

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

----- X

MARCH 16, 2018
Start: 10:28 A.M.
Recess: 2:03 P.M.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E:

COUNCIL MEMBERS: James G. Van Bramer, Chair
Laurie A. Cumbo, Majority Leader
Karen Klosowitz
Francisco P. Moya

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

Tom Finkelppearl, Commissioner for
Department of Cultural Affairs

Linda Johnson, President and CEO of
Brooklyn Public Library

Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of
Queen Library

Tony Marx, President and CEO of New York
Public Library

Corey Johnson, Speaker

Valentin Colon, President, DC37 Local
1930

John Hyslop, President, DC37 Local 1321

Ron Barber, President, DC37 Local 1482

Brooklyn Public Library Employees

Leonard Paul, President, DC37 Local 274

Tress Walker, Public speaker for
Libraries, Completed Program at Job and
Business Academy Queens Library

EK Williams, Public Speaker Technology
Trained Supervisor Brooklyn Public
Library

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

LaMeane Isaac, Branch Manager Macon
Library Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brooklyn

John Calvelli, Co-Chair of the Cultural
Institutions Group (CIG), Executive Vice
President for Public Affairs at the
Wildlife Conservation Society, Co-Chair
of New Yorkers for Cultures and the Arts

Christopher Carroll, Representing Local
802 the American Federation of Musicians

Sheila Lewandowski, Founder/Executive
Director of Chocolate Factory Theatre

Yosenix Orango (SP?), Young Adult
Librarian at Brooklyn Public Library
Stone Avenue Branch in Brownsville,
Brooklyn

Lucy Sexton, Executive Director for New
Yorkers for Culture and the Arts

John O'Reilly, Community member concerned
about the Queens Museum

Ellen Leszynski, Brooklyn Academy of
Music

Mark Rossier, Director of Grants at the
New York Foundation for the Arts

Joval Ochalla (SP?), customer service
specialist at Woodside Community Library

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

Bashir Osmani (SP?), representing newcomers

Ana Diaz (SP?), Student at Queens Library English for Speakers of Other Languages Class (ESOL)

Jeffery Omara (SP?), Actor, member of Organization for Fair Wage on Stage

Stephanie Wilchfort, President and CEO of Brooklyn Children's Museum

Tiffany Bryant, for the Public Theatre

David Johnston, Executive Director Exploring the Metropolis

Tiffany Geigel, Dance NYC

Jamie Bryant, Member of New York City Artist Coalition and an Artist Safety Advocate

(test, test, test)

(Introduction: Today is a Committee on
Cultural Affairs and Libraries. Today's date is
March 2018 and this is recorded by Sargeant Brala
(SIC, SP?).)

JIMMY G. VAN BRAMER: Good morning
everyone. Good morning everyone. First of all, uhm
I want to thank all of the Sargeants at Arms and Carl
de Alba and the entire team for moving us back here
into the chambers, obviously when Libraries come to
town, they come full force and that requires us to
have a little bit more space so I want to thank all
of the, the team here for quickly setting this up for
us and getting us back here for our hearing so we
don't clap in the Chambers but we, we raise our hands
for all of the Sargeants in Arms and all the staff
members who have helped put us together back here in
chambers. So, my name is Jimmy Van Bramer, I am
proud to be the Chair of Cultural Affairs and
Libraries and proud to Chair this, our hearing on the
Mayor's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 and
we are now in session. I want to thank all of you
for being here, all of you who joined the rally and
press conference to should loud and clear and in

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

6

1
2 unison that libraries are for everyone and we need to
3 protect and defend our libraries. I want to thank
4 our three Library System Heads and all of you, the
5 members of the Library Community. Also just to know,
6 because I see some folks in the audience are here for
7 the Cultural Affairs portion of this hearing that
8 will follow this hearing, so uhm, you will get to
9 learn all you ever wanted to know about libraries
10 while you await the second portion of this hearing
11 which will include Commissioner Tom Finkelparl on
12 the Department of Cultural Affairs Budget. Uhm, let
13 me recognize and thank Councilmember Karen Koslowitz
14 from Queens who is a new member of our committee but
15 certainly not new to the City Council and certainly
16 not new to libraries and library issues. Uhm, and as
17 I said earlier today, I joined the Staff of the
18 Queens Library in January of 1999 and one of my
19 duties was to help craft the testimony for the then
20 Director of the Queens Library, Gary Strong in 1999
21 and so this Preliminary Budget Hearing I would have
22 attended in February/March of 1999 and this marks the
23 20th year that I will be involved in the Budget
24 Process on behalf of Libraries and I was thinking
25 about that this morning, thinking about the fact that

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

7

1
2 20 years of my life have been devoted to protecting
3 and defending our Libraries, something that I am
4 immensely proud of, it's become really my life's work
5 and I am thrilled to be a part of you and a part of
6 this effort. Now, we know that Libraries are
7 essential. We know that they are vital. We know
8 that as our values are under attack all across the
9 country that Libraries and Library workers are at the
10 front lines of defending those values and making sure
11 that every single New Yorker has a safe place to
12 congregate, to learn, to strive and to simply be,
13 really. Because Libraries provide that space for
14 people to simply be and I am immensely proud that
15 over the last several years not only did we fight
16 back millions and millions dollars in budget cuts,
17 but we were also able to then restore tens of
18 millions of dollars to the Libraries Budget and then
19 achieve what we have worked for, for the 20 years
20 that I have been involved in this effort, the base-
21 lining of six day service. We have also seen record
22 investment in the Capital Budget for Libraries and
23 that too has been a very significant advancement.
24 But that's not to say that we can rest on our laroza
25 (SP?) that we should stop there. The truth is that

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

8

1
2 the Capital Needs for our three Library Systems are
3 still immense and require immediate investment and
4 attention and of course, we haven't increased the
5 Budget for Libraries in three years in a meaningful
6 way and we need to do that because not only do
7 expenses increase but the need for Libraries has
8 increased, the desire for the information, the
9 services, the programs has increased dramatically and
10 so we believe that Libraries can and should receive
11 more from the City Government and the Council has
12 always lead the way, literally for the last 20 years,
13 the Council has led the way in the fight for
14 Libraries and Library Services. So I am thrilled to
15 be a part of that effort along with Councilmember
16 Koslowitz and the members of this committee and this
17 council to fight for Libraries. So, with that, I
18 want to welcome the three Library Presidents and
19 CEOs, Linda Johnson from the Brooklyn Public Library,
20 Dennis Walcott from the Queens Library and Tony Marx
21 from the New York Public Library and I know that some
22 representatives from the unions and the DC37 locals
23 may be speaking later as well. So with that I will
24 ask Linda Johnson to begin the testimony on behalf of
25 the Library Systems.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

9

LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you Chairman Van
Bramer, thank you Councilwoman Koslowitz and members
of the committee, Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader
Cumbo, Finance Chair Drum and Brooklyn Delegation and
the City Council for supporting New York City's
Libraries. We deeply appreciate all you have done to
ensure our Libraries remain welcoming institutions,
open to everyone nearly every day. We rely on your
commitment to our Libraries so we can help the many
communities who depend on us. Your support has
helped reverse years of underfunding but our job
is far from finished; as well, thank you to all the
Library workers who came out to City Hall today
including our Partners at DC37 and Brooklyn's local
1482 and local President Ron Barber. I am certain
you will appreciate their eloquent testimony. It is
due, it is due in large part to our staff that
Libraries can be counted on as safe, welcoming spaces
for all. This aspect of our mission has never been
more important. We know that you and the City Council
share this core value. Our doors are open wide to
accommodate everyone from the New American practicing
English at a Conversation Group in Bay Ridge to the
Senior Bowling with a Virtual League in Bed Stuy,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

10

1
2 from toddlers enjoying Saturday story-time to the
3 parents on Riker's Island reading to a child via
4 teleconference to Coney Island Library. There is no
5 question that public libraries are truly here for
6 everyone. We need the City's increased support to
7 fulfill this mission. Today we submit our Fiscal
8 Year 19 Tri-Library Executive Budget request, an
9 increase of \$16 million in operating funds to be
10 split among the three library systems, coupled with
11 an increase of \$20 million in Capital dollars for
12 each library system. For Brooklyn Public Library,
13 the \$4.5 million we are requesting, an increase in
14 expense dollars to provide the exceptional library
15 service our patrons deserve. It is imperative that
16 we maintain our physical spaces. We need funds to
17 cover repairs and upkeep that are not capitally
18 eligible and to invest in highly trained staff and
19 up-to-date materials and collections. The cost of
20 providing 6-day service has increased and it is all
21 the more challenging to remain nimble and responsive
22 to the changing needs of our patrons. Just last
23 month for example, our Immigrant Services Team hosted
24 its first Legal Clinic to help patrons renew Haitian
25 Temporary Protective Status, a benefit that the Trump

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

11

1 Administration has recently terminated. Every day
2 families who are facing uncertainty about Immigration
3 Status in the United States turn to the library for
4 free legal services and reliable information. In
5 many cases, the Library is the only institution they
6 trust. You can also see what a difference 6-day
7 service has made by visiting one of our standing room
8 only Story Time Programs. We offer them every week
9 in every library and in multiple languages as often
10 as possible. Cortelyou Library for example provides
11 Story Time in English, Spanish, Urdu and Russian
12 every single week and they are seeking ways to add
13 Napoli to their repertoire. To sustain this
14 incredible work we must continue to support our staff
15 and ensure our materials and collections budget,
16 particularly in world languages or increase to a
17 level commensurate with expanded service. In a
18 borough of 2.6 million we should be spending at least
19 \$10 million on our collections but we are not there
20 yet. Brooklyn Public Library finds new and inventive
21 ways to engage communities that might otherwise be
22 isolated or overlooked. Our services for Older
23 Adults launched Senior Debate last week which gathers
24 seniors in the Library for lively discussions about
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

12

1
2 pressing issues with their peers while learning and
3 practicing the art of debate. Earlier I mentioned
4 that Brooklyn Public Library's popular Virtual
5 Bowling League for senior citizens library lane, an
6 incredibly popular program. It has 24 teams around
7 the borough who compete virtually for the league
8 trophy while making friends and becoming
9 technologically adept. Technology at the Library is
10 the life-line for all of our patrons but children and
11 teens in particular appreciate Brooklyn Public
12 Library's new technology resources. Last year, BPL
13 launched its first ever Brooklyn Robotics League.
14 Young adults throughout the borough are invited to
15 join one of a dozen teams to learn the value of
16 teamwork and problem solving while building coding
17 and programming robots. At the end of the 8-week
18 program we held a competition and judged their
19 creations. This Team Tech Stem Program is in such
20 high demand we expanded the league to all of our
21 branches just last month. Our focus on teen
22 engagement has grown stronger thanks to the Library's
23 Brooklyn Incubator, a process that supports
24 innovative programming by providing mentorship and
25 resources to Library Staff with creative new ideas.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

13

1
2 Book Match Teen for example is based on the premise
3 that Teen Library Services are most successful when
4 they are spearheaded by the teens themselves. This
5 series involves training participant in reader
6 advisor group skills including interviewing, writing
7 book reviews and crafting book lists. The popular
8 Remix Academy is a 6-week DJ and Music Production
9 Workshop for Bed Stuy teen culminating in a final
10 product presented in a teen showcase. Likewise,
11 Brownsville Excerpts Teens Podcasting is a 10-week
12 instructor lead program in partnership with
13 Brownsville Community Justice Center which builds
14 broadcasting skills for young adults who record and
15 edit their own podcasts about life in Brownsville.
16 In these, and so many other ways, Brooklyn Public
17 Library has strengthened our commitment to community
18 engagement which is the center of our recently
19 completed Strategic Plan. We are determined to be
20 responsive to the different needs of the
21 neighborhoods our libraries serve and will continue
22 to prioritize community input for all major Capital
23 Projects over the next several years. Indeed, a
24 cornerstone of our Strategic Plan is to provide
25 inclusive and inspirational place, providing a

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

14

1
2 welcoming environment to our patrons is vital but so
3 many of our libraries are plagued by maintenance
4 issues, equipment failures and drab, uninspiring
5 interiors. We spend upwards of \$1 million of our
6 operating funds every year on infrastructure, upkeep
7 that is not Capitally eligible, maintaining old
8 boilers, replacing dilapidated furniture and funding
9 temporary heating and cooling solution which we wait
10 for a Capital Project to replace nonworking systems.
11 These costly needs compete for our treasured
12 operating dollars and ultimately steal fund from our
13 critical programming needs. We are forced to spend
14 limited operating dollars treating the symptoms of
15 our Capital Crisis. Just a few year ago, Brooklyn
16 Public Library carried \$300 million in unfunded
17 Capital needs for the 59 libraries in our system.
18 With the help of the City and our Brooklyn Council
19 Members, the State and Creative Capital Projects
20 Partnerships we have reduced the need to \$240
21 million. You have helped BPL enter its most
22 significant era of building in recent memory. Over
23 the next five years, 1/3 of Brooklyn Public Library
24 System will have been rebuilt or renovated. While we
25 are turning to the, while we are turning the ship in

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

15

1 the right direction, the bad news is that we still
2 have \$240 million in unmet Capital needs system wide.
3 Approximately 1/3 of those needs are emergency
4 infrastructure projects like boilers, HVAC systems,
5 roofs and security upgrades. We are facing a
6 deferred maintenance crisis that still impacts many
7 neighborhoods in the borough. We are not alone in
8 this crisis. Together our three library systems are
9 requesting a total of \$60 million in funding this
10 year, \$20 for each system. For Brooklyn Public
11 Library, this funding will address our most critical
12 Capital needs including failing infrastructure and
13 equipment that has long exceeded its useful life.
14 While we have begun to make progress for libraries,
15 our overall funding level continually forces us to
16 triage only the most serious projects and leave the
17 countless critical infrastructure needs and
18 preventative work unaddressed. We spend much of our
19 time and resources responding to emergencies. The
20 lack of a reliable source of recurring funding also
21 makes it impossible for us to manage Capital Projects
22 efficiently. This is why the undercurrent of this
23 years request for \$20 million each in Capital, the
24 request that we employ you to remember after this
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

16

1
2 Budget is finalized is to push for Library inclusion
3 in next years 10-year plan. At our present level of
4 funding, we cannot perform necessary preventative
5 maintenance. We cannot ensure that projects that
6 encounter a short-fall can continue to move forward
7 and we cannot manage our program, the largely city-
8 owned buildings in the most holistic and efficient
9 way possible. New York City's Libraries are and
10 always will be for everyone. We are a haven for
11 immigrants, a provider of hope to the unemployed, a
12 source of endless wonder for children, a place for
13 discovery and learning for whoever has the
14 inclination to walk through our doors. There has
15 never been a better time for the City to stand with
16 us and proclaim that everyone is welcome here. Help
17 us fulfill our mission by supporting libraries and
18 the people who need us most. Thank you.

19 JAMES VAN BRAMER: Thank you. Dennis.

20 DENNIS WALCOTT: Thank you Chair and good
21 morning to you. My name is Dennis Walcott and I am
22 the President and CEO of the Queens Library and thank
23 you Linda for outlining the challenges our three
24 systems collectively face next year and how we can
25 meet them. Uhm, it's really an honor to be here once

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

17

1
2 again Chair to talk to you and to the members of the
3 committee and to the Chair of the Queens Delegation,
4 Karen Koslowitz. It is always a pleasure to see you
5 and as always a pleasure to interact with you around
6 libraries, and you may be new to the committee but as
7 indicated, you are a person who has been there for
8 the Queens Library for years and years and years and
9 years and we truly appreciate all of your support and
10 to also to your other new member for Queens,
11 Councilman Moya, my best to him as well. He has been
12 a steward advocate in his former life for our
13 libraries and now in his new role as Council Member,
14 we always look forward to his support and actually
15 have appeared together already in his new roles, so
16 we thank him for his leadership and his total
17 commitment to all of us. As you know, uhm, Queens
18 Library alone maintains a collection that consists of
19 print and digital materials in 223 languages and our
20 total circulation of materials and languages other
21 than English last year was 1.3 million. While our
22 numbers are impressive they are vulnerable to
23 stagnation, decline unless we keep pace with the
24 every changing learning needs of this most this most
25 heterogenous city in the world. For example, in a

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

18

1 recent survey at the Queens Library Customers as part
2 of our process for developing our Strategic Plan, we
3 heard repeated calls for additional investment in a
4 number and variety of print and electronic books, job
5 skills and training programs for immigrants and
6 resources to provide meaningful learning experience
7 to our teenagers. We are committed to delivering for
8 them and are looking forward to working with you on
9 behalf of them and the patrons of our sister library
10 systems. Before I get further into my remarks, I
11 want to also acknowledge all the other members of the
12 committee who have been there, whether they are
13 representing all the other boroughs or the borough of
14 Queens itself. You are supporters of us and we truly
15 value your support as well and thank you for all the
16 outstanding commitment to guaranteeing free access to
17 information, learning opportunities and the joy of
18 discovery for everyone we serve in person, on the
19 phone or over the internet. You have consistently
20 demonstrated that the people of New York deserve the
21 City's firm financial support. Immigrant and New
22 Yorkers at the forefront of Queens Library Mission
23 are extremely important. The proof that we are
24 indeed delivering for our customers is in the
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

19

1 numbers. Last year, Queens Library Programs and
2 Services drew a record 1.4 million people, an
3 increase of 27% from the previous year. Many of the
4 participants are immigrant New Yorkers. For them,
5 Queens Library offers the first stop on the path
6 towards their dreams in this country. Of the 2.3
7 million people who live in Queens, nearly half were
8 born outside of the United States. Let me repeat
9 that, of the 2.3 million people who live in Queens,
10 nearly half were born outside of the United States.
11 Queens Library provides classes, workshops and
12 services in the language spoken by the boroughs
13 immigrant communities which assist new immigrants to
14 adapt to live in America and offer programs that
15 celebrate the cultures of the diverse ethnic groups
16 in Queens. Last year, we offered 126 English for
17 Speakers of Other Language Classes at 36 sites across
18 our system to nearly 4,000 individuals with 7,100
19 session and attendance of nearly 90,000 individuals.
20 We presented Citizenship Classes, Citizenship
21 Application Assistant and Confidential Financial
22 Counseling to 2,000 people. Queens Library has long
23 been the primary destination of the immigrant New
24 Yorkers. With the establishment of our New Americans
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

20

1
2 Program in 1977, we became the first public library
3 in the nation to provide comprehensive programs and
4 services to new comers. The goal was to help them
5 adjust to their new home and keep them connected to
6 what the left behind by building a multi-lingual
7 collection and creating relevant programming such as
8 coping skills, workshops, native language coding
9 classes and cultural events. To keep pace with the
10 ever changing communities of Queens, members of our
11 staff can Federal and Local Demographic Data to
12 pinpoint where the boroughs newcomers live and where
13 they are from. This information is enhanced by what
14 our community librarians are seeing on the ground.
15 They reach to their communities to understand who is
16 living in the diverse neighborhoods of Queens and
17 look out foretelling details like new restaurants,
18 new newspapers and languages other than English on
19 the newsstands. Through our New Americans Program,
20 we presented to more than 4,000 people, coping skill
21 workshops in Spanish, Mandarin, New Ghali, Korean and
22 Russian, the five most spoken languages in Queens
23 aside from English. Professionals including Lawyers,
24 Social Workers, Doctors, Business Experts guide them
25 through the Immigration Law, Citizenship, Housing,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

21

1
2 Worker's Right, Starting a Business, Finding a Job,
3 Parenting and Health. The program works in close
4 partnership with organizations such as United States
5 Citizenship Immigration Services, New York City
6 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Queen
7 Borough President's Immigration Task Force, Women for
8 Afghan Women, New York Tibetan Services Center and
9 many, many others. It helps people to get real
10 results, people like Robert Melbourne, a recent
11 immigrant from Jamaica, seeking to improve his
12 reading skills. Last July, Robert enrolled in
13 literacy classes and went from a second grade reading
14 level to a fifth grade reading level with less than
15 20 weeks of instruction. He also sought employment
16 opportunities. The library helped him create a
17 resume and referred him to another of our Signature
18 Initiatives, our Job and Business Academy through its
19 services, Robert received Security Guard Training and
20 Certification and recently obtained his Employment
21 Authorization and a New York State Driver's License
22 and we hired by a major shipping company. The Job
23 Business Academy provides specialized training,
24 learning opportunities with an emphasis on
25 technology, training to job seekers, aspiring

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

22

1
2 entrepreneurs and business owners. In Fiscal year
3 2017 the Job Business Academy Staff served 25,422
4 customers with 41,366 hours of training and
5 individual assistance. In total the Job Business
6 Academy offered 700 technology training classes, 700
7 job search workshops, 175 entrepreneurship and small
8 business workshops and 84 job skill training
9 workshops. The Job Business Academy prepares Queens
10 residents to thrive in the modern workforce.
11 Individuals seeking access to Job Business Academy
12 Services get started by using the Job Map, an
13 innovative online job skills assessment tool
14 developed by the Queens Library. Based on assessment
15 and one-on-one interviewed the Job Business Academy
16 staff customers are enrolled in structured job search
17 classes, workshops and technology training classes.
18 The Job Business Academy also runs a free incubator
19 for aspiring entrepreneurs in conjunction with the
20 New York City Economic Development Corporation called
21 The Jamaica Feast Program, food, entrepreneurship and
22 services training space. The program was created to
23 provide resources to those who are looking to start
24 and run their own food business in Queens. Those who
25 participate in this program learn the fundamentals of

