even though it's the largest school district in the country. So, we're fighting constantly issues of equity, and what I still see in New York City public schools is a huge inequity no matter what the promotion has been about increased numbers of arts accessible opportunities in the schools. That's not my experience. Dr. Cynthia Celestine of Jesse Owens PS 26 in Bed-Stuy has said to me repeatedly: We don't even have a skeletal budget. We have no budget for the arts. How can this continue in New York City the arts capital of the world? Our partnerships in literacy through dance and creativity was just researched by Johns Hopkins University as the first embodied cognition program that's ever been studied in this way, and we had statistically significant increases in our children's state reading test scores. [bell] Also, a tremendous support from the teachers as well wanting it to come back. So, we just continue to advocate that we look at funding structures. We've been very gratefully funded by DCLA for 25 years, and two City Council members, but it's way inadequate to the

numbers of students. [bell] Organizations like ourselves could be serving if there were actually more money available to support us.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Absolutely, and thank you for spreading the message in Mexico and Canada that—that we are actually still a country that has values that are not espoused by the president. Last on this panel.

LUTZ RATH: Alright. I'm Lutz Rath, Director and Conductor of the Washington Square Music Festival. Thanks for having me. It's hard to justify what can classical music do, a sort of classical music in order for POTUS any kind of political movement. Anyway, we're sort of specialize a little bit, and we are a little bit, you know, Frank Ridler (sp?) of the New Yorker called us once the most eclectic outdoor festival in this country. We are eclectic, but we are provocative. By the way, it's our sixth year anniversary this year. We are the longest outdoor festival in the United—in New York City. When Kennedy got shot in 1963, a lot—Leonard Bernstein said: This will be our reply to violence to make music more intensely, more beautifully and more devotedly than ever before. The

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

119

Washington Square Music Festival has had a long history of doing the provocative problems. Just to give you an example that some of it we presented music, which was called degenerate or forbidden music between 1933 and 1945. Other music which was composed in concentration camps, anything that had to do with authoritarian regimes. I'll spare you names right, but also for instruments that allow more people to volunteer as a solo instrument like the xylophone, the base trombone and the harmonica. The diversity, of course, of Washington Square population is enormous. Remember John Raitt in 1927 climbed on the--on the arch and declared Washington Square the 51st state of the nation. [laughter] The--we have in our history very diverse personnel, our first conductors as well as African-American conductor. We have Marilyn Horne on it. We have Wynton Marsalis as a soloist when he was 18 years old, and we had [bell] the Sartore Band (sic) who was a survivor of the Rwanda Massacre. The--we have been funded by Euvic Blakeford (sic) and, of course, we want more. [laughter] They--they will also to stay with us because we really like to continue to provoke and we create thought for the audience, and it has been for

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

120

60 years free to the audience to the public, and the audience we are packed each time, and we like to continue.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That is a very good thing. Thank you and I'm thrilled that we have classical music represented here in terms of resistance. So, thank you all for being here. Our next panel is Ryan Gillian. Is that Ryan Gillian.

RYAN GILLIAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [laughs]
[background comments] Dr. India Etwane. [background comments] Okay, and David Martine. How many do we have, two or three? [pause] Nope. [background comments] Yeah, and do we still have the folks from the Immigrant Arts Coalition here? Yep, okay, you're the last panel. We'll bring you all in together. I think there are several folks right? [background comments] Is John from the Coalition? Great. There you go. John, why don't you join this panel then? Yep. [background comments] Then you can both join the panel. Yeah. Okay. Great. [pause] So, why don't we go back to this side first. There you go.

MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Thank you.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

121

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Oh, make sure
your light is on there.

MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Make sure it's
on? Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes, push the
button down. There you go.

MALE SPEAKER: Thank you very much for
having us, having me this morning. American Indian
Artists Incorporated has been instrumental in the
continuation of a rich legacy here in the city since
1987. Begun by bold and innovative Native American
cultural leaders affiliated with the New York
movement of contemporary Native American arts, these
native artists determined very early that because
Native Americans were the most under-resourced group
in the United States, Amerinda as an organization had
to have very specific strategies in order—and focus—
in order to survive and thrive in the highly
competitive and status-oriented art world of New York
City. We're celebrating our 30th anniversary, and
Amerinda since its inception has exemplified a
community-based arts organization inculcating
strength from within, which is necessary to any
resistance movement. Amerinda continues to reflect

the needs and desires despite its own struggles with racists and insensitive portrayals in theater and film as well as fraudulent and racist experiences within the local political climate especially related to reinstate. Amerinda has spoken out for its rights, sought to enlighten and fought to gain redress for great inequity, and we will continue to do so when necessary. Unfortunately, Amerinda's experience in recent years has again been one of inequity, and engagement in a non-transparent real estate process in the city that excludes organizations of color, maintains preference to white organizations. As the U.N. Declaration on the rights of indigenous people 2007 states: All indigenous people have a right to the perpetuation of their unique legacies for future generations. For Native Americans the phrase: Seven Generations has an incredibly significant meaning, that of protecting the earth for the generations to come yet even this phrase has been commercialized and become the name of a product brand. We're not interested in symbolic gestures. We want equal consideration and special treatment. We're looking for fairness and respectful consideration. Amerinda will continue to nurture and

foster this creativity for the next 30 years with the blessings of the creator and the inspiration of all native artists of whatever discipline will continue to come to New York to find freedom to express their individuality, creativity and identity. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

