

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL SERVICE AND LABOR

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February 28, 2025
Start: 10:30 a.m.
Recess: 12:10 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - COMMITTEE ROOM, 14TH
FLOOR

B E F O R E: Carmen N. De La Rosa, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Oswald Feliz
Julie Menin
Francisco P. Moya

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Crystal Hudson

A P P E A R A N C E S

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

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

Henry Garrido, Executive Director of DC37

June Lei, Secretary DC37, Local 1502

Maida Rosenstein, Director of Organizing for
Local 2110 of the UAW

Ellen Nigro, Assistant Paintings Conservator at
the Brooklyn Museum

Elizabeth St. George, Unit Chair of the Brooklyn
Museum's local 2110 UAW shop

Brandon Mancilla, Director of UAW Region 9A

Vail Kohnert-Yount, Assistant Director of UAW
Region 9A

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Check, check. This is a
3 microphone check for the Committee on Civil Service
4 and Labor located in the 14th Floor on February 28,
5 2025, by Pat Kurzyna.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Settle down, guys.
7 We're about to begin.

8 Good morning. Welcome to the New York
9 City Council hearing on the Committee on Civil
10 Service and Labor.

11 At this time, please silence all
12 electronics and do not approach the dais. I repeat,
13 please do not approach the dais.

14 If you are testifying today, make sure
15 you fill out a slip at the back of the room with the
16 Sergeant-at-Arms. You may submit one online at
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. That is
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

19 Any further questions or concerns, please
20 contact the Sergeant.

21 Chair, you may begin.

22 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: [GAVEL] Good
23 morning, everyone. I'm Council Member Carmen De La
24 Rosa, Chair of the Committee on Civil Service and
25 Labor. Thank you for joining us at today's hearing on

2 pending layoffs at the Brooklyn Museum. The Brooklyn
3 Museum is a cornerstone of New York City's cultural
4 landscape, welcoming approximately 650,000 visitors
5 each year and housing over 500,000 artifacts. Its
6 diverse collections spanning from ancient Egyptian
7 antiquities to the works of Norman Rockwell and
8 Georgia O'Keeffe provide an invaluable educational
9 and artistic experience for New Yorkers of all ages.
10 Unfortunately, financial hardships have forced
11 changes to the Museum's operation. Earlier this
12 month, the Brooklyn Museum announced a series of
13 cost-saving measures, including a hiring freeze, a
14 reduction in exhibitions, and a cancellation of some
15 weeknight events. Most notably, these budget cuts
16 have resulted in the layoffs of 47 part-time and
17 full-time staff. Shortly thereafter, the New York
18 Times reported that DC 37, Local 1502, sent a cease-
19 and-desist letter to the Museum, citing a contractual
20 requirement for 30-day notice to employees prior to
21 layoffs. The notice period expires in the first week
22 of March, and negotiations remain ongoing.

23 Today, this Committee reaffirms our
24 commitment to supporting arts and cultural
25 institutions while also seeking to better understand

2 the circumstances surrounding these layoffs. We will
3 examine the Museum's financial management, the role
4 of public funding, the broader implications these
5 cuts may have on employees, visitors, and the
6 cultural sector at large. Our goal is to ensure that
7 institutions like the Brooklyn Museum remain strong,
8 accessible, equitable workplaces, while continuing to
9 provide the public with valuable artistic and
10 educational experiences.

11 I'd like to thank the Committee Staff,
12 Senior Policy Analyst Elizabeth Arzt, Legislative
13 Counsel Rie Ogasawara, and Extern Ravi Rosen
14 (phonetic) from Brooklyn Law School for their hard
15 work in preparing for this hearing. I'd also like to
16 thank my Chief-of-Staff James Burke, Deputy Chief-of-
17 Staff Kiana Diaz, and Communications Director Fray
18 Familia, and our Legislative Fellow Hiba Imad
19 (phonetic).

20 I would like to recognize that we've been
21 joined by Council Members Moya on Zoom, Council
22 Member Dinowitz, Menin, and Council Member Hudson. We
23 will be hearing testimony from representatives from
24 the Administration. And, oh, we're going to have an
25 opening statement from Council Member Hudson, and

2 then we'll turn the hearing over to representatives
3 from the Administration.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much.
5 Good morning, and thank you, Chair De La Rosa, for
6 giving me the opportunity to say a few words about
7 today's oversight topic, pending layoffs at the
8 Brooklyn Museum.

9 I'm proud to represent the 35th District,
10 the cultural capital of Brooklyn, and perhaps even of
11 New York City. My District is home to the Brooklyn
12 Academy of Music, BRIC, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden,
13 the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts,
14 651 Arts, and of course, the focus of today's
15 hearing, the Brooklyn Museum, which is celebrating
16 its 200th anniversary this year. Arts and culture are
17 an economic engine of our city, with the creative
18 sector accounting for 110 billion dollars in local
19 economic impact, and tourism generating 74 billion
20 dollars annually. Yet, our city's cultural sector
21 routinely sees tens of millions of dollars in budget
22 cuts each year, which not only impacts the
23 programming of our city's cultural institutions, but
24 also the hardworking staff that keep the lights on,
25 doors open, and exhibitions on display. The Brooklyn

2 Museum's decision to reduce services and end employee
3 agreements is indicative of the harsh fiscal
4 challenges faced by many cultural and arts
5 institutions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
6 I've stood shoulder to shoulder with many of my
7 Colleagues at rallies and press conferences. I've sat
8 in these very chairs for hearing upon hearing,
9 fighting against the Mayor's budget cuts to our
10 cherished cultural institutions. But these
11 institutions are still struggling, and it is our
12 constituents, New Yorkers, who are taking the hits.
13 Whether it's a reduction in educational access for
14 children, less programming for low-income New
15 Yorkers, or the very livelihoods of the 47 employees
16 represented by District Council 37, Local 1502, and
17 UAW Local 2110, it is New Yorkers who are bearing the
18 brunt of these cuts. I stand in solidarity with the
19 workers who keep the Museum running and with the
20 cultural institutions throughout the city, who year
21 after year fight tooth and nail for the funding they
22 need and deserve. At a time when we're facing an
23 affordability crisis in New York City, we must fight
24 to preserve every good paying union job in our city,
25 and we must continue advocating for our cultural

2 institutions to not only avoid the budget cuts
3 repeatedly proposed by this Administration, but to
4 increase funding that has remained the same since
5 2015, despite a significant rise in inflation. In
6 order to move forward, the Museum must secure the
7 funding it needs to avoid these layoffs in order to
8 protect jobs and preserve our city's rich cultural
9 heritage. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you,
11 Council Member Hudson.

12 We will now be hearing testimony from
13 representatives from the Administration. For the
14 first panel, we'll be calling Commissioner Lauri
15 Cumbo and Lance Polivy. Sorry, guys, you know my
16 Dominican accent is in style today. And we will turn
17 it over to the Committee Counsel to administer the
18 oath for this panel.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Thank you,
20 Chair. Hi, folks. Do you affirm to tell the truth,
21 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before
22 this Committee and to respond honestly to Council
23 Member questions?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I do.

25 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: I do.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL OGASAWARA: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

4 Commissioner, you may begin.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. Good
6 morning, Chair De La Rosa and Members of the
7 Committee. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New
8 York City Department of Cultural Affairs. I'm here
9 today to testify regarding today's topic, examining
10 the recently announced layoffs at the Brooklyn
11 Museum.

12 The Brooklyn Museum is one of our city's
13 most important cultural institutions. It's actually
14 one of the largest institutions in the country, and
15 the City and the DCLA provide substantial funding in
16 support of their mission to engage the public with
17 their cultural programming. In fact, the City expense
18 subsidy for the Museum has grown from 6.7 million in
19 Fiscal Year '22 to 8.5 million in the current Fiscal
20 Year, an increase of 27 percent over the span of the
21 Adams Administration. The City further provides an
22 additional 2 million dollars annually in support for
23 energy costs.

24 But even with this robust support, the
25 vast majority of the Museum's funding, more than 80

2 percent, comes from other sources, and cultural
3 organizations across the city and beyond are facing
4 major shifts and changes when it comes to their
5 diverse sources of support. Philanthropies are
6 shifting their focus away from the arts. Federal
7 funding has been called into question. Corporations
8 simply aren't giving as much as they once did, and
9 inflation is driving up costs. Audiences have yet to
10 return in the same numbers as they did before the
11 pandemic. Even our tourism numbers, while we've come
12 a long way toward their recovery, still haven't
13 reached their pre-pandemic highs.

14 To dig into one of these major downward
15 trends, according to a report last year in the Art
16 Newspaper, private donor contributions have
17 historically accounted for the single largest share
18 of museum's operating revenue. In a survey, while
19 arts and culture rank second on older generations
20 giving priorities, it's not even the top three,
21 unfortunately, for many of our younger donors.
22 Another report found that from 2020 to 2021, while
23 seven of nine charitable sectors, such as education
24 and the environment, saw significant growth, giving
25 to the arts, culture, and humanities declined by 8.6

1 percent. For these major shifts to come on the heels
2 of the global pandemic has been nothing short of
3 catastrophic for so many organizations. In this
4 environment, cultural institutions are struggling to
5 maintain operations across the city and have been
6 forced to make painful decisions. Layoffs, reductions
7 in programming, and other drastic measures have been
8 taken just to make sure that institutions can stay
9 afloat.
10

11 The Brooklyn Museum is just the latest
12 example of an organization having to take these dire
13 steps, which no organization wants to do. We have to
14 be clear that this isn't specific to the Brooklyn
15 Museum. Many organizations are facing the same
16 challenges. We are devastated by the job cuts that
17 the Museum's budget shortfalls have forced them to
18 pursue. These are cultural workers who have dedicated
19 their time and energy and passion to this critical
20 institution. The same inflationary pressures that are
21 impacting the bottom line of the Brooklyn Museum are
22 also impacting hardworking New Yorkers across the
23 five boroughs. The impact to the families of each
24 employee laid off through these cuts will reverberate
25 throughout our communities. I feel for these workers

2 and the unimaginable position each one of them has
3 put in through these cuts. I am a DC37 baby. Both my
4 parents were DC37 workers. They worked for off-track
5 betting for most of their career until off-track
6 betting was dissolved. And I remember that time in my
7 household, what that meant for my family, including
8 their medical benefits, which they had to fight for
9 for many years until they were restored. You know
10 about that fight, Henry. So, I'm here. I totally
11 understand the challenge that so many of you are
12 facing. We want to be of support and assistance and
13 best we can, but also recognizing that this is a huge
14 systemic issue that goes far beyond the Brooklyn
15 Museum, and we need many more players at the table to
16 figure out how to help our DC37 and UAW and many
17 other workers to maintain their positions moving
18 forward.

