



**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Committee on Immigration**

Oversight Hearing: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts

January 12, 2023, 10:00AM – City Council Chambers

Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo

Good morning, Chair Ossé and Chair Hanif and members of the committees. I am Commissioner Laurie Cumbo, here today to testify in regards to today's topic: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts. I am joined by a number of my colleagues from the Department of Cultural Affairs, as well as colleagues from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

New York is a city of immigrants. It's been true for centuries, and the city we all live in today – its energy, vibrancy, and beauty – we owe to immigrants both past and present. For so many of us, the immigrant experience is central to who we are, and where we and our families come from. Any understanding of our city, its people, and its needs has to take the immigrant experience into account. It's a fundamental part of who we are as New Yorkers.

Another statement that's just as true as saying we're a "city of immigrants": culture is the bedrock of New York's communities. It's a source of joy, connection, social cohesion, and economic vibrancy. It's a critical way for us to celebrate, share, and express who we are. Our immigrant neighbors have always embraced this power. In the process, they both strengthen their bonds as a community and make our whole city stronger. And at the Department of Cultural Affairs, it's our great honor to support the individuals and organizations who do the work of organizing, community building, creating, programming, and bringing people together to share their singular cultural experiences.

As a result of so many diverse artists, audiences, and disciplines thriving in such close proximity - across disciplines from all corners of the globe - an incredible cross-pollination happens in our city. In other words, New York wouldn't be New York without the creative energy of immigrants. Full stop.

Culture also has a role to play in welcoming the newest arrivals to our city, including asylum seekers. Little Amal's visit to New York last fall is one recent, high profile example of this. For those who might have missed her whirlwind tour of New York, Amal is a towering puppet representing a Syrian refugee who anchored a series of interactive performances hosted by groups across the city. Last September, we joined Chair Hanif, our colleagues at the Civic Engagement Commission, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and Little Amal to welcome asylum seekers arriving at the Port Authority bus terminal in midtown. The families had been on a bus all night and they were exhausted - but they were in good spirits. And once the younger arrivals warmed up to Little Amal, it was such a powerful moment. Amal created space for these kids be just what they were: kids in awe of the bizarrely beautiful 12 foot tall puppet. For that moment, the tragedy of their situation wasn't defining them. It

also provided a potent reminder to anyone watching of the real people whose lives are often obscured by the frenzied national headlines. That's the power of art.

The conversations that Amal catalyzed around the cultural community's services for asylum seekers continue to this day, spurring an ongoing collaboration between DCLA and MOIA around Immigrant Heritage Week later this year, among other things.

At the Department of Cultural Affairs, we are so proud of our work to support the vibrant cultural life of our immigrant communities. The diversity of immigrant experiences in our city is matched by the diversity of the ways these experiences are reflected in our creative life and cultural community. As a consequence, there is a range of ways that City support reaches our immigrant arts communities.

DCLA's Cultural Development Fund (CDF) supports hundreds of immigrant – serving arts groups and programs across the five boroughs. To highlight just a few from the most recent grant cycle:

- In Manhattan, Harlem's **Custom Collaborative**, which is a first-time CDF grantee in FY23, trains, mentors, and advocates for and with no- and low-income immigrant women to build the skills necessary to achieve economic success in the sustainable fashion industry and broader society; and **Create in Chinatown** works at the cross-section of neighborhood engagement, storytelling, and the arts, amplifying voices of their neighbors, advocating for equity, and highlighting local histories through oral history projects, cultural classes, and talks.
- In Brooklyn, the **Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project** – another first-time CDF recipient – serves English Language Learning (ELL) Haitian immigrant students in New York City ages 14 to 21, providing them with vital cultural and linguistic services; and the **Coney Island History Project** records oral histories from residents of their iconic neighborhood in English, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, and other languages. Last year they also produced two immigrant-themed History Days featuring live performances.
- In the Bronx, we support **Casita Maria**, NYC's oldest Latino-serving charity. Their wide range of programming showcases diverse cultures through events in their art gallery and in non-traditional venues such as local businesses and street corners, erasing barriers for local residents who may not be inclined to visit more mainstream venues.
- In Queens, the **Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts** (which also operates in Brooklyn) promotes Bengali arts & language in NYC's multicultural communities by offering accessible classes and platforms for emerging artists and performers.
- In Staten Island, **Universal Temple of the Arts** serves as a resource and platform for artists of color and the community from a multicultural perspective; and **Staten Island Arts** offers programming that explores the cultural heritage of the ethnic communities that make Staten Island home.
- Citywide, the CDF also supports services for immigrant artists. We work with **arts councils** in each of the five boroughs to provide funding for individual artists, collectives and smaller organization – a funding partnership we're proud to continue supporting at historically high levels this year. And **New York Foundation for the Art's Immigrant Artist Program** provides services, individualized mentoring, and resources that help further artist careers and gain access to the cultural world while upholding their distinct identities.

As you may know, the FY23 CDF awards announced last month integrated new, far-reaching equity reforms intended to distribute this public support more fairly to more organizations. We're still evaluating the outcomes, but the results were promising: DCLA awarded the most funding to the largest number of cultural organizations ever. More than 82% of groups led or founded by people of

color saw an increase in their baseline awards. We doubled the minimum grant from \$5,000 to \$10,000 – a major benefit for smaller groups, who saw their average baseline awards increase by 67%. Successful applications from first-time applicants also jumped from 47 in the previous competitive cycle to 125 this year. The CDF application doesn't ask specifically about immigrant-serving missions or programs, but we know that our most immigrant-rich neighborhoods tend to be served by smaller and POC-led groups, categories which benefitted tremendously from the reforms.