INDIRA WATAROO: Hi. My name is Indira Wataroo and I come to you as Executive Director from the Historic Billie Holiday Theater and Restoration Art in Bedford-Stuyvesant Central Brooklyn, home to the largest community of people of African descent in the New York City and indeed the country. I come to you as the leader of the cultural centerpiece of the First Community Development Corporation in the nation founded through the bi-partisan efforts of Senators Jacob Javits and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. inspired by the grassroots efforts of community activists. The Billie Holiday Theater and Restoration Art are bi-products of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements of the '60s. both movements of resistance. With five decades of experience in one of the most underserved communities in the city, we have a unique perspective on art as resistance. 2018 is a year marked by uncertainty and fear with an emerging

national agenda that has left lower income community members, immigrants, communities of color, the LGBTQ and community, women and Muslims anxious about deepening injustices and inequities. At the Billie Holiday Theater and Restoration Art we are driven by our ever-deepening commitment to difficult dialogues with dignity. We understand that these are only going to become more important to our community and national narrative. We also know that art is a force for change beyond the marketplace of ideas. The arts confer unique and meaningful benefits to the communities in which they are housed. They are heralded as a contributor to academic performance and student discipline, economic prosperity, physical and psychological wellbeing, safer neighborhoods, and social capital. Supporting the arts is not just a symbolic gesture of resistance. It is the resistance. In closing, I would like to share a quote from Nobel Prize Winning Author Tony Morrison, one that informs our work at the Billie Holiday Theater and Restoration Art. This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. [bell] We speak, we write, we do

language. That is how civilizations heal. Thank you
for your time.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, and
the two of you together, right?

LAURA PARIS: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Alright.

LAURA PARIS: Thank you. I'm Laura
Paris. I'm the AED of the Coalition for Aesthetic
Family Services, Arts and Literacy, After School and
Summer Program. [background comments] This is John
Senesco, the Director of Middle School Programs and
we're funded through DCA, and DYCD. We're in 10
different neighborhood in Brooklyn and Queens, and I
just wanted to say thank you for creating this forum.
I've been taking notes on what other organizations
are doing, and I'm so inspired and encouraged, and
while I've been sitting here, I've been thinking it
would be great in addition to funding, which, of
course, we really need to have a web presence of some
sort where all of these organizations can share these
ideas and where New York City could put the word out
there about what we're doing, and what we stand for
as a city. I wanted to share one of our projects,
maybe more time permitted. So, right after the

elections, our families—we have 1,300 and their families that we work with in arts and literacy, and the theater was palpable, and our team of teaching artists and art therapists thought we have to do something. One of the many things we did was we created an immersive interactive installation that was shown at Knockdown Center this October to highlight, well really to showcase our children and families' feelings about what was going on. We encouraged all of our parents, which was an amazing experience of sort of group art therapy processing to imagine what facing (sic) borders should look like, and we created a huge projected montage that was projected on two permeable walls. It created a corridor, and we had hundreds of pictures imagining more open borders. We also collected interviews and we had kids decide how they wanted to react, what sort of projects they developed. I'll you about maybe three of them. [laughs] So, one of them [bell] was a really moving puppet show where the kids retold a story of one of their family's immigration experiences and how when they came to New York friends and family supported them, helped them get work, et cetera. Another group of kids developed a

skit exploring how the electoral college undermines
democracy, and how the process of impeachment
functions. [bell] That was their idea not ours.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Can I ask you to
wrap it up?

LAURA PARIS: Sorry?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Tie it in a bow.
Wrap it up and tie it in a bow, if you would.

LAURA PARIS: And--and one of our soccer
teams in Queens developed a video art project showing
how youth from different countries and backgrounds
display teamwork.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you so
much. I appreciate all four of you hanging in there,
and I'm glad you got something out of hearing
everyone else testify, which I also feel is very
inspirational. So, thank you all for being here
today, and joining our hearing, and essentially
anyone else left in the audience can testify.

[laughter] Yeah. [laugh] So, we have [background
comments] Is Christopher--

CHRISTOPHER MASSIMINE: [off mic] Yes.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

128

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: --still. Oh,
thank you, Christopher. [background comments] Marlene
Fitzpatrick.

