

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Start: 12:18 P.M.

Recess: 5:35 P.M.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Carlina Rivera, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr
Shahana K. Hanif
Kamillah M. Hanks
Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis
Chi A. Ossé
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Gale Brewer

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

A P P E A R A N C E S

Linda Johnson,
President and CEO, Brooklyn Public Library

Tony Marx—President,
The New York Public Library

Dennis Walcott,
President and CEO, Queens Public Library

Laurie Cumbo,
Commissioner of New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs

Lance Polivy,
General Counsel at New York City Department of
Cultural Affairs

Andrea Louie,
Assistant Commissioner of Program Services New
York City Department of Cultural Affairs

Lauren Comito,
Executive Director at Urban Librarians Unite

Leonard Paul,
President of Local 374, DC37

John Hyslop,
President Queens Public Library Guild, Local
1321

George Sarah Olken,
President of Brooklyn Public Library Guild,
Local 1482

Deborah Allman,
New York Public President Library Guild, Local
1930

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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

Coco Killingsworth,
Chief Experience and Impact Officer at the
Brooklyn Academy of Music; Chair of the Cultural
Institutions Group (CIG)

Norah Yahya,
Met Museum; Manhattan Borough Vice Chair,
Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)

Aaron Bouska,
Bronx Vice-Chair of the Cultural Institutions
Group; New York Botanical Gardens

Jessica Phillips,
Staten Island Vice Chair, Cultural Institutions
Group (CIG)

Shannon Rockett,
Associate Director Carnegie Hall; Cultural
Institutions Group (CIG)

Francine Garber-Cohen,
President of the Regina Opera Company, Inc.

Lucy Sexton,
New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Lisa Gold,
Executive Director of the Asian American
Arts Alliance

Candace Thompson-Zachery,
Co-Executive Director of Dance/NYC

Melody Capote,
Executive Director Caribbean Cultural Center
African Diaspora Institute

Kimberly Olsen,
Executive Director of New York City Arts in
Education Roundtable

Gonzalo Casals,
Co-Director at Culture & Arts Policy Institute
Institute

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

Judith Insell,
Executive Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble

Kate Madigan,
Public Affairs Coordinator for The Public Theater

Ted Stabile, Self
Advocating for Sunset Park Library, Brooklyn
Public Library

Ryan Gilliam,
Executive Director of Fourth Arts Block
(FABnyc) and Downtown Art

Benjamin Spierman,
General Director of The Bronx Opera Company

Gina Tribotti,
Development Manager at Program International
Studio & Curatorial Program

Lenore Davis,
Chair of the Symphony Space Board

Lisa Alpert,
Senior Vice President of Development and
Programming at Green-Wood Cemetery

Juliana Cope,
Assistant Executive Director for Development and
External Affairs for Mind-Builders Creative Arts
Center

Tod Stewart,
Director for Community Engagement for the
Universal Temple of the Arts

Gregory J Morris,
CEO of the New York City Employment and Training
Coalition (NYCETC)

Todd Seward
Director of Community Engagement for the
Universal Temple of the Arts

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

Gregory J Morris,
CEO of the New York City Employment and Training
Coalition (NYCETC)

Alejandro Epifanio Torres,
Executive and Artistic Director of Loisaida, Inc.
Arts & Culture Center

Sophia Harrison,
Founder and Executive Director of Art's House
Schools of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts

Cheryl Warfield,
Professional Opera Singer, Teaching Artist,
Producer and Founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera

Nicole Touzien,
Executive Director at Dancewave

Lacy Tauber,
Representing the Office of The Brooklyn Borough
President Antonio Reynoso

Elzbieta Krawczuk,
Childrens' Librarian at Brooklyn Public Library

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

6

3 SERGEANT LYNCH: This is a microphone check for
4 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
5 International Intergroup Relations; recorded by Layla
6 Lynch on March 12, 2024 in the Council Chambers.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Can everyone find a seat. Good
8 afternoon, and welcome to the New York City
9 Preliminary Budget Hearing on the Committee on
10 Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International
11 Intergroup Relations.

12 At this time, please place all electronic devices
13 to vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to testify,
14 please go the Sergeant at Arms' desk to fill out a
15 testimony slip - even if you have already registered
16 online.

17 At this time, and going forward, no one is to
18 approach the dais, I repeat, no one is to approach
19 the dais.

20 Thank you for your cooperation, Chair we are
21 ready to begin.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: [GAVEL SOUND] [GAVELING IN]

23 Good afternoon, and to the hearing for the
24 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
25 International Intergroup Relations. I am Council
Member Carlina Rivera, chair of this committee. Today

1
2 we will begin with a hearing on the City's three
3 Library systems, followed by a hearing on Cultural
4 Affairs. Finally, Committee will hear public
5 testimony related to these two hearings.

6 With that, I would like to welcome you to our
7 Libraries' Hearing.

8 This afternoon, we will be discussing the Fiscal
9 2025 Preliminary Expense in Capital Budget for the
10 systems.

11 For Fiscal 2025, the Administration is proposing
12 a \$420.9 million subsidy for the systems. The Fiscal
13 Year 2025 Preliminary Capital Plan, which covers
14 Fiscal Years 2024 to 2028, includes \$879 million for
15 the Library systems.

16 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, we are going to take a
17 quick commercial break to fix our tech.

18 (PAUSE)

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, everyone for your
20 patience, we are just dealing with a technical issue.
21 We should be back online soon.

22 (PAUSE)

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Just as a reminder, there is no
24 eating or drinking in the Council Chambers.

1
2 If you wish to testify, please go to the back of
3 the Sergeant at Arms table to fill out a slip, even
4 if you have registered online.

5 At this time, and going forward, no one is to
6 approach the dais - no one is to approach the dais.

7 Chair, we are ready to continue.

8 (PAUSE)

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: [GAVEL SOUND] [GAVELING IN]

10 Okay, Good afternoon, and welcome once again to
11 the hearing for the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
12 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. I
13 am Council Member Carlina Rivera, chair of this
14 committee. Today we will begin with a hearing on the
15 City's three Library systems, followed by a hearing
16 on Cultural Affairs, and finally, Committee will hear
17 public testimony related to these two hearings.

18 With that, I would like to welcome you to our
19 Libraries' Hearing. This afternoon, we will be
20 discussing the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Expense in
21 Capital Budget for the systems. For Fiscal Year 2025,
22 the Administration is proposing a \$420.9 million
23 subsidy for the systems. And with the Fiscal Year
24 2025 Preliminary Capital Plan, which covers five
25 years - 2024 to 2028, that includes \$879.9 million

1
2 for the Library systems. But, just to be clear, there
3 is certainly a reduction in the subsidy from the
4 amount in the Fiscal 2024 Adopted Budget... to our
5 Library systems.

6 Libraries, which are an essential presence in
7 every neighborhood of New York providing
8 indispensable services in a safe and reliable space
9 to the youth, seniors, immigrants, among many, many
10 other New Yorkers and newly arrived New Yorkers. The
11 doors of the library are open to everyone, and
12 libraries are a critical component of moving our
13 society forward. Our Library system protects the
14 right to speech and expression, and promotes a
15 vibrant civic society and human flourishing. I grew
16 up on the Lower East Side, and libraries were an
17 important part of my childhood. I was raised going to
18 free public library events, and now I take my own
19 family to enjoy the many services public libraries
20 have to offer. Libraries continue to launch
21 groundbreaking initiatives to meet the needs of the
22 diverse communities they serve. Our City's public
23 libraries provide language classes, theater and music
24 performances, access to technology, career and

1
2 financial services, and many, many other
3 opportunities *-all for free.*

4 So, in the November plan, I was very disappointed
5 to see a baseline reduction to the operation subsidy
6 of the systems. Reductions total \$23.6 million in
7 Fiscal Year 2024; \$22 million in the out years.

8 I was further disappointed that even though some
9 PEGs for other agencies were restored in the January
10 Plan, the Library's PEG was not.

11 We've seen how cuts have impacted Sunday service
12 across the City, reducing access to youth centers and
13 a safe place to gather and invest in skills. And now
14 the libraries might be forced to adopt 5-day service,
15 cutting another day of service. New Yorkers deserve
16 better, and these cuts are unacceptable.

17 The Council calls on the Administration to
18 support the Library systems by increasing their
19 Expense and Capital Budgets to meet all shortfalls
20 the systems have. It is essential that the budget
21 that we adopt this year is transparent, accountable,
22 and reflective of the priorities and interests of the
23 Council and the people we represent.

24 I look forward to an active engagement with the
25 Administration over the next few months to ensure the

1
2 Fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget meets the goals the
3 Council has set out.

4 I would like to acknowledge the members who are
5 present, we have Council Member Ossé, Council Member
6 Hanif, Council Member Hudson, Council Member Louis,
7 and Council Member Williams. I would also like to
8 thank my staff for organizing today's hearing
9 including Chief of Staff Budget Director Katie Loeb;
10 Legislation and Communications Director, Eddie
11 Amador; Financial Analyst Sandra Gray; Committee's
12 Counsel, Christina Yellamaty; and Legislative Policy
13 Analyst, Regina Paul.

14 We find ourselves in a time when Library capacity
15 is expanding, and yet program hours, which are rising
16 -branch utilization is rising, are all on the
17 chopping block. City funding is being cut, and we are
18 here to get to the bottom of why the Administration
19 finds this is appropriate at a time when we know it
20 is so critical.

21 So with that, I will turn to committee counsel.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You can begin your testimony.

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good afternoon, I'm Linda
24 Johnson President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library.
25 Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chair Rivera, and members

1
2 of the Committee, Finance Chair Brannan, our Brooklyn
3 Delegation, and the entire City Council for your
4 steadfast support.

5 Libraries are the most democratic spaces in our
6 city, and you, our dedicated outspoken leaders,
7 understand the importance of protecting libraries and
8 the promise we hold for every Community. For this, we
9 are grateful.

10 As you know, Libraries are facing some of the
11 most significant cuts we have seen in years - in
12 total \$58.3 million for New York City's libraries has
13 been stripped from the Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary
14 Budget, and for the first time in 16 years, the
15 Library's Capital Plans have been reduced by a
16 staggering \$130 million. The numbers are
17 overwhelming; we are not blind to the City's
18 financial troubles, but libraries ought to be held
19 harmless. As you know, investments in our libraries
20 yields strong returns. Given the difficulties facing
21 our city, we should be increasing these investments
22 not slashing them.

23 Today I ask for your continued support and urge
24 the full restoration and baselining of Library
25 funding in the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget. In expense

1 funding, this includes a reversal of the \$22.1
2 million PEG to the Library's baseline funding, the
3 reinstatement of \$20.5 million in Mayoral funding,
4 and the rest restoration of Council's Libraries'
5 Initiative funded last year at a level of \$15.7
6 million. In Capital Funding, we ask you to advocate
7 for a reversal of the capital PEG, returning the
8 sorely needed \$130 million to our Capital Plans. The
9 impact of these cuts is untenable and will result in
10 devastating service loss and derailed infrastructure
11 upgrades if they are allowed to proceed.
12

13 Too often our libraries are asked to absorb
14 midyear reductions, the result is an underfunded,
15 thinly staffed system forced to dedicate our precious
16 resources to regaining lost ground in the face of
17 increased costs.

18 This last November, the City's three Library
19 systems, along with City agencies, sustained a 5% cut
20 to our operating budgets. We have already eliminated
21 universal 7-Day service, significantly reduced
22 spending on library materials, programming, and
23 building maintenance, and have had to eliminate
24 vacant positions - all of which resulted in
25 disruptions to service.

1 The proposed Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget
2
3 will only deepen these service impacts. Brooklyn
4 Public Library alone faces a \$16.2 million cut, or
5 13% of our operating budget. To sustain a loss of
6 this magnitude, we would need to drastically curtail
7 hiring, exacerbating staffing shortages and our
8 ability to fully operate our libraries. Over half of
9 our branches would reduce operations to only 5 days a
10 week, and our projections show that after about 9
11 months, this number will likely increase due to
12 attrition without active hiring and the loss of half
13 of our part-time staff hours.

14 Further, we will have to reduce hours by opening
15 at 1:00 p.m. on Thursdays, as we already do on
16 Tuesdays, to keep our branches open until 8:00 p.m.
17 two nights a week. Our operating hours have already
18 decreased from 52 hours, prior to the November PEG,
19 to 48 Hours currently - an 8% reduction. If these
20 cuts proceed, on July 1st we will drop to 38
21 operating hours, a week a 27% reduction.

22 Additionally, to help maintain adequate staffing
23 levels, three branches, due to come back online in
24 Fiscal Year 2025 after renovations are completed, may
25 not be able to reopen. It is heartbreaking to be in

1
2 this position when we have invested so much time and
3 money renovating branches the communities deserve to
4 have back online.

5 We are reducing our building hours at a time when
6 our patrons most want to walk through our doors. By
7 nearly every metric, demand for our service increased
8 in 2023 compared to 2022. Program sessions grew by
9 59%, and program attendance was up by 46%. Notably
10 visits across the system increased by %40 and new
11 card applications up 42%.

12 New Yorkers are eager to use their local
13 libraries and connect with one another. This fall, I
14 watched as over 600,000 visitors came to Central
15 Library to see *The Book of HOV* exhibition, breaking
16 previous daily records. Visitors sang, danced, even
17 skipped rope together on our plaza as they not only
18 celebrated a Brooklyn icon, but also checked out
19 their first books in years, and found a genuine sense
20 of community and belonging.

21 Similarly, our LevelUp Program has built a
22 community of over 250 Black female entrepreneurs.
23 Through instructional workshops, mentoring, and
24 financial coaching these women are working together
25 to accelerate their careers in real estate, finance

1
2 and tech sectors, combat systematic and individual
3 discrimination in the job market, and build a more
4 equitable future for New York and beyond.

5 We are proud to bring creative programming and
6 workshops like these to the library and we will
7 continue to look for opportunities to expand our
8 reach. In fact, we have already hosted over 880,000
9 in-person programs this year, but offering fewer days
10 of service hinders this momentum and means our
11 programming will significantly... will be
12 significantly curtailed.

13 Though library usage is soaring, we will need to
14 reduce programming budgets by one-third, impacting
15 all non-grant funded programming. This translates to
16 fewer citizenship classes, fewer visits to senior
17 centers and nursing homes, cuts to creative aging,
18 and older adults classes, reduction of the young
19 adult literacy program by half, fewer stipends
20 resulting in fewer teen interns, and, unfortunately,
21 scaling back our new and popular Teen Takeover
22 Initiative.

23 We have made great strides in the last few years
24 to focus on better serving our younger patrons as
25 they begin to navigate the world outside their homes.

1
2 With funding from the Administration, we have added
3 five new Teen Tech Centers, safe spaces where teens
4 can meet their peers, sharpen their digital skills,
5 and express their creativity. However, if the 2025
6 budget cuts are enacted, the teen programming budget
7 will be cut, and one of our new tech centers will
8 close on Saturdays .

9 It's not only our programming that's shrinking,
10 so are our collections. There are 4,000 fewer books
11 on the shelves since the enactment of the November
12 cut. And there will be even fewer in Fiscal Year
13 2025, despite increasing demand for physical and
14 digital material.

15 In 2023, our physical and digital collections
16 circulated nearly 10 million items on top of these
17 collections, and programming impacts, there is a
18 dangerous domino effect at play. If these cuts are
19 not reversed, Libraries could lose 25% of our state
20 funding. The Maintenance of Effort Clause in the
21 state's Library Aid Statute requires local aid to
22 remain at or above 95% of the prior 2-year average.
23 If the Maintenance of Effort is triggered in this
24 year's City budget, Brooklyn Public Library stands to
25

1
2 lose an additional \$2 million in state funding next
3 year.

4 We spend months every year planning for cuts
5 instead of planning more programming for the millions
6 of New Yorkers who rely on our services. Fighting to
7 regain lost ground every year forces us to be
8 reactive instead of proactive, losing both time,
9 money, and opportunities as we navigate our
10 constantly shifting budget. One minute we are
11 recruiting new employees, and the next imposing
12 hiring freezes driving away the best candidates and
13 discouraging our staff who are already stretched
14 thin.

15 And all the while, the operational costs of
16 providing quality Library services are increasing.
17 Covering the necessary union salary and minimum wage
18 increases will cost an additional \$1.8 million for
19 Brooklyn Public Library; the library's share of staff
20 health care premiums has increased by \$1.4 million,
21 and the operating costs of two new locations - the
22 Center for Brooklyn History and the Library for Arts
23 and Culture, are an additional \$1.4 million.

24 Operating with these increased costs is tantamount to
25 a cut.

1
2 Our libraries need more, not less. Our patrons
3 deserve more, not less. So, in addition to advocating
4 for a full restoration of Library funding, I also
5 urge you to push for the \$58.3 million restoration to
6 be baselined. In these increasingly uncertain times,
7 New Yorkers must have stable, reliable, free public
8 spaces.

9 And I must speak about capital for a moment as
10 well. These spaces must be safe, welcoming, and in a
11 state of good repair. While the Library's operational
12 funding is of great grave concern, our capital
13 funding is also at risk. Brooklyn Public Library is
14 the steward of over 1 million square feet of city-
15 owned facilities, but we lack adequate funding to
16 maintain them. These needs are not new, you have
17 heard it many times, Brooklyn Public Library is an
18 aging system where the average branch is 70 years
19 old, and 19 locations are over a hundred years old.
20 Our deferred maintenance has grown to over \$380
21 million, one-third of which is emergency
22 infrastructure work like roofs, heating, and cooling
23 systems or fire safety and accessibility needs. Last
24 year, we lost more than 2,200 hours to unplanned
25

1
2 closures stemming from infrastructure needs at 56 of
3 our 62 libraries.

4 What is new is that for the first time since
5 2008, nearly \$47 million of capital funding necessary
6 to maintain the public libraries our patrons rely on,
7 has been pulled out of the Capital Plan. We depend on
8 City support for the maintenance of our physical
9 plant, and, of course, without the support of our
10 council members, who have funded local projects in
11 their districts and supported us with delegation
12 level funding, we would not have come this far in
13 revitalizing our local libraries, but our progress is
14 at risk. Try as we might to minimize the detrimental
15 impacts of this capital reduction, we have already
16 been forced to eliminate four long-awaited
17 renovations, remove funding for several construction
18 projects, and eliminate critical infrastructure
19 funds. A capital cut of this size is unimaginable,
20 and it is even more painful when paired with reduced
21 expense funds. Every year, we are forced to dip into
22 our operating budget to solve urgent capital demands
23 - maintaining old boilers, replacing dilapidated
24 furniture, and funding temporary heating and cooling
25 fixes - while we wait for long overdue capital to be

1 completed. This year there's no cushion to pull from;
2 for example, many of the HVAC systems throughout our
3 branches are in such disrepair that our vendors can
4 no longer service them. It will cost us half a
5 million dollars in expense funding this year to bring
6 those units up to a serviceable level. Additionally,
7 nearly \$10 million in Council funded capital projects
8 were pushed out 10 years - 10 years to fiscal 2033 of
9 our Capital plan and cannot proceed. This includes
10 six projects - several about to begin construction -
11 two full branch renovations and systemwide funding to
12 cover active shortfalls. By delaying projects we will
13 incur construction costs escalation, increased
14 maintenance costs to keep troubled branches
15 operational, squander design fees, and sustain
16 unplanned branch closures due to failing
17 infrastructure as we endure drastic reductions to the
18 city's operating budget. This will have a
19 catastrophic effect on patrons, staff, and the entire
20 Library system. In total, the Fiscal Year 2025
21 Preliminary Budget proposal will have dire
22 consequences for public service, which will in turn
23 have dire consequences for our city.
24
25

1
2 Chair Rivera, members of the Committee, the
3 future depends on your leadership and support.
4 Libraries are on the front of mind for so many New
5 Yorkers. If you need a warm hideout, an enriching
6 after school program, help learning English, or
7 filing your taxes, a recommendation for a new book,
8 or simply a quiet space to work we are the first
9 place you think of. But, now the loss of Library
10 service is front of mind for many New Yorkers.
11 Restoring and baselining our funds will barely affect
12 the City's finances, but will greatly affect New
13 Yorkers lives. You can make a difference for so many
14 of our neighbors by championing libraries and
15 protecting the most democratic spaces in our country,
16 thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you very much.

18 PRESIDENT MARX: Good afternoon, my name is Tony
19 Marx, I'm the President of the New York Public
20 Library. I want to thank Speaker Adams, Chair Rivera,
21 all the members, and all the members of the of the
22 City Council for their stalworth support.

23 We're here to testify - I have submitted written
24 testimony; I will be brief and summarize here.

1
2 Last July the City Council passed a budget that
3 fully restored Libraries for the current Fiscal Year
4 24. That was amazing, and we're so grateful.

5 Unfortunately the victory was short lived. Libraries
6 received from the Administration a midyear November
7 cut of \$23.6 million nearly two-thirds of the amount
8 that was restored through your great efforts.

9 For the New York Public Library, that included
10 over \$10 million. We've already seen the end of
11 Sunday service, which is tragic for New Yorkers.
12 We've had to reduce spending on our collections, our
13 programming that is dependent upon by so many, our
14 outreach efforts, our maintenance and repairs, we've
15 had to delay hiring for our amazing colleagues who
16 are the driving force of our systems and what New
17 Yorkers depend upon.

18 As we enter FY25, we are facing \$58.3 million -
19 \$58.3 million in reductions. The midyear cut
20 baselined to FY25 is \$22.1 million, the one-time
21 Mayoral funding from last year is \$20.5, the non-
22 baseline Council funding that we depend on is \$15.7.

23 A cut of this magnitude to our expense budget is
24 the highest we have faced in the time I have been
25 with the Library systems. It includes \$25.5 million

1 just for the New York Public Library. We will have to
2 further reduce days and hours of operation. Six-day
3 service will no longer be universal - unthinkable
4 results in the city at the center of the world.
5 Budgets for pages, who we love, and who become our
6 great colleagues, will have to be slashed. The number
7 of branches that have been closed for large scale
8 renovations, and are slated to be reopened, we will
9 not be able to reopen them - tragic. The staff that
10 we need to operate those budgets, we will not be able
11 to hire them, and we won't be able to reopen on time.
12 Those include five Carnegie branches, in the highest
13 need areas of New York - where we were so proud to
14 work with the Administration to be able to give great
15 restorations - now we will have to sit on those
16 restored libraries for lack of staffing.

17
18 These locations are essential in their
19 neighborhoods. And it was only possible because we
20 were in the 10-year Capital Plan. That happened in
21 2016, it has not happened since. So, we can't even
22 plan let alone deliver what New Yorkers need -
23 whether it's ADA accessible, dedicated spaces for
24 children, and facade restoration, and more. How long
25 these delays will be for reopening, it is simply

1 impossible to tell. There may be additional renovated
2 branches that will not be able to open on time, and
3 as you have heard from Linda in her inspiring
4 testimony, we also face as a result of city cuts, a
5 further reduction in State funding - The Maintenance
6 of Effort Requirement will produce a 25% cut in state
7 funding to libraries.
8

9 How do all these cuts translate into reality? We
10 are looking at midyear cuts alone that have met
11 already 72,000 fewer items in our collections, and
12 the number is projected to jump to over \$180,000.
13 We're looking at around 850 hours less hours per week
14 translated to a 20% reduction in our systemwide
15 planned efforts. Fifty After School locations, 20
16 Teen Centers, 24 ESOL Program Centers, 11 tax
17 preparation programs, 40 College and Career Hubs- all
18 at risk. All have been built with City Council and
19 Administration partnership, all essential, and most
20 used all now at risk.

21 On the research side, we've already seen
22 reductions from the PEGs for staffing - that means
23 more wait times for key research, fewer service
24 points, New Yorkers and all comers less able to do
25

1
2 the creative work that we need them all to be able to
3 do.

4 And these cuts come at a time when we've seen New
5 Yorkers returning to their libraries. After difficult
6 pandemic and economic years, the City and the Mayor's
7 own Preliminary Management Report shows that
8 circulation, program attendance, library card
9 registration - all increasing since FY21. The demand
10 for our services is clear; therefore, the demand for
11 not seeing these cuts - for restoring them and
12 increasing funding needs to be similarly clear. That
13 is also true on the capital side. As I said, we were
14 in the 10-year Capital Plan - we are no longer there.
15 We've seen our 10-year capital funding reduced and
16 put into off years - it translates to a removal of
17 \$45.5 million from our capital budget - pushing into
18 out years, another \$42 million. Our buildings are
19 aging, they need help just to stay open - let alone
20 to be the inspiring and respectful spaces that we
21 should be offering in neighborhoods where our
22 citizens have much too little. They depend on the
23 Library and we will not be able to give it to them.

24 The current cuts to our Capital Plan will undo
25 much of the progress that Iris and David and my

1
2 colleagues here have been so proud to deliver. We
3 will simply not be able to deliver.

4 We know as our costs increase that the cuts are
5 even more tragic, because our... the costs of
6 delivering for New Yorkers are going up, and we're
7 seeing our budget decrease.

8 We have to resist this. We have to get past this
9 game that we're in - months of living on the edge of
10 planning for the unthinkable, finding costs rising
11 while we're facing our budgets decreasing. We
12 estimate that the unreimbursed cost growth, just from
13 next year, will be more than \$8 million - and again,
14 that's not even calculated into the cuts.

15 We ask simply, humbly, and urgently, please let
16 us restore these cuts, baseline them, let's stop
17 these games with people's lives, with their future,
18 with what New York stands for. We've had enough.
19 Let's rally together. We know the mayor feels this
20 way as well. Let's all pull together and get New
21 Yorkers what they need. Madam, Chair, thank you for
22 this opportunity.

23 (APPLAUSE)

24 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Thank you, Tony. Madam Chair,
25 it is a pleasure.

1
2 My name is Dennis Walcott, and I have the honor
3 of being the president of the Queen's Public Library.
4 It's always a pleasure to be here with Linda and
5 Tony, and testifying before the Committee. But at
6 the same time, I hope that one day our testimony will
7 be extremely short when we can come here and say,
8 "thank you very much", and then instead of the mic,
9 we drop our library card and leave. And that to me
10 would be the ideal setting for us to talk about, but
11 right now, that is not the case.

12 So, it's a pleasure to be here, and, again, thank
13 you for your leadership as well. Chair Rivera, you
14 have been outstanding, members of the Committee, we
15 thank you for your advocacy, and to our speaker, we
16 always thank her for her advocacy as far as Libraries
17 and her leadership as well.

18 Right now, we are witnessing before our eyes what
19 happens when library funding is cut. As a result of
20 the midyear November PEG, not a single library - not
21 a single library in the city of New York, the
22 greatest city in the world, is open seven days a
23 week. This is New York City, and that's unacceptable.
24 QPL - Queens Public Library - estimates that since we
25 had to shutter Sunday service at our two busiest

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2 libraries, Flushing and Central, we have lost at
3 least 45,000 visits, 1,000 per Sunday at Central and
4 2,000 per Sunday at Flushing. That is tragic.

