

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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May 21, 2024
Start: 9:41 a.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Justin L. Brannan
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Diana I. Ayala
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David M. Carr
Amanda Farías
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Crystal Hudson
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Keith Powers
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Pierina Ana Sanchez

Althea V. Stevens
Nantasha N. Williams
Julie Won

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

Linda Johnson
President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library

Tony Marx
President of New York Public Library

Dennis Walcott
President and CEO of Queens Public Library

Laurie Cumbo
Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner

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Department of Cultural Affairs General Counsel

Leonard Paul

Deborah Allman
New York Public Library Guild Local 1930

George Olken
President of Local 1482

John Hyslop
Queens Library Guild 1321

Lucy Sexton
Culture Lab, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

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

Coco Killingsworth
Brooklyn Academy of Music, CIG Chairperson

Francine Garber-Cohen
President of Regina Opera Company

Lisa Gold
Asian American Arts Alliance

Judith Insell
Executive Director of Bronx Arts Ensemble

Risa Shoup
Co-Executive Director at Alliance of Resident
Theaters New York

Dohini Sompura
American Museum of Natural History

Rosa Chang
President of Gotham Park

Claire Mooney
Brooklyn Public Library

Matthew Zadrozny
SaveNYPL.org

Lauren Comito
Director Urban Librarians Unite

David Pecoraro
President of Friends of Rosedale Library

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

Sheila Lewandowski
Executive Director of Chocolate Factory Theater
Long Island

Candace Thompson-Zachery
Dance NYC Executive Director

Melody Capote
Executive Director of Caribbean Cultural African
Diaspora Institute

Kate Madigan
Public Theater at Astor Place

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

David Freudenthal
Carnegie Hall

Lisa Alpert
Senior Vice President of Development and
Programming at Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn

Michelle Lema
NYC Culture Curator

Elyse Buxbaum
Museum of Jewish Heritage

Nicole Gardner
Building for the Arts

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

Ryan Gilliam
FABnyc, Community Board Three

Tamia Santana
Ballet Hispanico

Skye Kowaleski
JACK Arts

Jirina Ribbens
Executive Director of Ice Theater of New York

Andrea Gordillo
Community Board Three Chair

Gina Tribotti
International Studio and Curatorial Program

Beth Allen
Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance

Colby Herchel
Scantic River Productions

Dian Dong
Chen Dance Studio

David Johnston
The Jazz Gallery

Christopher Leon Johnson

Maeve Montalvo
Museum of City of New York

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and
3 welcome to the New York City Council Executive Budget
4 hearing on finance jointly with Cultural Affairs,
5 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. At
6 this time, can everybody please silence your
7 cellphones? If you wish to testify, please go up to
8 the Sergeant at Arms desk to fill out a testimony
9 slip. Written testimony can be emailed to
10 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is
11 testimony@council.nyc.gov. At this time and going
12 forward, no one is to approach the dais. I repeat,
13 no one is to approach the dais. Thank you for your
14 cooperation. Chairs, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
16 Sergeant. [gavel] Okay, good morning and welcome to
17 day 11 of the FY 25 Executive Budget hearings. I'm
18 Council Member Justin Brannan. I chair the Committee
19 on Finance. Today's hearings will begin with the
20 City's library systems, followed by the Department of
21 Cultural Affairs. I'm pleased to be joined by my
22 colleague, Council Member Carlina Rivera who chairs
23 the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
24 International Intergroup Relations. We've been
25 joined this morning by Council Members Carr, Louis,

1 COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 8

2 and Moya on Zoom. I want to welcome Linda Johnson,
3 President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library, Tony
4 Marx, President and CEO of New York Public Library,
5 and Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of the Queens
6 Library. Thank you all for joining us today to
7 answer our questions. Just to set the table here, on
8 April 24th, 2024, the Administration released the
9 Executive Financial Plan for FY 24 to 28 with a
10 proposed FY 25 budget of \$111.6 billion. The
11 libraries' proposed FY 25 budget of \$425 million
12 across all three systems represents less than one
13 percent of the Administration's proposed FY 25
14 budget. This is an increase of \$4 million or one
15 percent from the \$421 million originally budgeted in
16 the Preliminary Plan. This increase mostly results
17 from added funds for the collective bargaining
18 agreements. As of March 2024, the libraries
19 collectively had 613 vacancies relative to their FY
20 24 budgeted headcount. In the Council's Preliminary
21 Budget response, we called on the Mayor to add \$58.3
22 million to reverse a series of funding cuts made to
23 the libraries, \$22.1 million to undo the baseline
24 cut, \$20.5 million to reinstate the one-shot funding
25 from FY 24, and \$15.7 million to cover the funds from

2 the City Council discretionary funding picked up at
3 adoption last June. Council's proposal would allow
4 libraries citywide to expand their current hours,
5 increase programming, and reinstate Sunday library
6 service. Stop me if you've heard this one before,
7 but the Mayor's Executive Budget included not one
8 dollar towards the Council's call for funding our
9 libraries. Despite the Mayor's recent restorations
10 in the Executive Budget, they represent a fraction of
11 the cuts the Administration has made to keep programs
12 like here, which the Council has found were never
13 necessary in the first place. The Council's economic
14 analysis found \$6.15 billion in resources left on the
15 table by the Mayor's Preliminary Budget. in our
16 budget response, we laid out how some of this can
17 contribute to our reserves, be set aside to hedge
18 against under-budgeted costs and other economic
19 hazards, and still leave \$1.63 billion for
20 restoration and investments into valuable service and
21 programs like the ones we'll talk about today,
22 another \$1 billion left in surplus to address other
23 fiscal issues for good measure. As budget
24 negotiations go forward, it's critical that we all
25 work off the same set of facts. The Council's

2 economists have been consistently accurate year over
3 year while this Administration's back and forth
4 approach of cutting and restoring introduces
5 instability into our city's most vital services and
6 programs that our communities simply cannot afford.
7 My questions today will largely go further on the
8 Council's Preliminary Budget response along with
9 examining the libraries' capital gap. I now want to
10 turn to my Co-Chair, Council Member Rivera, for her
11 opening remarks.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you so much.
13 Good morning everyone. Thank you for being here. I
14 want to thank Chair Brannan for highlighting what it
15 is the City is going through in terms of the stakes
16 and how important our library system is to the
17 functioning of the City and its availability-- its
18 importance of its availability to so many families
19 across the boroughs. Welcome to the hearing for the
20 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
21 International Intergroup Relations. I am Council
22 Member Carlina Rivera, Chair of this committee.
23 Today, we'll begin with a hearing on the City's three
24 library systems following a hearing on cultural
25 affairs. This morning we'll be discussing the

2 executive expense and capital budget for the systems.

3 For fiscal 2025, the Administration is proposing a

4 \$425 million subsidy for the library systems. The

5 fiscal 2025 Executive Capital Commitment Plan which

6 covers fiscal 2024 to 2028 includes \$920.2 million

7 for the library systems. In the Council's fiscal

8 2025 Preliminary Budget response, we called on the

9 Administration to allocate an additional \$58.3

10 million to the City's three library systems. This

11 funding would have resorted the baseline cut of \$22.1

12 million to libraries budgets, reinstated the one-shot

13 funding of \$20.5 million from fiscal 2024, and

14 covered the \$15.7 million subsidy provided through

15 City Council discretionary funding at budget adoption

16 last June. These commitments would have made the

17 fiscal 2025 budget for libraries commensurate with

18 the adopted fiscal 2024 funding level. I think it is

19 safe to say we are all disappointed to see that the

20 Executive Plan did not include a restoration of the

21 cuts. The Council and the Administration for that

22 matter continues to champion libraries, but it is his

23 council that has made it very clear that libraries

24 are a funding priority and urges the Administration

25 to reverse these reductions immediately. I grew up

2 visiting the libraries, enjoying the different
3 programs offered, and reading the wide variety of
4 books. I would like for my children and all young
5 New Yorkers to have the same opportunities that I
6 had. I've also been there as an adult, of course,
7 and been recommended amazing books like Pachinko, and
8 Demon Copperhead, and so many others-- such an
9 inclusive place. Libraries have an essential
10 presence in every neighborhood of New York providing
11 indispensable services and a safe and reliable space
12 to all residents, be it our young people, seniors,
13 immigrants, asylum-seekers, or even incarcerated
14 individuals. Along with the increase in programming
15 and circulations, the systems have also seen a rise
16 in the cost of materials, staffing, and general
17 operating. It is essential that our city's libraries
18 are provided the funding essential to continue the
19 provision of the high level of service New Yorkers
20 expect and deserve. Funds are also required to
21 maintain the libraries' physical spaces for repairs
22 and upkeep that are not capital eligible. Without
23 appropriate safe and reliable facilities, the amount
24 of operational funding available for libraries would
25 be irrelevant. The systems were also subjected to a

2 \$130 million capital budget reduction. This
3 reduction has resulted in the delaying of capital
4 projects, pushing them into the out-years of the
5 plan, as well as the elimination of funding for
6 several projects some of which had already commenced
7 their early phases of design. Libraries need capital
8 dollars to restore aging infrastructure, construct
9 new buildings, and to expand existing facilities.
10 Public libraries help many New Yorkers to rebuild
11 their lives and reconnect to their communities,
12 particularly in the post-pandemic world. I want to
13 ensure that the fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget adequately
14 funds the City's library systems. Libraries are a
15 beacon for our city and they deserve a budget that
16 enables them to provide the necessary services for
17 the community, and of course to support the amazing
18 staff inside of those facilities. Thank you all for
19 your service. It is essential that the budget we
20 adopted this year is transparent, accountable, and
21 reflective of the priorities and interests of the
22 Council and the people that we represent. I look
23 forward to an active engagement with the
24 Administration over the next few weeks, I guess at
25 this point, to ensure the fiscal 2025 Adopted Budget

2 meets the goals the Council has set out. I want to
3 recognize the members of the Committee that are
4 present. I see Council Member Louis, and also, I want
5 to thank my staff for organizing not just today's
6 hearing, but also the past few weeks, holding it
7 down, Chief of Staff and Budget Director Katie Loeb
8 [sp?], Legislative Director Eddie Amador [sp?],
9 Financial Analyst, Sandra Gray [sp?], Committee
10 Counsel Christina Yellamaty [sp?], and Legislative
11 Policy Analyst, Regina Paul [sp?]. I just also thank
12 my husband for being at home today with my newborn
13 baby. With that, turn it back to the Chair.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair
15 Rivera. We've also been joined by Council Members
16 Williams and Brooks-Powers. I also want to take a
17 minute just to thank the Council Finance Division who
18 work very, very hard. These-- this through May and
19 June, not just here in the Chambers, but also across
20 the street at 250 Broadway, but especially for this
21 hearing, Aliya Ali [sp?], and Sandra Gray [sp?], my
22 Committee Counsel Mike Twomey [sp?]. As a reminder,
23 for this year's Executive Budget joint hearings we're
24 taking public testimony the day of the hearing,
25 meaning today. So after testimony is concluded, from

2 the library systems and Department of Cultural
3 Affairs, we'll take public testimony. If you wish to
4 speak on libraries or cultural budgets, just make
5 sure you fill out a witness slip that are available
6 on the back table with the Sergeant at Arms. I'm now
7 going to turn it over to Committee Counsel to swear
8 in our witnesses and we can start.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. DO you
10 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
11 but the truth before this committee and to respond
12 honestly to Council Member questions? Tony Marx?
13 Linda Johnson? Dennis Walcott? Thank you. You may
14 begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Just turn your mic
16 on.

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning. Day
18 11. Thank you all so much for hanging in there with
19 us and for your support. I'm Linda Johnson, the
20 President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library. Thank
21 you, Speaker Adams, Finance Chair Brannan, Chair
22 Rivera, members of the committees, our Brooklyn
23 delegation, and the entire City Council for the
24 opportunity to testify. We are grateful for your
25 leadership and unwavering support of libraries and

2 our mission. New York City's Libraries are facing
3 the most significant cuts we have seen in years. It
4 pains me to repeat these numbers to you, but
5 together, our systems stand to lose \$58.3 million in
6 Fiscal Year 2025. And for the first time in 16
7 years, the libraries' capital plans have been slashed
8 by a staggering \$125 million. Tragically, these cuts
9 come at a time when Library usage is high and the
10 costs of running the system are even higher. For
11 Brooklyn this amounts to a drastic \$16.2 million cut,
12 equivalent to 13 percent of our operating budget.
13 This will force us to severely limit library service,
14 a devastating and avoidable consequence. We must
15 protect library service for the millions of patrons
16 who rely on us. Libraries have not faced cuts of
17 this severity since the years following the 2008
18 financial crisis. If the Executive Budget passes as
19 proposed, the City will be turning back a decade of
20 diligent progress. In six weeks, Brooklyn Public
21 Library will be forced to drop down to a five-day-a-
22 week service in more than half of our locations. We
23 will further reduce our operating hours. We will
24 drastically diminish the collection and programming,
25 and we will severely curtail hiring and cut part-time

2 staff hours in half. It is unjustifiable to put
3 libraries in this position. As we continue to
4 rebound from the pandemic, demand for services is
5 soaring. Visits, program sessions, program
6 attendance and new card applications are all up by
7 more than 40 percent. Instead of rising to meet this
8 increased demand, we are forced to reduce
9 programming. If these cuts are enacted, teen
10 programming will diminish by a third. We will offer
11 half as many young adult literacy classes.
12 Citizenship classes will be cut by more than half,
13 50 percent fewer visits to senior centers and nursing
14 homes, 30 percent fewer visits to children and
15 families in hospitals and rehabilitation facilities,
16 14 percent fewer creative aging classes for older
17 adults. It is heartbreaking to think of the people
18 who will be deprived of our services. Just last
19 week, a patron wrote to tell us the Sunset Park
20 Library was a refuge for him while living at a local
21 shelter. He said, "I found housing and work by
22 coming to this library every day that it has been
23 open, because there's no Wi-Fi at the shelter. It's
24 also a place for peace, quiet, free books and
25 activities." Our staff form genuine connections with

2 patrons, helping answer questions from early
3 childhood literacy to career development and
4 everything in between. But our library workers are
5 struggling to provide excellent service to their
6 communities, as they contend with staff shortages in
7 the branches. A cut of this magnitude will only
8 increase the burdens on our staff, requiring us to
9 severely curtail hiring, operate with half of our
10 part-time staff, and permanently eliminate 146
11 public-facing vacant positions-- coveted city jobs.
12 Our patrons are experiencing the impact of a smaller
13 collection after the \$6.5 million that we absorbed in
14 November. There are 40,000 fewer books on the
15 shelves. Then percent of these titles are in
16 languages other than English. We have had to suspend
17 purchasing more expensive materials such as test prep
18 and passport study guides, large print books and
19 reference resources. Fifteen percent of our database
20 subscriptions have been cancelled, and we have had to
21 restrict the number of books patrons can check out
22 and place on hold. Fewer books mean longer wait
23 times: the average wait for eBooks and audiobooks has
24 increased by 30 percent since the November cut.
25 Instead of encouraging young readers to explore their

3 passions, we are holding them back. It's harder for
4 patrons to check-out novels in their native language,
5 harder to take home a GED prep book, and harder to
6 find your child's favorite story on the shelves. To
7 make matters worse, if these cuts are not reversed,
8 libraries will lose 25 percent of our state funding.
9 The Maintenance of Effort clause in the State's
10 Library Aid statute requires local aid to remain at
11 or above 90 percent of the prior two-year average. If
12 this MOE is triggered in this year's city budget,
13 Brooklyn Public Library stands to lose an additional
14 \$2 million in state funding next year. These cuts
15 are being proposed while the library is confronting
16 more than \$5 million in increased costs. In FY25, we
17 must cover the cost of union salary and minimum wage
18 increases, the library's share of staff health care
19 premiums, as well as the operating costs of two new
20 locations, the Center for Brooklyn History and the
21 Library for Arts and Culture. And this does not
22 include the increased cost of doing business. We are
23 running a library system today on a pre-pandemic
24 funding level that has not kept pace with inflation.
25 Restoration alone will not solve our operating budget
needs. While preventing the further loss of library

2 service is my highest priority, addressing the
3 library's capital crisis keeps me up at night, not
4 that little baby, but-- Brooklyn Public Library's
5 unfunded capital needs have grown to over \$380
6 million dollars, including emergency infrastructure
7 such as roofs, heating and cooling systems and
8 accessibility upgrades. This year, the city cut \$47
9 million from our capital plan, forcing us to
10 eliminate four long-awaited renovations, remove
11 funding for several construction projects and cancel
12 critical infrastructure upgrades. In 2023, BPL
13 branches lost more than 2,200 hours to unplanned
14 closures stemming from outdated building systems and
15 failing infrastructure. Just last month Macon and
16 DeKalb libraries closed unexpectedly when their
17 heating systems failed during a cold spell. In fact,
18 every year, we end up spending nearly \$1 million in
19 expense funding addressing emergencies that cannot
20 wait for a full capital project. Without a
21 restoration of the \$47 million in capital funding and
22 dedicated funding in the City's Capital Plan, these
23 unplanned closures will undoubtedly increase. We
24 depend on city support for the maintenance of our
25 physical plant. And of course, without the backing

2 of our councilmembers who have generously funded
3 local projects in their districts and supported us
4 with delegation-level funding, we would not have come
5 this far in revitalizing our local libraries, but our
6 progress is at risk. We are not dismissing the
7 city's financial difficulties, but the life-changing
8 opportunities libraries provide to all New Yorkers,
9 even our newest neighbors, are an essential part of
10 the City's safety net. We offer much more than books
11 and reference materials; we provide support and
12 security. And if libraries are not adequately
13 funded, the city's safety net starts to fray. We
14 must protect our city and our neighbors by protecting
15 our libraries. I am not alone in making this urgent
16 plea. I am proud to work alongside you at the
17 Council, my colleagues in DC37 and all of our staff
18 as well as a strong coalition of library supporters,
19 many of whom are in this room today. Over 22,000
20 letters from Brooklynites have already made their way
21 to elected leaders imploring the city to protect
22 library funding. Today, I will also be submitting
23 over 400 statements from New Yorkers who asked that
24 their words of support for libraries be on the
25 record. These are not one-sentence emails that have

3 been sent to us. These are paragraphs and paragraphs
4 of people explaining how important their libraries
5 are to them and why library funding should be
6 restored. Chair Brannan, Chair Rivera, members of
7 the committee, the future of our libraries depends on
8 your continued leadership and support. We are
9 confident that working together, all our City Leaders
10 will rise to this occasion. Thank you very much.

11 PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you, Linda. My
12 name is Tony Marx, the President of the New York
13 Public Library. I want to thank City Council Speaker
14 Adams, Chairs Rivera and Brannan, and members of the
15 Committee, all of your colleagues for the opportunity
16 to testify today. Unfortunately, New York City's
17 libraries are in the same position we were in two
18 months ago when we were last year. We are facing a
19 staggering FY 25 proposed cut of \$58.3 million in
20 expense reductions. Roughly \$25.5 million of cuts
21 just for the New York Public Library alone. We have
22 now and even clearer understanding of the devastating
23 and unprecedented impact these cuts are already
24 having on our system and our city. While the mid-year
25 PEG ended Sunday-service at seven locations-- no more
Sunday libraries in New York City. This budget cut

2 will bring us down to five day service at the
3 majority of our locations. This is unthinkable.
4 We're not in the 1970s here. Collection reductions
5 are already hitting home. We've seen 72,000 fewer
6 items already on our shelves. The number is
7 projected to jump to 185,000. Hiring and recruitment
8 levels stemming from the November cut, have already
9 produced staff shortfalls and unplanned closings, 69
10 unplanned closings just from November to March. The
11 trend will only worsen. With fewer staff, fewer
12 resources to pay for those staff to commit to those
13 staff, we'll have to potentially delay the reopening
14 of a number of branches. The City, together with our
15 private sources, invested roughly \$160 million in
16 five of our incredible Carnegies that were in
17 terrible disrepair in some of the neediest
18 neighborhoods of this city. We were proud to partner
19 with the City and with the City Council to make that
20 historic investment, to say to the people in those
21 neighborhoods, you deserve a majestic, inspiring, and
22 respectful library full of programs and amazing
23 librarians and staff. And we're ready. We're almost
24 ready. They are almost ready. It is tragic and
25 unthinkable that we have to even consider not opening

2 those branches, not giving the New Yorkers the
3 payback from their investment. But those are the
4 kinds of decisions we're now facing. We'll have to
5 reduce our budget for our pages, our beloved pages,
6 who are an essential workforce development pipeline
7 into our system and elsewhere in the city. As you
8 know, we provide essential lifelines for underserved
9 communities, but we're looking at around 850 fewer
10 hours per week, 20 percent reduction in our system-
11 wide planned hours. Unthinkable. Think about our 50
12 afterschool locations, our 20 Teen Centers, our 24
13 ESOL locations, our 11 tax preparation locations, our
14 40 college and career hubs. None of that can happen
15 if our doors aren't open. Let alone, as Linda
16 mentioned, the emergency maintenance requirements, or
17 the cooling centers that New Yorkers are going to
18 depend upon us, the Administration is going to depend
19 on us for this summer. On the research side, we've
20 already seen increased waiting times for key research
21 library services, fewer service point staff, reduced
22 capacity to process, preserve, and conserve
23 collections. We are the most used public research
24 library on the planet. We represent New York. This
25 is not how you want New York represented when we

2 cannot meet those needs for creators and artists and
3 writers and scholars to come up with the solutions we
4 need. We need to feed that, not cut it off. The
5 City's recent Preliminary Mayor's Management Report
6 shows that by circulation, program attendance,
7 library card registration, everything is rising.
8 Circulation up 50 percent since FY 21, and that's not
9 just because of the pandemic, because in the pandemic
10 we had e-books to replace the circulating books. We
11 were ready. We've always been ready for what New
12 Yorkers need. So why cut us now? Let alone, the
13 threat, as Linda mentioned, of the state's invocation
14 of its maintenance, an effort that would reduce our
15 funding even further. Capital, as Linda mentioned,
16 is just as alarming. We saw a removal in this budget
17 of \$45.5 million from our 10-year Capital Plan. Our
18 system is aging, some of them over a 100 years. They
19 are in disrepair and face critical issues, even
20 though we have proudly invested a billion dollars,
21 including hundreds of millions of our private
22 resources into capital improvements. There's still
23 so much more that needs to be done. We've got an
24 amazing team that's proven its ability to do it, but
25 we can't do it without the funding and without the

3 security of that funding. We will lose the progress
4 we have made. We know when we invest in our branches
5 what difference it makes. Washington Heights
6 Library, a neighborhood I grew up in, we did a total
7 amazing renovation to that beautiful building. It
8 was in sad shape. And we saw 47 percent increase in
9 visits, a 45 percent increase in circulation, and 105
10 percent increase in program attendance. The same in
11 Charleston, same throughout our system. We currently
12 face at the New York Public Library a \$500+ million
13 capital needs that are not met. But here we are,
14 battling for a simple restoration when our costs have
15 gone up, when our services have gone up. We are
16 sitting here today with cuts that threaten us with
17 service reductions that we have to threaten in
18 response. We are throwing threats back and forth.
19 How is that helpful? How is that useful? It
20 distracts us from doing the work we need to do that
21 New Yorkers need us to do, that we know the Mayor
22 looks to us to do, takes pride in us doing. How can
23 we build any consistency and dependability our
24 growth? How can we plan? How can we deliver with
25 this constant state of budget instability? This is
no way to run a railroad, or a city, or the greatest

2 library systems in the country. The budget dance
3 distracts us. We spend months on edge running too
4 many different budget scenarios. We can't hire. We
5 can't be ready to deliver. So here we are facing
6 those cuts and facing, in our case, roughly \$9
7 million of additional costs just to do what we've
8 already been doing. Let's end this dance. We love
9 being with you all. We love these opportunities to
10 share with each other, but let's not do it in this
11 way. The dance helps no one. We need to restore our
12 funding. We need it baselined so we're not right
13 back where we started from months later, and we
14 should be talking about an increase in funding given
15 our cost and given what we are delivering. Thank you
16 so much for this opportunity.

17 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Good morning. I am
18 Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of the Queens
19 Public Library. Chairs Brannan and Rivera and the
20 members of the committee, I want to say a big thank
21 you for the opportunity to be here today. Before I
22 begin, also, I want to say a special thanks to
23 Speaker Adams for her leadership as well. She has
24 been truly fantastic and we appreciate all of the
25 support and the members of the City Council for being

3 the greatest advocate for our public libraries. You
4 understand the promise of our trusted spaces and the
5 life-changing impact we have on New Yorkers of all
6 ages, backgrounds, and circumstances. And I want to
7 deviate for one quick second, and just pick up on
8 something that Chair Rivera said. We're such an
9 inclusive place. I mean, that's who we are at the
10 libraries. We're just about inclusiveness and who we
11 have come through our doors for free represent all of
12 New York City. Throughout this process, you have been
13 at the forefront supporting us, and we are deeply
14 appreciative. You have our written testimony, so I
15 will forgo reading it and just highlight a few
16 points, and also being very sympathetic that this is
17 your 11th hearing as well. Public libraries are a
18 safe-haven for anyone who needs it, but
19 unfortunately, most New Yorkers no longer have access
20 to libraries on Sunday. It is a travesty that New
21 York City, the greatest city-- I say it over and over
22 again, because I truly believe it-- in the world has
23 no library that is open seven days a week. We
24 estimate that from when we ended Sunday service in
25 Queens and from November through June we will have
lost more than 120,000 visits to QPL just on Sundays

2 alone, and that's not all. The three systems also
3 had to slash budgets for books, programs, building
4 repairs, and maintenance. At QPL, the November PEG
5 reduced our collections by approximately 25,000 print
6 books and 5,000 e-books system-wide. Wait times, as
7 indicated by both Linda and Tony, for library
8 materials have escalated with an average e-book wait
9 now 63 days when it used to be 30 days. Over the
10 past six months we have been forced to close our
11 doors or delay our openings on 27 occasions due to
12 staff shortages and building infrastructure failures.
13 And unfortunately and sadly, this is only the
14 beginning. The Executive Budget still includes, as
15 you know, \$58.3 million in the cut to QPL, BPL, and
16 NYPL. The three of us are facing these losses while
17 also confronting uncovered increased costs stemming
18 from minimum wage and contractual increases, rising
19 health insurance costs, and more. QPL alone is
20 facing \$5 million in uncovered costs alone, and if
21 the Executive Budget is adopted, it will force QPL to
22 delay the long-awaited branch openings at our Bay
23 Terrace, Broadway, and Hillcrest libraries. And as I
24 indicated earlier, yesterday I actually went to Bay
25 Terrace and Broadway just to see the latest, and they

2 are gorgeous, and it saddens me to say that the
3 communities will not be able to participate if these
4 budget cuts go into effect. People are clamoring to
5 get back into these libraries. We will also need to
6 close on Saturdays if these cuts go through at every
7 location in the borough except Central and Flushing.
8 Two Saturdays ago, we had a mobile food pantry
9 outside our Peninsula Library where more than 400
10 individuals benefited from the distribution. On that
11 same day at our Cambria Heights Teen Center we hosted
12 a prom XQPL prom attire giveaway which offered teens,
13 their friends, and family members the opportunity to
14 choose a memorable outfit from more than 1,000 new
15 and gently-used dresses, suits, shoes, handbags, and
16 jewelry generously donated by the community. That
17 would not be happening if we have to close on
18 Saturdays. Closing on Saturdays means we will be
19 unable to offer these events and many other
20 indispensable programs on Saturdays like ESOL
21 classes, story times, job skill trainings, and other
22 crucial resources. Our fantastic, amazing staff are
23 devoted to the communities they serve. I am astounded
24 by their commitment to meeting the ever-growing needs
25 of every individual who seeks our help, but our staff

3 are strained. We are unable to hire the proper
4 number of staff due to the mid-year and upcoming
5 cuts. This is no way to run a library system,
6 especially in New York City. We are keeping
7 libraries open by regularly shifting staff from
8 different locations to fill gaps. This is
9 unsustainable. We also cannot forget the impact on
10 the budget, as Linda and Tony have indicated, on our
11 Capital Budget. As my colleagues explained, all
12 three systems sustained a combined \$125 million
13 capital program to eliminate the gap, a PEG. This
14 substantial cut put our entire portfolio at risk with
15 project susceptible to being paused or delayed if
16 shortfall appears. And we've all faced it. Boilers
17 break down. Air conditioning systems are not
18 working. That's no way to run our libraries. It's
19 no way to serve the public of New York City. Our
20 buildings are an average of 50 years old. They need
21 renovations, critical infrastructure replacements,
22 resiliency projects and more. We have a duty to keep
23 our buildings safe and modern, both for our
24 communities and our staff, but we cannot do that
25 without the restoration of the capital funds. When
people are in need, when the City is in need, who do

2 they turn to? Our libraries, plain and simple. Like
3 Deborah, one of our customers at our Douglaston
4 Library. She found herself unexpectedly living in a
5 shelter and without a job. With the trusted guidance
6 from library staff, Deborah was able to get two job
7 offers from the US Postal Service. She credits the
8 library for lifting her up in her time of need. This
9 is just one of the many, many, many examples of the
10 roles library plays in the lives of New Yorkers.
11 Libraries are vital to the quality of life in every
12 neighborhood throughout the City. One other quick
13 side story. Before the pandemic there was a customer
14 that would come into the library at Central, and I
15 would see him every day, and he would get there as
16 soon as we opened, and we-- he would leave at 2:30.
17 He wouldn't read a book. He just sat at a table, and
18 he sat there and sat there. So one day I approached
19 him, and I said, if you don't mind me asking you, you
20 know, you come in our doors first thing in the
21 morning. You leave at 2:30. I never see you read. I
22 don't see you even going to the bathroom, and like,
23 what's up. And he said, you know what, this library
24 is my oasis from the craziness of life. Plain and
25 simple. A true story. That's what we represent to

2 the people of New York City, plain and simple. We
3 cannot afford to deprive New York City residents of a
4 robust collection, wide-ranging and diverse programs,
5 access to resources, weekend service, reliable
6 buildings that are equipped to withstand whatever the
7 future holds. We cannot deny our customers for being
8 that oasis from the craziness of life. Public
9 libraries are the last truly democratic institutions.
10 They have the power to change lives. With your
11 steadfast and continued advocacy, we are hopeful that
12 the City will fully restore, baseline and provide
13 meaningful investment to all three public library
14 systems in the City's Fiscal Year 2025 Adopted
15 Budget. Thank you for your leadership, Chairs, and
16 members of the Council and those who are not here.
17 We always appreciate it, and thank you for the
18 opportunity to talk to you this morning.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
20 much. We've also been joined this morning by Council
21 Member Sanchez, Hanif, Salaam, Stevens, Ung, and
22 Powers. I want to jump right into it. So, the
23 Council's FY 24 budget response, we called on the
24 Administration to allocate an additional \$58.3
25 million to three library systems. This funding would

2 have restored the baseline cut of \$22.1 million. The
3 library budgets from the November Plan would have
4 reinstated the one-shot funding from \$20.5 million
5 from FY 24, and it would have covered the \$15.7
6 million subsidy provided through the Council
7 discretionary funds. None of these funds were
8 restored in the Executive Plan. So has the
9 Administration explained why none of this funding was
10 included in this plan?