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

23

1
2 getting a start in the food business with hands on
3 workshop, access to a commercial kitchen and one on
4 one session with industry expert. The program is the
5 only one of its kind in Queens. Workshops cover a
6 range of topics including financial planning,
7 marketing and food industry best practices. It is
8 ideal for neighborhood cooks seeking to expand their
9 experience, New Americans looking to start a business
10 and recent Culinary School graduates who want to
11 learn the business side of the food world. The
12 program has achieve some amazing outcomes for its
13 participants like a woman named Tress Walker,
14 founding of Mom's Kitchen, Mom's Kitchen, in Jamaica
15 which sells West Indian cuisine and baked goods. Her
16 vision was to create a space where moms like her from
17 various ethnic and cultural backgrounds could cook
18 together and sell their goods. Through the program,
19 she gained all of the legal, financial and logistical
20 knowledge needed to build her business. Next month,
21 Mom's will be debuting next month at the night market
22 and Flushing Meadows Park. Just as it is never too
23 late for adults to start a business or to take their
24 career in a new direction, we believe it is never too
25 late for adults to learn how to read, improve their

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

24

1
2 writing skills or get a high school equivalency
3 diploma. Our full time professional staff and
4 volunteers facilitate writing groups, technology
5 assistant instruction and ongoing tutoring. Last
6 year, these sessions helped 1,300 adults become
7 readers and writers and helped 500 adults prepare for
8 their high school equivalency exams. But we also
9 know that the joy of learning is now just for the
10 able body and younger adults. That's why we operate
11 a mail a book program for those who are homebound
12 with an annual mail a book circulation of 50,000
13 people. We have dedicated staff that recommends
14 books in different format from large print to
15 electronic version and mails them to our customers on
16 a regular basis. We offer a wealth of programs and
17 resources that help older adults, population build
18 relationships with people of all ages as well as
19 nurture their creativity and growth. For example,
20 the Library holds an annual Older Adults Day Fair
21 which I will probably attend soon which features free
22 health screenings, live entertainment and information
23 on healthcare benefits and other important topics
24 from partner organizations like Live on New York, the
25 North Shore (LIJ) Long Island Jewish Cancer Services

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

25

1
2 and local senior centers. Customers also have access
3 to programs such as intergenerational creative arts
4 program, book discussion groups, live performances
5 and readings, talks and panel discussions, film
6 screenings, drama clubs, chess clubs, arts and crafts
7 our Stay Well Exercise Program which introduces
8 adults over 60, again I will qualify for that to
9 special exercises, relaxation techniques and
10 principals of good nutrition. Computer training
11 courses, we offer a range of classes appropriate for
12 older learners including beginning classes on using
13 computers, the internet, email, Microsoft programs,
14 Google, Facebook and other technologies and social
15 media. Let me take a minute to focus on the Capital
16 part of our life as well. Maintaining our 65
17 locations and aging infrastructure is a short and
18 long-term challenge for us. We are very lucky in
19 Queens. We have had and continue to have dedicated
20 Council Members who get it. They get it big time as
21 far as the importance of investment in the
22 infrastructure and our Queens delegation has been
23 truly outstanding along with three successive borough
24 Presidents as well who have constantly invested in
25 our infrastructure. Even with them getting it, we

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

26

1
2 still have a lot more work to do. The average
3 community library in Queens is over 60 years old.
4 More then 1/3 of our buildings are over 50 years old.
5 They are heavily used and most were not constructed
6 to accommodate the traffic that we experience on a
7 daily basis due to the growth and demand of our
8 services. The Library has identified at Capital
9 Funding need of nearly \$173 million over the next 10
10 years, \$46 million in Fiscal year 2019 to address the
11 critical infrastructure issues and to modernize all
12 of our facilities and bring them in a state of good
13 repair. Immediate critical infrastructure needs
14 exist in our Astoria, Douglaston, Flushing, Forrest
15 Hills, Queensboro Hills, Ridgewood, Steinway and
16 White Stone Community Libraries. The Mayor and the
17 City Council's Capital Investment in Libraries over
18 the last several years have had a significant and
19 positive impact on the state of our facilities;
20 however, clear that much needs to be done and your
21 continued support is critical. When the Library is
22 forced to make as Linda has indicated so ably and
23 always so well that as far as critical infrastructure
24 around emergency needs, it comes out of our Expense
25 Budget and sometimes not from the Capital side and

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

27

1
2 that takes away from critical needed programming. We
3 do not have the luxury of waiting for the Capital
4 Procurement and Construction Process to play itself
5 out. In order to prevent our buildings from being
6 closed to our customers for months on end, the
7 Library finds itself in an unfortunate position where
8 Operating Funds and necessary funds that should be
9 used for our customers using their for Capital
10 Repairs. Additional Operating Funds are needed to
11 maintain the increased amount of services we provide
12 to our customers six days a week and to address the
13 Emergency Capital Repairs to our Libraries. Before I
14 close, I want to draw our attention to an article
15 that was in today's New York Times. It wasn't about
16 Libraries but if you take a look at it, it could b
17 sometime in the very near future about Libraries and
18 the article is about Toys R Us and how Toys R Us is
19 declaring bankruptcy and if you really read that
20 article it takes about both the indebtedness of Toys
21 R Us but also the competition that it faced and the
22 pressure it put on it for now to declare bankruptcy
23 and close basically all of their United States
24 stores. We do not want to be in that position. We
25 need your continued investment and support because we

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

28

1
2 have shown and produced on a record basis that the
3 customers need us and as we have said Libraries are
4 for everyone. Thank you for your support and we
5 truly appreciate it.

6 JIMMY VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.
7 Tony.

8 TONY MARX: Thank you so much and thanks
9 to my colleagues Linda and Dennis always for their
10 eloquence and to all of the Library colleagues who
11 are here, the DC37 Leadership, Val Colon our local
12 president. Thank you Chairman Van Bramer, Council
13 Member Koslowitz and all of the City Council who have
14 been stalwart supporters of the Library. We know
15 that you know how important our public libraries are
16 and we are so grateful to you for that and for this
17 opportunity to get testify. We are here simply to
18 ask you to continue to invest and to invest further
19 in our libraries for all the reasons that my
20 colleagues have made clear. In FY19 the New York
21 Public Library has asked as part of our tri-li-ask is
22 an additional \$7 million. The majority of that will
23 go to strengthening and maintaining and ensuring our
24 six-day service with our great staff and making sure
25 that they continue to be paid what they need to be

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

29

1
2 paid and what is fair to pay them, adding to our
3 collections as well as \$1.1 million towards our
4 Research Centers including Schaumburg where I was
5 last evening in Harlem. We thank again the Council
6 for your amazing support. You know, we know how vital
7 library services are to all New Yorkers to making
8 this city great, whether it is from early literacy to
9 English Language Classes, Video Visitation just to
10 name a few which I will highlight quickly this
11 morning. Early Literacy is one where we play a
12 particularly vital role at a moment when the city is
13 investing more in pre-K literacy we are the vital
14 partners in that. The New York Public Library now
15 welcome $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million attendees, so 750,000 slots in
16 our early literacy program for a year, that is up
17 from 200,000 just in FY15, so a massive increase as a
18 partnership to ensure that our city's youth have the
19 opportunities to learn to read, particularly in the
20 poor neighborhoods where so many families don't even
21 have books at home and need to come to us and get our
22 support and our help so that they can help their kids
23 learn how to read. We are proud to have partnered
24 with the City Council's First Readers Initiative, New
25 York Public Library distributed more than 105,000

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

30

1
2 early literacy kits. We really are the foundation
3 for literacy in this town and we all know that that
4 is the foundation for opportunity, for skills, for
5 jobs and for democracy. We partner with the
6 Administration for Children's Services as well as the
7 Department of Education Pre-K and 3K for All
8 Initiatives. We provide direct services by going
9 into pre-K classrooms and providing book lists. In
10 fact, I am particularly proud to say that just in the
11 last six months the circulation of material for our
12 youth from our collections is up 27%, that is just in
13 six months. So it is vital that we also have the
14 resources to ensure that we have and grow our
15 collections. We want the kids who come in and do
16 pre-K literacy with us to grab those books on the way
17 so they can take them home and continue that work at
18 home with their parents or the caregivers or their
19 grandparents. Uhm, we don't have the resources to
20 ensure that we have the books that New York's Kids
21 needs. This is, you know, 2018, uhm, this is New
22 York, we cannot have a lack of just the basic
23 materials for our kids to learn, that we need them to
24 learn. Turning to our immigrant community, which of
25 course, this city is almost everybody here comes from

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

31

1
2 a background of Immigrants and as Dennis said so many
3 of our current citizens uhm were not born in this
4 country. We are proud of that, that's what makes New
5 York so strong and so special and so many of those
6 from the Immigrant Community want to learn English
7 and look to us for help. In the past five years, we
8 have invested in our English Language classes and
9 increased them by 500%, that is a five-fold increase.
10 We also provide as Dennis and Linda described
11 citizenship classes and now even legal services in
12 the libraries. Uhm, we are the New York Public
13 Library is the largest provider of English Language
14 Instruction after the Public Schools and Cuny in this
15 City. We need to maintain that and we need to do
16 more. We are particularly delighted to just last
17 year, we launched English Language Classes at two
18 Riker's Island Correctional Facilities. We continue
19 to maintain and have to maintain collections in a
20 great variety of languages. I was recently at the
21 Andrew High School talking book and Braille Library
22 in Manhattan which is a federally supported center
23 for Tri-Li and for three states. I met with a blind
24 patron who had immigrated recently from Syria, a
25 country obviously in deep distress. She came to the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

32

1
2 high school library to learn the read Braille and she
3 was using that to now work towards a high school
4 equivalency degree so that she can then find a job
5 and find the opportunity that America, New York
6 promised that Syria has tragically failed to deliver
7 on to put it mildly. Turning then to incarcerated
8 and the formerly incarcerated who deserve our
9 support. We all know that America has a crisis of
10 incarceration. There are far too many of our fellow
11 citizens. We need to make sure that they get support
12 and services so that uhm can return to their families
13 and the communities and find jobs and not return to
14 incarceration. In 2016, in a moving ceremony after
15 years of pushing carts around on Riker's Island, we
16 finally opened our first dedicated library space at
17 the Rosie M. Singer Facility and we will be opening a
18 second dedicated library in the Manhattan Detention
19 Complex this spring. We have been providing,
20 circulating more than 30,000 books and magazines. It
21 is heartwarming to see literacy the library staff
22 carrying bags of books with them every day and guards
23 from the facilities bringing books and contributing
24 them and everyone working on these efforts together.
25 The Video Visitation Program that you have supported

1
2 has enabled us to bring together and keep together
3 234 families in 22 branches over the past year and we
4 have just recently expanded that program to two new
5 Bronx locations. We have to, we have to do better by
6 these populations. Even the formerly incarcerated
7 folks come to us for computer training. We have a
8 set of special resources for them that they publish
9 in a program called Connections. It is just one of
10 the symbolisms of this is often for people leaving
11 Riker's Island, they get off at 125th street and the
12 very first stop they go to is the 125th Street
13 Library. Uhm, that's where they can find a computer.
14 It's where they can find reading material. It is
15 where they can get information about housing,
16 information about jobs. We are the first stop for so
17 many in America and so many in New York who depend
18 upon us. We also know as my colleagues described, we
19 need the staff and we need the collections for those
20 programs and services but we cannot do it if our
21 facilities are falling apart. Again, this is New
22 York in 2018 and New Yorkers deserve, particularly in
23 the poorer neighborhoods where they may not have
24 other opportunities, facilities that live up to the
25 standards of this city. Thanks to you and the Mayor

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

34

1
2 we are now in the Ten Year Capital Plan, we are on
3 schedule to renovate five historic Carnegie Branches
4 including that Branch on 125th Street which is often
5 a first stop after Riker's Island and for so many in
6 that neighborhood, but we have an ongoing maintenance
7 crisis. We have asked you this year for a combined
8 \$60 million additional Capital Investment. We have
9 work to do, some of it isn't glamorous, mechanical
10 systems and energy conversation, building envelope
11 and preservation work, ADA improvements and IT
12 infrastructure but given that the average age of our
13 libraries is 67 years old, and many of our branches
14 date back more than 100 years, this is work that is
15 absolutely essential. Let me give you a quick
16 examples, St. George Library Center on Staton Island,
17 the roof isn't holding any longer. The paint is
18 peeling off the walls as water comes cascading down.
19 The windows are rotting. Each aspect of this adds to
20 further combinations of difficulties on physical
21 structure. The front steps and the ramp there are
22 crumbling. This just cannot be. In the Bronx, the
23 staff at the Tremont Library are putting pails under
24 leaks of water. They can't spend the time serving
25 the citizens of that location when they are running

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

35

1
2 around trying to put pails, garbage cans to collect
3 water leaks. At the Columbus Library in Manhattan,
4 we have an entrance that is inaccessible to those
5 with disabilities. People even have to haul their
6 heavy strollers up to get into the library with their
7 children so that they can learn to read. This simply
8 cannot be. We need your help to upgrade, we need
9 your help to maintain and we need your help to ensure
10 that all of our facilities are not only up to
11 standard but inspiring welcoming spaces as the core
12 civic locations in every neighborhood. Libraries are
13 truly for everyone. They are for our immigrants,
14 they are for our job seekers, they are for children
15 seeking early literacy help. They are what makes New
16 York great. We are so grateful for your support. We
17 are grateful for the opportunity to testify. We have
18 no doubt that City Council and Mayor De Blasio not
19 only have made significant investments in the
20 libraries but will continue to do so. We need more
21 to keep up the momentum at this moment in history.
22 We need the great staff fairly paid, we need the
23 buildings up to standards and inspiring, we need the
24 collections so that we can provide. Those are basics
25 of the Library and they are the basics of what make

1
2 the libraries the heart of this city of opportunity
3 for all of our citizens now and going forward. Thank
4 you Mr. Chairman.

5 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
6 to all three of our Library Systems Presidents and
7 CEOs for your eloquent testimony. I do want to
8 recognize that we have been joined by another new
9 member of the Committee, Council Member Francisco
10 Moya, also of Queens. We are very Queens centric
11 right way on the stayas (sp?). Never a bad thing. I
12 also want to say to Council Member Moya if you get a
13 chance to when you can't sleep at 3 o'clock in the
14 morning and watch back this when it airs on NYCT,
15 Dennis Walcott said the nicest things about it. It
16 is worth going back and watching it. Uhm, he gave
17 you a huge shout out before, I just want to make sure
18 that you are aware that.

19 FRANCISCO MOYA: My mom watches it and
20 called me and said "Why am I not there?", while you
21 were speaking so Dennis I have a lot of explaining to
22 do and thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: It was well
24 deserved praised. Uhm at one point also in your
25 presentation Tony I looked at and I saw a lot of

1
2 people smiling in the audience and I was wondering
3 what they were smiling about and it was because this
4 photo came up on the screen, perhaps the most
5 adorable child in the City of New York. Just for
6 showing us this photo and making everyone smile you
7 deserve the \$16 million that you asked for. So I
8 just have a couple of questions I know my colleagues
9 both would, would like to speak as well. So listen,
10 you, you know where I stand. There is no point in
11 debating it. Obviously you do incredible work. I
12 loved the testimony about all of the various ways
13 that you are partnering with other organizations. I
14 just hope that everyone in the world knows that
15 you've got robotics clubs and you've got all of these
16 incredible programs for our immigrant communities and
17 they know that you are so much more than books and
18 materials but in fact you are communities centers and
19 you are the hubs of communities and you are really
20 doing so much work and your staff, the workers do
21 incredible work and they deserve and need to be paid
22 appropriately and so we need to continue to reinvest.
23 So I, myself obviously love libraries and love books
24 and I know your collections have struggled to
25 maintain pace with the usage that you get so uhm,

1
2 just for all three, very quickly where are you at in
3 terms of your Budget for materials, books, other
4 materials, where would you like to be. What's the
5 need for the three systems? Because I'm assuming
6 that with some of the additional money were you
7 secure it this year, you would bolster your
8 collections.

9 TONY MARX: Very quickly Mr. Chairman,
10 uhm, back in 15, FY15 our Branch Collections Budget
11 so separate from the Research Library was just under
12 \$16 million and that is pretty much where it stays
13 today and that's after years of both the cost of
14 material going up and thank god circulation and
15 therefore demand for material going up. So we are
16 simply not keeping pace. We want to add at least \$1
17 million from our request to catch on to that and to
18 do better than that, and of course, we also have
19 additional materials that we didn't use to circulate,
20 electronic material, all of those requires additional
21 investment.

22 LINDA JOHNSON: Brooklyn Public Library
23 uhm is currently spending \$9 million on collections
24 and with the additional increase we would hope to get
25 to 10. I will say that during the years when the

1
2 system was experiencing Budget Cuts, of course the
3 place that we went was to the Materials Collection to
4 save jobs and library hours. We have been building
5 back steadily over time but we still feel that we are
6 not keeping pace with demand or frankly with what our
7 colleagues around the country are doing, so an
8 additional \$1 million would go to the Collections
9 Budget.

10 DENNIS WALCOTT: So in Queens we are
11 woefully behind uhm currently with spending roughly
12 \$6 million and again that as Linda indicated is a
13 gradual build from when we were in a recession period
14 and but still that is not satisfactory and also part
15 of our Strategic Planning Process we did the Customer
16 and Consumer Surveys and #1 on the hit list was
17 Collections, Collections, Collections and we want
18 more and we want more diversity and we want more e-
19 books and materials as well and so as we get new
20 dollars in we try to put it into collections but this
21 investment that we are asking you for would
22 definitely help us enhance on our collections and our
23 publications and materials.

24 JIMMY VAN BRAMER: And I'll, I'll just
25 stipulate from my side the Capital Need is clear, uhm

1
2 and you need that funding, that funding is
3 desperately needed. So I won't ask any questions
4 about it because I know how deeply needed that
5 funding is. My last question before I turn to
6 Council Member Koslowitz and Council Member Moya uhm,
7 we talk about staff all the time. Obviously it is
8 greatly important that the staff are paid but I
9 wanted to just ask in terms of your unionized, non-
10 unionized, where are you at? How have those
11 increases over the last... cause you have been doing
12 some hiring over the last several years thankfully,
13 how has that changed if it all? Uhm and I know
14 because I worked at a Library for 11 years that
15 people love working for the Library and so your
16 attention generally is pretty good because once
17 people start to work at your three Library Systems
18 they realize how powerful it is and they love their
19 jobs. So, if, if the three of your really quickly
20 could also talk about the Union versus non-Union
21 staff, your hiring over the last three years and and
22 retention?

23 DENNIS WALCOTT: So in Queens we've been
24 having and thanks to the Investment on the part of
25 the City Council and Mayor's Office and uhm the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

41

1
2 significant proportion of people that we've hired are
3 on the Union side so 7/1/17 through 3/15/18 we've
4 hired 43 new Union workers out of a total of 61,
5 7/1/16 through 6/30/17 we hired 61 Union workers and
6 then from 7/1/15 through 6/30/16 we hired additional
7 167 Union workers and from a base of 197 so as you
8 can see, we have been hiring and really in the
9 communities and the significant portion of those
10 individual represent our Union.

11 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Linda or Tony?

12 LINDA JOHNSON: Uhm sure, uhm, sorry, so
13 uhm, in FY16 which is the last time we got an
14 increase in Operating Dollars I will add Brooklyn
15 Public Library hired 95 new people all of which were
16 Union. Our current breakdown between Union and non-
17 Union is 849 Union members and 163 non-Union members.
18 Uhm, we have a retention rate of over 90%, sometimes
19 hovering in the 95% range. I don't have the
20 breakdown by category within our staff but it is a
21 place where people like to work and we're thrilled to
22 have such high levels.

23 TONY MARX: Mr. Chairman, uhm, the New
24 York Public Library today has Unionized staff of
25 about 1500 and a non-Unionized staff of just over 500

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

42

1 and that's roughly comparable ratios going back for a
2 very long time. Uhm, the last time we got the
3 increase, uhm, some years back, three years back, we,
4 we hired 120 new members of the staff because we know
5 the people who work at the Library are the essential
6 ingredient. All of those were Unionized staff as
7 Linda and I think the same with Dennis, we have a
8 retention rate of some hovering somewhere in the sort
9 of 94% to 95% through natural turnover even though
10 people love staying and working at the Library and we
11 love having them. We have currently 40 Union
12 positions vacant that we are searching for, so but
13 let's be clear. What we applaud, the City Council
14 and the Mayor's raising of the minimum wage, of
15 adding Family Leave Benefits and others uhm, you
16 could do the Math as easily as I can. If the costs
17 go up which we agree they should, because people need
18 to be paid more, uhm and have their rights protected
19 in the ways that you have insured. If the Budget
20 doesn't go up you know it makes it hard for us to
21 maintain all the commitments that you want us to
22 maintain and that we want to maintain.