5 It is absolutely astounding to me that we are in
6 a situation where we are seriously discussing the
7 possibility of losing universal six-day service,
8 which New Yorkers have counted on for nearly a
9 decade, after New Yorkers and the Council
10 successfully fought to secure it.

11 In Fiscal Year 2025, cuts stand if our Council
12 funding is not reauthorized. There will be no weekend
13 Library service in the borough of Queens - home to
14 2.4 million people. Weekends are an important time
15 for people to use our libraries. Last year, we had
16 more than 883,000 visits on weekends alone in Queens,
17 and program attendance of more than 125,000. On top
18 of this, we will not have sufficient staff to reopen
19 three libraries: Bay Terrace, Broadway, and Hillcrest
20 once construction work at each one is completed this
21 spring. It really does break my heart, and it breaks
22 the heart of our trusted and dedicated staff that
23 people will have far less access to our libraries.

24 The proposed budget is a devastating blow to our
25 already strained staffing, our outstanding staff, who

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2 work day in and day out to provide the services, but
3 they are strained because of these cuts and resources
4 forcing us to deepen the reductions we have already
5 had to implement.

6 Although we are here right now pleading with you
7 to reverse the cut we took in November and reverse
8 the additional cuts we are facing, we should be
9 discussing expanding services to meet the profound
10 needs of our communities. We are always there for the
11 city of New York. We are always there for the people
12 of New York. And we want to make sure we continue to
13 expand those needs to serve the public.

14 We have talented, motivated, hardworking staff
15 who are doing outstanding work. They have innovative
16 and creative ideas for doing more. Instead we are
17 struggling to maintain core services, safe and
18 welcoming spaces, robust collections, meaningful
19 programs, and access to technology.

20 We know that people across the city, our children
21 our teens, our families, adult learners, job seekers,
22 seniors, and new Americans trust and count on
23 libraries to give them opportunities to learn, to
24 grow and find success.

1
2 We know that libraries have the power to change
3 lives. It changed my life. And it pains me that we
4 are not even close to having the funding we need to
5 give them the libraries they deserve. Even if our
6 funding is fully restored, as indicated by Linda and
7 Tony, the City's allocation would still fall short of
8 our needs because of our escalating costs related to
9 meeting the contractual salary obligations minimum
10 wage and health insurance increases - and other
11 expenses as well.

12 On top of the reductions to our operating budget,
13 QPL had a \$32 million capital program to eliminate
14 the gap, a PEG, which significantly limits our
15 ability to cover short falls for ongoing projects.

16 No organization, not a single organization, can
17 plan effectively for the future with the way our
18 funding cycle works. A hopefully restored budget at
19 the start of the fiscal year, cuts or proposed cuts
20 in the middle of the fiscal year, a cut for the next
21 fiscal year, and then battle for restoration again.
22 Think about that. It's a constant treadmill, and it's
23 no way to plan and run an institution like our
24 libraries.

1
2 Imagine what Libraries could do for the people of
3 our great city with steady, reliable, and adequate
4 investment. For example, extending our operational
5 hours at all of our locations - morning, evenings,
6 and weekends. I have dreams, and we have dreams, of
7 how we can continue to expand our services to
8 programs, inspiring spaces, that Linda always talks
9 about, with the state-of-the-art technology and
10 reliable infrastructure - so important, renovated
11 buildings that allow us to adapt with the evolving
12 needs of our communities. Our communities are
13 changing before our eyes, and our libraries need to
14 change with them. And cuts constantly hamper us in
15 doing that. We need to be responsive to the changing
16 demographics of New York City, because New York City
17 is a magnet for all people, and we are here to serve
18 the entire demographic population of New York City -
19 not needing to turn away customers who are seeking
20 ESOL citizenship, job and business help, or any other
21 service they are seeking.

22 We are here for the public- every location having
23 in hand educational enrichment programs for children
24 and teens. I always share the story, one time I was
25 out at Peninsula Library, it was a Saturday, rainy

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2 day, and the library was jam-packed. Just imagine if
3 we have to make further cuts, those services for the
4 people who were there to get the library services at
5 Peninsula like libraries across the city, will no
6 longer be able to do that.

7 Libraries are the catalyst for our city's dreams,
8 and we trust that with your steadfast advocacy we can
9 see our budgets restored and keep those dreams alive.

10 Chair Rivera, Committee members, thank you for
11 the opportunity to speak, and wishing you all the
12 best, thank you.

13 (APPLAUSE)

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you. I appreciate the
15 support that you all give each other, it's really
16 something lovely to see.

17 I don't mean to steal from your testimony, Tony,
18 I know you kept it brief, but you had a line in here
19 that I thought really encapsulated the issue that
20 we're facing here, which is for less than half of 1%
21 of the total budget, the Library has proved itself
22 unmatched in its ability to reach our communities.
23 And some of my opening questions were around the
24 impact itself on the programs and services, but
25

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2 thought the three of you did a really wonderful job
3 in being comprehensive in conveying that.

4 I'm going to go through a quick list of just some
5 of the things that I jotted down that you all
6 mentioned: Citizenship classes, classes for older
7 adults, adult literacy, fewer visits to senior
8 centers and nursing homes, deferred maintenance and
9 infrastructure upgrades, fewer books, less outreach,
10 a pause in hiring, an adverse impact on civic
11 engagement - I know my colleagues here, who all want
12 to ask questions, we've done mobile offices, Omni
13 events, IDNYC. I've personally done Council 101 in
14 the basement of Tompkins Square Park, these are
15 incredible places that welcome everyone, and
16 certainly feel friendly and quite peaceful. So, I
17 want to thank you for that.

18 Let's ask a little bit of some of the impact that
19 you did mention. So, what changes, maybe that I
20 failed to capture in that checklist, did the systems
21 have to incorporate to absorb these reductions. I
22 went through a lot of them...

23 PRESIDENT MARX: I'll just jump in. You've already
24 covered so much of the details. I'll just go to just
25 make the point that when we have to close, when our

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2 doors are closed, whether it's because of the funding
3 reductions, or because the funding reductions mean we
4 can't do the repairs that are necessary to keep our
5 doors open, let alone the renovations that are
6 essential, it's really the effect on the citizenry
7 could not be more powerful. These are the most
8 trusted, the most used civic institutions in New
9 York. We are in every neighborhood - neighborhoods
10 that are not served in any other way. New Yorkers
11 know they can always come to the library. It's in a
12 world and a time when it's not clear who you can
13 trust, who you can believe, who you can rely on. The
14 libraries are the one thing that the real people of
15 New York in our neighborhoods know. What message are
16 we sending, never mind what we can't actually do,
17 what message are we sending to our brothers and
18 sisters to our children, that says, no, you can't
19 rely on the one thing you thought you could rely on,
20 the one thing that is dedicated to what this city
21 stands for, and delivering on making opportunity
22 possible. It's what makes this city go, and when we
23 have to close, the city stops delivering. And we are
24 all heartbroken at that prospect. This is New York.
25 We can do better than this.

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2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, if I may, I mean one of
3 the concrete things, it really pains me to see this
4 and say this, but when our Broadway Library - will be
5 ready to open and in a little while - it won't be
6 open, plain and simple, because we don't have the
7 staff to staff it properly. And we have a brand new
8 computer center there, and as a result of that,
9 you'll have people walking by a library - and they
10 look in and say what the heck is going on? And
11 rightfully so, to be angry and not receive services
12 there. That to me is one concrete example. When I
13 look at our council member from Flushing here, and we
14 don't have Flushing open on a Sunday, because the
15 Library can't staff it and pay for it at this
16 particular point in time based on the budget cuts.

17 It pains me. Those are concrete things -
18 something like a mobile library, I mean we have our
19 mobile library out on a regular basis, but we will
20 not be able to have our mobile libraries out on a
21 Saturday at all, because we can't have staff to staff
22 it. And then when we had those extra hours to maybe
23 have it out on a Sunday, we won't be able to do that.
24 And the mobile Library reaches the communities at
25

1
2 their point of contact so they don't have to come to
3 our buildings.

4 I mean, those are some of the other types of
5 things that we face, much less the regular hours that
6 we have, and not having the ability to have regular
7 hours. Then not to steal Linda's thunder, because I
8 always like the way I hear Linda always say it, but
9 with the infrastructure work, I mean you have to
10 delay projects. That's ridiculous. And then on top of
11 that, pushing money out to 2033? when those projects
12 are ready to launch now? So, our aging buildings
13 will look be refreshed or to have new buildings? I
14 mean those are all real examples. Those are not
15 dramatic examples just to make a point. Those are
16 things that we have a decision to make on how we
17 balance our budget based on the projected cuts
18 themselves.

19 So, think those are some of the real things in
20 addition to less services and less hours available
21 for people to come in on weekends and during the
22 weekday.

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Hard to add anything at this
24 point, but, you know, I think the important thing to
25 understand is that all the work we do is really

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2 dependent on the people who work with and for us. And
3 the great library workers, librarians, you know, in
4 every single category of employee, if we start
5 cutting that back it has this ripple effect across
6 the system, which is, of course, to cut hours, which
7 then in term cuts programming, it affects our ability
8 to keep capital projects on course. We all talk
9 about this quite a lot, and the reason is because
10 there's really not very many places we have to cut.
11 And, so when you're looking at cuts of the size that
12 are being proposed, our only choice is to continue to
13 skinny down our staff, which ultimately means we just
14 won't be there for the community. And I think that
15 the point really that Tony makes about the city of
16 New York what this act communicates to the people of
17 New York, is really devastating. Right? It really is
18 that we don't care enough about the education of our
19 citizenry, and that's a tough thing to grapple with.

20 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: You know, on top of that, I
21 mean I think we've talked about it in our testimony,
22 but fewer books - I mean personnel, collections
23 that's our basic bottom-line. Personnel, collections
24 - we say it over and over again. Fewer personnel to
25 provide the program services, fewer books and

1 collection material for the public itself. So when
2 they come in to look at the shelves for a book per
3 se, or they go for their eBook, and they say, wait a
4 minute, it's not there - because we didn't have the
5 money to fund it. And that's where the base of the
6 funding is from. And, as a result of that, that will
7 have a direct impact as far as what the cuts mean.

9 PRESIDENT MARX: Can I just add one, another
10 example? So, again, with thanks to the
11 Administration, to the City Council, we got into the
12 10-year capital plan. It's almost 10 years ago. It
13 took us a hundred years to get into that plan, so
14 that we could actually deliver, in a meaningful and
15 in a planned way. We said, okay what do we... in at
16 New York Public Library, we said we've got five
17 Carnegie amazing structures, you know, just inspiring
18 structures that had fallen into deep disrepair. And
19 it happened to be in some of the poorest
20 neighborhoods of New York where people depend on us
21 even more. We said let's spend that \$100 million to
22 create inspiring, amazing libraries again - where
23 they are most needed. And we are ready to deliver,
24 and now the Administration says, we don't have the
25 money to give you to staff those libraries. In Port

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2 Richmond, Council Member Hanks, we are so proud that
3 we are going to have this amazing new Carnegie ready
4 to reopen, and we will not be able to open it until
5 we get the funding necessary to make that possible.
6 That is tragic for New Yorkers who depend on and love
7 their libraries, and need to know they will be open.
8 Help us. Let's not do this.

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well thank you.

10 I want to say we have been joined by Council
11 Members Hanks and Ung.

12 I think we all agree on the messaging. Not too
13 long ago, we had a hearing on book banning. And to
14 recently see on the news books about the queer
15 experience in the trash, beside a school, fewer books
16 on the shelves, it's all related to how important it
17 is to see representation on those bookshelves. The
18 young people, the increase in Gen Z attending the
19 library and creating that safe space... and you all
20 mention headcount as well, what is the total number
21 of employees at each of the systems?

22 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, we're already down. So,
23 at full complement, we're at 1,200.

24 PRESIDENT MARX: We are at 2,700 roughly, uh,
25 proudly so, with great workers, great colleagues DC

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2 37 doing an amazing job, but if we don't funding, we
3 can't have the colleagues we need, we can't maintain
4 them. The last thing we want to see is reducing that
5 number, uh, that would be tragic for everyone.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Do you know what percentage
7 of the employees are represented by unions?

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In our case, it is 82%.

9 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Ours is 90+%. And we have
10 1,450 full and part time employees, but, again, that
11 number is getting smaller and smaller, and we are
12 shrinking. And that to us is unaccountable.

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: How many vacancies does each
14 system have?

15 PRESIDENT MARX: Vacancies, how many vacancies...

16 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Give you an exact number...

17 PRESIDENT MARX: We're going to get you that
18 number, but I can tell you that we have, uh, we're
19 doing controlled hiring, it... hiring is largely
20 frozen at this point. So those vacancies stay in
21 place, many of those, for instance, are in the Bronx,
22 where we need to hire more. It... again it adds to
23 the tragedy when we cannot hire in the neighborhoods
24 that most need us to have the staff to deliver.

25 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We have 83 vacancies.

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2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We have 146 vacancies.

3 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Is the City providing any
4 additional funding to the systems for provision of
5 services to asylum seekers?

6 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I've personally seen the
8 way you all have transformed your space to accompany
9 languages and families who are now going there for
10 services that are newly arrived. So, that is a
11 disappointment to say the least.

12 What percentage of the system's budget is City
13 funding?

14 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: With Queens it's 92% roughly.

15 PRESIDENT MARX: For the New York Public Library
16 it's closer to... it's just over half, maybe 60% -
17 that's because, uh, we're a private trust that raises
18 money and has an endowment that enables us to provide
19 the research libraries to all New Yorkers for all
20 five boroughs. We fund that privately, we're proud to
21 do it as a public-private partnership. But, if we are
22 getting City cuts, that has an effect on our research
23 libraries and also on our ability to continue to
24 raise the money to partner with the City.

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2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn the percentage of
3 City funding is 85%.

4 And I just want to correct myself, because we did
5 receive some money from MOIA for providing ESOL
6 classes in Spanish.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I know how much time you all
8 spent privately fundraising. So, I realize that's
9 a... the majority of your time is doing that.

10 When you look at the... we're looking... the
11 state is currently negotiating their budget as well,
12 how has the November plan baseline expense PEGs
13 impacted State expense funding?

14 PRESIDENT MARX: We haven't seen a reduction in
15 State funding. We're grateful to the state, it is...
16 works on formula; we're grateful for that, too. But
17 we have now learned, because we face cuts that are
18 unprecedented, at least in my time, we've learned uh
19 about a threat that we didn't even sort of fully
20 focus on before - which is the State, eager to make
21 sure that the City will maintain its effort, maintain
22 its investment in libraries, one of the ways the
23 State does that is to create a penalty if the City
24 fails to do that. Two years of 5% cuts triggers a 25%
25 cut - for New York Public Library - \$20 million we

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2 get from the state. That means rather than protecting
3 us, which is what the State was trying to do, the
4 legislation forces the state to reduce us
5 significantly in addition to the reduction of City
6 cuts. It's a piling on that will have terrible
7 results for everyone. And we know the Governor is
8 eager for that not to happen, that our colleagues in
9 Albany are eager, just as the City Council and the
10 mayor are eager to make sure that doesn't happen.
11 But, that is what we are also facing at this
12 juncture.

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So with capital projects,
14 what obstacles and delays do you face in starting and
15 completing capital projects? And how can this process
16 be improved?

17 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So several things, one with
18 the capital process, uh, the pay could be just
19 totally restored, and that would basically address
20 our needs. In addition to that, as Linda and others
21 have indicated - Tony has indicated, that the push
22 out to 2033 just stops projects dead in their tracks,
23 and will not be funding for us to kick projects off
24 that we've been planning for - a long period of time.
25 So the various districts throughout the city will be

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2 impacted in having buildings that are potentially
3 closes as a result of infrastructure problems. Part
4 of the balancing at that we always do is the
5 capitally eligible capital projects versus those
6 capital projects that may not be capitally eligible,
7 and then having expense money to pay for that. Now we
8 will suffer on both sides of the coin in that we will
9 have fewer capital dollars available. And then we
10 will have fewer expense dollars, and that will double
11 impact the capital infrastructure needs of our
12 buildings.

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In addition, as we've all
14 testified, our systems are aging. We all have
15 libraries of different... from different eras. The
16 Carnegie libraries, perhaps the most cherished, just
17 because of their historical significance, are also
18 the most expensive to maintain. And we've been told
19 by OMB that we should not be forecasting new capital
20 projects. But, at the same time, we have \$13.8
21 million in new needs, and those needs get more
22 expensive as time passes. Obviously the sooner you
23 can correct an issue the less costly it is to do the
24 renovations. So, in the case of projects where we've
25 already designed the work, and we're ready to go but

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2 we've been told not to star, that means we've
3 squandered the design money which is not nothing. And
4 in the case of buildings that are in disrepair, the
5 longer the problems languish, the more expensive they
6 get to fix. And that's sort of part of how we got
7 here in the first place. It's why we all have such
8 significant deferred maintenance numbers.

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I imagine the increase in
10 capacity that you have had with the projects that
11 were completed, now you have to staff them and that's
12 challenge... (CROSS-TALK)

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's separate problem, which
14 is that we have a couple of libraries that are ready
15 to come online. We have... We, we being the City, we
16 being you, City Council, and the Administration have
17 spent significant dollars on capital projects that
18 are ready to go, and the public will benefit greatly,
19 and no doubt we will start using them immediately.
20 We just opened a library in Sunset Park that had been
21 closed for years, and within days it had been... it
22 was though that library had been operating at full
23 bore forever. So, the sin of that is all the money
24 that's been poured into these projects, not to have
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2 the operating budget to be able to staff them, is
3 it's hard to even talk about that.

4 PRESIDENT MARX: Madam Chair, I'm going to be
5 brief but strong on this one.

6 The Mayor, the City, have invested hundreds of
7 millions of dollars in our renovations, which were
8 essential. We have a deferred maintenance problems
9 that was projected at a billion dollars. When we
10 invested we were ready to deliver, but now we're
11 going to have to hold on opening already renovated
12 branches in the neighborhoods most in need of those
13 branches. That is terrifying. We won't have the
14 expense budget just to do the emergency repairs to
15 keep our other branches open let alone in the state
16 of inspiring physicality that they need to be. We now
17 - I've never seen this before - we're now seeing a
18 \$45 million cut in January to our capital budget and
19 another \$41 million pushed out a decade. We might as
20 well not have it. Let's stop playing games. If we
21 don't get funding for capital in a serious, committed
22 dependable way that's - what? - the 10-year capital
23 plan is for - we can't deliver and money gets wasted,
24 people's lives get wasted because they can't come
25 into our libraries. The City, the Mayor, knows full

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2 well what we are facing here. He put a task force
3 together, because we all know that when we work with
4 DDC - we love those folks - but when we work with
5 them, we get half as much done and twice as much time
6 for twice as much money. We'd love to be able to step
7 up even with private dollars to partner more to solve
8 this problem. But if we can't depend on the City to
9 deliver the basics then we can't partner with you. We
10 can't help solve this problem which we are so eager
11 to do.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I... you'll hear this
13 from your colleagues in Culture as well, this the
14 process of DCLA and then DDC for some of these
15 projects feels like a duplication of efforts -
16 however helpful each agency might be, there's
17 certainly a way to streamline the process to make it
18 more efficient.

19 And my last question, before I go to my
20 colleagues, is the Preliminary Mayor's Management
21 Report showed an increase across all three systems in
22 usage and in program sessions, which is I guess
23 somewhat ironic considering the cuts. What was the
24 primary driver of this increase?
25

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2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Trust, consistency,
3 creativity, dedicated folks who work for the Library.
4 The community knows who their local librarians, their
5 managers, their customer service reps are; great
6 programming on all of our parts as far as the
7 programming that fits the need, the population;
8 outreach to the community, having mobile libraries
9 out in the community on a regular basis, having staff
10 out on a regular basis going to local events. All of
11 those things allow us to increase the number of card
12 holders, people coming through our doors, people
13 participating in programs, having ESOL classes that
14 meet the needs of the various uh new speaking groups
15 who are part of the city of New York. All of that
16 allows for people to take advantage of who we are. We
17 are the best return on investment that exists in the
18 world quite frankly. People get us. (APPLAUSE) They
19 know us. They trust us. That's the bottom line. I
20 mean there's no script along that line. We're Library
21 System. We're great. Talk to each person, and they
22 know their childhood library. They have their horror
23 library story, how much money did I owe when I was a
24 kid? Fines have been waved. I mean those are the
25 things that attract people to our doors. People

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2 talked about it outside, feeling safe - parents
3 grandparents, people who are homeless, they come in
4 to library, because they feel safe there they know we
5 won't hassle them. That's what drives the numbers up
6 over and over and more and more.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I will tell you, I Hamilton
8 Fish was like my around the corner library. When I
9 was a kid, they gave me a free copy of *Strega Nona*...

10 PRESIDENT MARX: Wow...

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: which is, you know, classic
12 of course, uh, *Magic Spaghetti*, and I still have it
13 and I can't wait to read it to my kids. So, I know
14 you have more to add, but I want to make sure,
15 because I'm sure my colleagues are going to ask
16 something similar to this. We're going to go to
17 Council Members Hudson, for questions and then Louis.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much, Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you for.

20 PANEL: Thanks

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I just have two questions
22 I believe. But, the first one is, since its founding
23 in 2016 CUNY Cultural Corps has connected more than
24 1,070 students with paid internships in New York
25 City's cultural sector and partnership with DCLA,

1 including 169 students who are currently
2 participating in FY24. According to a 2023 Alumni
3 Survey, 60% of respondents reported that they're
4 working or had worked in the cultural sector after
5 their internship. Can you share what plans the City
6 has to continue to support this essential pipeline
7 for a diverse and thriving cultural sector?
8

9 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We do quite a lot with
10 internships at Brooklyn Public Library - including
11 with CUNY and SUNY, uh, we're working on one. And we
12 have... and this is actually one of the things at
13 risk, which makes me extremely uncomfortable, but we
14 do a lot of work which allows us to pay stipends to
15 teens for the work that they're doing. In fact, on
16 the Books Unbanned project, we have teenagers who are
17 teaching people around the country how to advocate
18 for themselves. So, that these programs that are
19 providing material to students across the country,
20 they're also providing opportunities for teenagers in
21 Brooklyn to enhance their skills, and they're being
22 compensated for that. And these kinds of programs,
23 which are creative, and which have benefits for not
24 only the recipients of the service but also for those
25 who are providing it. Those are the things that make

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2 us special, and we hate the idea of needing to cut
3 those.

4 PRESIDENT MARX: I'll just add that we're
5 particularly proud of our page program, it's been a
6 pipeline for so many of our folks' start in high
7 school. They love this work it, is unique for...
8 Unique opportunity. And they... It became they... I
9 think the majority of our frontline workforce started
10 as pages. This isn't just sort of a theoretical
11 pipeline, this is real pipeline to amazing jobs that
12 create our amazing colleagues who deliver the goods
13 for New Yorkers. All of that is in jeopardy under
14 this budget.

15 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We also we do internships with
16 our colleges and also high schools. We have a
17 pipeline as indicated before with pages. I mean, so
18 there's a constant reinforcement and partnership with
19 various institutions to make sure that there is a
20 connectivity between the libraries and the
21 communities that we are there to serve and work with.

22 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I would just add one thing,
23 which is, you know, Tony spoke about jobs, I would
24 just modify it slightly to say that what we're really
25 doing is giving students, younger students, uh, the

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2 opportunity for really lifelong (TIMER CHIMES)
3 enriching careers. These are people who are deeply
4 committed to the work of the Library.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely. Can I just ask
6 one other question? Thank you.

7 In the FY24 Adopted Budget, the City Council
8 allocated an additional \$15.7 million subsidy support
9 for the Systems. How did the Systems use this onetime
10 funding? And was it adequate?

11 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, for us it was a lifeline
12 of help and tremendous support - both from capital
13 needs, and dealing with emergency needs, and some
14 programs as well. And what we decided to do is to
15 make sure we developed a clear itemization of the use
16 of those dollars as well, and we broke it down to
17 show the return again on the investment. So, we were
18 able to definitely take advantage of that money to
19 deal with the necessary needs of the organization
20 both from an expense programmatic side as well as a
21 capital side. And you asked a question that is a
22 lovely open-ended question, was it enough? It's never
23 enough, but it was perfect, though, as far as filling
24 the needs that we had to address emergency types of
25 responses.

1
2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn we spent \$2.1
3 million for 19 public service positions - people who
4 are in the neighborhoods interacting with the
5 community, \$710,000 for the care and maintenance of
6 our buildings, and \$1.5 million for our collections.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. Thank you,
8 Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, Council Member Louis?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair, and thank
11 you all for your testimony today.

12 Council member Hudson asked my last question, but
13 I have a followup to it, so I'll ask all three.

14 So, I wanted to know how was the November PEG?
15 How has the November PEG impacted women's programming
16 like the LevelUP... as well as LevelUP Black female
17 entrepreneurship program that that was mentioned in
18 testimony, Teen Takeover, and the Teen Tech programs?

19 I also wanted to know, the programs that provide
20 language access for BIPOC communities like IDNYC, how
21 was how has the PEG impacted those programs, and what
22 does the current infrastructure for those programs
23 look like right now with that PEG? And the last
24 question is in regards to the \$15.7 million, I heard
25 the quick breakdown for Brooklyn, but I just wanted

1
2 to know, will, if restored the \$15.7 million, will
3 that be a sufficient amount if it's baselined through
4 the Mayor's Office?

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'll start just because it was
6 directed at Brooklyn.

7 I ,you know, I'll echo the comment that it's
8 never enough. I think the thing about libraries is
9 the better funded we are, uh, the more work we can
10 do. And it feels, to us anyway, that there's always
11 more to be done. There's always ways to do better to
12 get people the information and the knowledge they
13 need, but to continue to build and cement the
14 communities that we serve. So, we are deeply
15 appreciative, and any penny you give us, we're going
16 to put to good use, so thank you for that.

17 In terms of the specific questions about how the
18 PEG impacted our delivery of service, I would say
19 that what we've done is we've lost 55 full-time
20 public facing positions through attrition and vacancy
21 elimination. So, the domino effect of that, of
22 course, is that we've suspended, as we've testified,
23 we've suspended 7-Day service. So, we keep reducing
24 hours, which means that we reduce programs, which
25 means there are fewer opportunities for our patrons

1
2 to come into our branches to take advantage of those
3 programs. And that's really the spiral that we're on
4 and that we're worried about sort of where we are
5 today, but where we could get if we don't get these
6 proposed cuts restored.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And that includes the
8 IDNYC? Because I see long lines by Central Branch,
9 uh, with migrants... (CROSS-TALK)

10 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, the IDNYC lines are long.
11 We were actually in jeopardy of losing our IDNYC
12 offices, but fortunately wiser heads prevailed. It's
13 the same issue, there are lines at the IDNYC centers,
14 and it's just a matter of how many we can process.
15 So, if we have shorter hours, we'll process fewer.
16 (TIMER CHIMES)

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And the \$15.7, that's
18 sustainable for the entire system if it's baselined?

19 PRESIDENT MARX: It's extremely sustainable, but
20 always more helps...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yeah, I...