19 In the long run, the Museum's leadership
20 prioritized the long-term health of their
21 institution. They have a solid plan for putting the
22 Museum back on firm financial footing. And like we
23 would do, and are doing, for any cultural constituent
24 who is struggling, we'll do whatever we can to
25 assist. Culture is part of our city's fabric, and

2 institutions like the Brooklyn Museum are community
3 anchors. They're economic drivers. They're the source
4 of so much of what makes our city great. In 2019, the
5 creative sector had a 110-billion-dollar total
6 economic impact and employed 300,000 workers. We are
7 proud of our record setting investments in culture
8 under the Adams Administration. This year's budget is
9 an all time record high, much larger than even pre-
10 pandemic levels, thanks to our partnership with the
11 City Council. But as I said, local government cannot
12 solve these problems alone. We want to serve as a
13 resource for addressing these broader trends in
14 philanthropy and corporate giving. We need to find
15 the right solutions, because our art and culture
16 institutions are the bedrocks of our communities and
17 sources of education, inspiration, and so much more.
18 These institutions helped bring us back from the
19 brink from the pandemic. Now we need to be there for
20 them so that they can support these and so many other
21 critical jobs for New Yorkers in the arts.

22 I want to thank everyone that's come here
23 to testify. I want to thank all of the members of the
24 Brooklyn Museum that are here. I certainly feel your
25 pain and understand the challenges that you're facing

2 with a bit of an uncertain future. Similarly, my
3 second job in my career was at the Brooklyn Museum.
4 So, I am a former staffer of the Brooklyn Museum, and
5 certainly gave my time and energy to fundraising at
6 the Brooklyn Museum, and so I'm honored to be here to
7 help be a thought partner in coming up with strategic
8 strategies to help and assist not only the Brooklyn
9 Museum, but the broader cultural sector navigate
10 through perhaps what is one of the most unprecedented
11 and challenging times facing our cultural
12 institutions.

13 Thank you so much for all of you, and
14 thank you for being here and calling this hearing.

15 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you,
16 Commissioner, and thank you for your thoughtful words
17 and your messaging of partnership, that is certainly
18 the goal here, and thank you for taking the time to
19 be here today.

20 I'm going to ask just two questions, and
21 then I'm going to pass on to Colleagues, and then
22 maybe come back, but I wanted to talk a little bit
23 about the funding. So as of FY25 adopted budget, DCLA
24 and the City Council allocated about 10.1 million in
25 expense funds to the Brooklyn Museum. Each of the 34

2 members of the cultural institutions group have
3 separate contracts with DCLA outlining the specific
4 use of funding. Can you provide a breakdown of how
5 the Brooklyn Museum allocated the DCLA funding for
6 FY25, and what portion of that was used for
7 operations, infrastructure, programming, or other
8 specific expenses?

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Okay. I just want to
10 start off by giving a special note before I get into
11 the bulk of the question. The 10.574 million includes
12 75,000 from City Council Member items, and an
13 additional 1.986,323 in energy subsidy. The City
14 subsidy supports the majority of the DC37 positions,
15 currently 153, but will be reduced down to 134 with
16 the pending layoffs. The DC37 covered positions are
17 chiefly security, maintenance, collections care. The
18 subsidy also covers education and other program
19 staff, not DC37. Important to note is the City
20 subsidy covers only the base salary of the DC37
21 positions with the Museum responsible for the balance
22 of fringe and the contractual premium wage rates over
23 time, etc. I just want to add also that our subsidy
24 to the Brooklyn Museum only covers about 20 percent
25 of the entire operation of the Museum. So, 20 percent

2 is typically what government provides support for,
3 but the other 80 percent comes through foundations,
4 corporations, individual giving, admissions,
5 fundraising, programming, and other programs.

6 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: So, what
7 percentage would you say directly or indirectly
8 supports the staffing costs?

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: What is the direct
10 number, the percentage that covers the DC37 staffing
11 out of the subsidy that we give?

12 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Yes, correct.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Essentially all of
14 it.

15 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay, 70 percent,
16 80 percent, do you have an idea?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'll get you the
18 exact number during the course of this hearing, but
19 in the interest of time, if you have another
20 question, we'll come right back to that one.

21 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Sure. Are there
22 any restrictions or guidelines within the Brooklyn
23 Museum's contract about how expense funding can be
24 used for staffing?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We don't provide a
3 guideline in the sense of saying this is a rule that
4 the funding has to be spent in this way. What we
5 typically do, we give them an obligation plan, and we
6 work within that obligation plan, and I would say
7 that it's typically used to cover front-facing and
8 essential support staff positions, security,
9 maintenance, as it is typically easier to fundraise
10 for program-related staff and expenses. So, I would
11 say that there are not restrictions, but at the top
12 of the fiscal year, CIGs submit a completed
13 obligation plan, which outlines for the year how they
14 intend to allocate their subsidy across organization
15 expenses. The City subsidy is paid out monthly, and
16 CIGs submit a monthly payment request for the
17 upcoming month and a detailed expense report for the
18 previous month. The agency also requires a year-end
19 final report, which includes a previous year of
20 audited financials. So, I say that to say that it's
21 more that they submit to us a monthly expense report
22 in terms of how they're spending the money, and then
23 at the end, they have to do a final report, and that
24 final report outlines how they are spending money.
25 And Lance, did you want to add to that?

2 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: We also just
3 wanted to add that we currently are providing 80
4 million dollars in capital support to the Brooklyn
5 Museum for various City-funded capital projects.

6 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay. I guess a
7 followup. What oversight does DCLA conduct over the
8 Brooklyn Museum's finances, like all of the finances,
9 before approving funding?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That would be the
11 plan that I just outlined, which is the obligation
12 plan.

13 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So the obligation
15 plan outlines how they intend to allocate their
16 subsidy across the organization expenses. But what
17 organizations typically do is that they utilize that
18 funding for the positions that are the hardest to
19 fundraise for, security, maintenance, operations.
20 Foundations and corporations typically don't want to
21 fund those types of salaried positions, so many
22 organizations utilize City subsidy for those very
23 specific purposes, and then they would use a portion
24 of their budget for more programmatic expenses where
25 they can fundraise for those. Sometimes those do come

2 under the City subsidy, but very rarely. Because part
3 of it also goes to the fact that for museums such as
4 the Brooklyn Museum, is very difficult to fundraise
5 for the non-sexy things that we say in the cultural
6 world, but also the challenge becomes on so many
7 levels is that foundations, corporations,
8 individuals, they like to give to a museum or a
9 cultural institution that they feel is very
10 successful, that they have something exciting going
11 on. So, this circumstance that the Brooklyn Museum
12 and many other institutions find themselves in is
13 that when they have to do layoffs, when they have to
14 downsize, that's really not the momentum that many
15 organizations want to function from. They want to
16 function from a place of high energy, great
17 programming, so this is a really precarious situation
18 for the Museum, and certainly not one that they want
19 to be in, nor do we as an agency want to see this
20 happen.

21 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: And did DCLA have
22 any indications that the Museum was facing a
23 significant financial shortfall before the layoffs
24 were publicly announced?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We understood that
3 the Museum, like many of the cultural institutions,
4 the 34 that we represent as part of the Cultural
5 Institution Groups, they are all experiencing some
6 level of challenge financially that they keep us
7 abreast of. The Brooklyn Museum did not stand out as
8 one of those organizations that were experiencing
9 deficits of this level, but we were aware of it, we
10 were certainly aware of it. We did not know that it
11 was going to come to the point of layoffs and a
12 reduction in programming of this magnitude. I know
13 that they were trying to do a lot of different cost-
14 savings measures before it came to this, but this was
15 something that we were aware of, but we didn't know
16 that it was going to take this significant of an
17 impact on the Museum staffing.

18 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay, thank you,
19 Commissioner. I'm going to pass it to my Colleagues.
20 I have more questions, but I'll pass it to Council
21 Member Hudson, and then Council Member Menin, and
22 then I'll come back. Okay, okay. Council Member
23 Menin.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Great. Thank you so
25 much, Chair. Good to see you, Commissioner.

2 So, I do have a very specific question.
3 So NYC and Company, which has now been renamed the
4 Visitors and Conventions Bureau, I used to serve on
5 the executive board of NYC and Co when I was
6 commissioner of media and entertainment. Right now,
7 the City of New York is spending 20 million dollars
8 in budget that they are giving, 20 million dollars of
9 City money is going to NYC and Co. What are you all
10 doing to collaborate with them? Because you say
11 tourism is down, but you've got a crisis now at the
12 Brooklyn Museum, and it seems to me you could be
13 utilizing some of that funding to do a really
14 targeted campaign to support the Brooklyn Museum.
15 Utilizing, I mean, there are 18 different
16 international offices that NYC and Company runs. They
17 also do programs to get New Yorkers to go to
18 different venues so, I mean, if some of that funding
19 was designated for a really robust campaign to boost
20 visitors to the Museum, it seems like that would be
21 something that should be tried first.