24 DENNIS WALCOTT: And if I may add, just
25 one quick point, I mean when you take a look at

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

43

1
2 imagine or respective staff, they reflect the
3 diversity of the city as well and all you need to do
4 is take a look in the audience and beyond and you see
5 the core of our City who are on the staff of our
6 respective Libraries and our goal is to make sure
7 that we provide them the living opportunities to have
8 a successful life and so that's why we are requesting
9 the increase to meet the basics and to have the
10 people who are the diversity and the community who
11 are employed at our Libraries.

12 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you and we
13 will be hearing from DC37, all of our local
14 presidents in the next panel, right after my
15 colleagues have an opportunity to weigh in. So I
16 will ask Council Member Koslowitz to speak.

17 KAREN KOSLOWITZ: Thank you, I want to
18 thank all of you for the work that you do for around
19 New York Public Libraries for the people of our city.
20 I'm going to be a little nimby (sp?) right now to
21 Dennis Walcott who has been a fresh, a breath of
22 fresh air to our system. The Regal Park Library
23 which we have worked on for many, many years, putting
24 money into it since the 90s and every time we thought
25 we were getting close the price of the Library went

1
2 up and thanks to Dennis and the Mayor we finally have
3 the money there that we could do something with the
4 Library. Where are we at with this Library?

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: I have my nimby (sp?)
6 file here as well. So I am very well prepared with
7 our nimby (sp?) file. We have a full commitment of
8 money for Regal Park and so we are in the final
9 stages of getting details together then to deal with
10 the release and so the Regal Park is fully committed
11 and so we are very happy about that and we are
12 looking at a variety of different designs right now.
13 We will be sitting down because I imaging like my
14 colleagues, we sit down with our individual Council
15 Members and go over all the Libraries in their
16 respective districts so Regal Park is a part of that
17 and so we are fully committed.

18 KAREN KOSLOWITZ: Thank you and thank you
19 and thanks to you and thanks to the Mayor for making
20 this a reality. I just wanted to tell all of you
21 that Libraries are very important to me and during
22 Budget I will be fighting for the Libraries.

23 DENNIS WALCOTT: Thank you.

24 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
25 much. Uhm, to the Chair of our Queens Delegation and

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

45

1
2 it is great news indeed for all of us to know that
3 Councilwoman Koslowitz will be in our corner fighting
4 for us and congratulations Councilwoman I know how
5 long you have been fighting for that Library to
6 happen, that is a great victory. Uhm, now to hear
7 from the highly praised Council Member Francisco
8 Moya.

9 FRANCISCO MOYA: Thank you Chairman and
10 Chairman thank you so much for your lifelong fight to
11 improve our Libraries in Queens and throughout the
12 City in helping guide this committee in making sure
13 that we have a voice during this process. Uhm, to
14 Dennis, I really wasn't lying, my mother really does
15 watch the Legislative Channel, she did that all
16 throughout my career in the Assembly and she said to
17 me in Spanish, she said "(SPEAKING SPANISH)", that's
18 in Spanish, saying there is a really elegant man
19 speaking highly of you, where are you? Uhm.

20 DENNIS WALCOTT: Tell her Gracias. I
21 respect...

22 FRANCISCO MOYA: I will, I will but I
23 just want to say to you Dennis, thank you for your
24 kind words but more for your dedication and your work
25 for Queens and the Libraries that have really been

1 suffering for so long. I grew up in Corona, Corona
2 Library has been my Library for many years. I know,
3 you, you've come to visit, you have seen the
4 struggles but we have also been very proud in the
5 work that you have done to help in the expansion of
6 the surrounding libraries. We see what the beautiful
7 library in Elmhurst that has come up. There is just
8 some fantastic work that is being done but we are now
9 talking about \$25 million in renovations to the
10 Corona Branch, can you provide an update on the
11 renovations and kind of where we are on that?

13 DENNIS WALCOTT: Sure, so we are looking.
14 Corona is an interesting study in that Corona is just
15 a high demand library as you well know and the number
16 of people who come through their doors is amazing and
17 also as you well know and I imagine the Chair and the
18 Chair of the Queens Delegation knows that we have a
19 house that we have purchased as well, so we have
20 explored a number of designs that incorporate the
21 house that we have purchased on the lot that is
22 somewhat next door to the existing library and how we
23 bridge the two and as you know we are talking to the
24 Borough President and others as far as the funding
25 that goes along with Corona. So Corona is hot on our

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

47

1
2 hit parade as far as developing the next steps and we
3 are ready to talk about the commitment of additional
4 money as far as making it work. Uhm, part of what we
5 are looking at is the intersection of the two and so
6 I think the challenge is whether we go up and out or
7 just out across the house and the existing library so
8 we are at the final stages of working on that. Also
9 in your district we have East Elmhurst that is
10 wrapping up as well. And so we are on target as far
11 as completion date with East Elmhurst so that is
12 moving forward and then the other one in your
13 district is Lefrak City and Lefrak City, we just a
14 meeting about Lefrak City and doing total reformation
15 of the Lefrak Library as well and so the next step is
16 we will be placing a call to look for a space as we
17 move forward and Lefrak and talk about alternative
18 space and then deal with the Capital Renovation of
19 Lefrak and shutting that down for a period of time to
20 do the total renovation. So a number of the
21 libraries in your district we are ready to move and I
22 think with Corona in particular, going back to that I
23 think that the demand challenges, the demand on that
24 library and that as you know better than I do how we
25 are basically landlocked there as far as space

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

48

1
2 availability and what that means as I think that is
3 what we are working on right now.

4 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Do you, do you see
5 a time table for when we would?

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: Hold on I'm going to
7 look in the.

8 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: In the audience do
9 we have a...?

10 DENNIS WALCOTT: Not yet, not yet.

11 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Okay but let's set
12 up to meet with you so we can work that that and
13 then...

14 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's fine.

15 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And then go with
16 that. And uhm, just on your Wi-Fi programs that I
17 think is a great program, it is program, especially
18 in communities of, of color where we have limited
19 access to Wi-Fi, have you found that program to work
20 and is this something that we can invest more money
21 in to that program.

22 DENNIS WALCOTT: So not just work, it has
23 been an outstanding success and so we have a
24 relatively new VP of IT who is just outstanding and
25 he is exploring a variety of different ways to expand

1
2 that but again the challenges as we have all
3 indicated in our respective systems of having more
4 Expense Money which allows us to do those type of
5 programmatic things and not to suck those moneys away
6 into dealing with infrastructure needs as well. So
7 the Wi-Fi program has been an extreme success. We
8 are looking to expand it and build up the bandwidth
9 as far as capacity through all of our different
10 libraries and we have a potential project that we
11 will be announcing shortly that we are doing in joint
12 partnership with someone else to give us additional
13 capacity as well.

14 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: That's great, well
15 thank you Dennis for your dedication to the, to the
16 kids in Queens and the folks that use the libraries.
17 We will be fighting extremely hard and we have our
18 Delegation Chair who will be leading that fight and
19 of course with our Chairman we will do everything
20 possible to make sure that our Libraries are fully
21 funded so that the people of Queens and the great
22 city of New York will have access to having really
23 fully funded libraries throughout the city and thank
24 you for all the great work that you all do.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

50

DENNIS WALCOTT: And thank you for your leadership as well, we appreciate it.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much. My amazing colleagues and I just want to uhm let Linda and Tony know that we love them equally. Even though we are feeling our Queensness right now. Uhm, and and loving every minute of it. And uhm.

LINDA JOHNSON: In the Bronx.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: There you go. My father was born in Brooklyn, yeah, there you go. We love all of you. Uhm, thank you to our three Library Systems for your testimony, for your passion, for the service and the work that you do and most importantly for the people that you serve, we are going to excuse this panel and welcome the Presidents of our DC37 Locals, John Hyslop, President of Queens Library Guild, Local 1321, Ron Barber, President of DC37 Local 1482, the Brooklyn Public Library Employees and Val Calone, President of DC37 Local 1930 Representing New York Public Library Workers as well and then we have one last panel of four after that. So Mr. Paul... Yeah... Alright out Library Local Presidents, if you would. Have a seat, we are going to begin this portion of the testimony... Thank you... Thank

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

51

1
2 you... and we are running a little late, we have
3 Department of Cultural Affairs coming in right after
4 we are going to go a three minute clock. Uhm, and we
5 are thrilled to have all of you here, all four of you
6 here, I see Mr. Paul is here as well so I want to
7 recognize you as well. Uhm, I don't know if you have
8 determined an order of speaking for the four of you
9 but I will just say on behalf of the members of the
10 panel and Francisco Moya I'm sure agrees the DC37 and
11 the workers of DC37 are incredibly important to the
12 work of our libraries and to our city. We value
13 greatly the work of all four locals that are
14 represented here and most importantly the men and
15 women of DC37 so with that, whichever order you all
16 have decided would like to go in. Mr. Barber are you
17 first? Alright.

18 RON BARBER: Test, okay, I'm on, so I'm
19 going to uhm being reading the joint testimony upon
20 the joint but the joint testimony. All three of the
21 locals this morning. It was determined, Jimmy Van
22 Bramer and fellow Committee Members, thank you for
23 giving us the opportunity to testify before you this
24 morning. My fellow Presidents will testify this
25 morning to the Committee of Cultural Affairs,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

52

Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

herein under three Library System Budget. Val Colon,

President of Local 1930, Leonard Paul, newly

appointed President of Local 274, John Hylop,

President of Local 1321 and I, Ronald Barber,

President at Local 1482 become before you, united in

our request for more Library Funding. This year

requests come from another year of funding stability

and security; however, that funding is still

insufficient of the custodians, librarians, drivers,

ESL, teachers, clerk, IT workers struggle to meet the

ever increasing demands our elected officials and

patrons place on us. In Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018

the City Council and Mayor maintained our Library

Funding allowing us to plan. In Fiscal Year 2019 we

are reassured that Mayor has proposed the same amount

of money as last year. This positive development is

underscore with the one the Unions have repeated that

this year since Fiscal Year 2017. The funding is not

enough. New York City Library Systems are bursting

and our patrons are demanding more from us every day.

I work in Public Library because of the increasing

number of building reopening and additional programs

and services that we provide there is not enough

1
2 staff to maintain the growing demand for safety,
3 cleanliness, and service that the branches in our
4 community provide. There is a great need for more
5 stuff in order to service our community branches such
6 as custodians, special officers in addition to
7 clerical and IT staff. At New York Public Library,
8 inadequate funding has left many branches suffering
9 from staff shortage. Staff shortage have created in
10 some case security issues that need to be addressed.
11 Some branches at times are staffed with two people to
12 open and close. The Bronx Library Center is one
13 location that is understaffed and is not far and over
14 time budget the branch services will have to be cut.
15 The staff at Staton Island, Todt Hill Westerleigh
16 Library invariable must leave the reference desk
17 unstaffed with a sign directing patrons to the
18 circulation desk for help because they do not have
19 enough staff. The hours at the short-staffed Science
20 Industry and Business Library were increased to
21 alleviate some of the strength mid-Manhattan Library
22 Staff were transferred there while mid-Manhattan is
23 closed for renovation. Now, some of those staff
24 members have been removed and the hours stayed the
25 same, exacerbating a short staffing situation even

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

54

1
2 more. At the Queens Library there are many examples
3 of why more funds are needed. There are just a few,
4 these are just a few, I'm sorry. Most Library, one
5 of the highest circulating branches in the Nation was
6 newly renovated. The branch added two new floors,
7 expanded Footprint, increased the size of Adult
8 Learning Center and increased hours. The size of the
9 staff remained almost the same as it was before the
10 renovations. Excuse me, Glen Oaks Library expanded,
11 adding more floors and the staff sized remained the
12 same. Hunter Point Library was a brand new location
13 and many floors and a large collection to maintain.
14 Queens Library does not have the extra money to hire
15 more people to staff this brand new building. Our
16 members are contending with all the mandate placed on
17 us since the service large newly renovated or brand
18 new buildings, new programs, more space to clean and
19 maintain, more books, DVDs, newspaper, strong Wi-Fi,
20 laptop, best step scanners, printers, copies, mobile
21 Wi-Fi and more. Our patrons now only appreciate all
22 of this, they demand more. Our members are examples
23 of the Mission of Public Library. They are decided
24 to providing free access to information programs and
25 services. We have proven that the printed word and

1
2 the digital space co-exists and strive. We have
3 proven that our programs and services are vital to
4 our community. We have proven that if a library is
5 renovated or a new one is built the community flocked
6 to us. To meet everyone's demands for more programs,
7 new or larger libraries, more materials, more
8 technologies our elected officials must not only
9 maintain current funding but increase it. Speaking
10 on behalf of the staff who works so hard to make
11 library service a reality, we say please help us
12 maintain and enhance the service we so diligently
13 strive to provide in our communities. With the
14 collaboration of this Mayor, the members of City
15 Council and our New York City Libraries we have done
16 great things. We need your help to maintain the
17 level of service without exhausting our staff. You
18 are agriculturists, expert farmers. You know the
19 libraries are good grounds and when you sow in these
20 fertile ground we provide much fruit for our patrons
21 and staff and the community at large. Thank you.

22 JIMMY VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.
23 Well done, Mr. Barber and I gave you extra time so
24 you said the entire full name of my Committee which
25 takes about two minutes just to say the full name of

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

56

1
2 my Committee. Thank you so much for representing so
3 well all four of the Locals represented and all of
4 the workers that do such an amazing job and as you
5 know for 11 years, I worked side by side by John at
6 the Queens Library and saw firsthand the work that
7 the Members of DC37 do at all of our Libraries and I
8 agree that you need more and I am going to do
9 everything I can to fight for more as we have had
10 some very good years recently but we still need to
11 finish the work and do more because your members
12 deserve that from your City Governments. So with
13 that I just want to say thank you to all four of you.
14 I don't know if Council Member Moya has anything to
15 add. I think he believes very strongly as I do in
16 the work that all of you do and we deeply appreciate
17 DC37 and all of your Locals. So thank you very much
18 to all four of you. Okay, thank you. And I see the
19 cultural community is gathering in the back like a
20 strong force, a cultural wave coming over us. Uhm,
21 but I do not see Commissioner Finkelparl right.

22 KAREN KOSLOWITZ: Let me make sure he
23 knows that we switched rooms, maybe the Commissioner
24 went to the other room.

25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

57

1
2 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Alright so we have
3 a couple of folks from the Public who would like to
4 testify on libraries. Once we spot the Commissioner
5 we will hear from the Commissioner and then do Public
6 but right know since we have some time. Tress
7 Walker, is Tress Walker here, would you like to come
8 forward Tress, you were shouted out in Dennis
9 Walcott's testimony in a big way and now we are going
10 to have to go to Mom's Kitchen in Jamaica and check
11 that out. Anna Diaz, is Anna Diaz still here.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: Going to be here later.

13 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Okay, great. Joel
14 Ochoa, did I see Joel, is Joel here? Maybe they are
15 going to come a little bit later for the pubic
16 testimony, Tiffany Johnson as well, Bashir Osmani.
17 Okay we will hear from them later and we also have?

18 DENNIS WALCOTT: Folks could you make it
19 quietly please so people can... Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Is it Ek Williams,
21 E, K Williams, is EK Williams here. Thank you
22 LaMeane Isaac would you like to come forward and
23 Yosinex Lorengo (SP?). Alright so we will hear from
24 this panel of Library Workers and Activists and
25 Lovers. We will go to a three minute clock and ask

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

58

1
2 everyone to passionate and succinct at the same time
3 as we await our Commissioner as well. So Ms. Walker
4 since you got the biggest shout out of the day, tell
5 us all about your experience at the Queens Library
6 and Mom's Kitchen.

7 TRESS WALKER: Good afternoon. It is an
8 honor for me to be here speaking with you today.
9 Every journey begins with a single step. Many people
10 have quoted this. I would like to add my peace.
11 "Every journey begins with the understanding that
12 where you are no longer suits you. The journey
13 begins with the decision that you will no longer stay
14 in your current situation and you take your first
15 step."

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Can I just
17 interrupt for one second? We need your name for the
18 record.

19 TRESS WALKER: My name is Tress Walker.

20 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

21 TRESS WALKER: Should I begin from the
22 beginning again or just continue?

23 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Just continue.

24 TRESS WALKER: My steps led me here
25 today, to this moment where I have the opportunity to

1
2 share with you while the Queens Central Library is a
3 critical part of the Jamaica Queens Landscape. While
4 the Job and Business Academy is virtually important
5 to its resident and why increased funding is
6 necessary. My journey here began after what could
7 have been considered a life ending accident. On my
8 way to physical therapy, one beautiful morning my
9 phone buzzed as I am locking my door. My brother
10 texted me about a class being offered at the Central
11 Library. As I am reading the information, the tears
12 welled up, my pulse quickened, this was it. This was
13 the missing part of the puzzle. I immediately signed
14 up and the rest is a sweet memory. Jamaica Feasts,
15 Food, Entrepreneurship and Services Training Space
16 under the Job and Business Academy umbrella is
17 vitally important to those who want to start a
18 business and is sometimes overwhelmed by all the
19 paperwork required. The Jamaica Feast Program like
20 many programs at the Queen Library are managed by
21 talented and caring individuals who want to see you
22 success. Staffed by individuals who have the best
23 interest in your success. Mom's Kitchen NYC was
24 fully birthed through the Jamaica Feast Program.
25 This team brings real world knowledge to this amazing

1
2 program. They have very discerning pallets and many
3 programs have been fine tuned through their
4 assistance. Mr. Marco Maldonia can find the tiniest
5 needle and thread it and point me in the right
6 direction. His world knowledge and research skills
7 are undeniable. Ms. Taralel Stanton drives to see
8 what is now the Feast Program move from a thought to
9 a concept to actually changing the lives is a
10 testimony of her commitment to make a difference.
11 Her ideas and insights pointed us in the direction to
12 see her projects in a different light and in depth to
13 a product line. The students are this program are
14 now business partners as we work on building our
15 individual businesses while making a difference in
16 the lives of our children and our family. We also
17 partner with each other when needed as we work to
18 build up our communities. If the Food Industry is a
19 path that you want to explore.

20 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: I know you have one
21 more paragraph to go so go for it.

22 TRESS WALKER: You need to be in the
23 Jamaica Feast Program. In fact, if you are
24 struggling with life issues, work issues, uncertainty
25 about where you belong the Queen Center Library is a

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

61

1
2 source that is sometimes overlooked that can no
3 longer be. Queens Library with an emphasis on the
4 Job and Business Academy is a treasure trough of
5 skilled personnel who need the necessary resources to
6 have a larger reach into the community and make a
7 significant difference in the lives of many. Please
8 help them to help us so we too can help others and in
9 so doing create a legacy we can all be very proud of.
10 Chairman Van Bramer and Members of the Committee,
11 thank you very much for allowing me to testify before
12 you today.

13 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
14 and congratulations and Francisco Moya and I are
15 going to go on a date to Mom's Kitchen in Jamaica and
16 check out the amazing establishment you've got there.
17 Okay I know Commissioner Finkelparl has joined us so
18 we are going to hear from him right after we hear
19 from our next two speakers, so, who would like to go
20 first? Flip a coin. There you go.

21 EK WILLIAMS: First and foremost I would
22 like to thank the Cultural Affairs and Library
23 Committees for giving me the opportunity to testify
24 this afternoon. My name is Ek Williams. I am a
25 Technology Trained Supervisor at the Brooklyn Public

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

62

1
2 Library. I have been with the Library for over 12
3 years. In the past four years I've been working at
4 the New Locks Library in East New York. East New
5 York is a community which has been faced with many
6 adversities, some of them including the addition of
7 numerous homeless shelters, social economic issues
8 that continue to plague individuals and their
9 families. In addition, the neighborhood continues to
10 be burdened by crimes that occurred as a result of
11 the aforementioned issues. In communities like East
12 New York the Library plays a pivotal role in the
13 livelihood of its residents. According to the Social
14 Research Council, East New York, Brooklyn has the
15 second highest rate of youth disconnect, meaning a
16 large number of youth who are not enrolled in school
17 or employed. As a Library Professional I have the
18 opportunity to address this issue when I piloted a
19 New Program called Documentary Photography Bootcamp.
20 My team and I were able to teach new skills, provide
21 a caring and nurturing environment and positivity for
22 youth in East New York. The goal of the program is
23 to provide teams with professional photography skills
24 and serve as a safe and constructive alternative to
25 hanging out on the streets. The program success

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

63

1
2 gained national attention just this month when we won
3 the 2018 Innovative Libraries of Wart from Georgia's
4 Gwinnett County Public Library System. Through this
5 Library Based Program we were able to address a big
6 issue which continues to be a problem in East New
7 York. I would like to thank our elected officials
8 for the continued support in our communities. The
9 Generous Digital Inclusion Grant of laptops from
10 Council Member Baron for her for her New Lots, East
11 Flapwish, Cypress Hills and Spring Creek Libraries
12 are greatly appreciated and continue to bridge the
13 gap by providing successful technology education to
14 underserved residence and at a free cost.