22 PRESIDENT MARX: Because, again, that money has
23 allowed us... we probably treat it a little
24 differently, each system, but to allow us to deal
25 with emergency repairs, capital needs, and also

1
2 various types of programs to plug as well. So, it's
3 been very beneficial, I think, to all three systems,
4 and more is always better, and we respect, though,
5 you know, the amount that we have as well.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much. Thank
7 you, Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

9 I just want to ask a couple more questions. You
10 know, you all have done so much for the families, and
11 specifically, the asylum seekers piece I just keep
12 coming back to, because I know you've seen an
13 increase just in attendance and like physical
14 presence of people. I mean, just in Epiphany Library,
15 we've done IDNYC, library cards, just tremendous
16 things in in this, you know, little part of
17 Manhattan.

18 Are you thinking of... and I know you're very
19 strained by the budget limitations, but have you
20 considered any sort of like workforce programs or
21 maybe like a job component, some sort of programming
22 to accommodate the population in the future?

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We're all doing a lot of work
24 in the work workforce development space. And, of
25 course, the demand has increased with the advent of

1
2 our new neighbors. We're also doing a lot to go
3 outside of our four walls and deliver service right
4 into some of the shelter where they're living
5 providing knapsacks for kids with books, uh, and
6 really trying to invite them into the library, and to
7 educate people who are new about all the things, and
8 resources that we have that will make their lives
9 better.

10 PRESIDENT MARX: I'll just reiterate, Madam Chair,
11 I mean we have, for 125 years, been the place where
12 immigrants have come, because this is a city of
13 immigrants. It's why we are the center of the world -
14 why we are a go strong, because of waves of talent
15 eager to come to this city and to work. And the
16 libraries have been the first place they come,
17 because they know, they hear from their neighbors,
18 from their friends, you can trust us, we don't, as
19 Dennis, says we don't ask for your papers, we don't
20 ask anything. We're here to serve. And that is true
21 of the latest wave of folks who have joined us in New
22 York. We're proud to serve them as we have always
23 been proud. We don't say. you're different, because
24 you're asylum seekers. You're part of New York. Part
25 of the strength of New York. We can't deliver what

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2 those folks - what everyone needs - if our doors are
3 closed, if we don't have the amazing staff, if we've
4 had to reduce our pages or our teen ambassadors. All
5 of those are part of our workforce efforts. None of
6 it works if we don't have the funding.

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: In Queens we have our Job and
8 Business Academy. But, again, as a result of the
9 cuts, we can't staff it at the level that it had
10 been staffed before. We have our Workforce
11 Development folks who are there to work with the
12 community, and people, no matter who they are, who
13 come through our doors. But, again, it's all
14 connected, and that we have fewer people on staff,
15 fewer hours, then the people won't be able to take
16 advantage of the experts that we have who was sitting
17 behind me or in our libraries right now. And that to
18 me is the tragedy that we face.

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I think it's safe to say
20 we... in restoring the cuts, and bringing back its
21 level, and then talking of expansion, is how we would
22 get these critical programs back online and expanded
23 the way that we need them.

1
2 So, I guess my last question is, what would be
3 required for the Libraries to remain open seven days
4 a week?

5 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So let me take the first step.
6 First, we get restored, and that's \$58.3, then for
7 Queens, I know it's a specific amount, and each of us
8 have our unique amounts, but to meet the cuts that we
9 talked about, the unfunded program expenses that we
10 have with minimum wage increases, contractual
11 obligations that have to be met, that's an additional
12 \$5 million. But, then to be creative, there's
13 additional money on top of that as well. Because,
14 again, that's just the expense side of the budget,
15 and then we also have to make sure, and you've heard
16 us talk more and more this time about the capital
17 restorations as well. Because that's a key part of
18 this whole equation, because if we don't have the
19 work done in the buildings, and we have buildings
20 that are in poor state of condition, then the people
21 will not be able to get quality services. So that
22 also factors in. So, a full restoration of our
23 Capital Budget, and not pushing the budget out to
24 Fiscal Year 2033. So that's just a start I think of

1
2 the discussion of how we can both restore, but then
3 build on top of that restoration.

4 PRESIDENT MARX: Madam Chair, we would love to
5 join a conversation, a serious conversation about 7-
6 day service, which is what New Yorkers should have.
7 It's actually what a contractor with Andrew Carnegie
8 says they will have and that the city is committed to
9 funding. But, let's be serious, we're sitting here
10 facing unprecedented cuts. We're begging to be
11 restored. Our costs go up. We should be talking about
12 increased investment given the return on that
13 investment, which you've heard eloquently from my
14 colleagues. We should be talking about that - we're
15 not even talking about that, and none of that gets us
16 to 7-day service. We'd love to have a serious
17 conversation. We need to have a conversation with our
18 union about that, because we can't require Sunday
19 work, but we would love to have that conversation. We
20 are way far away from having that serious a
21 conversation.

22 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: However, I do have some
23 numbers, because I can tell you that what restoration
24 does, which would be great, but given the increase in
25 the costs of doing business, I have a list of things

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2 that total to \$5.3 million, over and above what
3 restoration would do for us, that somehow we'll have
4 to figure out how to cover. So, restoration would be
5 terrific, and we wouldn't look a gift horse in the
6 mouth; however, to really be whole, we need, in
7 Brooklyn alone, over \$5 million to get to a point
8 where we're able to do business in the way we were
9 doing business before.

10 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yes, mine is \$5 million.

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: What about the capital budget
12 restoration funding amount? Do you have that?

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: \$47 million.

14 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We are about the same?

15 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)

16 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: \$34 million.

17 PRESIDENT MARX: For us, it's \$45.5 million, plus
18 the \$41.4 million that's in the budget, but has been
19 pushed so far out into the future that it basically
20 might as well not (INAUDIBLE) there.

21 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: All right. Well, I want to
22 thank you all. I don't... if any of my colleagues
23 have any further questions? Uh, I want to thank you
24 for your testimony, for your time. We all have
25 incredible memories, but we also know we have a duty

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2 and an obligation to support you. So, thank you for
3 your testimony. Thank you to all of the people here
4 who are representing your systems, who obviously care
5 so deeply about their work. We look forward to
6 negotiating and fighting on your behalf.

7 PANEL: Thank you.

8 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Thank you, Chair. Thank you,
9 members of the Council, thank you, Speaker...

10 PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you so much. Thank you for
11 all of your support and everything you do. It's great
12 to work with you.

13 (APPLAUSE)

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: We are going to take a brief
15 recess, and then we will bring DCLA to the dais. So,
16 thank you, everyone, and hang tight.

17 (PAUSE)

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Good afternoon, we are set to
19 begin. (GAVEL SOUND) Good afternoon, and welcome to
20 this hearing for the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
21 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. I
22 am Council Member Carlina Rivera, chair of this
23 committee. This afternoon, we will discussing the
24 Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Expense Budget for DCLA,
25 which stands at \$144.8 million, and the Fiscal Year

1
2 2025 Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan that
3 includes \$1.1 billion in Fiscal 2024 to 2028 for the
4 Department.

5 At the urging of the Council, the Administration
6 added approximately \$40 million at adoption of the
7 Fiscal 2024 plan. The Council is disappointed that
8 the funding is not included in the Fiscal 2025
9 Preliminary Plan, but additionally the Administration
10 has implemented an additional \$ 11.6 million PEG in
11 Fiscal 2024 and approximately \$7.6 million in the out
12 years. This is on top of the November planned PEG of
13 \$9.3 million in Fiscal 2024, and \$8 million in the
14 out years for a total of \$21 million in cuts to
15 Culture, in the middle of this year, and over \$15
16 million in cuts for future years. The midyear
17 baseline cuts to Culture and Arts are a proposal to
18 further draw back from the City's obligation to
19 support the Arts, and it comes at a time when
20 cultural organizations are still recovering from the
21 debilitating impact of the pandemic. Further, at a
22 time when the importance of diversity is being
23 highlighted, especially by this administration, it
24 seems that our cultural institutions, especially
25 those in the BIPOC community, are faring worse than

1
2 ever. Baseline funding has not changed since 2009,
3 and through the pandemic and inflation, the agency
4 remains stagnant.

5 What is the Administration's rationale for
6 cutting support for arts and culture when it acts as
7 an economic engine that generates critical revenue
8 for the City? These cuts are resulting in budget
9 shortfalls, already undercutting program delivery and
10 endangering jobs. Cuts to culture have devastating
11 impacts on multiple layers of economic activity.
12 Locally, we're telling groups it's their time for
13 groups that are often overlooked to come and take
14 their place. We have finally recognized the Lenape
15 people; we have celebrated the upcoming Hip Hop
16 Museum in multiple iterations, and categorize it as
17 the one to watch.

18 We say again and again that culture is our
19 lifeline, and yet we pull back programming and
20 operational dollars for this very sector? How can we
21 make cuts to institutions and groups so core to our
22 New York City identity and the reason people come to
23 visit and live here? *Timeout Magazine* recently ranked
24 New York City the best city in the world, and its
25 editors credited arts and culture almost exclusively

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2 for achieving this ranking. It was a ranking, and it
3 was news that was highlighted in the State of the
4 City by Mayor Adams. In fact, he held up this very
5 article - proudly.

6 It's clear and widely known that public
7 investments help organizations attract private
8 donations, create and protect jobs, and keep arts and
9 culture accessible for communities through the city.
10 These investments are critical to bolstering local
11 economies, create good paying jobs, and driving
12 economic activity.

13 It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that
14 the City's budget is fair, transparent, and
15 accountable to New Yorkers. Our cultural
16 organizations provide welcoming public spaces for our
17 community, creating positive social impact.

18 As the chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs
19 Libraries International, and Intergroup Relations, I
20 will continue to push for accountability and accuracy
21 and ensure that the budget reflects the needs and
22 interests of the City. It is essential that the
23 budget that we adopt this year is reflective of the
24 priorities and interests of the Council and the
25 people we represent. This hearing is a vital part of

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2 that process, and I expect that DCLA will be
3 responsive to the questions and concerns of council
4 members.

5 I look forward to an active engagement with the
6 Administration over the next few months to ensure
7 that the Fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget meets the goals
8 the Council has set out.

9 I would like to recognize the members of the
10 Committee that are present, we have Council Members
11 Nantasha Williams, Farah Louis, Crystal Hudson, and
12 David Carr.

13 I would also like to thank my staff for
14 organizing today's hearing, Katie Loeb; Eddie Amador;
15 Financial Analyst, Sandra Gray; Committee's Counsel,
16 Christina Yellamaty; and Legislative Policy Analyst,
17 Regina Paul. And I want to thank everyone else who is
18 here as well for their presence, their testimony,
19 and their continued commitment and compassion to the
20 sector that we so desperately need.

21 With that, I'll turn it over to committee
22 counsel.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, good afternoon, please
24 raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the
25 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

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2 before this committee, and to respond honestly to
3 council member questions?

4 PANEL: I do

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin when
6 ready.

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you good afternoon,
8 Chair Rivera, and members of the Committee. I am
9 Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New York City
10 Department of Cultural Affairs, here to testify in
11 regards to DCLA's proposed Fiscal Year 2025
12 Preliminary Budget. I'm joined by number of my
13 colleagues from the agency, and I just want to say,
14 it has been so exciting to see so many of you in your
15 districts. Today I had an opportunity to, just this
16 morning, to have a meeting about Council Member
17 Carr's Staten Island Zoo, as well as conversation
18 with PS 9, which is a blue ribbon school in your
19 district - who also want a larger building -but, I
20 had that wonderful conversation. And, Council Member
21 Hudson, we've been having active conversations about
22 L10 in your district, and looking forward to
23 delivering on this project in such a substantial way.
24 And, Council Member Lewis, I remember I was very
25 excited to come to your district on Flatbush Avenue

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2 in a new cultural center promoting Haitian art and
3 culture, and it was a fascinating and exciting
4 opportunity. And I just saw Council Member Williams
5 just this weekend, the Black art fair that you all
6 produced in your district was powerful, it was
7 exciting, and it was an incredible way to see new
8 talent that's on the horizon, and you were so proudly
9 there supporting all of your artists. And thank you
10 for the social media posts on that as well.

11 Before I get started, I just wanted to take a
12 moment to reflect on Women's HERstory Month,
13 especially as a woman-led agency testifies before a
14 woman-led committee.

15 And my team's research indicates that you are the
16 first woman to chair this committee since it was
17 established as a standalone committee, so
18 congratulations on being the first woman (APPLAUSE)
19 to chair this committee. Look at that getting you
20 Kudos before the hearing even begins. But, I'll take
21 it one even better, you and I also share something in
22 common, we are two of the council members from this
23 term, as well as last session, who gave birth while
24 running for office - and successfully won. So, it's
25 so exciting to see women assuming so many leadership

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2 roles throughout the city, something that this month
3 provides a perfect moment to reflect upon.

4 I will start my testimony today with a quick
5 review of the numbers for Fiscal Year 25 the
6 Preliminary Budget allocates a total of \$143.9
7 million for the agency. This includes: \$24.9 million
8 for the Cultural Development Fund; \$108.7 million for
9 the Cultural Institutions Group; \$7.4 million for
10 agency operations and staffing; \$2.92 million for
11 CreateNYC initiatives; energy support; and other
12 funding for culturals.

13 These figures do reflect the programs to
14 eliminate the gap, also known as PEGs, required by
15 the Mayor last November and again in January. Note
16 that they are and do not reflect any one-time funding
17 typically added at adoption, such as Council
18 initiatives and member items. And that's where our
19 partnership comes together.

20 At this point in the process last year, DCLA's
21 preliminary budget stood at \$49.5 million.

22 I want to say up front here, we understand the
23 immense challenges that any reduction to DCLA's
24 budget presents for the groups we support. But all
25 agencies were asked to do their part and make

1
2 reductions in light of the unprecedented fiscal
3 challenges we're facing as a city. DCLA was
4 unprecedented, uh, had unprecedented fiscal
5 challenges, but we were exempted from four prior
6 rounds of PEGs, and thanks to this prudent financial
7 planning, the Mayor was able to cancel the PEG that
8 was being expected in April of this year. We have
9 also gotten the green light to fill several open
10 positions at the agency following a hiring freeze,
11 which is going to help critically in terms of
12 streamlining our process and getting funding out the
13 door quicker. And our support for the city's cultural
14 community remains steadfast and high by historical
15 standards.

16 I'm happy to answer any questions you might have
17 about these figures, but first I'd like to provide a
18 few updates on the work we're doing here at Cultural
19 Affairs.

20 Last month, Cultural Development Fund
21 notifications went out to the field with \$52.2
22 million going to support cultural programming at over
23 1,31 not for-profits citywide. Due to the PEG, these
24 notifications were delayed, and we recognize the
25 major challenges this posed to many of the

1 recipients. Our program officers are ready to answer
2 questions any group might have, including handling
3 scope changes due to the timing of notifications.
4 Still, distributing more than \$50 million to the
5 cultural sector, despite the fiscal challenges, is a
6 major investment in this essential community of
7 organizations and artists. I founded and led an
8 organization that received funding from the CDF, and
9 I know firsthand how big of a deal this is. The
10 Fiscal Year 25 application process will be opening in
11 just a few weeks, and we're looking to you, our
12 partners in the city council, to spread the word and
13 help us recruit panelists that reflect the full
14 breadth and diversity of our communities. So, we are
15 looking for the future Council Member David Carr, who
16 have served on these panels before, to be able to
17 promote and to get as many panelists as we possibly
18 can for upcoming process, and to let even more
19 organizations in your district know about the
20 incredible work at DCLA.

22 City Canvas is an exciting program that allows
23 artist to install work on the sidewalk sheds, fences,
24 and scaffolding that line so many miles of New York's
25 streets. You might recall that last July, Mayor Adams

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2 and The Department of Buildings announced "Get Sheds
3 Down" a sweeping new effort to remove these eye sores
4 source from city streets more quickly while
5 redesigning and reimagining those that are needed.
6 Make no mistake: we fully support the effort to get
7 sheds down. We are here for it. But for the sheds
8 that have to remain installed for safety reasons, we
9 stand ready to transform them into platforms for
10 creative expression that beautify our cityscape.

11 Following a pilot version of the program that
12 lasted several years, we launched the new permanent
13 City Canvas program last year. This new program,
14 which I'm proud to say was created in part to
15 legislation that I passed while serving on the
16 Council - it includes an open call for artists to
17 design preapproved artworks that site owners will be
18 able to choose from. The open call received hundreds
19 of submissions from artists and we look forward to
20 announcing up to 10 selected designs later this
21 spring.

22 Staying in the realm of public art our Percent
23 for Art program recently turned 40 - yes! It's
24 exciting you can whoop-whoop for that, yes - this
25 program has had a transformative impact on the City's

1 public spaces: since it was established more than 400
2 permanent public art projects have been completed.
3 Another 100+ commissions are in progress throughout
4 the five boroughs. This administration understands
5 the critical importance of public spaces to our
6 city's health and vitality, and these spaces wouldn't
7 be complete without about the extraordinary artworks
8 we've commissioned for them. We've been happy to work
9 with so many of you. We've had incredible
10 conversations with Council Member Williams in her
11 district, because we want to make sure that public
12 art is such a part of the vitality of working class
13 communities all throughout the city. This program is
14 one of the most critical ways that we invite artists
15 to work with our communities to co-create our public
16 realm together, and it gives real meaningful
17 financial support to artists in the process. Often a
18 percent commission is just the first foray into
19 public art. Hank Willis Thomas, for instance,
20 designed the incredible "Unity" monument in Brooklyn,
21 a massive bronze arm that comes out of the medium on
22 Tillary Street. This was the first public art
23 commission, and now he has also created the monument
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2 to Coretta Scott King and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.
3 recently unveiled in Boston Common.

4 The very first Percent project, completed in
5 1985, was artist Jorge Luis Rodriguez's "Growth" in
6 the East Harlem Art Park. It stands tall there today,
7 and it marks the first in a proud lineage. Soon a
8 monument to Shirley Chisholm will rise in Prospect
9 Park, designed by the MacArthur winning artists
10 Amanda Williams and Olalekan Jeyifous, who won a
11 major award at the Venice Architecture Biennale. So
12 far, in recognition of the 40th anniversary, we've
13 already had an installation on the steps of City Hall
14 in celebration, and hosted tours during Open House
15 New York Weekend. When I was in Council, I was proud
16 to support legislation that updated the Percent for
17 Art formula for the first time since the program's
18 inception. Law 22 of 2017 raised the cap per project
19 from \$400,000 to \$900,000 and raised the annual cap
20 for spending from \$1.4 million to \$4 million,
21 allocating even more funding to create ambitious
22 exciting projects that can stand the test of time.

23 Black History Month, and now Women's HERstory
24 month, provide great opportunities to remind us of
25 the power of cultural programming to examine our

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2 past, come together in the present, and chart the
3 course for a brighter future. Last month, you could
4 visit the Black Future Festival at Brooklyn
5 Children's Museum; explore the history of the Black
6 Angels of Sea View Hospital at Staten Island Museum;
7 participate in the Bronx Museum's James Baldwin Book
8 Club; or here bassist Hillard Greene present
9 "Milestone Negro Spirituals" at the National Jazz
10 Museum. This month you can experience Jamaica Center
11 for Arts and Learnings, "Strength Courage & Wisdom" a
12 performance showcasing the range of women's voices
13 and vocal expression on March 30th, or visit the
14 Women's Work Exhibition at the New York Historical
15 Society.

16 We are living through such a pivotal moment for
17 our Black community and for the rights for women's
18 equality all across New York City. Black leaders and
19 institutions are reaching new heights of influence
20 and investment, and I'm so proud to be a part of
21 this. Just think of Studio Museum; Universal Hip Hop
22 Museum; Afro Latin Jazz Alliance; National Black
23 Theatre, MoCADA, 651 Arts, La MaMa, and so many more.

24 These Black institutions, many of them founded
25 and led by women, have all opened new and renovated

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2 spaces or will soon. We're proud of the city's
3 investment in all of these spaces. Black culture,
4 Black leadership, Black Excellence are getting their
5 long overdue credit. But it took generations of
6 advocacy and investment to get to this point, and
7 it's going to take generations more to continue
8 building on the achievements we're witnessing before
9 our eyes.

10 The city alone has never been able to fully
11 support all of our sector even in the best financial
12 circumstances. We need all levels of government to
13 step up. We need private philanthropy to invest. We
14 need our leaders across sectors to join boards and
15 pledge their support. It took a village to get us
16 here, and it's going to take the whole city to keep
17 us moving forward. Just consider that Black residents
18 are leaving New York in record numbers. We don't want
19 these institutions to become tributes to past
20 greatness. We want them to be anchors for living,
21 vital communities. We need to invest in working New
22 Yorkers, as the Mayor is committed to doing - through
23 affordable housing, through good jobs, and so much
24 more.

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2 DCLA's capital program continues to pay dividends
3 for New Yorkers. No other city in America provides
4 this level of support for construction, equipment,
5 renovation, and other hard costs like these. These
6 sorts of projects can often be more difficult to
7 raise funds for, because let's face it, HVAC isn't an
8 exciting thing for a donor to put their names on, but
9 these are essential investments that deliver a
10 worldclass cultural infrastructure for New Yorkers.

11 Just this year, we broke ground on a \$13 million
12 project for The Clemente, which will modernize their
13 historic facility and install a new elevator that
14 will make it accessible for people with disabilities.
15 We cut the ribbon on a revamped education center at
16 the Brooklyn Museum and a new performing art space at
17 the 92nd Street Y. The full renovation of the
18 Nuyorican Poets Café will soon be underway, and
19 projects at Downtown Art will also be complete. Along
20 with the major renovation of La MaMa, we cut the
21 ribbon on last year, the Arts community on East 4th
22 Street is having a major moment that will ensure it
23 continues to engage New Yorkers and attract audiences
24 from all over the world for many years to come. And I
25 was so excited to share that moment with Council

1
2 Member Rivera. Just a few blocks away, the Joyce is
3 starting to welcome dancers to its new facility on
4 10th Street in the East Village. We're proud of the
5 city's role in supporting these public-private
6 partnerships.

7 Art and culture is essential to New York City,
8 they drive our economy and strengthen our
9 communities. We're proud of the city's ongoing
10 investment in the partnership with the cultural
11 nonprofits that form the backbone of this essential
12 sector. Despite the fiscal headwinds this city has
13 been facing, we've done our best to make the
14 necessary reductions in a way that would minimize
15 impacts on our constituents.

16 We're optimistic about the city's trajectory with
17 - prudent financial management, we've been able to
18 avoid another PEG, and soon we'll be preparing to
19 launch the Fiscal Year 25 CDF process. No one knows
20 your districts better than you do, so we'll look to
21 you to help spread the word about this opportunity to
22 groups in your communities, we will provide toolkits
23 and everything you need to make this happen.

1
2 Thank you for the opportunity to present on the
3 Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Budget, I am happy to
4 answer any questions you may have.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you. I appreciate you
6 going through some of the places that you've been,
7 and that you've seen, and that you've experienced
8 with the local council members. A lot of that was
9 done through negotiation by the Council through money
10 allocated out of our discretionary funds and through
11 consistent advocacy with the Administration, but also
12 because of the Speaker. A lot of that money now is
13 included in sort of this pot - you have the Council
14 money, you have mayoral funds. And out of that pot of
15 money, again funds that were negotiated and for
16 adoption, and out of that money that we worked so
17 hard to try to produce, the Administration has made
18 cuts. It feels like theft.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: It feels like theft to the
21 council members and to our work. And at the minimum,
22 it's bad faith in terms of negotiations.

23 So in that, we're very, very disappointed that
24 it's come to this. I realize you mentioned a few
25 tactics people have to... we need private

1
2 philanthropy to invest. But I think we all know that
3 even if groups who could navigate what could be a
4 very bureaucratic difficult process, the money
5 doesn't come in the door tomorrow.

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Some of these letters were
8 received eight months into the year.

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Correct.

10 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: It just doesn't... it doesn't
11 work that way. And we have cultural organizations in
12 crisis - you mentioned Fourth Arts Bloc, you
13 mentioned some of the larger cultural institutions
14 and groups, and it feels... It does feel personal to
15 many.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm.

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: The Bronx Art Ensemble zeroed
18 out. I mean, these are historically disenfranchised,
19 underserved communities seeing zero dollars from the
20 city. It's heartbreaking.

21 So, we saw that cultural institutions received a
22 \$21 million budget cut in the middle of this year.
23 This is... It's deep. It's devastating. It impacts
24 organizations across the city and has implications
25 for economic recovery. The city's cultural

1
2 organizations are one of the city's economic engines
3 while improving the economy and that social impact
4 piece, which I think is so, so important.

5 So, we've just started rebounding from COVID...

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: and there are inflation
8 costs, the Administration imposes the devastating
9 cuts. The organizations are already spread too thin,
10 so now we have cut service hours, cut programs, cut
11 jobs. We had the Staten Island Children's Museum
12 closed for the entire month of January. That's just
13 one example, there are so many.

14 So, with so many reasons not to cut funding for
15 cultural institutions, why did the Agency and the
16 Administration feel that these cuts were appropriate?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I thank you for putting this
18 into context, and we too share many of the concerns
19 that you just brought up. The challenge that every
20 agency across this city faced were budget cuts. We
21 had to make really tough decisions, and if you
22 recall, there were several rounds of the PEG that the
23 Department of Cultural Affairs was one of a few
24 agencies that was not called in to participate in a
25 cost savings plan. The City recognized the importance

1
2 of the arts, they put their money where their beliefs
3 were and made sure that this agency was kept whole.
4 But because we were then facing, uh, our city in
5 particular was facing having to make good on the
6 challenges that they were facing on a national level
7 with a city budget. And, so, trying to come up with
8 solutions, trying to come up with resources on a city
9 level, with a city budget, that really required
10 federal dollars and support, put us in a very
11 contentious, precarious, and unfortunate situation
12 where we all, across all city agencies had to make
13 very difficult decisions. And we recognized that
14 these very difficult decisions were going to impact
15 many of our cultural institutions, but this was a
16 place that we had to be in because of the financial
17 crisis that we were facing. But I also want to say
18 that the cultural community has been faced with so
19 many things that cannot be understated in terms of
20 not only were we faced with this with this federal
21 crises that required on so many levels federal
22 support, during the pandemic organizations
23 received... many received federal stimulus funding.
24 Federal stimulus funding dried up. Many of our
25 private donors moved from New York City during that

1
2 time. We also had a lot of challenges in the way of
3 the pandemic and the recovery. And international
4 tourism, particularly from Asia, has not rebounded,
5 and many organizations are faced with the challenges
6 of that. We also faced many challenges in terms of
7 many of the organizations have not been able to
8 recover and bring their audiences back, which means
9 that earned income is also down. One of the biggest
10 challenges that organizations are facing at this this
11 time is that many foundations and corporations have
12 changed their giving model, and that they are no
13 longer funding the arts. They have decided that they
14 want to fund social justice initiatives, health care,
15 climate, and all of these environmental issues are
16 critically important to New York City and the world
17 as a whole, but at the same time we haven't been able
18 to make the correlation between social justice,
19 environment, and climate are the very issues that the
20 art community is addressing - that they are tackling,
21 that they are bringing forth discussion and solution
22 in a very robust way. So, there are a lot of things
23 that are happening simultaneously at the same time
24 that impacted the arts community that government
25 can't solve exclusively. There need to be more

1
2 opportunities and spaces and places for us to
3 recognize that this artistic and cultural community
4 is an ecosystem, that every element of it has to be
5 balanced with the other elements in terms of private
6 foundation, corporations, individuals, government,
7 federal, state, city. Everyone has to work
8 collectively, and we're starting to see a shift in
9 that, and we need to continue to bring those
10 resources together.