The CDF also includes the Language Access Fund, which grew from the CreateNYC cultural plan and its strategies for engaging New Yorkers more equitably. This year, 55 groups received \$550,000 support for programming that increases access to arts and culture for those whose primary language is not English. The FY23 grantees serve populations that speak a range of languages including Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), ASL, Arabic, Bangla, Bosnian, Georgian, Japanese, Quechua, Russian, Uzbek, Tagalog, and Yiddish. These groups include:

- Sundog Theatre on Staten Island, which links theater skills with language mastery for ELLs.
- In Brooklyn, Fort Greene Park Conservancy and Rooftop Films have partnered for a Chinese and Spanish Language Film Festival that will happen later this spring. It will feature 4 films aimed at engaging local Chinese and Spanish speaking populations.
- In the Bronx, ID Studio Theater's Bilingual Community Theater Programming includes the production and performance of ID Studio's repertoire, new and existing, in theaters and community spaces throughout the Bronx. Their DCLA grant will allow them to present these plays to their diverse community through collaborations with mission-aligned organizations developed through their Bilingual Healing Arts Initiative.

A partnership I'm incredibly proud of is the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. As a Council Member, I helped create this new pool of funding with the former chair of this committee, Jimmy Van Bramer. I'm so thrilled that this Council has embraced the initiative – it's so important to call out the things we see value in, to both name them and invest in them with real dollars. Last year, the Immigrant Initiative allocated more than \$6 million to over 180 organizations delivering services in every community across the city. From the Asian American Writers' Workshop to the Dominican Collectives Dance Ensemble, the groups getting support from this initiative are doing the *work* in every single Council district.

The Coalition of Theatres of Color – another collaboration between Council and DCLA – also provides major support to dozens of organizations serving and uplifting immigrant communities. I fought to expand this initiative from covering just 8 organizations to more than 50 during my time in Council. Last year, it provided more than \$5 million to more than 60 groups citywide, including Ma-Yi Filipino Theater Ensemble, Pan Asian Repertory Theater, Thalia Spanish Theater, Vibe Theater Experience, Amerinda, and more.

The members of the Cultural Institutions Group – which occupy public property and have a mandate to serve all New Yorkers - also do an incredible job of engaging our immigrant communities.

- Flushing Town Hall – beyond its own diverse programming, FTH provides a hub for immigrants across Queens. Groups like CDF grantee Tong Xiao Ling Chinese Opera Ensemble use FTH as their performance hub. The FTH stage will have a jazz performance one evening and a Chinese opera the next – capturing the amazing diversity of the borough itself.
- Bronx County Historical Society runs Garifuna Cultural and Heritage Initiative, which focuses on documenting the Bronx Garifuna community, the largest such community outside of

Honduras, by recording oral histories, collecting archival material, and celebrating Garifuna art and culture through public events.

- Queens Theatre presents theatrical work exploring the immigrant experience, and offers a program for English Language Learners in elementary and middle school, where teaching artists use theater games to support students acquiring English as a new language.
- El Museo del Barrio – which is deeply rooted in our city’s Puerto Rican and Latino communities – provides a wealth of education programs in multiple languages and cultural celebrations. Just last week, I was thrilled to participate in their 46th annual Three Kings Day celebration, which is an important holiday throughout the Spanish speaking world.
- Lincoln Center, as part of their American Songbook series “A World of Voices,” last fall showcased nine performers whose diverse global artistic heritage deeply informed their creative expression. These musicians hailed from Honduras, Mexico, India, Guinea, China, Sudan, Venezuela, Tunisia, and Guatemala. The series sought to broaden exposure for artists and remove financial boundaries for audiences through a pilot of Choose What You Pay with tickets offered as low as \$5.
- Staten Island Museum offers Spanish language guides and programming.
- Jamaica Center for Art and Learning centers immigrant artists in their work and produces concerts exploring music of the Diaspora, particularly directed toward the Caribbean immigrant communities of Queens.
- Brooklyn Museum’s Adult Literacy Programs include partnerships with CUNY’s Language Immersion Program at Queensborough Community College, where museum staff works with college-bound immigrant students on socially relevant art-making projects while further developing their English skills.

Under Mayor Adams, we’re also investing capital dollars in cultural groups that serve immigrant communities, helping to ensure they have the long-term stability and top notch facilities they need to serve audiences. At adoption last year, the City added \$11 million for a new home for the Afro-Latin Jazz Alliance in East Harlem, including \$7 million from Mayor Adams. This year, we also made new capital investments in the Hispanic Society of America and Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute – whose home is in a former firehouse they received from the City. Other recent capital investments by the City include \$10 million for a new home for the Pregones / Puerto Rican Traveling Theater in the Bronx; support for a major renovation to the Tenement Museum, which is dedicated to preserving and sharing NYC’s immigrant heritage; and funding to secure a permanent home for the Museum of Chinese in America.