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, I think that's
23 what this hearing is all about, solutions, and you're
24 coming up with a good one. We need to further explore
25 that. We could definitely have those conversations,

2 would love for you to be a part of them, so that we
3 can see what we can do to have a more robust tourism
4 program promoting the Brooklyn Museum and other
5 institutions. I'm not sure what they are doing in
6 that sense, in terms of how much it's specifically
7 targeted to the Brooklyn Museum. We would have to
8 find that out, but I feel like that's another great
9 solution in terms of maybe more targeted specifically
10 to the Museum during this really particularly
11 challenging time, could be helpful. I don't know how
12 it's going to help us in the immediate, but I think
13 in the long term we have to find solutions, and I
14 think that that would be a great one.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Well, I would just
16 suggest respectfully that immediately that this be
17 done, because those funds are there, and we've used
18 them in the past for these kinds of, not this
19 particular situation, but other similar situations
20 where you have cultural organizations or venues that
21 are really struggling, and we could do a rapid
22 infusion of funds to help to support that
23 institution. So, I would obviously hold off on any
24 draconian measure like layoffs, which we absolutely
25 shouldn't be doing for this institution.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Let me ask you,
3 Council Member Menin, in that way. You're saying more
4 so for a marketing to increase visitorship at the
5 Museum?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Correct, because
7 you were saying that tourism is down, that the Museum
8 is struggling, that it can't support these additional
9 staff members but, before taking any kind of, just to
10 be clear, I totally oppose these kinds of layoffs, so
11 before going down that draconian path, why wouldn't
12 we use every tool in our toolbox? We have an amazing
13 tool in our toolbox, which is we have this Visitors
14 and Conventions Bureau. It has significant City
15 funds. Let's hold off on any kind of layoffs, and
16 let's try this first, and really try to boost the
17 Museum and visitorship, which would obviously boost
18 its overall revenues.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We will certainly
20 look into it. Sounds like a wonderful idea. I guess
21 the challenge that I would experience with that is
22 that those funds couldn't be directly allocated to
23 the Museum, but it could be utilized, I would
24 suspect, to boost fundraising and tourism and
25 visitorship to the Museum without, unfortunately, the

2 Museum having direct access to that funding, being
3 able to be utilized specifically for staffing.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Correct. The idea
5 is that we come up with an immediate emergency plan
6 to support the Museum, and this would be one very
7 significant element of it.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Got it. Thank you so
9 much.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you.

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Keep them coming.

12 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you,
13 Council Member Menin.

14 Commissioner, does your agency require
15 that cultural institutions submit financial
16 contingency plans to prevent worker reductions, given
17 the landscape that you put forth with all of the
18 CIGs?

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: DCLA expects all of
20 its constituents to adhere to all applicable laws in
21 this regard. CIGs can choose to hire DC37 labor and
22 assume the base City negotiated DC37 salaries, but
23 also have their own negotiated contracts above what
24 the City has negotiated. The City is proud to support
25 institutions that choose to work with strong,

2 organized unions, and to set a minimum base rate of
3 pay through its own negotiations. The layoffs at the
4 Brooklyn Museum are deeply unfortunate, and we will
5 work with the Museum to avoid any additional layoffs.

6 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: I get that, but
7 do you all require contingency plans when we're at
8 the point where layoffs are being considered? So, as
9 DCLA is releasing funding to organizations, are you
10 saying if layoffs are something that have been
11 flagged for your agency as something that is
12 forthcoming, is there a contingency plan?

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We do not have a
14 contingency plan requirement. We trust with many of
15 the institutions that we support, with the 34 that we
16 support plus the 1,000 that we support through our
17 CDF program. We administer funds to those
18 organizations, but we do not require contingency
19 plans as part of it.

20 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: What about
21 requiring institutions receiving City funding to
22 follow specific labor standards or engage in good
23 faith negotiations with unions before implementing
24 layoffs, is that something your agency requires?

2 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: We require that
3 all groups follow all applicable federal, state, and
4 local law.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay. Does DCLA
6 assess the impact of staff reductions on the Museum's
7 ability to fulfill its mission, so?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Ask that one again.

9 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: So, does your
10 agency basically assess the impact of staff
11 reductions in the ability for the Museum to fulfill
12 its mission? So, as we're going into this next
13 budget, right, you're sitting with the Museum and
14 you're thinking about the way the Museum should be
15 fulfilling its mission, are you taking into account
16 the impact of staff reductions?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We don't take into
18 account staff reductions when we are funding the
19 institution. They have a mission statement in terms
20 of programming that they have to administer to the
21 public, and we have to make sure that they are
22 working towards the mission statement that's provided
23 by the institution. So, for them to have staffing
24 reductions, which unfortunately happens from time to
25 time with many of our organizations, and the

2 challenge is that we're going to be facing more of
3 those in the upcoming years is that we have to
4 continue to fund those organizations, we have to
5 continue to make sure that they can keep the doors
6 open but, at the same time, we don't have a
7 requirement in terms of that they have to fulfill
8 certain amount of staffing obligations before we
9 would fund them in the next budget or fiscal year.

10 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay. The Museum
11 recently announced the suspension of their First
12 Saturday program, their free flagship event that
13 began in 2023, and from what I hear from the
14 youngsters, it's all the rave.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You gotta check it
16 out.

17 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: I have to check
18 it out. I have to get myself to Brooklyn a little
19 more frequently. But it's a free program, and
20 apparently it has brought in a lot of folks to come
21 into the Museum so it's dealing with the issues that
22 I think Council Member Menin was bringing up in terms
23 of visitorship. Does DCLA have concerns about the
24 impact of these cancellations on public engagement
25 with the Museum? And also as a contingency, if it's a

2 free event, why not attach some sort of nominal fee
3 that might help to, you know, because people know
4 that they want to be there, and it's a free program,
5 completely free, if you attach a 20-dollar fee or
6 something like that, you know, while still making it
7 accessible maybe for people who have benefits or
8 other things, you could draw some revenue from a
9 program that is obviously successful. So, have those
10 conversations occurred?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I have not had
12 conversation with the Museum to go and have a
13 discussion about what if they did it this way or if
14 they did it that way. I trust that they have
15 knowledge about the impact or the financial impact of
16 that program to their bottom line, but as well as
17 they have the staffing in order to be able to
18 maintain and to foster that program. One of the
19 questions, there are a lot of very difficult
20 decisions that all museums and cultural institutions
21 are making across the city. The Brooklyn Museum is
22 one of the few institutions that is preserving and
23 protecting their pay as you wish program. So, many
24 organizations or museums have made the decision to
25 say, hey, it's no longer pay as you wish, it's 22

2 dollars to enter this museum, and that's non-
3 negotiable. The Brooklyn Museum is maintaining their
4 position to say, we want to continue to be a pay as
5 you wish museum. We want to continue to make sure
6 that the First Saturday programs are free and open to
7 the public. These are not permanent cancellations.
8 These are cost-saving measures that they are doing in
9 the immediate in order to be able to foster a plan
10 and a strategic plan to get back on track so that
11 they can have these programs on a year-round basis
12 and that they can be affordable and free to the
13 community. The basis of the First Saturday program
14 was all about accessibility. It's all about making
15 sure that all people can access that particular
16 program. And the benefit of that program, because
17 it's been going on for some time, is that it has
18 inspired museums, not only in New York City, but
19 across the country to do these free First Friday or
20 First Saturday programs, and that originated at the
21 Brooklyn Museum. I'm sure there's some thought that
22 if you were to associate a cost with it, you would be
23 changing the dynamics of what makes that program
24 special. So, I think that sometimes, and I can't
25 speak completely for them because I'm obviously not

2 on the staff or part of their executive team, I'm
3 sure they're making that decision to say, let's pause
4 for a moment, let's figure out a new effective
5 economic strategy to take the Museum forward, and
6 hopefully in the very near future, bring that program
7 and many of their other programs back, but there are
8 some organizations that are having these same
9 conversations that we are with that are saying, we're
10 going to close the gap by raising our prices, and
11 those prices will be non-negotiable. And I'm sure
12 you're aware of many of them in your community as
13 well that are saying we have a non-negotiable price,
14 and that's how we're going to close the gap. That may
15 make it unaffordable for many of your constituents,
16 especially families who are coming with children,
17 that are coming with grandma, that are coming with
18 everyone. They have to make decisions. So, it's a
19 matter of where you want to make those really tough
20 decisions but, however you make them, it's not going
21 to be favored by all.

22 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Yeah. I mean, I
23 would still argue that the cancellation, even if it's
24 temporary, still has an impact, right, and I think
25 that if you're seeing something that is wildly

2 successful, even attaching a cost once a month could
3 lead to some revenue-generating options, and I think
4 where I'm coming from, and I think where my
5 Colleagues from their questionings are coming from,
6 is that it seems like all options were not exhausted
7 or have not been exhausted before we turn to layoffs,
8 right, and I would also argue that while it is
9 laudable that the Museum wants to continue to be
10 accessible, and I firmly support that decision, there
11 are also 57 workers that now have to go home and not
12 provide for their families also, and there's an
13 impact on that, not only in the economy, but also for
14 our City's workforce, right?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

16 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: And so, yes, the
17 hard decisions are being made all the time, and I
18 think that it is our goal to think about how we can
19 support the Museum as they go through this hardship
20 while still thinking about maybe ideas that haven't
21 been brought forth. And again, I don't know because
22 obviously none of us work at the Museum at the
23 moment, but I'm just thinking about ways that we can
24 help them to move that conversation forward.

2 Do the CIGs members have an obligation
3 under agreements with DCLA to maintain a certain
4 level of free programming, or is this something that
5 they're sort of just doing because it's part of their
6 mission?

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: There is an
8 obligation. It isn't a rule, but it's an obligation.
9 And many of the Museums were founded with that and
10 became CIGs under that, such as the Metropolitan
11 Museum. They are a pay-as-you-wish institution as
12 well as institutions like the American Museum of
13 Natural History. These are pay-as-you-wish programs.
14 But even in their pay-as-you-wish programs, they are
15 negotiating and thinking of other ways in order to
16 continue their pay-as-you-wish program, but maybe
17 limiting some of those programs from it being
18 nationally pay-as-you-wish to the tri-state areas is
19 what we consider our catchment area for pay-as-you-
20 wish, to some are thinking about, no, it's only New
21 York State is pay-as-you-wish. Some are like, it's
22 only New York City as you pay-as-you-wish. So,
23 everyone's trying to figure out strategies in order
24 to cut costs, raise revenue, and find new solutions,
25 particularly as foundations, corporations, etc., are

2 changing their funding guidelines. Like in my ideal
3 world, this hearing would also have board members,
4 foundations, corporations, individuals, to get
5 everyone in the room to really talk about how are we
6 going to support a cultural sector during one of the
7 toughest challenges in terms of our economy, in terms
8 of the pandemic, in terms of recovery. This is really
9 like a holistic conversation that really needs to be
10 had. And I want to be clear that the City government
11 is not going to be able to financially provide for
12 the over 1,000 organizations that we provide support
13 for. We're not going to be able to make up those
14 deficits from the changes on the federal government
15 to the changes in foundations and corporations. And I
16 understand clearly, we do have to continue to find
17 other solutions, but City government is not going to
18 be able to bear the brunt of maintaining and holding
19 up an entire sector that has traditionally had
20 partners in how they function and operate. One of the
21 major ways that the Brooklyn Museum and many other
22 institutions raise money is through fundraising,
23 events, those sorts of programming opportunities
24 provide funding and resources for the Brooklyn Museum
25 on many levels.