15 LAMEANE ISAAC: Good morning everyone.
16 Good morning everyone. I would like to thank the
17 Cultural Affairs Committee and the Library Committee
18 for the opportunity to testify. My name is LaMeane
19 Isaac and I am the Branch Manager for the Macon
20 Library in Bedford, Stuyvesant and Brooklyn. I am
21 also a resident of Brownsville which is a few steps
22 away from the branch where I work because I live at
23 the tail end of Brownsville. Nearly 18 years ago, I
24 was a recent college graduate who was unemployed. My
25 job search led me to my local public library, the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

64

1 same library I used as a child, as a young adult and
2 worked for as a youth part-time at the school. The
3 branch librarian there in his effort to help me find
4 work suggested I apply to work for the library and I
5 did and I think you can figure out how that turned
6 out. The Library has had a tremendous impact on my
7 life just as it has a tremendous impact on the lives
8 of its many issues. Committee I thank you for your
9 support of libraries which make our ability to help
10 users possible. With your support Macon Library is
11 able to open its doors 53 hours a week, 7 days a week
12 but that is not the case with all libraries. During
13 that time, Macon Library is able to offer a variety
14 of programs to meet the needs of its diverse
15 patronage, every step of their lives. For example,
16 we have Library Lanes for older adults. We have five
17 weekly programs for children birth to five years old.
18 We have kid and teen tech time and legal robotics.
19 We offer career and resume help and computer classes.
20 We are also having an Artisan Residency Program to
21 support our local artists. We have Genealogy
22 Workshops and Independent Writing Workshops. A
23 variety of programs. I can go on but I won't. We
24 were also able to collaborate with many community
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

65

1
2 partners because of our hours of service and
3 available. For example, Divas for Social Justice
4 they provide an after school program for middle
5 school problems that focus on steam or Shop Healthy
6 Brooklyn which have brought together several
7 organizations to conduct workshops for families to
8 teach them how to eat well and advocate for healthy
9 foods in their communities. One NAMI, stands for the
10 National Alliance for the Mental Ill, we are
11 conducting programs to see what that community needs
12 like support groups for people who care for people
13 with mental illness and/or people who are living with
14 mental illness. The Library is not only a place for
15 individuals and groups to come, for programs and
16 children to come for after school but is also a place
17 for New York City's most vulnerable, the homeless,
18 the older adults. They come to the Library for a
19 cool place in the summer and a warm place in the
20 winter. Are fortunate at Macon to have 53 public
21 service hours and we are able to do so much. More
22 needs to be done. With your continued support and
23 increased support, the Library will be able to
24 increase its reach and help the patrons that they
25 serve and continue to be a place of life-long

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

66

1
2 learning, opportunity and discovery. Thank you
3 Committee for your time and consideration, I
4 appreciate it.

5 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you so much,
6 great job and that is really impressive that all of
7 that is happening at the Macon Branch Library. I am
8 sure the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs is thrilled
9 that you have Artisan Residents and Film makers and
10 all sort of things and Divas for Social Justice
11 sounds like a really fierce group of woman, no?

12 LAMEANE ISAAC: It is indeed.

13 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: We are all going to
14 have to go out there and meet them. Uhm and of
15 course you have STEAM which includes the A in STEM,
16 right so?

17 LAMEANE ISAAC: Yes.

18 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you so very
19 much to all of you for being here for the work that
20 you do and the passion that you have for libraries
21 which obviously I old as well. So with that, your
22 panel is excused. Thank you so much for coming to
23 City Hall today and if the Commissioner for the
24 Department of Cultural Affairs is ready, we will go
25 right into the Cultural Affairs portion of this

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

67

1
2 hearing. We are going to have more public testimony
3 at around 1 o'clock on both libraries and culture but
4 first we will hear from our Commissioner in the
5 Cultural Affairs Portion of the Culture Affairs
6 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
7 Committee. Thank you to all the Library supporters
8 who are leaving and the cultural community that is
9 arriving. So we are going to now shift gears and
10 hear from our Commissioner but before we hear his
11 testimony you do have to be sworn in.

12 LEGAL COUNSEL: Mr. Commissioner if you
13 will please raise your right hand. Do you affirm to
14 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the
15 truth in your testimony before this Committee and to
16 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

17 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Yes I do.

18 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: So Commissioner
19 thank you for joining us, we are thrilled to have
20 Council Member Francisco Moya from Queens also
21 joining. Obviously other Council Members will be
22 coming and going and everyone in the audience who
23 cares about Culture and the Arts in the City of New
24 York knows how hard I have fought with you over the
25 last several years. Uhm, we have had some strong

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

68

1 gains and some increases in funding that has been
2 desperately needed and we have seen continued support
3 of the Capital Program, a robust Capital Program for
4 our Cultural Organizations and Institutions but it is
5 the increase in Expense Funding that has helped so
6 many, particularly smaller cultural organizations
7 receive much needed infusions towards their budgets.
8 Now it is important to note that the City Council
9 through the great work of the City Council over the
10 last several years has dramatically increased City
11 Council, Cultural Initiatives. The Cultural After
12 School Adventure Program has almost tripled in the
13 last four years alone. We created the Cultural
14 Immigrant Initiative which is now over \$5 million.
15 We created the SUCASA Cultural Initiative bringing
16 artists to senior centers, all of that with other
17 increases as well where the City Council's Cultural
18 Initiatives are at record levels of funding and then
19 we went even further and increased the Operating
20 Support for the Department of Cultural Affairs, added
21 funding for the Cultural Development Fund and have
22 done terrific things towards implementing the
23 cultural plan that I am proud to work with Council
24 Member Levin to support. However, all of the
25

1
2 increases that are not City Council Cultural
3 Initiatives were not base lined so \$15 million that
4 was increased last year has not been base lined by
5 the Mayor and therefore we are technically looking at
6 a cut of \$15 million right now unless that funding
7 were restored. It is absolutely imperative that the
8 Mayor base line those \$15 million and allow us to
9 then push for even more funding but those gains
10 should not be temporary. Those gains should not
11 simply be reflected in our Budgets in good times when
12 we have the ability but instead they should be
13 permanent markers in terms of how we regard the
14 importance of this funding. So, I am anxious to hear
15 the Commissioner's testimony talking about that
16 effort and obviously we will hear questions after his
17 testimony but welcome Commissioner Finkelpearl and if
18 you would commence your testimony.

19 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Thank you
20 and let me just say before my testimony, I love
21 libraries, my mother was a librarian and both of her
22 parents are librarians so after Cultural Affairs my
23 heart is with those and it was great, like you said
24 to hear that there is a lot of Artisan residency,
25 etc. going on with libraries, just fantastic. So

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

70

1
2 that was the tail end of that. Okay. My testimony,
3 good afternoon Chair Van Bramer and members of the
4 committee. I am Cultural Affairs Commissioner, Tom
5 Finkelpearl here today to testify in regards to the
6 Mayor's Fiscal 2018 Preliminary Budget Proposal for
7 the Department of Cultural Affairs. I am joined
8 today by a number of my staff from the agency. First
9 I will review the numbers, the Agency Baseline
10 Expense Budget for 2019 and the Preliminary Budget
11 Proposal is \$142.1 million. This includes 28.5
12 million for the Cultural Development Fund, \$106.7
13 million for the Cultural Institution Group and \$6.9
14 million for Agency Operations and Other Expenses.
15 This is the Preliminary Budget Proposal. These
16 figures do not include any initiatives or other one
17 time additions typically added at Budgeted Option.
18 For the current Fiscal Year, our Budget is \$186.4
19 million. This is DCLA's largest every allocation.
20 This remarkable investment in Cultural Life of our
21 Communities is thanks to our strong partnership with
22 the City Council but by, led by the speaker and Chair
23 Van Bramer. It also reflects a real commitment to
24 the goals of Create NYC. I will discuss these in
25 more detail later in my testimony. I would also like

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

71

1
2 to highlight that my Agency's Operating Expenses
3 represent just 3.5% of our overall Budget. This
4 means that 96.5% of funds flow directly to the
5 Cultural Organizations in neighborhoods that make the
6 city a cultural powerhouse. Applications for the
7 Fiscal Year 2019 Cultural Development Fund were due
8 last month. The panel review process starts next
9 week and we will run through June. As always, we
10 appreciate the Council's consistent support and
11 involvement in this important process. For the
12 current year we are providing more than \$40 million
13 to more than 900 cultural groups across the five
14 boroughs. Next to our partnership with the City
15 Council this is the largest ever CDF allocation.
16 Turning to Capital the DCLA's four year Capital
17 Budget currently allocates \$933.84 million to
18 projects for 250 cultural groups city wide. These
19 projects are essential to the cultural organizations
20 and audiences in all five boroughs insuring access to
21 the best and most efficient cultural facilities and
22 equipment. If you are entered the New York Botanical
23 Gardens that has recently opened East Gate or climbed
24 about the gloriously restored Tall Ship Wavertree at
25 the South Street Seaport Museum you've encountered

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

72

1
2 City Funded DCLA Capital Projects. Some current
3 highlights from our portfolio include replacing
4 outdated HVAC boiler systems and fire safety systems
5 at the Dance Theatre of Harlem, renovating a new
6 administrative facility for the Louis Armstrong House
7 and Museum in Queens, upgrading the South Wing Atrium
8 at the Bronx Museum including new energy efficient
9 windows, HVAC upgrades and enhancement allowing for
10 all, for improving access and multi-use programming
11 year-round, improving the aquarium at the Staton
12 Island Zoo resulting in both better visitor
13 experience and greater energy efficiency and phase 3
14 of Brooklyn Botanic Garden South Gate Redevelopment
15 Project which will enhance and guide sustainable
16 operations and improved connections to its
17 surrounding neighborhoods. As you know Create NYC
18 has influenced DCLAs priorities, programs and budget
19 this year. There was a Cultural Plan Oversight
20 Hearing held by this committee in September of 2017.
21 Here is an update on a few recent announcements and
22 markers of progress towards the goals for this far
23 reaching program. In January we announced the winners
24 of the Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impact which
25 provides \$500,000 dollars for seven partnerships

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

73

1 between city agencies and cultural organizations to
2 fund programs benefiting underserved and vulnerable
3 New Yorkers. These programs respond to create NYC
4 recommendations to better intergrade culture into the
5 City Services. They include partnerships between
6 Artist New York and the New York City Department of
7 Planning to enliven Success Garden, an underutilized
8 community garden in East New York and expanding the
9 partnership between the Carnegie Hall and the
10 Department of Probation. To bring free verse
11 programs and apprenticeship project to neighborhood
12 opportunity networks, that is Neon Centers in
13 Northern Staton Island and Jamaica Queens. DCLA
14 launched public Artisan Residents or PAIR in 2015
15 which enable artists to work at city agencies where
16 they will work alongside staff and constituents.
17 Create NYC called for more such collaborations so
18 last month we announced New Artist Residencies for
19 four city agencies, the Department of Probation, the
20 Department of Corrections, NYC Commission on Human
21 Rights and the Mayor's Office to combat domestic
22 violence. We are excited to work alongside these
23 four artists and agencies to bring creative practice
24 to help solve from the New York City's most difficult
25

1
2 and pressing issues. Last month we kicked off
3 Building Community Capacity Program in three new
4 neighborhoods, Morrisania in the Bronx, Far Rockaway
5 in Queens and Bushwick in Brooklyn. We have also
6 started related effort in East Harlem building on the
7 Arts and Culture Chapter of the East Harlem
8 Neighborhood Plan. As I have testified on bel... in
9 the past, this program provides support to
10 organizations in low-income communities that are
11 engaged in broader planning and development efforts.
12 Through funding and technical assistance, the ECC
13 helps to ensure that local cultural groups and
14 artists are represented as neighborhoods plan their
15 futures. Their previous cohort included East New
16 York, Mount Haven and Jamaica, Jamaica and Endwood.
17 They concluded the run of their two-year program in
18 January. Affordable Real Estate for Artists or AREA,
19 Mayor De Blasio first announced the city's commitment
20 to create 500 affordable artists workspace in his
21 2015 State of the City Address. Create NYC
22 reinforced the importance of cultivating affordable
23 workspace for artists to maintain NYCs creative
24 vitality. Last month, DCLA and the New York City
25 Economic Development Corporation launched an effort

1
2 to identify new non-profit partners that are
3 interested in developing or operating affordable
4 artist workspace in city led development projects.
5 We also released a survey to proudly assess the
6 demand for artist workspace citywide. If you want to
7 learn more about or promote these opportunities among
8 your constituents, I am happy to connect you with my
9 appropriate stock members. During the cultural plan,
10 public engagement we started the Create NYC Officer
11 Hours with the Commissioner. This series provides an
12 opportunity for us to listen to residents about what
13 matters to them in an open audience led format.
14 Today we have had engaging conversations on topics
15 including DIY Artist Space, Arts and Disability,
16 Immigrant Artists and much more. These events have
17 shaped our understanding of so many critical issues
18 facing residents and cultural community in
19 particular. We have also sparked new collaborations
20 among participants. We promised to continue hosting
21 these events after the plan was released. The next
22 one will take place on March 26 at the Whitney Museum
23 where I will be hosting a conversation about sexual
24 harassment in the cultural community. Colleagues
25 from the Mayor's office to combat domestic violence

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

76

1
2 and the Commission on Human Rights will join us for
3 this important conversation. More information is
4 available on the DCLA Facebook page. Thanks in
5 particular to our partnership with the Council,
6 Create NYC provided a big boost in funding to
7 individual artists and small organizations in low
8 income communities. Our largest ever CDF allocation
9 included \$6.5 million to support cultural plan
10 objectives including as the Chair mentioned \$4
11 million boost from the City Council to CDF funding
12 with greater increase allocated to smaller
13 organizations, \$1.5 from the Mayor to support
14 organizations in neighborhoods identified by the
15 Social Impact for the Arts Project and another \$1
16 million from Council for Individual Artists provided
17 through the local arts councils. We believe that
18 culture is essential to healthy communities and we
19 are so proud and grateful for this increased funding.
20 The Cultural Plan contains over 90 recommendations
21 including eight immediate actions. Of the eight I am
22 glad to say that we have achieved substantial
23 progress on all of them from moving ahead with
24 creating new position in our agency dedicated to
25 promoting greater energy efficiency and Cultural

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

77

1
2 Institutions to establishing a Cultural Cabinet of
3 City Agencies to coordinate our drive, to drive
4 forward cultural efforts across multiple portfolios.
5 Another long term commitment identified in Create NYC
6 and reinforced by the Mayor itself at the release of
7 the Cultural Plan in July is DCLAs effort to promote
8 diversity, equity and inclusion in cultural
9 workforce. Prior to the release of the plan, we
10 directed millions of dollars towards promoting equity
11 and diversity in hiring. This included support for
12 the Cueni Cultural Core which provides paid
13 internships at cultural institutions for Cueni
14 students and over \$2 million to the Theatre
15 Subdistrict Council to fund programs aimed at
16 diversifying theatre groups. Theatres of Discipline
17 in our 2016 survey is found to have particularly
18 touch challenges with regard to diversity on their
19 staff so we've been excited to see TSC Programs
20 unfold and hope to report some of the outcomes in the
21 near future. With the release of the plan, we also
22 committed to building an emphasis on diversity in our
23 agencies funding at every level. To this end, the
24 Cultural Development Fund Applications included new
25 questions this year about each applicants efforts to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

78

1
2 hire diverse staff and reach diverse audiences. The
3 Cultural Institution Group given their greater share
4 of the funding are being required to produce full
5 diversity plans, set benchmarks, and increase
6 accountability. These will be due next Fiscal year.
7 In the meantime, we have been working with them
8 closely to figure out how to produce plans that
9 translate to concrete improvements that are
10 cultivating more inclusive cultural sector. Another
11 commitment in the Cultural Plan was to look carefully
12 at how we could support engagement and inclusion of
13 people with disabilities in the arts communities as
14 artists, cultural workers and audience members. To
15 this end, we have created a new position at the
16 Agency, Disability Inclusion Associate. We are also
17 planning an announcement about disability focused
18 funding in the near future. There is an amazing
19 innovative work being done by people in the
20 disability community city-wide and we want to be part
21 of making this more visible, better funded and more
22 essential to the ongoing conversation about
23 diversity, equity and inclusion in New York City.
24 This year, we have also implemented far reaching
25 legislation passed by the City Council and signed by

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

79

1 the Mayor, one piece of legislation pertaining to the
2 Percent for Art Program, adjusted funding formulas
3 that haven't been updated since Mayor Koch signed
4 them into law in 1992. Thanks to the leadership of
5 Chair Van Bramer and Majority Leader Cumbo, this law
6 went in to effect last month, modernizing the formula
7 and providing more funding for individual Public Art
8 Commissions. As the Mayor said when he signed the
9 Legislation the Improvement of the Percent for Art
10 Program strengthens the city's ability to invest in
11 Public Works of Art and local artists who created it.
12 As of today, there are already 15% projects in the
13 pipeline that will benefit from the new Legislation
14 and the first artist selection panels will take place
15 later this year. In January, Mayor De Blasio
16 released the final report of the Mayoral Commission
17 on City Arts, Monuments and Markers. As you know, I
18 co-Chair this Commission along side Darren Walker,
19 President of the Ford Foundation. The Commission was
20 charged with developing recommendation on how the
21 city should address monuments and markers on city
22 property that are a subject of significant public
23 debate. While similar issues have long been relevant
24 in New York the events connected to monuments in
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

80

1
2 other cities place new emphasis on ensuring that our
3 public ground is inclusive and welcoming to all. The
4 Commission was comprised of members with expertise in
5 History, Art and Antiquities, Public Art and Public
6 Space, Preservation and Diversity Inclusion. A small
7 number of city agencies with relevant roles and
8 skills provided additional technical and policy
9 expertise. During the public engagement process last
10 fall, New Yorkers spoke up and provided FYIs. Newly
11 200 offered verbal testimony and on-line survey
12 received more than 3,000 responses. Broadly speaking
13 the Commission laid off process for evaluating city-
14 owned monuments and markers on city property that are
15 subject of significant public debate. The Commission
16 also provided recommendations on four monuments in
17 particular. The Mayor largely embraced the
18 Commissions recommendations for these four monuments.
19 In general, the Commission emphasized additive
20 measures and public dialog. This includes
21 commissioning new permanent artwork honoring
22 histories of people not currently represented in
23 public property starting with indigenous peoples
24 supported by \$10 million in DCLA Capital Funding.
25 The Mayor also committed to relocate the statue of J.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

81

1
2 Marion Sims from its current location at the edge of
3 Central Park to Greenwood Cemetery where Sims is
4 buried. In addition, the city will take steps to
5 inform the public of the origin of the statue and the
6 historical context. The input from members of the
7 committee, the Broader Council and the general public
8 continue to inform our approach to cultivating public
9 space that are welcome to all New Yorkers and
10 representative of the rich histories of the city and
11 the city's residence. Almost there, no review of the
12 activities of the Department of Cultural Affair would
13 be complete without a nod to one of our most popular
14 programs, Materials for the Arts which provided a
15 fitting location for the lease of the Create NYC plan
16 in Chair Van Bramer's District last July. This year
17 we are celebrating 40 years of Materials for the Arts
18 that is #mftaturns40. In each of the last two years
19 we have pushed very close to the \$10 million and the
20 value of materials donated to this Creative Re-Use
21 Program. We are on our way to reaching this
22 milestone during this Fiscal Year. Along with our
23 partners at the Department of Sanitation, the
24 Department of Education, we are providing free
25 materials to 100s of organizations in public schools

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

82

1
2 creating great educational opportunities and writing
3 tons of useful material from our landfields. We
4 appreciate the opportunity to testify last month at
5 your hearing on the Role of Cultural Organizations in
6 the Current Political Climate. We are proud to
7 support the Transformity for what our Cultural
8 Community is doing and we thank you for your
9 leadership in these issues. I am happy to answer
10 questions you may have.

11 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
12 much, Commissioner Finkelpearl, you said almost there
13 as if the Majority Leader and I didn't want to hear
14 your testimony anymore but I think we both could have
15 sat here for hours and listened to a lot more, so.

16 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Thank you
17 very much.

18 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: So uhm, no need to
19 rush through your uhm testimony, it is all really
20 important stuff and I know that we both enjoy always
21 hearing from Commissioner Finkelpearl.

22 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: A few things that I
24 have, uhm, so I mentioned in my, my opening the
25 failure to baseline the increases that we have seen,

1
2 the \$15 million is really what I am talking about
3 because we worked together uhm, very closely to see
4 those gains and then we worked together very closely
5 in terms of which pieces you would pick up and which
6 pieces we would pick up, uhm but all of it is
7 incredibly important and if we are going to do
8 justice to the Cultural Plan that we worked so hard
9 on and we all talked so much about, not simply being
10 a dusty plan that goes on the shelf and but instead
11 actually effectuating the change that we all know is
12 needed and the \$15 million is really for me, that
13 manifestation of the plan actually changing our
14 Cultural Scene and Community. So talk to me about
15 the importance of that \$15 million in particular and,
16 and what would happen if we did not see that funding
17 restored.