CHRISTOPHER MASSIMINE: Marlene had to
take off.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No worries and
then we have [background comments] Seta Chang, and I
think you are the final two to testify at this
hearing. Thank you again for your patience and for
hanging in, and sticking with us. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER MASSIMINE: Thank you for
having us. Alright, we'll be very fast. My name is
Christopher Massimine. I'm the CEO of the National
Yiddish Theater. I'm the Chair of the Immigrants
Arts Coalition, and I'm a Trustee on the Alliance of
Resident Theaters New York. So, with the National
Yiddish Theater, I'll at the beginning very quickly,
founded in 1914 and established officially in 1915,
we are the oldest continually producing arts
organization in the U.S. and the longest continuing
operating Yiddish Theater in the world. We were
founded on the basis of social change folks being in
against (sic) people stage. It's been knocked down.
It's not there today. We served audiences of the

1 first immigrants that came over. We also served
2 audiences at the LGBTQ community when they were
3 unable to come out. We served women when it was
4 looked down upon for women to go out to the
5 audiences, and be part of audiences and theaters
6 alone. So, social change has always been part of
7 what we do. I had an idea that became an action that
8 ultimately resulted in what's very fast becoming a
9 movement. We have several, many several, you know,
10 multi-cultural and multi-ethnic groups in New York
11 City as pertaining to the arts and cultures. I always
12 wondered why the dialogues really haven't come
13 together. So, as of last year, we created the first
14 Immigrant Arts Summit, which brought together over 50
15 multi-cultural organizations in New York City,
16 government bureaus, agencies, foundations, et cetera.
17 By the end of it, we had a round table, and we
18 decided we need to do something about this. Based on
19 four principles we formed a coalition, which serves
20 our advocacy, empowerment, diversity support and
21 collaboration. Those are four important things.
22 We've been doing a lot of things with. I'll give you
23 an example of one of the things we did. Recently,
24 based on this asinine situation with U.S. citizenship
25

and immigration services recounting basically and taking away the idea of the statement of this being a country for immigrants, we wrote the Administration, and we're hoping for a response on that. Several other things we're doing entail collaborations throughout all of these communities figuring out how we can find share representations with different audiences, look at the different problems we have whether they be community issue relations, whether they be [bell] and I'll tell you, oh, very quick. Whether they be situations where there are more threats and more antisemitism, and more I guess feelings of hatred in this country or whether they be things like I'm talking visas and getting people on board. We're looking at that. There's all sorts of other stuff we're doing. All I'll say—I'll conclude with this is we're continuing the dialogue August 6th through August 8th. We're going to do the Second Arts and Immigration Summit at the Museum of the Jewish Heritage. It's going to be great. It's going to be big. We're here on the local level, but we're now moving very quickly towards the national stage.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's great.

Thank you, and last but not least.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

131

SITA CHAY: Hi. I'm Sita Chay. [bell]
I'm a violinist from Altima (sic) Mariachi Band, Flor
de toloache. Also an Executive Director of
Cosmopolis Collective. I want to start with a quote
by a puppeteer from Sesame Street who said yesterday:
Mean people are mean because they fail—they fail to
imagine. They lack imagination, and that—that says a
lot because a lot of people who—who fail to connect
with people who dismiss different people fail to put
themselves in different in a different position, and
they only see things from the surface. This is where
art comes in, and I fear that at the state of just
that kind of society in many ways art has failed the
society to remind, to revoke and to—to awaken our
empathy, empathy to connect and to realize that we
are actually so much more connected than we know, and
that's why I believe in cultural art, and that's why
I was—I formed Cosmos—Cosmopolis Collective. We are
musicians, individually pursuing pure art, but as a
group, we bring our background from Korean culture,
from Indian culture, Puerto Rican, and as an American
people because we are all an immigrant there
undocumented or documented, and I want—I wanted
emphasize the importance in highlighting the traffic

between cultures. It—the cultures are not just
diverse or colorful. There has been so many
interactions between cultures that makes us who we
are right now and it is—I believe it is our
responsibility as an artist and also as people who
support art [bell] to shine upon that, support that
cause. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

Quite a way to end, and I know a lot of people joined
the room for the hearing that's coming afterwards,
but for those of you who are new, we're just
concluding a three-hour hearing of the Cultural
Affairs Committee on Art as Resistance in the Age of
Donald Trump, and so, this was the last person to
testify in three hours. It's been an amazing hearing
learning how artists and cultural organizations are
responding to America under President Donald Trump.
So, thank you so much for sticking it out, and being
here for three hours with me, and the rest of the
committee, and we will continue to fight on. So,
thank you all very much, and with that, we are
adjourned before a very important hearing takes place
in a few minutes in this very room. [gavel]
[applause]

1	COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS	133
2		
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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 March 18, 2018