Another investment we’re proud of is in the future home of the People’s Theater Project (PTP) in Inwood. Last May, Mayor Adams announced that PTP — an immigrant- and women-led nonprofit — will own and operate a first-of-its-kind Immigrant Research and Performing Arts Center (lovingly known as IRPAC). The center will amplify the voices of New York’s vibrant immigrant communities and cultivate work by local artists and arts groups. The City will invest \$15 million to help PTP acquire a newly constructed cultural center that will deliver theater that is more equitable and representative of immigrants and people of color. Working with EDC and the Mayor’s Office, DCLA helped select this incredible organization to anchor this facility dedicated to exploring, celebrating, uplifting, and understanding the immigrants that have called New York home, now and across the generations.

Another critical City program for which culture is critical is IDNYC. IDNYC is designed to give undocumented residents and other people without formal ID access to a range of essential services. But to be successful, it needed to be broadly adopted by New Yorkers. To achieve this, and to build cultural access into the DNA program, cultural groups stepped up from the very start to offer free memberships

and other perks to IDNYC card holders. We're incredibly grateful to the more than 40 cultural groups who are currently IDNYC partners, and to all of those who have been partners before. Cultural participation is and should be a birthright for all New Yorkers, and this program helps make that a reality for so many.

New York is full of amazing public art, including temporary and permanent works that pay tribute to our immigrant heritage. Mark Saldana's "Somos Uno," currently installed by the NYC Parks Department in Travers Park, Queens, is inspired by the traditional practices of the many cultures that make up the surrounding community, especially the contributions of immigrants. Again in partnership with the Parks Department, our public art unit at DCLA has been working to commission a permanent public artwork honoring the historic Little Syria community that once flourished in Lower Manhattan. At PS 152 in Brooklyn, artist Arlan Huang's "American Origins" presents historical and contemporary educational material in subtle and surprising ways, focusing on the immigrant experience and the collective hope represented by our school system, as so many people came to this country with hopes of attaining the best education and opportunities they could for their children. Not to mention one of the most famous sculptures in the world, located in our harbor as an enduring reminder of New York's open arms and embrace of people who have arrived here from all over the world.

Cultural groups have also stepped up to meet their neighbors' most urgent needs. In the pandemic, cultural groups became vaccination sites, food pantries – whatever their neighbors needed. During the ongoing influx of asylum seekers, cultural groups have organized donation drives across the city – The Whitney, BAM, LXNY, El Museo, and others have all collected donated goods. Chair Hanif, I know you've been working with People's Theater Project, Lincoln Center and others to organize an upcoming welcome event for asylum seekers. The list of essential services our cultural are providing for all New Yorkers in need, including immigrants, goes on and on. Another inspiring service cultural groups offer: education support and ceremonies for those seeking naturalization. The Tenement Museum, Lincoln Center, and New-York Historical Society, to name just a few, have provided such ceremonies, where immigrants become full fledged U.S. citizens. In New York, culture is community!

Finally, the CreateNYC cultural plan, which has influenced so much of DCLA's work, included a range of recommendations specific to immigrant communities, and directly led to the creation of the Language Access Fund I described earlier in testimony. CreateNYC also laid out an ambitious vision for fostering a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive cultural community. And to create a cultural sector that looks like and serves New York, that's got to include immigrants – so we're proud of all the programs and work described in testimony today that offer immigrants meaningful ways to participate in and contribute to our city's rich cultural life.

As always, we believe that the best way we in City government can serve the needs of our cultural community is by working in close partnership. The Cultural Immigrant Initiative is just the most salient example of the great ways we can serve our immigrant neighbors and all New Yorkers when we work together. I applaud the many incredible ways that our cultural community engages with New Yorkers from around the world, and stand ready to support their work however we can.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm happy to answer any questions you have at this time.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS, LIBRARIES AND IMMIGRATION
JANUARY 12, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Osse, and members of the Committees on Cultural Affairs and Immigration for holding this hearing today.

New York City is home to almost 1.4 million people identifying solely as Asian, a number that accounts for 15% of the city's total population. According to the 2020 Census, this number then expands to 19.9 million people across the United States with an additional 4.1 million who identify as Asian in combination with another race and/or ethnicity. With this growing population, our city's cultural awareness grows.

Lunar New Year, a holiday that first originated in ancient China more than 4,000 years ago, is now observed by numerous cultures across Asia, parts of the Middle East and by a diaspora of people across the globe. In New York City, Lunar New Year festivities include traditional foods; cultural performances; parades, street fairs and fireworks displays. Asian Americans as well as New Yorkers of all backgrounds are able to enjoy these vibrant festivities in communities and neighborhoods such as Chinatown in Manhattan, Flushing in Queens, Sunset Park in Brooklyn, and numerous others.

In conjunction with legislation from our federal partners, who introduced in January 2022 a bill (H.R. 6525) to establish Lunar New Year Day as a Federal holiday, Resolution 0424-2022 urges the United States to recognize Lunar New Year as a federal holiday. Resolution 0331-2022 urges the Mayor and the City of New York to recognize Lunar New Year as an annual school holiday and as an official holiday in the City of New York. I support both resolutions in its celebration of Lunar New Year and honoring the vibrant communities that make up our city and play such an important role in its social, cultural and economic development.

ARTS & DEMOCRACY

**NOCD
NY**

Arts & Democracy and Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY

Testimony for Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations joint with the Committee on Immigration Hearing, January 12, 2023 at 10am.

Hello, I'm Caron Atlas and I direct Arts & Democracy and the citywide alliance Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY), two cultural organizations working in support of immigrant communities.