11 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We have not heard
12 anything at all. I will add, though, we've had
13 ongoing communication with the Administration around
14 specifics things, but nothing dealing with the
15 budget.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Wow. And would the
17 \$58.3 million, that restoration, would it
18 sufficiently meet the expense needs of the three
19 systems?

20 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, not really.
21 Part of the problem with the way this process works
22 and the fact that the Executive Budget didn't make
23 any restoration means that the conversation that
24 we're having today is about getting back to where
25

2 we've been, but not actually getting to where we need
3 to be.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, the \$58.3 would
5 basically get you back to zero.

6 PRESIDENT MARX: And could I just add,
7 Mr. Chairman, it gets you back to zero, but we
8 haven't been investing and planning and hiring. So,
9 it doesn't even get you to zero right away. It takes
10 us half a year to build these programs back up. You
11 know, we have amazing colleagues. They don't just
12 grow on trees. They don't just fall when we want
13 them. They are human beings with lives. We need to
14 attract the best talent. It takes time. So, you
15 know, even just the dance, never mind covering our
16 real additional costs, inflation, and additional
17 services for New Yorkers, the dance means we can't
18 even meet the current expectations.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, let's talk
20 about headcount. What's the total number of active
21 employees at each of the systems, including full-time
22 and part-time? Could you give us a breakdown?

23 PRESIDENT MARX: So, the New York Public
24 Library, our total headcount is 2,741. That includes
25 2,099 total salaried staff, full-time and part-time,

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2 as well as 1,417 are union members. We also have
3 roughly 433 hourly and page positions.

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn, we
5 currently have 1,257 employees, 989 full-time, 268
6 part-time. We will have to-- the budgeted headcount
7 is 1,167 at FY 24 adoption.

8 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And at Queens, we
9 have 1,415 staff, full-time 978, part-time 437, 87
10 percent of the full-time positions are union jobs,
11 and due to the PEG and the budget outlook, we are
12 down approximately 200 positions at this point.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: New York and
14 Brooklyn, did you guys mention how you calculate your
15 vacancies?

16 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We have 140-- we will
17 have 146 vacancies.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Got it. Sorry, I
19 didn't hear it.

20 PRESIDENT MARX: Roughly 200.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sorry, I didn't
22 hear it. Okay, capital funding, so all three systems
23 were forced to cut their capital portfolios by a
24 combined \$130 million. Can you tell us if this has
25 led to projects being paused or delayed, and if so,

3 how many and what phases were some of these projects
4 in?

5 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So with Queens, there
6 is phases with the capital cuts, though, that really
7 deals with them moving forward. So we're going to
8 have to stop a number of them. And again, it's the
9 uncertainty of knowing the amount of money we'll have
10 available to us. So that's part of the challenge as
11 far as the status of the capital funding at this
12 point, and then in planning and moving forward, so we
13 had a number like Baisley [sic] Park and several
14 other libraries that are on hold at this point. And
15 we can give you a specific list.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Because I know you
17 had testified in the past that capital projects that
18 are near completion ultimately can't be completed due
19 to the need for more funding. Is that right?

20 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, with us, again,
21 we have several of the projects that are not going to
22 be paused, but we will not be able to move forward
23 with new projects.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Got it.

25 PRESIDENT MARX: We've had to push up \$41
million. We've been requested to push up \$41 million

2 of our capital, and that means lots of amazing and
3 essential renovations that were being planned. Those
4 plans have stopped. There are a few instances where
5 we were actually beyond planning and into design.
6 Again, had to stop. We know that when we return to
7 these projects, which we will have to-- these are
8 capital requirements. The City is obligated to meet
9 these needs. They will be more expensive and along
10 the way, we'll have our branches closed because we'll
11 have emergency repairs because we haven't been able
12 to do the necessary deferred maintenance.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Costs a lot of
14 money to do nothing.

15 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, no such thing
16 is standing still. In Brooklyn we've had to
17 eliminate \$47 million from our capital plan. Four
18 renovations are in jeopardy, Cortell U [sic], Dyker
19 [sp?], Gravesend, and Hilon [sp?]. And these are
20 productions that are forcing us to eliminate really
21 long-awaited renovations to remove funding for
22 capital projects and eliminate critical
23 infrastructure.

24 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yeah, an exact
25 amount-- just to give you the exact amount of Queens

2 in the Capital PEG is \$32.2 million is our capital
3 PEG is \$32.2 million dollars is our capital PEG.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. And
5 just another thing in terms of headcount, were there
6 any changes since the PEGs?

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, we've been, you
8 know, obviously slow to hire because of what we're
9 anticipating. I don't know-- I don't know the exact
10 number sense.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

12 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: The bottom line is
13 that we've basically have stopped hiring. And so
14 while it's not a hard freeze, we have really soft
15 freeze. We've formed an internal committee that
16 looks at priority hires that we need to put in place,
17 but we're, as I indicated earlier, down 200 in our
18 headcount.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And that's just due
20 to the uncertainty.

21 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: it's due to the-- oh
22 yeah. And then, if I may, picking up on Tony's point
23 from earlier, that carries forward obviously into the
24 new fiscal year. So even if the money is restored,
25 we're behind already because we don't have the

2 positions there. The libraries are not going to open
3 as a result of not having those positions. We have
4 to post. We have to go through the interviewing
5 process. So even with restoration, we're going to
6 be stretched even thinner for a period of time. And
7 so that's the challenges I think. And then, again,
8 as I indicated in one other discussion point, we
9 really have to deal with moving staff from point to
10 point to point to cover that, and then you have
11 people who are retiring as well as people who just
12 decide to leave. So I mean, those are all the
13 vacancies that we have to manage to make sure the
14 system is running.

15 PRESIDENT MARX: My colleagues have
16 covered it. I'll just add that because we have--
17 because of the research library being mostly
18 supported by private dollars, funding, endowment,
19 etcetera, you know, we-- we face challenges in that
20 arena as well, because city funding is essential.
21 You know, and we can't-- you know, we simply can't
22 deliver with this level of uncertainty. We're not
23 hiring. When we do get restored, if it's not
24 baselined, are we being responsible in hiring at that
25 point? Right? How do we attract the best talent,

2 the sorts of folks sitting behind me under those
3 kinds of uncertain circumstances? It's really quite-
4 - it's quite unthinkable.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Just for the
6 record, speaking about the \$58.3 million that the
7 Council called on and what that would basically
8 barely get us back to zero. Is there a number that's
9 not an aspirational number, but a number that you
10 feel would make you whole in terms of what you've
11 lost?

12 PRESIDENT MARX: We need those-- that.
13 The number that we have lost restored. We need it.
14 We need the City Council's amazing efforts and
15 support for us continued. We need to make sure that
16 the money that we saw restored, but that was not
17 baselined is baselined so that we don't keep coming
18 back to zero or negative numbers. In which case, we
19 cannot deliver what you need us to deliver.

20 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I think if I
21 interpret your question properly, you're asking what
22 we need over and above a full restoration--

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Right.

24 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: in order to be whole.
25 And I hesitate to throw a number out there, but I

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2 would be more than happy by the end of the day to
3 provide something to you that I think would be-- and
4 I'm not-- you know, I don't want you to think that
5 I'm being greedy here, but we could put very solid
6 numbers together that would allow us to operate
7 without the constant stress of being under-funded.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: That would be
9 helpful. I mean, the Council has maintained that
10 there's enough money here to get us back to zero and
11 then some. So, I think it's important that we know--

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: [interposing] The
13 then some will be forthcoming.

14 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Yeah, I was thinking
15 the same thing.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Got it.

17 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We encourage the then
18 some, because-- a reality.

19 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We-- my team is
20 saying that they think we need an additional \$5
21 million over and above full restoration.

22 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And we've analyzed it
23 as well, and ours is \$5 million.

24 PRESIDENT MARX: Ours is \$9 million, but
25 again, I just want to reiterate, if this isn't

2 baselined, right-- the City Council should be talking
3 to the Administration to say it's not enough to
4 restore these monies to bring this dance to what
5 would be then seen as a successful conclusion. That
6 is not a successful conclusion because we can't plan.
7 We can't hire. We can't continue to invest unless we
8 have the certainty of baselining going forward in
9 addition to the additional costs that we face, \$9
10 million in the case of New York.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, this is last
12 for me. So, tomorrow we're going to ask OMB about
13 libraries, and they're going to tell us that they
14 didn't tell you cut seven-day service. They're going
15 to tell you, you should just tap into your endowment.
16 What is our response to that?

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In Brooklyn, and I
18 think I speak for all of us when we talk about the
19 decision to cut Sunday service. Sunday is far and
20 away our most expensive day to operate, and so when
21 you're in an environment where you're trying to
22 minimize the impact of a constrained library system,
23 it makes the most sense to start on Sundays. It's
24 also the day that's hardest to get people to work,
25 because it's voluntary. So, it's not-- it's not

2 random and it's not political. It's just want makes
3 sense fiscally. So, that's the answer to the Sunday
4 issue. And with respect to the endowment, Brooklyn
5 has a small endowment, and it's not legal actually
6 for us to just spend--

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Well,
8 that was my next question. So, the-- I mean, I think
9 it's puzzling to me, because there's no other agency
10 where we say, oh, if they're falling on tough times,
11 just dip into your endowment to keep the lights on.
12 But is that even allowed?

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Much of the funds in
14 the endowment are restricted and it's not allowed.
15 And also, the endowment itself generates operating
16 dollars that we take advantage of every year, and if
17 you start to spend down the corpus, you end up
18 reducing the amount of money that the budget-- that
19 the endowment will contribute to the budget, and
20 eventually you'll be in a much worse situation than--

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Yeah,
22 it's a spiral.

23 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, again, Queens has
24 a small endowment, and our endowment is restricted.
25 It's not legally permissible. The people who

2 provide, give money, or endow a library restrict it
3 for a specific purpose. I mean, it's not for general
4 operating purposes.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Right.

6 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Linda indicated, you
7 know-- Linda knows it like anything. It's just not
8 the way to do business and it's not legally
9 permissible.

10 PRESIDENT MARX: My colleagues have
11 covered this. Let me just add, the New York Public
12 Libraries endowment has been built over the last 125
13 years. It is perhaps the perfect example of a private
14 public partnership. That private funding together
15 with the resources we raise, record-breaking every
16 year, despite the City's budget cuts, means that we
17 can offer the City of New York the greatest, most-
18 used research library. We can cover central
19 administration costs privately. We're proud of
20 having built that capacity. Let me be very clear,
21 the annual, ongoing operating costs of the branches
22 of our public libraries are the responsibility
23 legally of the City, and there is simply no way, in
24 addition to the issues of restriction, there is no
25 way that our private giving our endowment could

2 cover, could possibly cover the annual ongoing
3 operating costs of the branches or the capital
4 requirements. Let me give an example. If the City
5 said we are cutting this agency's-- and they said,
6 oh, don't worry, you can cover it by selling assets,
7 why don't you sell the building that you operate the
8 agency in. That will give you cash, problem solved,
9 resulting in a complete inability to provide services
10 and destroying your future possibility of providing
11 services. That is what the endowment question
12 analogizes to.

13 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Chair, may I just--

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Yeah.

15 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: follow up on one
16 other point that you raised. With Sunday services
17 Linda indicated, obviously it's time and half, but
18 from a management point of view, our options are
19 limited. It's personnel. We're not going to lay off
20 staff. So, it's attrition and not hiring many
21 people, hiring at all. It's books which we've
22 indicated we've cut into. It's the various services
23 that we offer and trying to constrict it to a way
24 that allows us provide the services, but at the same
25 time may not be at the same level based on the budget

2 cuts, and there's some of the times that are smaller
3 items. Those are things that we have to focus on as
4 managers, and so the Sunday service is unfortunately
5 and sadly is a place to go. We are lean
6 organizations, plain and simple. And so I just say
7 that to you, and then the other piece of this-- and
8 again, it's been alluded to but just to say it again
9 in a more direct way, that a lot of the capital
10 issues that service will not be paid for through
11 capital funds based on the emergency nature. So
12 that's money that comes out of the expense budget as
13 well. So, we have to then hold back on some of those
14 expense items for the capital needs of the libraries
15 because we don't have enough money. So you may see
16 the closings that we talked about in our testimony or
17 the not opening, or the air conditioning or the
18 boilers breaking down. Those are the ways we've been
19 able to manage the cuts that were in place. So to
20 say that oh, we made a decision on Sundays-- Sunday,
21 unfortunately, sadly is one of the many ways we have
22 to merely deal with the cuts that we're facing.

23 PRESIDENT MARX: There is no choice of
24 cuts that anyone wants to see. If you reduce our
25 budget, we have to cut services. We don't have that

2 kind of fat. We are efficient. So if the
3 Administration turns and say why did you cut X, the
4 answer is, well, would you have rather we cut
5 Saturday hours or branches in neighborhoods that are
6 desperate for those services, cut those altogether.
7 It's disingenuous to say, you know, why did you cut
8 Sunday. Something had to be cut. We hate all those
9 possible cuts. We want all of that restored.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
11 much. Chair Rivera?

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you very much.
13 Just want to-- you know, Linda mentioned being up at
14 night, you know, and how distressing this is.
15 Certainly, I've been thinking of these cuts a lot.
16 I am up in the middle of the night, but the baby has
17 listened to a lot of Council live and New York One.
18 Just because protecting our democratic institutions
19 are so, so important-- and I had questions on, you
20 know, what is it that you all provide and how are the
21 communities impacted, but I thought that you laid
22 that out quite brilliantly in your opening statements
23 that included attendance and membership up by 40
24 percent. You offer citizenship classes and you go to
25 senior centers and nursing homes, and cut to

2 essential lifelines like food pantries, I mean, this
3 is really critical services, tax prep, college, and
4 career hubs. The prom dress donation I found, you
5 know, especially touching. I was so thrilled that I
6 got to go to prom, and I remember when I donated my
7 dress afterwards, because I just wanted someone else
8 to have that. so, I think that there's these
9 experiences in these little moment throughout this
10 very, very vibrant and energetic city that we all
11 have to come to appreciate, and sometimes it's in
12 that quiet, in that space in your libraries that
13 allows someone to have that. So what percentage of
14 the system's budget is city funding? We do all this
15 with these funds. What percentage of the system's
16 budget is city funding?

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: For Brooklyn, it's 85
18 percent.

19 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: For Queens is roughly
20 90 to 92 percent, give or take.

21 PRESIDENT MARX: And we're a slightly
22 different animal. We're at about 60 percent.

23 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Still, all above--

24 PRESIDENT MARX: Essential, essential 60
25 percent.

2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Absolutely.

3 PRESIDENT MARX: It's the, you know, the
4 lion share for the branches, as per an agreement
5 signed with Andrew Carnegie.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: What steps do you
7 take to minimize the impact of any closed branches in
8 neighborhoods? Or I would say, the reduction of
9 services that you've seen. So, you've had a
10 reduction of services. Have you had to close any
11 branches because of the cuts?

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thus far, we've
13 actually refrained from opening branches that were
14 scheduled to come back on line in order not to
15 disrupt the pattern of usage for people who have
16 become accustomed to using the branches that are
17 open. If we do have to take the next step, you know,
18 we try and deploy our book mobiles and our tech
19 mobiles and our kid mobiles, but it's not sufficient.
20 In cases where we have long-planned renovations, we
21 also look for a temporary space in the neighborhood.
22 An example that's happening right now is in Red Hook
23 where we're doing a full renovation and we're in the
24 process of opening a temporary space nearby for that
25 community.

2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: so, yesterday, when I
3 went to the Broadway branch which unfortunately won't
4 open right now based on the cuts, our mobile library
5 was there. And on Thursday, if I'm not mistaken,
6 it's at our Bay Terrace Library. So it's the mobile
7 library there as well. So we have our mobile
8 libraries deployed to the various branches. On
9 Saturday we're at Laurelton which is under
10 construction right now. So, that's how we've had to
11 really adjust to the branches that aren't open, but
12 we have not closed a branch based on the cuts. It's
13 just no reopening branches that are ready to open
14 based on the cuts.

15 PRESIDENT MARX: Same here. At New York
16 Public Library from November to March 24, as I
17 mentioned, the library had 69 unplanned closures
18 effecting 34 branches for an average of two hours
19 lost per closure, and that will just continue to
20 speed up as we don't have the capital investments or
21 the expense that we can spend on repairs. Those
22 repairs will lead to more closures that we-- you
23 know, and we simply won' have the staff to meet those
24 needs.

2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: With-- you know,
3 we've said it over and over again, without a
4 restoration of the tens of millions of dollars that
5 you all need, that things will only worsen. I know my
6 council colleagues are funding all types of projects.
7 I know there are HVACs or even teen centers, right, a
8 wide spectrum of services that are provided through
9 these physical facilities, and we have to overhaul
10 the older facilities as well. If I could ask about
11 specific examples in each of the boroughs. Can the
12 New York Public Library provide a status update on
13 the Tompkins Square and West New Brighton
14 comprehensive renovation projects and the projected
15 completion date, and has the Department of Design and
16 Construction remained on target?

17 PRESIDENT MARX: sure, I can start.
18 Tompkins Square, we are engaged in a \$30.1 million
19 comprehensive renovation. It's in the planning phase.
20 Funding starts in FY 25. We hope to be able to do
21 this, please. In West New Brighton, \$16.5 million
22 comprehensive renovation plan also in the planning
23 phase. We're waiting for design CP approval at OMB.
24 This project will be managed by EDC. That's a great
25 partnership, let me just reiterate. We are prepared

3 to put private dollars into play to make it possible
4 for us to do what are called pass-through to work
5 with other city agencies. we, you know, we love our
6 colleagues are DDC, but the truth is, when we do
7 that, the work with them, it takes twice as long,
8 costs twice as much. The City isn't getting half as
9 much bang for its buck. So we look for these kinds of
10 great other partnerships that can get us a better
11 result for the all the citizens of New York,
12 especially in these neighborhoods that are so
13 desperate for their library services.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: We agree that going
15 to multiple agencies to get to this phase is a bit
16 cumbersome and can take quite a long time. Before we
17 leave Manhattan, I think Battery Park is here. I want
18 to give a shout out to the students from School 276
19 in Council Member Marte's district. Hi, welcome
20 everyone. That's awesome. Okay. And to Brooklyn,
21 can you all provide a status update on the Eastern
22 Parkway and Brownsville overhaul projects and the
23 projected completion date, and has DDC remained on
24 target?

25 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So, Eastern Parkway--
sorry. Eastern Parkway is a \$20 million full

2 restoration project which is planned, but not until
3 spring of next year. We've asked for an additional
4 \$750,000 for initial outfitting, but hopefully this
5 project will be able to stay on course should things
6 turn around. I'm sorry, the other one you asked
7 about was Brownsville?

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Tomp-- yeah,
9 Brownsville.

10 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And then Brownsville,
11 the branch has \$23.3 million in the fiscal 2024-2028
12 commitment plan for another full branch renovation
13 which includes a rooftop addition. This project has
14 been in the works for a long time, additional public
15 service space, new landscaping, a green roof,
16 security, and fire safety systems, and a new system
17 to make it fossil fuel-free.

18 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. And in
19 Queens, the Corona branch expansion.

20 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Sure. Corona is
21 increasing the building floor area by 7,500 square
22 feet to 16,000 square feet, probably maybe even
23 closer to 18,000. DDC construction budget is roughly
24 \$28.4 million. Current status is that DDC's front
25 end planning unit is in engaged in this process right

2 now working with our folks. DDC forecasts
3 substantial completion is to be determined. Current
4 plans for the lot to bulldoze a house that we owned
5 next door. That will be torn down and leveled to the
6 ground, and then building a security fence so the
7 space can be used by our facilities team as well as
8 DDC's team, and then we'll start the renovation of
9 Corona. So it's in font end and planning right now
10 with DDC.

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I ask about these
12 neighborhoods, because clearly this doesn't cover the
13 current system wide unfunded capital need that you
14 have, but these are all special significant
15 neighborhoods that are deserving of a finished
16 project. So, I just wanted to ask about those, and I
17 know the Council Members have been great advocates.
18 It's just this constant state of budget instability
19 as was mentioned. That's incredibly frustrating. So
20 how much funding would be required to reinstate
21 Sunday hours for all-- for all libraries in each
22 system. I know there's a few numbers there, but--

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We need a full
24 restoration to do that.

2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And you've mentioned
3 an additional \$5 million--

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: [interposing] Yeah,
5 the additional money would be great. That would
6 allow us to be properly staff, you know, at full
7 complement.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So, the libraries
9 offer, you know, books and materials in many
10 languages. You touched on that in your testimony.
11 How many languages are audio books provided in or
12 print books, just to give an idea?

13 PRESIDENT MARX: We'll get you that
14 precise number. I mean, it is astonishing. I know
15 that New York-- the public school system, for
16 instance, through our My Libraries NYC partnership,
17 in effect, depends upon our providing books in the
18 multiple languages that they simply cannot. In
19 addition to our shelves in the branches, you know,
20 tailored to the needs of each neighborhood and the
21 languages that are being met there. We have amazing
22 staff who are, you know, fluent in those language.
23 You know, we use technology to help us when we need
24 help. We are the first place of immigrants. We
25 always have been because we're trusted, because we

2 don't ask for your papers, because we respect you.

3 We're inclusive. We want everyone to come, and they
4 can tell. The languages are just a part of that.

5 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I don't know the
6 exact number in audio books, but I will say that the
7 services that we provide in multiple languages is
8 extraordinary, and I always hesitate to say this
9 number, because it sounds so large, but we offer
10 services in over 60 languages throughout the
11 boroughs. And in Brooklyn, where half the families
12 speak a language other than English at home, it's
13 essential that we be able to continue to do so.

14 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, in Queens we have
15 roughly 191 languages represented in our collection,
16 not audio books, but in our collection, and roughly
17 dozens in audio books itself, but obviously as Tony
18 indicated, based on the neighborhood we always make
19 sure we tailor our collection and to the best of our
20 ability our audio books to the neighborhood
21 demographics as well.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And I just want to
23 thank you for that, because I know even in my own
24 district we've had many people who are seeking asylum
25 go to St. Bridget's which is a church and former

2 school and seeking services, and Tompkins Square Park
3 Library has actually added a section to accommodate
4 the languages from West Africa, and I know that
5 you're doing that in your branches across the City.
6 And we all know Queens, I mean, you can walk in
7 Queens and hear 50 languages in a given day. So, I
8 want to thank you for doing that. Just a couple more
9 questions, because I know my colleagues are anxious
10 to also engage with you. Do the systems offer
11 toddler programs? Asking for a friend?

12 PRESIDENT MARX: Absolutely. Our-- you
13 know, our early childhood, you know, story hours.
14 You know, I think we were I know at roughly a million
15 visits to those a year. I think we're coming back
16 towards those numbers post-pandemic. You know, in--
17 you know, they are the essential sort of first
18 foundation block where parents and caregivers have a
19 place to go. They learn how to teach reading. The
20 students get excited by reading and by being with
21 other kids who are reading. They grab books on the
22 way out. Often, the caregivers or the parents sign
23 up for education programs while they're there for
24 story hours. That is foundational. We love our

2 story hours. The idea that if we have branches
3 closed, we can't offer those is just unthinkable.

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean,
5 obviously services, you know, zero to five are bread
6 and butter. We even have stroller parking, if your
7 friend might be worried about what to do with her
8 stroller while her kids are in story hour. We
9 haven't gotten to valet parking yet.

10 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: so funny you should
11 say that, Tony. Because yes, we do, to answer your
12 question. I thought of that idea. The folks behind
13 me know that I have that crazy idea. There's one
14 library in particular where the strollers are lined
15 up all the way, and I said someone who's
16 entrepreneurial can really make a lot of money if
17 they wanted to have valet parking for strollers. Yes
18 to your question, and we pride ourselves on that. I
19 mean, my mental sanity is directly correlated to the
20 number of strollers I see outside our door. Plain
21 and simple, because you know what's taking place at
22 those hours. That to me, the bread and butter of
23 what we do. So, yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I know you brought--
25 and you brought back so much programming. You know,

2 during the pandemic you moved to have an expanded
3 virtual presence and remote offerings. You're still
4 offering virtual programs, obviously. So can you
5 just talk very briefly about that, just so I can get
6 to my colleagues questions.

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, thanks so much
8 for that question, because one thing that had added
9 significantly to our operating costs is that during
10 the pandemic we all sort of transformed ourselves to
11 digital enterprises, and it was necessary and it's
12 fabulous, and unfortunately it made the ability to
13 reach those on the wrong side of the digital divide
14 that much more difficult. And then as we started
15 reopening and taking full advantage of our bricks and
16 mortars libraries, we find ourselves in the position
17 to having to finance not only the traditional bricks
18 and mortar business, but also the digital enterprise,
19 because there's-- once that box was open, there's no
20 way to put that back, nor do we want to. But part of
21 the reason that our expenses has increased, not only
22 inflation but also the fact that our business is much
23 more complicated today than it was before the
24 pandemic.

2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I'll just reiterate.

3 The digital divide continues to be a major program.

4 I mean, let's just be very clear. Something like one

5 and a half to two million New Yorkers don't have

6 broadband at home. Imagine living through the

7 pandemic when that was the only way to go to school,

8 that was the only way to go to work or to do research

9 and to be in touch with your loved ones. Imagine

10 being cut off like that in the world that is the

11 communications capital of the globe. We are-- we

12 have a pilot project. We've been investing millions

13 of private dollars to figure out whether citizens

14 band radio can be a way to provide basic utility-

15 level broadband to every New Yorker for free by

16 broadcasting it from our branches. We'll explore

17 anything. As Linda said, the pandemic proved that

18 our investment in digital had been foresighted. I

19 wished that it hadn't proven it so powerfully, but it

20 did. We didn't lose any circulation. We shifted to

21 e-books. On the research library, we're aspiring to

22 provide every book ever written to anyone on the

23 planet as an e-book. And now that people are

24 returning, thank God, to something more like regular

25 life and enjoying each other's company and community

2 and physical spaces. We need to be sure, are
3 inviting and respectful of people. We're now doing
4 both. As my colleagues say, we're running two
5 libraries. On the budget, we used to run one, and
6 we're here talking about restoration of massive cuts.
7 We're not even talking about the resources to
8 maintain those additional expectations that we are
9 proud to provide to the City of New York. So one of
10 our programs is a mail-a-book program. And mail-a-
11 book did something this year and prior years, but
12 this year, I think it was even more people
13 participating. We had a New Year's Eve celebration
14 for people who are homebound for the most part, and
15 it was fantastic, and I joined in for a little bit.
16 And those are the types of things we're doing. We
17 have author talks, ESOL classes virtually in addition
18 to having in-person as well. And so those are the
19 things that we get involved in, and then one of our
20 key people at the library is Ralph McDaniels, and
21 Ralph, for those who know Ralph, is video music box.
22 So Ralph hold his DJ lunch/brunch session on a
23 regular basis on Saturday and during the week and
24 then uses that for various program reinforcement as
25 well. So we've incorporated both the virtual side as

2 well as the in-person side. And as Tony indicated
3 and Linda indicated, you know, we're running two
4 libraries for the benefit of the public.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you for that.
6 I just wanted to highlight how much work you do in
7 terms of your remote presence. And of course, you're
8 going to hear from our colleagues about our
9 experiences. Even as Council Members, I know my
10 first experiences were watching Drag Story Hour. I
11 think now also with what we're seeing across the
12 country with banned books, and how you all continue
13 to help not just New Yorkers but other people read
14 books that are important to our development as
15 people. And civic engagement, what you offer in
16 terms of computer services, thank you. With that, I
17 will turn it over back to the Chair. Thank you very
18 much.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair
20 Rivera. We've also been joined by Council Members
21 Hudson and Ossé on Zoom, as well as Council Member
22 Brewer. Now we're going to start with questions from
23 Council Member Louis followed by Brooks-Powers.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs,
25 and good morning, President Walcott, Johnson, and

2 Marx. I share your sentiment about everything we're
3 talking about today, and I want to thank you all for
4 your leadership. I just have a quick question. The
5 Brooklyn Library has been a major force in providing
6 services for entrepreneurs with learning and
7 certification opportunities for MWBEs through the BPL
8 Business Center which you also call Power up Pitch.
9 So, I wanted to know do you have figures on how many
10 businesses are being supported through the MWBE
11 clinic in the Brooklyn Public Library branches in FY
12 24 and what does that look like in FY 25. And how
13 many times a year does the program operate and how
14 many branches are served through this programming?