2 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: I agree with you
3 in that it has to be a holistic conversation.
4 Obviously, we as an agency and Council will have the
5 opportunity to bite at that apple at the budget
6 hearings that are starting next month, and we will be
7 honing in on some of these conversations. And not
8 only through my Committee and through a public
9 hearing that's happening today, but also through the
10 Cultural Committee, those conversations I know are
11 welcome on our side.

12 But my question was more around, you said
13 that it was a rule but not an obligation so, if they
14 don't maintain the same levels of free programming,
15 their funding is not impacted.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: At a certain point,
17 it would be.

18 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: It would be?

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: At a certain point,
20 if an organization, you know, we've operated more so
21 from a policy standpoint, and so if an organization
22 were to start to make decisions to say, we provide no
23 free programming, we provide no accessibility, school
24 groups, those sorts of things are going to have to
25 pay general admission costs. Like if it started to

2 operate as a for-profit entity, then we would have to
3 seriously consider our relationship as a cultural
4 institution group with the City of New York.

5 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Madam Chair, let
6 me give you a good example. So, Brooklyn Museum is
7 pay-as-you-wish. If they wanted to increase and say
8 that now everyone has to pay 10 dollars to come to
9 the Museum, any increase in your admission fee has to
10 be approved by the City's Department of Cultural
11 Affairs. So that's one tool at our disposal that we
12 can use to have conversations about free and
13 accessible programming, and it's exactly what we do
14 whenever we get an application for an increase. It's,
15 okay, you want to increase your fee for admission for
16 folks coming to your institution? What are you going
17 to do to make your programming free and accessible to
18 New Yorkers who need it most?

19 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: And when there
20 are considerations like the ones we're discussing
21 today where there's going to be layoffs, significant
22 layoffs, right, there is wiggle room or flexibility
23 in that conversation because they've gotten to a
24 crisis point at this point.

2 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Well, they
3 haven't come to us with an application to increase
4 their admission fee.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Okay.

6 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Eliminating First
7 Saturdays is devastating for the community, for New
8 York City, for all of those that enjoy it. A good
9 point about First Saturdays, though, is that they
10 used to have a corporate sponsorship. It used to be
11 the name of a corporation, First Saturdays, and that
12 left several years ago. That's a really concrete
13 example and a good way to understand and capture what
14 this change in philanthropic giving from
15 corporations, the impact that it's having on the
16 ground.

17 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: That makes sense.
18 Okay. Will these layoffs affect the Brooklyn Museum's
19 ability to access future City funding at all?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The fact that they
21 are in a difficult financial position right now and
22 that they are experiencing layoffs is not going to
23 cause us to say we think that your funding should be
24 reduced because you have fewer workers at this time
25 and you should also have a reduction in your funding.

2 Again, we're only about 20 percent of the Brooklyn
3 Museum's total operation costs so we're not going to
4 reduce the Museum's funding. We're going to try to
5 figure out ways that we can strategize to be able to
6 have real tangible conversations about how we should
7 help and support during this time.

8 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: How would you
9 categorize your involvement as an agency when it
10 comes to exploring measures for City-funded
11 institutions like the CIGs to retain staff during
12 financial downturns? So, as you mentioned, many other
13 organizations are going through this. Does the agency
14 play an official role in trying to have those
15 planning conversations with the CIGs to say, you
16 know, if staffing is going to be impacted, this is a
17 way that we can help or help them with the planning
18 of their financial?

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: When something like
20 this happens, it's more where we would help to
21 strategize in terms of, let's say, an organization
22 has an extensive capital project that they've been
23 undertaking for a number of years and they have seen
24 some challenges internally with reimbursements and
25 they're paying heavy interest on waiting for those

2 reimbursements to come in, we can try to work to say,
3 let's help you facilitate your paperwork. Let's help
4 you fill out these documents quicker. Let's help to
5 see if on the agency side it's hung up or stuck
6 somewhere or something like that. Or maybe you
7 haven't filled out everything you were supposed to
8 fill out. Let's try and do what we can do to get your
9 reimbursement funding into the organization's budget
10 so that they can stop paying heavy interest costs. We
11 also can do things where we can say, have you met
12 with this foundation, have you met with this
13 corporation, maybe you all should talk with this
14 organization and see if there's some way that there
15 could be a bridge loan or if there's some way that
16 you can have funding from a foundation that's
17 interested or willing to help and support at this
18 time so it's more of a connecting. It's more of have
19 you thought of this. It's more of that sort of thing.
20 But as I stated before in this, our increase to the
21 Brooklyn Museum over these last few years has been
22 approximately, in the Adams Administration, a 27
23 percent increase so we have supported at the highest
24 level that we possibly could. But the downturn on so
25 many levels, I suspect we're going to be in this

2 meeting room quite a bit discussing a lot of the
3 challenges that our organizations are facing. That's
4 why on so many levels, it's unfortunate that the
5 focus here is specifically the Brooklyn Museum, and
6 this really needs to be a sector conversation in
7 terms of how do we hold up not only our cultural
8 institutions, but the staff that make up these
9 cultural institutions, how do we protect programming,
10 so I hope that we can come back and have a more
11 robust conversation that's not really focused
12 specifically on the Brooklyn Museum, because this
13 issue is so systemic that most of my time as a
14 Commissioner is trying to help fulfill and solve for
15 many of these issues so that they can avoid coming to
16 this point, and some who we've read in the headlines
17 have already gotten to that point and we've tried to
18 help and shepherd those organizations so that they
19 don't have to close their doors.

20 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Yeah. I think we
21 share that goal of preventing this situation,
22 obviously. But when it does happen, the Council does
23 have oversight..

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes.

2 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: And has the
3 ability to call for a public hearing. Those are all
4 of my questions. I thank you... Colleagues, any other
5 followups? No?

6 Thank you, Commissioner, for your time
7 and for being here today and being a willing partner
8 in helping us to resolve this. We really appreciate
9 it.

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And I want to thank
11 you for calling this hearing in today. I want to
12 thank all of you that are here today. This is a very
13 serious issue. We understand the severity of the
14 issue. We want to work with you moving forward, and I
15 hope that we can do it proactively. I think that we
16 need more internal conversations. We need more phone
17 calls. We need more meetings. Because often the
18 ability to sit around a table and to talk through
19 ideas and issues can really help us come up with
20 tangible solutions that'll be long-term. So, we now
21 all have each other's numbers, and we can reach out,
22 and we can begin a dialogue that will be healthy, not
23 only for us, but for the entire sector so thank you
24 all so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you both.
3 Thank you so much.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And I just want to
5 add, I'll be able to stay for a portion of the
6 hearing, but because we didn't know that far in
7 advance, I do have other meetings that I have to
8 attend today, but I do want to hear as much of the
9 testimony as possible so thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: And as you know,
11 we live stream, so you can put it in and have some
12 Friday night entertainment at home.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That is true. Thank
14 you so much.

15 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you,
16 Commissioner.

17 I now open the floor to public testimony.
18 Before we begin, I remind members of the public that
19 this is a formal government proceeding and that
20 decorum shall be observed at all times. As such,
21 members of the public shall remain silent at all
22 times.

23 The witness table is reserved for people
24 who wish to testify. No video recording or
25 photography is allowed from the witness table.

2 Further, members of the public may not present audio
3 or video recordings as testimony, but may submit
4 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-
5 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

6 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,
7 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
8 at-Arms and wait for your name to be called. Once you
9 have been recognized, you will have two minutes to
10 speak on today's hearing topic regarding pending
11 layoffs at the Brooklyn Museum.

12 If you have written testimony or
13 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
14 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony
15 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written
16 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72
17 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
18 will not be accepted.

19 When you hear your name, please come up
20 to the witness panel. For the first panel, we invite
21 Henry Garrido, Executive Director of DC37.

22 HENRY GARRIDO: All right. Good morning,
23 Madam Chairman. Good morning, Members of the
24 Committee. Thank you for holding this important
25 hearing. My name is Henry Garrido. I'm the Executive

2 Director, District Council 37, representing 132,000
3 union members and 100,000 retirees. We are the
4 largest municipal union here.

5 And I come before you to express my
6 absolute alarm and outrage at the layoffs of the
7 members and the workers being proposed at the
8 Brooklyn Museum, which we're facing effective March
9 9th, just nine days from now. We're proud to
10 represent our members who do absolutely essential
11 work in running one of New York City's cultural
12 jewels. Our members execute the Members' wonderful
13 public and community programs, they clean and
14 maintain the exhibition space, they curate and
15 install museum's invaluable art and cultural
16 artifacts, and they keep this treasure in the public
17 safe. With salaries as low as 30,000 dollars a year,
18 our members love the work they do because they love
19 the Museum, even as they struggle to make ends meet.
20 On Wednesday, February 5th, the Brooklyn Museum
21 informed DC37 that on February 7th, two days later,
22 the Museum would announce its massive layoffs, and we
23 learned that at that point that 19 of our members
24 will be given 30-day notices that would be losing the
25 jobs by March 9th. Together with 21 members of UAW,

2 my sisters and brothers here of Local 2110, and a
3 handful of managers at the Museum's, the Museum made
4 a decision to lay off in total 47 people, we demanded
5 to meet. While our union members were being summoned
6 one by one to receive the news from Human Resources,
7 which is inappropriate, down the hall we were
8 pleading with the Museum council to pause layoff
9 conversation and give us time to determine what was
10 happening and why. The Museum council told our staff
11 that the Museum had lost more than 11 million dollars
12 in Fiscal Year '24 and that they were on track to
13 lose another 10 million dollars in Fiscal Year '25
14 (TIMER CHIME) and they claimed they had no choice but
15 to...