Arts & Democracy engages the power of creativity to increase people's participation in the decision making that impacts their lives through cultural organizing, capacity building, and creative programming. Our focus is on communities that have been historically disenfranchised. We put arts and culture on agendas where it hasn't been before, connect artists, activists, and policymakers who wouldn't otherwise know each other, and create the connective tissue and generative environment needed for cross sector collaboration to succeed.

NOCD-NY is a citywide alliance of cultural networks and community leaders that have joined together to revitalize New York City from the neighborhood up. NOCD-NY came together in 2010 in response to the vision, sustained needs, and creative resilience of our diverse communities. We facilitate peer learning, increase the visibility of community-based work, and advocate for and carry out cross sector collaborations related to public housing and public health.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the importance of supporting immigrant arts and culture. Our work in support of immigrant communities ranges from an annual community Iftar, bilingual (English and Bangla) workshops addressing climate justice, youth writing workshops, Día de los Muertos programs with Casa Cultural commemorating those who were lost during the pandemic, and the Kensington Cares public art exhibition honoring immigrant-led mutual aid. We want to acknowledge our Council member Shahana Hanif for her support of and participation in our work.

Says Arts & Democracy Program Director, Hasiba Haq: "Working within the immigrant community that our neighbors have built has laid a foundation for young, Muslim women to continue creating change in our neighborhood. Support from the Cultural Immigrant Initiative and other city funding not only elevates the voice of communities that go unheard, but also helps build a next generation of leaders. Young women have become trailblazers in our community: they've redefined the importance of public space and women's participation in it, built safe spaces for queer youth, provided platforms for young people to celebrate their artistic skills, and established intergenerational relationships that bridge cultural divides. I've

been lucky to not only grow up within our community but to return to serve the people who've helped raise me and many other young people carving out a new story for next generations.

Arts and culture organizing is an important pathway for civic engagement for communities that are often unable to access power through traditional models. Working with and alongside immigrant communities means we not only center their culture and experiences but provide opportunities to elevate ideas and solutions that might go unheard. Activating civic change and generating solutions requires arts and culture at the center."

Says youth organizer, Aamnah Khan: "When I think of this pandemic, I think of the pain. I think of those who lost loved ones or risked their lives to provide essential services, struggled to make ends meet or keep their local mom and pop shops in business, stayed in abusive situations, protested racial injustice, or deferred milestone celebrations. But I learned I could navigate multiple realities which didn't have to contradict each other. I could grieve and still find joy. And, as a youth organizer, I found joy in my work at Arts & Democracy. As we piloted a virtual open mic series called ReGeneration, we tackled social issues such as integration and paid homage to spring and community healing to return to our roots and nourish the soul."

Here are some of our recommendations for the city to support immigrant arts and culture:

- **Continue and further city initiatives that are critical for immigrant communities** including the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, Language Access, and Neighborhood Development Fund.
- **Address delayed decision making and funding**, which make it very difficult for small organizations to work with the city and results in severe cash flow challenges and debt. We should not receive contracts and funding more than half way through the fiscal year and small organizations cannot be expected to work without pay. We support the recommendations of the Joint Task Force to Get Nonprofits Paid On Time to create new processes to hold city stakeholders accountable for timely procurement and contracting, and to make these processes transparent.
- **Allow small cultural organizations to use fiscal sponsors to receive city funding.** Many immigrant-led cultural organizations and artists do not have 501c3 status which prevents them from receiving support from the city. Fiscal sponsors allow these small organizations to provide much needed services in a manner that is fiscally accountable but doesn't over burden them with becoming a nonprofit.
- **Make it possible for nonprofits to register as Minority-and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs).** They are often the best organizations to work as city vendors but without this status they are held back.
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- **Increase cross sector opportunities that engage the power of arts and culture across city agencies.** The arts are grounded in values, accessible, engage multiple perspectives, and bring people together. Examples of our cross-sector partnerships include NOCD-NY's multiyear What Creates Health? @ Queensbridge partnership with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 696 Build Queensbridge and Jacob A Riis Settlement that addressed violence as a public health issue and Arts & Democracy's integration of arts and culture as part of Participatory Budgeting. Make funding opportunities for the arts in other agencies transparent, with realistic timelines, and equitable pay for artists.
- **Recognize the importance of cultural hubs, including neighborhood center cultural centers, as critical community infrastructure and provide ongoing support to them.** Immigrant arts and culture often happens in these holistic spaces which combine arts and culture with civic participation, education, job training, and healing. This work is powerful because it builds trust and reciprocity over time. Funding needs to support the multifaceted and sustained nature of this work.
- **Plazas are also critical community infrastructure.** As artist Anam Raheem wrote after participating in the Community Iftar on the Ave C Plaza in Kensington: "The experience has me thinking about how a patch of concrete can become a gathering space for cultural expression, communal care, and artistry. How we can build connections, solidarity, and empathy with a set of carefully curated words."
- **Address challenges for small organizations and community networks to function as plaza partners.** Provide financial support and technical assistance for small plaza partners so they can succeed, such as the model of Neighborhood Plaza Partnership. The DOT's Plaza Equity program has provided key support for programming by immigrant artists for immigrant communities and should be continued.
- **Humanize policymaking** by grounding policy in stories, culture, and lived experience - meeting the people most impacted where they are at.
- **Recognize and reward the knowledge and leadership of community members and people working in the field.** Support their organic work rather than duplicating it through top down programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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FY 2024 City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations hearing:
"Oversight: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts"
January 12, 2022