15 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Good morning.

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I don't have the
18 exact figures, but I can get them for you quickly.
19 In terms of how many times they're offered, like
20 Power Up for example, is a nine-month period. It's
21 an annual program that operates for the majority of
22 the year. It progresses toward the culmination of an
23 investment in the local business.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And will this
25 program see cuts in hours and scope due to cuts

2 indicated in the FY 25 budget, and what does that
3 look like?

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: so, some of these
5 programs that you've mentioned are privately funded
6 programs. The problem is that if the branches aren't
7 open, there's no place for people to come and take
8 advantage of those programs. There's no way to offer
9 the services that we've come to offer. And so it's a
10 real problem. So, even if you have the benefit of
11 private funding for a particular programming, if you
12 don't have the physical space to have the sessions
13 that you need in order to accomplish the goals, it's
14 all sort of pointless.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Right. Thank you
16 so much. That's all my questions, Chairs. Thank
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Council
19 Member Brooks-Powers followed by Hanif.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you
21 and thank you for today's testimony. Just a few
22 quick questions. Mr. Marx, you had mentioned in your
23 testimony in terms of 69 unplanned closures and 34
24 branches that were closed due to staffing shortages.

2 Was that solely with the New York Library, or is that
3 across the-- all of the boroughs?

4 PRESIDENT MARX: That's three boroughs.
5 That's our Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Would you
7 be able to provide us with a list of which ones were
8 impacted?

9 PRESIDENT MARX: Sure, we can get that to
10 you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And then--

12 PRESIDENT MARX: [interposing] Each one
13 is a tragedy, of course.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS:
15 Absolutely. Also, I know that my colleagues had
16 spoken about the capital projects and where they are,
17 and we've been working closely with Mr. Walcott on
18 that trying to see these projects move back up. So,
19 our understanding is that OMB has either cancelled or
20 pushed out a significant number of capital projects.
21 I know most council projects were moved back up, but
22 can you provide a list of projects that were funded
23 by this Administration that were either rescinded and
24 cancelled entirely, or have been intentionally pushed
25 into the out-years like fiscal year 33? And has OMB

2 indicated whether these projects will be restored or
3 committed into early fiscal years? And then my last
4 question is, of course,-- can't miss the opportunity
5 to check on the status of the Far Rockaway libraries--
6 -

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: [interposing] I'm
8 surprised that wasn't your first question.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: opening.
10 You know I was just trying to--

11 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: [interposing] I know
12 you'll--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: ease my
14 way in there.

15 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So, Linda's looking
16 at me. So I guess I'm responding to Far Rock, and
17 then you can take the other parts. That's a real
18 question. So we're looking at mid-summer. As you
19 know, we're stacking books right now in Far Rockaway,
20 an exciting opportunity when you are ready to
21 participate in.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Yes, I
23 missed the other day. I would like to-- if we could
24 schedule it.

2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We'll be glad to
3 reschedule it. So we're stacking the books in Far
4 Rockaway, and it's moving along nicely. It really is
5 shaping up and our timeline is mid-July, end of July
6 give or take a couple of weeks. So, we're excited
7 and as you know, we'll maintain the teen library as
8 well in Far Rockaway. So we'll have the new Far
9 Rockaway branch as well as teen library will be our
10 phasing out. The temporary site, we're doing grab-
11 and-go there right now so that way the staff could
12 concentrate the stacking of the books and setting up
13 the new buildings. So that's the status of Far
14 Rockaway.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Is there
16 any way we could speed up the opening to like early
17 July? I mean, June is here now, but--

18 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: [interposing] I would
19 not make a commitment to that. I mean, if it
20 happens, it's as a result of the hard work and the
21 great work of the staff and staffing and the stacking
22 of the books. And then the other thing that I think
23 you've been involved in discussion as well, that back
24 yard area will be open to the public. So we've
25 already set that up.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Okay.

3 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And the sign has been
4 reflecting. That'll be open to the public as well.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Speaking
6 of signage, sorry, I just added another piece.

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I know I set you up
8 for that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Yes, you
10 were. Far Rockaway, Far Rockaway has such rich
11 history and shout out to Louisa [sic] who answered
12 all my emails.

13 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: In a timely way, I
14 know.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: In a very
16 timely way, and I appreciate her, but I cannot miss
17 the opportunity to advocate to put the Far Rockaway
18 name somewhere prominently on the door so that when
19 people come, they know that they're not just coming
20 to the Queens library, but that they're coming to the
21 Far Rockaway Library so that the community is still
22 seen, and the new design. And because, it's
23 beautiful, and as we know when nice shiny things come
24 to communities, communities often feel like they're
25 being pushed out. And we've received a number of

2 emails making this request. So I wouldn't be doing
3 my job if I did not advocate, and I would love to see
4 it. I'm sure there's a design that works to
5 incorporate it. And then also, since we're talking
6 about my libraries now, if you could just tell me
7 about Laurelton, and that's it. And thank you,
8 Chairs.

9 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: Sure. I'm prepared
10 for Laurelton, as well, in that-- as you know,
11 Laurelton is closed at this particular point, and as
12 a result of your advocacy we have the mobile library
13 there on Saturdays, and we were there for the opening
14 of the mobile library there for the first Saturday.
15 And with Laurelton, DDC construction budget is
16 roughly \$1.8 million and that's for roof replacement
17 with substantial completion projected for third
18 quarter of 2024, and then the second phase will be
19 dealing with additional work, and that DDC
20 construction budget will be \$13.9. That's off in the
21 future. So Laurelton is moving along nicely and
22 we'll have a mobile library there on Saturdays.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And off in
24 the future is in fiscal 33?

2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: I'm sorry, I couldn't
3 hear.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Often the
5 future is not fiscal year 33, though, right? Not
6 that--

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We hope not. I mean,
8 that goes back to push-out, and I think we've been
9 able to get-- you know, remove-- go ahead.

10 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, those rollback-
11 - those

12 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: [interposing] Have
13 been rolled back.

14 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: have all have been
15 rolled back. So, library projects that were being
16 pushed out as much as 10 years have all been rolled
17 back.

18 PRESIDENT MARX: But the just the ones
19 that were City Council funded.

20 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just the ones-- yeah,
21 yeah. Just the one that we're sitting--

22 PRESIDENT MARX: There's a lot of, you
23 know, projects that are being pushed out because the
24 capital budget's been pushed out.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: So, going
3 back to the original questions, can you tell us which
4 ones those are?

5 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: We'll give you the
6 breakdown.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Yeah.
8 Thank you. Thank you for your advocacy.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We have
10 questions from Council Member Hanif followed by
11 Brewer.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much,
13 Chairs, and thank you for being here and I just want
14 to give a big gratitude to all of our library
15 workers. You all are brilliant, so talented, and it
16 just hurts my heart to hear that we're in a place
17 where we can't bring in all of the sort of folks who
18 are in-- trying to get into this industry. And
19 that's a big failure for our city. Of course, the
20 Sunday cuts have had a devastating effect on our city
21 and to think that Saturday services might be cut
22 also. It's overwhelming. It's overwhelming, and it
23 is disruptive to our local democracy, just like real
24 talk. This is disruptive to our local democracy. As
25 other states ban books, our libraries, you all have

2 stood firm in pushing back against censorship and
3 really making sure that our libraries are dedicated
4 to intellectual freedom, curiosity, and allowing all
5 types of characters and authors to be in our shelves,
6 and on our walls. So, I just want to get into the
7 weeds a little about how the impact of cuts on
8 programs are going to impact children and teens, and
9 I want to go through-- because the library has
10 coverage of so many constituencies, and with these
11 cuts, could you just walk us through? Like, which
12 programs will perhaps banish entirely, or how are we--
13 - how is cutting back on programming going to impact
14 children and teens, older adults, those who are
15 coming in for English language classes and other
16 programming for immigrants, folks experiencing
17 homelessness, and then I want to-- I want you all to
18 just give me an overview of the staffing. Like, how--
19 - where do we want staffing to be at this moment in
20 2024 and five years from now?

21 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, a lot of parts
22 to that. I'll start with the programming cuts, and I
23 think that's what is the hardest thing to swallow,
24 because we will need to reduce programming budgets by
25 a third which impacts all non-grant-funded

2 programming. that means that fewer citizenship
3 classes, fewer visits to senior centers, nursing
4 homes, cuts to creative aging, and older adult
5 classes, reduction of the young adult literacy
6 programming by half, fewer stipends resulting in
7 fewer teen interns. We are doing a lot with teens
8 these days, and those internships which are actually
9 paid internships, give teens the ability to find good
10 jobs in the summer close to their homes. We will
11 unfortunately scale back our new and popular Teen
12 Takeover initiative. So, the cut to our programming
13 budget for teen initiatives by a third. We'd
14 eliminate two Teen Takeover sites. That leads to a
15 decrease of 22 total takeover events. We would scale
16 back technology and arts workshops for teens.
17 Budgets for external presenters and teachers will be
18 diminished by a third. And one of our new teen tech
19 centers at Adams Street would be closed on all
20 Saturdays. Our new young adult literacy programs
21 which are located in two library-- neighborhood
22 libraries-- would be forced to cut classes by half,
23 by 50 percent. We'd keep one site operational while
24 closing the other. We would have five fewer 10-week

2 citizenship classes which is a reduction of 63
3 percent. I can go-- I mean, this is really what--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] Yeah,
5 this is-- I would love--

6 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: [interposing] It's
7 terrible.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: to just get this
9 in over email.

10 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Fifty percent
11 reduction in library visits to senior centers and
12 nursing homes. A third fewer visits to children and
13 families in hospitals and rehabilitation facilities
14 and book distribution to children cut by half. We
15 would be forced to cut four creative aging program
16 series and branches beginning in July of 2024, and we
17 would also cut multi-session artist-led classes for
18 older adults who seek to learn a new skill and help
19 mitigate the effects of social isolation.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, this is just
21 infuriating to hear.

22 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And what-- like,
24 how many people would that impact? Having half fewer
25 sessions-- are people being turned away or?

2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, they just-- you
3 know, if the library hours aren't there and the
4 classes aren't being offered, there's nowhere to go.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Right.

6 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And if they come, you
7 know, and we're not providing classes there's still a
8 place for them to come to read, and to, you know, do
9 all the wonderful things people do in libraries to
10 sort of take advantage of that town square. But yes,
11 the programs are everything these days, especially
12 important as we become less and less about being a
13 repository for material and more about literacy
14 programming that allow people of all ages,
15 backgrounds to rub shoulders.

16 PRESIDENT MARX: I'll just reiterate. You
17 got some numbers, and I mentioned them in my
18 testimony. If there are other numbers, we're happy
19 to get those to you. None of them are happy-making
20 numbers. Let me just be clear. The libraries and
21 the times we have been working together, have
22 transformed themselves. We are still the essential
23 passive space. Even just heating and air
24 conditioning or computer skills, let alone our great
25

2 collections, our amazing librarians. That continues.
3 In neighborhoods, there's no place else to go.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Right.

5 PRESIDENT MARX: but we have changed. In
6 this decade or more we've been doing this, to now
7 also proactive education centers. We were-- we'd
8 gone from like 100,000 visits to our education
9 programs to nearly \$2 million visits. And let me be
10 clear, that was in part because in the case of New
11 York Public Library, we've raised \$100 million of
12 private money to partner with the City. Those are--
13 should be city obligations, but we've partnered,
14 we've stepped up. Our donors, our trustees have
15 stepped up. Now, we're facing unprecedented cuts.
16 Some significant portion of those 2 million visits,
17 probably three or four million across the three
18 systems, will be reduced simply because we can't open
19 our doors. And the private dollars and donors that
20 have looked to partner with the City to provide the
21 needs of New Yorkers because they are coming to us
22 more than any place else, all of that rolls back if
23 the City doesn't meet its side of the bargain and do
24 it with stability, with confidence so that we can
25

3 plan on that partnership and build it so that people
4 can continue to come.

5 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: If I can just take a
6 quick second to try to answer it a little
7 differently, as well. And our reliability and
8 credibility will start to go down because when it's
9 time to have an ESOL class, but the doors aren't open
10 because we don't have the ability to open a door on a
11 particular day or a particular week, or whatever the
12 case may be. People saying huh? Or that person is
13 coming for toddler story time, and the doors aren't
14 open or the children librarians aren't hired because
15 of the budget cuts. People say, what's going on
16 here? It's totally counter to who we are as far as
17 that trusted institution, the reliable institution,
18 the high-quality institution that our staff provides
19 through the programs. So, in addition to the stats
20 that Linda talked about or Tony talked about, it's
21 the unknowingness of the library door may not be open
22 as a result of these budget cuts, and we don't have
23 the ability to [inaudible].

24 PRESIDENT MARX: We love it.

25 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And to me-- for me.
Go ahead. I know Linda is just ready to jump on the

2 mic. But the reliability and the quality that we
3 provide is totally undermined as a result of these
4 cuts, and that's getting into the weeds.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, I totally
6 agree. I just want to-- can you also incorporate--
7 because, of course, it's proactive repository of-- I
8 mean, passive repository of information, but also a
9 literacy center and so much more. Just specifically,
10 the Books for All initiative, as-- because you all
11 are serving as an example, as a demonstration, one of
12 the view in our entire nation of how to protect
13 intellectuals, authors, characters.

14 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So, thanks. You
15 know, Brooklyn has initiated now over two years ago
16 this program called Books Unbanned which is a program
17 that is nationwide as you point out. It's done with
18 100 percent private money which I say, because we of
19 course are providing service outside of New York
20 City, but also because of the point that Tony just
21 made, and Dennis. It all sort of coalesces.
22 Libraries are in fact, you know, highly trusted
23 institutions, and they're trusted not only by our
24 patrons and consistency is an important part of that,
25 but we're also trusted by the foundation and

2 philanthropists who contribute to the libraries, and
3 if that trust starts to fray of-- great word that
4 Dennis uses-- all of it starts to disintegrate in
5 ways that impact not only the work that our fabulous
6 staffs want to provide, but also in terms of how much
7 the community feels welcomed and trusts that we'll be
8 doing what we say we'll do. It's very important for
9 all libraries to be consistent in their hours and
10 their service and in everything that we deliver. That
11 is an essential part of who we are. With respect to
12 Books Unbanned, you know, we are very fortunate here
13 in New York City not to be afflicted by book bans,
14 but it's not something that libraries across the
15 country can say. And so the programs that we've been
16 offering have provide access to teens across the
17 country to our entire digital collection, not just
18 books that have been banned, but all books, because
19 we believe deeply in the freedom to read anything
20 that you would like to read.

21 PRESIDENT MARX: Linda and Dennis are
22 doing amazing work on this, and look, it's un-- just
23 as it's unthinkable that we're sitting here talking
24 about resisting cuts to libraries given everything
25 you've heard, it's also unthank about that we're

2 sitting here talking about book banning in America.

3 Bannings that are targeted at kids who are trying to

4 figure out who they are, right? Whether it's LGBTQ

5 or kids of color, whatever it is, right? So we're

6 proud to use private funds to step up to be national

7 leaders, to stand for what New York stands for, what

8 we know the Mayor stands for, right? He's been very

9 vocal on this subject with us. That's a fabulous

10 partnership, but you know, if-- yes, we're not

11 banning books in New York, but if our doors are

12 closed-- I mean, I'll go back to Dennis' point. You

13 know, so many of the people who use us and depend on

14 us are folks without resources who are managing

15 double jobs and raising kids or taking care of aging

16 seniors. They need to know that when they show up at

17 the door it will be opened, reliably so. Just a one

18 or two experiences of oh, it's not open, and people

19 get busy. They move on. They don't come back.

20 They're not sure they can trust us, and we are the

21 most trusted institution in this town. Those are

22 tragic outcomes that we need a budget result that

23 precludes those outcomes and guarantees that going

24 forward so that we can move forward together.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We're
3 going to move on to questions from Council Member
4 Brewer.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
6 much and thank you for always partnering with all the
7 libraries and us on different programs, and Tony,
8 you're right, this is a tragedy. So I have a couple
9 of questions. Number one, when you mentioned EDC, I
10 wanted to know how does one get to renovate with EDC
11 as opposed to DDC? What's that process? I didn't
12 know you could do that and that's a great idea.
13 Number two, on technology. In the past, we always
14 tried-- I don't know if we still have e-rate, and I
15 was wondering if we do. Is that's something that we
16 could still consider, if we have federal support, of
17 pushing it out into the neighborhood? And just on
18 technology in general, I wanted to know-- you know,
19 every five years you almost need new support in terms
20 of the hardware, software. I want to know what your
21 technology budgets are and how this could be
22 impacted. And then we all-- all the literacy
23 programs have wait lists. So I was just wondering
24 what your wait lists are. And then also just on the
25 Sunday research libraries, are they open on Sunday?

2 Obviously, the branches are dealing with this insane
3 budget cut, but I didn't know if the research
4 libraries were also. And then, in the past,-- I
5 should know this, but we're-- what was baselined in
6 the past? Those are my questions.

7 PRESIDENT MARX: I will try my best,
8 Gale. The--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
10 Thank you, Tony.

11 PRESIDENT MARX: So, first, yes. Look,
12 the research library is-- the vast majority is
13 privately funded, but we--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I
15 know.

16 PRESIDENT MARX: depend upon the City.
17 So, when the City cuts us, we have to reduce our
18 services, and again, because of the overtime
19 additional costs, our research libraries are closed
20 on Sunday. People come from all over the City and
21 all over the globe to use this amazing resource. It
22 is not open on Sunday. That is tragic.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, so if
24 the money's restored for Sunday, then the research
25 library will be restored for Sunday?

2 PRESIDENT MARX: Absolutely. We'd be
3 proud and delighted to do that. Our-- sorry. Our E-
4 rate [sic] eligible costs in FY 24 were \$1.8 million.
5 Those-- that's an incredibly important partnership,
6 but our needs are greater than that, and we need to
7 be, for instance, projecting broadband into the
8 neighborhoods and being innovative in that way.
9 Lastly, EDC-- look, DDC is the commission that is
10 supposed to do design and development.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And I complain
12 about them all the time.

13 PRESIDENT MARX: But it costs twice as
14 much, takes twice as long. We look for other
15 partners. Iris Weinshall, our COO and our amazing
16 team are working hard at that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The best.

18 PRESIDENT MARX: they are the best.
19 Those other agencies like EDC are happy to try to
20 help, but that's not what they were designed for or
21 funded for, so their capacity is limited. I'll give
22 you just one example, and this goes back importantly
23 to early partnerships with Maria Torres Springer in a
24 previous role and other great colleagues. When we--
25 it was time to renovate Inwood, and working with

2 Ydanis, etcetera, and so many of you, we said let's
3 do this not just to grant a better, bigger library as
4 well as other community resources. We also partnered
5 with a private donor and HPD to get 175 units of 100
6 percent affordable housing like Brooklyn using air
7 for the first time in our history to meet the City's
8 needs, because we can. EDC was our partner on that.
9 It meant we got it done in half the time and half the
10 cost, but they're-- we love working with them. We'll
11 work with anyone.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

13 PRESIDENT MARX: But that's not what they
14 designed or funded for. Their capacity to be able to
15 do those partnerships with us is not what it-- we
16 need to solve and fix the essential core of--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] We
18 need to fix the DDC problem. Yeah, I got it. I've
19 been complaining into the microphone for years, and
20 I'll keep it up. You didn't answer all my questions,
21 though. Literacy, what's the waitlist for literacy?
22 If there is one. I assume, because there's waitlist
23 everywhere for literacy. If that's an issue-- the
24 classes are desperately need.

2 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: So with us-- while
3 Tony talks to his folks. With our ESOL programs
4 itself we have a waiting list that's over 1,000.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Over 1,000.

6 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: For ESOL. And just
7 to answer you around the e-rate, our e-rate is
8 roughly \$750,000.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

10 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And if I'm not
11 mistaken, that's gone down over the years, but it's
12 roughly still around \$750,000. And our main work is
13 through DDC unless we're doing a project on our own,
14 and if we're doing a project on our own we have to
15 have other funding, so that way it's come mainly for
16 us from the state. We don't have the type of
17 private donors to step up at this particular point in
18 time. So we look for those types of projects.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright.

20 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It seems that
21 waitlist for ESOL classes are now the most dire
22 situation. We have over 2,800 people on our wait
23 list for ESOL. Our citizenship programs had 53
24 sessions with 543 attendees in 2022, and in 2023 we
25 had 109 E6 [sic] sessions with over 1,000 attendees

2 which is almost 1,000 percent increase. So that's
3 really the pain point for us right now. Our tech
4 budget is approximately five percent of our overall
5 budget at \$4.6 million, and about \$1 million a year
6 for Brooklyn in e-rate funding. It's restricted to
7 use in libraries.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know.

9 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And then finally, the
10 EDC issue which Tony spoke about, in order to take
11 advantage of EDC as our, you know, agency, it has to
12 be a project that aligns with their own initiatives
13 and priorities. So, for example, in Red Hook,
14 Brooklyn which is a waterfront community that's an
15 EDC project because EDC is focused on the waterfront.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. It just
17 makes no sense to me why DDC has to be so expensive
18 when EDC isn't.

19 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, part of the
20 problem is time. You know, the EDC's projects are so
21 poorly designed and so poorly executed--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] DDC.

23 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: DDC, I'm sorry. That
24 it stretches over time. As you know, time--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]

3 There's something wrong, though.

4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: time is no friend to
5 these.

6 PRESIDENT MARX: We've talked about this-

7 -

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] And
9 listening [sic].

10 PRESIDENT MARX: The DDC question is sort
11 of a public policy, sort of, enigma to put it nicely.
12 You know, why the City doesn't solve this problem to
13 get twice as much bang for its buck, I--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
15 sounds like--

16 PRESIDENT MARX: [interposing] I fail to
17 understand, and you know, we can get creative working
18 with EDC. We can do pass-through's.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

20 PRESIDENT MARX: We'll find private
21 money, and we've done that in record numbers, but we
22 need to know that the City is a dependable partner.
23 We can't do pass-through's if we don't a capital
24 allocation. The-- can I just-- I'll go back to your
25 question. In FY-- in calendar year 23, the library

2 filled 13-- almost 14,000 ESOL class seats, record
3 numbers, 74 percent increase from the previous year,
4 but we still do turn people away, and we'll get you
5 those numbers. We're proud to be there for the
6 asylum-seekers. We're all talking about that. We
7 are front and center, as we have been for generations
8 of immigrants and we'll continue to be. I'll just
9 sadly say that the truth is when we have to close our
10 doors, we won't even have a waist list to show you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

12 PRESIDENT MARX: People will get
13 discouraged. They'll turn away, right? They're
14 busy. They need to know--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
16 They're not--

17 PRESIDENT MARX: [interposing] they can
18 rely on us. That's the great tragedy, the sort of
19 silent wait list. The sort of-- people just give up
20 the hope that we have given them. That is not New
21 York.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They Chair said
23 you're going to get another nine and another-- what
24 did you need?

25 PRESIDENT MARX: Five.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Five. That's
3 what the Chairs have said.

4 PRESIDENT MARX: For additional costs.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's what the
6 Chair just said. Thank you very much.

7 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And--

8 PRESIDENT MARX: We'll hold you to it.

9 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And just to give you
10 a concrete number for us, we had--

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Gale's
12 giving out cash here.

13 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: 4,7--

14 PRESIDENT MARX: We'll be back tomorrow.

15 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: 4,752 ESOL sessions
16 which roughly, approximately the attendance of 57,710
17 people.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
19 much. I think you could tell you're preaching to the
20 choir, but it's important that the City understands
21 what's at stake here. So, thank you all very much.

22 PRESIDENT WALCOTT: And thank you very
23 much. Have a good day.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You, too.

25 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright, we'll take
3 a 10-minute break and then we're going to hear from
4 the Department of Cultural Affairs.

5 [break]

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Good
7 morning. Once again, as a reminder, there is no
8 eating or drinking in the Council Chambers. At this
9 time, can everybody please silence your cellphones,
10 and if you wish to testify, please go to the back of
11 the room to fill out a testimony slip. Everybody can
12 find a seat and settle down. We are getting ready to
13 continue.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, good
15 afternoon and welcome to the final Executive Budget
16 hearing for the day focusing on the Department of
17 Cultural Affairs. Council Member Brannan, I Chair
18 the Committee on Finance. I'm still joined by my
19 colleague Council Member Rivera, Chair of the
20 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
21 International Intergroup Relations. Welcome to our
22 old friend, Commissioner Laurie Cumbo. It's good to
23 have you back in the Chambers, and your team. Thank
24 you for joining us today to answer our questions.
25 Just as a reminder, on April 24th, 2024 the

2 Administration released the Executive Financial Plan
3 for FY 24 to 28 with a proposed FY 25 budget of
4 \$111.6 billion. DCLA's proposed FY 25 budget of \$152
5 million represents less than one percent of the
6 Administration's proposed FY 25 budget in the Executive
7 Plan. This is an increase of \$7.2 million or five
8 percent from the initial \$144.8 million budgeted in
9 the Preliminary Plan. The \$7.2 million increase
10 results from several actions, mostly a partial
11 restoration of PEGs to the CDF, the Cultural
12 Development Fund, and the CIG, the Cultural
13 Institution Group operating subsidy, partially offset
14 by an adjustment in utilities spending cost. As of
15 March 2024, DCLA has nine vacancies relative to the
16 FY 24 budgeted headcount. The Council's Preliminary
17 Budget response, we called on the Mayor to add 75.6
18 million to DCLA's budget to fully restore the cuts
19 imposed to the Cultural Institution's funding of
20 which the Executive Plan only restored \$15 million.
21 As I said this morning, we do not arrive at these
22 numbers lightly. The Council has identified
23 sufficient resources to restore this and other
24 necessary cuts in full. Investing in our arts and
25 cultural institutions isn't a nice luxury, but one of

2 those rare moments where it work from both a moral
3 and a financial position. If a budget is a moral
4 document, then the arts are what inspires generations
5 today and tomorrow to create and think and explore
6 the world beyond. I've got the Passport stamps to
7 prove it. Financially, our cultural institutions are
8 also those key investments we need to support, a heat
9 beat pulling millions of people in this city from
10 round every year, generating revenue and supporting
11 jobs all the while. Council is obligated to deliver a
12 final budget that supports New Yorker's success
13 fiscal and otherwise, and we'll continue that work in
14 the negotiations in the months ahead. My questions
15 today will largely focus on the Council's budget
16 response along with one-time funding and the DCLA's
17 capital program. I now want to turn it to my co-
18 chair for this hearing, Council Member Rivera, for
19 her opening statement.

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, Chair
21 Brannan. Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for
22 being here. Welcome to the hearing for the Committee
23 on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International
24 Intergroup Relations. I'm Council Member Carlina
25 Rivera, Chair of this committee. This afternoon we

2 will be discussing DCLA's Executive Plan. The DCLA
3 budget for fiscal 2025 is \$152 million. In the
4 fiscal 2025 Executive Capital Commitment Plan,
5 includes \$1.3 billion in fiscal 2024 to 2028 for the
6 Department. the proposed fiscal 2025 budget is 89.6
7 million less than the fiscal 2024 Adopted Budget with
8 the understanding that the fiscal 2025 Executive
9 Budget does not yet reflect council initiatives, this
10 represent a \$53 million cut to cultural
11 organizations, and I strongly believe that the budget
12 does not adequately fund the City's cultural
13 organizations. The culture community is not only an
14 economic driver for the City, but it is also the
15 foundation for what makes New York City vibrant,
16 healthy, and alive. A large part of what lights up
17 New York is our arts and cultural sector, from our
18 world-famous museums and cultural institution to
19 Broadway theaters and the performing arts scene, and
20 all of the organizations along the way on our streets
21 and corners that contribute so much to our
22 communities. New York City performers themselves are
23 trend-setters, creating and expanding among genres of
24 art like hip-hop and rap, ballet, and dance. Arts
25 and culture define New York City. The critical role

2 the arts play in our City is the primary reason the
3 Council urged the Administration in our budget
4 response to provide additional support for cultural
5 organizations by adding an additional \$75.6 million
6 in fiscal 2025 to support Cultural Institution
7 Groups, or CIGs, and to provide across-the-board
8 grant increases for all cultural development fund
9 recipients. That \$75.6 million included restoring
10 and baselining \$45 million allocated in fiscal 2034
11 for the Department of Cultural Affairs as well as
12 restorations of the \$20.1 million fiscal 2024 PEG,
13 program to eliminate the gap, and the \$15.5 million
14 fiscal 2025 PEG. These funds would support city
15 artists and help to bring equity to arts and culture
16 in the City. I am very, very disappointed to see
17 that only a fraction of this funding has been
18 included in the Executive Plan. New York City's
19 world-renowned cultural institution are vital to the
20 enrichment and growth of the neighborhoods in which
21 they reside and attract visitors from all over to
22 visit our neighborhoods and support our small
23 businesses. These organizations need full
24 restoration for the sector to continue to flourish.
25 With that said, it is the Council's responsibility to

2 ensure that the City's budget is fair, transparent,
3 and accountable to all New Yorkers. Hence, as the
4 Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries
5 and International Intergroup Relations, I will
6 continue to push for accountability and accuracy, and
7 that's to ensure that the budget reflects the needs
8 and interest of the City. It is essential that the
9 budget we adopt this year is reflective of the
10 priorities and interest of the Council and of course
11 all the people that we represent. This hearing is a
12 critical part of that process, and I expect that DCLA
13 will be responsive to the questions and concerns of
14 Council Members, and I look forward to a native
15 engagement with the Administration as we set to adopt
16 this budget finally. With that, I just want to
17 acknowledge the members of the Committee, just
18 everyone who is here pretty much. I see Council
19 Member Brewer, Hanif, Hudson, and Williams. I also
20 want to thank all the members of the public who are
21 going to testify shortly. I want to thank all of my
22 staff, my Chief of Staff and Budget Director Katie
23 Lobe [sp?], Legislative director, Eddie Amador [sp?],
24 Financial Analyst Sandra Gray, Committee Counsel
25 Christina Yellamati [sp?] and Legislative Policy

2 Analyst Regina Paul, and I once again I want to thank
3 my husband Jamie for being at home with our newborn.
4 With that, I will turn it back over the Chair
5 Brannan.