16 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Please continue.

17 HENRY GARRIDO: Implement layoffs. To add
18 insult to injury, the Museum asked the unions to give
19 up protections that are guaranteed by the union
20 contract that have nothing to do with financial
21 implications. They wanted the union to reduce the
22 time required to do recall, they wanted us to give up
23 and ignore seniority, they wanted us to give all
24 kinds of things that have nothing to do with money,
25 I'll emphasize again. And while union members who

1 worked very tirelessly were facing layoffs even after
2 working for the Museum for more than 20 years. We
3 asked why, right? You know, during a fiscal crisis,
4 why would we want to put the Museum and the workers
5 under this condition? And there were other questions
6 that were asked, I'm not going to ask, but I will say
7 this to you, to your point, Madam Chairman. I was
8 here in 2016 when the Museum was facing layoffs. And
9 I was part of the negotiating team that included then
10 First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan, the Museum
11 leadership, and many others, and what resulted in
12 that was that the director of the Museum, myself,
13 Dean, others, agreed to what you alluded to, which is
14 the voluntary contributions by the folks. There was
15 also, in addition to that, an increased funding by
16 the City and the City Council that I was part of, you
17 know, pushed for, and, and this is really important,
18 a furlough that we did for the workers and the
19 managers that were able to take unpaid leave for
20 weeks at a time and implement it in sparse throughout
21 the year in order to prevent the layoffs. This was
22 not an easy thing to do, but the workers understood
23 that because we were facing financial difficulties
24 that we were willing to do everything possible to
25

2 keep everybody employed. That means even those who
3 were not slated to be laid off took an unpaid
4 furlough to be able to save their fellow co-workers
5 in solidarity, which I thought was amazing. And
6 again, during this process, you know, we approached
7 the Museum and said, hey, why don't we do the same,
8 why don't we start, as painful as it is, to look at
9 alternatives. You know, I think some things were
10 said. I mean, I personally said, you know, you have
11 your museum staff, you're hiring people when you are
12 looking to lay off people. This makes no sense to us.
13 You're giving salary raises to managers. In this
14 case, the director makes more than a million dollars
15 and you're giving raises to people when you're
16 claiming poverty and claiming that you're broke. So,
17 there's an inconsistency here where you're blaming
18 the workers for your financial problems, but at the
19 same time, you're unwilling to consider furloughs.
20 You're unwilling to do any kind of revenue-producing
21 pieces, and it's not just the admission piece. There
22 are other museums who did minimum admissions, for
23 instance. Did voluntary admissions, say on these
24 days, we're going to have minimum admissions. They
25 would not consider that, right? And we said, why

2 don't we do the furloughs, and that did not happen.

3 In addition to that, I said I will commit to fight

4 for the Museum when it comes to budget season, to the

5 budget cycle that we're about to engage, and they

6 would not consider that. Now, so it begs the

7 question, what is behind all these layoffs. And I

8 will say this to you. I've been the executive

9 director for about 10 years, and at any given time,

10 we face layoffs and institutions lose revenue, and

11 you work within institutions to come up with

12 solutions to mitigate those layoffs because you have

13 a fundamental understanding that you're not only

14 having somebody lose their job, not have any money to

15 put foot on the table, but that there's a financial

16 impact on the city, right? In this case, the Brooklyn

17 Museum does a lot of work at the Department of

18 Education. There are contracts that they do to teach

19 children. That is not part of the revenue you heard

20 today. So, when you heard from the Commissioner,

21 rightfully so, many institutions are facing those

22 challenges. That is a separate part. In the last

23 round in 2016, I remember we even discussed the David

24 Bowie concerts, and they needed a change to raise

25 revenue with the staff of the security because they

2 were making money out of these meetings with David
3 Bowie at the time, and we agreed to make some
4 concessions then that would mitigate the impact on
5 having the guards in terms of premium pay in order to
6 give the Museum more flexibility in working. So,
7 there are always alternatives. There's a list of
8 things we could be talking about that don't imply
9 people losing their jobs, and we are prepared to do
10 that as long as it shares sacrifices, as long as we
11 don't see managers getting huge increases in salaries
12 when our workers are seeing pink slips.

13 And I'll conclude with this, Madam
14 Chairman, because I feel very strongly about this.
15 One of the questions you raised is how much is the
16 cultural institutions part of our workers. We were
17 told at the bargaining table that it was 50 percent
18 of the amount. That's what we were told. We were told
19 that their deficits go back to 2015. And so one of
20 the things that I asked was, well, can we look at
21 fringes, for instance. Healthcare is one of the
22 biggest jump that they have had, and I don't blame
23 the Museums because I think the Commissioner is
24 absolutely right, this is not just a Brooklyn Museum
25 issue. It's endemic of all the museums, and this is

2 just the beginning of much layoffs that we're going
3 to see. Can we look at fringes, for instance? How
4 much does the City charge the Museums in terms of
5 fringes for workers, particularly healthcare? And
6 there's a methodology the City follows based on the
7 Administrative Code that doesn't make any sense to us
8 because you charge a HIPAA-GMO rate for cultural
9 institutions that mostly don't have HIPAA-GMO. So
10 there's rooms to do fringe work for all cultural
11 institutions that would allow to reduce the cost of
12 healthcare for the institutions, but it has to be in
13 the context, absolute context, of reducing costs and
14 saving layoffs. It can't just be for managing to have
15 more money to spend on trips, I'll say it, to spend
16 on things that have nothing to do with the operation.

17 And I will close with this, Madam
18 Chairwoman. This Brooklyn Museum is fantastic. It has
19 a history, has great exhibits, provides great service
20 to the community, provides great service to the
21 children. But what makes the Museum shine are its
22 people. It's the workers who make this thing that
23 take less of a salary and sacrifice to make sure they
24 provide the services to that public. Without that,

2 we're just looking at old things on a wall, and
3 people need to remember that. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you, Henry,
5 for your testimony, for sharing your experience with
6 us. I continue and will always stand with the workers
7 of our city and, as I said to the Commissioner, it
8 has an impact when we lay folks off, and the impact
9 is felt citywide, but it's felt personally for those
10 families that are no longer able to bring home a
11 paycheck, that are no longer able to provide health
12 benefits for their families.

13 I'm going to ask you one question, and
14 then I'm going to pass it to my Colleagues because
15 they have questions as well. Can you clarify how the
16 Museum's actions violated the union contract?

17 HENRY GARRIDO: Well, I said some of it,
18 right? First, by going directly to the workers before
19 they had an opportunity to negotiate, right? So the
20 general practice is you go and you negotiate. You're
21 supposed to meet and confer, that's the term. Not go
22 directly to the workers. That's considered direct
23 dealing. That's violation number one. They also
24 violated by timeline issues, right? We believe, and
25 that would be, I don't want to get into the legal

2 case, because we understood that there was a
3 timeline, and this is both questionable in my mind
4 because the budget process ends in June, our budget
5 process in the City. If we have the best possible
6 intention to address the financial problems of the
7 Museum, why would you make the layoffs affected March
8 9th? Why not wait to see what we could've done? Even
9 if the City Council did not put up all of the money,
10 even if the Administration, and I work very well with
11 this Commissioner, didn't find all the alternatives
12 to do it, if we had a way to reduce that 10 million
13 dollars to, say, six, then perhaps you didn't have to
14 lay off 47 people. Perhaps you could reduce that to
15 20. And then we could've worked to try to figure out
16 to make that from 20 to zero. You see what I'm
17 saying? So, I don't understand the approach of the
18 Administration and the Museum on this. I know they
19 have a responsibility. And also the other things that
20 bothered me is that the things that they were asking
21 by way of concessions to make things better had
22 nothing to do with reducing cost, but reducing the
23 power of the collective bargaining agreements.
24 Seniority has no cost on it, right? And the way that
25 we're doing it, laying off senior people or junior

2 people has no cost other than the fact that you can
3 get rid of whoever you want. So, those are the things
4 that we are going to be questioning during this
5 process.

6 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you, Henry.
7 Council Member Hudson.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you, and
9 thank you so much for your testimony. My first
10 question is, was the director the same in 2016 when
11 you said you had the furloughs and?

12 HENRY GARRIDO: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay.

14 HENRY GARRIDO: Yes, it was the same
15 director.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, so what is
17 your sense as to why maybe she's not open to similar
18 tactics that were used in the past to save jobs?

19 HENRY GARRIDO: Well, honestly, I get
20 alone, and we talked all the time with Anne
21 Pasternak. We faced a lot of issues. When the COVID-
22 19 crisis hit, I was leading the fight to get the New
23 York delegation to get federal funding into the
24 museums, even though they weren't classified at the
25 time. If you recall, a lot was said. So, there were a

2 lot of conversations there. I think, in all honesty,
3 there was a City Hall involvement in those
4 conversations that is not present this time around so
5 I don't want to put just the Museum. It was the First
6 Deputy Mayor at the time, Dean Fuleihan, who said,
7 from the City's perspective, this is where we are. I
8 heard from the Commissioner today, we're going to
9 have conversations about that, but I think the
10 problem is time is of the essence. You need somebody
11 who's going to guide this, and I don't want to put
12 what is happening in the city as a way, but I think
13 that's real, that if you don't have somebody on that
14 end who can commit to certain things, because what we
15 found as a solution in 2016 was we needed to spread
16 the pain. We didn't bury ourselves and didn't
17 acknowledge the Museum was facing financial
18 institutions. But it was a combination of things. It
19 was the institution of the voluntary contributions.
20 It was furloughs. We made a change to other things
21 that were necessary for the Museum, and we had a
22 table of things to get to a savings. Some were
23 concessions, quite frankly, in the union. It wasn't
24 just the union workers who took a furlough.
25 Management took a furlough, too. And that's what I

2 mean by shared sacrifices. But we don't have that
3 this time, and so I hope that between now and before
4 anybody loses their job that that happens.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely, and I
6 am absolutely willing to work with you and with the
7 Museum to make sure that some of those conversations
8 do happen.