Introduction:

Thank you to the City Council for your previous support and for this opportunity. Bronx Children's Museum asks that you support our FY 2024 financial program needs requests to ensure that we can continue to be accessible TO ALL. This is our reason for being: to be accessible TO ALL:

- In our new building, opened in the South Bronx on December 3, 2022 (thanks in large part to the City Council)
- In the streets and schools, through outreach programs throughout the borough (funded in part by the City Council)
- By the fullest definition of "accessibility" wherever and whenever we offer programs, making them inclusive for all, with respect to participants' language and culture.
- As an organization that caters to the 190,000 children under age nine in the Bronx. The children and families the Museum engages reflect the overall demographics of the Bronx, in which more than 34% percent of people are foreign born.

Background: Founded in 2005, Bronx Children's Museum is a new kind of multicultural, Bronx-inspired children's geared to those from infancy through fourth grade. Since outreach programming began in 2010, the Museum has engaged more than 125,000 children and families at 611 different community events and 103 educational institutions. On an annual basis, we were engaging more than 16,000 children and caregivers in after and in-school programs and with our iconic Museum on the Go! bus, all funded in part with CASA, CII, CDF, and expense funding from our City Council Members.

The Museum, with the City, proudly opened the first children's museum facility in The Bronx's history in December 2022. It is located on parkland just steps away from the Bronx Terminal Market and Yankee Stadium; it is near the 161st and 149th Street subway stations. All exhibits—including a 32-foot waterway, nature area, digital playground, early childhood play space, and neighborhood arts and culture area—celebrate Bronx people, environment, history, and vibrancy. There are also a dozen dazzling commissioned art installations. In the few weeks that the Museum has opened, we have already welcomed 1,300 visitors.

Going forward, the Museum will always operate "with and without walls." It anticipates engaging nearly 36,000 children and families in 2023: 23,750 in the building and 12,000 through outreach programs.

The Museum and Immigrant Communities: The Museum has always offered programming geared to immigrant communities, working in partnership with local CBOs and organizations, and with the help of Council funding. Examples: We have developed arts programming on cultural heritage for parents and children in partnership taught in English and Spanish at MASA; created "Music Matters" concerts

celebrating the rich cultural diversity of the borough, performed in English, Spanish and ASL; all materials and signage in the building are in English and Spanish. It is our plan to offer programming in some of the many other languages commonly spoken in our borough in the future.

Funding Need:

The BxCM is not a CIG and does not receive ANY operational support from the City. We rely on the City's support of arts and cultural organizations and know that with expanded funding geared specifically to engaging immigrant communities in the Bronx we will become an anchor for those families. We will always be a museum with and without walls, committed to being FULLY ACCESSIBLE to all children.

Without your leadership we will simply not be able to reach a new generation of our youngest and most vulnerable children. We request that funding be added to the budget to ensure that Bronx Children's Museum specifically, and arts and culture organizations in general, are able to:

- Offer in-building and outreach programming in multiple languages
- Print and distribute materials, including building resources, activity take-aways and educator tools, in languages other than English
- Hire local translators

However, with your support, we can continue to meet the needs of our borough's youngest constituents through a "with and without walls" museum that is accessible to all, regardless of age, ability, or geographic location.

Arts and culture is a central driver of New York's economy, an anchor to its communities! We need your support!



**Testimony to the New York City Council
Immigrant Communities and the Arts, January 12, 2023
Jane Li, Programs & Engagement Coordinator,
Brooklyn Children's Museum**

Good morning. I'm Jane Li. I am Coordinator of Programs and Engagement for Brooklyn Children's Museum (BCM), a community museum in Crown Heights and the world's first children's museum. We serve 300,000 children and caregivers annually, most of whom hail from our borough. Over 35% of Brooklynites, almost one million people, are immigrants from another country.

BCM has been serving New York's immigrant communities since its inception in 1899, but in 2016, the Museum recognized a particular need to make large gathering spaces for celebration available to immigrant communities; create and offer reflective programming; and create paid opportunities for immigrant artists and performers. With support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Council, BCM started to host monthly – sometimes even more than monthly – cultural festivals that reflect the diversity of our borough.

My job is to work with community curators to plan and coordinate these events. For each festival, we partner with a community-based organization or artistic partner to hire visual artists, musicians, dancers, DJs, storytellers, and food vendors from that community. BCM provides free space for artisans to sell on our roof, and we offer free tickets for our partner organizations to provide to their communities. A few examples include:

- In April, we celebrated **Holi** with New York City's largest family powder party, hosted in partnership with Ajna Dance, Jiva Dance, DJ DynAMITe, and artists Kavita Ramchandran and Deepti Sunder. Veera da Dhaba provided food for the day.
- Later in the Spring, BCM hosted one of Brooklyn's largest family celebrations for **Eid al-Fitr** in partnership with Council Member Shahana Hanif. The event brought together performers from Bangladesh Institute for the Performing Arts, the Muslim Community Network, the Culture Tree, and the Turkish Cultural Center. Our partners at APNA and Rethink Foods provided 500 free halal meals.
- In August, BCM hosted **Celebrate the Caribbean** in partnership with the West Indian American Carnival Day Association (WIADCA), dancers from CarNival, Sesame Flyers International, and steel pan drumming workshops with Harmony Music Makers. Our friends at Allan's Bakery, Sugarcane, and Nelia's Vegan Kitchen located in Brooklyn, provided food.
- In November, we hosted **Dia de los Muertos**, curated by Bed-Stuy-based artist Benjamin Rojas. Families learned about traditions of honoring their ancestors with help from dance troupe Cetiliztli Nauhcampa, puppeteer Karina Onofre, and artist Ixmucane Artisan. DJ Farbeon and Gecko Jones contributed to the lively atmosphere with their sounds. Food was provided by El Patrón in Flatbush.
- In January, our **Lunar New Year** programs will welcome the Year of the Rabbit in partnership with the Chinatown Community Young Lions, the New York Chinese Cultural Center, storyteller Yobe Qiu, and calligraphy artist Nelson Leung. I'm very excited about this program since the year of the rabbit is my zodiac year.