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's what I'm
7 talking about. Daddy's at home with the newborn
8 while you are here at work. Yes, girl.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair.
10 As a reminder for this year's Executive Budget joint
11 hearings, we'll take public testimony today after
12 Cultural Affairs is finished given their testimony.
13 So if you wish to speak on either the library or
14 cultural affairs FY 25 budget, just make sure you fil
15 out a witness slip in the back with the Sergeant at
16 Arms. I'll now turn it over to Committee Counsel Mike
17 Toome [sp?] to swear in our witnesses and we can
18 begin.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. Do
20 you affirm to the truth, the whole truth and nothing
21 but the truth before this committee and to respond
22 honestly to Council Member questions? Laurie Cumbo?

23 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lance Polivy?

25 LANCE POLIVY: I do.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may
3 begin.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. Good
5 morning, Chairs Rivera and Brannan and members of the
6 Finance and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Laurie
7 Cumbo, Commissioner of the New York City Department
8 of Cultural Affairs. I am here today to testify in
9 regards to the Mayor's fiscal year 25 Executive
10 Budget proposal as it applies to my agency. I am
11 joined today by a number of my staff. And as you
12 said, Chair Rivera, you will hear a lot today of
13 response to many of the hearings that we've had in
14 the past, and we look forward to delivering a lot on
15 many of the suggestions and recommendations that have
16 been made by this Council. I will begin today with a
17 run-down of DCLA's proposed budget for fiscal year
18 25. The Mayor's Executive Budget allocates \$151
19 million for the agency in the coming fiscal year.
20 This includes \$27.4 million for the Cultural
21 Development Fund, \$67.8 million for operating
22 subsidies at the Cultural Institution Group, \$45.1
23 million for SIG energy costs, \$1.17 million for
24 Create NYC initiatives, \$8.16 million for agency
25 operations, and \$1.75 million for other funding

2 streams such as energy subsidies. Note that these
3 figures do not include any funding such as City
4 Council Member items or initiatives that are
5 typically added at adoption. By comparison, DCLA's
6 budget at this same point in the process last year
7 was just over \$157 million. That means there were
8 more than \$80 million added to our budget at adoption
9 last year when DCLA's budget stood at \$241 million.
10 In spite of the fiscal challenges that we've all
11 faced, our fiscal year 24 budget remains among the
12 largest ever for DCLA and follows record-setting
13 investments in culture by the Adams Administration.
14 The Administration support for DCLA also includes a
15 number of PEG reductions in previous fiscal years
16 that DCLA was exempted from, one of the few agencies
17 to receive such exemptions. We're proud of this
18 record of support and we look forward toward adopting
19 a budget for fiscal year 25 that builds on this
20 strong foundation. I'd also like to highlight that
21 the fiscal year 25 figures include more than \$7.5
22 million in funding that was restored by Mayor Adams
23 in his Executive Budget. This is part of more than
24 \$22 million in restorations over three fiscal years
25 that the mayor and Speaker Adams announced last

2 month. DCLA along with our fellow agencies was asked
3 to tighten our belts and find savings amid the
4 immense fiscal challenges facing our city. While it
5 was difficult, we did our part. Now the strong
6 fiscal management is paying off. It's what made this
7 restoration possible, and we're thrilled to be able
8 to invest this major sum back into our cultural
9 community, and the process of making that investment
10 is already underway. Yesterday, we launched the
11 application for the fiscal year 25 Cultural
12 Development Fund, and as you know, this is one of the
13 primary ways that the City supports the nonprofit
14 cultural community that is such an important part of
15 New York. For fiscal year 24, we invested over \$52
16 million in 1,031 groups through the CDF in
17 partnership with the Council. This funding goes to
18 groups of all shapes and sizes and every corner of
19 all five boroughs, and this is in thanks in part to
20 the Council's close collaboration. My team will be
21 sending you tool kits to promote the fiscal year 25
22 CDF application as well as the call for panelists to
23 review applications. No one knows your districts
24 like you do, and we appreciate your partnership in
25 spreading the word about this critical source of

2 support for the City's nonprofit cultural community.

3 We really need your support in getting the word out.

4 We really need your support at your community boards

5 when you make those announcements to help us to

6 recruit for more panelists, and to make sure that we

7 have the most robust panelists assembled from all

8 five boroughs. And your partnership is critical in

9 that. We're excited to roll out several changes to

10 the CDF process this year, because of the feedback

11 that we've gotten from these hearings and so many

12 other aspects of communication with the field. These

13 are part of the ongoing reform efforts to make this

14 funding stream as transparent and as equitable as

15 possible. We have always said this would be an

16 ongoing pilot process, one that we would continue to

17 refine to find the fairest, most-equitable ways to

18 administer. We started with changes that included

19 doubling the minimum grant size, and making currently

20 funded groups eligible for multi-year awards

21 regardless of their budget size. These are just a

22 few of the reforms that we've already seen pay

23 dividends. Since rolling out the initial reforms,

24 forums like these hearings have been critical ways

25 for us to learn about how the reforms are working on

2 the ground. I've stayed after delivering my own
3 testimony to listen to dozens of groups testify from
4 across the City, and we thank each of those
5 organizations that come here and take time away from
6 their organizations to provide critical testimony
7 that helps shape this process. I've joined
8 constituent-led conversations, like those that
9 happened at Cultra [sic] Three, to listen to
10 feedback. My team and I have been in constant
11 dialogue with constituents from across the City at
12 events, at site visits and one-on-one conversations.
13 Since we launched the reform efforts in fiscal year
14 23. And we're eager to adopt several new reforms
15 this year as a result. This year's changes include
16 adding a brand new band for applicants with budget
17 sizes of \$1.5 million up to \$3 million. Previously,
18 this ban included groups from 500,000 up to \$3
19 million with a minimum award size of 30,000.
20 However, in practice, we saw that this lumped
21 together incredibly disparate groups and prevented
22 many mid-size organizations from receiving more
23 significant awards reflective of the reach of their
24 programming. Now, the minimum for this new budget
25 ban will be \$40,000, an effort to give more city

2 support to mid-sized institutions which are community
3 anchors for neighborhoods across the boroughs.

4 Another reform I'm excited to roll out this year is
5 the CDF Safety Net. One concern that we've heard
6 loud and clear, especially from Council Member
7 brewer, in our dialogue with the field is that groups
8 which had received long-term support from CDF had
9 been unexpectedly reduced or their applications
10 denied funding entirely. This is funding they relied
11 on to support their roles as long-time community-
12 based institutions, and when they didn't receive it,
13 the implications were too often very dire. To avoid
14 this situation, groups that have received CDF support
15 for six years or more in a row would no longer be in
16 this position of being zeroed out. If eligible
17 groups receive CDF panel scores low enough to mean
18 they would not be funded in fiscal year 25, instead,
19 they'll now receive a safety net award of up to half
20 the average of their total CDF baseline awards from
21 the prior six fiscal years. Many members of the
22 Council and leaders in the cultural sector advocated
23 for us to find a way to maintain support for such
24 institutions, and we listened. We think this will
25 help reduce the uncertainty for CDF grantees who have

2 long track records of doing great cultural
3 programming in their community. Another change I'm
4 excited to bring forward is bringing direct council
5 representation back to the CDF process. This will
6 make sure your unique on-the-ground understanding of
7 your communities is included in the application
8 review process. Chair Rivera, I know my staff has
9 briefed your team on these changes. We're happy to
10 offer briefings to anyone else who wants to learn
11 more and provide feedback into the process as we
12 continue to work towards fostering a more transparent
13 equitable CDF. We are partners in this all the way.
14 I want to turn now to a few other recent developments
15 and highlights from the agency. DCLA's capital
16 program which is a partnership between the Mayor,
17 Council and Borough Presidents continues to deliver
18 incredible cultural assets for all New Yorkers. as
19 the end of March I was delighted to join Chair Rivera
20 to break ground on the renovation of the home of the
21 Nuyorican Poets Café on the lower east side. It was
22 a proud moment for both of us that day. The City has
23 provided more than \$24 million for complete
24 renovation of this important institution and
25 investment in its future as an anchor of Puerto Rican

2 and Latinx heritage in this rapid-changing community.

3 I was also recently at the Aperture Foundation's
4 future home on the Upper West Side where I joined
5 Council Member Brewer to break ground on this
6 exciting project. The City has invested \$1 million
7 in Aperture's permanent home which will become a hub
8 of public engagement built around the work of this
9 storied photography organization and iconic
10 publication. And the only thing more exciting than
11 picking up a shovel to get a project started is when
12 you grab a pair of scissors to cut the ribbon on a
13 completed project. We recently joined our partners
14 of the Parks Department to cut the ribbon on an
15 incredible new building at Socrates Sculpture Park,
16 which I hope you all will come and visit. While this
17 was a Parks Department capital project, we are proud
18 supporters of programming at Socrates and are
19 thrilled for this amazing support for our cultural
20 institution from our partners at Parks. And these
21 new buildings, former shipping containers which are
22 the first permanent structure at the park will be
23 transformative for the organization's programming
24 giving them a weather-proof space to engage New
25 Yorkers year-round. It's been great seeing a number

2 of you at events celebrating other important cultural
3 milestones across the City. I joined Council Member
4 Salamanca to mark the Bronx Zoo's 125th anniversary,
5 a great example of how long-term public/private
6 partnerships can foster incredible cultural assets
7 that attract visitors and uplift residents. The
8 Bronx Zoo, I'm sure to note, is the largest youth
9 employer in the Bronx. I also saw Council Member
10 Hanks at the celebration marking the 25th anniversary
11 of the New York Chinese Scholar's Garden located at
12 the grounds of the Snug Harbor Cultural Campus on
13 Staten Island. It is a must-see. The stunning
14 outdoor space bring the beauty of the Ming Dynasty
15 gardens and Chinese culture right to Staten Island's
16 Northshore. And Chair Rivera, I was proud to join
17 you to officially co-name East 23rd Street SVA Way in
18 recognition of this incredible impact of the School
19 of the Visual Arts has had on New York since its
20 founding 75 years ago. And I had a blast at this
21 past weekend's dance parade, which if all of you had
22 not been, this is pure magic in New York City. It
23 transformed the streets in the district into New
24 York's hottest dance party, and all jokes aside,
25 dance and the performing arts is such important parts

2 of what makes this city great. So if you really want
3 to see the culture of New York City, dance is such a
4 great way to do it at this parade. Dance is one of
5 the one things that really-- of many things that
6 makes New York City great. Public art is another.
7 Earlier this year, we had an amazing celebration at
8 Gracie Mansion where we marked the 40th anniversary
9 of the City's Percent [sic] for Art program. Since
10 it was established in the early 1980s, Percent for
11 Art has transformed schools, libraries, plazas,
12 parks, and other civic spaces through the
13 commissioning of over 400 works of site-specific
14 permanent art work. To celebrate, we launched a new
15 interactive map and a website highlighting Percent
16 commissions in all five boroughs. Many of the
17 artworks featured on the map included audio
18 interviews with artists and arts administrators who
19 were involved in the project's creation. I encourage
20 you to check it at on.nyc.gov/percent40. When it
21 comes to public art, we're not resting on our
22 laurels. Shortly after we celebrated its 40th
23 anniversary at the People's House, we joined Mayor
24 Adams to announce the revival of the She Built NYC
25 program honoring great women from New York City

2 history with monuments in all five boroughs. The
3 first of these projects to be announced, a monument
4 honoring the great Shirley Chisolm at Prospect Park
5 is already well-underway. The PDC unanimously
6 approved its visionary design last year, and we
7 continue to work with the artists and community to
8 create something that pays tribute to Chisolm's
9 legacy. Now with our recent announcement, we're
10 ready to build monuments to four other incredible
11 women, Dr. Helen Rodriguez Triage [sp?] in the Bronx,
12 Billy Holiday in Queens, Catherine Walker in Staten
13 Island, and Elizabeth Jennings Graham [sp?] in
14 Manhattan. We currently have an open call for
15 artists to design these monuments. Learn more at
16 nyc.gov/culture. She Built NYC projects are just the
17 tip of the iceberg. Our public art team is moving
18 forward on exciting commissions all over the city.
19 We're working on new artwork for Medgar Evers High
20 School in Brooklyn, one more than 20 school projects
21 we expect to install this year, and on new
22 commissions for libraries across the City. I'm also
23 very excited to announce that just yesterday, Artist
24 Ken Seth Armstead's [sp?] proposal for Abolitionist
25 Place in Brooklyn was unanimously approved by the

2 Public Design Commission. This artwork will honor
3 the legacy of the movement to abolish slavery which
4 had deep roots in the area around this incredible new
5 open space. And last, but never least, our Materials
6 for the Arts program continues to collect donated
7 items that fuels arts programming across the City.
8 It's been particularly gratifying to join the amazing
9 MFTA team for their new initiative to deliver
10 supplies to arts educators at drop-off sites across
11 the five boroughs. In addition to delivery in much-
12 needed supplies, the MFTA Education Team runs
13 workshops for participating educators to introduce
14 new ways of working with the unique materials you
15 encounter in the warehouse. I saw them in action in
16 Jamaica Center for the Arts and Learning in Queens
17 and Snug Harbor on Staten Island. I encourage
18 educators and arts groups to visit nyc.gov/mfta to
19 see how they can get involved in all the great
20 action. And I could go on and on about the amazing
21 work happening at DCLA, because there's so much, and
22 the incredible programming we're proud to support
23 across the City, but I certainly want to leave plenty
24 of time for all the questions, comments and feedback
25 from this incredible body, but in the interest of

2 time, I will stop here. I thank you for the
3 opportunity to testify today, and I'm so happy to
4 answer all questions that you might have today.
5 Thank you so much.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
7 Commissioner. I want to jump right into it. So, the
8 Department's \$152 million FY 25 budget represents
9 about one-tenth of one percent of the City's proposed
10 FY 25 budget. In our budget response we advocated
11 for the provision of an additional \$75.6 million for
12 the city's cultural organizations to restore the PEGs
13 from their current and previous year. The Executive
14 Plan included the restoration of \$7.4 million in FY
15 24, \$5.4 in FY 25, \$5.5 in FY 26 to 28 for the CIGs,
16 \$2.2 in FY 25, and \$2.1 in FY 26 to 28 for the CDF,
17 the Cultural Development Fund. Could you tell us, why
18 were this year's PEGs not fully restored, and had
19 there been conversations between your agency and City
20 Hall with regard to fighting for hate full
21 restoration to the CIGs and CDFs at adoption.

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you so much
23 for that question, Chair Brannan. Our agency from
24 the time that I've been appointed Commissioner, we
25 were the only agency in the first two fiscal years

2 that was exempted from the cost-saving measures that
3 many agencies unfortunately had to take to tighten
4 those belt that much harder to make sure that we were
5 able to get the City through this very challenging
6 time. We have had a very significant partial
7 restoration from many of those cost-saving measures,
8 and we continue to advocate and to have many
9 conversations with the Administration, but the
10 Administration has over the first two fiscal years
11 demonstrated its commitment to the arts. We are
12 still the largest funder in the United States as it
13 pertains to art and culture. We understand that we
14 could always do more with more, but the funding
15 numbers that you are looking at do not also include
16 the funding that many other agencies also spend on
17 the arts. From the Department of Youth and Community
18 Development to Department of Probation to the
19 Department of Education, many agencies throughout the
20 City of New York also have arts budgets that are
21 quite robust that contribute to the art and cultural
22 vibrancy of New York City. So what you see here from
23 the Department of Cultural Affairs does not represent
24 the entire cultural budget. there are many agencies
25 that participate and we are proud to work with them,

2 but also I'd like to bring to your attention that if
3 you were to include our capital budget, we would be
4 very much close to that one percent in terms of the
5 amount of investment that the City brings forward to
6 so many cultural institutions on the capital front
7 all throughout the five boroughs. Those significant
8 capital projects are being seen, that investment, in
9 all five boroughs all across the City, and as
10 Commissioner I've been incredibly proud that we've
11 been able to invest in so many organizations from the
12 BIPOC community in record-breaking numbers. From the
13 Nuyorican that I just spoke about in terms of in
14 Weeksville, in Brooklyn, New York and all throughout
15 the five boroughs. We just cut the ribbon on the new
16 Bronx Children's Museum. We cut the ribbon on Louis
17 Armstrong House in Queens, and we're so excited that
18 the National Black Theater will be cutting a ribbon
19 next year on that incredible project that also
20 includes affordable housing, and we can't forget the
21 Hip-Hop Museum in the Bronx. These are incredible
22 capital investments that are very meaningful all
23 across the City.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I mean, we agree
25 with all that obviously.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm so glad.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And as someone who--
4 - you know, I learned three or four chords in music
5 class, and--

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: [interposing] I think
7 you learned a little bit more.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: No, punk rock, you
9 don't need more than three--

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: [interposing] I've
11 read the article.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You don't need more
13 than three chords. But now as Chair of the Finance
14 Committee, certainly understanding that not-- you
15 know, the role that cultural institutions play not
16 only as a foundation for our neighborhoods and our
17 city, but really as, you know, a main cog in the
18 engine of the City's economy. It's concerning to the
19 Council and it should be concerning to everybody that
20 the-- you know, and agency that is tasked with
21 cultural affairs in our city has a budget that's only
22 one-tenth of one percent of the City's total budget.
23 You know, there's a million ways you can bump up that
24 number by including funding from other agencies, but
25 the bottom line is DCLA is funded at one-tenth of one

2 percent of the City's budget for the cultural
3 institutions that really have such an exponential
4 impact for our city and our economy. We talk about
5 New York City and what makes New York City so
6 special, without our cultural institutions we would
7 be, I don't know, Des Moines, Iowa. No offense to
8 Des Moines, right? But so I guess our concern is the
9 Administration seems to be pennywise and pound
10 foolish when it comes to such a relatively small
11 amount of funding with regard to the City's cultural
12 institutions. Is there a disconnect there that we're
13 not-- are we not making our case well enough to show
14 the exponential impact that our culturals have on the
15 City?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Mayor Adams has on
17 many occasions spoken very prominently about the
18 importance of art and culture to the City of New
19 York, but more important than words has been the
20 critical investments in the arts. The last two
21 budget cycles were ground-breaking, record-breaking
22 funding and commitments and contributions to the
23 arts. Our capital budgets have been the three
24 largest. This one coming up will be the three largest
25 capital budgets that the City has experienced in

2 terms of investments in art and culture, and we
3 continue to work with the City Council, and we
4 continue to work with our partners to continue to
5 expand the cultural budget. And so we continue to
6 work with the Mayor. We continue to work with OMB to
7 continue to support and provide funding for art and
8 culture, but what I will say is that this is
9 certainly a partnership. We continue to expand the
10 cultural budget and we can do that with the City
11 Council. So, what you're describing as a cut to the
12 cultural budget is really that we're waiting for the
13 time when we negotiate the budget where we have those
14 contributions and that commitment and that
15 partnership with the City Council. And just to give
16 some examples in this, you know, when I was in the
17 City Council there were five CASA grants that were
18 delivered for every City Council Member. When we
19 were in the Council we expanded that five to 17, and
20 that expanded the cultural budget. We were able to
21 create new initiatives in the Council such as the Art
22 is a Catalyst for Change. That was a cultural
23 initiative that I was able to bring forward to the
24 Council and to have it voted on upon my colleagues,
25 and that expanded the cultural budget. We were able

2 to take the Theaters of Color initiative. That was
3 part of Gale Brewer's Administration when she was in
4 the Council. It was eight Theaters of Color that
5 were now expanded to 54 organizations of color
6 throughout the City. That also expands the cultural
7 budget. So if we on the administrative side expand
8 our cultural budget and we partner with the Council
9 who also expands our cultural budget, we could expand
10 the cultural budget to record-breaking numbers like
11 never before. So I look forward to this partnership
12 with the Council, and we look forward to your
13 advocacy within your Dem [sic] Conferences and your
14 different committee conferences to be able to expand
15 the cultural budget to record-breaking numbers.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, the one-time
17 funding at adoption-- so of the additional \$40
18 million the Council included in the DCLA's FY 24
19 budget, the CDF received \$23.5 million while the CIGs
20 got \$16.5 million. So, could you tell us how is the
21 funding split between the CIGs determined?

22 LANCE POLIVY: Council Member Brannan,
23 can you please repeat the question?

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah. Of the
25 additional \$40 million the Council included in DCLA's

2 FY 24 budget, the CDF received \$23.5 million while
3 \$16.5 was allocated to the CIGs. So, we're trying to
4 understand how the \$40 million was split.

5 LANCE POLIVY: You're saying who made the
6 determination--

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Yeah,
8 how did-- why-- why did the CDF get \$23.5 and why did
9 the CIGs get \$16.5?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, in each
11 process that we have to do that, there's a baseline
12 amount of funding that has to go to the cultural
13 institution groups each year. So that funding goes
14 for security, light, gas, utilities, all of those
15 things. So, a lot of that decision is built-in in
16 terms of how much funding baseline that the cultural
17 institution groups get. Those are the 34
18 institutions that we are obligated to support and to
19 fund each year, and the CDF process, a lot of that
20 has to do with the amount of funding that is
21 available that we are able to allocate to 1,031
22 organizations that we fund, but much of this funding
23 is determined from baseline and how much it's going
24 to cost in order to oversee the operation of city-
25 owned properties that are part of the City's

2 responsibility, financial and fiscal responsibility,
3 to manage and maintain.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: so, what was the
5 averaged-- what was the average increased amount that
6 the CDF recipients received from that one-time \$40
7 million?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: What was the average
9 increase?

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, the \$40 million
11 that the Council included in the budget, the FY 24
12 budget last year, what was the average increased
13 amount that each of the CDF received from that \$40?

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We cannot really
15 look at it in that way, because each organization is
16 reviewed by a panel review process, and so through
17 that panel review process, given what your budget
18 size is and how you performed in that panel would
19 determine how much funding you were actually
20 allocated each year. So, from year to year you
21 wouldn't be allocated additional funding and then get
22 an increase because increased funding was made
23 available. You would get an increase as an
24 organization based off how your application was
25 reviewed by the panel review process. You would get

2 an increase depending on the budget ban that you're
3 in. If your organization's budget grew, then you
4 would be in a larger funding band. That would allow
5 you the opportunity to apply for more funding than
6 you had in previous years, but from year to year,
7 organizations don't naturally just get a boost
8 individually as an organization based off of an
9 increase of available funds. Organizations are
10 granted increases and/or decreases depending upon
11 their performance in the application review process.
12 I don't know you if you wanted to expand on that.

13 LANCE POLIVY: The only other thing I
14 would say is that the programs that the Council asked
15 for that the Commissioner described that we're
16 including in the CDF process this year are programs
17 that will not impact baseline funding to the CDF, but
18 will be programs that will be applied on top of
19 baseline awards. And so the types of programs that
20 we've heard that there's interest in from the
21 Council, like being able to help organizations that
22 have previously been zeroed out and creating that
23 safety net, those have to be funds that are added at
24 adoption, because otherwise they would be taking away
25 from baseline funding that groups know they can rely

2 on for a three-year commitment. So, I would say that
3 the more that we get as a one-shot at adoption, the
4 more that we can invest in the types of programs that
5 the Commissioner described that we're adding this
6 year in response to the Council's feedback.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, let's talk
8 about capital. How much community perspective
9 factors into capital planning and decision-making in
10 terms of equity?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Glad you asked. I'm
12 glad you asked that question. As Commissioner, one
13 of the major things that I wanted to do was to have
14 each year a capital process where we talk with the
15 five Borough Presidents to talk about what are the
16 priorities that have come to the surface of capital
17 projects that need support and funding each year.
18 We've also extend that to have communication with
19 each of the Council Members whose districts have put
20 in a funding request for capital construction
21 improvements and expansion. Another part of it that
22 is a major part of the process is that there are some
23 projects that are-- year after year they are coming
24 to our agency because they are what's known as
25 banking. They are raising capital dollars for a

2 larger project, and so we tend to-- like
3 organizations, let's say, National Black Theater and
4 others, we want to make sure that organizations that
5 are already in the capital process, who are already
6 in construction or already in design, we want to get
7 those projects over the finish line. So those will
8 also participate in a very large way. there are also
9 organizations that need capital expansions and
10 renovations, and there's just a need for those
11 projects to happen, but a lot of this happens in
12 terms of one-on-one communication with the
13 organizations where they come, they present to us,
14 they explain to us what their needs are in terms of
15 capital improvement or expansion, and they talk about
16 audience development. They talk about how their
17 current space or facility may be insufficient for the
18 growth and the development of the organization. We
19 also utilize those opportunities to then speak to the
20 Council Member about that process as well as the
21 Borough President to understand what is it that this
22 community needs in terms of capital improvements,
23 capital investments, and then there are also
24 equipment. Equipment is a large part that we do a
25 large part of partnership with our City Council

2 Members. We actually fund a lot of the brick and
3 mortar and expansion, while the City Council supports
4 many of the equipment purchases and equipment
5 expansions into many of the institutions, and this is
6 really a partnership that we've utilized over the
7 years in order to make sure that we are meeting the
8 needs of the Borough Presidents, meeting the needs of
9 the Council Member, and understanding on the ground
10 what the needs are, because nobody knows your
11 district like a City Council Member. You know the
12 needs. You're sitting in those seats. You're going
13 to those performances. You're seeing the lines around
14 the corner. You're seeing the roofs. You're seeing
15 all of those things. As many organizations do bring
16 those issues to you, and you're relaying that to us,
17 and that informs a great deal of our process.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Can you talk about
19 what the expense budget implications are of the
20 capital program? Does the expense budget capture
21 all the costs for staff and maintenance and energy
22 and leases and fuel costs that are associated with
23 the capital projects?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, for our capital
25 projects, our capital projects are separate and

2 apart. So, when we do a capital construction
3 project, it does not pay for staff. A capital
4 project doesn't pay for utilities, lights, gas, all
5 of those things. Those are many of the major
6 expenses that an organization has to really think
7 about and consider when taking on a larger project.
8 We all want a brand new state-of-the-art multi-
9 million-dollar institution, but a lot of expenses
10 come with that. Our CDF process is programmatically
11 based. So we-- we provide support and funding for
12 exhibitions, afterschool programs. We provide
13 support for projects that organizations want to do in
14 terms of community outreach, a dance performance, a
15 recital, a theater group, but we wouldn't take on the
16 expense of utility, gas, light, or resources for an
17 organization that has undergone the process of a
18 capital expansion project, per say. So, they are
19 very much separate entities. We support programmatic
20 as well as capital, but they are not intuitively
21 combined. What we do have, which is another way that
22 we can expand our City Council and artists budget--
23 when I was in the Council I was able to create
24 something called Utility Relief. Utility, or the
25 Utility Relief Fund is something that organizations

2 that are not cultural institution groups but they are
3 on city-owned property, we were able to create a
4 subsidy that would allow the City to cover the cost
5 for those utilities on city-owned property that were
6 not cultural institution groups. So that program and
7 project can always be expanded, and we can always
8 utilize greater resources to support more of that
9 utility relief effort, and that's another way we
10 could expand the cultural budget and get us closer to
11 that one percent.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Last for me. I'm
13 going to turn it over to Chair Rivera. The Executive
14 Plan, the Department's Executive Plan includes a
15 fulltime headcount of 60 for FY 25. It's an
16 increase, I believe, of two over FY 24. Is that
17 headcount efficient to meet the needs of the cultural
18 community in our city?