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I would only say that it's
12 very hard to hear that you have philanthropy not
13 quite there. I mean I think no one understands it
14 better than these organizations. It's like Melon and
15 New York Community Trusts are not going to solve
16 everyone's issues and their challenges...

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And you mentioned tourism,
19 and I feel that tourism, and the drive to get people
20 here from whatever country, at whatever pace that
21 we're at is almost exclusively driven by these
22 organizations and these groups. So, I mean this is a
23 99 to 1 return on the dollars into these cultural
24 institutions and groups. And that's the part that I
25 can't quite figure out what math is coming out of the

1 Administration. And since the January plan was
2 released, the economic outlook for the city has
3 improved greatly. And the Mayor announced the
4 additional cuts that were planned for April would not
5 go through - we were all happy about that. However,
6 as you can imagine, damage is already done and
7 devastating.

9 Have there been any discussions about restoring
10 the cuts to Culture especially in light of their
11 economic impact?

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: This is a daily conversation,
13 if it's not hourly, in terms of what we can do to
14 restore the PEG - exercises from November and January
15 - we are in conversations with OMB. We continue to
16 have discussions. We continue to put forward many of
17 the ideas, and proposals, and the information that
18 you just shared in terms of the rate of return on
19 cultural institutions to the city of New York. So,
20 those conversations have been going well. We continue
21 to be in negotiation. The opportunity to make sure
22 that the upcoming PEG doesn't happen was the
23 successful effort of all of us in terms of making
24 sure that we're on stable financial footing. But,
25 again, the conversations in terms of restoring past

1
2 PEGs, is a conversation that we continue to have,
3 that many agencies still continue to have. We're
4 hearing from the field. We're hearing conversations
5 from our federal and state colleagues in terms of the
6 importance of this. And we're going to continue to
7 stay in negotiations and close communication with
8 OMB.

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So the PEGs for Fiscal Year
10 2025 and the out years are being reconsidered?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: All of that is being
12 reconsidered. All of that is being negotiated. All of
13 that is being discussed. And I would say that we are
14 in such challenging financial times at this point
15 that while they're being discussed, while they're
16 being negotiated, factors continue to change and
17 shift. And, so, this will be an ever evolving
18 conversation, this is always going to be something
19 that we're going to be discussing. Negotiations will
20 always be ongoing, because of the uncertainty of the
21 fiscal climate at this time.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So the DCLA funding goes
23 towards agency staff, but directly supports nonprofit
24 cultural institutions throughout the city - many of
25

1
2 them are here actually to testify. And, of course, we
3 encourage you to hear a public testimony.

4 How many organizations were impacted by the PEGs?
5 And can you explain to us how the PEGs were
6 calculated and implemented for the Cultural
7 Institutions Group in both November and January?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that almost every
9 organization that we fund was impacted by the PEG -
10 so that the amount of funding that we had decreased,
11 and so because of the amount of funding that
12 decreased, every element of our agency had to have
13 some level of a decrease. What we tried to do was to
14 do that on a tiered basis, so that the impacts would
15 not be felt so harshly on any one organization. But
16 it was a very challenging process. When you have less
17 dollars and less resources, you have to make very
18 tough decisions, but you try to do that in a way
19 where the impact is not felt so remarkably on any one
20 institution.

21 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Do you know how many?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We fund over 1,031
23 organizations, so all of those organizations received
24 some element of a reduction.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Can you explain how the PEGs
3 were calculated and implemented for the Cultural
4 Institutions Group in both November and January?

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm going to turn it over to
6 Lance who's going to answer those questions - our
7 general counsel.

8 MR. POLIVY: Council Member, there were two
9 different approaches for the November PEG exercise
10 and for the January PEG exercise. The goal of the
11 agency was to achieve equity. And, so we implemented
12 different strategies, and in some cases it was an
13 across the board cut of the same percentage to all of
14 the CIGS, and in others it was a more tiered approach
15 to make sure to acknowledge the impact that would...
16 that a PEG exercise would have on small smaller
17 organizations. So, we experimented with both keeping
18 in mind the sacrifice that larger organizations at
19 some points were playing with cap swaps and cuts at
20 adoption against, uh, the inequity of all groups
21 receiving the same cut.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: That somewhat explains the
23 strategy. So, you try to look at equity, that's clear
24 by what you said. But, you try to see the impact it

1
2 would have? I'm trying to understand your two
3 different approaches and strategies.

4 Was there any analysis about how these cuts would
5 impact individual institutions and their ability to
6 absorb these cuts?

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We didn't really look at
8 individual organizations. Let's say when we're
9 looking at the Cultural Institution Groups, right?
10 Because the thought process there is that every
11 organization has its own dynamics. They're totally
12 different institutions from zoos, to parks, to
13 botanic gardens - so, it's very difficult to look at
14 them individually. What we tried to look at them as
15 were by economic budget size. And, so, we looked at
16 some of the smaller organizations that are part of
17 the Cultural Institution Groups, some of the midsize
18 organizations and the larger institutions, and making
19 decisions in terms of how we could surgically do this
20 in a way that would allow, essentially, these
21 organizations to see another day. Right? So, we sort
22 of looked at it in that way in terms of, like, how
23 can some of these institutions survive during this
24 PEG exercise? But, then also looking at the CDF
25 process, and the CDF process functions differently,

1
2 because it's a panel review process. So, even in the
3 panel review process, some organization do have an
4 opportunity to fair better than they did the previous
5 year. But, even with that, they're still working from
6 a place of a reduced amount of funding for grants as
7 a whole. So, many of those organizations, uh, during
8 the CDF process, some organizations saw an increase,
9 some stayed right where they were, and some were...
10 saw a decrease. And as you have stated before, some
11 were zeroed out, not because of a lack of resources,
12 but more so because of how they scored during the
13 panel review process.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: But was there any analysis of
15 how these cuts might affect ticket prices, admission
16 fees, or other accessibility and equity measurements?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We didn't have the ability to
18 make those decisions in that way primarily because of
19 the expediency in which you have to respond to the
20 PEG exercises. The type of analysis that you're
21 looking at would take some sort of outside firm to do
22 a review an analysis, and to make recommendations,
23 and just understand how the field works, and how all
24 of these institutions would be impacted. We simply
25 didn't have those resources and tools at our

1 disposal, and we had to make very significant cuts to
2 meet those target goals. I'm sure even with that
3 level of analysis there would be organizations
4 throughout this process that would be hurt through
5 this process. What we are proud of is that 76% of the
6 organizations that applied to the Department of
7 Cultural Affairs did receive an award. So, 76% of
8 those organizations received an award which continues
9 to make us the largest cultural funder in the United
10 States of America - above that of even the National
11 Endowment for the Arts, which is the national funder
12 for all of the United States. We still allocate more
13 resources, because this city recognizes the power of
14 art and culture, uh, and this mayor has established,
15 particularly during the first two budget cycles, his
16 deep appreciation and understanding of the power of
17 the arts.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I agree that at some point an
20 organization might feel hurt, but it just feels like
21 a very careless and destructive way of implementing
22 blunt cuts instead of meaningful analysis on the
23 City's economic outlook and revenue, which is what
24 the Administration continues to tout as sort of their
25

1
2 metric as to how we rebound from what is has been a
3 very debilitating last couple of years.

4 So, let me just move on to the CDF. So, not only
5 does DCLA provide funding to CIGS, but also to
6 smaller organizations through the Cultural
7 Development Fund. Can you explain the impact of the
8 PEGs on CDF recipients and how these decisions were
9 made? And just to break that down for you, how many
10 of the CDF awardees received reduced funding when
11 compared to the previous year? How many CDF awardees
12 were new recipients? How many organizations who had
13 received grant funding in the previous year did not
14 receive funding in the current cycle? And can you
15 provide us with a list of these organizations?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: All of the organizations that
17 we funded received less funding through the CDF
18 process, because we had to account for about a \$4
19 million reduction to the CDF process. While I'm
20 continuing to answer this question, I'll also bring
21 forward Andrea Louie, who is the CDF Assistant
22 Commissioner, for the Programs Unit, and she can
23 delve more into the specific numbers that you brought
24 forward. And committee counsel can swear her in as
25 well. And, so, during this process, we basically made

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2 decisions based off of the panel decision, in terms
3 of that they allocated, in terms of the scoring, and
4 the scoring determined how much resources
5 organizations would be able to receive through this
6 process. So, it's really a panel review process that
7 determines how much funding each organization
8 receives each year.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, please raise your right
10 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
11 truth, and nothing but the truth, before this
12 committee, and to respond honestly to council member
13 questions?

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: (NO MIC)
15 (INAUDIBLE)

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, may begin.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Thank you, Council
18 Member.

19 So, as the commissioner said, we were able to
20 fund 75% of eligible applicants. I do not have the
21 number for you of the exact number of organizations
22 that received less funding at this time, but we can
23 get back to you on those precise figures.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: If you can provide us with a
25 breakdown on who received funding in Fiscal Year

1
2 2024, how much they received, and how much each
3 organization was cut, we would greatly appreciate
4 that as soon as possible.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Okay.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So, you mentioned the panel.
7 I'm glad that you mentioned the process, we've
8 received a lot of concerns over how the panels were
9 conducted this year.

10 Can you briefly describe the panel process for
11 determining recipients? Have there been any changes
12 made recently to the panel review process? For
13 example, reducing the number of days or the number of
14 panelists or representation from other branches of
15 government, like City Council, and the borough
16 presidents? And why were these changes made? So, if
17 you can describe it and the changes, I would
18 appreciate that.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Okay, thank you for
20 that question.

21 There have not been appreciable changes to the
22 panel review process for FY24 compared to FY23.

23 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: No changes?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: There were some
25 changes, but not appreciably different ones. One

1
2 thing that we were able to do was we added a round of
3 discussion during the panel review process, so that
4 panelists could rediscuss the scoring of the
5 individual applications following the initial
6 discussion.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: How many of the panelists
8 were new? What type of training was provided to them?
9 Does DCLA have adequate staff to run the panel
10 successfully?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Yes, while we
12 always welcome new staff, and I know that we'll be
13 welcoming new staff to the agency shortly, which is
14 very much appreciated. Last year for FY24, we had
15 conducted 35 panels, and each of those were co-
16 facilitated by two staff members. In addition, there
17 was a notetaker and a production manager who was
18 present for those. Each panel had five panelists
19 scheduled for that... for that conversation, and each
20 panelist was instructed to either attend an in person
21 virtual webinar, or if they could not attend, to view
22 it after the fact - it was recorded and made
23 available to them. There were also robust training
24 materials, and it's part of those instructions, each
25 panelist was instructed to review the full deck of

1
2 the applications - approximately 20 applications, uh,
3 at home during their own time.

4 I should say that we were pleased to be able to
5 increase the amount of the panel panelist honorarium
6 to pay for the individual's time to participate. The
7 panelists then spent approximately eight or more
8 hours reviewing the applications at home, and then
9 came together for a virtual discussion on one day.
10 Prior to the pandemic, the panels did take place over
11 on average one to two days, and for a very large
12 panel, there was an occasional uh third day of
13 discussion or partial third day of discussion. But
14 that was definitely on the on the rare side.

15 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Right, those are the changes
16 also that I was alluding to, because it wasn't last
17 year, but maybe two years ago, there have been
18 change... (CROSS-TALK)

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: That didn't take...
20 that change did not take place for... beginning in
21 Fiscal Year 24, that is correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: But before that?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Yes, they did. And
24 that was also in part due to feedback that we had
25 gotten from the field. When there were multi-day in

1
2 person panels, especially for smaller organizations,
3 that can be quite a burden on staff members to have
4 to take time away from their regular positions, or if
5 individual artists are doing that, for them to take
6 that time away, so we wanted to make it a more
7 equitable process and also one that was more... in
8 other words, we wanted to be able to open the door to
9 allow for greater participation. And, so, in doing
10 so, we have it now as a one-day virtual...

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay...

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: process...

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: You want to maximize
14 participation, but you by limiting the time that
15 you... well, you're going to hear from many
16 organizations as to what they think would be a more
17 efficient way to run the panel process, starting with
18 better communication on expectations. I think that's
19 going to be something that's underlined over, and
20 over, and over again.

21 I just want to recognize we've been joined by
22 Council Member Brewer as well.

23 And I would like to go to my colleagues for
24 questions. We can start with Council Member Carr.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you Chair.

1
2 Commissioner, always good to see you; although
3 with you and Lance sitting there, I really expect to
4 see you sitting behind us (LAUGHTER) uh, in your old
5 chair, but always a pleasure.

6 I want to piggyback off what the Chair was asking
7 about the CDF panel funding. And you know that this
8 is a matter of great concern to me over the last two
9 years - which is that the changes that predated you,
10 right?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: That came into effect as you
13 were becoming the commissioner, the removal of the
14 political representation, the council delegation, the
15 borough president, the elimination of the borough
16 base structure, that predated Fiscal Year 23, has
17 created outcomes that are always going to be
18 iniquitous from a borough perspective.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: And that's really what we've
21 been seeing since FY23, and to your credit, you used
22 the budget that you had to mitigate those negative
23 externalities while you could. But, now we're in a
24 tough budget scenario...

25 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right...

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: and what I hear from CDF
3 panel applicants locally, is that they're being
4 zeroed out -not just cut...

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hm?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: And while there are some
7 groups in the past that had told me there were issues
8 that now are happy with their grant this year - and
9 that's to be expected, not everybody's application is
10 the same every year - but the outcomes are uneven,
11 even internally to the borough that I represent. And,
12 so, given that structurally we're always going to
13 have, in my view, these iniquitous outcomes and these
14 so-called reforms predate your tenure...

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: why are we still
17 experimenting with them? Why don't we go back to a
18 model that worked, and that was fair across the
19 board, and then tinker with that base model to make
20 sure that everyone has accessibility like you're
21 claiming you'd like to get?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I thank you so much for that
23 question. I would say that, as you stated, the
24 implementations of the reforms came at the very
25 moment that I was coming into this position. And, so,

1
2 many of the ideas, or the way that things used to
3 operate, are things that we are considering, because
4 at the end of the day, the reforms are a living
5 process. It was a model, and it is a model, that is
6 an evolution and a continuous work in process.

7 I share many of the concerns that you've brought
8 up, and I understand the challenges that many
9 organizations have faced as a result of how the
10 reforms have been implemented. But, it's an ever
11 breathing, ever growing, ever evolving process. Your
12 testimony helps in many ways for us to understand
13 what you're hearing on the ground in your community.
14 And we're taking all of this information back,
15 because our agency is very open to hearing feedback
16 from the field especially. Our agency is very in tune
17 with hearing feedback from the field, and we want to
18 be able to take that information back and continue to
19 create a better process, to create a process that's
20 more accountable to the communities that we serve in
21 New York City. And I want you to know that (TIMER
22 CHIMES) much of what you are speaking about is much
23 of what we're speaking about internally within the
24 agency. And, we're looking for ways to continue to
25 see how the reforms have functioned and operated.

1
2 But, at the same time, we don't want to just throw
3 the baby out with the bath water at the same time, in
4 terms of saying, we've implemented something, and
5 there are some really good things that have come out
6 of that implementation, from raising the floor from
7 \$5,000 to \$10,000 - previously organizations would
8 put together a proposal, and they might come away
9 with \$5,000, but it might have cost \$5,000 in staff
10 time to write the grant, and to provide the final
11 report, and all of that dynamic. So we raised the
12 floor from \$5,000 to \$10,000. In the last fiscal
13 year, we funded 125 new organizations, and that's
14 what the field said, they wanted to see more
15 organizations funded and not the same organizations
16 funded over and over again. And they also said that
17 they wanted to make sure that organizations had
18 multi-year grants. So, those are really good positive
19 things, but when you raise the floor from \$5,000 to
20 \$10,000, you fund over a 100 new organizations. It
21 creates a more competitive field, and there are more
22 organizations competing for funding than ever before.
23 So, it's all of these challenges in terms of how we
24 find the middle road to so much of what is happening
25 and the change in the dynamics that are happening in

1
2 the cultural field? Organizations are being founded
3 and created, they're coming into their own. If you
4 just look at the organization that I founded 25 years
5 ago, it's now a full grown organization moving into a
6 brand new building. So it's like they're going to be
7 commanding their share of the cultural pie. So, it's
8 all of these dynamics that we're looking at in terms
9 of how we create a fairer, better, more equitable
10 process. And our agency is completely invested in
11 doing that work to get to that point - that will
12 continue to evolve and change once we get to that
13 pivotal point.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Understood.

15 Chair, if I could have a brief followup with your
16 permission?

17 I hear everything that you're saying, and I agree
18 that it's always going to be an ongoing process. But
19 I think that we actually have to try to get it right
20 for the coming fiscal year, because we've had three
21 fiscal years now with this process...

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: And I think that we need to
24 make sure that we correct some of the kinks in this

25

1
2 process, because the issue is that it's been bad and
3 uneven for three fiscal years...

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: and but for the budget
6 infusion you had in FY23, it would have been bad from
7 the get-go. And, so, I think that the other thing
8 that we have to focus on is, and you mentioned, you
9 know, getting more panelists - and I'm happy to ad
10 advertise that at that time - but, I think the other
11 part is when I participated as a staffer for my
12 predecessor...

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: every year I would look at
15 applications from groups that I'm very familiar with
16 from my work. And they were just... they were not
17 great. And they needed to be told that, and they
18 needed some troubleshooting. And every year we would
19 ask your predecessor if the agency could help and do
20 a workshop with that before next year's panelists ere
21 convened. And the answer was always, "Well, maybe",
22 and I think that' something else the agency has to
23 do, is that if we are going to say, well, we don't
24 want the same groups getting funding year after year,
25 and we don't want this to be a stale list...

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm?

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: let's also make sure that
4 they're not submitting the same bad application over
5 and over again, and that we do what we can to help
6 them. Because most of these groups are all volunteer
7 organizations, they're not necessarily paid,
8 particularly for the communities that I represent.

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I want to say you are exactly
10 on point with where you are. I would say that there's
11 a bit of a rubber meeting the road moment that needs
12 to happen in terms of we have to do more to promote
13 to organizations that we are doing very intensive
14 webinars prior to the application becoming live and
15 even once it becomes alive. And the program officers
16 at the Department of Cultural Affairs are the best in
17 terms of taking that time to walk applicants through
18 that process and in terms of where they could do more
19 in order to make their application more competitive.
20 So that process does exist. What you're talking about
21 is something more (INAUDIBLE) in terms of you know
22 these organizations, they live next door to you,
23 they... you know them from elementary school, you see
24 them at the bus stop; you can say, hey, so and so, I
25 read your application, and it really wasn't good,

1
2 man, you got to do something to fix this. Like, come
3 into the office, we're gonna... we don't have that
4 level yet. But what you're talking about, in terms of
5 how the old process was, the old process married with
6 a newer process, somewhere in the middle getting to
7 that point is where we need to be - where those
8 conversations at the bus stop, in the supermarket, at
9 the barber shop, can happen because you know all of
10 these groups. But, also on our end, making it more
11 known to the organizations that you do have the
12 ability to pick up the phone and have a program
13 officer speak directly to you. You do have the
14 ability to come on our webinar and ask substantial
15 questions about how to improve your application.

16 Did you want to share something?

17 MR. POLIVY: I wanted to add to everything the
18 commissioner has already said. Council Member Carr,
19 uh, some of these devices are already available and
20 maybe part of what we need is to partner with the
21 Council to make sure that the word gets to all
22 applications to the CDF process about how to make
23 sure that they get exactly the type of conversation
24 you are suggesting.

25

1
2 In addition to the webinars that we do during the
3 application process, every applicant, successful and
4 not successful, gets an email from the Department of
5 Cultural Affairs, after the awards are announced,
6 inviting them to sign up for something called a
7 feedback call. So, every group, all 1,300 applicants,
8 are invited to sign up for feedback so that they can
9 hear exactly what went wrong - or what went right
10 with their application in that particular year.

11 Beyond feedback calls, there are also advice
12 calls. And, so, one of the best pieces, uhm, of
13 feedback that I think our agency could give is, if
14 you are one of the applicants to the Cultural
15 Development Fund, please get to know and reach out to
16 your assigned program officer. That is going to be
17 the expert who is going to help guide you through the
18 process, take a look at what happened in your FY24
19 application, and give you the advice you need to be
20 as successful as possible in FY25.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you, Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Something you wanted to add?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Oh, yes, I was just
24 going to say that we have already set up the calendar
25 for this year's webinars as well as office hours. So,

1
2 we would be happy to share that with Council after
3 this hearing... (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: We appreciate it, thank you.
5 Thank you, Chair... (CROSS-TALK)

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: We appreciate your
7 getting the word out, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I appreciate the
9 competitiveness and you mentioning the growth. I
10 think you are talking about more groups, more growth,
11 more need, and, yet, you're implementing the cuts. It
12 just seems a bit out of place. Without council
13 members, borough presidents, representatives there is
14 no oversight of these panels. And we can't tell if
15 the panels are as rigorous or as inclusive as they
16 previously were.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm?

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I am sure you will hear
19 that from many groups in terms of feedback.

20 So, we are going to go to Council Member Hudson
21 for questions, followed by Louis.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you, Chair, and good
23 afternoon, Commissioner.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Good afternoon.
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Since its founding in
3 2016, CUNY Cultural Corps has connected more than
4 1,070 students with paid internships in New York
5 City's cultural sector in partnership with DCLA -
6 including 169 students who are currently
7 participating in FY24. Cultural Corps participants
8 represent the diversity of New York City. Since 2016
9 78% identified as non-white; 33% identify as Latinx;
10 and 23% identify as LGBTQIA+. Each year,
11 approximately 80 of New York City's cultural
12 institutions, including MoMA, Museo del Barrio,
13 Little Island, and Jazz at Lincoln Center benefit
14 from access to CUNY student talent expertise and
15 assets during the internship. Partner organizations
16 then have connections to strong candidates for job
17 openings, because 80% of CUNY students stay in New
18 York City after graduation. The result is a cultural
19 institution workforce that better reflects New York
20 City and ultimately a more inclusive cultural sector.

21 According to a 2023 alumni survey, 60% of
22 respondents reported they are working or had worked
23 in the cultural sector after their internship. Can
24 you share what plans the city has to continue to
25

1 support this essential pipeline for a diverse and
2 thriving cultural sector?
3

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much for that
5 question.

6 CUNY Cultural Corps is certainly a program that
7 I believe very strongly in. Uh, internships are why I
8 why I am here today. I was able to intern at the
9 Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, The
10 Met, and many others in order to get to this place
11 right here as the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs.

12 So, during this budget cycle, again we had to
13 make very difficult decisions to implement the PEG.
14 And we had to pause the CUNY Cultural Corps for
15 Fiscal Year 24. We are hoping to restore it next
16 year. We are going to fight to make sure that the
17 CUNY Cultural Corps is part of this administration.
18 It's a strong point to the work that we're doing in
19 New York City in terms of building the cultural
20 leaders of tomorrow. And this is one of those
21 programs that is just... it exemplifies everything
22 that we believe in in New York City in terms of
23 training the next generation. But, I want to say, it
24 was one of the hardest decisions to pause this
25 program. And to anyone here, you know, as Mayor Eric

1
2 Adams says and asks us, "Do you really think that
3 this is the budget that I wanted for the City of New
4 York?" This is absolutely not the budget that Mayor
5 Eric Adams wanted to implement for the City of New
6 York, but he had to make very tough decisions, and
7 thereby; we had to make very tough decisions. And
8 CUNY Cultural Corp is something that we want to see
9 come back; it's something that we're going to fight
10 to make come back, because the future all of us are
11 essentially in this CUNY Cultural Corps. So, we want
12 to make sure that it comes back.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And just to clarify, are
14 you having conversations with OMB about bringing it
15 back? (CROSS-TALK)

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, certainly...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: For 2025?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I mean this is at like the
19 top of the list in terms of (TIMER CHIMES) it's not a
20 significant amount of funding, and we want to make
21 sure that this amount of funding does come back in
22 the negotiations. So, we are negotiating; we are
23 fighting hard for CUNY Cultural Corp. And we are
24 certainly making sure that it's part of the
25 negotiation process in a very robust way.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you, thanks, Chair.

3 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

4 Council member Louis?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chair.

6 Good to see you, Commissioner.

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Always good to see you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Three quick questions: I
9 wanted to know if you could talk to us a little bit
10 about the impact of tourism. So, I wanted to know how
11 does DCLA measure the impact of tourism on the city's
12 cultural institutions? And which boroughs see the
13 greatest amount of visitors when it comes to tourism?
14 I also wanted to ask, what metrics are used for DCLA
15 and measuring which organizations will be qualified
16 for funding? And it's based off of the competitive
17 conversation you just had with the chair. Because,
18 what I often see is organizations for the first time
19 get funding, and some organizations that have been
20 doing work for a long time, uh, don't get access. And
21 it may be that their application is not viable. But
22 it would be great to know what metrics are being
23 used, so that we could further support those
24 organizations that we think would be the best
25 qualified.

1
2 And the last question is in regards to the
3 upcoming application. I spent maybe three hours of my
4 time looking for a program officer when our
5 application was up... the deadline was up just to
6 make sure I had the dates right. So, the website had
7 the incorrect information, and I went in my phone and
8 found an old staff of yours, and I was able to
9 connect with someone else. Uh, but it would be good
10 to know, like, who is the best person to contact so
11 that we're prepared for that time to provide the
12 information? Thank you

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'll start with tourism. NYC
14 & Company has been our go-to in terms of
15 understanding the metrics and the numbers of the
16 impact of tourism. We know that tourism generates
17 over \$110 billion, uh, in New York City, and it is
18 certainly the lifeline on so many levels. We haven't
19 had a more recent breakdown of the impact of tourism
20 in that way since the pandemic. The Comptroller's
21 Office has often done those types of assessments. We
22 don't have the most recent numbers, and we should get
23 a breakdown in the in an upcoming assessment in terms
24 of where each borough places in terms of the amount

25

1 of revenue that they bring for the City of New York.

2 So we can definitely get that number for you.

3 In terms of the not... I understand in terms of
4 what you're saying as far as viable applications,
5 and Andrea can talk a bit more about that.