18 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So look, I
19 broadly agree with a lot of what you are saying, uhm
20 but I want to just, and I hope you don't think I am
21 pushing back but I do want to say that there is a lot
22 of stuff going on with the Cultural Plan that is not
23 within that \$15 million. I will just say that it is
24 Diversity Planning, the energy, the nightlife
25 offices, a lot of great stuff that came out of the

1
2 plan that has actually happened. New laws have been
3 passed, night life office, I look forward to the
4 woman who is going to run that next week. Uhm, so
5 uhm, every Commissioner sits here with the Oversight
6 Committee and we obviously have goals for our agency,
7 we work closely with our partners at OMB to create
8 the best, you know, Budget for the City and this you
9 know, preliminary, we are sitting in a very similar
10 position that we were sitting last year at
11 preliminary looking forward to the Budget's outcome.
12 I obviously said in my testimony that the Budget
13 outcome last year was, was great. That is the
14 biggest Budget in the history of this agency,
15 therefore, the biggest Budget in any city in America
16 because we have the largest Cultural Budget, so I
17 would repeat I guess what I have said in past
18 testimony which is that I look forward to working
19 with you. I understand also that there will be push
20 from the Cultural Community. This is not surprising
21 to baseline the money and I look forward to working
22 with you on the Budget as it unfolds.

23 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: I appreciate that.
24 So you get to push back a little bit and I get to
25 push back a little bit too. Because in the within

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

85

1 the \$10 million that the Mayor allocated virtually
2 every dollar in those \$10 million was in fact
3 allocated toward very specific initiatives that came
4 out of the Cultural Plan and so I reiterate that it
5 is imperative that we once again see those \$15
6 million in the final Adopted Budget but we don't even
7 have to get there. The Mayor has that ability to
8 baseline that funding between right now and the
9 release of the Executive Budget and that should be
10 done and then we can also seek the increases that we
11 all agree are necessary to get us to where we are at.
12 Because I am very pleased that funding for the
13 Department of Cultural Affairs is at an all-time
14 record high. We worked very hard together to make
15 sure that we could say that and that you could put
16 that in your testimony and say it today. Uhm, I am
17 also very proud that the Cultural Development Fund is
18 at a record level. Again the City Council putting in
19 an additional \$4 million last year to make that
20 possible but you are the Mayor's Commissioner at the
21 Department of Cultural Affairs and it is imperative
22 that the Mayor understand how important this is to
23 you and to the community and to this Council and
24 baseline this funding once and for all because we
25

1
2 cannot risk it year after year after year, allow our
3 economy to get into one of those downward phases
4 which are inevitable as the ebb and flow of the
5 Economy happens and we all know sitting here today
6 that that \$15 million would be among the first that
7 people would propose to take away from our community
8 and so now is the moment for it to be protected and
9 preserved and enhanced. And I see some happy fingers
10 going up.

11 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: You see
12 that in the room.

13 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Uhm, so I think it
14 is, you know, of course a little bit ironic that I
15 used to be the Chair of the Cultural Institution
16 Group where John Calvelli is going to testify, I am
17 sure, supporting that. Uhm and this sort of
18 definition of what a cut is? So I am sitting now
19 where Kate Levin was when I was sitting where John
20 Calvelli. In those days, we were looking at cuts to
21 the Cultural Budget that were quite significant which
22 added up to a big \$65 million gap so the first four
23 years ago I, I reiterate the history here, uhm, there
24 was a baseline, a big baseline increase, the biggest
25 in the history of agency as I understand to baseline

1
2 that money so then when we have successfully been
3 able to add the money then it is defined as a cut if
4 it is not added again. So it's, that's the position
5 I am sitting in. I understand what you are saying, I
6 look forward to working with you, I appreciate the
7 collaborative work that we have all done together on
8 behalf of this and we are going to work together in
9 the coming months. So I understand your situation,
10 but it would be good to hear you at least say that
11 base-lining this funding is better than not base-
12 lining this funding. Increasing funding for the
13 Department of Cultural Affairs is not better than not
14 increasing the Budget for the Department of Cultural
15 Affairs and that all of the organizations, the nearly
16 1,000 that rely on this funding and then all of the
17 groups that received additional funding or additional
18 grants as a result that the \$10 million that the
19 Mayor was put in that was really specifically geared
20 towards making sure that the Cultural Plan is a
21 living, breathing document, I think it would, it
22 would be good to know that you are in there fighting
23 with your Deputy Mayor and I don't mean fighting
24 against them but fighting with them to, to make sure
25 that we are getting increases that we need.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

88

1
2 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: I can say
3 with great confidence that the money was well spent,
4 that the \$15 million was extremely good thing for the
5 Cultural Community and for the Life of New York City.
6 I can say that every Commissioner that comes up here,
7 has a role in the Budget and that the role of working
8 with our friends at OMB, some of whom are here. Uhm
9 to create the best Budget for the people of New York
10 City, it has to be a balanced Budget so I can say
11 that I am an advocate for its culture and that I am
12 proud of the Budget that we have been able to
13 collaboratively create and proud of that I can say.

14 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Can we, can we
15 agree that it would be a very bad thing if this lack
16 of base-lining lead to a \$15 million cut to the
17 Department of Cultural Affairs Budget.

18 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: I mean I
19 think what I can say as Commissioner is that adding
20 that money has been great thing for the Cultural Life
21 of New York City. You know, I can't get up here and
22 make a comment that says anything that is clear about
23 base-lining that money because that is part of the
24 Budget process, I think we all know that Budget
25 process is what it is. I am proud of the money that

1
2 you and I and other advocates and people in this room
3 have added to the Budget in the last years. When I
4 say you and I, when I say I, I mean the Mayor, right,
5 that's who added the money, not Tom Finkelpearl,
6 let's be clear about that. Uhm so I mean I think
7 that is what I'm, what I can say and I think you
8 understand the limitations on what I can say are I am
9 proud of the Budgets that have been created, I am
10 100% certain it has been good for New York City to
11 spend that money and I look forward to the Budget
12 process.

13 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And I look forward
14 to the Mayor base-lining this funding for.

15 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: I
16 understand that.

17 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: The Cultural
18 Community and we just got to get of this, this, uhm,
19 annual fight and we've got to affirmatively assert
20 that funding for Culture and the Arts is critical.
21 It is not a luxury it is not fluff. It is absolutely
22 essential and if a Budget is a reflection of our
23 values then we've got to put our money where our
24 mouths are in terms of the value that we place on
25 Culture and the Arts. Uhm, I wanted to ask a

1
2 specific question about the Percent for Art Program
3 and the, the works that you are talking about that
4 are in the pipeline that will benefit from the
5 increase. How, how are you breaking those out by
6 borough, those projects in particular because
7 obviously you would not be shocked to learn that I
8 would be particularly interested in knowing that all
9 of the boroughs are receiving an equal amount of
10 attention when it comes to the absolute need for
11 public art.

12 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Uhm, so
13 actually I don't have the borough breakdown but just
14 to be clear the law, remember when the law was passed
15 there was a year from that date was when the numbers
16 were going to go up so that just happened last week
17 so all subsequent Percent for Art are based on the
18 new allocation which is again much more then, more
19 than twice as much money. So the way the Percent for
20 Art Program works is not that we seek out you know,
21 let's do a project in Queens and let's do a project
22 in the Bronx. We sit down with the agencies and we
23 find out where there are Capital Projects that are,
24 that are eligible for Percent for Art. We look at
25 the most publically accessible so I can get back to

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

91

1
2 you with Kendall Henry and our, my Percent for Art
3 Director and try to figure out exactly or not try to,
4 we can tell you where those works are being done.

5 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: I hear what you are
6 saying but it's pretty obvious that Percent for Art
7 Eligible Projects are happening all over the city.

8 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: They are,
9 yep. Yep.

10 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And in every
11 borough and therefore you do have some ability to
12 determine that there is equity and that you aren't
13 just putting them all in one neighborhood.

14 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: No, no and
15 I.

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Or one borough and
17 so there is some discretion here when it comes to all
18 the projects because just in my district alone I
19 could point you to numerous projects that are Percent
20 for Art eligible and of course that is probably for
21 just about every district in the city.

22 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Yeah, so I
23 mean there definitely is an effort to do city-wide
24 and it has been through, I believe the Percent for
25 Art really is a city-wide project. It is in all

1
2 boroughs but again I can get back to you and say
3 which ones are at this point going forward and we can
4 look at that list and see if, how it stands.

5 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: I would appreciate
6 that a great deal. Maybe that is a good topic for
7 another hearing of this committee going forward. So
8 Cheers for the Arts, obviously is a city-wide program
9 but because it is based in my district we are
10 absolutely thrilled with it and the \$10 million
11 marketing materials is that also a record, and...

12 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So we've
13 had, we've approached \$10 million in the last two
14 years, we are hoping to get to that threshold this
15 year, that would be a record. The last two years
16 have been the highest ever, right around \$9.5 million
17 of materials. We also measured in tons and they have
18 been the highest so we are, it has been improving its
19 efficient and reach and amount of money saved, so we
20 are hoping for a record. The last two years have
21 been highest we have ever had. I can show you those
22 stats also.

23 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Right.

24 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: I can
25 share them with you.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

93

1
2 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Yeah, that would be
3 terrified, and, and turning to Capital, with respect
4 to our Cultural Institutions and Organizations, uhm,
5 I think you completely agree with, with me, that when
6 we make those investments we are really investing in
7 the City of New York and the future of the City of
8 New York and it's absolutely essential that we
9 continue to increase the Capital Program for the
10 Department and for all of these amazing projects that
11 are going all over the City of New York, increasing
12 our footprint is so incredibly important so uhm, talk
13 to me about the Capital Budget and where we are at
14 now and where we need to be?

15 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So, the,
16 the last year or this Fiscal Year's Capital Budget
17 for the Department of Cultural Affairs was about \$175
18 million, that included a very robust partnership with
19 the Council and we are looking forward to that. We
20 are hoping for that really great partnership going
21 forward. We are looking at the statistics and the
22 \$175 million mark is a very robust Capital Budget,
23 adjusted for inflation that is about where uhm it was
24 during the last administration. Uhm, the last couple
25 of years of Bloomberg were extremely high but the

1
2 average years. So we don't have a number yet and you
3 don't have a number yet on Capital but we are hoping
4 uhm that our investment has been very consistent from
5 the City side of \$60 or \$70 million a year coming
6 from the Administration in the terms of Capital,
7 similar coming from the Council, last year was
8 extremely good year, the borough Presidents threw in
9 maybe \$20 million. I can get the st, st, st, exact
10 statistics to you but it has been a very robust set
11 of investments. We have the Capital Applications are
12 just coming in. There is a lot to look at. We are
13 beginning to look at that, there is a lot of big
14 requests coming from our brothers and sisters in the
15 audience here today. Uhm, so look it has been very
16 robust. I'm, I'm glad you brought it up. It's about
17 at least half of what we do as Capital in terms of
18 funding and we are looking forward to another robust
19 year this year.

20 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Yes, who here would
21 like more Capital Funding. Yeah, I think that's and
22 in terms of actually being able to spend the money
23 and get those projects built in timely and efficient
24 ways, obviously there is a lot of concern about the
25 Department of Design and Construction and various

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

95

1 issues that some organizations and institutions face,
2 how, talk to us a little bit about all of the Capital
3 Program and there is a lot in there, hundreds of
4 millions of dollars being spent in a way and those
5 projects being built in a way that are efficient for
6 the taxpayers.
7

8 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Uhm, so
9 first of all in the way that we spend our Capital
10 money, a lot of the larger institutions do either
11 what is called a Funding Agreement through the
12 Economic Development Corporation or a Cultural
13 Capital Grant, thank you very much, CCG through DDC.
14 So a lot of the money is actually managed by the
15 Cultural Institutions usually that own Capital
16 Projects and that is do only really for the bigger
17 institutions where there is a lot of private
18 fundraising so I think that is a very efficient use.
19 That is something uhm that we do a lot of. We have
20 been working very closely with the Council to look at
21 efficiencies, to sit down with some very lengthy
22 meetings to talk about how the money is spent.
23 Obviously, we are not the Capital Agency, we are the
24 Funding Agency but there are some experiments that
25 have to do with something called pre-scoping which is

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

96

1
2 to work especially with small Cultural Institutions,
3 one of the problems has been that scoping in other
4 words to try and figure out how much money you need
5 to do the Capital Project that you need to do is very
6 hard for small cultural institutions to get to the
7 finish line with a Budget that is realistic to
8 present to us and to the Council to ask for funding.
9 Right, so we have all seen this. They, you are not
10 quite sure, because this is not a small cultural
11 institution, even including something like the Queens
12 Museum didn't have a Capital Division it had some
13 people who worked on the Capital Projects. So we
14 have been working on some experiments like that,
15 working with pre-scoping with DDC, you know,
16 obviously this is something we would like to get done
17 more quickly, so we are working very much on that but
18 we are not the Capital Agency.

19 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Right, uhm, so the
20 commitment rate, is 27.2%, uhm, now there are other
21 agencies that are even significantly lower than that
22 but there are significant agencies that are
23 significantly higher than that, so what is the plan
24 to increase your commitment rate, because I also
25 serve on the Transportation Committee and

1
2 Commissioner Trottenberg has come before the
3 Committee in past years and I commemorate was for
4 that agency was significantly lower. Commissioner
5 Trottenberg has been very successful in getting that
6 commitment rate up at the DOT and she talked about it
7 just a couple of weeks ago here, right in your very
8 same spot. So, for your department and for this
9 community what is the plan to get?

10 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So there
11 base proposal is on the table, not necessarily been
12 accepted yet, but I'll just mention to you and I
13 already mentioned the pre-scoping so we believe that
14 before, if enough research is done that you really,
15 that the organization has the right exact idea of how
16 to create the scope at the beginning of the process,
17 these are for the smaller organizations working with
18 DDC that that is going to make it much more efficient
19 so by the time you actually get the money in hand you
20 understand the Budget, understand the scope and then
21 the other, we've had slowdowns in relationship to
22 Equipment Purchases so there is a proposal on the
23 table, again not, it's under discussion, but has been
24 openly discussed with the Council, I'm not breaking
25 any confidentiality rules to do alternate year

1
2 equipment purchase so that to say every equipment
3 purchase needs to be completed within a certain
4 period of time, it creates a beginning, a middle and
5 an end. You start over every two years. You only
6 apply every two years. Again, it hasn't been
7 approved. We think that is something, we again have
8 been working with our friends at OMB about that kind
9 of procurement which we think, you know, there is a
10 lot of what we do is equipment purchases and those
11 things have been taking longer than they should, so
12 those are two proposals on the table, we are
13 absolutely actively pursuing it. Uhm, this is
14 something that has been in high priority for the
15 administration.

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Well I may come
17 back and ask some more questions, uhm, but I want
18 wrap up my statement by saying once again
19 Commissioner I am enormously proud of the work that
20 we have done together and to find so many instances
21 in your testimony where you talk about being at
22 record levels of funding, you and I both know more
23 than just about anyone else in the city just how hard
24 we have had to work to be able to say those things.
25 Uhm, it shouldn't have to be that hard but it

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

99

1 sometimes is when it comes to uhm, Culture and the
2 Arts but we have been able to do it and we need to do
3 more and we should see even more increases for this
4 community and then we need base-lining. We
5 absolutely need to have this funding base-lined and
6 this community deserves it and we can't leave the
7 community vulnerable to those who have a less, a
8 lesser appreciation for this community when times get
9 tough in the City of New York.

11 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: And I can
12 say on the record that I appreciate your advocacy and
13 support.

14 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you I am
15 determined and very, very dogged when it comes to the
16 things that I care about and we just saw our Library
17 Systems talk about their base-lining and their
18 increases and I fight equally hard for both of the
19 things that I care about most in the world which are
20 Libraries and the Cultural Community, so it's, I look
21 forward to the fight again this year, Commissioner
22 Finkelpearl with you and now I believe Majority
23 Leader Cumbo has some questions.

24 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you
25 Chair Van Bramer, thank you Commissioner Finkelpearl

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

100

1 for being here. I wanted to start off with questions
2 about resources and money out the door and the time
3 frame in which organizations receive funding. So
4 there were a lot of challenges with CASA Funding,
5 SUCASA as well as the Cultural Immigration Fund and
6 organizations receiving those resources, uhm,
7 throughout the years that has always been an issue
8 but it was particularly an issue last year when many
9 organizations had to front a great deal of money
10 before they got reimbursed. I want this to be the
11 year that it all changes, I want this to be a
12 revolutionary year where people refer back to 2018
13 and say that's when they fixed it. What are we going
14 to do this year to make sure that organizations get
15 the funding in a timely fashion because not in
16 theory, in reality these are suppose to be yearlong
17 programs so what happens with programs like CASA and
18 others is that the money comes in late, the
19 organizations then start the programs late, the
20 students have already selected afterschool programs
21 and then enrollment in these programs is typically
22 very low because we never got a chance to get the
23 resources out the door in a fashion that would allow
24 it. What are we going to do differently?
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

101

2 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So first
3 of all I will say there is some good news. Which is
4 the money actually for CASA, Immigrant Initiative,
5 SUCASA, did go out quicker this year, significantly,
6 we had a hearing on that last year. I said we will
7 work together, we are going to do everything we can,
8 promised to get it out and we did get it out sooner.
9 Last year was I think the high watermark on lateness
10 and it was very difficult to get those Council
11 Initiative money out the door. This year, with
12 SUCASA was delayed for a variety of reasons. Look,
13 the thing we would love to do and to work together
14 with y'all on this committee to work together with
15 the new speaker, to get designations right up front
16 as much as we can at adoption. If we could get the
17 designations from the Council early enough we will
18 work like crazy to get the money out of the door as
19 quickly as possible. Again, the results were much,
20 much better this year. I remember last year in
21 December, things were, very, very stalled. This year
22 much of that money, much of the designations were
23 completed and things were going on ea... much
24 earlier. So you know from our side, we are hoping
25 and praying that we can get to the point, which we

1
2 really did make a lot of progress this year. I don't
3 know if the groups feel it, but it really was. We
4 have the statistics to back it up saying it was much
5 better this year than last year but let's make it
6 even better next year, create a system that gets all
7 the designations done in a very timely manner. We
8 would love to have a very hard deadline, working
9 together with Council Finance of you know the end of
10 the summer for all of the designations. We will work
11 together with y'all to make that happen.

12 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: I hear
13 you, I don't see why when we actually vote on the
14 Budget why those allocations can't be included in the
15 Budget at that time and when we vote those
16 organizations are already part of the decision making
17 process so that July 1 we are already working towards
18 having that money going to the hands of the
19 organizations.

20 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Well that
21 would be a dream come true. I will say that there
22 are plenty of Council Members who do make those
23 designations right at the very beginning of the
24 Fiscal Year.

25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

103

1
2 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: And they
3 make designations for tons of things in other areas,
4 street cleanup, Parks Initiatives, all of these
5 different types of programming those decisions are
6 made. We have to buckle down and make sure that
7 those decisions are made at adoption.

8 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: To be
9 fair, many Council Member do initially make those
10 designations at adoption. We are always working to
11 have more Council Members make those designations at
12 adoption and as soon as possible. I will also say
13 that the totality of the issue is not simply about
14 member designation and there is a piece of that the
15 Department of Cultural Affairs owns as well, so your
16 point is very well taken but uhm, we, we have had
17 many Council Members designate at adoption but, but
18 some still choose to take a little more time to get
19 that done but even when they are all done or
20 virtually all done I think there is some other issues
21 at the, at the other end to be fair.

22 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you.
23 I also want to move into security. So we are living
24 in another time, uhm, going into a Cultural
25 Institution, particularly a lot our Performing Arts

1 Venues, particularly on the larger scale are
2 experiencing greater needs for security. What is
3 DCLAs plan around security for our Cultural
4 Institutions, uhm, requests that have gone in, in
5 terms of increased security and allowing
6 organizations the opportunity to not have to have the
7 need to utilize their Operating Budgets to take on
8 additional security costs that obviously takes away
9 from Programming and Events, staff, utilities and so
10 in and so forth. What is DCLAs plan as it pertains
11 to security moving forward?

13 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So I
14 personally have not gotten an avalanche of requests
15 related specifically to security. I would be
16 interested to hear what you have heard? Obviously a
17 lot of the money that goes to the Cultural
18 Institution Group goes to Maintenance and Security so
19 those security guards at institutions, so there is a
20 lot of money being allocated towards security at
21 institutions already. So it is not something that
22 has come up as a major issue. I mean, I know what
23 you are talking about, things like the security
24 issues at schools, etc. I haven't heard from a large
25 number of Cultural Institutions that there is, you

1
2 know, but I would be interested in hear if you have
3 heard that and if Cultural Organizations do see a
4 huge uptick in the amount of money being spent on
5 security. I just haven't seen it.

6 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: We have
7 more so heard from Cultural Institutions but I think
8 that many of them that are outside of the CIGs as
9 well don't even think that that is an option for
10 them. So I think that it is a conversation that we
11 have to have in terms of how DCLA is going to be
12 looking at security moving forward in this new era.
13 Another aspect is in Traveling. I am always very
14 excited when I see brochures, events translated into
15 different languages. Where are we with allowing
16 organizations or providing resources for
17 organizations to translate materials into other
18 languages so that we can capitalize on the amount of
19 tourism that many of our institutions enjoy and would
20 like to enjoy more of?