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We could always do
20 more with more, and currently, we are in the process
21 of interviewing. In many of our agencies and
22 departments, now that the hiring freezes has been
23 lifted to some extent, we're able to hire in many of
24 the different positions throughout the agency. We
25 are interviewing. We're looking forward to expanding

2 and growing the agency with the headcount that we
3 have, but if we're able to hire, which we are because
4 we're currently interviewing, we're able to hire for
5 those positions, we will have the headcount that will
6 be sufficient in order to operate and efficiently run
7 this agency. So, it's more a matter of the
8 interviewing and vetting time in order to bring those
9 positions on board, but we have the capacity to do
10 so, and that capacity is going to allow us to operate
11 a very efficient, streamlined agency.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
13 Commissioner. I'm going to hand it over to Chair
14 Rivera.

15 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, thank you so
16 much for your testimony.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you, Chair
18 Rivera.

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I don't know where
20 to begin. Commissioner, I'm a little taken aback
21 because I agree that I would love to expand the
22 budget. I would love to work with the Administration,
23 but we need a willing partner in the Administration,
24 and that is the part where we might agree to
25 disagree. In terms of where the Administration has

2 come forward in terms of meeting us. I find it
3 unrealistic and irresponsible to depend on Council
4 one-shots to cover SIG operating costs. That's the
5 City's responsibility. We urged the Administration
6 to restore \$45 million to cover these expenses. And
7 what was mentioned which I thought was important, is
8 that there are these investments that have been made
9 in Black and indigenous people of color run
10 institution finally. We finally invited them to come
11 to the table to expand their programming, and now you
12 have long-term institutions who you would think are
13 quite established and they have the infrastructure
14 and they're incredible, but because of these cuts are
15 seeing so much-- they're likely to close if these
16 cuts are not restored. And I haven't even gotten to
17 the smaller organizations who are funded by the
18 Cultural Development Fund, who don't even know where
19 to begin in terms of what they've experienced in
20 terms of losses. And I'll ask you about the safety
21 net awards, because I think those are important. But
22 just to highlight, because again, the smaller
23 organizations I can't wait to talk about, because you
24 know, they're so important to our communities, but
25 when you have Le Mama [sic] asking for \$1 million in

2 expense and the Queens Museum afraid they won't be
3 able to keep their doors open. You have the Brooklyn
4 Academy of Music in serious operating distress.
5 These are major institutions that have now been
6 really sort of undercut by the Administration. So, I
7 do have questions. I just have to vent a little of
8 my frustration, because I appreciate, you know,
9 flowers. I love flowery prose and I love breaking
10 ground and cutting ribbons and these institution that
11 I've been able to bring money to in my district were
12 so important to me growing up, and I see your
13 enthusiasm and your love for arts and culture every
14 single day in the work that you do, but how do you
15 explain the cuts that have come and have not even
16 been restored nearly half. I mean, there is so much
17 going on right now with the groups who were cut, you
18 know, eight months in. They received those letters,
19 and we went over this in the last budget hearing. I
20 want to note your presence at that last hearing,
21 because you stood in its entirety and you heard every
22 single person testify. So I want to make sure that I
23 thank you for that. So let's-- let me get into these
24 questions. Why is DCLA relying on the Council's one-
25 shots to cover the CIGs operating costs? Why was the

2 funding, the \$45 million that the Council urged the
3 Administration to include, not included in the
4 Executive Budget.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Okay. I want to
6 thank you for your question. I appreciate your view
7 in terms of the partnership, but I want to say I have
8 to respectfully disagree on our willingness to be a
9 partner. I feel while the testimony may seem
10 flowery, that may just be in my delivery, but there
11 is a whole lot of really critical substance. Just as
12 I add, \$24 million to Nuyorican to build this world-
13 class state-of-the-art just in your district, that's
14 real dollars. Those are real capital dollars
15 invested into the cultural community of New York
16 City. No other city in the world is making cultural
17 investments in BIPOC-led communities like New York
18 City, and it's real. Our commitment to the cultural
19 community has been consistent, and I would say a
20 major aspect of what you are highlighting and noting
21 is something that the field is experiencing on a
22 whole. We are the only consistent funder for arts
23 and culture in New York City on a consistent basis.
24 We're not changing our platform. The challenge that
25 we're having on so many levels is that we're coming

2 back from a pandemic which means that many of our
3 audiences and international visitors have not quite
4 returned to full capacity, that's one. Two, many of
5 our foundations and corporations are also changing
6 their funding in terms of looking at different areas
7 to fund when they had been longtime cultural funders
8 and partners. So organizations are taking up really
9 important issues like climate control, the
10 environment, following the many different issues that
11 we face, the Black Lives Matter movement, social
12 justice issues, and they are moving into those very
13 critical issues, not recognizing that the arts and
14 culture are at the foundation of those issues and are
15 the real changes of-- change agents to making a lot
16 of those changes happen. So we want to bring our
17 foundation and corporate partners and individual
18 givers to understanding that we have created a
19 portfolio, a cultural portfolio of how we support art
20 and culture in New York City, and we need that level
21 of consistency to maintain and to grow as we're
22 fighting through really difficult economic times in
23 the City of New York.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: But knowing these
25 challenges, why would the City then make the cuts?

2 We should be stepping up to provide support in these
3 times of need.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We're in a fiscal
5 crisis. Mayor Eric Adams has demonstrated in the
6 first two fiscal years that he has an unwavering
7 support to art and culture, but like every agency
8 across the City, every single agency had to tighten
9 their belt, and many of these agencies tightened
10 their belt in the first fiscal year and the second
11 year, as well as the cost-reduction of exercises that
12 they had to undergo in this fiscal year. We've had
13 major restorations put forward. These restorations
14 are going to help us in fiscal year 25. It's going to
15 help us to restore so many of the programs and
16 provide more robust funding for our CDF applicants
17 and making sure that as we launched the application
18 just yesterday, that those organizations are going to
19 be able to receive a greater level of funding than in
20 the previous year, but we are happy to move forward
21 with understanding that fiscal year 25 is going to be
22 better and bigger than fiscal year 24.

23 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I mean, I think you
24 have said-- I think we all understand that arts and
25 culture are these economic drivers. They increase

2 our revenues. They create jobs. Do you think it is
3 fiscally responsible to cut programs that help our
4 economy?

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would just say
6 that, again, when I participated in this road to
7 becoming Mayor, the budget crises that Mayor Eric
8 Adams was facing was not the budget that he ran on.
9 It was not-- it was not the goals and aspirations
10 that he wanted to become Mayor on. There were so
11 many things and different agencies that he wanted to
12 see delivered, but because of the challenges that we
13 were facing fiscally and not having the federal
14 support help to support the fiscal crises and
15 challenges that we were having, we as the taxpayers
16 we had to suffer because we needed to make those
17 really important changes and cost-saving measures in
18 order to move the City forward. I would say these
19 reductions hurt every agency on every single level,
20 and we had to fight really hard to make sure that we
21 tried to help support so many of those organizations
22 during this fiscal time. Did you want to add to
23 that, Lance?

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well, I just want to
25 again underline the return on our investment. The

2 public investment in arts and culture by the City's
3 budget, the return that it brings in terms of
4 visitors, what it does for businesses, what it does
5 for communities, what we need in terms of development
6 for our young people, our seniors, everyone, that is
7 unquantifiable. But let's get into the numbers a
8 little bit. How many CDF groups were impacted by the
9 PEG in fiscal 2024, and what was the average amount
10 they say their grants reduced by?

11 LANCE POLIVY: Thank you for the
12 question, Chair Rivera. That's not quite how our CDF
13 process works. There are these very complicated
14 formulas that help to equate the percentile score
15 that any particular applicant gets to their ultimate
16 award. So, the amount of funding that each group
17 gets is calculated based on the amount of funding
18 that the agency has for the CDF program. So once we
19 knew the total amount that we had for the CDF
20 program, we were able to calculate each of the
21 awards, but it's not as if we had 1,031 awards, then
22 we got our PEG cut, and then we reduced each by a
23 certain amount, and we could give you that number.
24 It's that we did not calculate the awards until we

2 knew how much funding we would have for the CDF
3 program.

4 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So, how do you
5 ensure that there's borough parity in the
6 distribution of funding, and can you give us a
7 borough-wide breakdown of CDF recipients by funding
8 amount? Can you talk to how the funding has been
9 used to expand equity within the cultural community
10 with--

11 LANCE POLIVY: [interposing] Absolutely,
12 Chair.

13 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: specific examples?

14 LANCE POLIVY: In terms of borough
15 equity, we're really proud that our application
16 process that is so focused on the quality of each
17 grant application has yielded results that align to
18 the percentage based on the total number of
19 applications from each borough and the total number
20 of awards for each borough. So, those percentages
21 are within one percent exactly the same for all five
22 boroughs. So, to the extent that there is any
23 borough who wants more funding to that borough, the
24 best way to do it is to make sure that we have more
25 applicants from that borough, but as soon as we get

2 those applications, we are seeing that the awards
3 match exactly to the percent to the number of
4 applicants coming in.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And I just wanted to
6 add something that you had asked about in terms of
7 the amount of funding awarded. So, we changed. One
8 of the changes that we made from the hearings was
9 that a new band for applicants with budget sizes of
10 \$1.5 million up to \$3 million. So the way that the
11 application process works is, if you're an
12 organization with the budget size of \$1.5 million to
13 \$3 million, previously this band included groups from
14 \$500,000 up to \$3 million with a minimum award size
15 of \$30,000, right? So, we changed that so that in
16 practice what we wanted to make sure was that we now
17 have a budget band that will be \$40,000 in effort to
18 give more City support to mid-size institutions. So
19 we may have a budget band that starts at \$30,000 and
20 could go to like let's say \$60,000, but now we've
21 changed that budget band so that it's \$40,000. When
22 we have additional funding, because the budget bands
23 could go from like \$40,000 to let's say \$60,000, but
24 when we have less funding, most of the organizations
25 would get a \$40,000 grant in that budget band versus

2 a \$60,000 grant. So more funding allows us the
3 ability to be able to allocate more resources for
4 that band when more resources are available. But
5 what we don't want to have happen is that for certain
6 organizations that are between \$1.5 and \$3 million,
7 we didn't want their budget band to be \$30,000 at the
8 start. We wanted it to be \$40,000 just to provide a
9 bit more help and support in funding to those
10 organizations that is more directly related to the
11 amount of programming that they're doing and the
12 community that they're serving. So, more funding
13 allows us to be able to fund organizations at a
14 higher level within their budget band when more
15 resources are available.

16 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. I think you're
17 going to hear from a lot of organizations today,
18 their thoughts on how these cuts and awards
19 transpired. I will also just mention that many of
20 them do feel blindsided. And I want to ask about the
21 safety net awards, because I thought that was really
22 interesting, and I think that a designated funding
23 pot for safety net is necessary.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Right? And that's
3 to ensure that public funding streams to not-- not
4 necessarily-- that public funding streams do not
5 necessarily or unknowingly harm dedicated
6 organizations that serve our communities. So, I'm
7 glad to hear that this is going to be implemented
8 going forward. I think it should have been included
9 at the start of the reforms, but we're here now. How
10 will this safety net funding be funded? Is it going
11 to come from additional funds from the Administration
12 that's dedicated to this, or will it come from the
13 existing CDF funding, and will any of this funding be
14 able to address organizations who saw large cuts in
15 fiscal year 24?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It will not be a
17 part of baseline funding because baseline funding has
18 to go through the panel review process. So it will
19 not be a part of baseline funding. It will be
20 through funding that's added at adoption, and we will
21 make sure that there's funding adequately available
22 for monies that are added at adoption to be able to
23 cover this particular initiative that we are-- policy
24 that we are initiating through the Department of
25 Cultural Affairs. It will be moving forward. We

2 looked at the opportunity to do a look-back, but we
3 just don't have the resources to do a look-back.

4 These are-- as we've said, this is a pilot process,
5 and we are continuing to evolve and learn and to

6 implement so much of the information that we're

7 getting from the hearings and from feedback calls,

8 and that is in part why, as you mentioned earlier,

9 why the application was being launched later this

10 year, because each policy change takes a significant

11 amount of time. It takes a significant amount of

12 time to make a policy change within the agency, as

13 well as with the Law Department and to do all of

14 these different things takes time. But we wanted to-

15 - we didn't just want to just continue to move

16 forward in the interest of expediency. We wanted to

17 make sure that if the field is articulating the

18 challenges that they are facing with being zeroed

19 out, or to receive such a reduction of funding, we

20 have to fix that. And when we fix that it takes

21 time, and when it takes times that impacts the

22 organizations, but the goal was to take this time,

23 make these necessary changes, and to get back on

24 track so that we can deliver resources more equitably

25 in a more streamlined approach on time and even early

2 in order to get the funding out the door. But I
3 didn't want to race to get funding out the door at
4 the expense of organizations that are hurt and harmed
5 along the way.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, so I
7 appreciate that, because like, you know, how long
8 everything takes to be, you know, implemented,
9 finalized. So the money is coming from the
10 Administration.

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Correct.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, and let me just
13 ask, because you said it's not baselined. It's going
14 to be added at adoption, because you mentioned the
15 reforms and you mentioned the look-back. So, is
16 there a look-back? Because I'm worried about the
17 groups that were zeroed out last year, and when we're
18 looking at even fiscal year 23, those organizations,
19 will they be able to capture some of this awarded
20 money, the ones that were zeroed out in the last
21 round?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: They will not be
23 able to capture some of that funding, unfortunately.
24 There's just not resources available to do that, but

2 this is something that we are going to look at moving
3 forward in order to implement.

4 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. Well, I mean,
5 some of them are here, so you'll hear from them. I
6 think the safety net award clearly is something that
7 we need, especially for those organizations that are
8 doing critical work. It's just for those groups that
9 were zeroed out and significantly decreased, I mean,
10 they're really, really struggling. I know you know
11 that. In terms of process, you know, the panel also
12 has-- is significant in terms of how this entire
13 thing really goes about. So, I think you mentioned
14 some reforms to the panel process. I know we've
15 talked about it in the past. There have been many,
16 many concerns and complaints about the panels being
17 too short, people on the panel being underprepared
18 without understanding of the impact of the scoring
19 and how that scoring could actually lead you to be
20 zeroed out. So I just wanted to ask, is there an
21 update on the reforms to the panel? I know many
22 people contributed comments as to how to improve it,
23 and I really enjoyed working with them to figure out
24 how to do so comprehensively and responsibly, even
25 looking at legislation. SO, can you talk a little

2 bit about the reforms and considerations for the
3 panel process?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say as it
5 pertains to the panel process, almost 80 percent of
6 all applicants that applied to the New York City
7 Department of Cultural Affairs are funded. So,
8 that's a huge number in terms of the amount of
9 organizations that are funded by this agency. We
10 have one of the highest responses in terms of the
11 ability to fund as many organizations as we do, and
12 80 percent is quite a high number. I also want to
13 add that with the panel review process, one of the
14 things that we implemented in this was that we wanted
15 to make sure that we brought back City Council
16 representation onto the panel review process. So you
17 are able to send staffers and other representatives
18 from your office to be able to sit in on those panels
19 and to be able to participate. As it compares to
20 other funding agencies across the state as well as
21 across the federal government, we actually have one
22 of the longest review processes in terms of how we
23 actually review and evaluate applications. This
24 process happens. We've increased the amount of
25 panelists that participate each year. We're able to

2 actually pay panelists for that work. We've reduced
3 the amount of applications that each panelist has to
4 review, and that came about as part of the reforms,
5 but we're always looking to review and to increase
6 the process so that it is more reflective of the
7 organizations within the City. But the best way, the
8 most effective way to actually improve the
9 circumstances of how the panel review process works
10 is for each and every City Council Member to
11 advocate. When you do those Community Board
12 meetings, when you do those Public Safety hearings,
13 when you do those different community PTA meetings,
14 is to go to every end of your district and to get
15 true representation from your district who
16 understands the arts, understands your community, and
17 is able to speak up and to be able to provide their
18 hands-on experience with many of those organizations.
19 That's really the most-effective way, and to make
20 sure that boroughs that feel under-represented in
21 terms of the amount of funding that their borough is
22 receiving, we want to make sure that those boroughs
23 are participating by having more panelists part of
24 that process. And this happens on so many different
25 levels. We need more borough equity. We need more

1 COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
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2 cultural equity. We need more of those types-- forms
3 of equity in every form on the panels to make them
4 more reflective of the City of New York.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I agree.
6 Inclusivity, diversity, equity, inclusion is always
7 important. I think the-- so you perform an
8 evaluation of the CDF process to see what changes
9 should be made?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: To be more
12 inclusive.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: How did you go about
15 that process? Who did you include?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I included the City
17 Council, starting with you. Discussion with the
18 Administration in terms of their views as well. We
19 brought many of this to the culture at three calls
20 that happen on a regular basis. Our agency
21 participates. We hear from feedback the testimony
22 and the incredible arts and cultural organizations
23 that come here to testify which we listen to. We
24 have heard the testimonies. We've incorporated the
25 testimony. So often people think that the written

2 testimony or coming here just goes into like the
3 ethers of some sort, but we took that information and
4 brought it back to the agency to see how can we
5 address these really challenging issues that are
6 happening. We did numerous site visits. So my day
7 every day is going to numerous cultural institutions
8 from the beginning of the day to the end of the
9 night. I just saw Gale Brewer last night. We were
10 both at the MET Opera which was an incredible
11 presentation. I went to see See Mom [sic] the
12 morning before the MET Opera to see an incredible
13 program of a partnership with Rikers, and this
14 partnership with Rikers where they allow those that
15 are being held at Rikers to have a reconnection with
16 their family at the Children's Museum of Manhattan,
17 and to have those valuable experiences and to have
18 those meetings and discussions, and this happens on
19 an every-day basis. I can't even tell you what my
20 weekends look like in terms of being able to meet
21 with so many different organizations to find out how
22 this process is impacting them.

23 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well, there is a
24 wealth of knowledge out there, no doubt. So you're
25 getting these recommendations, this feedback. You did

2 the safety net award. Are there other examples of how
3 you're trying to achieve these goals?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, every
5 organization has a program officer, and every
6 organization communicates with their program officer
7 feedback from the CDF process. So, that feedback
8 from the CDF process also goes into how do we
9 continue to build a better, more equitable
10 transparent CDF process. The other element that goes
11 into so much of this is taking that feedback along
12 with the Culture at Three calls, along with the one-
13 on-one visits, along with the hearings, along with
14 the testimony, but also looking very clearly at the
15 data. The data is going to explain to us how one
16 organization did one year compared to how they did in
17 the current fiscal year. And seeing those
18 organizations that might have been zeroed out,
19 hearing those phone calls like organizations that you
20 brought forward who we have to do somewhat of a
21 triage in terms of figuring out how can we help
22 support, fund, and save this organization outside of
23 the process that's been presented to us. What are the
24 other tools? We've developed a culture at risk arm
25 of the agency, and we are continuing to develop that

2 culture at risk arm of the agency to give it more
3 support systems, more outreach, more resources in
4 order to be able to address a lot of the challenges
5 that many of eh organizations face during this really
6 challenging time coming out of the pandemic.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay, alright.

8 Well, I appreciate your response. I'm just-- I
9 really want to make sure that there's so many
10 expenses that these organizations that they just take
11 on, and now with the cuts it's been incredible. I
12 mean, even the cost of collective bargaining. That
13 is something that should be covered by the City.
14 It's-- there are so many examples, but I know that we
15 have people on deck, right, to ask questions. So, I
16 will go to my colleagues and if anything, can come
17 back for a second round. Thank you for your
18 responses.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you, Council
20 Member Rivera.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we've been
22 joined by Council Member Farías, and we have
23 questions from Council Member Brewer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
25 much, Commissioner. Thank you for showing up at so

2 many events. I do the same. I know what it's like,
3 and I really appreciate your participation. So on
4 the CDF, I know we're concentrated on that. So, I
5 appreciate the news-- having sat through many of the
6 panels myself over the years. It's really
7 instructive as to what is out there, and you know,
8 you got to read the applications very seriously and I
9 think it would be helpful to have somebody from the
10 City Council there. We have to make sure-- give us
11 enough time to get people to show up, because it does
12 mean a staff person is out for that day, particularly
13 Manhattan, because we have more than any other
14 borough. But I appreciate that. Obviously, the one
15 that got cut that hurt me the most was Young People's
16 Chorus. They had \$118,000 zeroed out, and when they
17 went for the review to try to amend that, they were--
18 they got \$26,500. So, I guess, what I want to know
19 is-- how-- they wanted to have a minimum of three
20 rounds in order to have a more substantial eyes on
21 the prize, so to speak, because they felt that they
22 didn't get enough from what was considered, and they
23 want-- and they do want to have Council staff, and I
24 appreciate that. How would their situation--
25 obviously not a tiny organization. Obviously a

2 community of color-led organization. Obviously an
3 organization that is internationally known. How would
4 the process be different for them than what they
5 experienced which was to get zeroed out until they
6 appealed, and even then, they didn't get very much.
7 How will it be different?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that
9 they had opportunities to speak with their program
10 officer. The program officer could offer them
11 feedback which was very valuable feedback in terms
12 how to put forward a more competitive application.
13 At the end of the day, this is a panel review
14 process. It is something where your peers are
15 evaluating your application, and there has to be
16 merit based off of the quality of the application.
17 You can be an incredible extraordinary organization
18 like Young People's Chorus is. I've seen firsthand.
19 Our agency has seen firsthand. They fill Lincoln
20 Center. They're an incredible organization impacting
21 so many young people, but a large part of how
22 organizations are reviewed is going to be the quality
23 of that application. We've changed some elements of
24 the application so that this year moving forward--
25 what I wanted to see out of this application was that

2 the quality of the program is what is weighted and
3 valued far more than any other aspect of the
4 application, and that's a huge change and a huge
5 significant change in terms of the quality of the
6 program, and that weight was changed from 15 percent
7 to 30 percent. so that was a change that we wanted
8 to see, because I know firsthand that Young People's
9 Chorus is a phenomenal organization and program, but
10 the way this process would actually be administered
11 would be an organization like Young People's Chorus
12 that had received six consecutive years of funding,
13 if this had been implemented previously, we would
14 have taken an average of those six years of their
15 baseline funding and would have given them half of
16 that in order to sustain them as they move forward in
17 the process next year. We don't want to see
18 incredible organizations like that zeroed out and to
19 have to face the challenges of continuing to
20 administer programming within the fiscal year while
21 also being zeroed out. It puts organizations in
22 quite a quandary.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I hope it
24 works. We will see. Next question, arts education--

25 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: [interposing] Yeah.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: obviously, we all
3 care about it. I don't think you mentioned it in
4 your testimony, but we all want to understand. Is
5 there some way that your agency-- because with all
6 due respect to DOE, that may not be their first
7 priority. It's certainly one of mine. So, we
8 obviously, in this City Council push for an arts
9 teacher in every school. That's great, but that
10 doesn't necessarily cut it in terms of the arts
11 education that I'm talking about. So, I mean, we
12 have CASA. I understand what we got. We need more.
13 So what do you do as an agency to monitor arts
14 education in the public schools?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's really-- we
16 work very close with Paul Thompson in the DOE and the
17 guidelines and the blueprint that he puts out each
18 year. It's something where really we advocate, we
19 push, we work towards, but it's really a DOE,
20 Department of Education, it's really in their
21 portfolio in terms of the ability to increase art
22 teachers in every school that you spoke about.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. I would
24 argue that we're one Administration, we're one city,
25 and it's nice to push off to somebody else, but with

2 all due respect, DOE's not going to care about arts
3 as you should. So I think you-- we need something
4 internally stronger. Kate Levin did have a blueprint
5 and she stood on it, and she screamed and yelled, and
6 I think that should be more coming from you about
7 arts education. I know, you know, situations-- I
8 just finally got a dance-- empty dance studio in six
9 high schools. One high school-- six schools in
10 building filled, but it took me two years. That's
11 craziness, and it seems to me that every opportunity
12 for arts education-- there are closets full of
13 instruments that are not being used. I mean, I would
14 suggest more of a push, advocacy. Maybe we need some
15 laws to say every single school needs not just what
16 we have, but a lot more. And you need to have an
17 overall sense of what arts education is really going
18 on. One more quick question. On the housing front,
19 PS 109, Manhattan Plaza, they're great. What else
20 are we doing to house artists in the City of New
21 York?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: WE are continuing to
23 have conversations and meaningful conversations with
24 Commissioner Alopho Carrion [sp?]. We're continuing
25 to talk about ways that we can utilize all the

2 different forms of affordable housing, if there are
3 ways, if there are pathways. A lot of this is on the
4 federal level, but we're looking for very creative
5 ways to recreate a lot of the successful models that
6 we have right here in New York City. So we are
7 definitely working on that with him. Want to see
8 something substantive come from a lot of these
9 conversations, panel discussions that we've been
10 having around it, and we'll continue to push that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. You
12 know, that's an okay answer. It's not what I want to
13 hear. I want to hear that you have some buildings
14 that you've identified them. Artist housing is
15 different. PS 109, Melissa Mark-Viverito gets all
16 the credit, but there should be other examples like
17 that constantly. Next time, I hope we hear from you
18 we have six buildings, some of those conversions
19 going on Mid-town with the AB-- the BC buildings,
20 should be for artists. It's a different kind of
21 application. It's more complicated. They don't have
22 the same kinds of pensions. It's-- I mean, savings,
23 etcetera. So, next time can we get a list of the
24 buildings that you identified for artists?

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Well, one of them
3 just I want to bring to your attention is National
4 Black Theater. They are doing this particular
5 building--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I
7 know well.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: construction with--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I
10 put money in as Borough President.

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: See that there,
12 we're already working together.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: One, one, one. We
14 need more.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We need more, but I
16 feel like the-- why what National Black Theater is
17 doing is because they are able to create a model, and
18 our goal and hope is that this model will be able to
19 transform and all buildings-- well, not all
20 buildings, but where it makes sense in New York City.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The model was the
22 founder smart enough-- she was-- to have a purchase
23 of building in Harlem. That's where the model came
24 from in that particular instance. Just finally, I

2 know Inez Dickens deserves all the credit for Theater
3 of Color. Thank you very much.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you, Council
5 Member Brewer.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we have
7 Council Member-- Chair Rivera.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Oh, okay. Thank
9 you. I just had just one last question, because we
10 have many people writing to testify, which I
11 appreciate very, very much. I'm happy to hear that
12 you acknowledge the Council's commitment in increased
13 cultural funding over the years. You mentioned
14 CASA's, for example. But you know--

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: [interposing] Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: probably better than
17 anyone that CASA's are like \$20,000 a piece, right,
18 for every group which is significant and substantial
19 for many groups, but the Council cannot even meet the
20 City halfway. We have such a small fraction of
21 funding, and we cannot like CASA our way to equity
22 when you have made so many cuts to these groups. So
23 I just ask, because meanwhile the baseline funding
24 for cultural institution have not changed since 2009,
25 except for, I mean, this year's unprecedented cuts.

2 So looking at baseline funding over the past 10 or 15
3 years, we see that culture has actually not kept pace
4 with the City budget. Have you considered what the
5 DCLA budget should be in actual numbers, if it simply
6 enjoyed the same increase as the overall City budget
7 over time?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that to
9 your question, the 2009 budget does not include--
10 yes, you are right in terms of the baseline budget,
11 but the additional funding that is added at adoption
12 does continue to grow the cultural budget each year,
13 and over the last two fiscal years, those additional
14 resources added at adoption have continued to expand
15 the cultural budget, making us the largest cultural
16 funder in the nation, and that's no small feat in
17 terms of demonstrating the amount of commitment that
18 the Administration has put forward as it pertains to
19 art and culture. And yes, I do agree that we cannot
20 CASA our way out of the funding inequities that are
21 seen, but at the same time, on the Council side, CASA
22 grants can grow from \$20-\$30,000. We can't make
23 those decisions here on the administrative side. The
24 Council would have to look at their priorities and to

2 see is expanding art and culture on their side
3 something that they would like to prioritize.

4 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: So, can you just
5 really quickly mention about the Culture at Risk
6 program and how it's serving the community, because I
7 think that's a great program to mention, and you
8 know, because that one time funding you're mentioning
9 is also because of the Council, but I wanted to talk
10 about something, you know, in terms of Culture at
11 Risk, but also how the Department is assisting with
12 workforce development and job pipelines just to close
13 us out.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: So, Anne del
15 Castillo on our team, Senior Advisor, is developing
16 the Culture at Risk program. She's taking her
17 experiences from MOME and bringing them here to the
18 Department of Cultural Affairs. And really what the
19 Culture at Risk program and arm of DCLA is doing is
20 really expanding the network resources of the city
21 agencies here, as well as with state and federal
22 partners, to provide connectivity to cultural
23 institution on the federal, state, city, even
24 corporation and foundation level to connect
25 organizations and artists in some ways in our local

2 arts councils to resources that agencies have, but
3 also that are seen all throughout the state as well
4 as the federal government. Because a lot of the
5 challenge is that there are resources available for
6 so many organizations, but they are connected to
7 those resources. So it's leading them, walking them
8 through the process of how to access many of the
9 resources throughout our city's agencies, but also on
10 the state level. This is also in partnership with
11 the New York State Council on the Arts as well as the
12 National Endowment for the Arts, Institution of
13 Museum and Library Services. This is relay bringing
14 organizations further in greater connectivity in
15 resources all throughout. And as it pertains to
16 workforce development, many of our cultural
17 institution are participating on a large level in
18 terms of being workforce development providers such
19 as Roundabout Theater, such as the Brooklyn Botanic
20 Garden. These are incredible organizations that are
21 doing workforce development. one of the things that
22 I would like to do as Commissioner is to continue to
23 understand and to have a full resource of
24 opportunities so that we can connect particularly our
25 young people to all of these workforce development

2 programs, and making sure that there's better
3 connectivity, but they are also a greater part of the
4 City's workforce development programs and agencies
5 are seen as a true champion of workforce development
6 in the careers of art and culture.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you for that.
8 I'm looking forward to that program and working
9 together. I know Anne's going to be just a great
10 help. I know the City Canvas program you're working
11 on, we're working to bring art to sidewalk sheds and
12 scaffolding which I'm excited for as well, and really
13 employing as many young people as possible. I think
14 that's very, very important. Thank you for shouting
15 out the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. I know they're here.
16 We just have to protect those Cherry Blossoms. It's
17 an incredible sector that we get to walk through, and
18 so I thank you for your dedication and your advocacy
19 and for answering the questions, and we look forward
20 to the weeks ahead. I don't have any further
21 questions, Chair Brannan.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Commissioner, thank
23 you so much. We look forward to working with you
24 going forward.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you. It's
3 always an honor and a privilege to testify before
4 each of you today, and I hope to come back to the
5 next hearing and my rating with Council Member Brewer
6 goes from okay to better. So I'm looking for better.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: That's all we can
8 all ask.