6 There is an assessment internally that a part of
7 our guidelines that explains to each applicant how
8 they can get funded through this process, and we want
9 to make sure that organizations understand those
10 guidelines and where they need to put more emphasis
11 in terms of explaining what it is that they do and
12 the outcomes and the deliverables of our of their
13 programs. You know, we want to make sure that
14 organizations are doing, of course, quality
15 programming and that it's reaching diverse audiences,
16 and that they have (TIMER CHIMES) individuals from
17 their community that are reflective of the
18 organization that are working, that are providing
19 services for. So, there are multiple points in terms
20 of how organizations can show the very best of what
21 they do and who they're reaching. And what we do
22 essentially is that organizations, through the
23 panelists, are given points, or they score a certain
24 amount of points, those points based off of the
25

1
2 points that they scored and the amount of funding
3 that we have, come together to determine how we will
4 award grants.

5 But Andrea can speak a little bit more about the
6 nature of that process.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Sure, thank you,
8 and thank you for that question.

9 The guidelines are on our website as the
10 commissioner mentioned, and are very clearly listed
11 throughout the application process as well. There are
12 three criteria by which the applications are reviewed
13 and that is service to the field, organizational
14 accountability, and quality. And as I mentioned,
15 those are sort of described in much greater detail
16 both in the guidelines as well as also in the
17 application.

18 I should say that also we do provide worksheets
19 for the written portion of the application as well as
20 the budget, so that organizations can prepare their
21 responses well in advance. And, then, also that
22 material is also available through our Salesforce
23 platform - when they actually log in to input their
24 responses...

25 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right...

1
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: And if I may answer
3 your final question. If anyone has a question about
4 who their program officer is or would like to speak
5 to someone, the email address is
6 CDFhelpdesk@culture.nyc.gov.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: It will be good to have a
8 contact that we can speak to as council members.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Oh! Okay, very
10 good...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: We can also email the help
12 desk...

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You can email me...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Not a problem, but if you
15 could give us a point of contact that would be
16 helpful.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Of course.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: It's also helpful that...
19 so, the guidelines are online, folks see that. The
20 issue is the scorecard, right? So making sure that
21 the application is really viable... so they could...
22 they could definitely check all the boxes.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Yes, that's
24 right...

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: but is the application
3 vibrant? And I think that's what the commissioner
4 just shared - finding a way to sit with folks and
5 making sure that the application actually looks
6 exactly like what the guidelines are expecting.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: That's right. And
8 the percentage that each of the categories is
9 weighted, is also noted clearly on the guidelines as
10 well... (CROSS-TALK)

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Yes, thank you.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER LOUIE: Okay thank you...
13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would like to... and it's
15 been in my mind, but I want to further talk with you
16 and explore, because you passed the legislation for
17 the not for-profit offices of support. How is... what
18 is the correct title for it?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: The Mayor's Office of
20 Nonprofit Services - which we would help with
21 applications like these.

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, we should figure out a
23 way to connect so that the not for-profit support
24 office that you've created wholes the Department of
25 Cultural Affairs and those types of not for-profits

1
2 as part of that service - and how we can build out
3 that office, uh, to have more of those levels of
4 support and touchpoints, because they really should
5 not be seen as separate - because not for profit art
6 organizations are clearly part of the not for profit
7 field of New York City. So, we should meet shortly
8 after this to discuss that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Mm-hmm

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And congratulations on
11 passing that legislation.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. And thank you,
13 Madam Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, Council Member.

15 I know after Council Member Brewer, I certainly
16 have questions about the issues that the nonprofits
17 are facing with the CDF letters that have a
18 headcount, capital projects. But, first let's go to
19 Council Member Brewer

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Madam
21 Chair.

22 So a couple of things, uh, on the economic
23 development - so, I obviously represent, on The Upper
24 West Side, some very large institutions that bring
25 tourism. So, I actually feel whether it's The Met or

1 the Natural History, they all need to have full
2 funding even though they're large, because they've
3 already gone into their endowment quite a bit
4 during... given this, uh, pandemic. So, my question
5 is do... in terms of... I know the Comptroller hasn't
6 done a tourism so-called economic impact for the
7 arts, and they really should be doing it, because we
8 haven't had one for a very long time.

9
10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Port Authority used to do
12 it, so between the Port Authority or the comptroller,
13 somebody needs to do it.

14 So, my question is, do we have any sense of
15 closing the American Museum or cancelling shows at
16 The Met or whatever? What kind of an impact...
17 Because that's what's going to happen if these
18 horrible budget cuts go through in terms of tourism
19 and economic development... Do you have a sense of
20 that? Or you have none because there's no study?

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Currently there is no study
22 for us to make a comparison, but at the same time,
23 living on the edge in that way, we are trying to do
24 everything in terms of negotiating with OMB to have
25 the restoration of those PEGS restored so that we

1
2 don't have to answer that question at this time. So,
3 we are in robust conversations - nothing has been
4 decided at this time, but we want to make sure that
5 those organizations... I shared with you the opening
6 of the Gilder Center, shared in the enthusiasm of
7 seeing uh Dr. Sean Decatur, the first African-
8 American man to hold that position at the Museum of
9 Natural History - really making Black History Month
10 quite a celebration. We want to make sure that these
11 organizations are doing well. We want to make sure
12 that they have the budgets that they need to perform
13 at the level that they need to perform at because of
14 the level of tourism that is so viable to New York
15 City.

16 So, we're continuing to engage in conversations,
17 continuing to engage in negotiations, share your
18 enthusiasm, and recognize the importance of these
19 institutions... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I appreciate that.
21 I wish that the Mayor... I know he goes to the
22 events, but I wish that the Mayor would also
23 understand that. So, I'm just reiterating, agreeing,
24 and feel very strongly that these organizations are
25 the backbone for our economy in so many different

1
2 ways - Young People's Chorus also got a cut, my God.
3 I mean if there's another organization like that, I
4 haven't met them. So these are examples where I know
5 you're arguing, we are too, do not cut either capital
6 or expense - you've got the same capital problem. You
7 know, The Met can't live without certain technology
8 that... you know, when we give them money, it's not
9 for fun, even though they're large, it's because they
10 need a new system for the largest opera in the world.
11 And they need that, it's not fluff. (TIMER CHIMES)

12 So I just want to emphasize that.

13 The other quick question, which is not on the
14 list, is arts education. Kate Levan (PHONETIC) used
15 to make sure that there was a blue book that said,
16 okay arts education, maybe you're doing literacy, and
17 maybe you're doing math, but, of course, I believe
18 you can't do that without music - that's my
19 impression.

20 So, are we doing any analysis of what arts
21 education includes in the school system? Because,
22 with all due respect of the principals, and I
23 understand this this, this not high on their priority
24 list. I know too many schools that don't have any
25 music. So, is that something that's on your agenda?

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That is exactly something that's
3 on our agenda. We are working with Mr. Paul Thompson
4 who is at the Department of Education. And he is
5 really their arts facilitator for the entire city of
6 New York. We have many conversations, they just put
7 out what would be perceived as their own blueprint,
8 uh, showing the metrics of where they are and where
9 they want to be - in terms of having arts education
10 on every level, from elementary, junior high school,
11 and high school. We can get you a copy of that new
12 report that they just issued. We had an incredible
13 celebration showing where we are, where we want to
14 be, and where we want to take the arts, in terms of
15 New York City, into every single classroom. As you
16 know, I have a six-year old, and I have seen some of
17 those challenges that you speak of when you're trying
18 to find a school that has arts education for our
19 students. Every child should have that, and we're
20 going to continue to work with DOE on that goal...

21 (CROSS-TALK)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, is that a new need, or
23 is that something that has data and money associated
24 with it?

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Now, I don't know how they
3 did it under Kate Levan when she was at the
4 Department of Cultural Affairs, but that falls -
5 those reports and those metrics - that falls under
6 the Department of Education. So their budget would
7 have to expand in order to provide that level of
8 education and support. You can add on... (CROSS-TALK)

9 MR. POLIVY: But they're already doing it. We will
10 get you a copy of the report it's incredibly
11 comprehensive... (CROSS-TALK)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I would love to read the
13 report, but the issue for me is, with all due respect
14 on the ground, I know for a fact that... I mean, I
15 know Manhattan, I don't know the other boroughs, as
16 you know, but I know Manhattan - arts education is
17 not what it should be, and here we are the capital of
18 arts - in the world. So, it takes money, but without
19 it you have no more audiences and you oblivious don't
20 have a rounded student. So, I'm saying if, you know,
21 it's got to be in every single school in a quality
22 way. So, I'd like... if you don't have arts
23 (APPLAUSE) if you don't have it mandated, and if you
24 don't have data, and if you don't have somebody
25 paying attention, then it's not going to happen.

1
2 Because I understand, you're a principal, you got
3 other challenges that you have to address. So, we're
4 not doing enough on arts education that's what I'm
5 saying. And it's one Administration, so DOE has to
6 work with you, you've got to work with DOE, et cetera

7 Thank you, Madam Chair.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much, Council
9 Member Brewer.

10 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Absolutely. I would just say
11 the arts and education, I mean, that has... that has
12 to happen. And then the services and the programs
13 that we depend on in the schools, and even beyond the
14 schools - in our senior centers, and nursing homes,
15 and everywhere else, that is made possible by the
16 revenue generated by these very groups. So it's
17 actually a cycle that should continue with the
18 support of the city. And without it, without
19 supporting these groups, it's... it just goes... it
20 affects so many different critical components,
21 especially when it comes to supporting our
22 communities that that need it the most. And that's
23 the piece I'm really trying to understand.

24 So for the groups that are CDF recipients, and I
25 thank Council Member Brewer for mentioning the larger

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2 institutions that provide so much programming you
3 don't even see. You know, The American Museum of
4 Natural History it's not just dinosaur bones. I mean
5 they're training teachers and professors, and there
6 are children in classrooms learning, and seeing, and
7 feeling all types of important and incredible
8 lessons.

9 For this the CDF recipients, that was such, uh,
10 I just... I'll say it, it was a very botched process.
11 They not only faced deep cuts to their budgets, but
12 they only learned about their funding in February,
13 which was eight months into the fiscal year. This
14 delay, as you can imagine, is incredibly
15 destabilizing for organizations who need to schedule
16 and plan and programming in advance - and many who
17 already actually implemented this programming -
18 there's no doubt. Many either received the cut for
19 programming they have already hired for, or learned
20 they were funded to do a program they now can't do.

21 Can you explain the reason for the delay and
22 announcements? What steps are you taking to prevent
23 delayed awards letters again?

24 MR. POLIVY: Absolutely, Council Member Rivera.

1
2 So, to explain the delay in funding, it simply
3 was about the PEG cut. And the way that we allocate
4 funding there is a formula applied based on the score
5 that each group receives from the panelists. That
6 formula is very complicated, and then once we ran it
7 we were able to give out awards to 1,031 groups.
8 When we didn't know how much funding we would have,
9 it doesn't impact just a few groups, it impacts the
10 formula that applies to all of the recipients - all
11 1,031. So until we knew exactly how much money we
12 were going to have for the CDF program, it was very
13 difficult to give out awards. As soon as we had the
14 award, the total amount for the CDF program, which
15 was in mid to late January, we promptly distributed
16 awards at the beginning of February. This is an
17 impact of the PEG cut. We're deeply hopeful that the
18 sacrifices that all agencies made collectively to get
19 a better handle and a stronger financial picture for
20 the City of New York will mean that there won't be
21 future PEG cuts in FY25, and we can get back to the
22 more steady schedule that we have had for many years
23 of giving out awards in about November. And with any
24 luck, we would hope to accelerate that timeline

1
2 But we had been pretty stable about making
3 announcements in November, which is our target for
4 FY25.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I mean we're in the Council
6 looking for a way to be inclusive of about codifying
7 this process. We understand, and I believe that that
8 this panel cares about the work, but something like
9 that, that was just unacceptable. It's indefensible.
10 I just I can't imagine being in... running an
11 organization and in February you get this news. And I
12 know a lot of it depends on the score and the panel,
13 but I mean you had longstanding organizations that
14 were funded for a very, very long time like - The
15 Bronx Arts Ensemble, and I know they didn't write a
16 bad application. (APPLAUSE) I just... they got cuts
17 due to the panel score. I think the process is flawed
18 and needs fixing. I believe that there... are
19 there's a coalition here at least and many, many
20 artists and organizations that submitted a list of
21 suggested reforms last year. So we hope that those
22 are taken into consideration. And, again, we're
23 looking to memorialize it.

24 So, in terms of the capital projects as well,
25 because we've all... we're also seeing... and I know

1
2 Council Member Brewer has been such a great advocate
3 for the organizations in her district who are seeing
4 their capital projects pause as well... So this is
5 programmatic interruptions...

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: and then you have capital
8 projects that are already under way planned, you
9 know, for capacity. So, how many active capital
10 projects does the agency currently have?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We can get you that number,
12 the exact number, but if you have another follow-up
13 question to the capital...

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Yeah...

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: we can go into that while
16 we're getting you that exact number.

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Sure, let's... Okay.

18 Do you believe that the Preliminary Capital
19 Commitment Plan accurately accounts for the current
20 and future capital needs of the City's cultural
21 institutions? Are there any capital programs and
22 projects that may be under budgeted or not yet
23 included in the current plan? And are there any
24 capital projects that have been cut or pushed out of
25 the Capital Commitment Plan?

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The challenge again with
3 this entire process is having to make really tough
4 decisions with less funding. And, so there are
5 projects that are happening that we are state
6 mandated to do from the borough-based jails to the
7 BQE Project, and many others that are having huge
8 implications on the amount of funding that we are
9 able to spend on capital projects in New York City -
10 also given the challenges of the budget at this time.
11 So, many projects that we want to see implemented
12 have been paused. We also had to make cuts to our
13 capital budget, so some projects have been paused,
14 some have had to have been cut, but those projects
15 that we cut were projects that inevitably we made
16 those decisions, because there were things that those
17 projects... that made them ineligible for funding.
18 Things that we might have done 10 years ago, we don't
19 do now - such as, let's say acquisition. So some
20 organizations might have been allocated funding for
21 acquisition, and the agency does not provide funding
22 for acquisition. So organizations such as that, maybe
23 some organizations were allocated capital dollars 10
24 years ago, and they have not moved that project
25 forward, because during that time they couldn't find

1
2 other foundation, corporate, or individual partners
3 to advance that project. But what we have told all of
4 those organizations, that found their projects to be
5 ineligible, reapply in the next fiscal year, come
6 forward with a project that can be capitally funded
7 and supported, and we would happily review that
8 project, and to see if there's any way we can get
9 those projects over the finish line. We want to see
10 projects get over the finish line. That's essentially
11 what our agency does, and that's essentially tied to
12 the viability of the city, and we want to see that
13 level of support. So if organizations did not
14 receive, or their budget was actually cut out of this
15 capital process, please apply again.

16 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well, we know there have been
17 capital projects that have been cut or pushed out of
18 the Capital Commitment Plan. I wanted to hear from
19 you all s to sort of the decision making process. I
20 mean the Administration has been moving projects into
21 the out years or cancelling them altogether, under
22 the assumption that the City is nearing its debt
23 capacity. And with the Governor including the TFA
24 Debt Limit increase as part of her Executive Budget
25 Proposal, do you believe that the Capital Commitment

1
2 Plan can now be adjusted... readjusted to move
3 projects back into the first years of the plan and to
4 rec commit or restore projects that had been
5 cancelled?

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's certainly a part of
7 the negotiation process. That's what these
8 conversations are about in terms of new information
9 that wasn't provided to us previously, and now this
10 information is apparent and visible. How do we then
11 take this information and readjust it so that the
12 capital projects that were put on hold, that we now
13 have a pathway to get there? It's just interesting in
14 terms of when this particular hearing took place that
15 we are probably at the pinnacle of these discussions
16 in terms of really understanding how we're going to
17 move forward as a city, how we're going to move
18 forward as an agency, and how we're going to get
19 these projects over the finish line. I mean, we want
20 to see this happen. This is essentially what is the
21 viability of the city, and, for me, I take getting
22 capital projects over the finish line so personally,
23 because I've gone through that process. But I also
24 understand taking it from the administrative lens,
25 taking it from, you know, the agency lens. And all of

1
2 these different you know bureaucratic processes,
3 essentially what you have in your hands as a
4 commissioner is you have the ability, you're holding
5 people's dreams in your hands, and it's your goal,
6 and job, and desire to have those dreams become
7 realized. So, it's ,you know, it's a lot of pressure
8 on a day-to-day basis to figure out how to make all
9 of these aspirations and dreams come true that many,
10 as I faced as myself, are founders and they've put
11 their blood sweat and tears and their entire lives
12 into these projects. And it's really important to
13 figure out how to get them over the finish line.

14 So, we take that role and job very seriously. And
15 we're continuing to be in the negotiation process
16 with OMB to figure out how to in fact do that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want to second what
18 the Chair said, because the Governor put I think, \$6
19 million, in terms of raising the debt limit, and I
20 can promise you I know they'll do that at least in
21 the state legislature if not more. Right?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Mr. OMB sat here and said
24 the same thing - BQE, jails, I think it threw in the
25 subway. Come on. There there's no question that

1
2 there's enough for your agencies to be able to get
3 their capital. So, when I hear from The Met, and I
4 hear from Lincoln Center and others, I say with all
5 due respect, just... you're going to get your money,
6 your capital money. Right? But, then you tell them,
7 with all due respect, to go and apply for something
8 else. I say you can apply for something else, but
9 you're going to get your money, your capital money.
10 because we're going to fight for it. So, it's just a
11 little bit of a mixed message coming from you and
12 from us. Maybe... I think what you should say to
13 people is ,you know, I know you can't counter OMB,
14 they're like the elephant in the room, but you could
15 at least tell them that there's a money coming in
16 terms of ceiling in Albany. Because I think that's
17 going to happen.

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: In fact, I know that's
20 going to happen. So the capital projects, are...
21 they're so... as you say, they're so important,
22 they're jobs, they're the future, they're economic
23 development, you know, and particularly for your
24 agency, they're incredibly important. So...

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are going to fight

3 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Tell them something off
5 the record and on the record, Commissioner, thank
6 you.

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I appreciate that. And, yes,
8 the off the record conversations are far more
9 interesting than the hearing conversations. But, uh,
10 we want to make sure... And I just want to be clear,
11 we can only fund projects that are eligible. And, so,
12 there are certain dynamics that we have to adhere to,
13 but we do want to make sure that organizations that
14 did receive cuts, because their projects were not
15 eligible, they absolutely have an opportunity to
16 reapply for that funding. And just to Chair Rivera,
17 we have 408 active capital projects.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But, the ones that I am
19 talking about were eligible originally, just to...

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Totally. Then those will
21 definitely be looked at.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you for the number. I
23 mean ,you know, you mentioned in your testimony,
24 Nuyorican, Downtown Art, (INAUDIBLE), La MaMa, I mean
25 these are... The Joyce, these are all in my district,

1
2 which I appreciate your personal touch there. But,
3 absolutely my priority, because they needed their
4 capacity expanded. There was an (INAUDIBLE)...

5 (CROSS-TALK)

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right...

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: They're critical. And, so,
8 whether it's ,you know, Downtown Art, it... Lincoln
9 Center, I mean, there are places that are lifelines,
10 lifelines for our communities - our young people
11 especially. I have personally witnessed that on
12 Fourth Arts Block.

13 So, thank you, uh, thank you, Council Member
14 Brewer, for your addition to that, because we feel
15 with OMB and your organization, we are trying to be
16 at least have some sort of collaboration on messaging
17 on what we need from different levels of government.
18 But, truly, the City, we have to... We have to do
19 better and so does DCLA.

20 So, the department's Fiscal 2025 Preliminary
21 Budget provides for 60 fulltime positions across all
22 divisions, an increase of two compared to the
23 headcount at the Fiscal 2024 adopted budget.

24
25

1
2 Does the Agency have adequate headcount to meet
3 the needs of the cultural organizations and
4 effectively run all of the programs and initiatives?

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, I want to... And Lance
6 will take up the rest of this question, but I want
7 to say, one of the things that I am really excited
8 about that happened out of this process, was that we
9 were able to take the hiring freeze. So, during all
10 of these negotiations, we have a hiring freeze. The
11 hiring freeze has been lifted, we now were able to
12 hire for so many positions. We are actively
13 interviewing for three positions right in the
14 programs unit. And there are many other units
15 throughout our agency where we are interviewing, we
16 are now able to hire so that we can meet, uh, the
17 needs of the communities, and we get our capital
18 process more streamlined when we have the level of
19 expertise and positions filled - as well as through
20 the CDF process. We are in that process of
21 negotiations.

22 Did you want to add to that?

23 MR. POLIVY: (NO MIC) (INAUDIBLE)

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And we can always do more
25 with more.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: You're preaching to the choir
3 on that one. But, three positions being interviewed
4 for right now... So, you... Do you think you have
5 adequate headcount?

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We have adequate headcount
7 now. Once those positions are filled, our agency will
8 be able to run a more streamlined operation. We will
9 be able to get funding out the door quickly. Our
10 capital projects will be able to move more
11 efficiently through the process. And we are just
12 working currently on that.

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: What's your vacancy rate
14 right now?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would have to look up to
16 see what that actual percentage is. I'll get back to
17 you with that answer. But, we will have it before the
18 hearing closes

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, I appreciate that.

20 Well, I just want to thank you for your
21 testimony. There were a number of things we went
22 over, and I just... I feel like the CDF data and the
23 process... the panel process is... really needs our
24 attention, and our collect collaboration. Because,
25 you know, the Independent Budget Office released an

1
2 analysis of CDF data that showed about 80% of
3 organizations received a cut, uh, they received a cut
4 on an average of 31%. But that this average masks
5 substantial variation, especially when grouping by
6 size of award with smaller organizations receiving an
7 average cut of 59%.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mm-hmm

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And, so, we have also heard
10 from organizations who lost all of their funding.

11 So, can you just explain the... again, the
12 variation and cuts, or at least what are you all
13 going to do going forward to address the situation?
14 Because, you're... after you all leave in a couple
15 minutes, we're going to have many, many groups and
16 individuals testify to their experience.

17 So I'd just like them to hear, before you go, the
18 variation in cuts and what we are going to do to fix
19 the process once and for all?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, I just want to first
21 start off by saying before I go, uh, sitting on that
22 side of the table, I always was very disgruntled when
23 commissioners would leave and run out of the room
24 right after a hearing. I am here for the entire
25 hearing. I want to hear from each and every person

1
2 that came here to testify. I understand, and I'm
3 going to say the reason why I ran for office was
4 because I could no longer afford to come here, to
5 come to Albany, to organize the bus trips, to protest
6 on the steps of City Hall for more funding, to
7 protest outside of the Department of Cultural Affairs
8 for more funding. So I decided I needed to just run
9 for office.

10 So, I just want to say to all of the
11 organizations that are here, I see you. I know,
12 especially with these gloomy financial times, the
13 last place you need to spend all day today is here.
14 But your presence is appreciated here, your testimony
15 is appreciated here. So, I'll start by saying that

16 Secondly, I would say that we have done a lot
17 internally in terms of how we're going to improve
18 this process. So we have done a lot in terms of
19 restructuring and working on the guidelines. We have
20 put formal processes in place so that the agency runs
21 more from a legal perspective versus a policy
22 perspective. We've engaged with members of the
23 community in the field to determine how to strengthen
24 this. Many convers have been held with many of you,
25 our local elected leaders, so that we can have a

1
2 better process moving forward. Because, as Council
3 Member Carr has said, we do not want to go into a
4 third year with the same process that is hurting so
5 many of our organizations. Again, much of this was
6 based off of the scoring, and oftentimes when the
7 field talks about how we want increased grant award
8 sizes, we want more organizations to get funded, we
9 want multi-year grants, we want a lot of things. But
10 there's a give and take in terms of how all wanting
11 all of those things actually shapes out in the
12 process. So, we may want 125 new organizations, but
13 we have to figure out how to include those 125
14 organizations in a way that does not destabilize the
15 1,000 organizations that are already being funded.
16 So a lot of those questions are going to have to be
17 answered, uh, and we're going to have solutions for
18 them in the next budget process moving forward.

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. Again, the cuts, we
20 hope that we're going to have better news. We just...
21 we demand ,you know, the restoration. We really need
22 these organizations to be... just to have more trust
23 in the City. And that's really only going to be
24 acquired through restabilizing them and valuing them.

25 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We are committed to a better

1
2 process, but I just want to say, there is no place or
3 where that a budget that's going to consist of cuts
4 at this level is ever going to be a satisfying
5 process for all of those involved. Budget cuts are
6 going to feel bad, they're going to feel terrible,
7 they're going to amount to terrible hearings, they're
8 going to amount to terrible discussions, terrible
9 implications for the organizations. Budget cuts feel
10 bad. They don't look good. They're not good for the
11 city. They are not helpful, but they are a necessary
12 evil to satisfying and moving forward our city, in
13 terms of dire financial times. This is not a budget
14 that any of us signed up for. This is unprecedented
15 in terms of coming out of a global pandemic, coming
16 out of a financial crisis that should have been
17 managed by the federal government. All of these
18 dynamics happening at the same time, as well as a
19 campaign of many of foundations and corporations
20 pulling out of funding the arts. Happening at the
21 same time is not going to be or put forward a
22 satisfactory result for the city and for a community
23 that is the lifeline for this city. And, so, we're
24 going to try to work through this very challenging
25 budget cycle, and at the same time, we're going to

1
2 have to talk to our other partners in the cultural
3 community to come up with better solutions for
4 stabilized support.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well we did a local law in
6 relation to requiring DCLA, uh, the commissioner
7 specifically... (CROSS-TALK)

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: to report annually on
10 department funding of art and cultural organizations
11 and institutions. That was intro 1184.

12 Can you provide us with the action plan for
13 providing the geographical and the demographics and
14 the reporting as it relates to the cultural
15 organizations and institutions.

16 MR. POLIVY: We have reviewed the local law that
17 was passed last year. And we look forward to
18 submitting our report when it's due at the end of the
19 summer.

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So your action plan is to get
21 it done? If you can get it done sooner, that would
22 make a lot more sense. And we're looking to see if we
23 can actually figure out a cycle that occurs earlier
24 in the year.

25 MR. POLIVY: Yes, Council Member.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So diligence would be
3 fantastic.

4 You know, the only I just would say to end this,
5 besides thank you very, very much for your testimony,
6 uh, is that these organizations they drive revenue,
7 they grow our economy, and we need them to thrive.
8 And all these factors, the revenue, the mental
9 health, the support to our young people and our older
10 adults, and free performances, and the lifechanging
11 programs and services that they provide, I just don't
12 know how we can cut these organizations given these
13 factors. So, I look forward to the next few months
14 and negotiations. And, again, I thank you for your
15 testimony. And I appreciate that you'll stay to hear
16 from our friends and allies. Thank you.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much, Council
18 Member Rivera.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now turn to public
20 testimony. We will be limiting public testimony today
21 to two minutes each. For in person panelists, please
22 come up to the table once your name has been called.

23 Our first in person panel will be Lauren Comito,
24 Leonard Paul, Deborah Allman, John Hyslop, and George
25 Sarah Olken.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Would you like to start?

3 LAUREN COMITO: Thank you so much, uh, to Speaker
4 Adams, Council Member Rivera, the Chair, and all the
5 committee members for the opportunity to speak on the
6 devastating budget proposal for libraries in Fiscal
7 Year 2025.