During COVID it felt hard to celebrate. Gathering safely was tricky. But BCM and our partners didn't give up. We masked and created sessions to control crowds. Over 25,000 people – more than 1,000 people per day – came to a cultural festival in 2022, even during the pandemic. In 2023, we expect 35,000 people to attend a cultural festival.

I appreciate this opportunity to share my work with all of you. As a first generation Fuzhounese American, also from Brooklyn, it's rewarding to see immigrant communities, not just from Brooklyn joining us at the Museum

for our cultural festivals. Growing up in an immigrant family, there wasn't much opportunity to participate in cultural events often. And we didn't get to learn and understand the cultures of our neighbors. That's why cultural festivals at BCM are particularly special, families are able to see their cultural celebrations being reflected and they can also connect with other cultures. I remember at our Dia de los Muertos festival, one mother expressed to me that the topic of death was something her family has always avoided, but seeing how other communities celebrate their ancestors instead was something she wanted to start practicing in her own family. I think that's the magic that happens at our museum.

Thank you to DCLA and the City Council for your support. Special thanks to Council Members Chi Ossé, Crystal Hudson, Shahana Hanif, and Rita Joseph for their participation at BCM's cultural festivals. I have calendars of BCM's spring cultural festivals with me today, and we are delighted to have Council Members join us for any event.

Good Morning, Chair Ossé and Committee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nikiesha Hamilton, and I am the Founder and CEO of Afeni Creative Studios. I am a West Indian-American with parents from Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago.

I came to discuss the importance of investing into the Carnival sector and its impact on immigrant communities. As we know, New York Caribbean Carnival happens every Labor Day weekend, and according to a study done in the early 2000s, it generated approximately \$300 million a year. Carnival, an industry created by immigrants, is an industry that impacts almost every type of business you can think of. From micro entrepreneurs, to beauty, to transportation, Carnival generates millions for the local to global economy within 4 days. We need more support from the city to sustain and develop our sector, and support Caribbean cultural organizations as they work to diversify streams of income to preserve and develop Caribbean culture.

The Carnival industry does culture preservation and celebration, job generation, tourism marketing, foreign exchange earnings and wealth creation. **Carnival is a multibillion dollar industry.** According to the Inter-American Development Bank, between Latin America & the Caribbean only, Carnival generates \$125 Billion. Every city that hosts a carnival makes at least \$100 million in 5-12 days, with a cost to the city of less than 10% of the revenue generated. Most cities invest \$2 million dollars or less in carnival, which pales in comparison to how much money Carnival generates for a city. Here is how much cities generate:

- Rio De Janeiro makes (\$1 Billion)
- New Orleans makes (\$1 Billion)
- Toronto makes (\$250 Million) and
- Miami makes (\$130 Million)

These particular cities have made concentrated efforts in sustainably developing the market through fiscal investment and resources, and in turn, carnival became the largest economic generator or tourist attraction in their regions.

It also creates a channel for the government to collect extra tax revenue from permits, transportation fees, hotel and airport taxes, which can be used to finance improvements to public infrastructure, schools, housing and public safety. Since New York has one of the largest and most diverse Caribbean communities outside of the Caribbean, New York City can lead the Carnival industry building international trade relations with Caribbean Diaspora around the world, and develop ways we can make Carnival environmentally sustainable.

New York City is currently losing its stature in regards to Caribbean Carnival. Many carnival bands are leaving, folks rather travel to other cities to spend money and participate in carnival. This means that we are losing revenue. It is understood that opposition to funding carnival would

be due to the City and State facing budget cuts and inflation, so opponents may argue that money that invested in carnival should be reallocated. The Carnival sector is one of the few multi-billion dollar industries that was created and still non-white led, and directly and indirectly impacts NYC communities of color local economies. Lack of fiscal investment into Carnival restricts the Caribbean community's rich cultural expression and devastates the local economy.

The economic impact of the creative production of Carnival is sporadic, inconsistent, under-developed and often unrealized. The City should be generating annual or bi-annual reports to track the progress of carnival, conducting research on how other cities' carnivals are structured, and investing into Carnival. As the City and State grapple with finding new streams of revenue, let's double down on things we know work, Carnival and the cultural organizations that support this industry.

Thank you!

City Council Testimony - January 12, 2023
Presented by Liz Koch, Producer, Brooklyn Book Festival

The Brooklyn Book Festival was launched in 2006 to address the need for a free, major literary event that embraced the diverse constituencies of New York City. We established our credo “hip, smart, diverse and inclusive as part of our mission statement and those words guide us each year in creating a festival that is forward thinking and inclusive and that very much includes international authors, programming and outreach to immigrant communities.