21 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So we did
22 allocate some money through the Cultural Plan,
23 specifically for translation services. Uhm, that was
24 money that was added essentially to organizations
25 Budgets and but we were actually thinking of it more

1
2 in terms of access for New Yorkers who speak many
3 different languages. I think a lot of the folks who
4 are going to the tourist destinations, like if you
5 go, you know big Cultural Institutions that have lots
6 of tourists there, there is often translation already
7 there for some of those languages that tourists are
8 speaking.

9 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: I wanted
10 to go into the diversity work that you are doing. So
11 there is obviously been a huge push in order to make
12 our Cultural Institutions, staffs, boards, etc., more
13 diverse. Do you have numbers in terms of where we
14 have been able to move the needle and how that is
15 working? And what are the, what are the things that
16 are working? What are the areas that we need to do
17 more as far as diversity throughout our institutions
18 and have we thought of adding more partners to
19 assisting with that effort, particularly some of our
20 smaller institutions of color that could also be
21 considered training grounds for diversifying staff?

22 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So we did
23 the initial. When I say we, there was an initial
24 survey done by an outside non-profit which is Dorsey
25 Activity Inclusion Survey of the Cultural World in

1
2 New York City. So everybody who got a grant from us
3 was required to fill out this survey and it, it
4 created results for 37,000 employees, I think 11,000
5 board members. The next step, so we don't, that was
6 sort of a baseline survey. The next step is going to
7 be a new survey that is going to be done in the
8 coming months working with CDP, the Cultural Data
9 Project and one of the things about surveying is that
10 the goal standard of surveying is self-reporting and
11 that, that is what this will be, involved, and it
12 will be the CIG plus a sample of Program Groups. So
13 since we have done the baseline survey we have not
14 done another survey so we can't say what the progress
15 is until we do the next survey. But we are very
16 interested in that, obviously, I think doing the
17 survey at periodic times to see whether the needle is
18 changing or whether the needle is being moved is
19 important to us.

20 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Have you
21 thought about any uhm, other ways to include more
22 partners to add to that desire.

23 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So I mean,
24 there are for example Cunei Cultural Cores.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

108

1
2 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: I was just
3 going to ask.

4 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Yeah, so
5 that's been, I think really successful. We have our
6 second cohort, I think we have had 200 Cunei students
7 participate. I know many of the organizations out
8 there have had those. You guys, have you done it?
9 Yes, some of you yeah, so that's paid internships
10 where it doesn't cost the institution money, we are
11 paying for the internships and it's a super diverse
12 group of Cunei students. Anybody is eligible that
13 who is a Cunei student but it's just, that's how
14 diverse Cunei is. We've also worked with their 11
15 theatre programs, theatre diversity programs underway
16 with funding from Theatre Subdistrict Council. It is
17 an amazing program diversifying work force at
18 theatres so there is a series of uhm diversity
19 funding that we have been doing which includes many
20 different partners, not just Cunei but 11 theatre
21 organizations and the entire you know sort of
22 cultural field is in discussion about that.

23 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: As it
24 pertains to Capital, where do you stand in terms of,
25 where does the Department stand in terms of

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

109

1
2 exhibitions being included in your Capital Budget,
3 because many organizations are different from let's
4 say a Fine Art Institution with Moama. There are
5 institutions that their exhibitions can last five,
6 ten years because it is almost a part of the, the
7 construction of the institution but it needs upkeep,
8 it needs general change and care, many historical
9 centers will be similar to that, Children's Museums,
10 exhibitions, spaces such as that. How do you look at
11 and view exhibitions in your Capital Budget?

12 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So it's not
13 just us, there is something called Directive Ten
14 which has to do with the use of Capital money. This
15 Directive Ten is essentially a legal definition of
16 what is Capitally eligible. So that is something
17 that we work with the Office of Management and Budget
18 on that. Often exhibitions are not considered to be
19 Capitally eligible, so you know, if you think what
20 happens is people buy bonds and there is a period of
21 time of that bond. There has to be a fixed asset
22 that is bought with those bonds and the fixed asset
23 has to last as long as the bonds, at least, right, so
24 if you are building a building those are often 30
25 year bonds. So the people of New York City are

1
2 paying back those bonds or the people of whoever buy
3 the bonds. They don't have to be from New York City
4 but these are, you know, bonds that have a life span
5 and there is a very strict set of laws around what is
6 Capitally eligible. It is not something I as
7 Commissioner of Cultural Affairs could simply say an
8 exhibition is now eligible. We work with our
9 partners at Office of Management and Budget to
10 determine what is Capitally eligible. So that, I
11 mean it is very strict in New York State and it has
12 been getting stricter.

13 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Could a,
14 because an exhibitions as well as like certain forms
15 of technology, it's an extremely difficult space
16 because we are moving, we are in the technology era
17 and age and everything is moving in that way. The
18 way in which we fund and support technology doesn't
19 go along with the bonding process as you would say.
20 Nor do exhibitions because people want to see new
21 things but the construction of an exhibition is a
22 costly one and one that often cannot be covered by
23 Programmatic or Expense Funding. So what would you
24 say would be the life of an exhibition that DCLA
25 could support?

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

111

1
2 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So I mean
3 this would have to be very specific but I think it is
4 technology. There are different lengths of different
5 bonds, right so, when we are buying for an
6 organization a complete system. It has to be a
7 complete system, it can't just be a computer. If it
8 is lighting system or something that is technological
9 there are again restrictions on that. For example,
10 there are restrictions on buying software as opposed
11 to hardware and I am actually not the expert. I have
12 seen these get approved or disapproved depending upon
13 the organization, but in general, you know, if you
14 would like to sit down, we can have an in depth
15 meeting to talk about Capital eligibility.

16 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: We can do
17 that.

18 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: It is, I
19 am happy to do it with the actual experts in my
20 Capital Unit. Absolutely, look the restrictions are
21 clear, they are defending you know those bond buyers
22 and the interest of you know of New York City in
23 creating permanent long-term assets.

24 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: I just
25 have two more questions, uhm, on the Federal level do

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

112

1 we have an understanding at this point, what Federal
2 cuts have taken place and how they are impacting New
3 York City Cultural Institutions or what is forecasted
4 moving forward? I know Chair Van Bramer had a
5 hearing on that recently and I just wanted to
6 reiterate those numbers?
7

8 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Right, so
9 there haven't been cuts in Arts and Cultural Fundings
10 so and that's because partially of advocacy. There
11 was a national movement. The current Proposed
12 Federal Budget which was sort of in the same phase,
13 does eliminate entirely agencies including NEH, NEA,
14 IMLS and Public Radio, I believe, have been zeroed
15 out. What I have heard from advocates on those
16 fronts is you know the really terrible scenario is if
17 these agencies are zeroed out and disbanded, it is
18 much worse than a 10% cut or whatever, we don't want
19 there to be cuts, we think there should be increases
20 but so far you know there haven't been cuts, in fact,
21 there was a slight increase, I think, seem to
22 remember in NEA funding. A bunch of New York City
23 Organization, I think just a couple of weeks ago, \$6
24 million of funding was announced for New York City
25 Organizations from the NEA alone. So there haven't

1
2 been cuts and we want to fight against them and you
3 know it has been successful in the first. We can't
4 be, you know we have to be diligent and fight against
5 the cuts happening in the future.

6 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Is there a
7 reserve that has been discussed or talked about in
8 the event that these proposed wipe-outs of agencies
9 happen because unfortunately this President seems to
10 act on what he says.

11 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: No, I mean
12 so the city does not have reserves in anticipation of
13 the cuts. Our feeling is we should be fighting the
14 cuts.

15 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Correct.

16 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: And along
17 with the people of America to keep Cultural Funding
18 in place.

19 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Uh-huh,
20 and my final question uhm pertains to during the
21 Cultural Plan. Was there a study or an
22 understanding of what do the Cultural Institutions of
23 the City of New York. So when we talk about, let's
24 just say the \$28 million for the Cultural Development
25 Fund, the \$106 million for Cultural Institute Groups

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

114

1 and the \$6.9 for Agency plus Capital. Do we have an
2 understanding at this time as to what is the City of
3 New York's Economic Revenue Generator for the City at
4 this time? So have we done like an analysis to say
5 the city spends this much on Culture, either through
6 Expense or Capital and as a result it yields X, Y and
7 Z?
8

9 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So there
10 have been numerous, you know, analysis of the
11 economic impact of Arts and Culture in New York City.
12 The thing that we have done under this administration
13 is the social impact of the Arts Studies. That was
14 different and by the way we 100% agree with and
15 believe in the idea that there is a big economic
16 impact but there are other kinds of impact and we
17 wanted to do that study, so the social impact of the
18 arts study said aside from Economic impact, Arts and
19 Cultural Activities in communities are good for
20 educational outcomes, safety and other social
21 outcomes, health as well. So it is actually, there
22 are correlations between Arts and Cultural Activities
23 believe it or not and lower instances of high blood
24 pressure and diabetes in communities. These are
25 other kinds of outcomes that are extremely important

1
2 so that's the uhm, the study that we felt was
3 important to do, the other studies having already
4 been done that we support. So we think of the Art as
5 an economic impact but there is also a Social Impact
6 of the Arts. And have you seen that study? I am
7 happy to share that with you.

8 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: I would
9 love to see that. I would love to see it on an
10 economic level, educational level, social level
11 because we would have a greater understanding of how
12 much we should allocate based off of where we are
13 saving just by allocating resources in those areas,
14 so if we find that Culture in an area brings down
15 crime then we know that that is a better way of
16 spending money than maybe putting in an entire police
17 force to do that same type of work. So I mean, it's
18 different but.

19 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So just be
20 a clear. I have a little bit of technical, there is
21 a correlation between Arts and Cultural Activities
22 and lower crime. It doesn't mean it is a direct
23 relation. This study is saying that it is part of a
24 healthy community. So I am happy to share that study
25 with you.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

116

1
2 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: And then
3 this is my last one, uhm, we discussed a lot in
4 regards to this and in my district the 35th District,
5 Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Crown
6 Heights, part of Bedford-Stuyvesant, it is something
7 that I am so frustrated by, that there is so much
8 development happening, there are so many
9 corporations, Apple, Whole Foods, Target, H&M, all of
10 these different corporations that are thriving in my
11 district. Whereas like a Target's number 1 selling
12 store in my district uhm and then they just opened up
13 a second one, #2, but not the Not for Profit and
14 Cultural Community is simply not benefiting from the
15 philanthropy that could be garnered from either the
16 development or the corporations that are moving into
17 our city. How can we leverage this investment into
18 our Not for Profit Community because I just feel like
19 I am going to scream the next ad that I see moving to
20 the Cultural Community in Downtown Brooklyn, near the
21 subway, near this and all of this but there is no
22 investment in all that they are advertising and it is
23 actually going to in many ways not allow those very
24 institutions and artists and organizations to thrive
25 in the same way and I know we have had this

1
2 discussion a lot and I have brought it up a lot
3 during the Cultural Plan.

4 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: So I will
5 say that I don't know if there is a comprehensive
6 answer to exactly the question that you are way, it
7 is quite broad but I will say that actually inspired
8 by some of the things that you said at some of the
9 meetings. We have been meeting with a group of
10 corporations and corporate philanthropies to
11 understand how they can better invest in communities
12 where they are doing business. So I don't want to,
13 maybe we could talk off line. Uhm, we have taken
14 that seriously and we have had some meetings inspired
15 by that very set of issues you are bringing up.

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you I just
17 want to let everyone know we have the room only until
18 2 o'clock because we have another important hearing
19 coming. What's that? Okay, thank you Council
20 Member. Commissioner I want to thank you for your
21 testimony. We have another 15 or so people who would
22 like to testify so we are going to uhm, try and move
23 a little bit more swiftly. Uhm going forward and but
24 I want to thank you for your testimony. I want to
25 thank you for being here and I want to thank you in

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

118

1
2 advance for your advocacy to baseline the funding and
3 to increase the funding for your department and for
4 this community because we both know that you and I
5 agree that our city is better off when this funding
6 is there and it is there permanently and it is
7 increased and New York City is thriving because these
8 folks make it thrive.

9 COMMISSIONER TOM FINKELPEARL: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
11 much. Uhm, now we will hear our first panel, John
12 Calvelli, representing the Cultural Institutions
13 Group, Christopher Carroll representing local 802 the
14 American Federation of Musicians. We have Sheila
15 Lewandowski representing the Chocolate Factory and I
16 know that we have a young man from the library
17 portion of our panel who has been waiting for hours.
18 Would you like to testify now? Yes, so we are going
19 to hear from Yosenix Orango (SP?), that is great name
20 so why don't you join us and if it is okay with our
21 cultural folks we are going to allow Yosenix (SP?) to
22 close out our library portion with some heartfelt
23 testimony I am sure about Libraries and uhm have a
24 Yosenix (SP?) next to Sheila and Chris and John. So
25 we have been at this since 9:30 this morning and we

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

119

1 are in hour four or something like this it's, it's
2 great to see everyone here. So we are going to go to
3 a three minute timer. I will ask everyone to be as
4 succinct as possible. I will be a little bit more
5 aggressive than I usually am and in pursuing this
6 through just because we uhm want to hear from
7 everybody who has come to City Hall today and we want
8 to make sure that we also give over the room to the
9 next Committee who would like to have their hearing.
10 So uhm, to close out the Library portion of the day
11 why don't we hear from Mr. Orango (SP?) first.

12 YOSINIX ORANGO: Good afternoon.

13 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Why don't you press
14 the little light in front of you.

15 YOSINIX ORANGO: Alright got it. Good
16 afternoon members of the Cultural Affairs and Library
17 Committees. I would like to begin by thanking you
18 all the opportunity to speak before you today. My
19 name is Yosenix Orango (SP?) and I am the Young Adult
20 Librarian at Brooklyn Public Library Stone Avenue
21 Branch in Brownsville, Brooklyn which is also the
22 area where I reside. Uhm, in two months I will be
23 celebrating my one year anniversary with BPL. As a
24 young adult librarian I provide programs and services
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

120

1 primarily to teens. Some of my programs include
2 Japanese Language Instruction, STEM Activities such
3 as Game Design and Robotics and Recreational Programs
4 including board games and video games. Growing up in
5 Brownsville myself and sharing similar interest in
6 technologies and all things Japanese with our teens
7 who reside in our community has allowed me to make
8 our branch a desirable place to be for our youth.
9 The library is an important pillar of our community,
10 especially in an area like Brownsville which is many
11 low income households. It provides a safe
12 environment for individuals of all ages and
13 backgrounds to take part in. We help bridge the
14 digital divide in our community by providing access
15 to desktop computers, laptops, tablets and of course
16 Wi-Fi. Our library provides many services beyond
17 books and library cards. We are actively involved in
18 recreational programs for adult with special needs,
19 provide computer lessons for seniors and our go to
20 place for people seeking employment, housing and task
21 resources. On a weekly basis, I assist adults of all
22 ages who are trying to pursue a high school
23 equivalence diploma and it has become my favorite
24 question to answer every week because often those
25

1 patrons leave with a smile, it gives them hope to
2 broaden their career options. Uhm I would like to
3 personally thank you all for the support that the
4 libraries have received from you. It really goes a
5 long way toward serving our community and I would
6 like to request that you continue to provide
7 financial support to all three library systems in New
8 York City to better serve or dense population.
9 Additionally I would like to ask for this financial
10 support to be increased further for the upcoming
11 Fiscal Year so that our resources can continue to
12 remain up to date in our ever evolving society.
13 Thank you one again for taking the time to listen to
14 my testimony.

16 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you so much
17 for being here and uhm, thank you also for doing it
18 in about two minutes times.

19 YOSINIX ORANGO: I timed it.

20 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And but uhm,
21 Brooklyn Public Library always does such a great job
22 of having staff and library workers come and testify
23 and it is always so powerful and, and customers as
24 well, so thank you for your passion for Libraries and
25 for sharing that story and uhm and I love my

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

122

1
2 Committee for so many reasons but one of them is that
3 sort of my two worlds collide so I we have all of
4 these great big Cultural Leaders and they are
5 listening to your testimony on Libraries and you
6 know, we are all sort of one big family, right,
7 looking to make sure really good things happen for
8 the people who need them in so many ways and so thank
9 you for being here and for testifying and for your
10 love of libraries and I want one of those shirts by
11 the way. I haven't said that today but I totally
12 need to score one of those shirts. So uhm, you are
13 welcome to stay and listen to all of these August
14 Cultural Icons in the City of New York speak about
15 Culture and the Arts but if you need to get back to
16 uhm, to work or need to take off. I'll take the
17 shirt, Matt, you can bring it up to me. Wow. How
18 cool is that. Do you see that? And it's a small.
19 That's awesome. I will wear that to the gym,
20 absolutely. So thank you and I will leave it up to
21 the Cultural Team to decide which order you are going
22 to speak in.

23 JOHN CALVELLI: I'll go, we'll go, I
24 guess we will go in this order from right to left if
25 that is okay. Exactly the best for last. Good

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

123

1
2 afternoon Chairman Van Bramer and Members of
3 Committee, Council Member Cumbo, I am John Calvelli
4 the Executive Vice-President for Public Affairs at
5 the Wildlife Conversation Society and I am honored to
6 serve as the Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group
7 and co-Chair of New Yorkers for Cultures and Arts.
8 Can I ask my colleagues from the CIG to just kind of
9 give a little hand, we don't have shirts but we have
10 people here so it is good. Maybe next year we will
11 have shirts too. We will do that too.

12 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Dude, you need
13 shirts. You need shirts.

14 JOHN CALVELLI: I'm, trust, Daisy
15 Rodriguez, where are you, did you hear that we need
16 shirts.

17 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: It's not real if
18 you don't have shirts and buttons.

19 JOHN CALVELLI: Let me begin by saying
20 how grateful we are for the Councils vital support
21 for Culture and the Arts in New York City throughout
22 the years. Your support yields a monumental return
23 on investment for all New Yorkers regardless of age,
24 background or status and I also want to thank
25 Commissioner Finkelpearl for his leadership and as a

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

124

1
2 former Chair of the CIG I think he understands the
3 complexities of the roles and responsibilities that
4 our institutions have. I also want to acknowledge
5 our non-CIG colleagues with whom we have worked
6 alongside several years to increase our resources for
7 Culture and Arts, Andrea Louie is here my fellow co-
8 Chair of the New Yorkers for Culture and Arts and I
9 think you are going to be hearing from Lucy Sexton
10 our new Executive Director but of course to my right
11 you will be hearing soon from the head of the
12 Chocolate Factory Theatre and I just want to let you
13 know that we are all working collaboratively to make
14 sure that we work as a community not just as CIGs or
15 Program Groups, we are one culture community needing
16 to work together. This sector is a unique ecosystem
17 that is vibrant, creates a healthy network for
18 communities as well as engages, inspires all New
19 Yorkers including the 63 million visitors that take
20 part in various aspects of CIG offerings each year.
21 When I became chair of the CIG one of my immediate
22 actions was to visit each borough and meet with each
23 CIG to familiarize myself with the needs of the
24 organizations and the challenges they face. Each CIG
25 inherently is aware of their responsibilities to

1
2 serve the people of New York and integrate the
3 communities in which they live and work. They are
4 fully aware that they provide safe places for youth
5 and families, serve as examples of accessibility and
6 remain the go-to organizations that the city calls
7 upon to pilot programs like Plan NYC and IDNYC which
8 I believe have been major successes. While we are
9 aware of the services that we provide and the Culture
10 Plan affirms the necessity of our work, we still need
11 to continue making the argument for support and I
12 thank you so much today to the Chairman and to
13 Council Member Cumbo for leading that charge, I love
14 the words determined and dogged. I am going to
15 remember that. Due to the historical relationship
16 that we share with the City we are expected to meet
17 certain standards and restricted by others, such as,
18 for examples, limitations on raising our admission
19 prices, we need approval from the City of New York.
20 May I, at some point I do have something for you that
21 I would like to give you and you are going to laugh
22 when I give it to you but.

23 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: As long as it is
24 worth less than \$50.

1
2 JOHN CALVELLI: These are less than \$5,
3 uhm these are roach socks, one of the projects that
4 we worked on this year to raise money and we named,
5 you could name a roach for a loved one on Valentine's
6 Day so this is one of the things.

7 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Can I see that.

8 JOHN CALVELLI: It's not a shirt.

9 LAURIE CUMBO: I was going to say that I
10 wanted one too until I.

11 JOHN CALVELLI: There is one for
12 everybody and for staff, as a former staffer, make
13 sure you get one too. I, I will tell you that my
14 time is up but I wanted to share with each of you.
15 Yes, these are the lengths that we go to Mr.
16 Chairman, name a roach.

17 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Amazing. Uhm,
18 thank you.

19 JOHN CALVELLI: And I just want to say
20 that you are welcome. Let me just, let me just, uhm,
21 go to the punch line, we are obviously very much in
22 support of base-lining the \$10 million. We look at
23 uhm, we are requesting a \$30 million increase in the
24 DCLA Budget, again evenly split between the Program
25 Groups and CIG. We feel it is important that we make

1
2 a down payment to the Cultural Plan. There is a
3 great deal more that needs to be done. This is just
4 the beginning. Enjoy the socks.