8 My name is Lauren Comito, I'm a librarian here in
9 New York City, and the Executive Director Of Urban
10 Librarians Unite, uh, a 501(c)(3) Professional
11 Organization based here in New York City in Brooklyn.

12 Every spring for the last 14 years, I've been
13 involved in advocacy to restore funding to libraries.
14 Every year during this painful process we come to
15 City Hall, and someone inevitably says that a budget
16 is a statement of priorities. But I would take it a
17 step further, I would also say that a budget is a
18 demonstration of vision and leadership. This
19 Preliminary Budget, particularly when paired with yet
20 another year of proposed mid-year cuts, demonstrates
21 neither vision nor leadership. Seven budget cuts in
22 two years have left providers like libraries unable
23 to plan even a full six months of service. It has
24 become yet again the burden of this body to save
25 services like libraries that New Yorkers rely on.

1
2 This Saturday, a patron came to my reference desk
3 with a journal article and a circled citation, and
4 they were looking for access to another journal
5 article - and this is usually the most fun question -
6 somebody has a hard one. Right? They want an article
7 you may or may not be able to get, it's going to be a
8 fun question you can really dig into. I love these
9 usually. I couldn't find the article, so I dug deeper
10 and I asked what it was about the topic she really
11 wanted to know. Her real question was, given the
12 diagnosis she had just gotten, how long did she have
13 left to live? Libraries aren't just for assignments,
14 and reports, and academic settings. (TIMER CHIMES) We
15 don't just find articles for school. We help people
16 answer the pressing questions of their lives. Under
17 this budget proposal, we'll lose at least half our
18 Saturday services. She could very well walk up,
19 instead of to help and an article and an answer, to a
20 locked gate. So, today I'm imploring you to hold the
21 line on these cuts, fight back against them; restore
22 library funding and increase it, hopefully so we can
23 continue to be this human connection with our
24 neighbors, connecting them to a sea of information
25

1
2 that people can't find their way through on their
3 own. Thank you.

4 LEONARD PAUL: Good afternoon, Council Member
5 Rivera and members of the Committee.

6 My name is Lenny Paul, I'm thankful for the
7 opportunity to come before you today. We are asking
8 for a full restoration of the Mayor's PEGs from the
9 November modification, and the Preliminary Budget
10 totaling \$35.5 million in re-action for the
11 restoration and baselining of the \$45 million from
12 the City Council to the CIG programs - such as the
13 Cultural After School Adventures Program.

14 Cultural institutions partner with the New York
15 City Public Schools to provide educational
16 programming and visits throughout the year. Without
17 these programs, many low-income students will not
18 have the opportunity to visit and experience the
19 beauty of our worldclass institution throughout the
20 five boroughs. Without continued funding, many free
21 educational programs for students and the public will
22 be reduced or eliminated. Furthermore, this will
23 limit the availability of career development and
24 internship opportunities for students who are
25 thinking of working in the cultural field.

1
2 I would like to remind everyone that the CIG
3 employs thousands of unionized workers. They provide
4 a stable living wage for many New York City families.
5 As a matter of fact, The Bronx Zoo is the largest
6 employer of young workers in the Bronx who live and
7 work in the community. If these cuts are not
8 restored, it can lead to the elimination of many
9 jobs, furloughs, and reduce hours at various
10 institutions. Some institutions have already rolled
11 out furloughs and hiring freezes. We have seen this
12 occur in the past, and we are pleading for this not
13 to happen again. It has been proven that in New York
14 City, cultural institutions are economic drivers.
15 This is true for the past and the present. Tourists
16 come here to experience our world class and world-
17 renowned museums and famous botanic gardens. Our
18 institutions are revenue generators that support
19 local economies and businesses. We all remember how
20 our institution played a key role in the city's
21 economic revitalization after the worst economic
22 downturn due to COVID-19. If we want our city to
23 continue its economic (TIMER CHIMES) recovery, the
24 Administration needs to invest in places that draw
25 tourism - which are our cultural institutions.

1
2 In closing, I would like to reiterate that it's
3 so vitally important for the City to restore the
4 funding for our cultural treasures and for its
5 workforce to survive. We really, really need this in
6 investment. I thank you for your time, Chair Rivera.

7 JOHN HYSLOP: Chairperson Rivera, and fellow
8 committee members, thank you for giving us an
9 opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of all
10 the union workers of Brooklyn Public Library New
11 York, Public Library, and Queens Public Library.

12 We are united in our appeal for our elected
13 officials to save our public libraries. In July 2023,
14 the mayor and the city council agreed to a Fiscal
15 Year 2024 budget that allowed Library workers to
16 provide all the library services our patrons expect
17 six and seven days a week across every borough. Five
18 months later, the mayor implemented a 5% budget cut
19 that forced the libraries whole day of service,
20 decimated materials budgets, eliminated maintenance
21 budgets, and stopped them from hiring staff.

22 The mayor's cut had no meaningful impact on the
23 City's fiscal situation, but had a very meaningful
24 and negative impact on the patrons of this city.

1
2 Today only two branches are open on Sunday and
3 they're closed on Saturday. Queen's Library cannot
4 afford Sunday service at Flushing, the busiest branch
5 in the nation. Those who relied on Sunday service,
6 because that was the only day they could visit their
7 branch, are denied our services. Furthermore, this
8 cut has impacted staff salaries who need that extra
9 money to survive in New York City's ever rising
10 costs.

11 The Library systems have not been able to fill
12 all the positions that have been made vacant from
13 people have left, and levels are very low. Locations
14 sometimes open with two or three library workers,
15 limiting the ability to provide programs and
16 services, and creating very unsafe conditions for
17 staff and patrons. Custodians cover multiple branches
18 in one day, affecting the cleanliness and safety of
19 these branches. Programs are cut because we do not
20 have enough staff. Maintenance requests remain open
21 longer, because we do not have enough maintenance
22 staff. Newly renovated branches cannot open because
23 we do not have enough staff. The Library systems have
24 had to cut back our materials budgets. We have as, we
25 learned, in the city council's oversight hearing on

1 book banning, book banning is a crisis across the
2 country, including New York City. We cannot be
3 effective at fighting these book band if we cannot
4 buy books or keep our doors open. Many have stated
5 that New York City is resilient and thriving, and
6 that is true, our spirit remains as defined and
7 strong as ever. However, the majority of New Yorkers
8 (TIMER CHIMES) are still struggling with day-to-day
9 expenses of our city. New York Public Libraries are
10 one of the city's most democratic and trusted
11 institutions. Our free open and clean spaces in every
12 New York City community allow Library workers to
13 create literacy and community for everyone who walks
14 through our doors - as a divide between those who
15 have and those who do not have grows into a chasm,
16 New Yorkers need our government resources. The only
17 way library workers can do our vital work is for our
18 elected officials to adopt a budget that is more than
19 what we' received in Fiscal Year 2024. That will
20 allow us to grow and thrive. Thank You.

22 GEORGE SARAH OLKEN: I just wanted to add a
23 personal story. I drive the Bookmobile. I'm the
24 president of Local 1482 Brooklyn Public Library
25 Guild. And we bring the library to the streets, we go

1 to shelters, pantries. We've brought... I've made
2 hundreds of library cards for our newest neighbors.
3 And we also cover for closed branches, and that
4 depends upon the staff of the branches that are
5 closed for renovations and stuff like that. And we...
6 it depends upon the staff of those branches to join
7 us, and as those staff have had to be reassigned
8 around the system to plug holes where we're under
9 staffed, that means we have to cut back on bookmobile
10 programming - which means I have to pull away from
11 bringing those services to the folks who can't reach
12 a library for one reason or another. And it means
13 we're reaching fewer people. And I think about, in
14 particular, I sometimes park in the Junction,
15 Flatbush Junction, and there's a unhoused man -
16 Haitian man who comes to... every week, and he's a
17 regular. He's a regular on the street. He's a regular
18 at the Bookmobile. And when we have to remove service
19 from a street corner, when we have to... when we're
20 all reassigned around the System to plug holes, it
21 means that we're not reaching the folks who need us
22 most. And, so, I just wanted to just try to describe
23 a little bit of how these... understaffing, like,
24 how they... how we're affected by them and how
25

1
2 desperately we need more resources, so that when a
3 branch closes, staff can remain in their home
4 neighborhood and continue to bring service to the
5 communities - which is something we promised, but
6 that we can't do if we're understaffed. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I just want to thank you all
8 so much. I know you represent the Libraries, but also
9 cultural institutions, and the gardens. And how many
10 days there as pay as you wish or they're free, you
11 know, days for free, that people can come and visit,
12 and The Bronx Zoo being a large employer of young
13 people. And I also... Sometimes I feel like people
14 forget about... or they just fail to really highlight
15 how valuable it is, the staff that keeps the actual
16 facilities going. So the maintenance and the
17 cleanliness, and knowing that you can go into your
18 library and be there for seven hours, and have a
19 clean bathroom and in a great place to just work and
20 thrive.

21 So, I just want to thank you all for your work
22 and for sharing stories that are so deeply personal.
23 Thank you, thank you for everything, thank you.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panel will Shannon
3 Rockett, Jessica Phillips, Coco Killingsworth, Norah
4 Yarah, Aaron Bouska, and Jose Ortiz.

5 COCO KILLINGSWORTH: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera
6 and members of the Committee. I am Coco
7 Killingsworth, Chief Experience and Impact Officer at
8 the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Chair of the
9 Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). I am here today to
10 provide testimony on behalf of the CIGs - a coalition
11 of 34 cultural organizations located in all five
12 boroughs, including zoos, gardens, museums, and
13 performing arts organizations.

14 This is a critical time for the cultural
15 community and the CIG. The City's relationship with
16 the CIGs is based in partnership: CIGs are nonprofits
17 operating in public facilities for the benefit of all
18 New Yorkers and the City provides the institutions
19 with critical funding. However, the November and
20 Preliminary Budget cuts have cut our sector to the
21 bone. In addition, our baseline support for the CIGs
22 has not increased since 2009.

23 Many of the impacts of the cuts have been
24 immediate and more will be on the way. Staff hours
25 have been reduced, hiring freezes and furloughs have

1
2 been implemented and jobs left vacant. Public
3 programming has been curtailed, including programs
4 that engage local and underprivileged communities,
5 seniors, youth education, career development, and
6 internship programs.

7 This is an unprecedented disinvestment in the
8 arts and culture that make our city great.

9 The cultural sector is a major economic driver
10 for the city of New York generating approximately
11 \$110 billion in economic activity and is central to
12 the success of our tourism industry. Thousands of
13 union and non-union jobs depend on the arts and
14 culture sector. CIGs employ 15,700 full and part-time
15 employees, and more than 6,000 New Yorkers
16 participate in CIG workforce development programs.

17 The jobs driven by the cultural sector also
18 include the education contractors, food services
19 staff at the CIGs, to those driving cabs, and working
20 in hotels, retail and restaurants.

21 As if driving critical economic revenue to New
22 York City isn't enough on its own, arts and culture
23 is a lifeline for our youth, for low-income New
24 Yorkers, and for families throughout the five
25 boroughs that rely on their local and citywide

1 institutions. (TIMER CHIMES) Each year more than 2
3 million children, many of whom are New York City
4 schoolchildren/camp groups, visit CIG institutions.

5 The cuts have hit small, medium, and large
6 lifeline institutions, and that in turn has already
7 hit the communities we serve. It is shameful.

8 We are requesting that the Council prioritizes
9 cultural and to reverse the November and Preliminary
10 Budget cuts to DCLA - that is \$20 million in FY24 -
11 and for the \$15.5 million in FY25 to be restored, and
12 the baseline of one-time addition to the CIGs
13 programs of \$45 million.

14 In addition, and I won't name them all, but we
15 want to see full funding of key Council initiatives
16 such as CASA, SU-CASA, Coalition Theaters and Arts,
17 Theaters of Color, and the Immigrant Initiative.

18 Thank you for your time, thank you for being a
19 champion. We are your partners.

20 NORAH YAHYA: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera,
21 Council Member Brewer, my name is Norah Yahya from
22 the Met Museum, but today I am here on behalf of the
23 Manhattan CIGs. I echo everything that our chair,
24 Coco, has already said. You all already know the
25 impact, as you've asked today.

1
2 Something that I did want to highlight, though,
3 in particular, is that these cuts are far-reaching.
4 That while we have not had major layoffs, there have
5 been some institutions that have had several layoffs.
6 But, in addition to that, we have had a massive
7 reduction in programming. And when you reduce
8 programming at cultural institutions then you also
9 reduce jobs - whether you know it or not. You are
10 reducing contract educators, you're reducing the
11 number of teaching artists. People have planning for
12 their seasons for the future. These are the future
13 artists of the city that will not have these jobs
14 available to them. So the impact is far-reaching
15 beyond our institutions.

16 And just to name a few impacts directly to
17 institution that I think everyone in this room is
18 familiar with, Carnegie Hall, you'll hear from later,
19 but they have had to eliminate a program with
20 Brooklyn Public Library; Lincoln Center faces an 18%
21 reducing, so they are reducing two months of
22 programming, so that is a number of jobs that they
23 will be seeing; The Museum of City of New York has a
24 hiring freeze for five to 10 positions, they are at
25 risk of eliminating two positions, and they have

1 almost fully eliminated their credit profession
2 development programs for NYC Educators.
3

4 So, these cuts, again, are far-reaching. And I
5 can say for The Met Museum, in 2019 we had 7 million
6 visitors, in 2023 we are only at 4.3 million. We have
7 not fully recovered from the pandemic yet.

8 While we are excited that we are making progress,
9 those visitors, the demographics are very different.
10 We are not seeing the same international visitors,
11 and they are our highest spenders. So we are losing
12 revenue. So, these cuts exacerbate what we are
13 already still recovering from.

14 In addition to that, Department of Cultural
15 Affairs has one of the smallest budgets in the city.
16 So, the idea that cutting Department of Cultural
17 Affairs is going to save the City is really not fair.
18 Right? A couple of million in an over \$100 billion
19 budget (TIMER CHIMES) is not worth the devastating
20 impacts it will have on the City across all five
21 boroughs. Thank you.

22 AARON BOUSKA: Chair Rivera, Good Afternoon, my
23 name is Aaron Bouska. I am testifying today as the
24 Bronx Vice-Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group
25 (CIG) I am also... As the City Council acknowledges,

1
2 this is a critical time for the cultural community in
3 the City we all love. This crisis is especially true
4 in the Bronx for the five cultural anchors that I
5 represent today: Bronx Zoo, Bronx Historical Society,
6 Bronx Museum, NYBG, and Wave Hill.

7 Many of my colleagues have said important things,
8 but I just wanted to quantify this, in just the past
9 five months, starting in November, Mayor Adams cut
10 operating support to our five Bronx CIGs by \$3.5
11 million as part of his \$20 million in FY24 cuts to
12 the Department of Cultural Affairs. And while the
13 Mayor's cuts are serious and consequential—resulting
14 in 55 hiring freezes at NYBG, program and service
15 reductions to some of my colleagues, and even loss of
16 jobs— the mid-year cuts are only part of the story.
17 And this is my main point: Even before the Mayor's
18 cuts, the City's funding to DCLA amounted to less
19 than a quarter of 1% of the City's adopted FY24
20 budget. Organizations like ours receive more City
21 operating support in 2009 than we did at the start of
22 this fiscal year - without any adjustments for
23 inflation or necessary salary growth. Simply put
24 DCLA's budget has not grown proportionately to the
25 City's significant budget growth over the past

1 decade, a choice that economists might describe as
2 penny wise, but pound foolish. We have all heard the
3 economic reasons that we bring to the table. So all
4 of this begs the question, which the Council has been
5 really great at asking - since culture creates needed
6 revenue for the City, serves as a lifeline to
7 communities, educates and inspires the next
8 generation of scientists, artists, business people,
9 and scholars - and does so at a cost that is less
10 than it was fifteen years ago, what is the Mayor's
11 purpose in cutting culture? It simply does not make
12 sense. And, thankfully, the City Council has been
13 asking that loudly and often, and continues to do so.
14 Until such time that we receive a sensible (TIMER
15 CHIMES) answer, I respectfully request that the cuts
16 be restored and the FY25 cuts be restored as well.
17 Thank you for your time.

19 JESSICA PHILLIPS: Thank you so much for this
20 opportunity to speak today. My name is Jessica
21 Phillips, and I am here representing as a vice-chair
22 of Staten Island, which has five cultural institution
23 group members, that is the Staten Island Museum, the
24 Staten Island Children's Museum, Snug Harbor Cultural
25 Center and Botanical Gardens, the Staten Island Zoo,

1
2 and my own organization, Historic Richmond Town. And
3 I am here today to talk about the devastation of the
4 cuts to culture.

5 Historic Richmond Town has been a CIG since the
6 60's. And if you look at the years past, every time
7 there is a cut, it leaves a scar on the organization.
8 And when you think about cultural bringing a \$110
9 billion to the City's economy or 13% of its budget,
10 every scar represents a missed opportunity. And for
11 our organization, with these cuts, we had to lay off
12 13% of our workforce and reduce our public hours by
13 40%. The Staten Island Children's Museum had to
14 reduce its toddler programming by 50%. And I think to
15 myself, you know, it is an investment. We need to
16 restore the \$20 million to the Fiscal 24 Budget. And
17 we need to restore \$15.5 million to the Fiscal 24
18 Budget. In order to stabilize this sector, we need to
19 baseline the \$45 million that we beg for every year
20 at adoption. And this is not an act of charity. This
21 is an investment in our economy, in our well-being,
22 and in our identify as a city. Thank you.

23 SHANNON ROCKETT: Good afternoon. My name is
24 Shannon Rockett, and I am here today on behalf of
25

1
2 Carnegie Hall and with the Cultural Institutions
3 Group.

4 As a member of the CIG, Carnegie Hall is owned by
5 the people of New York City, public service to New
6 Yorkers as mission central, and our public-private
7 partnerships with the City, supported with City
8 dollars, and leveraged many times with private
9 funding makes that work possible. We echo and
10 wholeheartedly endorsed the requests made by my
11 colleagues in the arts and cultural sector today.

12 I want to reiterate that this is a critical time
13 for the cultural community. New York's cultural
14 community reflects institutions both big and small,
15 multi-disciplinary, and from across the city.

16 CIGs are critical drivers of the economy and the
17 City's workforce, yet baselined funding for CIGs has
18 not changed since 2009. Cuts to the budget will
19 affect livelihoods - and already has. Cuts to
20 culture are cuts to jobs. The CIGs are foundational
21 to the City's economic strength, neighborhood safety,
22 and social health. Our impact and partnerships
23 throughout the city demonstrate that investment in
24 arts and culture is a compound investment in human
25 services and our communities. Cuts to arts and

1
2 culture; therefore, have a compound negative effect
3 on our communities.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
5 And we urge you to protect and prioritize arts and
6 culture in the months ahead, thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much. I just
8 wanted ,you know, I know this is exhausting. It's not
9 sustainable, it doesn't make any sense. And I
10 appreciate that you have heard my colleagues and I
11 loud and clear, because we've asked, we don't know
12 what math they're doing over there. It doesn't make
13 any sense - for our economy, for our well-being, for
14 our identity clearly. And I just want to say ,you
15 know, I was pleased... I was lucky and privileged to
16 accompany seniors to The Met on Valentines Day,
17 because that's where I like to spend my time. You
18 know? With my seniors, my older adults. And we had...
19 There were people there that had never gone before to
20 the museum, which was amazing. But I was also kind of
21 sad, because you were closed on a Wednesday. And ,you
22 know, in order to bring us back to ,you know, our
23 full selves and the vitality that we so desperately
24 need, I mean, this budget not growing proportionately
25 is... It makes very, very... zero sense. So, I also

1
2 want to thank you for your work. All of the school
3 children that go to visit your institutions, I know a
4 lot of will be at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music)
5 tomorrow. And I want to thank you for your service to
6 the City, thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel. Our
8 next panel will be Lucy Sexton, Lisa Gold, Fran
9 Garber-Cohen, Melody Capote, Candace Thompson-
10 Zachery, Kimberly Olsen, and Gonzalo Casals.

11 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Good afternoon, thank you
12 for considering my testimony today. I am Fran Garber-
13 Cohen, President of the Regina Opera Company, which
14 offers fully staged operas with full orchestra and
15 English supertitles in Sunset Park, and underserved
16 and low-income community, as well as many free
17 concerts in public accessible spaces in Brooklyn.

18 Today I join my colleagues in asking that New
19 York City reverse the November 2023 and any further
20 budget cuts to culture. That's \$20 million in Fiscal
21 Year 2024, and a projected \$15 million in Fiscal Year
22 2025.

23 At Regina Opera, we rely heavily on funding from
24 the Department of Cultural Affairs. That fund allows
25 us to provide affordable professional level

1
2 entertainment in accessible venues for people who may
3 not otherwise attend live performances. About 65% of
4 New York City residents that attend our performances
5 are seniors who are not able to afford the high
6 ticket prices at the major opera houses or are
7 unable to travel the long distance by subway or bus.

8 Cuts in funding to DCLA hurts small organizations
9 like Regina Opera who provide services for New York
10 City senior citizens - a continuously growing
11 population. This important sector of our population
12 depends on us and on other local groups to give even
13 our own parents, and our aunts, our uncles, our
14 grandparents to get them out of the house where they
15 often live alone. At our operas and concerts, seniors
16 socialize, they make plans to meet their friends
17 often for dinner at a local restaurant after or
18 before a concert. They also make new friends,
19 expanding their social context. They remember musical
20 performances they saw years ago, and make plans to
21 attend future productions. (TIMER CHIMES) We cannot
22 let these people down because of funding cuts.

23 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you, Chair Rivers, and members
24 of the City Council for hearing my testimony. My name
25 is Lucy Sexton, and I am with the cultural advocacy

1 coalition New Yorkers for Culture & Arts. We have
2 more than 400 members from arts workers to cultural
3 organizations of every size.
4

5 Culture, as we have been hearing, is one of New
6 York City's most important economic sectors, and yet
7 we are treated like a disposable extra that can be
8 cut and defunded without doing damage to the city at
9 large. This has got to change in order to save the
10 cultural sector and the City's economy.

11 Not only has culture been cut by \$20 million this
12 year, in addition the DCLA was historically late in
13 delivering grant letters, 8 months into the fiscal
14 year that the funds were meant to serve - And-
15 reducing or fully zeroing out funding to 80% of the
16 applying cultural organizations - mostly that receive
17 regular funding.

18 This has consequences and they are not pretty.
19 Less shows mean less traffic to local businesses.
20 Less opening hours and less exhibitions means less
21 visitors staying in hotels. Less classes for youth
22 and seniors means increased isolation and decreased
23 mental health. It all adds up to a less vibrant and
24 less safe city, one which people are less likely to
25 visit, and in which families are less likely to live.

1
2 I witnessed this downward spiral in the 1970's where
3 cuts to services lead to losses for small businesses
4 and a hollowing out of the middle class tax base,
5 leading to more budget troubles for the city. Let's
6 shift course now and reverse this spiral.

7 I join my colleagues in saying that this year's
8 cut of \$20 million needs to be reversed. Next year's
9 planned cuts need to be eliminated. We need to
10 baseline the \$45 million that the Council added to
11 the cultural budget last year, and fully fund
12 cultural initiatives like CASA for school kids, SU-
13 CASA for seniors, Coalition of Theaters of Color, and
14 the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. Then we will see
15 invigorated small businesses, families remaining in
16 the city so that their kids can take world class
17 music and dance classes (TIMER CHIMES), and gains in
18 tourism, and increase in dollars to our City budget.

19 Funding culture is the right thing for culture
20 for our communities and for our city, thank you.

21 LISA GOLD: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera, members
22 of the City Council, and friends from the Department
23 of Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to
24 testify today.

1
2 My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive
3 Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance, a 40-
4 year-old nonprofit service organization that works to
5 ensure representation, equity, and opportunities for
6 Asian American and Pacific Islander artists (AAPIs)
7 and arts organizations of all disciplines across this
8 great city.

9 AAPIs are one of the most diverse and fastest
10 growing ethnic groups in New York City, making up
11 almost 18% of the city's population, yet we receive
12 fewer than 2% cultural funding. We speak more than 50
13 languages so you can understand the importance of
14 language access for our community. Not to the impact
15 tourists visiting from Asia - very helpful.

16 The arts play such a critical part in the lives
17 of our constituents, bringing understanding and
18 tolerance in a time where is it so needed. Not to
19 mention that the arts promotes holistic wellness. And
20 you know that the arts are an economic engine,
21 creating jobs, attracting investment, I don't have to
22 tell you, you know the scope.

23 So, it is for these reasons, that I join my
24 colleagues in asking the City restore any budget
25 cuts; reverse the November and Preliminary Budget

1
2 cuts; no cuts to FY25; restore and baseline the one-
3 time addition of the \$45 million to all cultural
4 groups, with the ideal goal of 1% of the city budget
5 for arts and culture; fully fund all city
6 initiatives especially the Communities Of Color
7 Nonprofit Stabilization Fund and Theaters of Color,
8 because our communities rely disproportionately on
9 public funding as opposed to predominantly white
10 institutions, we just don't have the same resources,
11 so we depend on city recourses. And, also, as you
12 stated to ensure the implementation of the
13 transparency bill 1184, so that we have accessible
14 and useful data. (TIMER CHIMES)

15 Thank you very much.

16 CANDACE THOMPSON-ZACHERY: Greetings Cultural
17 Affairs Committee, my name is Candace Thompson-
18 Zachery, she/her pronouns, and I am the Co-Executive
19 Director of Dance/NYC, a service organization
20 dedicated to the dance industry, representing
21 dancers, choreographers, dance groups, and
22 institutions.

23 Why does dance matter? We despite contributing to
24 the city's economy, about \$300 million, not including
25 for profits or individuals, we enliven public areas

1
2 and digital spaces, we engage millions of people each
3 year throughout the city, and the dance sector
4 continues to grapple from the effects of the systemic
5 inequities, and insufficient access to resources,
6 funding, and advancement. Dance is integral to New
7 York City, we are the building blocks for the
8 entertainment industry, we are a substantial builder
9 of cultural vibrancy, and diversity, and an important
10 contributor to both individual and community well-
11 being. When we have cultural assets, we know that we
12 have improved outcomes around health, schooling, and
13 personal security.

14 What is dance experiencing? Currently our
15 research suggests that dance organizations are
16 relying more heavily on contributed income. About 22%
17 nationwide of dance organizations are relying on
18 contributed income by an increase of 22% - and, then
19 in New York City by at least 8%, they're relying on
20 the government foundations. Alongside the fact that
21 earned revenue in dance is lower across the nation,
22 we are only at 69% of revenue compared to before the
23 pandemic. And 40% of New York City dance
24 organizations consider their financial health as
25 weak, and our individual workers are experiencing

1
2 hardship. About half of our workers work about four
3 jobs to earn a living, and many do not have access to
4 adequate health care or social safety nets.