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's all we can
10 do. That's all we can do each day.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Thank you all so
14 much.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright, we're
16 going to take a 10-minute break, and then we're going
17 to hear testimony from the public.

18 [break]

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon,
20 everyone. At this time, we ask you to please find
21 your seats. We are resuming in just a moment. Also,
22 if you have an electronic device, please take the
23 opportunity to set that to silent or vibrate. Once
24 again, we need everyone to please find a seat. We
25 are going to resume in just a moment. Thank you.

2 Also, folks, a quick announcement if you are here to
3 testify and have not filled out a witness slip at the
4 back desk, please do so now even if you did register
5 online. You still need to fill out a witness slip
6 in-person. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we're now
8 going to open up the hearing for public testimony. I
9 just want to remind members of the public that this
10 is still a government proceeding and that decorum
11 must be observed at all times. As such, members of
12 the public, unless you're testifying, you've got to
13 remain silent unless you're at the dais testifying.
14 The witness table is only reserved for those people
15 who are signed up to testify. No video recording or
16 photography is allowed from the witness table.
17 Furthermore, members of the public may not present
18 audio or video recordings as testimony, but you may
19 submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant
20 at Arms for inclusion in the official record. If you
21 wish to speak at today's hearing, make sure you fill
22 out one of those appearance slips that are available
23 at the back desk with the Sergeant at Arms, and wait
24 to be called. Once recognized, you'll have two
25 minutes to speak on today's hearing topic which is

2 New York City Library systems and the DCA FY 25
3 budget. If you have a written statement or
4 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
5 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony
6 to the Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written
7 testimony within 72 hours of the conclusion of this
8 hearing to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Okay, we're
9 going to call the first panel. First we have John
10 Hyslop, George Olken, Leonard Paul, and we've got
11 Deborah Allman [sp?] on Zoom.

12 LEONARD PAUL: Good afternoon, Council
13 Member Brannan and fellow committee members. Thank
14 you for giving us the opportunity to come before you
15 today to testify on behalf of all of our fellow union
16 workers of Brooklyn, Queens, and the New York Public
17 Libraries. We are united in our appeal to you, our
18 elected officials, to help us save our libraries.
19 Everyone in this city knows how valuable their
20 libraries are to their communities, all the
21 materials, services, programs, computers, and Wi-Fi
22 are provided in clean and safe library buildings,
23 manned by dedicated and loyal hard-working union
24 members. Your constituents know that their libraries
25 are free, open and accepting of everyone six days a

2 week. Our members have been feeling this strain
3 because the Mayor never allowed the libraries to
4 recover the staff we have lost since the pandemic.
5 Since February of 2020 we have lost 234 fulltime
6 union positions, including librarians, clerks,
7 custodians, drivers, IT workers, catalog staff,
8 maintainers, etcetera to do the same amount of work
9 over the same number of days as we did in 2020. Now,
10 the Mayor has forced our libraries to not open
11 branches. Next year, the library system will cut
12 services to five days per week, because we do not
13 have enough members to provide the basic level of
14 services. We do not have children's librarians to
15 provide the programs every neighborhood child needs.
16 We do not have enough custodians to keep our branches
17 as clean as they ought to be, and we do not have
18 enough public safety officers to ensure our patrons
19 can enjoy our branches in peace, safety and comfort.
20 The Mayor budget's is a travesty to our libraries.
21 You will hear from my fellow Presidents who will now
22 provide you with firsthand testimonies from our
23 members from all across the library services
24 describing how much of a negative impact the cuts are
25 having on us all. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

3 Deborah, are you there on Zoom?

4 DEBORAH ALLMAN: Yes, I am.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, go ahead.

6 DEBORAH ALLMAN: Thank you. We at the

7 New York Public Library Guild Local 1930 are

8 extremely annoyed with the Mayor's budget cuts which

9 are forcing the library to operate and provide

10 library service without adequate staffing levels.

11 The roles libraries plays within the city ecosystem

12 should spare its officials from making its budgetary

13 case every year. Thinning staff increasingly means

14 that programming including children story time,

15 tutoring and class visits is either a cut-back or

16 when even a single librarian is absent, even

17 cancelled. These are educational programs that we're

18 cutting. Local 1930 members was 2,208 as of

19 September 2023. We were already down by 100 members

20 as of February 2020. As of today, our membership

21 numbers are only 1,177. The following are testimony

22 from library staff on the everyday issue confronting

23 them as their-- and their colleagues. "Our sole

24 children's librarian single-handedly provides several

25 programs every week. Our biweekly story time

2 generate 70-80 participants every session. When the
3 children librarian is absent, we have to cancel all
4 the programs. The community is saddened that we only
5 rely on one children's specialists. We also cannot
6 offer any outreach since our children's librarian is
7 busy working--

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
9 is expired. Thank you.

10 DEBORAH ALLMAN: in the branches, and
11 doesn't even have [inaudible] for much-needed
12 outreach. The Mayor needs to fully restore the
13 libraries' budget. We cannot keep funding libraries
14 and closing location. You cannot operate on fumes.
15 Something has to give. The library budget should be
16 baselined in the city's budget. Respectfully
17 submitted by Deborah D. Allman, President of New York
18 Public Library Guild Local 1930." Thank you all.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
20 much.

21 GEORGE OLKEN: Chair Brannan and other
22 Committee Members, thank you for giving me the
23 opportunity to share these stories from Brooklyn
24 Public Library New Yorkers. I'm George Olken,
25 President of Local 1482. Adeeba Rana, is a librarian

2 who was promoted to Branch Manager of BPL's Bedford

3 Location in 2021. After three years in her role,

4 Adeeba has never worked in the building. Instead,

5 she's worked at six low-staff branches across the

6 borough while Bedford remained closed. The branch

7 was supposed to open last year and then this year,

8 and if the proposed budget cuts go through, opening

9 will likely be delayed again for lack of staff.

10 Christian Austen [sp?] works in clerical operations

11 at our central branch in Grand Army Plaza. He

12 usually works the early shift which means he's at the

13 checkout desk when we open. The library used to

14 staff the desk in pairs, but recently he's been

15 assigned alone. More desk shifts means less time

16 going over the shelves. At the end of day, Christian

17 walks through the youth wing where he sees books

18 messy and disorganized. The library website boasts

19 of more than 650,000 visits to Central last year, but

20 workers like Christian can only be in one place at a

21 time. Finally, one of our Special Officer Sergeants

22 wanted me to share his experience, but was

23 embarrassed for me to share his name. As a union

24 member supervisor, he's tasked with making fair

25 schedules. He could take more of the few overtime

2 shifts for himself, but he knows that everyone is
3 struggling and he tries to make sure that everyone
4 gets something which means that nights and weekends
5 he deliver Uber Eats to make ends meet. We think of
6 delivery workers as among the most underpaid and
7 marginalized groups in the City. Those same workers
8 are making sure your children are safe at the
9 library. We are union workers being pushed into low-
10 paying exploitative side gigs. We're the communities
11 who won't have a library to take our kids to on the
12 weekends, and we're the voters of New York City.
13 Please do right by thee workers and all your
14 constituents but ending these unnecessary cuts and
15 refunding the libraries, increase library funding,
16 support democratic institution, cut cynicism and
17 austerity, and invest in our collective futures.
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

20 JOHN HYSLOP: Chair Brannan, Chair
21 Rivera, and to all Council Members, these are the
22 following testimonies of Queens Library staff on
23 their everyday issues confronting them and their
24 colleagues. "The lack of adequate staffing effects
25 services at my small but busy library. Currently, we

2 only have two librarians, an Assistant Manager and a
3 children's librarian. In my position as Assistant
4 Manager, I am responsible for all the administrative
5 work such as schedules, time cards, coverage requests
6 and monthly reports while also providing customer
7 services at the reference desk. This divided
8 attention means constant interruptions with
9 management part of my job, leading to mistakes and
10 having to do redo the work. The need for days off,
11 vacations, sick days, etcetera leads to eh programs
12 being cancelled. For example, story time in
13 particular week was cancelled because the children's
14 librarian was off to work on Saturday. The children
15 and their caregivers were extremely disappointed.
16 One of the caregivers asked if I could do the story
17 time, but I was the only librarian in the building,
18 so that was not a possibility. The constant juggling
19 of the schedules also means I'm always needing to ask
20 for coverage which disrupts and schedules of my
21 location and the location sending coverage. Often,
22 the coverage is to make sure we have an adequate
23 staff to cover programs and lunches. If we had
24 adequate staff we wouldn't need to keep asking for
25 coverage." "In every location, our meeting spaces is

2 the prized commodity of the community. Nonprofit and
3 city agencies compete for bookings. However, a
4 librarian is required to monitor the space while the
5 meeting is in session. Due to the skeleton staffing,
6 librarians can barely cover the reference desk.

7 Without sufficient staffing, agencies cannot book the
8 space." "As a custodian, I will be called upon to
9 cover another branch later in my shift. That means
10 performing the same strenuous work of the first four
11 hours of my day in a home branch at another branch,
12 and this task will be repeated on other days of the
13 week. Other branch custodians feel the same strain,
14 too, as they also cannot fully provide the work that
15 libraries truly need. Longton hedges may wait for a
16 week or longer before they're trimmed. If a branch
17 is in session and the patrons are around, mopping
18 floors and cleaning carpets will have to wait for
19 another day, leading to less than optimal sanitary
20 conditions. Some libraries have no custodians at
21 all. They just receive the base of coverage." Thank
22 you.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, John.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I don't have any
25 questions. I just want to thank you all, because I

2 personally seen you all in action, and you just make,
3 again, so many special moments in our city within our
4 families and our friends, and we truly owe you. So,
5 thank you for that. I covered even collective
6 bargaining costs that should be by the City. I mean,
7 these are the things that we should providing as our
8 responsibility. So I want to thank you for your
9 service and dedication to our city and how you're so
10 careful and thoughtful in how you provide it. So,
11 thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
13 much.

14 LEONARD PAUL: Chairperson, can I make a-
15 -

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Of
17 course.

18 LEONARD PAUL: off the record comment,
19 please?

20 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well, it's going to
21 be on the record, but-- is that okay?

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [inaudible] It's
23 too late now for that, but you can make a comment.

24

25

2 LEONARD PAUL: I would just like to
3 congratulate the Chairperson on the arrival of her
4 newborn.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

6 LEONARD PAUL: I'm hoping to meet the
7 fourth generations of Riveras. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: You met grandma,
9 mom, me, and my-- oh, yeah, that's right. Okay.

10 LEONARD PAUL: Four generations I've met.
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: It was a beautiful
13 day at Brooklyn Botanic. Thank you.

14 LEONARD PAUL: Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thanks, guys.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, next panel we
18 have Coco Killingsworth, Lucy Sexton, Lisa Gold, Risa
19 Shoup, Judith Insell, Dohini Sompura, Francine
20 Garber-Cohen. Okay, you want to go my right to left,
21 start with Lucy?

22 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you for hearing my
23 testimony. Lucy Sexton, the Culture Lab, the City
24 Coalition, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts. And I
25 like your t-shirt Council Member Brannan. Thank you.

2 I want to say first, culture is in crisis. I know
3 we've been talking about it, but I really want to
4 make it clear that this-- that we are still cutting
5 staff, we're cutting programs, we're cutting hours.
6 Most importantly we cut benefits to our community.
7 When there are less dance classes, there's less for
8 youth to do after school and increased isolation for
9 struggling teens. When there are less shows at the
10 local theater, there's less street traffic to small
11 businesses. Less vibrant, less safe streets in our
12 neighborhoods. When there are less jobs there's
13 increased unemployment in our culture workforce, and
14 less reason for them to stay in New York City. We
15 didn't just get cut by DCLA, we also-- as the
16 Commissioner was saying, we get funded by many
17 agencies. That meant we got cuts in many agencies,
18 right? We got DYCD cuts. We got DOE cuts. We got
19 Department of Aging cuts. So, we got a lot of cuts
20 this year. The dollars we do get are so late that
21 many organizations are forced to close.
22 Organizations are struggling to run programs for
23 months and months before their funding arrives.
24 Capital funding is so bad that organizations then dip
25 into program money, and the situation spirals. This

3 is not sustainable. The Su Casa program is so late
4 this year, that seniors will receive only a few weeks
5 of their vital classes. I've been a Su Casa teacher
6 in Chinatown where I had a gentleman in my class cry,
7 telling me this was the happiest thing he had been
8 doing in his life was to be in this community, in
9 this dance class doing theater and dance. I had
10 another member during COVID, a student that told me I
11 was the only person he engaged with in the course of
12 a week. This is not the way we want to serve our
13 city. We're asking for restoration of the cuts, and
14 in addition to the baseline of \$53 million in this
15 year's budget, right? But that only gets us back to
16 FY 23 levels. So it is in essence a cut. What you
17 have just asked for and which I so thank the Council
18 for doing is to also restore the damaging cuts of
19 this year to start to repair the damage of this year.
20 So, restore the FY 24 cuts for a total input of \$76
21 million, investment in our arts and culture, to start
22 to repair our damage and start to stabilize the
23 sector. Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

25 COCO KILLINGSWORTH: Thank you. Of
course, I forgot my glasses today, so. Thank you

2 chairs Rivera and Brannan and members of the
3 Committee for the opportunity to testify. I'm Coco
4 Killingsworth from BAM, and also Chair of the CIGs.
5 I'm here to provide testimony on behalf of all the
6 CIGs in the culture sector which includes 34
7 nonprofit museums, Performing Arts Center, historical
8 societies, zoos, botanic gardens all throughout the
9 City. We are here to support-- we're here today to
10 support Culture for All and ask for a full
11 restoration of FY 24 cuts, and for \$53 million in
12 baseline funding for CIGs and the CDF for FY 25. \$55
13 million-- \$53 million in funding would reverse all
14 the cuts imposed on culture and baseline the one-time
15 addition for all of us. I testified back in March
16 about the devastation of the November and the
17 Preliminary Budget cuts. I am back today to thank the
18 Council for prioritizing culture in your budget
19 response and for your advocacy in securing the
20 restoration in January for just the CIGs,
21 unfortunately. However, as you all know, the work is
22 far from over. The CIGs and our CDF partners are
23 facing baseline cuts that would put us back to FY 23
24 and we can't go back. We have not increased, as you
25 know, since 2009. This is an unprecedented

2 disinvestment in what makes our city great. Arts and
3 culture continue to generate \$110 billion in economic
4 activity annually, and we are a vital part of the
5 City's economy. We provide jobs. The CIGs alone
6 provide almost 16,000 full and part-time jobs, almost
7 6,000 of those are union members. And in addition,
8 our CDF partners provide thousands of jobs in every
9 borough throughout the City. Culture is a lifeline
10 for our communities and should be accessible for all
11 New Yorkers. Investing in culture is investing in
12 safe, public spaces for all New Yorkers of all ages.
13 I'm going to skip a lot. The Council has been a real
14 champion for culture, and we ask that your continued
15 support as we call for the restoration. We
16 eventually will get to a place where we are no longer
17 talking about cuts to the economic drivers and the
18 community up-lifters, but how to invest further in
19 artists and culture for the benefit of all New
20 Yorkers. Investment in culture is an investment in
21 New York City.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

23 FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN: Good afternoon.

24 I'm Fran Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera
25 Company which offers fully-staged operas will full

2 orchestra and English super titles and concerts in
3 Sunset Park, Bay Ridge, and other local areas, many
4 of which are low-income communities. As well as we
5 do free concerts all over Brooklyn. Today, I ask
6 that New York City reverse the five percent budget
7 cuts to culture which have already been reversed for
8 other agencies in the New York City budget, but not
9 for culture and the arts. We rely heavily on funding
10 from the Department of Culture Affairs which allows
11 us to provide affordable, professional-level
12 entertainment in accessible venues for people who may
13 not otherwise attend live performances. About 65
14 percent of the New York City residents that attend
15 our performances are senior citizens. They cannot
16 afford the high ticket prices at the major opera
17 houses, and many are unable to travel the long
18 distances to Manhattan. Cuts in funding hurts small
19 organizations like Regina Opera who provide services
20 for New York City's senior citizens, a continuously
21 growing population. This important section of the
22 population depends on us and other local groups to
23 give performances that feature music for our aunts,
24 our uncles, our grandparents, and even our own
25 parents, gets them out of the house where they

2 frequently live alone. At our events, senior
3 citizens socialize. They make plans to meet their
4 friends. They often go out for dinner before or
5 after an opera or a concert and they make new
6 friends. Due to the budget cuts, Regina Opera like
7 many other organizations cut some free programming
8 including Make Music New York and a Juneteenth event.
9 We are letting these people down because of the funds
10 and cuts. Please help.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 LISA GOLD: Thank you. Thank you. My
13 name is Lisa Gold. I'm the Executive Director of the
14 Asian American Arts Alliance, and also a proud member
15 of the Culture Equity Coalition. I want to thank--
16 I'm going to join my colleagues and thank you for
17 asking for the full restoration of \$76 million. You
18 are hearing us. You know how important culture is to
19 our community, so I don't even have to tell you. I'm
20 totally going off-script here, because I-- one of the
21 questions that you asked was about equity, and I
22 think the CDF is not equitable. I think what is
23 happening is that small organizations like ours, like
24 many of the AAPI organizations and BIPOC-led and
25 serving organizations rely disproportionately on

2 government funding, and they are hurt the most. When
3 the Department of Cultural Affairs says we need more
4 people to apply, we are small, and a lot of our
5 organizations don't have the capacity. I did a poll;
6 50 percent of people that are part of my
7 organizations, the AAPI arts organizations, they
8 don't have the wherewithal. They don't have the
9 language. They don't have the ability to even write
10 the grants for the Department of Cultural Affairs. A
11 lot of them haven't even applied at the state level
12 either, because it's just too rigorous and it's too
13 hard. That hurdle is too high. So, our community is
14 not getting our share of funding. You said one-tenth
15 of one percent. The Depart-- our community, even
16 within the Department of Cultural Affairs, the AAPI
17 community receives less than two percent of the CDF
18 budget. We are 18 percent of the City. That is two
19 percent of one-tenth of one percent. We are 18
20 percent of the City. How is that equitable? That is
21 not equitable. Organizations, small organizations
22 like ours, we do so much with so little. A \$5,000
23 cut means 10 artists aren't going to be able to serve
24 up to 100,000 people in the community doing graphic
25 design for domestic violence organizations, working

2 with youth at SAIA, creating murals and afterschool
3 programs, performing folk songs for senior citizens--
4 Hamilton Madison House. We do a lot with a little.
5 So I plead. I beg you to restore the funding to our
6 community. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Just
8 hit your mic, the button on the bottom.

9 JUDITH INSELL: Sorry. Good afternoon
10 Chairs Rivera and Brannan and Council Member Brewer.
11 My name is Judith Insell. I'm the Executive Director
12 of the Bronx Arts Ensemble, an organization that
13 annually provides over 20,000 residents of the Bronx
14 with free-of-charge live performances presented by
15 professional musicians in multiple music genres,
16 aiming to provide culturally-responsive events to the
17 neighborhoods we serve. I join my colleagues in
18 asking that the Council add \$53 million+ dollars to
19 the adopted budget to reverse the cuts and restore
20 and baseline the one-time funding for CIGs and CDF in
21 FY 25. The Bronx Arts Ensemble and thousands of
22 other city cultural institution are committed to
23 serving New Yorkers with something we all need which
24 is arts and culture. How do I know that Bronxites
25 need arts and culture? They actually tell us at our

2 events. Each year, thousands of Bronx residents'
3 experience the Bronx Arts Ensemble's live
4 performances and tell us how much our performances
5 have a positive impact on their lives. They show
6 gratitude to us for bringing a community building
7 experience to their neighborhood that has healing and
8 restorative emotional effects on their mind, body,
9 and spirit. Bronx Arts Ensemble strives to enhances
10 the lives of the citizens of our entire borough
11 through arts and culture. Unfortunately, we could
12 not serve everyone this fiscal year due to the loss
13 of cultural development funds support. Since being
14 zeroed out of the CDF, we have only been able to
15 present performances in the district where we receive
16 direct Council Member support. Thank you, Council
17 Members. That's four districts out of nine. So over
18 half of the Bronx did not experience our live
19 performances this year at all. Bronx Arts Ensemble
20 has dealt with the challenges of FY 24 vowing to
21 remain on mission. Over the past 52 years we have
22 enduring the Bronx burning, stock market crashes,
23 9/11, and a global pandemic. We are Bronx strong and
24 we will fight through any circumstances to continue
25 to serve our deserving borough. Funding neighborhood

2 cultural nonprofit institution is not optional. It
3 is essential. We employ artists and cultural workers
4 as a part of the New York City economic ecosystem and
5 nourish the spirits of the citizens of our city. Add
6 the \$53 million+ to the FY 25 cultural budget so we
7 can successfully continue our work of serving New
8 Yorkers. Thank you again for giving me this time,
9 and we are an organization that will continue to come
10 here and ask for support. Being zeroed out doesn't
11 work for us. We need support 24/7, every single day,
12 because we are serving the most underserved borough
13 in the entire city. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

15 RISA SHOUP: Thank you, Chair Brannan,
16 Chair Rivera, and Council Member Brewer, and everyone
17 who's here for this time. My name is Risa Shoup.
18 I'm a Co-Executive Director of the Alliance of
19 Resident Theaters New York. I represent over 450
20 theaters and over 150 individual practitioners, all
21 work-based [sic] in New York City, and I'm a member
22 with Lisa of the Cultural Equity Coalition. A budget
23 is a statement of values, and we're asking that New
24 York City show up for arts and culture and for our
25 communities. Thank you, Council Members, for your

2 historic and unwavering support for arts and culture.

3 Thank you for the \$76 million request for funding for

4 DCLA in FY 25. We are calling on this Administration

5 to commit to restoring FY 24 cuts for both the CDF

6 and the CIGs and to increase DCLA's funding in the

7 next fiscal year to \$53 million for a total, as

8 you've asked for, of \$76 million. New York City is a

9 great place to live and to work and to visit because

10 of arts and culture, and we must maintain that if we

11 want to keep this city strong. I want to share a

12 story with you right now about one of my member

13 theaters, the People's Theater Project, who couldn't

14 be here today. People's Theater Project works in

15 service with immigrant artists from their home based

16 in Inwood. Their young immigrant artists continue to

17 struggle with mental health challenges. Several have

18 been admitted to the hospital this year, and PTP's

19 youth and family advocate has been a key link in

20 connecting these youth with their-- and their

21 families to resources and support. So when you

22 invest in arts and culture, you are not just

23 investing in wonderful plays and paintings. You are

24 investing in healthy communities and strong families.

25 PTP like many of Art New York's members are grantees

2 of DCLA's cultural development fund. Most of us do
3 not have access to wealthy donors and private
4 philanthropic institutions. We proudly produce
5 public programs and we rely on public funding to do
6 so. This year, the CDF cuts were devastating. Art
7 New York worked together with Dance NYC outside of
8 our regular services to administer an impact survey
9 so that we could actually see what are the magnitude
10 of these cuts across organizations. I've shared
11 these results with you and I'm happy to do so again.
12 And I just want to end by reading one of the
13 testimonies from our survey. "Due to the lateness of
14 the award and the funding cuts, we have had cash flow
15 issues making payroll, paying artists, and paying
16 bills, and we've had to limit the number of artists
17 in our show and the number of programs that we can
18 provide to the public. This lower award amount as
19 well as the loss of a multi-year award will
20 negatively affect our staffing, artist pay, and
21 capacity for several years." So this increase of \$76
22 million in FY 25 will help stabilize this group for
23 years to come and many others like it and our city
24 with that. Thank you so much.

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

2 DOHINI SOMPURA: Good afternoon, Chair

3 Brannan, Chair Rivera, and Council Member Gale

4 Brewer. My name is Dohini Sompura and I'm providing

5 testimony on behalf of the American Museum of Natural

6 History. As has been said over and over again during

7 this hearing, CIGs are a vital economic engine that

8 power tourism, employment, and commerce in addition

9 to providing cultural education and workforce

10 development opportunities for New Yorkers. While

11 AMNH is extremely appreciative of the restorations

12 for the fiscal 2025 financial plan cuts that would

13 not have been possible without the incredible

14 leadership of City Council, there's still more work

15 to be done. AMNH along with our partners, CIG

16 partner institutions, have not seen an increase in

17 operational support for well over 15 years. Over this

18 time period, the cost of operating our institution

19 including staff wages increase under union contracts,

20 increased costs of healthcare, and retirement

21 benefits have grown. Yet, we all have continued to

22 provide high-quality programming and exceptional

23 visitor experience that we're all known for. This is

24 a critical time for the cultural community. As

25 budget cuts lead to job losses, closures, deferred

2 maintenance, and less public access and fewer
3 programs. So I'm here to ask for \$53 million in
4 baseline funding which includes the restoration of
5 November Plan cuts, \$40 million in one-time funding
6 that cultural institution received in FY 24, along
7 with the \$5 million in FY 23. For far too long
8 cultural institutions have been part of a budget
9 dance that impedes our ability to plan financial for
10 the long-term as one-time funding is not guaranteed
11 to carry over into the following fiscal year. In
12 addition to the \$53 million baseline funding, we also
13 ask for the full restoration of cultural initiatives
14 from the Council. Thank you for your time and
15 consideration.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
17 much. Okay, now we have David Pecora [sp?]
18 Pecoraro, Claire Mooney, Rosa Chang, Lauren Comito,
19 Matthew Zadrozny, Maria Garrett. You want to start
20 from the left? Go ahead.

21 ROSA CHANG: Thank you so much for your
22 time and the opportunity to speak today. I also love
23 your shirt. Hi, better? Okay, awesome. So, my name
24 is Rosa Chang. I'm the Co-founder, President of
25 Gotham Park, a grassroots 501C3 created in 2021 to

2 open, operate, and maintain a new community-led
3 public space in a neighborhood that has historically
4 been under-invested and overlooked right outside City
5 Hall. We are an environmental justice neighborhood
6 with over 47,000 residents living with racial health
7 and structural inequity, and that's just within a
8 half-mile radius. We are anchored by the mind-
9 blowingly beautiful landmark Brooklyn Bridge, the
10 vaults of which we are working to open to build a new
11 landmark public library for New Yorkers, I hope with
12 your help. It is our goal to become a significant
13 and free arts and culture destination in New York,
14 but there are a few hurdles for us to jump through
15 before we get there, but I have zero doubt that we
16 will get there, and we are getting closer every
17 single day. This morning, I was announced as a
18 finalist for the David Prize which is a prize
19 celebrating visionary New Yorkers, and this would not
20 be possible but for my access to libraries as a
21 child. Every single one of us grows up in a bubble,
22 our family bubble, our financial bubble, our cultural
23 and religious bubble. I grew up in a very traditional
24 Asian American bubble. I went to school seven days a
25 week and all I did was study. I could have ended up a

2 really stunted and one-sided human being, but books
3 and art and music are magic, and they are bubble-
4 busters. They open up your mind and your heart to
5 new worlds, new ways of thinking. They stretch you
6 and grow you and make you challenge yourself and the
7 world-- Sorry, I'm getting emotional, because I
8 believe in this so strongly-- and the world you are
9 physically anchored in every day. Without libraries
10 and the essential guardians and guides that are our
11 librarians, you lose those possibilities. Libraries
12 house the complexity of human thought, dreams, and
13 yearnings and possibilities through generations, and
14 collectively books are the DNA of your imagination
15 and your future. So, please fight to fully fund our
16 libraries, our librarians, our artists, and our
17 cultural institutions not because they need us, but
18 because we need them. They are the essential
19 nourishment that grow our brains and our souls.
20 Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience
21 and a bit about Gotham Park with you today, and
22 someday soon I hope you'll join us in advocating for
23 and building a new New York Public Library inside the
24 most beautiful bridge in the world so that we can all
25 nestle into a comfy chair with a book or 20 inside a

2 landmark built for all of us to connect people to
3 each other, a true testament to human ingenuity and
4 collaboration, to dream our own dreams of how we will
5 each contribute to making this incredible city of
6 ours the best home we can ever imagine for ourselves
7 and the generations of New Yorkers who will follow
8 us. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Just
10 make sure it's on.