9 And then just my only other question was
10 about that specifically. Are those conversations
11 still happening to put potential solutions on the
12 table?

13 HENRY GARRIDO: Yeah. We offer furloughs,
14 and management rejected those.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

16 HENRY GARRIDO: So again, we're going back
17 to the book. It's not something we want to do, but a
18 furlough for people, even those who are, I think some
19 of the workers that you'll see here would be willing
20 to take, and we could know, to pay for and make sure
21 their fellow workers have a job. I've heard from
22 them. I wouldn't be able to do it if they weren't in
23 support of that. So, but management has rejected
24 that, and has rejected that, to be fair, because it's
25 not part of an overall solution. It's only a piece of

2 it, but I do think that there are other ideas. To the
3 Chairwoman's point, we may have voluntary... so one of
4 the things we did in 16 is that when the voluntary
5 contribution came into the Museum, because it's not
6 like a lot of the museums in Manhattan where you have
7 a lot of tourist traffic, we said, does that exclude
8 children in the area, and we said, no, they're not
9 going to pay. Can we make it such adults pay a
10 minimum amount on certain days? What we discussed
11 last time was, can we make a, say, Monday, Wednesday,
12 and Thursday free, and the other two days will be
13 paid? It doesn't have to be an all-in, everybody pays
14 to, you know, we could work around and say, well,
15 that estimates to generate X based on your incoming,
16 and it would allow communities to access the Museum
17 for free on specific days, because we're facing a
18 crisis, right? We could do that in a way that it
19 could be furlough, that it could be sunset, I'm
20 sorry, that we just do it for the next two years
21 until we can figure out, and then work on the
22 financial stability of the Museum. There are a lot of
23 ideas and things that we can do, but I think the last
24 resort should be laying off people.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely. I
3 agree with that. I'll be in touch around continued
4 conversations. Thank you, and thank you, Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you.
6 Council Member Menin?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Yes. Thank you,
8 Henry, so much for your testimony. I don't have a
9 question. I just want to reiterate support for your
10 testimony and the fact that you've laid out a very
11 clear, creative, outside-of-the-box path, as you did
12 in 2016. There's no reason that the Admin shouldn't
13 do it, and in fact, not only is there no reason, the
14 onus is on them to do what needs to be done here, and
15 I think you've laid it out very clearly, and you
16 certainly have my support, and I really urge the
17 Admin to listen and to move this forward. Thank you.

18 HENRY GARRIDO: Thank you. I'll say, look,
19 we're going to fight this tooth and nail. There is no
20 reason why 47 people should be losing a job until we
21 exhaust everything possible, and we're committing to
22 our union and our brothers and sisters in other
23 unions to fight because those workers deserve no
24 less. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you. I do
3 have a few more questions, but I agree with you. I
4 think that that was the messaging that we're all
5 coming across this table and across this room with,
6 is that we're all willing to get in a room and have
7 conversation, right? None of us got here, and we're
8 not willing to do that, but it seems to me that all
9 options have not been exhausted, and I think we need
10 to get to the point where we are exhausting every
11 option, and I think you've laid out some very
12 concrete steps that could be taken and could be
13 considered.

14 Have remaining union members raised
15 concerns about increased workloads or job insecurity
16 following the layoffs? How's the morale?

17 HENRY GARRIDO: Oh, absolutely. Not only
18 that, about safety. Look, one of the issues that we
19 are facing now in the past is increased concerns
20 about safety in the Museum, especially when you have
21 those concerts and events that I mentioned that were
22 part, that were not part of it, so now you not only
23 have to cover a door, you have to cover two doors.
24 Now you have to clean more spaces that you're not
25 going to be able to do, and now you're going to be

2 able to slow curation of exhibits, so absolutely,
3 right? You know, you often hear the expression, you
4 gotta do more with less. This is doing less with
5 less. Like, there's no question about it, but safety
6 is one of the paramount concerns.

7 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: That makes a lot
8 of sense. Has the Museum shared detailed financial
9 records with the union to justify the layoffs, that
10 the layoffs are unavoidable at this point?

11 HENRY GARRIDO: No. They've shown us
12 numbers. They've thrown numbers at us, but as you
13 heard from the Commissioner herself, the City's
14 contribution has increased. We know expenses have
15 increased. We know that, you know, we're not blind to
16 the idea that inflation has hit all of us
17 increasingly, but it wasn't like the workers got a
18 million dollars in raises. You know what I'm saying?
19 Is if you look at the rate of inflation, what we got
20 was significantly less than the rate of inflation by
21 way of increases, and somehow the workers always get
22 blamed for this. So no, we haven't. That would be
23 something that we would be using. Hopefully, cooler
24 heads prevail, and we're going to try to work
25 something out, but we have not seen any written

2 financial statements that go back. They said to us
3 that the deficit that they've been facing goes back
4 to 2015, and that every year they've had a mounting
5 deficit until we reached '16, where we're able to
6 balance it for a couple of years through those
7 actions, and then it went back up.

8 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Do you believe,
9 well, obviously you believe that there could be
10 further cuts in the future. What protections are in
11 place to prevent impact on staff?

12 HENRY GARRIDO: Well, you know, one of the
13 things I'm going to question is when we did this
14 layout, this collective bargaining agreement, we had
15 an understanding there would be no layoffs in that
16 process. And that goes to the Administration and to
17 the Mayor himself. So, we're going to be reminding
18 him of that. Now, this is not a City agency, so they
19 would probably take the position that doesn't apply,
20 and that's probably true, but I think there's also a
21 responsibility by City and the City Hall to say the
22 Brooklyn Museum is servicing our constituency, right?
23 So, they can't get away with saying, well, things are
24 going up in expenses, because I think that's going to
25 happen in other museums. We're hearing Guggenheim may

2 face this. We went through this with the Brooklyn
3 Academy of Music to your question, and we worked
4 through that. We had furloughs there. We did some
5 cuts. We were able to figure out. They offer workers
6 a buyout. They were able to bring in new people at a
7 lower wage. There are alternatives to layoffs. And
8 not just to say we're informing you within 30-day
9 notice, this is it. No matter what happens, no matter
10 what the City Council does, we're just going to lay
11 them off. So, there are opportunities to work around
12 this.

13 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: What about, I
14 mean, it's been brought up in this hearing a few
15 times about the other CIGs. Are you all...

16 HENRY GARRIDO: I'm sorry?

17 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: The other CIGs,
18 the other cultural institutions, the members of the
19 other Cultural Institution Groups?

20 HENRY GARRIDO: We've worked out with the
21 others to prevent the idea of layoffs as well. Museum
22 of Natural History, for instance. We worked to
23 minimize the cost of pension, for instance, on CIRS.
24 With the Met, we had a discussion and changed the way
25 in bargaining. There are ways you can do it if you

2 approach it from us with the perspective of the union
3 being partners. Not somebody you're telling what's
4 going to happen. We need the Museum to do the same,
5 and we need the Administration to be part of that
6 process.

7 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Great. I want to
8 recognize we've been joined by Council Member Feliz.

9 If any other Colleagues have questions on
10 this? No?

11 Well, we want to thank you, Henry, for
12 taking the time and for the workers that are here as
13 well. Sharing your experience is valuable I think in
14 bringing us to a solution. I reiterate what my
15 Colleagues have said here. Layoffs should be the
16 absolute last resort, and we don't support New
17 Yorkers losing their jobs here. Thank you for being
18 here and for allowing us to get a glimpse of the
19 challenges that you're also dealing with.

20 HENRY GARRIDO: Thank you. Thank you for
21 your support. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you. Our
23 next panel, I want to call up June Lei of DC37. Maida
24 Rosenstein, I'm sorry with the last names, please

2 correct them for the record, UAW. Ellen Nigro, UAW.
3 Elizabeth St. George, UAW.

4 All right. When you're ready, you may
5 begin. Just identify yourself for the record.

6 JUNE LEI: Can you hear me?

7 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Yes.

8 JUNE LEI: Okay. Let's go. Good morning.

9 First, I wanted to give my thanks to Chair De La Rosa
10 and fellow Committee Members. Thank you so much for
11 your service, for exemplifying clear and true
12 leadership for the people of New York. It is no small
13 feat as we know. My name is June Lei. I am a born and
14 raised New Yorker, a part-time CUNY student, and a
15 full-time public programs producer at the Brooklyn
16 Museum. For the past three years, I've served as the
17 Secretary of DC37 Local 1502 so I speak to you today
18 as an elected representative of nearly 200 cultural
19 workers in Brooklyn. I started working at the
20 Brooklyn Museum as an intern in 2015, and I've spent
21 a decade believing in the mission of a democratic
22 arts institution that brings culture, learning, joy,
23 and jobs to the borough of Brooklyn. Three weeks ago,
24 when management abruptly laid off non-union workers
25 and announced a plan to lay off union workers in

2 violation of our contract, myself and my colleagues
3 were shocked and saddened for the place we love had
4 eschewed its longtime values for a DOGE-esque
5 consolidation of power. Last year, the Museum told us
6 our financial budget deficit was strategic. Today, it
7 is balancing its budget on the backs of workers who
8 lose their benefits, salaries, pensions, and union
9 membership. I thought our civic institutions were
10 supposed to support democracy and not repress it. As
11 many have noted from the Comptroller reports, the
12 creative economy of the City generates 110 billion
13 dollars of economic activity. Despite this, cultural
14 workers are underpaid, our skills exploited and
15 devalued because artwork is seen as a passion project
16 before it is seen as real work. At the Brooklyn
17 Museum, as Henry said, we are already understaffed,
18 with workers clocking in (TIMER CHIME) significant
19 overtime during evenings and weekends, risking injury
20 to themselves as well as works of art just to get the
21 shows up on time and make the magic happen. The
22 Museum's decision to conduct layoffs when we already
23 function with such a lean staff shows an egregious
24 error in judgment that will have lasting consequences
25 for the future of the Museum, its historic

2 collection, and the entire cultural economy of New
3 York City. I just want to point out that no one from
4 museum's management is here right now. The Museum
5 should be here today to ask for City Council to fund
6 the gap in the budget, but they are not. We are here,
7 and they are the ones who have created the fiscal
8 crisis, not the City and not the workers. The Museum
9 is not giving the union precise information, but
10 based off the data that we do have, we believe the
11 Museum needs three to four million dollars to prevent
12 these layoffs. We are asking for management at the
13 Museum to completely halt the layoff of our union
14 workers. Further, we ask the Comptroller's Office to
15 conduct an audit to understand how the Museum's
16 management led to the point of a 10-million-dollar
17 deficit and these layoffs. Lastly, I ask City Council
18 and members of the public to urge the Museum to
19 follow our union contract and contribute to
20 furthering democracy, not injuring it. Council
21 Members, thank you for your time.