5 What are we contributing? Our workers are also
6 doing the work of other essential sectors including
7 education, health care and wellness, and hospitality.
8 About 64% of dance workers who produce work are
9 shouldering the cost out of their own pockets. (TIMER
10 CHIMES) The individuals and orgs in the dance
11 community are keeping our sector alive on their own
12 backs, and we need the City's continued investment.

13 I am going to support the asks that many of my
14 colleagues have made to reverse the November and
15 Preliminary Budget cuts, to restore the baseline to
16 at least \$45 million, but we need to work towards 1%
17 for culture, to fully fund the city council
18 initiatives, and to make sure that the transparency
19 law, 1184, is implemented so that we have access to
20 the data that we need to keep DCLA accountable and to
21 partner with them on possible reforms. Thank you

22 MELODY CAPOTE: Good afternoon, Madam Chair,
23 members of the committee, and members of the City
24 Council.

1
2 My name is Melody Capote, Executive Director of
3 the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora
4 Institute. This is my first time testifying under the
5 leadership of Chairwoman Carlina Rivera, and I am so
6 honored to do so.

7 I am testifying today about what I call the tale
8 of two cities with deference to Charles Dickens. At
9 this time of the year you are bombarded with
10 testimony and letters attempting to show the impact
11 of the Cultural Affairs Budget, especially if it
12 affects tourism. And while I am a big fan of tourism,
13 I am an even bigger fan of cultural equity, racial
14 and social justice, and how it shows up or doesn't at
15 the Department of Cultural Affairs, and its impact
16 particularly on cultural organizations of color that
17 do this work every day while seeking to level the
18 playing field.

19 The Black and brown communities we serve is the
20 one hurt most by the violence that occurs in this
21 city. And it is that very community that we must
22 apply the healing balm of art and culture. And it is
23 the small community based culture and arts
24 organizations that tells our community members to
25 look at the bigger picture, to remember and honor our

1
2 ancestors, and that they, we, need to be the examples
3 for the younger generation that is confused and is
4 looking for guidance. In these challenging times of
5 deep and drastic budget cuts, we urge you to restore
6 and reverse the November and Preliminary Budget cuts
7 to culture - that is \$20 million in FY24, and \$15.5
8 million in FY25, and to fully fund The City Council
9 initiatives that include CASA for school aged
10 children, SU-CASA for older adults and seniors, The
11 Cultural Immigration Initiative, and the Coalition of
12 Theaters of Color.

13 The two of main positions are strongly held by an
14 overwhelming majority of the arts and cultural
15 organizations in this city, and it is crucial for
16 organizations of color (TIMER CHIMES) that depends on
17 initiative funding to boost and ensure their delivery
18 of services. We urge you to set up a capacity
19 building fund inside DCLA that will assist legacy
20 organizations that not only have long term
21 programmatic funding histories with the agency, but
22 have excellent track records in the field. This will
23 provide greater stability, sustainability, and
24 specifically for organizations of color, the ability
25

1
2 to effectively compete for opportunities. We can do
3 this if you fund it.

4 One of the urgent reasons for significantly
5 expanding the Cultural Immigrant Initiative is in
6 order to address that significant influx of new
7 immigrants to our city. Why can't we bring arts and
8 culture to the Roosevelt Hotel or the armories where
9 our migrant brothers, sisters, and children are
10 housed? We can, if you fund it.

11 I am going to close there. I know that I am over
12 time, thank you.

13 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Thank you, to Chair Carlina
14 Rivera, fellow Committee Members and Council staff,
15 for your passion, leadership, and support of arts,
16 culture, and arts education in New York City.

17 My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am so proud to
18 be the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in
19 Education Roundtable. We are a grassroots service
20 organization working to improve and advance arts
21 education across all five boroughs. I am here
22 testifying as part of our It Starts with the Arts
23 coalition – calling on our city to prioritize funding
24 for arts in NYC schools and communities.

1
2 As an arts service organization, I work with
3 4,000 arts workers each year, and the immediate
4 impact of the budget cuts has been keenly felt. It is
5 meant a stark uptick in the number of teaching
6 artists expressing concerns about unemployment,
7 delayed or canceled partnerships, housing
8 insecurities, and also questioning the overall
9 sustainability of working in the arts in New York
10 City. Furthermore, these cuts will have an immediate
11 and long acting impact on city's young people. Arts
12 and cultural organizations provide an essential
13 lifeline of support for New Yorkers of all ages. More
14 than 600 arts and cultural organizations partnered
15 with New York City Public Schools in the 2022-2023
16 school year. This was the most ever on record. This
17 was part attributed to federal stimulus funding,
18 which is set to expire June 30th of 2024 and part to
19 the increased funding for DCLA found last year, which
20 is now been cut and facing further cuts, and also an
21 infusion of Title IV funding, which was a one-time
22 funding within the DOE. Furthermore, cultural
23 partnerships have become even more critical as New
24 York City Public Schools experienced a loss of 425
25 fulltime certified arts teachers. That is a 14.8%

1 decrease from the 2019 to 2020 school year to our
2 most recent. So we have lost 14.8% of fulltime
3 certified arts teachers over the past three years.
4 This leaves thousands of students without a dedicated
5 arts teacher in their (TIMER CHIMES) school.
6

7 A quick note on transparency, as was brought up
8 earlier, we don't know what schools or districts have
9 been impacted, we don't know what schools have arts
10 teachers, what don't; we don't know what schools have
11 cultural partnerships, and what don't. So, that is
12 something that we ask as part of our overall asks to
13 the City Council, is to improve data transparency,
14 not only for arts education, but for arts and
15 cultural as well - prior type funding for arts
16 education, too, as well as reverse the November and
17 Preliminary Budget cuts, and restore and baseline
18 last year's one-time addition of \$45 million.

19 Additional information will be found in my written
20 testimony. Thank you so much for your time and
21 consideration.

22 GONZALO CASALS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) First
23 I want to acknowledge the honor of sharing the table
24 with these amazing cultural workers, and artists, and
25

1
2 being accepted in the Matrix here (INAUDIBLE)
3 (LAUGHTER) in New York City.

4 Thank you, Chair Rivera, and committee members
5 for allowing me to testify today. My name is Gonzalo
6 Casals, I have worked in the New York City Cultural
7 and Arts sector for over 20 years as a cultural
8 producer, educator, advocated, and policy maker.
9 Along with Mauricio Delfin, I co-Direct The Cultural
10 and Arts Policy Institute, which addresses critical
11 systemic challenges in the sector.

12 I'm not going to talk about budget cuts, because
13 everybody brilliantly spoke about the impact that
14 they have. I want to only add that the funding cuts
15 especially impact smaller community focus
16 organizations. We comprise over 65% of organizations
17 applying for CDF and rely heavily on mostly,
18 exclusively, on government funds for their operations
19 and outreach. Across the board percentages are not
20 equity, they are positive equality. We need a
21 framework for equitable distribution of resources,
22 which the Institute is working on, but a quick
23 approach to equity in the CDF program is a lower
24 percentage of cuts to small organizations as - and I
25 repeat, they only get funds from government.

1
2 But I want to talk today about solutions, and I
3 want to expand a little bit on data transparency,
4 which my colleagues have been mentioning. But,
5 without saying, no one can solve the problems we're
6 facing today alone. We all need to work together in
7 this. A critical component of the (INAUDIBLE) Report
8 is the inclusion of the data set detailing
9 allocations for CDF grantees over six fiscal years,
10 pre pandemic 2019 and 2020, pandemic 2021 and 2022,
11 and post-pandemic periods, including the
12 implementation of CDF reforms, in 2023 and 2024. The
13 challenge with the data set is it incorporates
14 aggregated, uh, not only the CDF Awards, but New York
15 City council member items. The problem with that is
16 that there's only so much we can do with that data.
17 (TIMER CHIMES) And I could go a little longer, or I
18 can just... you can see it on the report. The ongoing
19 evaluation of these evaluation of these goals, and
20 which is the (INAUDIBLE) distribution of funds cannot
21 be done. The data set also doesn't provide
22 organization's name and aggregated amount of CDF and
23 Council for each fiscal year. Is does not include tax
24 ID number, so without the tax identification number
25 we cannot cross reference this data - with an example

1
2 the Schedule C, which is a perfect example of open
3 data transparency for government. From an open data
4 perspective, the CLA (INAUDIBLE) presentation CDF
5 Awards presents significantly challenged for
6 comprehensive analysis. Even though the agencies'
7 funding allocations can be found in the City's Open
8 Data Portal, their quality requires improvement to
9 increase interpretation, and as you mentioned
10 earlier, it needs to be released in timely fashion.

11 I finish with this - with the inability to
12 dissect these allocations by organizational size,
13 location, discipline, and the race and ethnicity of
14 the organizations leadership and communities they
15 serve, the stakeholders are left with less nuanced
16 understanding of the funding impacts. The limitation
17 underscores a critical area of improvement in open
18 data quality, it highlights the need of more robust
19 reporting mechanisms to enable a deeper more informed
20 analysis of cultural and arts local public funding
21 and distribution across the City's diverse cultural
22 landscape.

23 I want to finish with an invitation to the City
24 Council, to the Department of Cultural Affairs to
25 join the sector in working together to, first of all,

1
2 in compliance with the New York City Open Data Law,
3 to build a standard for data in which we can all
4 access, and we can all evaluate the impact that the
5 data New York City public finding has in the sector.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you. I am very very
8 honored to have you here, of course. Oh yes please,
9 Council Member Brewer?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Gonzalo. As you
11 heard earlier and you know there has not been a real
12 study on economics of this. Aare you going to do one?
13 Should the Port Authority do one? The Controller?
14 Would it help, et cetera? Because you obviously are
15 thinking about it in your testimony.

16 GONZALO CASALS: We just launched the institute,
17 and we'll have our first event on Tuesday at Bric
18 House, that is The Creation and Open Data Agenda for
19 Arts And Culture in New York City - everybody's
20 invited. We are seeking funding to do this type of
21 reports, but we don't only need the report, because
22 the report can be done by any of us if the data is
23 available, is explicit, you know, it can be used to
24 provide interpretation. We want to work with the
25 Administration in order to do to create... for

1
2 everybody to access that data. And, again, the
3 Schedule C, uh, data that is available through the
4 Council's website is an example of the detailed
5 amount of data that you need in order to do these
6 kind of reports.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Alright, thank you.

8 GONZALO CASALS: Excuse me, also if we wanted to
9 access some of this data, I try and we can buy it in
10 organizations like Candid for a minimum of \$3,500,
11 right, when we should be able to access these for
12 free.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well you know who wrote
14 the Open Data Bill, right?

15 GONZALO CASALS: Yes!

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

17 (LAUGHTER)

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, Gale.

19 I just... Thank you so much, I don't even think
20 you mentioned you were the former commissioner, so we
21 appreciate your perspective. And, also, that
22 invitation, I just want to give credit where it's
23 due, the current commissioner is still here, and is
24 still listening. So, I just want to give you credit,
25 uh, Commissioner Cumbo.

1
2 But, I just want to thank you all. I think, ,you
3 know, CASA, SU-CASA, The Cultural Immigrant
4 Initiative, Coalition of Theaters of Color, I think
5 we know what the data would say. Right? It supports
6 small business, we are creating jobs, we are
7 attaching economic investment. This is about our
8 health, schooling, our personal security, I think you
9 all just laid that out so beautifully. And the
10 cultural equity of it, the racial and social justice
11 and how it actually shows up in DCLA remains to be
12 seen. And thank you for superficially mentioning a
13 capacity building fund within the organization to
14 help legacy organizations - and others- effectively
15 compete. I think that is really, really important.
16 And I think we all know, and we will hear from more
17 individuals and organizations, but these cuts are
18 effecting really the community focused organizations.
19 So, thank you all for your testimony and for your
20 partnership.

21 PANEL: Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel.

23 Our next panel will be Kate Madigan, Judith
24 Insell, Ryan Gilliam, Ted Stabile, Tom Angelo, and
25 Traci Barrow.

1
2 JUDITH INSELL: Good afternoon, honorable
3 Committee Chair Rivera, and City Council Members. My
4 name is Judith Insell, and I am the Executive
5 Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble, a 52-year-old
6 organization that annually provides over 20,000
7 residents of the Bronx with free-of-charge live
8 performances presented by professional musicians;
9 employing Local 802 members in multiple music genres
10 like classical, jazz, and Latin Jazz.

11 This fiscal year's deep funding cuts to the
12 Department of Culturally Affairs are resulting in the
13 elimination of jobs and public programming at
14 cultural institutions, both leading to the loss of
15 vital wages for cultural workers like Bronx based
16 artists.

17 Our organization has received annual funding from
18 the DCLA for over 40 years, until this fiscal year,
19 with us being completely zeroed out of the Cultural
20 Development Fund. As a direct result, we are facing
21 the unfamiliar challenges of not employing of all
22 scheduled Bronx based musicians, and canceling
23 scheduled live performances for Bronx neighborhoods.
24 We urge Mayor Adams and he City Council to approach
25 this upcoming funding cycle and beyond with the

1
2 understanding that the cultural sector of New York
3 City is an industry that drives the economic engine
4 of business and supports the building of community by
5 providing safe spaces for citizens to come together
6 in the Bronx and all boroughs.

7 Thank you for providing me with the opportunity
8 to speak to you today. The current crisis that the
9 cultural sector is facing is crippling all nonprofit
10 arts institutions in New York City, and it will have
11 an overall negative effect on the city's (TIMER
12 CHIMES) economy. The Bronx Arts Ensemble urges you to
13 remember one thing when tackling the FY25 Cultural
14 Budget, allocating funding for neighborhood arts
15 nonprofit institutions is not optional - it's
16 essential. Thank you.

17 KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon, Committee Chair
18 Rivera, present council members, and staff. My name
19 is Kate Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator for
20 The Public Theater. I am here to testify on the
21 impacts of the unrestored FY24 PEG cuts to the CIGs,
22 the hopes for the Preliminary Budget for FY 2025, and
23 to request your conditioned advocacy and support for
24 the arts and culture sector. We are grateful there
25 will not be an April round of PEG cuts, however; we

1 must continue to highlight the need to reverse the
2 \$20 million PEG cuts that have already been
3 implemented as a part of FY24 and the proposed
4 Preliminary Budget cuts for FY25. Furthermore, we are
5 asking the Administration to restore and baseline the
6 \$45 million one-time addition to CIGs and programs.
7 It is encouraging to hear verbal support from our
8 allies, but without fiscal action on the Mayor's
9 part, this city's cultural nonprofit sector will
10 become more unsustainable and eventually collapse.
11 The post pandemic funding levels were barely suited
12 to sustain the industry, and with the City relying on
13 the cultural tourism we bring in, the dwindling
14 investments in culture some five budget cycles later
15 is a real shame on the city government side. As our
16 industry generates nearly \$200 billion in revenue,
17 the City's reinvestment rate of less than 1% is
18 trivial.
19

20 The Public Theater has seen \$100,00 cut to our
21 operating funds exacerbating the financial challenges
22 we already face. Every cent is crucial to protecting
23 jobs and providing free and accessible programming,
24 which is vital for the cultural vibrancy of this
25 city. From free and accessible programming such free

1
2 Shakespeare in the Park to low-cost off Broadway
3 shows, the Public Theater has cemented its reputation
4 as an incubator for innovative productions, up and
5 coming playwrights, breakout actors, and premier
6 theater professionals. Two new shows originally
7 produced by The Public are being featured in this
8 Broadway season: Hell's Kitchen and Suffs. Our
9 production of Hamilton is still running and brining
10 tourists to New York City eight years after (TIMER
11 CHIMES) it initially opened in Broadway. And just one
12 more sentence before I go. The Public is grateful to
13 our government supporters that listen to our evidence
14 and head our appeals. Nevertheless, without fiscal
15 action, the nonprofit component of New York City's
16 arts and culture industry will continue to struggle
17 and may eventually fail and result in an arts culture
18 landscape that is less equitable, diverse, and
19 accessible. Thank you so much for your attention.

20 TED STABILE: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera, and
21 all present city council members, and thank you for
22 orchestrating this hearing today.

23 My name is Ted Stabile, I am a resident of Sunset
24 Park, Brooklyn testifying for the protection and
25 restoration of the Sunset Park Library's budget.

1 Growing up, I relied heavily on libraries, they
2 were and currently are a sanctuary of free, safe
3 internet access and self-paced study. The helpful
4 staff and late night hours at these libraries ensure
5 that I did not fall behind academically.
6

7 The Sunset Park branch specially is competent,
8 modern, and accessible. This library too serves as a
9 sanctuary for curated learning, growth, and offers
10 diverse, multilingual community enrichment programs
11 accessible for all communities at any stage of their
12 studies, career, or community involvement. This
13 library helps to connect people to resources that can
14 optimize their financial and social standings from
15 tax preparation, citizenship exam preparation, and
16 connecting them to affordable vital utilities such as
17 internet access.

18 Protecting the budget now is a stable investment.
19 The time spent by citizens in libraries will
20 translate into a workforce equipped with more
21 competent skills, enabling more fulfilling,
22 lucrative, and productive careers within New York
23 City. The knowledge gained from the library converts
24 into dividends that a person then returns to their
25 employer and the community at large. Moreover, budget

1 protection services as a preventive measure
2 mitigating situations where children within our city
3 may lack safe enriching options outside the home to
4 nurture their passions and improve their
5 socialization. Avoiding damage to the Library's
6 budget now is the prevention of avoidable but
7 crippling social and economic loss that a future with
8 a gutted Library System would create - from children
9 falling behind in school to citizens fighting through
10 unnecessary barriers while looking for employment.

12 Finally, with the current age of AI, robust
13 media, digital, and civic literacy will be vital to
14 adapting to the immanent future. The potential AI and
15 (INAUDIBLE) cases do not minimize the relevance of a
16 library and a community, rather (TIMER CHIMES) it
17 cements its importance as an effective resource to
18 grow literacy in these capacities. The library serves
19 as the optimal space outside of school for
20 individuals to improve themselves in the capacity
21 they choose, without the overhead of needing to
22 filter out misinformation, worry about their privacy,
23 or face the distractions from invasive
24 advertisements.

1
2 Libraries are not just buildings to rent books,
3 as you have seen from everyone's testimonies they are
4 cornerstones for communities. Securing adequate
5 funding and restoring funding and expanding hours
6 will empower many to thrive and contribute not only
7 to Sunset Park's local community, but New York City
8 at large. Thank you.

9 RYAN GILLIAM: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera,
10 members of the Council. My name is Ryan Gilliam, I am
11 the Executive Director of Fourth Arts Block or
12 FABnyc and Downtown Art. But, today, I just would
13 like to speak to you as a working artist, who has
14 spent most of my time working with the people of the
15 Lower East Side. I have been to these kinds of
16 hearings before, they seem to be an annual event.
17 And, so, I have to ask myself why is it so hard to
18 fund arts and culture? And I think it is because we
19 know in hearts that people will always make art. No
20 matter what happens, no matter how hard you make it,
21 how little money you provide for it, people will make
22 art. You can make art suffer, you can make art
23 limited, you can deprive students from learning about
24 it, you can make it so only wealthy people can make
25 art during working hours, but you cannot outright

1 kill it. Art will always be made, because us people
2 were hardwired to create. And why should be pay for
3 something that we will get for free? We are all
4 artists, and we all will be artists whether there is
5 funding or not. Given our complete unwillingness to
6 stop making art, even in the worst of circumstances,
7 I think we have to assume that somehow art is
8 necessary. Our problem is that we are not yet smart
9 enough to say why it's necessary in a way that
10 satisfies capitalism. Honestly, capitalism doesn't
11 seem to have a clue how to deal with our artistic
12 natures. And I think sometimes what if we had enough?
13 What if we had decent housing, food, health care,
14 education, what if we reached that blessed land? What
15 would we do with ourselves? Hell, we'd make art. Yes,
16 probably a few other things, too, but I think we'd
17 see an explosion of art and creativity, so maybe the
18 end goal of a successful economy is that we can all
19 finally be artists.

21 I am hoping that one day we won't have to answer
22 why art is important by pointing to its secondary
23 effects like thriving tourism, better math scores,
24 and an uplift to the city's economy. We will actually
25 have an answer (TIMER CHIMES) with the scientific

1
2 proof our culture respects, because, right now, we
3 know art making is important, we know it here, but
4 like other things we know here, our explanations
5 don't seem to satisfy investors.

6 I would love to see the day when art is no longer
7 dessert, desirable but slightly suspect at the bottom
8 of the menu to be considered after all other needs
9 are met, but instead we manage to evolve and learn to
10 trust when our body and soul declare that art is
11 nourishing, that it strengthens and sustains us, that
12 it should truly be at the table - even if our
13 calculating mind can't quite figure out why.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, very, very much. I
15 just want to say, I am glad that you mentioned AI,
16 this is something they were also thinking about for a
17 future hearing. I know it is just one small component
18 of your very compelling testimony, but I just think
19 there are a lot factors going on right now that are
20 affecting the arts community, that we have to focus
21 on.

22 And just in terms of what you all have done, I
23 know many of you and your work and how you have
24 provided jobs, but also helped launch careers, and
25 interests, and passions, and I have not seen Suffis,

1
2 but I saw my first play related to women's movement
3 and labor rights at Downtown Art, featuring an all
4 female ensemble, so I want to thank you all for that
5 - though I did take my sister to see Fat Ham and she
6 actually like it, and it's very hard to please her.

7 So, I just want to thank all of you so, so much.
8 And I hope that we can have a different conversation
9 in the very, very near future. And I will be working
10 every day to try to get there, thank you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Also, Judith, you were
12 very good on NY1 last night.

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Yes, you would excellent. I
14 told you that already, though.

15 UNKNOWN: (NO MIC) (INAUDIBLE) arts and culture
16 (INAUDIBLE)

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panel will be Lenore
18 Davis, Gina Tribotti, Lisa Alpert, Juliana Cope,
19 Benjamin Spierman, and Risa Shoup.

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Who would like to start?

21 BENJAMIN SPIERMAN: Good afternoon, my name is
22 Benjamin Spierman, and I serve as General Director of
23 The Bronx Opera Company. My first time testifying to
24 a group like this was at 18 years old, terrified, to
25

1
2 the Board of Estimates - so that shows you how long
3 ago it was.

4 I keep hearing this number... this ratio of 99 to
5 1, what scary is that doesn't seem to be high enough
6 for anybody. What are we supposed to do, how much
7 more can we do with what we are given?

8 Bronx Opera is in the midst of our 57th season,
9 and we are the only opera company other than our
10 much, much larger sibling at Lincoln Center, to
11 produce opera in each year since our founding. We
12 present fully staged productions in English at our
13 accessible space, The Lovinger Theatre at Lehman
14 College. And we have also worked through all of the
15 initiatives as well through SU-CASA, through CASA,
16 through Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and, of
17 course, we are funded via the CDF.

18 We all know the financial ask, we've all said it
19 a thousand times. And it has come to our direction
20 from you, Council Member Rivera - and thank you so
21 much for hosting this and giving us all a chance to
22 say what we think and feel.

23 I am here to very simply say that the choices
24 made in this current City budget have put our company
25 in an incredibly difficult position. In addition, the

1 delay in informing us, which is part of what puts us
2 in such a difficult position, has made things harder
3 by depriving us of the ability to plan. We got a
4 \$20,000 cut. Well, what does that mean? It means
5 fewer orchestra rehearsals; it means two fewer days
6 on stage; it means people bringing their own costumes
7 instead of us being able to make them; it means that
8 there is no makeup or wardrobe specialists backstage.
9 What do all of these things mean? Fewer people being
10 employed; fewer people being able to pay taxes in New
11 York City; to buy a MetroCard or OMNI swipe or
12 whatever (TIMER CHIMES) we're doing now. It means
13 people leave New York. Our sector has seen an exodus
14 - our sector being the theatrical operatic sector -
15 seeing a tremendous exodus from this city. And people
16 just... And it happened during the pandemic, and it
17 has continued, and it has escalated if anything since
18 then. What we are doing is giving fewer people the
19 reason to move to New York City. Fewer people will
20 come here. There are other places in the country to
21 go to do theater and opera. We are making New York a
22 less livable place, and that should scare us a lot
23 more than it seems like it does. Thank you.

1
2 GINA TRIBOTTI: Thank you Committee Chair Rivera
3 and Council Members of the Committee for the
4 opportunity to testify today. My name is Gina
5 Tribotti, and I am the Development Manager at the
6 International Studio & Curatorial Program. I am here
7 to advocate for the reversal of budget cuts to the
8 DCLA and for the full restoration of funding for City
9 Council initiatives.

10 I am really proud to be in a room where we all
11 share a deep appreciation for the arts and culture
12 and the value it brings to our communities. Art
13 provides a pathway to expand their own social
14 horizons—experiencing more, appreciating more, and
15 empathizing more. Tumultuous times justify more
16 funding for arts, not less.

17 As the largest arts and cultural organization in
18 East Williamsburg, ISCP brings together 80
19 international and 15 New York-based artists each
20 year, welcoming over 10,000 visitors, and nurturing
21 the cross-fertilizations that emerge when people from
22 diverse backgrounds come together. Our programs
23 foster a more inclusive and diverse cultural
24 community and provide transformative opportunities
25 for local residents through artist residencies, paid

1
2 internships, high school visits, and free cultural
3 education.

4 Our Ground Floor Program addresses a lack of
5 affordable space by providing subsidized studios for
6 New York artists, and our Vision Fund provides fully-
7 funded residencies for BIPOC artists from across the
8 United States.

9 For 30 years, ISCP has safeguarded freedom of
10 expression by providing refuge to artists under
11 threat for ideas expressed in their work. In recent
12 years, this has included supporting the residency of
13 an asylum seeker from Russia, who fled the abuses he
14 suffered there as a queer artist; granting a
15 residency to an Afghani artist forced to flee after a
16 performance about her experience living in a male-
17 dominated society, and o hosting a talk about the
18 current cultural climate of Iran by an artist whose
19 images of political unrest have never been shown in
20 her home country.

21 As socio-political tensions and cultural
22 inequities deepen, it's imperative that the City
23 continues to protect the expressive capabilities of
24 artists. Public investment ensures that wealth is not
25 a prerequisite for working in creative fields. If we

1
2 are not supporting the work of a wide range of
3 people, we deny ourselves from seeing society,
4 history, and culture for what it is (TIMER CHIMES)
5 and for what it could be. Thank you.

6 LENORE DAVIS: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera,
7 Council Member Brewer.

8 I am Lenore Davis, Chair of the Symphony Space
9 Board. Symphony Space is a performing arts and arts
10 education institution located at 95th Street and
11 Broadway, but our programs and their impact reach far
12 beyond our immediate geography. Symphony Space is
13 known for its acceptability and warmth as well as for
14 our groundbreaking programs, including selective
15 shorts literary series, wall to wall marathons, music
16 residencies, and film programs. We present original,
17 affordable -often free- programming, not only on our
18 two stages but throughout the country and the world
19 via live stream, tours, public radio broadcasts, and
20 podcasts. This year, our audience came to us from
21 every borough across the city - all 50 states and 71
22 countries around the world. Our staff of 151 and the
23 more than 600 artists we presented on our stages this
24 year, hailed from all five boroughs. And, then, there
25 are our classrooms, Symphony Spaces' arts education

1
2 program, Global Arts, welcomed over 15,000 New York
3 City Public School students in 50 schools to explore
4 and celebrate the history and cultures of Native
5 America, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. That is
6 more than 15,000 students this year alone.