Today, the Brooklyn Book Festival remains true to that goal and has grown to include Festival Day with more than 300 authors presented in panel discussions, a celebratory Children’s Day with a picture book stage, young readers stage, bi-lingual programming and interactive events with authors throughout the day. We also present a Virtual Festival Day and 9-days of literary events that take place in all 5 boroughs. We are committed to presenting both in person and virtual programs as Covid-19 taught us the importance of reaching and including audiences that cannot attend in person. Importantly, it also allows us to be more inclusive of authors from across the globe, who could not travel to NYC for the Festival.

Our international programming has a number of goals: providing immigrant communities with the opportunity to experience and celebrate their literary culture; fostering a shared understanding among the audiences as they experience discussions and readings by these authors and hear of the experiences that inspired their writing; bringing international literary events to diverse communities in all five boroughs; and exposing New York City children at a young age to writers and illustrators who represent varied cultures and ethnicities, to open their eyes and ears to books that reflect a different viewpoint and different world from their everyday experience.

Support from the city council has been so important in achieving these goals through discretionary funding and Cultural Immigrant Initiative Funding. Costs for interpreters, translated material, travel, and promotion are high but necessary for us to have outreach and presentations. As an example, since our first virtual programs in 2020, hundreds of viewers have tuned into programs presented in Spanish.

The Festival advertises in Caribbean Life, El Diario, Harlem Times, News India Times, Our Town, the Amsterdam News, as well as general media such as WNYC and others. But advertising only goes so far – we work with organizations such as **New Women New Yorkers**, community colleges, senior centers, and each year we reach out to all city council member offices to further help us reach your communities. The Festival also collaborates with cultural partners including the Asian American Writers Workshop, the Brooklyn, New York and Queens



January 12, 2022

Joint Committee Hearing
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Committee on Immigration

My name is Leticia Cortes, and I am the Youth and Family Advocate at People's Theatre Project, or PTP. Thank you to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations and the Committee on Immigration for having us here today.

Rooted in Washington Heights and Inwood, **People's Theatre Project** makes theatre with and for immigrant communities to build a more just and equitable world. PTP is Manhattan's largest performing arts organization north of Harlem. Through ensemble-based, multilingual and multigenerational programming, PTP's unique brand of theatre is a powerful artistic platform for immigrants and members of the Latine, Black, and Queer communities.

Through the theater-making process at PTP, we give immigrant youth the tools to tell their own stories—to be empowered by their identities, become stronger leaders and champions for their communities. But our work does not stop there. We also take care of our immigrant families by monitoring their needs in areas such as housing, food insecurity, legal services, and mental health. As the Youth & Family Advocate, I support the psychosocial health and physical needs of our young artists and their families through trustful relationships and by building systems to assess their needs and connect them with community resources.

We believe art must go hand in hand with holistic care. Yet, we see how arts and culture continue to be under-funded in our communities. Time and time again, data shows that cultural assets in neighborhoods lead to increased community safety, better outcomes in education, aging and mental health, and decreased youth involvement in the criminal justice system.

There is a strong need for immigrant centered cultural spaces, especially when less than 6% of NYC theaters are BIPOC owned. Additionally, despite the Latine community making up almost 30% of NYC's population, Latine artists hold less than 5% of roles and wrote less than 1% of the plays produced. **At PTP, we are honored to be partnering with the City to build its first immigrant theater, located in Inwood, home to the city's largest immigrant group.** Culturally responsive art, theater and music can be transformative and **investing spaces that do this will help make NYC a more welcoming home for new New Yorkers:** because seeing our stories and listening to our languages on stage matters. **Representation matters.**

Art is a human right and it needs to be accessible for all. With your advocacy and leadership we can achieve this. Gracias.



Testimony for the 01.12.23 Hearing of the Dept. of Cultural Affairs and The Dept. of Immigrant Affairs: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts.

From the Green-Wood Historic Fund (the 501c3 organization of Green-Wood Cemetery.)

Good morning and hello again Chair Ossé, my name is Lisa Alpert and I am representing The Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to this important topic.

Here's what we want you to know. Green-Wood is, yes, a working cemetery, but it's also a 478-acre outdoor multi-use space. We host over 300 public programs a year – which is a pretty big eye opener for most people. Over 300 programs onsite every year. We share your vision that our city's immigrant communities deserve arts programming that is original, authentic, and that offers opportunities for connection to cultures – cultural practices people are bringing with them and cultural practices they are coming into in their new homes. We want Green-Wood to be on your radar.

Here's a great example – our annual Dia de los Muertos family event. Every November 1st, those who celebrate the holiday come for music, dancing, food, crafts, and of course beautiful ofrendas, or altars, to those we have lost. I really wish you could have been there last fall. We had over 600 kids, parents, and community members, including mariachi bands, Mexican dancers, and we had amazing tamales – all from Sunset Park. Our very own councilmember Alexa Aviles was there and brought her entire staff to the event. It was just a great day and a beautiful celebration of Mexican culture in Sunset Park.

Beyond Day of the Dead, one of our most popular school programs is about immigrants who made their mark on this city. School-aged children, mostly from Title I schools, learn about immigration history at Green-Wood in a totally unique and moving way. This is learning that sticks – programming that affects hearts and minds.

