

**CITY COUNCIL HEARING
BEFORE THE COMMITTEES ON TECHNOLOGY
AND ON SMALL BUSINESS**

**TESTIMONY BY
ANNE DEL CASTILLO
COMMISSIONER OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE
OF MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT**

NOVEMBER 22, 2021

Good morning Chairs Holden and Gjonaj, and members of the City Council Committees on Technology and on Small Business. I'm Anne del Castillo, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME). I'm joined today by Josh Levin, MOME's Associate Commissioner of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs, Lt. Nicholas Minor, head of the NYPD Movie & TV Unit, and MOME's senior leadership team. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the current state of film and television production in New York City with you today.

I have had the distinct honor of leading MOME since I was appointed Commissioner in the Spring of 2019. Our agency works to strengthen New York City's creative economy and make it accessible to all. MOME has four divisions: the Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting, which coordinates film and television production throughout the five boroughs; NYC Media, the City's official television and radio broadcasting entity; our Programs division which oversees industry development and workforce and educational initiatives in film, television, theater, music, publishing, advertising and digital media; and the Office of Nightlife, which supports the sustainable development of New York City's night-time economy. We will also be home to the Press Credentials Office starting in early 2022.

When I last appeared before you in Fall of 2019, I outlined some of the ways I had intended to change our approach to film and television production permitting, and am proud to report that we've made significant progress on those ideas. First, we hired a new Intergovernmental and Community Affairs team to strengthen relations with Council Members and communities to establish more open lines of communication and better understand the unique characteristics of our diverse communities across the city. This has allowed for more collaborative solution seeking and troubleshooting as issues arise. For example, when a production posted signs in advance of landing in a Brooklyn neighborhood, residents voiced concerns to their council member who reached out directly to me and my office, and we were able to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution. Additionally, we have taken a more proactive approach to anticipating filming impacts in communities. For example, we have limited the amount of filming during the holiday season along busy commercial shopping corridors. And finally, we updated the Code of Conduct for film permit holders, and we made it easier to find on the Film Permit webpage so that the public knows what rules apply to productions.

What we could not have anticipated was that just a few months after that hearing, the COVID-19 pandemic would force a shutdown of the entire creative economy. The Department of Labor reported that employment in arts, entertainment and recreation fell by sixty-six percent in 2020. Film and television production came to a standstill. But as in previous crises, like 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy, the industry quickly jumped into action to assist with relief efforts—from distributing catered meals to healthcare workers, to providing gloves, masks, and other PPE from their medical shows to hospitals, and even producing supplies like face shields and gowns for the city. When New York City was in need, this industry stepped up, and we thank them for their generosity.

When the State approved the return of film production and the industry began developing protocols for safe return, MOME was very deliberate in ensuring productions returned to communities across the five boroughs safely. We imposed stricter protocols than the State guidance—for example, we limited the size of cast and crew for on location filming, and required that productions maintain minimum distances from hospitals, outdoor dining, and Open Streets. We provided plain language guidance and sample production safety signs. We also sent out weekly updates to keep industry stakeholders and elected officials apprised on the latest guidance and status of reopening. We’ve been proud to see productions take the initiative to support local small businesses, using them as featured locations and for catering services and holding areas.

The return of film and television production is a testament to the collaboration among industry, City and State government, and community partners. It is a shining example of New York City’s recovery success stories.

MOME works diligently to ensure that New York City continues to be a thriving center for film and television production, and, at the same time, causes minimal disruption to neighborhood residents and local businesses. The City’s expanded uses of our streets through new bike lanes, transportation projects, pedestrian plazas, and outdoor dining requires MOME to be even more flexible, collaborative, and responsive in our approach with communities, productions, and our

sister agencies. By the time a crew lands a production in a given area, MOME has already limited that production's schedule, size, and location according to the specific needs and characteristics of that particular community and surrounding neighborhoods. Because every community; every street; and every production is different. For example, when a given production was returning to film in the early days of reopening, we were able to work with the to reduce their parking footprint by utilizing nearby hotels around Lower Manhattan for holding and hair and makeup instead of using several campers. In addition to reducing the impact on parking in the neighborhood, it served to increase hotel occupancy during a time of high vacancy.

The benefits of our thriving film and television production sector ripple out far beyond the boundaries of any given location shoot. Film and television production create jobs and opportunities for New Yorkers who have never set foot on a set. We hear many stories from local business owners who tell us how business generated by productions has helped them grow and thrive. For example, a given production may generate over 1,200 jobs and \$20M in wages, but beyond that they will spend over \$600,000 on lodging, another \$600,000 on catering and other food items, and \$500,000 on hardware and lumber supplies. Each year – in the course of doing their jobs – this industry spends over \$80 billion right here in New York City. So, they aren't just helping themselves: They are contributing to our shared success and now our city's shared recovery.

Many people assume that the term production industry means big Hollywood studios. But the fact is, those studios are the ones who decide to bring the productions here. The production industry itself—the ones on the ground, filming in neighborhoods across the city, comprise 185,000 New Yorkers: tradespeople, actors, artisans, artists and small business owners. They are our family, our neighbors, our friends, and they are all New Yorkers, who are earning a living in their city.

We appreciate the tremendous impact that this industry has on our City's economy, and my agency continues to strive to make sure that filming works for everyone. We know there is still

work to be done and we look forward to continuing to work closely with you and with every community to ensure this great New York City success story continues

Now, I'm happy to answer your questions.