11 CLAIRE MOONEY: Good afternoon,
12 counselors. My name is Claire Mooney and I'm an
13 outreach librarian at the Brooklyn Public Library.
14 Today, I would like to testify on behalf of our
15 newest New Yorkers. As you are aware, in the past
16 several months, New Yorkers have displayed incredible
17 compassion and creativity in welcoming French West
18 African migrants to the City. At the library, I've
19 witnessed my colleagues translate countless number of
20 documents, create emergency committees, and discover
21 and engage new volunteer networks. Most of
22 volunteers can only work on Saturdays. I've even
23 witnesses my colleagues teach themselves asylum law
24 to support our patrons better. We do this out of
25 immense respect for our new patrons. An asylum-

2 seeker has 150 days after their application is
3 submitted before they are eligible to apply for a
4 work permit. In that time, most people would get
5 incredibly anxious. Instead, our patrons get ready.
6 They are keen and eager to get to work and to get
7 connected. They are building the essential ethnic
8 enclaves that make New York what it is. If library
9 funding is restored and invested in, we could build a
10 library system that meets the talent and ambition of
11 our new patrons. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

13 MATTHEW ZADROZNY: Chair Rivera, Council
14 Member Brannan, Council Member Brewer, fellow New
15 Yorkers, good afternoon. My name is Matthew
16 Zadrozny. I am President of SaveNYPL.org, an all-
17 volunteer watchdog group. In 2014, we saved the
18 great 42nd Street Library and the Mid-Manhattan
19 Library on 40th and Fifth. Since November, New York
20 City libraries have been closed on Sundays, depriving
21 one million school kids of a safe space to study and
22 hang, and knee-capping millions of ambitious adults
23 and incalculable social costs and economic loss. The
24 decision to keep all libraries closed on Sundays is
25 political theater and a scandal, especially at the

2 NYPL which recently spent hundreds of millions on a
3 new patio and catering elevator. When the city built
4 the 42nd Street Library, its contract with the NYPL
5 stipulated that "one or more reading rooms be open on
6 weekdays, holidays included, from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00
7 p.m. and on Sundays from 1:00 to 9:00 p.m." When
8 NYPL President Tony Marx and former Chair Evan
9 Chessler [sp?] were growing up in Inwood and
10 Allerton, the 42nd Street Library was open more than
11 80 hours per week. And yet today, a service at 42nd
12 Street has dwindled to just 52 hours per week.
13 NYPL's finances have seldom looked better. The NYPL
14 endowment is \$1.5 billion, a record. The NYPL board
15 has a combined net worth in excess of \$90 billion.
16 This means that NYPL trustees alone could fund the
17 entire NYPL system for 240 years. To quote Tony
18 Marx, "We're not in the 1970s here." In LA, where
19 NYPL trustee Ethan Hawk works, the central library is
20 open 60 hours a week and on Sundays. In Boston,
21 backyard of trustees Henry Louis Gates [sp?] and
22 Robert Darden [sp?], the central library is open 66
23 hours per week and on Sunday. In Paris, libraries
24 are open every day and on Sunday. In Sol, home of
25 trustee Michael Kim, the central library is open 78

2 hours per week and on Sundays. In Washington where
3 Senator Schumer works, the MLK library is open 66
4 hours a week and on Sundays. And yet, in our own
5 city, home to more than 100 billionaires, the most of
6 any city on earth, libraries are closed on Sundays.
7 Sorry about tomorrow's test, kid. Have you tried
8 Yonkers, Nassau or Hoboken? Their libraries are
9 open. So what's it going to be, New York? Are we
10 still in fact the state of opportunity, or are we a
11 second-rate city in a second-rate state with a
12 second-rate library high on our own supply? It's up
13 to you, New York. Today, the library chiefs came
14 before you once more with pockets outturned. Give
15 them the money they ask, but require them to keep
16 some libraries open every day and every night of the
17 week. Require NYPL leadership to keep the 42nd
18 Street Library, the largest most central, most
19 accessible, and most well-endowed of all New York
20 City libraries, open 80 hours per week, including on
21 Sundays as stipulated in NYPL's contract with the
22 City. 80 hours a week at 42nd Street. 80 hours a
23 week at 42nd Street. 80 hours a week at 42nd Street.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

2 MATTHEW ZADROZNY: And on the seventh day
3 there was service. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Go
5 ahead.

6 LAUREN COMITO: Thank you so much for the
7 opportunity to testify today on the devastating
8 budget proposal for fiscal year 2025. My name is
9 Lauren Comito. I'm a librarian here in New York City
10 and I'm the Executive Director of Urban Librarians
11 Unite, a 501C3 worker advocacy organization dedicated
12 to supporting library workers in urban areas. I know
13 that none of the members of this committee need to be
14 told this, but political and budgetary decisions have
15 consequences, and those consequences fall most
16 heavily on the communities with the highest needs and
17 the workers who meet those needs every day. That's
18 the case here. \$58.3 million in cuts will eliminate
19 Saturday service in most of the City, further reduce
20 the purchase of materials and continue the libraries'
21 hiring freezes, and that's what I'm going to talk
22 about today. The budget cut induced short staffing
23 is stretching library staff to the point of burnout,
24 and in some cases physical injury. Library work is
25 an emotional, intellectual, and physical job. You

3 think of us as grandmas sitting and reading books at
4 desk, because you don't always see us hauling 50 to
5 75-pound tubs of books back and forth as we process
6 holds. As workers try to keep up with the holds and
7 the moving materials and the pressure of doing more
8 work with fewer people, it puts more pressure on them
9 physically. These shortages are affecting all sorts
10 of logistical issues, but the one I'd like to
11 highlight actually did cause a staff injury. Because
12 of a lack of drivers in the hiring freeze, some
13 libraries in the city are only receiving book
14 deliveries every other day. This could mean that
15 instead of four or five bins of, again, 50 pounds of
16 books, a staffer attempting to process 10 in one day.
17 Staff care deeply about getting these books to our
18 patrons on time. They care about making sure people
19 have the resources they need, and they're pushing
20 themselves too far in an attempt to meet that need.
21 I know of one staff member who injured their shoulder
22 attempting to do this. The City budget isn't just
23 numbers on a spreadsheet. It's human beings. It's
24 the human beings trying so hard to meet the
25 commitment to service that they signed up for their
jobs for with ever-shrinking resources. We know from

2 decades of trying that austerity never results in
3 growth. We know that growth comes from investment,
4 and that the sheer human potential of the people of
5 New York City is worth investing in. Libraries
6 amplify that potential in every neighborhood of this
7 city. Please continue to invest in that
8 amplification and help libraries workers do their
9 vital work safely with the resources required to do
10 it.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 DAVID PECORARO: Good afternoon, Chairs
13 Justin Brannan, who represents my eldest son in
14 Brooklyn, Daniel, and Carlina Rivera who I believe
15 represents the Riis Houses where my wife grew up.
16 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is
17 David S. Pecoraro. I am the President of the Friends
18 of Rosedale Library, a 58-year resident of Rosedale,
19 and though I am not authorized to speak for either, a
20 member of Queens Community Board 13, and serve as
21 Rosedale Civic Association Secretary. I grew up at
22 the Rosedale Library. Our library was and still is a
23 vital place for activities in our community. I am
24 also the son of the late Sheila Pecoraro who led the
25 sit-in at the Rosedale branch to keep it open during

2 the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. Her spirit guides me
3 to not only fight the current proposed cuts, but to
4 call for the end of the Mayor's all-too-frequent
5 practice of putting our libraries on the chopping
6 block. Currently, New York City's libraries are
7 facing a cut of \$58.3 million in expense funding from
8 the City in fiscal year 2025. With the proposed
9 fiscal year 2025 cuts, Queens public libraries will
10 need to end Saturday service at nearly every Queens
11 Public Library branch. Our working class community
12 depends upon weekend access for programming and other
13 services. These are taxpayers who earned the right
14 for their families to receive needed services they
15 pay for with the sweat of their brows. Currently, we
16 plan a variety of culturally-relevant programming
17 thanks to the generous support from a grant from our
18 Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers. Many of the
19 programs such as the recent annual Jackie Robinson
20 Celebration and Earth Day Celebration, as well as our
21 Dream to Read Summer Book Giveaway in June are held
22 on Saturdays to maximize participation by our
23 community members. The loss of Saturday hours will
24 prevent many hardworking community members from
25 availing themselves of these programs. Delayed

2 reopening of three renovating locations which are
3 close to us also will harm us. The Rosedale Library
4 is where our students go to receive afterschool
5 homework help as well as attending the special
6 reading time programs we have organized for Veterans
7 Day. Kwanza, Dia de Los Muertos, Women's History, and
8 Purim which were also supported by Council Member
9 Brooks-Powers. None of these cuts are acceptable.
10 All will harm hardworking New Yorkers. These mayoral
11 budget games must end now. Please stop these
12 unnecessary cuts. Thank you for listening.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
14 much. Okay, now we have Sheila Lewnston [sp?]. Okay.
15 Candace Thompson-Zachery, David Freudenthal, Melody
16 Capote, Kimberly Olsen, Lisa Alpert, Kate Madigan.

17 SHEILA LEWANDOWSKI: Good afternoon,
18 Chairman Brannan, Chairman Rivera, Council Member
19 Brewer. Thank you for this opportunity to testify
20 and for your fight to not just restore, but to
21 increase the budget for culture in New York City.
22 Please fight to baseline it as well, and build in
23 COLA, because otherwise, we're starting behind every
24 year. I'm going to read my testimony because I
25 brought these pictures which I'll explain, and then

2 boy, I hope I have enough time for some comments on
3 other testimony. Sheila Lewandowski, Co-Founder,
4 Executive Director of Chocolate Factory Theater in
5 Long Island City, Queens. It's an artist-run and led
6 incubator for dance and performance and artist
7 service organizations, a western Queens community
8 anchor, and a place of pride. A voice in the City's
9 responsibility to increase funding and raise
10 awareness around the impact and importance of the
11 arts, and an international destination to see high-
12 quality ground-breaking performances outside of
13 Manhattan. New York City, this Administration, this
14 Council reached out and large part supported the
15 cultural community in 2021 to 2022 to partner with
16 the City in the height of the COVID crisis. So we
17 stepped up. We stepped up a lot. We pivoted and
18 distributed food and PPE. We paid artists to make
19 virtual work. We kept our staff employed and
20 borrowed from the future until relief funds came in,
21 and then the City asked for more. We were asked to
22 fully open without adequate support to help the
23 City's economy recover so that tourists flocked here
24 again, small businesses and restaurants would fill
25 again. We did this because we believed in a shared

2 vision of New York City with culture in all of its
3 glorious diversity as the center of New York City's
4 identity that is critical to the economic, emotional
5 and spiritual wellbeing of this city. I still believe
6 that, and I do believe that you do, too. Now, we
7 need you more than I can recall in my 40 years
8 working in the cultural community of New York City.
9 Almost every organization I know is facing 20 to 40
10 percent operating deficits next year and the year
11 beyond that. There are fewer foundations and
12 corporations given to the arts earned income, tickets
13 and such are only a tiny portion of the operating,
14 especially in the performing arts. We do need you.
15 I just want to note-- I brought this because I like
16 visual things. This artwork I'm showing you is from
17 my Uncle Ted Roziki [sp?], and it was in his memoir
18 about surviving 50 months in concentration camps, and
19 I bring that because that's how he survived. He drew
20 pictures of animals he saw inside and through the
21 barbed wire, in the sand, in the air, on his own skin
22 as a way to be human. We need to keep our arts and
23 culture alive, and we need to keep our artists in New
24 York City so we have this in our future. Culture is
25 healing, beauty, criticism, sharing language,

2 history, therapy. And by the way, Chocolate Factory
3 was zeroed out this year. We were one of those
4 groups. We appealed and did get a small amount back,
5 but that money we had to borrow from next year, just
6 because it was eight months in and we still paid our
7 artists. We kept our staff, just like we did during
8 COVID. And so we need you to step up for us so we
9 can step up for-- keep stepping up for the City.
10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 CANDACE THOMPSON-ZACHERY: Three things.
13 My name is Candace Thompson-Zachery, she/her
14 pronouns, and I'm the Co-Executive Director of Dance
15 NYC, a service organization dedicated to the dance
16 industry in the New York City metro area. The dance
17 community is a mean and mighty group representing 300
18 million in economic activity that includes dance
19 performers, choreographers, directors, educators,
20 administrators, musicians for dance, and the list
21 keeps going. Our dance leaders play such a critical
22 role in our communities. Working with our young
23 people to develop social and emotional skills,
24 embedding cultural awareness and appreciation, and
25 building confidence in their physical bodies. In our

2 arts and culture sector, our dance workers are the
3 innovators building strong artistic practices and
4 genre-bending dance work that has ripple effects on
5 local, indie, large, and commercial stages. Today's
6 dance graduate is tomorrow's Camelia Brown [sp?].
7 Dance workers are working with elders creating room
8 for their wisdom, keeping them agile and socially
9 connected. And lastly, they are working across
10 sectors as nurses, fitness trainers, massage
11 therapists, waiters, hosts, upholding the very fabric
12 of our service industries as they bring beauty to
13 this world. And yet, the city is becoming
14 increasingly hostile to the pursuit of a life in the
15 arts. The anchor that keeps most of our dance
16 workers here and that keeps dance alive as an art
17 form. They could choose to be anywhere, but they
18 come for the chance to be a part of a legendary arts
19 ecosystem. And now, between the inflationary costs,
20 continued changes in funding, and affordable housing
21 crisis and the existing shortfalls of the social
22 safety nets, since most of our workers are
23 independent, we said that-- in the pandemic that
24 culture stays, but even culture has a breaking point.
25 Earned revenue in dance is down across the country.

2 Our workers are working upwards of four jobs to make
3 ends meet. Our small organizations, the majority of
4 which are under 500K are taking out loans, going into
5 debt, or closing shop altogether because they can no
6 longer afford to make it work. The City's investment
7 is critical to provide stability to these
8 organizations, and moreover, give the acknowledgement
9 that yes, dance does matter to New York City, and
10 that yes, despite the hardship, I can count on my
11 city government to be an exemplary investor in the
12 arts. I'm here to support the \$76 million addition
13 to the budget, and underscoring the need for
14 restoration of both the 24 and 25 cuts to both CDF
15 and CIGs. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

17 MELODY CAPOTE: Good afternoon,
18 Chairperson Rivera, Chairperson Brannan, and Council
19 Member Brewer. My name is Melody Capote, Executive
20 Director of the Caribbean Cultural Center, African
21 Diaspora Institute. I'd like to begin by
22 congratulating you, Council Member Rivera on the
23 birth of your new baby and for your work as a mommy
24 and a wife, and for being here today in support of
25 the arts and cultural community to do that other job

2 here at City Council. Talk about a woman's work and
3 a woman's worth. I salute you. I am here to testify
4 about the growth and equity between funding that is
5 awarded to community-based organizations through the
6 DCLA Cultural Development Fund, known as CDF, and
7 such organizations that are led by and focused within
8 communities of color. I have read time and again
9 DCLA's Cultural Development Fund reform and find
10 myself angry that decade after decade we are
11 confronted with the same desire to reform, but a
12 complete inability to do it. Reforms and the
13 proposed overhauling of the DCLA agency requires
14 funding a true commitment to doing so. One would
15 think that the issues are so complex that it has
16 required decades of study. It has not. The bottom
17 line is that 85 percent of the budget for operations
18 and programming activities goes to 34 organizations
19 whose right to that money is based on ownership of
20 property designated over hundreds of years ago when
21 communities of African descendants had no access to
22 be in a similar position, let alone, try to be
23 competitive. The remaining organizations, most of
24 which are rooted in communities of color, are forced
25 to compete with each other for the remaining 15

1 COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 201
2 percent. Explain to me, if you will, how a city like
3 New York in the year 2024 can continue to allocate
4 tax levy funds for arts and culture based upon a 100-
5 year-old property value. Someone please make it make
6 sense. In a time where this city's administration
7 and City Council is the most representative of people
8 of color, it is sad to state that our cultural
9 organizations are none the better today. Consider
10 this, baseline funding to DCLA has not seen an
11 increase since 2008. The time is now, or as I say to
12 my staff, it's now o'clock, to restore and increase
13 DCLA funding, and we thank you for having just
14 recently learned of the \$76 million in full
15 restoration to repair the significant damage that
16 happens to the CDF and CIG partners. It is no small
17 wonder that the arguments made for increasing funding
18 for arts and culture rely so heavily upon tourism.
19 The tourism argument by the Administration is that
20 the major cultural institutions are economic drivers
21 for the City, and yet, while the CDF organizations
22 don't reap those same benefits, we find that even
23 CIG-- I'm sorry. We find that even the CIGs credited
24 with generating those tourism dollars that increase
25 year after year aren't seeing the impact in their

3 budgets either. The City is not investing those very
4 dollars into the very agency and organizations from
5 which these dollars are generated. In closing, I
6 support the call for restoration and increases in the
7 amount of \$76 million that our arts and cultural
8 organizations rightfully deserve, and particularly
9 those working directly in communities of color,
10 because that is where the need is greatest, and I
11 urge you to look at the inequity. Look at the
12 difference in the ability of large institutions to
13 raise from their boards and endowments when small and
14 mid-sized organizations simply do not have the same
15 access. Art and culture is not a band aid. It is
16 first aid. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon, Chair
19 Brannan and Chair Rivera, present Council Members and
20 staff. My name is Kate Madigan, the Government
21 Affairs Coordinator for the Public Theater located in
22 Astor Place. The CIGs hope the budget for fiscal
23 year 2025 will fully address our every-growing
24 financial deficits and bring recognition to our
25 essential programming that makes NYC the best city in
the world. While it is very encouraging and

3 appreciated to hear verbal support from our allies,
4 we do require fiscal action on the City's part. I am
5 disappointed to share that CIGs and CDFs alike feel
6 that work is not support and has been taken for
7 granted by the City of New York. Cultural
8 institution groups consistently show up for New
9 Yorkers from every borough and every life experience
10 and deliver an outsized economic impact for the City,
11 and yet, the baseline budget is stagnant. We truly
12 hope to see the Council's call for the restoration of
13 the \$75.6 million to cultural institutions come to
14 fruition. Due to inflation and the residual effects
15 of the pandemic, the Public Theater has been forced
16 to make difficult decisions about how to put our FY
17 25 season in a way that maintains excellence and
18 financial sustainability. This is reflected in the
19 reduced number of productions we can put on next
20 season. Reducing the number of production not only
21 harms the public but the overall economy of the City
22 and the livelihood of thousands of New Yorkers. As
23 an example, the Public Theater originated two shows
24 currently running on Broadway, Soft [sic] and Hell's
25 Kitchen. I'm sure you can realize the economic impact
these now Broadway shows from the public have on

3 Midtown and the City overall. Without fiscal action,
4 namely permanent government investment, the nonprofit
5 component of the City's arts and culture industry
6 will continue to struggle and may eventually fail,
7 resulting in an arts and culture landscape less
8 equitable, diverse, and accessible. Should we let
9 this version of the future come to pass, art,
10 culture, and entertainment will become solely a
11 commercial enterprise rather than a public good.
12 Thank you for your time and attention.

13 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Thank you so much, Chair
14 Rivera, and Brannan, Council Member Brewer, as well
15 as the City Council staff for hosting today's hearing
16 and for your passionate support for arts education in
17 our schools. My name is Kimberly Olsen, Kim, and I
18 am proud to be the Executive Director of the New York
19 City Arts in Education Roundtable. We are a
20 grassroots service organization that works with more
21 than 300 arts and cultural organizations each year and
22 more than 4,000 arts education practitioners. I'm
23 here testifying as part of Arts [sic] Starts with the
24 Arts Coalition calling our city to prioritize funding
25 for arts education in New York City schools and
communities in the FY 25 budget, as well as in

2 partnership with the Culture for All Coalition,
3 calling for our city to restore all cuts, both FY 24
4 and 25, to arts and culture totaling \$76 million. At
5 last week's education hearing, Chancellor David Banks
6 noted that cultural organizations fill the gap for
7 more than 300 schools that do not have a certified
8 arts teacher, and they also ensure that our city
9 students have access to arts instruction. We know
10 that at least 600 arts and cultural organizations
11 partnered with schools last year alone, the most ever
12 on record. It should be no surprise that this spike
13 in service coincided with an add-on in funds to the
14 Department of Cultural Affairs and the establishment
15 in the support for arts instruction initiative. Yet,
16 in this interconnected ecosystem this year we are
17 seeing firsthand how cuts to the Department of
18 Cultural Affairs deeply harms organization's
19 abilities to provide resources and partner with
20 schools. Cultural organizations helps students meet
21 state instructional requirements, especially at the
22 elementary school level and enrich school communities
23 with resources. With 36 percent of schools reporting,
24 they receive funding for arts instruction from arts
25 and cultural partners. Despite the uptick in the

2 number of organizations partnering with our schools,
3 only 74 percent of schools reported partnering with
4 an arts organizations last year. This is down 10
5 percent from five years ago. Council Member Brewer,
6 to your point earlier in questioning, we need
7 transparent system-wide reporting to understand where
8 organizations and in-school arts teachers are
9 present. Right now, only about 80 percent of schools
10 are completing our annual arts survey, and in
11 reviewing that data myself, schools are citing the
12 Apple Store and simply the word dance as cultural
13 partners. That is unacceptable. I look forward to
14 hopefully working with the Council to establish-- to
15 do something, essentially, because I believe that
16 there's potential to leverage data from DCLA as well
17 as work with the DOE so that we can understand where
18 is their great arts education happening and where do
19 the gaps exist. In closing, arts teachers and
20 cultural organizations are essential partners in the
21 delivery of arts instruction, but they cannot do that
22 without sustainable funding. Otherwise, we only
23 stand to widen the access gap for years to come.
24 Thank you so much.

2 DAVID FREUDENTHAL: Hi, Chair Brannan,
3 Chair Rivera, Council Member Brewer, excellent staff.
4 I'm David Freudenthal. I'm here for-- testify for
5 Carnegie Hall on behalf of CIG. I want to just
6 underscore our CIG Chair Coco Killingsworth call for
7 a full restoration of the \$53 million in FY 25 and a
8 baselining of all the one-time funding which is
9 really just kind of at the core. You've heard it
10 from everyone here why it's essential. For Carnegie
11 Hall, we're a member of the CIG. We're owned by the
12 people of New York. That public service is core to
13 our identity and we serve some 800,000 New Yorkers a
14 year, but our commitment to the City, to the State,
15 to the nation, worldwide. You know, New York, its
16 deep partnerships with many of the City's human
17 services agencies that the Council prioritizes so
18 much, our work in Early Childhood, our work in
19 correction settings, our work in mental health and
20 wellness. You know, it's a very much-- it's serving
21 New Yorkers, especially those in high-need
22 situations. It's part of who we are and what we do,
23 and that compact is because of the public funding. It
24 helps to shape what we do in that space. So, just to
25 underscore how important the public funding is-- I

2 know speaking to the choir here. I note that our
3 Finance Chair's excellent fashion choices. And so
4 you know, we know that our elected officials, the
5 committee staff-- we've had our Cultural Affairs
6 Commissioner Laurie Cumbo here in the room listen to
7 our testimony. All of you believe in what we're
8 doing. We know that well. We appreciate the
9 excellent work that you're doing on our behalf, and
10 we urge you to prioritize this in the budget ahead.
11 Thank you.

12 LISA ALPERT: Hello, my name is Lisa
13 Alpert. I'm the Senior Vice President of Development
14 and Programming at Greenwood in Brooklyn. How are
15 you guys doing? Okay, good. I'm here to advocate for
16 the cultural activities that Greenwood provides to
17 all New Yorkers. I'm going to start with the obvious.
18 Greenwood is a cemetery. We are a national historic
19 landmark and we cover a really big piece of land in
20 south Bronx, 478 acres. That's-- you can easily see
21 it from the airplane big. And now, the equally
22 important aspect of Greenwood, we are a cultural
23 institution. We serve over 450,000 New Yorkers
24 through our public programs, our school programs, and
25 the thousands who come to stroll our beautiful

2 landscape throughout the year. In terms of the
3 numbers we serve and the depth of our programming, we
4 are one of the City's major cultural institutions,
5 and yet, we have not received discretionary funding
6 from the City Council since 2017. That's seven
7 years. We very much hope that can change this year.
8 Simply put, we need support from the City Council to
9 help us to continue to serve New Yorkers. What do we
10 do at this Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn? I'm so
11 glad you asked. We do dance performance, art
12 installations, walking tours, trolley tours, artists
13 in residence programs, concerts in the catacombs,
14 Latinx programming, LGBT+ programming, Juneteenth
15 programming, a huge Day of the Dead-- sort of an
16 obvious one at a cemetery. We attract over 1,500
17 attendees. Environmental programs-- more, more,
18 more. We are located in south Brooklyn, as I
19 mentioned, and that is an area that always need more
20 cultural institution and Greenwood has taken on that
21 role for the residents of Sunset Park, Borough Park,
22 Kensington, Ditmas Park, Bay Ridge, and more. And
23 Greenwood is open seven days a week from dawn to
24 dusk, 365 days a year for free, no cost to the
25 public. So I believe you all are dedicated to

2 expanding opportunities for cultural programming. We
3 are too. We love sharing this incredible place with
4 New Yorkers. We need the support of the Council to
5 do that.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Council
7 Member Brewer?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
9 much. I am pretty fixated on arts education. So,
10 when you say improve data transparency, I guess what
11 you're saying-- when you spoke-- is the only data
12 compilation could be your survey, is that correct?
13 In other words, DOE doesn't compile it. Cultural
14 affairs doesn't compile it, and you're not getting
15 full compliance, is that sort of what you're saying?

16 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Pretty much. So
17 currently, each year there's an annual Arts in
18 Schools report that is generated--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] By?

20 KIMBERLY OLSEN: By the Department of
21 Education alone.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

23 KIMBERLY OLSEN: That data is derived
24 from state data with the bed [sic] system, in
25 addition to annual arts survey that goes out to all

2 schools. Over the past five years or so, anywhere
3 from 70 to 80 percent of schools actually complete
4 that survey, and it is only one person that typically
5 completes it who may or may not have a full picture
6 of what arts instruction looks like within their
7 schools. Knowing the breadth and depth of data that
8 the Department of Cultural Affairs has, we believe
9 that there is potential to be able to have cross-
10 agency collaboration so that we can better have an
11 understanding of where is their arts education
12 happening. That being, where are their arts
13 teachers? Where are their arts and cultural
14 partnerships? And arts and cultural partnership,
15 that's just one workshop. Looks very different than
16 a semester long partnership. So, that's ultimately
17 our goal. At one point, there was a report that was
18 shared with the Council in the 2019/2020 school year.
19 We don't know why, but that is an excellent baseline
20 of what should be reported on an annual basis to the
21 Council in terms of compliance.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
23 much.

24 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Thank you.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I just want to just
3 thank you all, everyone's who testified. I think,
4 you know, you all employ so many people, too.
5 People, artists, you're in our schools, and I know
6 that not only have you stopped hiring, you've had to
7 let people go, and it's just-- it's inexcusable. So
8 you have these really majestic spaces with amazing
9 staff. So, I just want to thank you all again for
10 your testimony.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
12 much. Okay, next panel, Michelle Lerna [sic], Elyse
13 Buxbaum, Tamia Santana, Ryan Gilliam, Skye Kowaleski,
14 David Roberts, Nicole Gardner. Okay, you want to
15 start from my right. Just make sure your mic's on.

16 MICHELLE LEMA: Hello. My name is
17 Michelle Lema. I'm fortunate enough to be a New York
18 City Culture Curator, an influencer representing
19 88,000 New Yorkers. I amplify BIPOC artists, queer
20 creatives, and advertise free resources and gift
21 tickets to low-income families with art and cultural
22 events in New York City. I am affiliated with New
23 York Botanical Garden, Museum of Natural History, the
24 MET, Disney on Broadway, etcetera. I am an
25 advertiser that loves humanity and cannot be bought.