7 Our adult literacy program, *All Write!*, now in
8 its 30th year, served over 1,400 adult learners this
9 past year alone. *All Write!* took place in 10 public
10 libraries, on five CUNY campuses, at two DOE Adult
11 Learning Centers, and in six community organizations
12 throughout Brookly, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens.
13 All completely free of charge for the students.

14 So, those are the statistics, the geographical
15 demographics, but to give you a glimpse of this
16 program's lifechanging impact, I would like to share
17 a quote from one of our adult students, "I was
18 illiterate my entire life. I didn't know where to
19 start, I didn't know how to start. *All Write!* opened
20 up a whole new world for me." (TIMER CHIMES) And as
21 you know, that is what the arts do. They open up a
22 whole world.

23 The support of The City Council and this
24 committee is crucial as we all collectively keep New
25

1
2 York City the most vibrant arts landscape in the
3 world. Thank you.

4 LISA ALPERT: Hi, Chair Rivera, and Council Member
5 Brewer, thanks for sticking with us! It's a long
6 time.

7 My name is Lisa Alpert, and I am the Senior Vice
8 President of Development and Programming at Green-
9 Wood in Brooklyn.

10 So, I am going to start with the obvious, Green-
11 Wood is a cemetery, and we are a national historic
12 landmark, and we cover a really, really big piece of
13 land in South Brooklyn - we just under 500 acres. And
14 then there is the less obvious, that Green-Wood is a
15 cultural institution. I have been wracking my brain
16 to make sure I am going, to in my few minutes, say
17 something that is not going to bore you and really
18 captures your attention. But, then I thought how can
19 I possibly bore you! Green-Wood is a fascinating non
20 traditional and much loved cultural space.

21 I am going to give you some numbers to back up my
22 main theme, that Green-Wood is one of the New York
23 City's major cultural institutions in terms of the
24 numbers we serve and the depth of our programming,
25 and yet we have not received discretionary funding

1
2 from the City Council in over 10 years. We very much
3 hope that we can change that this year. We need
4 support for DCLA and the City Council to help us
5 continue to serve New Yorkers.

6 So, what happens in Green-Wood? So much! Art
7 installations, walking tours, trolley tours, dance
8 performances, artists in residence, the moss, outdoor
9 films, concerts in the catacombs, Juneteenth program,
10 Day of the Dead, et cetera, et cetera.

11 We are not a public park or an indoor museum,
12 because we basically act like both of them. And we
13 are located in an area that is severely lacking in
14 cultural institutions, so Green-Wood has taken on
15 that role for the residents of Sunset Park, Borough
16 Park, Kensington, Ditmas Park, and more.

17 Our attendance numbers annually are 450,000
18 visitors and 40,000 are served by our programs. We
19 are open seven days a week until 7:00 p.m. daily at
20 no cost to the public.

21 So, Chair Rivera and committee members, (TIMER
22 CHIMES) we are excited to support your vision for
23 cultural programming, and we look forward to working
24 with you to support arts and culture in New York
25 City.

1
2 JULIANA COPE: Good afternoon, almost evening,
3 everyone.

4 I am Julian Cope from Mind-Builders Creative Arts
5 Center, I am the Assistant Executive Director for
6 Development and External Affairs. And, Chair Rivera,
7 Council Member Brewer, it is honor to be here with
8 colleagues. I will try to cut to the point.

9 Mind-Builders has been... Was founded in 1978. We
10 are located in North East Bronx, and we are very
11 fortunate to have longstanding support from the
12 Department of Cultural Affairs as well as the Council
13 for both programming and capital. We are very fortune
14 to own our building. I just want to emphasize that.
15 It would not have been possible, the gut renovations
16 for our building would not have been possible without
17 funding from DCLA I am going to go off script a
18 little bit just that I make some different points
19 than my colleagues.

20 One of the things I wanted to just (INAUDIBLE)
21 out from listening to others today, is that we are
22 part of not just the ecosystem in terms of local
23 businesses and hiring staff, but we simply would not
24 be able to function as an institution without our
25 colleagues in the field. We hire over 53 artists,

1 including our administrative staff who are mostly
2 artists themselves. So whether it's musicians,
3 actors, dancers, our collaborations that impact our
4 programs with The Joyce, New York Botanic Gardens,
5 opportunities for our students to perform across the
6 City, those all come through our colleagues in the
7 field who are also funded by the Department of
8 Cultural Affairs.
9

10 I just want to share one (TIMER CHIMES) quick
11 impact story. Thanks in part to Department of
12 Cultural Affairs and the New York City Council, our
13 stage band, for example, was expanded from 10 to 23
14 participants this year, aging to 10 to 73. They do
15 performances all over the city. This band is not just
16 a training ground for young musicians. To quote our
17 band pianists, "Music is not just an art in itself,
18 but a way to connect to the people around us." So
19 your support enables us to provide this program and
20 also serve thousands of New Yorkers, primarily from
21 the Bronx, and we call upon the City to continue your
22 ongoing investment in the cultural sector, supporting
23 work that transforms lives, neighborhoods, and
24 cities.
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CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you to this panel. I agree, a less livable city is not an option. And that you are really also creating the space to have these conversations - just what we read in the paper, and the wars abroad, and how it's affecting us just personally and in our communities, and I don't think there is... I know the commissioner agrees that there is no one else creating this space to have this kind of dialogue. And your mention of young people - also 73-year-olds, but that the tens of thousands of students and how we are opening up the whole world for them and the working artists that this work supports is so important.

And, Lisa, don't forget to mention the ghosts!

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: The pioneering iconic ghosts from Greenwood.

LISA ALPERT: (NO MIC) Well, they testified earlier, I don't know if you (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

(LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Yeah, I mean, that's... I feel like that's... Will get people right through the door.

1
2 LISA ALPERT: (NO MIC) The legacy of people that
3 have gone before us, (INAUDIBLE)

4 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Alright, I'll bring it up in
5 negotiations. (LAUGHTER) You know, you have some
6 incredible people buried there.

7 LISA ALPERT: Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: That's fact.

9 So, thank you all. Thank you all for your
10 testimony and a lot of love for the Bronx, too,
11 because they deserve so much more, thank you.

12 PANEL: Thank you

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, our last in person panel
14 will be Gregory J. Morris, Habiba Halal
15 (phonetic) from Canvas Institute, I'm sorry if I say
16 your name wrong, Bobby Digi Oliss, and Tod Stewart.

17 TODD SEWARD: Good afternoon. Good afternoon,
18 Chair Rivera, esteemed members of the City Council,
19 and Commissioner Cumbo.

20 My name is Todd Seward, and I have the privilege
21 for serving as Director of Community Engagement for
22 the Universal Temple of the Arts. We were founded in
23 1967 by artists, teachers, and philosophers along
24 with a group of young artists. We pioneered as one of
25 the first nonprofit organizations of its kind in

1
2 Staten Island to serve as a resource and platform for
3 artists of color and the community from a
4 multicultural perspective. Founding members include
5 the late Sajda Musawwir Ladner, who served as UTA's
6 Artistic and Executive Director from 1986 to 2021.

7 UTA works with professional artists to provide
8 instruction in and exposure to, an eclectic blend of
9 fine and performing arts, cultural, educational and
10 social programs for children and adults. Our
11 signature programs include visual arts, sewing,
12 music, vocal and dance training. These classes are
13 offered in schools, museums, homeless shelters, group
14 homes, senior citizen and community centers located
15 across Staten Island. UTA is, in fact, one of few
16 organizations providing mobile arts and cultural
17 courses in an effort to make them more accessible to
18 underserved populations.

19 In 1988 the organization founded the Staten
20 Island Jazz Festival and has presented this signature
21 high quality cultural staple for 35 years, the
22 longest running jazz festival in the state of New
23 York. This festival has brought worldclass jazz
24 musicians including NEA Jazz Masters and Grammy
25 winning artists to the Staten Island local community

1
2 (TIMER CHIMES). It has been a vehicle for tourism and
3 is a cultural draw for people from all five boroughs.
4 For nearly two decades, with the support of CDF
5 funding the Department of Cultural Affairs. In
6 partnership with the City Council, UTA has been able
7 to provide these services to the community for free
8 or at a very low cost. And we urge The City Council
9 to continue to advocate on the behalf of small
10 community based organizations, like ourselves, to
11 continue the support you have given us over the
12 years. Thank you.

13 GREGOR MORRIS: Thank you, Chair Rivera, I know it
14 has been a long day.

15 My name is Greg Morris, I am the lead for the New
16 York City Employment and Training Coalition, that is
17 220 workforce development providing organizations in
18 New York City that focus on job training and
19 readiness. The role of the New York City Employee
20 Training Coalition is to track the investments the
21 City makes in workforce development; to serve as a
22 resource to employers; and to advocate for the for
23 the budgetary, legislative, and compliance related
24 efforts that put New Yorkers on paths to good jobs,
25 quality wages, able to live in the city. The folks

1
2 that our providers work with the most are women,
3 young adults, NYCHA residents, justice impacted
4 individuals, immigrants, refugees, and asylum
5 seekers.

6 I am not going to bother with the written
7 testimony, because that can be sat and looked at at
8 your leisure, and I'm covering ground that we have
9 already heard. I just wanted to be here today to say
10 that these cultural institutions and our libraries
11 are an economic engine for this city. This workforce
12 is deserves wages of quality that allow them to be
13 successful. These institutions deserve the operate.
14 They are homes to digital literacy, access arts and
15 culture. I want to give a shoutout to Council Member
16 Hudson earlier for highlighting the CUNY Cultural
17 Corps, which is an invaluable program. (INAUDIBLE) a
18 pathway for young adults to find careers in the arts.
19 I'm not sure why that was put on pause.

20 But, more than anything else, I just want to say
21 this one thing we often preach to each other... I
22 want to thank Commissioner Cumbo, because it is very
23 rare that any government official sits through this
24 and listens. And in this circumstance if I could just
25 button this up to say, I think the cultural

1
2 institutions, the libraries, these are the smartest,
3 most dynamic, innovative and creative people in the
4 city. I think our pathways to figuring out how
5 budgets can work requires us to be in the same room
6 as the Administration to solve the problems that
7 plague us. So, thank you. And, by the way, just not
8 for nothing, a lot of times the coalition members
9 feel like they shouldn't testify, because it gets
10 overwhelming, or it strange, or they have to wait
11 (TIMER CHIMES) and they always say, but the
12 government folks are never in the room. And now I can
13 tell them, yes, they are. Thank you. And thank you.

14 (APPLAUSE)

15 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Alright. Well, thank you very
16 much, and thank you for mentioning justice impacted
17 individuals and the work there. I have been meaning
18 to bring that up... and CUNY. I think Commissioner
19 Cumbo would say this is the smartest most dynamic
20 innovative sector. I think I have heard those words
21 almost exactly. So, thank you both for your
22 testimony. Thank you.

23 PANEL: Thank you.

24

25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, this concludes our
3 in-person testimony, and we will now transition to
4 our virtual panelists.

5 Once your name is called a member of the staff
6 will unmute you, and the Sergeant at Arms will set
7 the timer and give you the go ahead to begin.

8 Our first remote panel will be Alejandro Epifanio
9 Torres, Sophia Harrison, Cheryl Warfield, Elzbieta
10 Krawczuk, Nicole Touzien, and Lacy Tauber.

11 Alejandro, you may begin when the sergeant starts
12 your clock.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is started.

14 ALEJANDRO EPIFANIO TORRES: Good evening, Chair
15 Rivera, members of the Committee, esteemed
16 colleagues, and dedicated community members. Today I
17 stand before you as the Executive and Artistic
18 Director of Loisaida, Inc. Arts & Culture Center, a
19 Puerto Rican multidisciplinary arts and culture
20 community development organization serving residents
21 of the Lower East Side and beyond since 1979. Our
22 home Loisaida Center provides space, mentorship,
23 technical resources for artists, and opportunities
24 for emerging community leaders, artists, and creators
25 working in diverse disciplines. We promote a vibrant

1
2 social and community life and serve as community
3 development incubator for self-sustainable projects
4 and grassroots initiatives.

5 I also stand before you as a steward of our
6 shared cultural heritage and a defender of the arts,
7 culture, and education, echoing the voices of those
8 who have historically championed the cause of justice
9 and community empowerment. In the spirit of exemplary
10 testimonies that have preceded me, I seek to
11 illuminate the crucial role of Loisaída and
12 underscore the dire implications of the proposed
13 budget cuts for community based organizations. Though
14 not a member of the esteemed Cultural Institutions
15 Group, the Loisaída Center is a small but mighty
16 beacon of cultural, social, and environmental justice
17 in our neighborhoods embodying the resilience and
18 diversity that are the hallmarks of our community.
19 Initiatives, including the Media Used for Justice
20 Equity and Respect (M.U.J.E.R.), the Loisaída
21 artistic residency program, The Digital Inclusion for
22 Access and Equity, and the Cultural Immigrant
23 Initiatives are not merely programs but lifelines for
24 many poor and low income multigenerational residents
25 and constituents of our neighborhood. They foster an

1
2 environment where culture thrives, where ecological,
3 digital literacy become a bridge to opportunity, and
4 where artists of color find their haven for their
5 voices contributing richly to the activism and
6 cultural narrative of our time. (TIMER CHIMES)

7 As we face the shadow of budget reductions from
8 the (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 ALEJANDRO EPIFANIO TORRES: (INAUDIBLE) I am
11 reminded of the words of those who stood in similar
12 positions advocating for the preservation of values
13 that define us. Therefore, I implore you to see
14 beyond the numbers to the lives enriched, the voices
15 empowered, and the community uplifted by the work of
16 Loisaída and all other small cultural development
17 organizations. We are ready to collaborate, innovate,
18 and find ways to sustain our mission in the face of
19 these challenges. Let us draw inspiration from the
20 powerful testimonies of the past and move forward
21 with a shared commitment to a future where culture,
22 community, and environmental stewardship are valued
23 and seen as essential to the very fabric of our
24 society.

1
2 In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to
3 testify today, and hope that together we can navigate
4 these challenging times and emerge stronger ensuring
5 organizations like Loisaída can continue to make
6 meaningful differences in the lives of those we
7 serve, thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

9 Sophia, you may begin when the sergeant starts
10 your clock.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 SOPHIA HARRISON: Thank you, Chair Rivera, and
13 council members present for allowing us to testify
14 via Zoom, as our organization does not have the
15 capacity to testify in person.

16 I am Sophia Harrison, the founder and Executive
17 Director of Art's House Schools of Music, Dance, and
18 Fine Arts established in October of 2005.

19 Art's House Schools' mission is to provide
20 culture in the humanities for children in Coney
21 Island community while providing them with the
22 opportunity to build self-esteem and self-confidence
23 and develop poise, grace, and balance. Art's House
24 Schools is a unique institution in the Coney Island
25 community and one of its longest-standing CBOs for

1 children providing formal music, dance, and art
2 training and instruction to children ages 3 to 17,
3 year-round, during after-school and out-of-school
4 times.
5

6 I want to state and reiterate to our council and
7 administration that cultural organizations are small
8 businesses. We serve and employ while the IRS has
9 granted us tax exemption, and we are eligible to
10 apply for public and private funding, that is where
11 our benefits mostly stop. As cultural organizations
12 in New York City, we are responsible for all the
13 expenses that for profit companies are liable for,
14 and unlike many social service organizations through
15 our five boroughs, that house their programs in NYCHA
16 buildings and public schools, most of the cultural
17 organizations rent commercial space. We are subject
18 to extremely high rent in all neighborhoods
19 throughout the city. Art's House Schools (INAUDIBLE)
20 our rent is \$6,750 monthly for 1,100 square feet.
21 Cultural organizations are liable for commercial and
22 liability insurance, which have all increased since
23 2020 - and utilities. These costs are nonnegotiable,
24 if we were a for profit entities, we would just
25 increase our costs for service without a thought.

1
2 However, our missions and visions are to provide low
3 cost and no cost exposure to cultural arts and arts
4 education to all residents of New York City,
5 especially our children and senior citizens.

6 If the cuts continue and budgets to do not
7 increase (TIMER CHIMES) small cultural organizations
8 will have to close. As a benefactor... (CROSS-TALK)

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired, thank
10 you...

11 SOPHIA HARRISON: of the grant reforms of the CDF
12 in 2022, it is evident that cutting budget
13 (INAUDIBLE) creates a (INAUDIBLE) mentality in the
14 city. Cutting the already minimal budget is
15 disheartening and financially threatening. If the
16 City truly wants to invest in new Black, Indigenous,
17 and people of color funded and run organizations, now
18 is not the time to cut our budget and to keep it low.
19 The Cultural Development Fund does not fund
20 organizations, The Cultural Development Fund supports
21 the City's most vulnerable residents - children,
22 senior citizens, and low income individuals and
23 families. I am asking for the reversal of the
24 November and Preliminary Budget cuts to Culture -
25 that is \$20 million in FY24 and \$15.5 million in

1
2 FY25; restore and baseline last year's one-time
3 addition of \$45 million for CIGs and all cultural
4 groups across the city; fully fund cultural
5 initiatives including CASA for Children, SU-CASA for
6 seniors, the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and the
7 Coalition of Theaters of Color. Thank you

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

9 Cheryl, you may begin when the sergeant starts
10 your clock.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 CHERYL WARFIELD: Good evening, thank you, Chair
13 Rivera, committee, and council members, including my
14 own Council Member, Gale Brewer, for the opportunity
15 testify before this body on behalf of arts and
16 culture.

17 I am Cheryl Warfield, a professional opera singer
18 and teaching artist, and both a union and independent
19 artist. I am also the founder of Vocal Artistry and
20 Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment (ADVANCE), a 501(c)
21 3 non-profit and the artistic director of MORE Opera
22 which showcase outstanding and diverse talent while
23 providing culturally responsive outreach and
24 educational programming to youth and seniors in
25 underserved communities in Manhattan and the Bronx. I

1
2 have also been a CDF panelist for the past two years
3 and previously sat on panels for the Lower Manhattan
4 Cultural Council.

5 Small minority-led organizations like ours mine
6 work in the trenches and focus on meeting the needs
7 of underserved communities. Initiatives like CASA and
8 SU-CASA help provide funding to provide services to
9 our targeted communities.

10 Since 2022, MORE Opera's outreach to older adults
11 has expanded threefold in part through community
12 partnerships - and in Fiscal Year 2024, through first
13 time CDF funding for our Seniors Sing program that
14 brings seniors from several different Bronx
15 neighborhoods, ranging from Riverdale to Norwood to
16 the South Bronx all together through music. We are so
17 grateful for the CDF funding we were awarded, and
18 want the arts and culture ecosystem to be made whole.
19 Therefore, I join my colleagues in respectfully
20 requesting the City to reverse the November 2023 cuts
21 to Culture, that's \$20 million in FY24 and \$15.5
22 million in FY25; (TIMER CHIMES) restore and baseline
23 last year's one time... (CROSS-TALK)

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.
25

1
2 CHERYL WARFIELD: (INAUDIBLE) of \$45 million, and
3 everything else that you have heard. And I thank you
4 for this opportunity to testify.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

6 Elzbieta you may begin when the sergeant starts
7 your clock.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: Good afternoon and thank you
10 very much (AUDIO CANNOT BE HEARD CLEARLY) (INAUDIBLE)

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Elzbieta, I just... your echo
12 makes you inaudible.

13 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: (INAUDIBLE)

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: No, we just can't hear you,
15 and I want to make sure that we capture your
16 testimony.

17 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: (INAUDIBLE)

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Maybe...

19 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: (INAUDIBLE)

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: You know, we'll do... We will
21 go to the next person and give you a minute. If you
22 can submit, we will make sure to get a copy of your
23 testimony on the record, no question, or if you want
24 to take a minute and try to fix the audio?

25 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: (INAUDIBLE)

1
2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Alright, we'll come back to
3 you and see if it's any better. But, just know that
4 your testimony will be on the record no matter what,
5 okay? Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, next we have Nicole, you
7 may begin when the sergeant starts your clock.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

9 NICOLE TOUZIEN: Thank you, Chair Rivera and
10 members of the Committee, thank you for the
11 opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of
12 Dancewave, where I serve as Executive Director.

13 Dancewave is an essential service provider,
14 leveraging inclusive, empowering dance programming to
15 help fill persistent gaps in City services. We reach
16 6,200 New Yorkers each year; helping children develop
17 the skills necessary for lifelong success,
18 facilitating successful transitions to higher
19 education, cultivating artists and arts workers,
20 caring for older adults, inspiring social cohesion
21 and cultural competency, and much, much more, all
22 while centering equity as part of our commitment to
23 the community.

24 Nonprofit arts leaders are steadfast stewards of
25 their organizations. Among many other things, we make

1
2 strategic decisions to maximize limited resources in
3 service to our missions. We need the stewards of our
4 city, our elected leaders in the New York City, to
5 back us and ensure that the City's resources are
6 being allocated in alignment with our values.

7 Each year, cultural organizations are expected to
8 do more with less. Demand for cultural programs at no
9 or low cost to participants, as Sophia outlined,
10 continues to increase. This is met by the City
11 performing devastating budget cuts. Cultural
12 organizations are already stretched too thin, and the
13 City is inviting an unnecessary crisis.

14 I ask that the members of this committee demand
15 that the administration produce a budget that asks
16 for careful prioritization without compromising city
17 services like those provided by cultural
18 organizations. Restore funding so that essential
19 programs like CASA, SU-CASA and Cultural Immigrant
20 Initiative can continue to enhance our communities,
21 not make "shortsighted, drastic cuts to vital City
22 services and programs" as Comptroller Lander warned.

23 To borrow words from you, Chair Rivera (TIMER
24 CHIMES) "Culture delivers". Cultural activity
25 generates revenue drivers... (CROSS-TALK)

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired, thank
3 you.

4 NICOLE TOUZIEN: and contributes to improved
5 mental and physical health, increased social
6 cohesion, and a deepened sense of belonging -- all
7 necessary for a thriving, vibrant New York City.

8 Please ensure cultural funding is restored, thank
9 you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

11 Lacy, you may begin when the sergeant starts your
12 clock.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14 LACY TAUBER: Hi, Chair Rivera, and members of the
15 Committee. My name is Lacy Tauber, and I here to
16 represent Brooklyn Borough President, Antiono
17 Reynoso.

18 I have submitted written testimony, and just to
19 summarize some of it, he wants to lift up the
20 testimony from all of these folks you have heard
21 today and call upon the administration to restore
22 cuts to our libraries and cultural institutions.

23 Rather than repeating a lot of what you have
24 heard, I just want to focus on one thing that maybe
25 hasn't come up as much, but is particularly relevant

1 for our office, and we just want to call attention
2 to. And this has to do with the capital budget. So,
3 the (INAUDIBLE) had testified about this (INAUDIBLE)
4 before, but the problem remains that DCLA does not
5 facilitate property acquisition with its capital
6 dollars, making it very difficult for small cultural
7 organizations to find and secure permanent homes. So,
8 in addition to dealing with all these budget cuts in
9 programming and cutbacks, they are also potentially
10 at the mercy of private landlords in our competitive
11 real estate market, which can make long term planning
12 difficult. These groups should be focusing on their
13 work, not worrying about losing their space. And the
14 Borough President has substantial capital resources
15 to allocate to Brooklyn, he has been wanting to use
16 them to help groups find permanent spaces, but
17 remains frustrated that he cannot extend this
18 resource to cultural organizations due to this
19 unnecessary limitation. So this is something that we
20 would encourage the Council to look at in addition
21 to, again, restoring the cuts to the libraries and
22 cultural institutions, thank you so much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

25 Elzbieta, do want to give it one more try?

1 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: Yes, I am ready.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Perfect... (CROSS-TALK)

3 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Oh, you sound great! Okay.

4
5 And I just want to thank Lacy from the Borough
6 President's Office, the council alum. I didn't see
7 your name in the stack, so I just want to thank you
8 and the Borough President for your testimony and for
9 your support. And I know Commissioner Cumbo mentioned
10 property acquisition and the challenges there.

11 So, Elzbieta, I am so glad, we can hear you loud
12 and clear. Please begin your testimony when you are
13 ready.

14 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: Yes, I am ready.

15 So, good afternoon, and thank you to Speaker
16 Adams, Council Member Carlina Rivera, and all the
17 members of the Committee for the opportunity for me
18 to speak about the budget.

19 My name is Elzbieta Krawczuk, and I am the
20 Children's Librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library -
21 Leonard Branch. And this is my place on the earth
22 that I love and miss dearly, really, really. My
23 library has been closed for badly need renovations
24 since January 2023, and we are extremely frightened
25 by the new proposed cuts. If that proposal of \$58

1
2 (INAUDIBLE) million dollars in cuts take place, my
3 lovely Leonard Library will remain closed for the
4 fiscal year 2025. It is a real blow to our community
5 and really, really unnecessary (INAUDIBLE) six to
6 eight months of depriving our patrons of critical
7 library services.

8 As you know, the library is no longer just for
9 books and reading. My Leonard Library is a buzzing
10 community hub where everyone is welcome, and there is
11 a place for every person who opens the door. So, that
12 is why I speak today on behalf of our neighborhood
13 young families and children who are growing up
14 without Ms. Elzbieta's story time, and playtime, and
15 library books.

16 I speak on behalf of our school students who
17 cannot socialize, explore, or create new ideas using
18 our library materials. I speak on behalf of our
19 teenagers for whom our Leonard Library Teen Space
20 became a second home. I speak on behalf of our adults
21 and seniors...

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired, thank
23 you... (CROSS-TALK)

24 ELZBIETA KRAWCZUK: for whom our libraries is a
25 place to meet, to talk, and sometimes to just

1
2 complain. And lastly, I speak on behalf of every
3 community in Brooklyn, and every person who needs our
4 professional assistance - the free internet access of
5 the language. I cannot empathize enough how much our
6 communities depend on free library access. That is
7 why this cut cannot go through. So, thank you very
8 much for the time you gave me, and I hope we will be
9 open to welcome everyone into our libraries, thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you. Are there any more
12 members of the public that wish to... Anyone left who
13 wants to testify? The Commissioner has already had
14 her turn. And I see we have been joined by someone
15 very, very lovely to your right. Thank you so much
16 for staying, Commissioner, and hearing every single
17 person. That was the last panelist. If there is
18 anyone else present who would like to testify, please
19 let the Sergeant at Arms know... or on Zoom.

20 Okay, seeing no one else, thank you all. It has
21 been quite the day, and we are looking forward to
22 negotiations. I know that DCLA was here to hear every
23 single person, and they take testimony very
24 seriously.

25

1
2 So, with that, I want to thank the Sergeant at
3 Arms, and everyone on the staff for making today
4 happen, and thank you, to the committee staff, of
5 course, and to my team. And we will adjourn. [GAVEL
6 SOUND] [GAVELING OUT]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 12, 2024