5 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you uhm, so
6 first I have a pretty good sock game. I have a
7 pretty good sock game but mostly it is because my
8 husband buys the socks and I just wear his uhm but
9 I'm going to bring this home and see what he thinks
10 about it.

11 JOHN CALVELLI: We hear from you.

12 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And see, uhm if we
13 both wear it at various times. Uhm, and now
14 seriously I want to thank you obviously the Culture
15 Institutions Groups Members are vital to the success
16 to the City of New York. Literally New York wouldn't
17 be the city that it is if we didn't have the CIGs
18 doing the work that they do and so I am grateful.
19 Also that you are partnering with the Program Groups
20 who are equally important to the effort and to the
21 City's efforts and so I agree that we need to base-
22 line to funding and then we need to go for the \$30
23 million and I believe very much in that happening and
24 thank you to Commissioner Finkelpearl for continuing
25 to stay and hear the testimony. Both of the

1
2 libraries and of the Culturals. And thank you for
3 your love of Libraries Commissioner Finkelppearl as
4 well.

5 CHRISTOPHER CARROLL: Good afternoon
6 everybody, uhm, Chairman Van Bramer thank you for you
7 for the opportunity to be testifying here today and
8 the entire City Council has been very supportive of
9 the Arts over the years and we are very appreciative
10 of that and it needs to be acknowledged as often as
11 possible. My name is Christopher Carroll, I am the
12 Chief of Staff for the Associated Musicians of
13 Greater New York 802 and we are here because we
14 believe that the City Budget should be expanded \$30
15 million and that \$10 million should be base-lined.
16 Uhm you know I want to be the first to say that you
17 know as the largest local Union of Professional
18 Musicians in the World we have seen firsthand how the
19 Arts and Music can have a profound economic impact in
20 the city but we also need to acknowledge the role
21 that the Arts play in our Social and Cultural Health
22 that our neighborhood, our districts, our boroughs
23 cannot be overstated. In their Social Impact of the
24 Arts Project, researches from the University of
25 Pennsylvania School, right at the critical resource,

1
2 the people who use as part of that Quest for Life or
3 value of the Arts. The Arts can provide tools for
4 making the sense of the world. The Arts can provide
5 opportunities to develop lanes of abilities to forge
6 connections with people like themselves and not like
7 themselves. Additionally the team from UPenn found
8 that controlling for our communities economic well-
9 being, race and ethnicity we could actually
10 statistically find relationship between culture asset
11 index and their indexes for health, personal security
12 school effectiveness. Obviously the Arts have a
13 profound impact on our communities and our city. I
14 think it also needs to be said that the city has an
15 incredible Arts Agenda, a sense of priorities. That
16 Agenda was expanded upon in a great deal in the
17 Create NYC Project. That Create NYC Project is our
18 first comprehensive Cultural Plan and it laid out an
19 impressive set of priorities, an impressive agenda
20 for the city to be taking moving forward along with
21 the City Council and thank you for your work on that
22 plan. These priorities included and I will start
23 actually quoting from the Plan itself, determining
24 how to provide sufficient compensation to Artists and
25 Cultural Workers and what those compensation levels

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

130

1
2 are need to allow Artists to make a living,
3 preserving and development long-term affordable
4 workspaces with their Cultural Community to advance
5 the Area Initiative, increasing the development of
6 affordable, accessible housing for Artists that
7 allows them to thrive, creating new supports for Arts
8 and Cultural Organizations with a primary mission of
9 serving historically underrepresented or underserved
10 communities and continuing to invest in city young
11 Cultural Assets and the Community Institution Groups.
12 All of these things are in great, great work that
13 needed to be done but they also needed to be
14 supported adequately by the city and to do that we
15 really need to make sure that the city has all of the
16 tools in its tool belt including the funding that it
17 needs to move forward so thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you uhm for
19 all of the work that you do on behalf of your members
20 and obviously we would be no where without all of the
21 talent that you represent and you Chris and also Tina
22 you have just been everywhere when it comes to these
23 issues and advocating with us and strengthening our
24 message by having you behind us so thank you.

25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

131

1
2 CHRISTOPHER CARROLL: Thank you for your
3 partnership.

4 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And thank you for
5 your talking about the Cultural Plan so much in
6 Create NYC which obviously Council Member Levin and I
7 are really, really proud of having pushed through
8 and, and made happen in the City of New York.
9 Sheila.

10 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Good afternoon
11 Chairman Van Bramer and Council Member Cumbo, thank
12 you both for the opportunity to testify. My name is
13 Sheila Lewandowski, I am Founder and Executive
14 Director of the Chocolate Factory Theatre. I did
15 not, I am sorry I missed part of your testimony. I
16 was at a Women's History Month Breakfast with regents
17 of the State who also one of them, a single mother
18 spoke about spending time in Museums and in Cultural
19 Places while her mother worked two jobs. That is
20 what her mother did for them so they would learn more
21 about different people and themselves and Culture.
22 I'm sorry, I apologize for missing some of that. I
23 don't have a fully written testimony but two very
24 important things that I brought with me because I
25 think they speak to the future one is from the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

132

1 Portrait of Michelle Obama with the young woman
2 seeing herself and her future because this is our
3 future. Another is a photo I took at Moama PSI last
4 year by chance of a young child looking at an
5 Experimental Artist statue. This is our future and
6 this is what culture does. Our libraries are
7 Cultural Destinations as well and their shelves are
8 filled with Culture and Poetry and Literature so we
9 need to be sully supporting or Libraries, we need to
10 be fully supporting culture throughout the city for
11 all New Yorkers and Arts Education. And one thing, I
12 want to, oh I'm going much faster than I thought I
13 was because I did want to say something that I don't
14 know of it was said about the Cultural Plan which is
15 critically important and needs to be supported if
16 DCLA is really going to deliver the service they are
17 promising to give to the city. The monument is a big
18 deal that is being discussed right now and that is
19 such an opportunity but it needs support. We have an
20 opportunity to really create things and re-define
21 things based on all of our people and all of the
22 history and be honest about it but that needs funding
23 and support so in addition to our unions within our
24 Cultures and our Libraries what is on shelves at the
25

1
2 libraries, what is in the zoos and the gardens, we
3 need, we need to be doing more to bring the identity
4 of the city up to reflect all New Yorkers and that
5 will affect our economy too. There are lots of study
6 on economy, I am glad there is on social impact. So
7 the one other thing I had was about data. Data is
8 only so good when it comes to Culture. Because if
9 you look at it, Department of Health, there is
10 culture in there, there is mental health services
11 that are impacted by role playing, by scripts, by
12 performance, by dance. There are senior citizens,
13 the Senior Shakers at Resettlement House who they,
14 they are healthier physically and mentally because of
15 participating in performance and dance on a regular
16 basis. If I looked at every agency of the city I
17 could pull out what is Cultural but maybe we are not
18 thinking of it as direct data but if we don't fund it
19 all of that is going to suffer and every New Yorker
20 will suffer so please baseline, increase the support,
21 it will impact all of us.

22 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you, you got
23 a lot in there in 2 minutes 21 seconds Sheila. Uhm,
24 so I want to assure you that the monuments question
25 is something that we take very seriously and in fact

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

134

1
2 it was a very big and important meeting at the
3 Department of Cultural Affairs with myself and
4 Council Member Cumbo and Council Member Lander and
5 this very topic was the thrust of the conversation so
6 we are all talking about it and an initial \$10
7 million has been allocated for the creation of new
8 monuments that will hopefully tell a more accurate
9 story of our history, but you are right, there needs
10 to be even more done beyond that, so we are working
11 on it and I, and I expect that we will, we will get
12 there. Uhm, thank you also for talking about
13 Libraries and your support there as well. Uhm so I
14 want to thank all of you for coming together. The
15 panel for being here. For your passion and we will
16 fight together for what we so rightfully deserve.
17 The next panel I am going to call is Lucy Sexton,
18 John O'Reilly, Mark Rossier and Ellen Leszynski and I
19 know we, do we still have library folks in the house?
20 Okay so then the next panel we will go back to the,
21 the Queens Library team with the great shirts and
22 with Joel Ochoa who looks at the Great Woodside
23 Library so big shout out to my Woodside Library over
24 there. I haven't forgotten you but we are going to
25

1 go back and forth between Culture and Libraries.

2 Uhm, whoever wants to go first.

3 LUCY SEXTON: Hi my name is Lucy Sexton.

4 I am pleased to introduce myself as the New Executive

5 Director for New Yorkers for Culture and Arts, the

6 new city-wide advocacy organization formed by the

7 merger of New York City Arts Coalition and One

8 Percent for Culture. I am no stranger to Culture and

9 Arts here in New York City. I work as a

10 choreographer and also run the New York Dance and

11 Performance Awards The Bessies. I know firsthand the

12 profound impact of Publicly supported Culture in this

13 city. My first dance training was at John Dewey High

14 School in Coney Island. My kids first dance training

15 was in their kindergarten at PS3, training and dance

16 and art classes that need to be available in every

17 kindergarten across this city. My Dance Company has

18 used Materials for the Arts for 35 years for our

19 props and costumes and I am current a SUCOSA teaching

20 artist at the open center in Chinatown. In my new

21 position at New Yorkers for Culture and the Arts, it

22 is my honor and my passion to work for a city in

23 which every New Yorker has their life transformed by

24 a flourishing and vital culture, regardless of

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

136

1
2 background, borough or economic status. We will work
3 for sustainable government resources and strong
4 public policy to advance equitable public support for
5 Culture Organizations for Artists and for the
6 Cultural Workforce in every community. New Yorkers
7 for Culture and Arts seeks to address long-standing
8 patterns of funding that have marginalized cultural
9 organizations serving communities and artists of
10 color. Thereby limiting the city's ability to fully
11 appreciate and celebrate the value of our rich
12 diversity. Committee Chair Van Bramer, Council
13 Majority Leader Cumbo, Members of the Committee, we
14 urge you to support Culture and Arts in the FY19 New
15 York City Budget but robustly supporting the
16 Department of Cultural Affairs. We stand with the
17 CIGs in expressing our gratitude for the increases in
18 FY18, particularly the additional support to the
19 borough Arts Councils and the funding of individual
20 Artists, the \$1 million in utility support to those
21 non-CIG organizations and city properties and the
22 increase to the Cultural Immigrant Initiative but the
23 need as you know remains great. New Yorkers for
24 Culture and Arts joins our Culture Colleagues to
25 request a baseline of the \$10 which you have so

1
2 advocated for, thank you, an additional \$30 million
3 in funding for FY19 to be equally shared by the CIGs
4 and the program groups to support the successful
5 implementation of the city's first ever Cultural
6 Plan. In particular, New Yorkers for Culture and
7 Arts is deeply invested in issues related to equity
8 and lowering the barriers to access to City Funding.
9 Finally, you may recall last fall New Yorkers for
10 Culture and Arts planned a forum for candidates for
11 City Council Speaker. More than 600 New Yorkers
12 RSVPed to attend demonstrating the enormous interest
13 and concern that city residents have for Culture and
14 Arts. Council Member Van Bramer we at New York for
15 Culture and Arts are grateful for your commitment to
16 planned forum and we look forward to working closer
17 with you and the entire City Council to ensure that
18 Culture and Arts can fully thrive in New York in all
19 the neighborhoods.

20 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you so much,
21 welcome aboard, well done and we will go to John
22 next.

23 JOHN O'REILLY: Good afternoon my name is
24 John O'Reilly. It is good to see you again Council
25 Member Van Bramer and thank you for the opportunity

1
2 to address the committee. I am here really as sort
3 of a last resort. I think I am going to be the odd
4 duck in this proceeding. I am here to talk about the
5 Activities of the Queens Museum and in particular the
6 politicization of that Museum by the former director
7 and by the board which is tolerated a course of
8 political conduct which is blatantly in violation of
9 the law and in fitsco to what I think we want our
10 Cultural Institutions to be. I reference in
11 particular a well publicized event two months ago
12 when the museum cancelled the Commemoration of the
13 70th Anniversary of the State of Israel and was
14 revealed that the museum had used taxpayer resources
15 to fund the book about the divestiture the BDSM
16 movement I think it is called, divestiture, boycott
17 that vestment and sanctions movement and there was
18 great uproar about that the board commissioned a law
19 firm, paid a lot of money to find out that it had
20 been deceived but the reality is the board was well
21 aware that the former director was engaging in
22 political activity and tolerated it. On January 20,
23 2017 the museum closed its doors in solidarity with
24 those who were protesting the Inauguration of Donald
25 Trump as President and in solidarity in their words

1
2 with the J20 General Strike Movement. Now regardless
3 of what you think about Donald Trump being President,
4 the museum should not be using taxpayer resources to
5 engage in those activities. I have communicated
6 repeated with the museum about what it is doing about
7 that? What actions is it taking and I get silence?
8 I have communicated with the Department of
9 Investigation with the City of New York about this
10 because this is, it is illegal for the museum to
11 engage in political activities, nothing. So I am
12 here to ask that this committee consider defunding
13 use of taxpayer resources for the Queens Museum until
14 the board either is replaced or comes to you and a
15 public hearing is conducted and come to you to see
16 what it is doing about preventing this from happening
17 again. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding my
18 constant protest, you can go on the museum website
19 today and there is still literature on the website
20 expressing support for the J20 General Strike
21 Movement and against Donald Trump as being President.
22 And I suspect there is not to many people in here
23 that believe in Donald and support Donald Trump's
24 Presidency but nobody, the museum should not be
25 allowed to engage in activity. I don't know if

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

140

1
2 anybody in here remembers when the Brooklyn Museum a
3 number of years ago was doing this time of thing at
4 the direction of the then Mayor and nobody liked that
5 and it was stopped and so I appeal to you on behalf
6 of people of whom I have discussed this with to do
7 something about this. To either call them to account
8 to come in here answering what they doing to stop
9 this? And/or requiring that the board quit and get
10 somebody else who will follow the law, thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Wow, uhm, so you
12 said a lot there and I will uhm, uhm address a few
13 things John. And obviously we know either other a
14 little bit from your Sunnyside Days. So as you know,
15 the, the board has taken an action and there have
16 been changes made in the Executive Leadership at the
17 Queens Museum. There was that report done and I, I
18 believe that the board has required the former
19 executive director, for example, to reimburse the
20 museum for the book related expenses and the board
21 has also put into effect some other changes as a
22 result of some of the things that they feel went on
23 at the museum that were inappropriate. So as Chair of
24 the Committee I certainly have been kept up to date
25 on all of what has been happening at the Queens

1
2 Museum and uhm, and I will say that you know the one
3 thing that I will say is the, the J20 Movement and
4 what happened there I think is an expression of, of
5 Art and Free Speech and Freedom of Expression and
6 whether you uhm, feel very, very strongly about some
7 of Lower's work or some of what happened and look I
8 was very clear, I disagreed with the decision firmly
9 to not allow Israel to have its 70th Anniversary
10 Celebration and I was very clear about that. That
11 was a mistake in my opinion but the fact that Art,
12 Art Institutions, Executives, Artists would not
13 engage in political discourse even very challenging
14 and controversial discourse in many ways that is sort
15 of the very definition of Art and Art is about
16 pushing the envelope, it is about making us
17 uncomfortable sometimes and, and it is about taking
18 stands and I, and I certainly hear what you are saying.
19 I think that uhm, something happened there that
20 shouldn't have happened clearly. The board has
21 responded and made changes and there may be other
22 changes that take place at the Queens Museum. I will
23 say that I think that the Queens Museum is a great
24 institution, I love the Queens Museum. It was the
25 first museum I ever went to as a kid growing up in

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

142

1
2 Astoria and I am sorry that all of this has happened
3 to the museum because it is a great institution with
4 great people who work in it but it will recover and
5 the Queens Museum will be greater than ever and, and
6 we will have a new leader chosen at the, at the
7 Queens museum and we will continue to support the
8 Queens museum because it is, it is a really good
9 institution that does a lot of great work and brings
10 a lot of different cultures together in the borough
11 and in the neighborhood that is so incredibly
12 diverse. They do a lot of good work. They will do a
13 lot of great work. I appreciate you coming and
14 testifying. I appreciate the things that you said
15 uhm and I you know, I, I, think that we will continue
16 to move forward at the Queens Museum.

17 JOHN O'REILLY: Council Member I
18 appreciate every you say but just one thing. If
19 something can be done to make sure that Cultural
20 Institutions don't close their doors, they close
21 their doors so people like me who wanted to go to the
22 museum that day couldn't go to the museum because of
23 their expression of a political activity, that was
24 wrong. Thank you.

25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

143

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you, I appreciate you coming to testify John. Sharing your thoughts on all of these topics. Next.

ELLEN LESZYNSKI: Hi, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ellen Leszynski I am here today on behalf of the Brooklyn Academy of Music which is a member of the Cultural Institutions Group. At BAM we collaborate with neighbor organizations on partnerships and programs. We are a proud founding member of the downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance a coalition of more than 35 cultural groups, organized to work for the best interest of the cultural sector in downtown Brooklyn and we are committed to bringing world class Artistic Programming and Community Events to our Brooklyn Community. At a time of national turmoil and change it is more important than ever for New York City to be a beacon of creativity and culture and for Cultural Institutions to work with the city to promote equity, access and diversity in Arts and Culture. BAM respectfully requests that the city baseline the Cultural Funding that was allocated in FY18 as well as additional funding this year to be divided equally among the CIGs and the program groups

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

144

1
2 in order to support the work that we will do under
3 the new Cultural Plan. BAM currently serves its
4 community by addressing many of the priorities of the
5 plan. Of a particular note is the fellowships and
6 stagecraft in production program which BAM launched
7 through a grant from the New York City Theatre
8 Subdistrict Council. This programs aims to securely
9 place individuals from underrepresented communities
10 on a career path in the stagehand and production
11 management fields. Through intensive training and
12 hands-on work experience participants are able to
13 establish themselves within a professional network
14 while also helping to increase diversity in the
15 field. The Fellow Program offers a much needed entry
16 point for youth from underrepresented communities
17 such as LGBTQ and low-income people as well African-
18 American, Latinex and female participants. The
19 program teaches them to become Freelance in-house
20 stagehands a field that traditionally struggles with
21 recruiting a diverse workforce. This kind of rigorous
22 training can lead to positions in production
23 management. The program will expend the pool of
24 qualified stagehands in the short-term and over time
25 as graduates gain experience increase diversity in

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

145

1 production positions. For example, one cycle one
2 graduate has secured a job as a lighting board
3 operator at the Jerry Orbach Theatre and another has
4 been working as a stage manager at 5th Floor Theatre
5 Company. This is the kind of programming that BAM
6 hopes to expand upon with additional funding. BAM is
7 excited to work with the Department of Cultural
8 Affairs in the City to be a Cultural Leader. By
9 presenting world-class international performances and
10 programming in the heart of Brooklyn we are able to
11 have a major Cultural and Economic impact in our
12 local community. As the largest institution, we are
13 poised to bring more outstanding programming and
14 services to more neighborhoods and communities and to
15 help our fellow Cultural Organizations and local
16 Artists build capacity and navigate a change in
17 landscape. We hope that you will consider BAMs
18 history an enormous potential when finalizing the
19 Cultural Budget and recognize that with your
20 continued and increased support. We are ready to
21 serve our community even beyond what we are currently
22 doing. Thank you to the Committee and the City for
23 your ongoing support.

24
25 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Mark.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

146

1
2 MARK ROSSIER: Uhm, thank you Chair Van
3 Bramer for the opportunity to testify at the hearing
4 and advocate for the highest possible level of
5 funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs and
6 the New York City Cultural Plan. I am Mark Rossier,
7 Director of Grants at the New York Foundation for the
8 Arts. NYFA is one of the few organizations in the
9 country to support individual Artists in all, at all
10 stages of their careers. We work with Artists in
11 every borough, in every artistic discipline. We
12 provide unrestricted grants of \$7000 to approximately
13 75 New York City Artists each year including in the
14 past Ms. Sexton. We have a website with among other
15 things lists over 800 new jobs and opportunities
16 every month. We provide physical sponsorship that
17 enabled 700 Artists and organizations to raise \$4.5
18 million last year. We provide entrepreneurial
19 training to over 500 Artists and Administrators
20 annually and the Amelia Program to serve Immigrant
21 Artists from nearly 100 countries including
22 programming in Mandarin and Spanish. We are able to
23 do all of this and more because of the support we
24 receive from the Department of Cultural Affairs. It
25 is not just NYFA. To say the totality of New York's

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

147

1 Cultural Sector is dependent on DCLA is no
2 exaggeration. The value of their support and
3 organizations ability to leverage it for additional
4 funds cannot be overstated. We hope you will
5 consider a baseline increase of \$10 million along
6 with an additional \$20 million to be split between
7 the programs group and the CIGs. Additionally during
8 testimony before this Committee regarding the
9 Cultural Plan many of us spoke of the need for DCLA
10 to receive separate additional support to ensure the
11 plan is adequately funded so that its allocable
12 goals, particularly with regard to equity and
13 community-based organizations are achieved. New York
14 City's Arts and Cultural Communities are thriving and
15 driving jobs, tourism and increased understandings
16 within and among the city's diverse communities. The
17 Budget of the Department of Cultural Affairs must
18 receive maximum funding to support his growth. Thank
19 you for your steadfast invisionary support of the
20 Cultural Community and the City we all call home.