22 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you so
23 much.

24 MAIDA ROSENSTEIN: Okay, can you hear me
25 now? Okay, good morning, everybody, and thank you so

2 much to the Council Members for conducting this
3 hearing. My name is Maida Rosenstein. I am the
4 Director of Organizing for Local 2110 of the UAW. We
5 are a technical office and professional union. We
6 represent thousands of members in the cultural
7 sector, both in New York City and New England. Our
8 international union, the United Auto Workers, the
9 UAW, represents over 20,000 members in the New York
10 City area, and I'm very glad to be here representing
11 the 170-member bargaining unit that we just organized
12 at the Brooklyn Museum. I was responsible for that
13 organizing campaign and for leading the negotiations
14 for the first contract, and just want to say that on
15 Friday, this is what has happened. We represent, that
16 unit includes curators, conservators, archivists,
17 graphic designers, exhibition staff, editors,
18 educators, front-of-house workers and visitor
19 services and retail staff in development and in
20 marketing, and we work alongside the members of DC37
21 AFSCME. On Friday, February 7th, the Museum announced
22 to us with no warning that they planned a mass layoff
23 of staff to be effective on March 10th, claiming that
24 they had a deficit. The overwhelming number of
25 positions that they intend to lay off are union

2 positions. At least 21 local 2110 represented
3 employees are scheduled for layoff. In addition, and
4 this hasn't been mentioned before, the Museum, in
5 addition to the layoffs of the DC37 and 2110 members,
6 the Museum has also told us that they are reducing
7 the hours of a number of our full-time members to
8 part-time and reducing the (TIMER CHIME) hours of
9 current part-timers in front-of-house and museum
10 educators as well so it's more than just 47 layoffs.
11 There are other reductions as well. These proposed
12 layoffs and reductions are devastating to our
13 members. Many of the employees that are targeted for
14 layoffs are longer-term, career-based employees. At
15 least one of our members has more than 20 years of
16 service at the Museum. How is that justified in any
17 way? Others who you'll hear from are curators and
18 conservators who have years of education and
19 experience that they bring to the Museum that will be
20 lost to the Museum. And I will say this is a career
21 killer for some of these folks because it is not easy
22 to come by these jobs and, not only could the
23 Brooklyn Museum lose these people, but the City and
24 State of New York could lose them as well. The
25 layoffs will leave the Museum, which is already very

2 skimpily staffed, I represent a lot of other museums,
3 and Brooklyn does not have a heavy staff amount. It
4 is a small headcount, will leave the Museum outright
5 understaffed, and it is going to cause tremendous
6 problems for the people who remain in terms of being
7 able to get the work done and ultimately will hurt
8 the Museum. The layoffs will be devastating to the
9 Museum. This is a museum that has a world-class
10 encyclopedic collection that's going to be harmed by
11 the reduction of all the collection care people that
12 they're getting rid of. Many of the Local 2110 people
13 who are scheduled for layoff include those with core
14 positions in collection management such as curators,
15 conservatives, and exhibition-related staff. As I
16 said, the Museum is already understaffed in these
17 areas and the loss of these skilled professionals
18 will really endanger this collection, which is a
19 value not only to the Museum, but to the public. The
20 proposed layoffs are devastating to the city and the
21 community as others have already testified. The
22 Museum is a treasure for the city and for the Borough
23 of Brooklyn. The Museum is planning to cut 40 percent
24 of its educational programs and reduce the number of
25 yearly exhibitions. Laying off tax-paying city

2 residents hurts everybody, and cutting the art and
3 culture of New York is indisputably bad for our city
4 as was said by Council Member Hudson. This is a
5 revenue generator. This is just like the spiral down
6 the drain instead of fighting for our economy. So,
7 letting one of our major museums flounder should not
8 be an option. The Museum has not engaged in good
9 faith bargaining with our union. Instead of coming to
10 us in advance to discuss the deficit and means of
11 reducing it, the Museum just announced it as a done
12 deal on February and, as prior people testified, went
13 directly to workers saying you're on the hit list for
14 layoff. That's a direct violation of our contract
15 which requires them to give us advance notice of any
16 intended reorganizations for the purpose of
17 discussion between the parties so it's a direct
18 violation and the union has already filed a grievance
19 over this as well as charges at the National Labor
20 Relations Board. The Museum has not abided by
21 seniority, apparently neither at DC37 or in our
22 union, and has taken advantage of the fact that as is
23 typical in this kind of white collar professional
24 unit, people are given very highly specialized unique
25 titles, and so claiming that seniority is based on

2 these very unique titles, the Museum has targeted
3 particular individuals for layoff, which is another
4 whole problem. It's not only that they're laying
5 people off which is bad enough, but they have used
6 these layoffs in a targeted, they weaponized this in
7 a targeted way. Our union chairperson has been laid
8 off, a curator at the Museum who's been there for
9 years and who is in the midst of a major
10 deaccessioning project. This makes no sense except in
11 the context of union busting. And a number of people
12 on the list for layoffs are people who have filed
13 grievances or who have testified at a National Labor
14 Relations Board hearing, and so we have filed charges
15 at the National Labor Relations Board against the
16 Museum for this anti-union animus. I will say, the
17 Museum has also told us that they intended, they are
18 taking the work and they are going to move it to
19 either non-union management employees at the Museum
20 or also offload it onto consultants, independent
21 contractors, or so-called temporary employees. So,
22 make no mistake about it, the Museum may have a
23 deficit but not only have they not talked to the
24 union and bargained in good faith about how to reduce

2 that deficit, they have weaponized it to target and
3 clean house in a way that is...

4 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Can you wrap up?
5 I'm sorry.

6 MAIDA ROSENSTEIN: Sorry, I will.

7 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: You've been going
8 over two minutes.

9 MAIDA ROSENSTEIN: So, we have expressed
10 to the Museum, as has DC37, a willingness to work
11 with the Museum on the deficit, and we have proposed
12 alternatives such as furloughs, voluntary exit
13 packages to avert the layoffs, but the Museum has
14 rejected these things out of hand and, again, I think
15 that underscores the fact that this layoff has been
16 weaponized. We join with DC37 in asking the City
17 Council to bridge the funding gap. Museum has told us
18 approximately three and a half million dollars in
19 savings for layoffs of DC37 for union workers. And we
20 join with DC37 in asking the Council and the public
21 to reach out to the director to revisit this. We also
22 joined with DC37 in their call upon for the
23 Comptroller to audit the Museum's finances. And we
24 would say not only should the Museum have come to us,
25 the unions, in advance to talk about this, they

2 should have involved the City Council in advance as
3 well. Thank you very much for your time.

4 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you for
5 your testimony.

6 ELLEN NIGRO: Hello, thank you for having
7 me here today, Madam Chair. My name is Ellen Nigro,
8 and I am the Assistant Paintings Conservator at the
9 Brooklyn Museum. I'm a member of the UAW Local 2110
10 and a resident of Brooklyn, specifically District 35.
11 I have worked in the Museum's Conservation Department
12 for over five years and the Brooklyn Museum plans to
13 lay me off. As one of two Paintings Conservators at
14 the Museum, I'm charged with the preservation and
15 restoration of the Museum's painting collection of
16 over 6,000 works. I clean the works of art and repair
17 them if they're damaged and create policies and enact
18 preventive measures to ensure the physical longevity
19 of the collection. My job and the jobs of all the
20 conservators at the Museum is critical to ensuring
21 that this 200-year-old institution's collection lasts
22 for 200 more years. The Conservation Department
23 itself is over 90 years old, one of the oldest
24 institutional labs in the city, and I am proud to be
25 in the long line of conservators who care for this

2 precious resource. Conservators are a key part of an
3 ecosystem of core museum workers that directly care
4 for the art. We collaborate with curators,
5 registrars, art handlers, exhibition designers, and
6 collections managers to ensure the artworks are
7 stored, exhibited, loaned, documented, and moved as
8 safely as possible. The conservators have highly
9 specialized knowledge in art materials, chemistry,
10 and art history. We also have the fine craft skills
11 to execute detailed treatments on priceless artworks.
12 This knowledge and skill is acquired through years of
13 formal education and hands-on training. For example,
14 in my case, I have a Bachelor of Arts in Art
15 Conservation and Art History and a three-year
16 Master's of Science in Art Conservation with a (TIMER
17 CHIME) specialization in paintings. My advanced
18 hands-on training was completed during a Fulbright
19 year in the Netherlands, a post-master's fellowship
20 at the University of Cambridge in the UK, and a
21 fellowship at the Brooklyn Museum. The Museum cannot
22 afford to cut its core museum workers whose
23 expertise, institutional knowledge, and established
24 rapport allows the collection to be cared for and
25 exhibited in the most efficient and effective manner.