3 We native New Yorkers are fighting for the New York
4 City Library, public school, and arts and culture.

5 Without arts and culture in New York City, I would
6 not be standing here before you today. I hail from
7 the beautiful world's borough that is Elmhurst,

8 Queens, New York City. I am 27 years old. I am an
9 artist that comes from a working-class Ecuadorian

10 family. My parents are blue collar workers who came
11 to New York City at age 18. They're now US citizens

12 working as construction drivers and homemakers. That
13 being said, my parents, like everyone in New York

14 City, are low-income and they're stuck in survival

15 mode, so much so that there's no time to breathe, let
16 alone pick up their head and stand up for their own

17 rights and get involved in politics. Why doesn't the
18 working-class have the day off to vote? Sounds very

19 sketchy if you tell me. Anyways, I dealt with

20 childhood neglect, because my parents were too busy
21 paying rent trying to keep our family afloat. So,

22 naturally, when six-year-old Michelle Lema said I

23 wanted to be an artists, I was discouraged. As the

24 eldest first generation daughter I was told to be a

25 doctor, a lawyer, because arts in the United States--

arts in New York City is seen as unimportant which is

2 a massive misconception. As a broke kid in Queens, I
3 relied on the Queens Library to teach myself to read.
4 Twelve-year-old Michelle asked her art teacher who
5 generously gave her unpaid afterschool time to help
6 me create a portfolio to audition to La Guardia.
7 It's a specialized arts high school. I was a La
8 Guardia visual arts student in Lincoln Center. I
9 worked at the CUNY Hunter Art Gallery. I've been a
10 CUNY student and now as a New York City Art and
11 Culture Curator with a massive New York City
12 following, I want to speak up for the people in New
13 York City. I'm disappointed that my Italian art
14 teacher, my art teachers at La Guardia High School in
15 Lincoln Center had to beg students to take foreign
16 language and art elective or else those courses would
17 face budget cuts despite La Guardia being one of the
18 most prestigious arts high school in the US. I
19 volunteered with Trinity Church to help feed homeless
20 New Yorkers who were pushed into-- and these are like
21 senior citizens, mind you. They were pushed into the
22 streets due to rising cost of living and
23 gentrification. All they want is a clean park to sit
24 in, but nah [sic] Eric Adams is building more anti-
25 homeless architecture, ablest architecture in New

2 York City and the MTA, and they're cutting funding
3 from New York public parks. My heart-- my heart goes
4 out to the CUNY students. Having studied childhood
5 education and adolescent education at Hunter,
6 Accounting at Baruch Zicklin School of Business,
7 having worked for CUNY graduates the Special
8 Education Department, I have seen firsthand the
9 inequity in CUNY and for the children with
10 intellectual disabilities with chronic pain, the lack
11 of mental health resources here in New York City.
12 Literally 78 percent of CUNY students are students of
13 color from low-income backgrounds while-- and they
14 balance school and work. Sixty percent of CUNY
15 students are first generation students, college
16 students just like myself, 58 percent of CUNY
17 students are women, 93 percent of CUNY students are
18 New York City residents. 12-year-old Michelle--
19 wait. 82-- okay, I'm done?

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Please conclude.

21 MICHELLE LEMA: Can I keep going?

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We can give you 30
23 seconds.

24 MICHELLE LEMA: Okay. 82 percent of CUNY
25 students went to New York City public schools. I am

2 the New York City native that you politicians are
3 effecting. As an adult now working fulltime as an
4 artist and an influencer, us New Yorkers are tired of
5 New York City art and culture budgets being cut. My
6 heart hurts for the single parents like my aunt
7 struggling with mental health and being driven to
8 addiction to suicidal ideation due to the lack of
9 affordable childcare, afterschool programs, or even
10 pre-K, all while her three-year-old daughter is
11 failing math despite being great at math just because
12 she can't read. Also, my three-year-old cousin peed
13 her pants and was embarrassed, because public schools
14 are being overpopulated and teachers are being
15 underpaid and under-supported, and there's long
16 bathroom lines.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you.

18 MICHELLE LEMA: My heart--

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
20 you.

21 ELYSE BUXBAUM: Hello. I'm Elyse Buxbaum.
22 I'm the Chief Operating Officer at the Museum of
23 Jewish Heritage, and Chairs Rivera, Brannan, thank
24 you so much for your time. I have submitted
25 testimony. I have submitted testimony, but I'm going

2 to go a little bit off-script if I can. While I was
3 sitting here I received an email from a fourth grade
4 teacher in public school, and she said, "My class
5 visited the museum last week after studying our
6 historical fiction unit and reading Number the Stars.
7 The level of engagement in my class is outstanding.
8 It was a joy to see my students researching,
9 collaborating with one another and sharing their new
10 learnings with each other inside and outside the
11 classroom. I've taught this lesson for nine years,
12 but going to the museum was my first time ever. The
13 impact the museum created for my class and myself
14 will provide everlasting memories for them." I know
15 that we all hear so much today, but the work that we
16 do at the Museum of Jewish Heritage and all these
17 cultural institutions is for the City and for the
18 people, and we do as much free as we can. I can tell
19 us all-- we provide free busing. We have private bus
20 companies who provide the busing. We have private
21 free student tours, free educational resources.
22 Everything that we can provide is free, so we just
23 depend on the City's budget to do the work that we're
24 doing. We're one of the organizations that has no
25 endowment, so when we don't raise the money year

2 after year we are stuck with laying off staff or just
3 not hiring staff. So, the support you provide is
4 essential. And we just want to say thank you, and
5 thank you for your help in restoring.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

7 NICOLE GARDNER: Hi. I'm Nicole Gardner,
8 representing the nonprofit Building for the Arts.
9 Thank you, Council Members, for all that you do to
10 support culture in New York City. Building for the
11 Arts was founded as the 42nd Street Development
12 Corporation in 1976, and we helped revitalize Hell's
13 Kitchen by founding Theater Row, and we're still here
14 providing supportive subsidizes theaters, studios,
15 and offices to artists and companies who do not have
16 a permanent space of their own. This year, we're
17 asking City Council for desperately needed modern
18 lighting systems in our five theaters which in turn
19 each year will give a diverse group of 3,000 artists,
20 300 companies and their audiences subsidized access
21 to a level of artistry that they deserve and which
22 supports the NYC cultural ecosystem. I'm also here
23 for our Music and the Brain Program which brings
24 school day music education and piano instruction to
25 every student in more than 145 K-8 NYC schools,

2 including schools in each of your districts free of
3 charge. Our program, like all quality arts and
4 education-- arts education programs, has proven
5 social/emotional benefits, and our partner schools,
6 85 percent of which are Title I, have seen better
7 than average ELA and math test scores. Our goal is
8 to bring all students the opportunity to learn to
9 read music and play an instrument. Please our
10 request for discretionary and initiative funding for
11 Music and the Brain, allowing us to sustain and
12 expand our proven school day music education program
13 which reaches over 55,000 NYC students each year.
14 Culture makes up 13 percent of the City's economy and
15 is the main tourism driver for NYC, but funding cuts
16 are crippling us. Please add \$53 million to the
17 Adopted Budget, reverse the cuts, and please also
18 fund Building for the Arts discretionary initiative
19 and capital requests so that all New Yorkers can
20 access the transformative power of the arts. Thank
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

23 : I'm good?

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You're good.

2 RYAN GILLIAM: Hi, my name is Ryan

3 Gilliam. I'm an artist and organizer. I lead FABnyc

4 which has a membership of 45 cultural organizations

5 in the Lower Eastside, but today I'm actually here

6 because I'm a Community Board Member, and the

7 Community Board has asked me to bring their voice

8 here, and I really feel special about that because

9 many of the voices that we do hear are from arts

10 organizations, cultural organizations fighting for

11 themselves, and sometimes we don't have lots of other

12 allies in the room, and so it makes a difference to

13 me that the Community Board asked me to come and

14 speak for them. They want to support you in every way

15 in these requests to restore budgets to both

16 libraries and to arts and culture, and they have some

17 specific things that are on their minds, including

18 more funding for small and mid-sized cultural

19 organizations, particularly those serving communities

20 of color, more support for cultural activation of

21 public spaces, parks, streets, and plazas, more

22 affordable workspace for artists, a re-imagining of

23 the artists core program which supported individual

24 artists and culture producers during the pandemic,

25 and city leadership in rebuilding Chatteau Sol Boio

2 [sp?] which was a cultural hub in the Lower Eastside
3 in which this community would like to see become a
4 cultural hub again. So, believe me when I tell you
5 that the Lower Eastside has many needs, but when
6 Community Board Three puts together its annual
7 statement of needs, they have never left arts and
8 culture off of that list. I think there are a lot of
9 people in this room who would understand these words.
10 I think Chairman Rivera, you would really appreciate
11 this as well, because they were spoken by a Lower
12 Eastside organizer many years ago. What the woman
13 who labors wants is the right to live, not simply
14 exist, the right to live as the rich woman has the
15 right to life and the sun and music and art. The
16 worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too.
17 On behalf of the Lower Eastside, I thank this
18 administration for the bread, and I ask you to send
19 roses.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

21 TAMIA SANTANA: Hello. Hi, I am Tamia
22 Blackman Santana, the Chief Officer of Engagement and
23 Inclusion at Ballet Hispanico. I am also on the
24 Executive Arts Committee for New York City Public
25 Schools, and represent Ballet Hispanico for the City

2 Council newest arrival Strategic Force under arts and
3 culture. Born and raised in New York. I might have a
4 very unpopular opinion, but I just want to state
5 growing up in New York, I do see that things are
6 getting better, and I do see that things are growing,
7 especially in the arts and especially in culture. I
8 remember growing up when we didn't go to BAM, because
9 my single mother was too afraid to take us out, you
10 know, late night at performances, and now how much
11 it's grown is really amazing. Now, don't get me
12 wrong. Please do not cut the budget for arts and
13 culture. Please increase the budget for arts and
14 culture. It is vital. But I just want to give my
15 honest opinion. I also want to thank you, CDF and
16 DCLA, for providing the funds that have been so
17 important to Ballet Hisapnico, the largest Latinx
18 arts institution in America. In the past 10 years,
19 our partnership with City Council Members and CASA
20 has allowed us to not only do programming for school
21 students and their families, but extend into public
22 housing and beyond. As the City considers financial
23 cuts that threaten cultural organizations, I'm here
24 to advocate for the continuation of vital support, in
25 particular for organizations of Black, indigenous,

2 and people of color like Ballet Hispanico that
3 provide important, culturally-relevant, inclusive
4 arts, and cultural programming, as well as those
5 serving our growing newest New Yorkers, all who need
6 care urgently. As we join together with our fellow
7 cultural organizations and development leaders in
8 regarding the need for sustained ongoing programming,
9 we look to the city leaders to support our commitment
10 with dedication through the resources that empower
11 programs like ourselves. We welcomed newest-arrival
12 families like in schools PS70 in Queens. We helped
13 do a holiday drive and dance camps in partnering with
14 organizations like Rising Ground who fosters the
15 wellbeing of children who have crossed the border
16 under 18 without their parents. In support of DCLA
17 and our City Council Members, we are able to give
18 Bienvenidos over a thousand tickets of free
19 programming. I feel like I have the best job because
20 I get to oversee that when we go to City Center, but
21 that includes 250 tickets to foster children through
22 ACS, adults with the American Alzheimer's Foundation,
23 and CASA families.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

2 TAMIA SANTANA: We depend on the New York
3 City for all your support in this 360-degree mission.
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

6 SKYE KOWALESKI: Hi, good afternoon.
7 Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify
8 today. It's my first time, so I'm a little nervous.
9 I appreciate you. My name is Skye Kowaleski. I use
10 they/them pronouns. I am the executive Director of
11 JACK Arts. JACK is a performance meets [sic] civic
12 space located in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn with a
13 mission to collaborate with adventurous artists and
14 our neighbors to bring about a more just and vibrant
15 society. We know the impact that JACK has, because
16 we are told by artists and audience and neighbors, by
17 senior in our Su Casa program how grateful they are
18 for the nurturing, thought-provoking, community-
19 forward, artist-forward space that we provide daily,
20 space to not only present theater, dance and music,
21 but host block association meeting, tenant
22 association meeting, community organization meetings,
23 space to pack mutual aid. And I joined leadership in
24 2022. I had high, perhaps naïve, hope for growth for
25 the organization, expanded and robustly-supported

2 programming, and instead due to budget cuts we've had
3 to cut programming by over 30 percent, reduce
4 staffing when we're already struggling with capacity.
5 We had to cut an entire performance festival which
6 serves dozens of artists and hundreds of audience
7 members per year, and if this continues we will soon
8 be fighting to keep our doors open. And yet, I keep
9 fighting with that same hope that I walked in with,
10 because each day I get to watch our artists create
11 spaces that imagine what it would be like if we
12 adequately funded resources for our communities, if
13 we funded the arts. They are mapping a blueprint for
14 a more beautiful way of life, one where we are all
15 living abundantly resourced and free, and I am asking
16 you today to invest in them, invest in a future,
17 because they are building it. So, I join my
18 colleagues in asking that the Council add \$53 million
19 to the Adopted Budget to reverse the cuts and to
20 restore the baseline one-time funding for CIGs and
21 CDF in FY 25. Thank you for your time.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
23 much. Okay, now we have Gina Tribotti, Dian Dong
24 Chen, Beth Allen, Colby Herchel, Andrea Gordillo,
25 Irena or Jirina Ribbens, David Johnston.

2 JIRINA RIBBENS: Hi, good afternoon.

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Hi.

4 JIRINA RIBBENS: I guess we'll start on
5 this side.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure.

7 JIRINA RIBBENS: My name is Jirina
8 Ribbens and I thank you for this opportunity to
9 address you, and I thank you for recognizing that our
10 culture is in crisis. I'm the Executive Director of
11 Ice Theater of New York which is an ice dance
12 company, New York's one and only, and since our
13 founding in 1984 we've been creating ice dance as a
14 performing art. We serve about 30,000 New Yorkers
15 and visitors every year with our public performances
16 in all the area rinks throughout the season. We also
17 work with over 1,000 New York City public school
18 children from Title One schools where we introduce
19 them to skating, and we also tell them about the arts
20 and classical music, which for a lot of them is the
21 first time they've ever heard. So, anyway, we do fun
22 stuff with them. And one of the teachers at the
23 Robert Wagner School for Arts and Technology who just
24 came to one of our programs in Queens said, "Thank
25 you so much for giving our students this opportunity.

2 We all had a great time, and the performances were
3 amazing." We can only do this with the help of the
4 public funding, and not only the DCLA funding but
5 also the discretionary funding that we receive from
6 the City Council, but it's very difficult to plan and
7 budget if you don't know every year what funding is
8 going to come to you, and especially the
9 discretionary funding which doesn't come until your
10 fiscal year is already gone and over. So, I am here
11 to ask you to restore the funding, the \$76 million,
12 and we'd like to say that skating is the closest
13 thing to flying without leaving the earth. So please
14 help us keep on doing that by restoring the funding.
15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

17 ANDREA GORDILLO: Hi, good afternoon
18 chair Rivera, Chair Brannan. My name is Andrea
19 Gordillo and I am Chairperson of Community Board
20 Three. I'm very pleased that Ryan was able to
21 testify on our behalf. But I'm here today as the
22 Development Director of the Clemente Soto Velez
23 Cultural Educational Center which also overlaps many
24 of Community Board Three's area of the East Village,
25 Lower Eastside in Chinatown. We're among the only

2 organization of its kind to provide affordable
3 creative and rehearsal spaces and culturally-specific
4 programs to the City's intersectional and wide-
5 ranging artistic community. And in my role as
6 Development Director, I'm acutely aware of where the
7 money goes and of the impact of sectoral [sic] cuts
8 that have on our communities and the industry,
9 particularly for Black and Latino-based organizations
10 which are over-represented in the Cultural
11 Development Fund program. And the Clemente is also a
12 founding member of the Latinx Arts Consortium of New
13 York, many of which were here and testifying as well,
14 and a part of the Cultural Equity Coalition. And we
15 thank you for your calls to restore the cuts to \$70
16 million, and we are-- continue to echo the call to
17 plead the increase of the investment in cultural
18 programs before the end of this current fiscal year.
19 We appreciate the cuts of-- the restoration of the
20 budget cuts to fiscal year 25 and 26, but these
21 outstanding cuts to the Cultural Development Fund
22 hurts jobs and programs that vulnerable New Yorkers
23 need most. So, we join our coalition in calling for
24 the complete restoration of the Cultural Development
25 Fund and the CIGs, specifically restoring the \$6.5

2 million to the CDF this year that addresses the cuts
3 made in November 2023 and January 24, restoring the
4 November 23 cuts to the CDF in fiscal year 25, 26 and
5 27, totaling \$4.2 million, and additionally
6 baselining an additional \$45 million to the DCLA's
7 total budget in 25. These restorations are crucial
8 to prevent further loss of talent, economic impacts
9 and the essential cultural services that make New
10 York City vibrant and compelling. As a coalition we
11 conduct our work within an ecosystem, and the
12 Clemente itself is home to 13 small nonprofits, an
13 ecosystem within our facility itself that are
14 affected by these cuts, and our partners-- this has a
15 domino effect on the strength of all of our
16 partnerships to scale up the programs that we provide
17 to artists and commit [sic] in communities. So,
18 thanks again for the community. I yield my time.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

20 GINA TRIBOTTI: thank you for the
21 opportunity to testify today. My name is Gina
22 Tribotti and I am Development Manager at the
23 International Studio and Curatorial Program. As the
24 largest visual arts residency in New York and the
25 fourth largest in the world, ISCP brings together 100

2 New York City-based and international artists each
3 year. Housed in former printing factory in the
4 industrial area of East Williamsburg, ISCP provides
5 transformative opportunities in an area designated by
6 New York State as severely disadvantaged including
7 free exhibitions, artist talks, open studios, paid
8 internships, and public high school visits. Our
9 programs nurture the cross-pollinations that emerge
10 from people from diverse backgrounds come together
11 which we share with our 10,000 annual visitors from
12 across the city and the world. ISCP's ground floor
13 program aims to counteract the lack of affordable
14 workspace in the city by providing subsidized studios
15 for New York-based artists. Our funded residencies
16 such as the Vision Fund counteract centuries of
17 disinvestments in communities of color by providing
18 free studios and monthly stipends that eliminate the
19 necessity of maintaining a mix of part-time and
20 fulltime jobs just to survive. If you were to visit
21 ISCP today you would meet artists from Austria,
22 Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Dominican
23 Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece,
24 India, Iran, Italy, Kenya, Norway, Qatar, South
25 Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States.

3 Our current ground floor exhibition recreates a West
4 African living room with four large-scale paintings
5 saturated with color and feelings of nostalgia and
6 friendship by Ghanaian painter Crystal Yayra Anthony.
7 And on our second floor, scenes of war and family are
8 told through a series of Japanese papercuts by
9 Japanese American Israeli artist Noa Yekutieli. In a
10 world where we often feel powerless to combat crises
11 and transcend the issues that divide us, funding for
12 organizations like ISCP help to bring global problems
13 back down to a human scale. By showcasing art from
14 immigrant communities and sharing international art
15 practices with New Yorkers of all backgrounds,
16 cultural funding helps to de-escalate tensions and
17 promote understanding throughout this great city.
18 Thank you.

19 BETH ALLEN: Okay. Thank you so much for
20 the opportunity to testify today. My name is Beth
21 Allen. I'm the Executive Director of the Downtown
22 Brooklyn Arts Alliance. I'm here today to join with
23 my colleagues in asking that the Council restore the-
24 - fully restore the fiscal 24 cuts and make a total
25 investment of \$76 million to the CIGs and CDF in
fiscal 25. The organization I run, the Downtown

2 Brooklyn Arts Alliance is a network of 60 nonprofit
3 arts organizations in the greater downtown Brooklyn
4 area. Our members include every presenting arts
5 organization situated in the Brooklyn cultural
6 district, as well as a range of smaller venues, dance
7 and theater companies, small galleries and others,
8 and what we do is to foster collaborations within the
9 field and between non-arts community leaders and arts
10 leaders. Our members collectively serve more than 5
11 million individuals annually, including approximately
12 100,000 school-aged children who participate in the
13 educational programs, both at their organizations and
14 in schools. And we-- it's an estimate here that
15 these 60 organizations generate more than \$250
16 million annually in economic impact. We're
17 celebrating Arts Month May this year at DBA which is
18 a new initiative where we have actually compiled
19 listings of everything that our organizations are
20 doing in May. It's turned out to be over 300 arts
21 activities that include everything from big festivals
22 like Dance Africa to smaller productions, design
23 week, lots of-- you know, a huge diversity of
24 offerings that are happening in the greater downtown
25 Brooklyn area. Oh, gosh, how did I get here? What I

2 want to wrap up with is-- so as part of my job, I
3 talk to a lot of non-arts leaders in the community,
4 BID leaders, business leaders, etcetera. One of the
5 conversations that is consistent right now is the
6 fact that communities want more art, whether it's
7 part of the City of Yes, whether it's part of other
8 initiatives to increase neighborhood vibrancy, and
9 that is just a huge disconnect with-- from what I'm
10 hearing from arts organizations which is that they're
11 having to make cuts, having to make really hard
12 decisions. We are not talking enough about the needs
13 for the sector to grow, and I think we should not be
14 talking about cuts this year, and we do thank you for
15 your support of increasing the budget. Thank you.

16 COLBY HERCHEL: Good afternoon
17 counselors. Thank you so much for your time today.
18 I'm Colby Herchel. I'm the Artistic Director and a
19 Co-founder of Scantic River Productions, a 501C3
20 theater and production company founded during the
21 heart of the pandemic in January 2021 based in
22 Alphabet [sic] City. To speak with what we've
23 accomplished in the first three years of our
24 founding, we brought to this city with partnerships
25 like with ART New York, to speak of examples,

2 original Mexican-written theater to an off-Broadway
3 venue. We've brought culture to New York City
4 communities including in Brooklyn, coming up in
5 Queens, also in Manhattan with educational theater
6 tours, music albums, accessible audio drama, and
7 podcasts focusing on young people's mental wellness,
8 and providing internships for students from places
9 like Puerto Rico so they can get an opportunity to
10 work with our community here in New York. Our focus
11 is exclusively on original voices for original work
12 that's queer, racially diverse, and immigrant voices
13 being put on stage. So we have had the benefit of
14 working with several of these wonderful institutions
15 who have spoken today. That I think is the most
16 important thing I want to bring up. Though we have
17 not received direct CDF funding as a company so far,
18 we have benefitted from having help from places who
19 are helping us with rehearsal spaces, performance
20 venues. Because we are new we need help and we need
21 these foundations to look up to and grow with. So,
22 largely, yes, we demand the restoration of funding to
23 CDF grantees in full year 24. By our estimation
24 without restoration of the \$6.5 million, we stand to
25 lose at least 130 full-time equivalent workers from

2 our labor force, and 3,250 artists will be denied
3 fees and that doesn't just stick with the
4 institutions who are receiving fundings, it's those
5 who will be receiving them in years to come. Thank
6 you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

8 DIAN DONG: Hello, hi. My name is Dian
9 Dong from Chen Dance Center in Lower Manhattan.
10 Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you.
11 Chen Dance Center. Chen Dance Center serves the
12 Chinatown and Lower Eastside community, but also
13 communities citywide. New York City is proudly known
14 as the dance capital of the nation, and yet, dance
15 artists and companies all struggle to make ends meet
16 while trying to make it seem effortless, and
17 unfortunately, that's what we're taught in dance to
18 do. You got to leap and do all of this, and you have
19 to make it effortless. So we're really good at that.
20 So, just before the pandemic, our organization was
21 displaced from a major fire at 70 Mulberry [sic]
22 Street. Then we lost our founder. Our company was--
23 decided to work even harder, because DCA funding has
24 been our life-- has been a real support for us. We
25 are able to do free programming in citywide schools,

2 and this past year we served 6,000 K to 12 students,
3 all through the support of DCA. And when we travel
4 to schools in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and
5 throughout Manhattan, we witnessed the transformation
6 of hundreds of young audiences who become instantly
7 engaged in our interactive dance performances which
8 tell the stories of the building of America. You
9 can't do more than that, because the teacher tell us
10 if we made them read this chapter and write a book
11 report, they would have a long face and they wouldn't
12 remember anything, but in a 45-minute assembly
13 program they see it through dance. It's an
14 interactive program. They stand up and they learn
15 some movements and they remember. So, thank you for
16 this opportunity to speak on behalf of DCA funding.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 DAVID JOHNSTON: Good afternoon. I thank
19 you for the opportunity to testify here. David
20 Johnston, Development Director for the Jazz Gallery.
21 The Jazz Gallery presents over 350 concerts every
22 year to in-person audiences of over 12,000. We've
23 been bringing top-quality jazz to New York City
24 audiences since 1995. We offer free tickets each
25 month to students at the Institute for Collaborative

2 Education. We provide educational programs for the
3 South Bronx Charter School for International Cultures
4 and the Arts. We offer free tickets through Culture
5 Pass, free concerts in Hudson Yards and the Financial
6 District. As everyone has stated, we are facing a
7 crisis in this field. In the past two budget cycles
8 we have been cut over 20 percent as our expenses have
9 risen. Delays in the funding have caused us to pause
10 or cut commissions and residencies. We're trying to
11 plan budgets for the next fiscal year, and we don't
12 know what we're getting, if anything, from the City.
13 And I have to say, I've worked over 20 years in this
14 field, and I worked in fundraising through DCA and
15 through 9/11 and anthrax and the great recession and
16 Super Storm Sandy and COVID, and at no point in any
17 of those periods was it suggested that the cultural
18 sector should accept cuts of this magnitude that we
19 have been dealing with in the last few years. We
20 cannot deliver our programming and our services to
21 NYC audiences. We cannot meet expectations in that
22 way. We call for a full restoration at \$76 million.
23 DCLA must have more capacity to deliver the funding
24 on time and hold the line against these catastrophic
25 reductions. And I would like to take a moment to

2 thank our City Council representative Carlina Rivera
3 who has been a great champion for the Jazz Gallery in
4 the capital allocation process, and we thank her for
5 her service on this committee.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
7 much. Now we have Christopher Leon Johnson.

8 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready?

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go ahead.

10 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Alright, good
11 afternoon. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson, and
12 you know, what's going on in City Council is
13 disgusting how they want to defund these-- defund the
14 libraries and defund all the cultural institutions in
15 NYC, but there's one way we could fix this. We could
16 save \$100,000 by defunding Allie Zirachi [sp?] who is
17 the Chief of Staff to Vickie Paladino, because what I
18 found out is recently that Allie Zirachi is married
19 to racist. Allie Zirachi who's the Chief of Staff to
20 Vickie Paladino is married to a racist named Smokey
21 the Bigot, AKA Mark Zirachi. I am calling on for the
22 City Council to fire Allie Zirachi because she is
23 married to a Proud Boy, a Proud Boy that was at a
24 Trump rally this weekend in the Bronx throwing up
25 gang signs, throwing up Proud Boy signs and making

2 racial epithets to myself and Raul Rivera and it's
3 all on video. Now, he-- it's America. We have the
4 right to support Trump or Joe Biden, but there's no
5 excuse for a member of the City Council to hire-- to
6 have a person, the Chief of Staff who is married to a
7 full-blown KKK, neo-Nazi racist. So, I'm calling for
8 the City Council to have the Speaker fire Allie
9 Zirachi because she is married to a Proud Boy. How
10 will the City-- how is the City Council expect to be
11 called transparency and human rights and equal rights
12 when you have a Council Member that is a member of
13 the Common Sense Caucus named Vickie Paladino who has
14 a Chief of Staff who is a racist herself? If you're
15 married to a racist, that means you're a racist
16 yourself. That's the truth. And the facts is, like
17 I say, if you're marry-- if you're a woman and you're
18 married to a man that's a racist, you're a racist and
19 vice versa. If you're a man, if you're married to
20 racist, then you're a racist yourself. If you're not
21 a racist, Allie, then you need to divorce that man,
22 Mark. Vickie Paladino, if you're not a racist, you
23 need to fire your Chief of Staff Allie Zirachi, and
24 that's it. That's all I got to say. Thank you.
25 Thank you, Justin.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Now, we
3 have on Zoom Maeve Montalvo.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 MAEVE MONTALVO: Chair Rivera and members
6 of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to
7 testify today. My name is Maeve Montalvo and I am
8 the Director of Education at the Museum of the City
9 of New York, a member of the Cultural Institutions
10 Group. MCNY is located in District Eight in the East
11 Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan where we are a
12 beacon for arts, culture and community, and this year
13 we've welcomed over 100,000 visitors. Chair Rivera,
14 thank you for visiting with us a few weeks ago. It
15 was wonderful to meet you and see you and your family
16 enjoy the Nanny Vega [sic] exhibition. The Museum of
17 the City of New York like all CIG members is directly
18 affected by cuts to culture, as you know. The
19 instability of ongoing fiscal uncertainty impairs our
20 ability to plan ahead with confidence that we will
21 have the staff and the resources we need to serve our
22 communities. We therefore request the City Council
23 advocate for a full reversal of all the cuts imposed
24 on culture and baseline funding for Cultural
25 Institutions Group and the Cultural Development Fund

2 in the FY 25 budget. As a member of the CIG, the
3 museum urges New York City Council to commit to
4 lasting permanent investment in our city's arts and
5 cultural organizations which we know as many have
6 testified here today drive New York City's economy
7 and the City's workforce, and which are foundational
8 to the City's economic strengths, neighborhood
9 safety, and social health. To restore culture fully,
10 the following budget cuts are necessary-- the
11 following budget actions are necessary in fiscal 2025
12 to meet the \$53 million total need. Reverse the
13 November Plan PEG to \$7.9 million, reverse the CIG FY
14 24 reduction to \$5 million, and restore one-year
15 funding of \$40 million. We also request that the
16 City Council add additional funds to the Cultural
17 Immigrant Initiative. This year, the museum will
18 serve 30,000 students, teachers, and families through
19 our educational programs. Over 50 percent of our
20 school groups this year noted that their classroom
21 includes English language learners, the majority of
22 whom selected Spanish as the primary language of
23 those students. We are currently offering a bilingual
24 field trip for our exhibition Nanny Vega Art in El
25 Barrio [sp?]

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time
3 has expired. Thank you.

4 MAEVE MONTALVO: and funding from the--
5 funding from the Cultural Immigrant Initiative will
6 enable us to hire additional bilingual educators and
7 be able to reach and serve the population of students
8 in New York City who greatly need to have access to
9 our cultural institutions. Thank you so much for
10 this opportunity to testify today, and thank you for
11 your advocacy in support of the arts and culture in
12 the City.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
14 much. Okay, with that, this hearing is adjourned.
15 Thank you very much.

16 [gavel]

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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 July 8, 2024