22 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much
23 for all of you for being here today and for your
24 passion for the Arts. I appreciate it. Thank you.
25 Uhm, next panel, uhm so we have like two more panels,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

148

1
2 so I want to thank in advance everyone for being so
3 patient and diligent and I want to uhm, hear from all
4 of you although we are up against a tight timeframe
5 so we are going to go to a two minute time limit on
6 the following two panels. We have the Queens Library
7 who has been waiting for hours. We are going to
8 allow that panel to come together and I believe they
9 are going to even possibly even condense their
10 testimony and then we have a Cultural Panel as well
11 so uhm, whoever is testifying, please come up, jump
12 right in to it. Thank you so much for being here.
13 Go head. Yep, press the button right in front of
14 you.

15 JOVAL OCHALLA (SP?) Got it, okay. Thank
16 you. Good afternoon my name is Joval Ochalla (SP?),
17 I am currently a customer service specialist at the
18 Woodside Community Library and I help customers with
19 the public computers which is part of my job
20 description. I had also put on an inflatable T-Rex
21 costume as part of our Halloween Carnival and I had
22 dressed up as a Chinese Groom as part of our Chinese
23 Lunar New Year Celebration but that is just the tip
24 of the iceberg and I have pictures to prove it. As a
25 Queens Library Employee I had many experiences that I

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

149

1 never expected to have. I realize how valuable
2 Queens library is to the communities it serves.
3
4 Everyday we provide an inclusive and a safe
5 environment to the customers for all walks of life
6 including children, seniors, the disabled and the
7 homeless. Our Motto is Queens Library is for
8 everyone and everyone comes through our doors. Our
9 customers have access to free information, programs
10 and services regardless of who they are or where they
11 came from. For instance, at the Woodside Community
12 Library in just like many of the libraries across
13 Queens we provide English classes, computer classes,
14 Arts and Craft programs, story time, exercise
15 programs, heritage celebrations and various reading
16 programs, coding classes, homework help, assistance
17 to resume writing, job searching and the navigation
18 of the internet and so much more. But honestly, do
19 you know what is most fascinating to me, it is our
20 children, our teens and tweens that come in at 3
21 o'clock in the afternoon through our doors smiling
22 and greeting me with a big smile and telling me and
23 curious to find out what program I will be doing
24 next. Or that one customer that comes in the next
25 day and tells me thank you I got the job or the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

150

1 students that come in the next day and they see that
2 they speak better English because of the classes that
3 they had taken but I do not only see the positive
4 impact that we have, I realize that we need so much
5 work in order to maintain and keep improving on our
6 programs and services and that is the reason why I am
7 here today.

9 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you uhm first
10 of all I am enormously proud of you, obviously you
11 represent my library and you do great work and that
12 was a very, very powerful testimony as well.

13 JOVAL OCHALLA: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Next.

15 BASHIR OSMANI (SP?): Uhm, good afternoon
16 Mr. Van Bramer and the Committee Members, my name is
17 Bashir Osmani (SP?) I'm from queens. Thank you for
18 giving me the opportunity to testify at New York City
19 Council's Preliminary Budget Hearing on Community
20 Libraries. I am greatly humbled to be here in your
21 presence today. As newcomers we do not earn enough
22 to cover our living expense, nor do we get a decent
23 job because of the language barrier. For decade, pre-
24 English learning programs have been offered at New
25 York City's Three Library Systems to this community.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

151

America is built by the Americans and peoples come from all over the world including non-English speaking countries. In America, English is the official language and therefore it is very important for immigrants to learn English. As we all know, knowledge is the power and the backbone of civilized nation. Language is the key to obtain the knowledge and for expanding educations. America is a great nation. To keep our pride, we immigrants need to contribute out thoughts, ideas and create a friendly work environment to take this country forward. Without effective communications, none of this is possible. The Queens Library at East Flushing is where I came to know of the free English language program. I was motivated to enroll myself in the intuitive class of ESL Program. They taught me a better way of expressing myself through reading and writing. They taught me many valuable things. The ESL program enlightened me and made me feel like I am not alone. I felt that I am part of this diverse and multi-cultural city. It changed my life positively in many ways, now I am able to contribute my talent and experience at my workplace.

25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

152

1
2 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Mr. Osmani I uhm
3 read through the rest of your testimony. I want to
4 thank you. I am really, really proud of the Queens
5 Library and proud of it because it makes a difference
6 in so many people's lives just like it has in yours.
7 So I want to thank you for bringing your experience
8 here to us today and allowing us to hear your voice.
9 So thank you.

10 BASHIR OSMANI (SP?): Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Next.

12 ANA DIAZ (SP?) Good afternoon, my name is
13 Ana Diaz and I am a student at Queens Library's
14 English for Speakers of other Languages Class. To
15 find a location where I could access free and quality
16 English language class was difficult. I needed a
17 group where I felt accepted and could express myself
18 in a safe and trusted environment. When I discovered
19 that Queens Library offers ESOL classes it was a
20 dream come true. I immediately registered for the
21 class and I am proud to announce that I am currently
22 enrolled in the intermediate ESOL classes at the
23 Community Library. It is my great pleasure to be a
24 party of the ESOL group. This is a program with a
25 high level of responsibility and commitment to the

1
2 participants. I feel privileged to learn English by
3 the highly qualified professional who teach the class
4 and have methodology. Because of the Queens Library
5 and their excellent teachers I am able to give this
6 testimony today. It is very important for more and
7 more people to get this amazing opportunity to learn.
8 People, specifically new immigrants rely on this free
9 service to interact with neighbors, find a job,
10 access resources and more. With every class, I
11 become more independent and self-relying individual.
12 I truly believe this program changes lives for the
13 better and we need to keep providing similar
14 services. People trust their local library to access
15 crucial materials. This is why Queens Library needs
16 more funding to be able to keep offering classes for
17 newly arrived immigrants improving their
18 international language collections, renovating the
19 buildings and more. Their programs and services
20 improve lives. Thank you for the opportunity to
21 testify today.

22 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you so much.

23 Can I ask where you came from? And how long?

24 ANA DIAZ: From Brazil.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

154

1
2 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: From Brazil. And
3 how long are you in Queens?

4 ANA DIAZ: Two years, yes.

5 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Two years and you
6 are testifying here at the City Hall.

7 ANA DIAZ: Yes.

8 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: That's amazing.
9 What a great journey. Congratulations. It is very,
10 very powerful. I know we are late in the hearing and
11 it feels like we are moving quickly but I want you to
12 know, all of you, uhm, this is very valuable and
13 meaningful to me and it is meaningful to all of us
14 and it makes me, very, very proud of the Queens
15 Library for the work that they are doing and making a
16 difference in your lives, so thank you so much.

17 ANA DIAZ: Thank you, I appreciate it.

18 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: And next we are
19 going to hear from Jeffrey Omara, Stephanie
20 Wilchfort, is Tiffany Bryant still here from the
21 Public, uhm Jamie Burkart, is Jamie Burkart still
22 here? Great and David Johnston is definitely still
23 here and then is Tiffany Geigel still here? You are
24 the last person so come and join this panel, we will
25 just throw the six of you all together and we will

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

155

1 uhm make it work. And Jeffery why don't you start us
2 off. Yes.

3
4 JEFFREY OMARA (SP?) : My name is Jeffery
5 Omara, I am an actor in the organization.

6 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Great, one more
7 time.

8 JEFFREY OMARA: My name is Jeffrey Omara
9 and I am an actor and a member of the Organization
10 Fair Wage on Stage and we are fighting to improve
11 wages for the 19,000 union stage managers and actors
12 who live in all five boroughs. Theatre is New York
13 City's biggest tourist attraction. Off Broadway
14 sells more tickets every year than the Statute of
15 Liberty, The Empire State Building and Coney Island
16 and it contributes ½ Billion dollars to the City's
17 economy. You are all familiar with the troupe of the
18 struggling out of work actor but the truth is we
19 struggle even when we are employed full time. I am
20 currently starring in an off Broadway show on 42nd
21 street and Times Square. My union negotiated is \$550
22 a week after taxes and agent commission my take home
23 pay is \$380 a week. By the time I finish this 8-week
24 contract I will be \$5000 poorer than when I started.
25 I can't afford to continue working Off Broadway. I

1
2 can't afford to continue subsidizing these theatre
3 with my savings and that is the sad truth for most of
4 the actors in this city. Actors are falling behind
5 on rent and bills everytime they accept a job from
6 one of these Off Broadway Theatre Companies. We
7 started a movement Fair Wage on Stage and created a
8 Campaign to pressure our Union Actor's Equity to
9 demand higher wages in our contract negotiation but
10 the fact is a lot of these theatre companies are
11 struggling to keep up with the escalating cost of New
12 York City. Meanwhile the Federal Tax Bill that was
13 just passed is going to devastate these theatre
14 companies in terms of charitable giving and also
15 Actors personally who will no longer be able to
16 deduct most of the things that we were used to
17 deducting. This is where you come in. Because
18 theatre is vital to New York City's Economy and
19 Culture, the Artists make up this community are in
20 crisis and we are asking for your help. We propose a
21 \$10 million annual fund dedicated to helping off
22 Broadway institutions pay us stage managers and
23 actors and the part of the theatre company, any not
24 for profit theatre company that employs stage
25 managers and actors under our union contract would

1
2 qualify to apply for a grant from this fund to
3 subsidize their actors wages. These grants would
4 fill in the gap between the union negotiated minimum
5 salary and the necessary weekly gross salary. After
6 surveying our members, we determined \$1300 a week
7 gross is the magic number we need to make ends meat,
8 after taxes that is a net of about \$813 a week. Art
9 belongs to all of us and we need to make sure that we
10 are all able to participate in it.

11 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you Jeffrey,
12 I'm glad you came to the committee and stuck it out
13 and and because you are an accomplished Actor you
14 were able to deliver that testimony in almost exact
15 time and it is an important issue you and your group
16 came to see me in my office and we need to fight this
17 fight so I am really glad you are taking it here to
18 City Hall.

19 JEFFERY OMARA (SP?): Thank you very
20 much.

21 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Stephanie you want
22 to go next.

23 STEPHANIE WILCHFORT: Sure, hi I'm
24 Stephanie Wilchfort. Oh, hello I'm Stephanie
25 Wilchfort, I am President and CEO of Brooklyn

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

158

1
2 Children's Museum, one of the 33 members of the City
3 Cultural Institutions Group located in Crown Heights
4 and we provide early childhood cultural experiences
5 for 275,000 children and caregivers annually. More
6 than half of whom come from Central Brooklyn,
7 Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Crown Heights, East
8 New York and Prospect, and when culture in New York
9 City is strong or institutions like Brooklyn
10 Children's Museum can think really big about serving
11 our communities and meeting the issues and strategies
12 identified in the Cultural Plan and I am here just to
13 share one example of this that speaks to preserving
14 the character of our neighborhoods and ensuring that
15 neighborhood organizations are not pushed out of
16 changing communities. Two years ago our friends at
17 Brooklyn Public Library shared a challenged at the
18 Brower Park Branch Library which is just a block and
19 a half from Brooklyn Children's Museum. That library
20 is housed in a leased space. It was built as a low-
21 rise building and it is in a rapidly developing area.
22 It is a very small library but one with enormous
23 passion, relevance and meaning to our neighbors many
24 of whom fought to see it created in 1963, have
25 volunteered in the library, have raised their

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

159

1 children in that space and like many branches the
2 Borough Park Library provides free literacy programs,
3 after school homework help, services to seniors and
4 critical access to books, media and information for
5 our community but because the space the leased it is
6 insecure. It is subject to the interest of private
7 development and equally challenging leased buildings
8 are not eligible for significant Capital Funding from
9 the City so this Library Systems and infrastructure
10 are deteriorating. At the same time, there is little
11 large scale spaced to be leased or purchased at a
12 reasonable price in Crown Heights. Brooklyn
13 Children's Museum however is owned by the City and
14 because the Department of Cultural Affairs and the
15 Department of Design and Construction had the
16 foresight to build our museum with expansion space in
17 2008, today we can offer our community's public
18 library a permanent home in our building of the same
19 size as its current lease space and in 2020 the
20 Brower Park Branch will move to Brooklyn Children's
21 Museum and it will be there safely and
22 inpropertunity, that is what support for culture can
23 do. It can fund our communities. It help our
24
25

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

160

1
2 community. Thank you all so much. Thank you Chair
3 Van Bramer who have been immensely supportive of us.

4 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you that is
5 really, really cool. I love the idea of museums
6 housing libraries and obviously the Queens museum
7 hopes to do that one day too but that is really
8 exciting news. Thank you. Who would like to go
9 next.

10 TIFFANY BRYANT: I will. Hello I am
11 Tiffany Bryant from the Public Theatre. Thank you
12 Councilman Van Bramer for holding today's hearing.
13 Conceived nearly 60 years ago as one of the nations
14 first nonprofit theatres the Public engages one of
15 the largest and diverse audiences in New York City.
16 Last year, through all of our programs we offered
17 more than 1600 performances and welcomed over 350,000
18 people, many of whom acquired tickets through our
19 free or low cost ticket initiatives. When Joe Pap
20 articulated the proposition of Free Shakespeare in
21 the Park he began with the idea that just as the city
22 offers free Libraries, free access to literature and
23 knowledge, the city should also offer free theatre.
24 Since 1962 the Delacorte Theatre, a city owned
25 structure in Central Park has been home to Free

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

161

1 Shakespeare in the Park. Since then, over 5 million
2 people have attended performances for free. Each
3 year we welcome over 100,000 attendees and in 2017 we
4 welcomed audiences from every zip code in New York
5 City. I am running out of time. The Public Theatre
6 is proud to partner with the New York Public Library,
7 the Brooklyn Public Library and Queens Public Library
8 systems as Free Shakespeare in the Park Ticket
9 Distribution Venue and sites for our mobile unit
10 performances. We choose branches in neighborhoods
11 identified by New York City's Cultural Plan as Civic
12 Clusters, Neighborhoods in the City that are
13 identified as high priority for Cultural Investment
14 and Cross Agency Partnerships. Let's see, in closing
15 I will just say that as a cultural organization we
16 are dedicated to serving the people, all people, we
17 have the responsibility to serve as broad an audience
18 as possible. We have long recognized that Free
19 Shakespeare in the Park is not enough to fully
20 achieve our mission. We are confident; however, that
21 our other programs will be able to get us much
22 closer.
23

24 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

25 Perfect. And everyone brought their A game today

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

162

1 with Library and Cultural Testimonies. So thank you
2 very much, obviously we are big fans of you all.
3 Uhm, so we will go to David next and then we will end
4 with the New York Artist Coalition.
5

6 DAVID JOHNSTON: Hi my name is David
7 Johnston I am the Executive Director of Exploring the
8 Metropolis. I would like to thank Council Member
9 Jimmy Van Bramer and the Cultural Affairs Committee
10 for the opportunity to testify today. Since 1982 ETM
11 has focused on solving the work space needs of New
12 York City's Performing Artists. Currently we
13 administer the ETM Conversant Composer Residencies,
14 the Choreographer and Con Edison Composer Residency
15 and partnership with the Jamaica Center for Arts and
16 Learning and the ETM Ridgewood Bushwick Composer
17 Residency. Since 2009, the ETM has supported more
18 than 80 composers, choreographers and performing
19 artists. By mid-2019 ETM will have provided over \$1
20 million worth of no cost rehearsal space and cash
21 awards to New York City Artists. In the past nine
22 years our artists and residents have gone on to win
23 recognition from the Jerome Foundation, the Kleban
24 Foundation, Guggenheim, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Cage
25 Cunningham Award, New Music/USA, MacDowell Colony,

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

163

Larson Foundation and the Doris Duke Charity
Foundation. Chris Cerrone who was a 2013-2014
composer and resident was named a Pulitzer finalist
for invisible cities work he developed during his ETM
residency, Jen Shyu developed Song of Silver Geese
with Satoshi Haga while in residence in Jamaica. The
recording of this work was named one of the New York
Times Best Albums of 2017. Artists at all career
stages in New York City need the support, workspace
can be prohibitively expensive even for those at a
more advanced level. Now last year, we were very
happy to receive an increase in Cultural Development
Fund Awards from the New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs. I am here today to ask for CDF and
CIG funding to held level to be base-lined at FY18
levels for FY19. I would just like to point out that
with the increase in funding last year for the first
time we were back at the pre-crash funding levels
from 2008. It has taken us a decade to get there.
We really hope that the FY18 is where we build from
rather than a one year.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you. I'm
really glad we got there. Next.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

164

1
2 TIFFANY GEIGEL: My name is Tiffany
3 Geigel and I'm here on behalf of Dance NYC. On
4 behalf of more than 1200 New York City based dance-
5 maker and companies the service entity DanceNYC
6 joined New Yorkers for Culture and Arts and
7 colleagues and advocates to request the city baseline
8 the \$10 million in new funding awarded in Fiscal Year
9 2018 and the City award an additional \$20 million in
10 funding in Fiscal Year 2019. The need and
11 opportunity for funding is urgent. This is a moment
12 when our Presidential Administration is threatening
13 the Rights to Creativity and Free Expression
14 proposing the elimination of our Federal Cultural
15 Agency and implementing a Tax Code that as an
16 disincentive to charitable giving. New York City's
17 increasing in Culture and the Arts now will have both
18 symbolic and tangible significance. It will
19 strengthen the city as a beacon for Artists and
20 audiences around the globe and ensure New York Artist
21 and Culture groups have the resources they need to
22 advocate to advance or other resistant state in
23 Trump's America. The powerful topic of a recent
24 Committee Hearing. Locally the increased funding is
25 needed to ensure the Department of Cultural Affairs

1
2 and our City's Arts and Cultural Institutions are
3 positioned to respond to the pressing recommendations
4 of Create NYC the City's new Cultural Plan. For
5 Dance NYC and its constituents the most urgent four
6 parties are increase grantee volume and funding
7 levels, including funding of individual Artists as
8 recommended by the advancing physically sponsored
9 Artists and Art Project support published by Dance
10 NYC with 9 physical sponsor partners, an expanded
11 diversity, equity and inclusion agenda that
12 expressively adversities, disability rights as called
13 for by Dance NYC's Disability Dance Artistry.
14 Researching partners such as the Disability Arts NYC
15 Task Force and Immigrants Rights as called for by our
16 recent New York City's Foreign Born Dance Workforce
17 Demographics report, part of a new immigrant artist
18 initiative that we launched last month. The
19 development for Dance NYC the Cultural Plan is a
20 significant monster and a launching pad for
21 strengthening new advocacy.

22 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you so much,
23 I appreciate, as you can see the next hearing is
24 about ready to go but after four and a half hours,
25 the last person to testify is Jamie Burkart.

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

166

JAMIE BURKART: Alright, thank you.

CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

JAMIE BURART: I am a member of the New York City Artist Coalition and an Artist Safety Advocate. I am here to support the Department of Cultural Affairs and ask for increased funding to implement the Create NYC Cultural Plan. The Create NYC office hours events with Tom Finkelpearl bring together artists, nonprofits, public officials for conversations where vital information is shared, unprecedented connections are formed and bridges of trust are build between Creative Communities and the City. These types of office hours are crucial for helping underground Artists get access to life saving safety services and for the City of New York to better understand how Artists lives work. My life as a safety advocate began with the loss of another. My friend Nick Gomez Hall who was among the 36 Artists killed in Oakland Tragic Ghost Ship Fire at the end of 2016. I committed myself to organizing for safety and the preservation of community driven spaces. Early on I attended the Department of Cultural Affairs Create NYC office hours event and soon found myself in league with long-time safety experts in the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

167

1 arts. We conducted pre-inspection fire code walk
2 throughs, we helped artists become Fire Department,
3 New York Certified Fire Guards. We organized
4 independently as a coalition to understand issues
5 that impact artists the most and to fight for the
6 safety and preservation of community-driven spaces.
7 The Coalitions top priorities are to prevent
8 criminalization of community spaces, get access to
9 support and stop displacement. Forming a diverse
10 city-wide coalition, we engaged to create NYC
11 process. We called for the repeal of NYC's
12 discriminatory 1926 no dancing cabaret law. We
13 called for the creation of a task force of
14 confidential cultural case workers to help community-
15 driven cultural spaces get access to code compliance,
16 safety and liability help. Versions of these
17 recommendations were included in the Create NYC plan
18 and we were pleased in 2017 when the Mayoral
19 Administration joined the City Council's work by
20 after 91 years signing the historic cabaret law
21 repeal and by creating New York City's First Ever
22 Office of Night Life.

24 CHAIRMAN VAN BRAMER: Thank you, I regret
25 to end the testimony as compelling as it was but I

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

168

1
2 want to thank you for all being here for as long as
3 you have today and for everything you do for Arts and
4 Culture in the City of New York and obviously we have
5 a big ahead of us but we are going to fight it. We
6 have been doing well. We need to continue the
7 progress so thank you all very, very much and with
8 that we are adjourned.

9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

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 April 15, 2018