2 I am building my career here, starting first as the
3 fellow in 2019 and then moving into the Assistant
4 Conservator role in 2021, where I hoped to grow my
5 career well beyond March of 2025. My skills and
6 knowledge, and that of my colleagues, are a precious
7 and growing resource that would be lost in layoffs. I
8 choose to work for the Brooklyn Museum because of its
9 commitment to being a community resource and a space
10 for all. I take pride in the fact that I get to serve
11 the community in which I live, but what I do not take
12 pride in is management's poor decision-making, lip
13 service to its workers, and blatant disregard for two
14 union contracts. Management's choice to lay me and my
15 colleagues off is in direct opposition to its
16 commitment to its community. Not only would it be
17 harder for the Museum to make its art accessible with
18 fewer workers, the layoffs would also strip away the
19 livelihoods of people in the very community that they
20 supposedly are committed to. And for all of these
21 reasons, I am here today to call on City Council to
22 insist the Brooklyn Museum immediately halt the
23 layoffs and to bargain with the UAW and DC37 in good
24 faith. Thank you.

2 ELIZABETH ST. GEORGE: Good morning. Thank
3 you for this opportunity to appear before this
4 Committee. My name is Elizabeth St. George. I am a
5 resident... Can you hear me now? Okay, good. Okay. My
6 name is Elizabeth St. George. I am a resident of
7 Sunset Park, Brooklyn, and serve as Unit Chair of the
8 Brooklyn Museum's local 2110 UAW shop, representing
9 170 members. I have worked at the Brooklyn Museum as
10 assistant curator of decorative arts and design since
11 January 2020. However, my position is now selected
12 for termination. As a curator at the Museum, I
13 oversee 30,000 objects, research and public
14 scholarship about the collection, conceive,
15 coordinate, and install temporary exhibitions and
16 permanent displays. The training for this type of job
17 is extensive, requiring advanced degrees, multiple
18 advanced degrees, and a multitude of work experience.
19 This is vital work that not only supports the
20 physical care and safety of artwork, but makes
21 historical research and knowledge broadly available
22 through our website and (INAUDIBLE). Also through
23 tours and other teaching opportunities, I guide
24 visitors and school groups of all ages through the
25 Museum and share stories about objects, the

2 collection, and Brooklyn history that serve as a
3 significant source of public education for our
4 community. This aspect of public service, educating
5 and building relationships with visitors is probably
6 the part of the job that I love the most. With its
7 cost and staff reductions, including my position and
8 others, the Museum plans to cut 40 percent of its
9 education public programs, reducing its ability to
10 serve and educate and engage with the local community
11 of all ages. With 22 years of experience in the
12 museum field, I wanted to work at the Brooklyn Museum
13 because of its mission that proclaims "to bring
14 people together through art and experiences that
15 inspire celebration, compassion, courage, and the
16 will to act, to be the place where art is a powerful
17 force for personal transformation and social change."
18 In recent weeks, I have been outraged that this
19 institution for social change has rejected humane
20 labor values and rights, not honoring its contracts
21 with its labor unions and creating an environment of
22 disastrously low morale. (TIMER CHIME) Indeed, the
23 Museum has not shown compassion nor courage. Its
24 staff have been left wondering how good faith in the
25 Museum's mission can be restored or achieved by

2 eliminating nearly 50 essential positions. Local
3 community members I have spoke to who rely on the
4 Museum's facilities and programs are equally
5 concerned about these staff reductions, particularly
6 how this will affect access to the Museum's world-
7 renowned collections and its role as a public forum
8 and space. Today, along with my fellow colleagues
9 from the Brooklyn Museum and UAW and DC37, I request
10 that the City Council bridge the funding gap, about
11 three and a half to four million dollars, to stop the
12 layoffs at the Brooklyn Museum and to please contact
13 the Director, Anne Pasternak, to halt these layoffs
14 entirely. I ask that the Comptroller audit the
15 Museum's finances to understand how this deficit came
16 about. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you all for
18 testifying. I'm really appreciative of you all coming
19 here. It takes courage to do what you're doing. It
20 takes courage to speak up and stand up and be
21 vulnerable so I want to acknowledge that. And I think
22 that the experience that you're going through right
23 now, it's important for people to hear it and to know
24 that it is happening. And I'm sorry that you all are
25 going through this. I can't imagine what it feels

2 like to have the instability that you are all feeling
3 right now, especially as you speak about your hopes
4 for the future of your careers, which obviously took
5 a lot of schooling and a lot of sacrifices to get to
6 where you are. And I want to thank you for also
7 highlighting the workers that have experienced
8 targeting through this process as well. I don't have
9 any questions. I just wanted to thank you all for
10 coming. Your testimony will obviously be put into the
11 record and we'll follow up. This will be an ongoing
12 conversation, but I really did want to take the
13 opportunity to thank UAW and DC37 for your ongoing
14 solidarity and courage in this process. Thank you.
15 Thank you for coming.

16 We have one more panel that is on Zoom.
17 Thank you to all who came here for sharing your
18 thoughts and experiences today. If anyone in the
19 Chamber who wishes to speak, but has not yet had the
20 opportunity to do so, please raise your hand and fill
21 out an appearance card with a Sergeant-at-Arms at the
22 back of the room.

23 Seeing no hands in the Chamber, we will
24 now shift to Zoom testimony. When your name is
25 called, please wait until a Member of our Team

2 unmutes you and the Sergeant-at-Arms indicates that
3 you may begin. We will start with Brandon Mancilla
4 followed by Vail Kohnert-Yount. I'm messing up these
5 names. Please make sure that you correct them for the
6 record.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Brandon, you may
9 begin.

10 BRANDON MANCILLA: Hello. Good afternoon,
11 everyone. I am Brandon Mancilla, the Director of UAW
12 Region 9A, which includes Local 2110 under its
13 umbrella. I'm here on behalf of the 1 million active
14 and retired members of the UAW across the country and
15 20,000 members in New York City. I'm here to support
16 our UAW Local 2110 members at the Brooklyn Museum. I
17 want to echo what Maida Rosenstein and the members
18 have already said about the UAW's commitment to
19 fighting for these members at Brooklyn Museum facing
20 these unjust layoffs, and I also want to express my
21 support to the members represented by DC37 and
22 Brother Garrido in this fight. DC37 and the UAW will
23 be united in this fight as we relentlessly represent
24 and win justice for our members. I want to just say
25 that in the era of DOGE and the federal threats to

2 all of our institutions, it is our duty as a union to
3 speak against all attempts to normalize layoffs and
4 downsizing, and we believe it is the City's
5 responsibility, City government's responsibility to
6 do everything in its power to make the city
7 affordable and a home of good, union-respecting
8 employers. The city cannot be a beacon of hope and an
9 alternative to what's going on in Washington if we
10 allow our storied institutions to not honor its
11 commitments to the community, to art, and to its
12 workers that make these institutions run. We have
13 talked to state electives and we will continue to do
14 so to emphasize the need to invest and increase
15 funding for cultural institutions and museums across
16 the city and state, and we also call on the City
17 Council to support our calls to make these situations
18 unacceptable and end these practices that only go to
19 hurt our members and union bust our unions. It is
20 unacceptable and it is ridiculous that the Museum
21 leadership isn't here to explain themselves. We
22 believe in the spirit of collective bargaining and as
23 a institution that receives State and City funding
24 that they should be here to be accountable to the
25 decisions that they make.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

3 BRANDON MANCILLA: Thank you. Thank you
4 very much, everyone.

5 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you,
6 Brandon.

7 Up next, we have Vail.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

9 VAIL KOHNERT-YOUNT: Yes. My name is Vail
10 Kohnert-Yount, and I'm the Assistant Director of
11 Region 9A of the UAW covering New York City. The A in
12 UAW, of course, stands for auto, but in New York
13 City, it could also stand for the arts because UAW
14 Local 2110 represents thousands of workers at museums
15 and cultural institutions in the city, including 170
16 staff at the Brooklyn Museum, some of whom you just
17 heard from. On Tuesday night, hundreds of union
18 workers and community members showed up to protest
19 the recent layoffs impacting nearly 50 full and part-
20 time staff members who are members of UAW Local 2110
21 and DC37, and it was incredible to see so many of the
22 people at this hearing there in person on Tuesday.
23 It's absolutely unacceptable for the Museum to lay
24 off these workers. It's especially outrageous for
25 management who have not only failed to plan for, but

2 also contributed to the budgetary shortfall to do so
3 when they haven't exhausted every other option or
4 even bothered to bargain in good faith with our
5 union, and starting by slashing workers essential to
6 maintaining the collections who make less than 6
7 percent of what the executive director makes so it's
8 just how deeply ill-considered and wrong this
9 decision is. It's bad for the staff and bad for the
10 institution and bad for its collections. And if
11 there's one thing you should know about the UAW, it's
12 that our members will always fight and fight hard for
13 our jobs. We have a saying in the UAW by former
14 president Walter Reuther who said, there's a direct
15 relationship between the ballot box and the bread box
16 and what the union fights for and wins at the
17 bargaining table can be taken away in the legislative
18 halls. We at the UAW know this very well, and it's
19 never been more relevant than today. We just cannot
20 normalize layoffs and the decimation of our public
21 services and institutions like this, not in Brooklyn
22 and not anywhere else. So, we really need our elected
23 officials to stand up and use your power to save
24 these workers' jobs and not let union members be
25 targeted for sacrifice, and we will remember those

2 who stood up for our members when we go to the ballot
3 box. Thank you to (TIMER CHIME) everyone who has
4 participated in this hearing, and I appreciate the
5 opportunity to speak on behalf of our membership.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON DE LA ROSA: Thank you, Vail.
8 We are making a final call for Zoom registrants who
9 have not yet spoken. If you're currently on Zoom and
10 wish to speak, but have not yet had the opportunity
11 to do so, please use the raise hand function and our
12 Staff will unmute you.

13 Seeing no hands, I would like to note
14 that everyone can submit written testimony to
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this
16 hearing.

17 To conclude, I would like to thank all of
18 the folks who provide the rich cultural experience
19 that New York is known for and to all of those who
20 attended today's hearing to share your experiences. I
21 think we've had a productive conversation here where
22 we were able to delve into some of the experiences of
23 the workers here, some of the challenges coming from
24 our cultural institutions, from our City agencies,
25 and we hope that you all have enjoyed being here and

2 witnessing government in action. We look forward to
3 continuing to have this conversation. This is not the
4 end of the conversation. This is just a point in the
5 conversation.

6 With that, we'll now conclude the
7 hearing. Thank you. [GAVEL] We're adjourned. Thank
8 you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 9, 2025