This is just a tiny sliver of what we do. We know you want New York's cultural institutions to do more, to innovate, and to make space for the creative expression of our immigrant neighbors. We are here for you – and for our newest New Yorkers – throughout the year. Thanks so much.

Lisa Alpert

Senior Vice President of Development and Programming

Green-Wood

718-210-3011, lisa_alpert@green-wood.com

library systems, the National Book Foundation, Pen America, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and many others. This collaboration is crucial and I genuinely thank your staff for sharing information about the Festival.

On Children's Day, families enjoy a full day of readings, workshops, performances, book signings, and art projects with favorite authors and illustrators. The goal for Children's day is to celebrate childhood reading as an act of love and a learning adventure – parents and guardians reading to children and children and getting excited and connecting with books. In keeping with the Festival's credo “hip, smart, diverse,” we seek to give children the opportunity to hear and experience diverse and international literary voices.

Citywide Bookend events have taken place in all five boroughs in collaboration with venues and organizations in dozens of council districts throughout the city. These literary events are presented in partnership with cultural partners and include parties, literary trivia, books-to-movies screenings, performances, spirited discussions and more. Events are presented in bookstores, clubs, libraries, cultural organizations and performance spaces to collectively create a literary celebration in all five boroughs including – a couple examples are Long Memoried Woman – An Evening with Caribbean Women Writers at the Dreiser Community Center in the Bronx, “On Writing, Immigration and Belonging” with Rumaan Alam, Nicole Dennis-Benn, Garnette Cadogen, Rigoberto Gonzalez and Porochista Khakpour in Brooklyn and a virtual program on Uyghur poets in exile.

Here are some examples of the countries whose authors have been represented at the Festival:

Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Jamaica, Trinidad, Russia, France, Brazil, India, Cameroon, *Pakistan, China*, Kenya, Japan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Haiti, Australia, Rwanda, among dozens of others.

City council support has been critical to allowing the Festival to expand to truly represent the immigrant communities of NYC in its 9-day Festival. We welcome you to be in touch with us if you have community groups in your district with whom we can collaborate more closely to include their constituents. Thank you.



Candice Anderson
Executive Director
Cool Culture
canderson@coolculture.org
January 12, 2023

My name is Candice Anderson, Executive Director of Cool Culture. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Cool Culture, and the community of 50,000 families that access the city's rich cultural resources through our arts and cultural programs.

Cool Culture is a social justice organization that uses arts and culture to strengthen family and community wellbeing. **With 20 years of BIPOC leadership, Cool Culture was founded to correct the historic disparities in how (and which) communities are able to access cultural resources needed to ensure they can engage individually and collectively in creative practice.** Today, our mission is to amplify the voices of families and strengthen the power of historically marginalized communities through engagement with art and culture, both within cultural institutions and beyond.

Cool Culture strengthens family and community wellbeing by building cross-cultural understanding, a movement for social change, and a more equitable city through arts and culture. Our staff of 14 Cool Culture team members are Latinx, Native, Black, East- and South Asian American, LGBTQ+ and allies. We are mothers, brothers, sisters, aunties and uncles, educators, policy makers, artists and authors who build arts and cultural programs in partnership with our community of families, educators, artists and museum staff. Cool Culture's community is consists of:

- **50,000 families**, who reflect the cultural diversity of our nation. 83% of our families are BIPOC. 47% speak a primary language other than English. The majority face economic injustice.¹
- **Over 1,000 educators** and administrators from over **450 schools, early learning programs**, and community based organizations.
- **Hundreds of cultural workers**, museum administrators, artists, and scientists from **90 of NYC's most celebrated museums**, historical societies, botanical gardens, and zoos.

I would like to thank the Committee on Cultural Affairs Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, and Chi A. Ossé, Chair; and the Committee on Immigration, and Shahana Hanif, Chair; and its members for the opportunity to provide you with some insight into Cool Culture's work to address the needs of BIPOC children and families throughout the five boroughs; to share our best practices and successes; and to speak to how **cultural equity and equitable access to arts and cultural resources are essential to thriving communities, and to healing and recovery from the intersecting impacts of systemic racism and the pandemic.**

¹ Most families have incomes at 200% of the poverty line or below, and all have a child enrolled in one of NYC's subsidized Child Care, Head Start and UPK Centers, or enrolled in grades PreK or K in a NYC Title I Public School.

THE NEED FOR CULTURAL EQUITY & ACCESS

A Fraying American Social Fabric, Systemic Racism and Its Devastating Impacts: An Historic Challenge In Need of Immediate Action

We are currently bearing witness to powerful cultural shifts which manifest themselves as virulent xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, increased anti-Asian violence, and the renewal of entrenched cultural narratives, and policies that reproduce inequality threaten the rights, safety and wellbeing of BIPOC, and new New Yorkers broadly.

In the midst of these cultural shifts, **New York City has adopted sanctuary policies, which under the Adams Administration, includes Project Open Arms, and which plans to support families seeking asylum, including providing families and children with access to education, mental health and social services. This multi-agency collaboration** includes the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Department of Education, and the Department of Social Services, and **this and similar cultural initiatives should be expanded to include the Department of Cultural Affairs.**

More broadly, **efforts to support the wellbeing of new New Yorkers (immigrants) and BIPOC communities should ensure equitable access to cultural funding for New Yorkers who represent almost 30% and 75% of the population of NYC respectively.**

The reality is that BIPOC and immigrant communities are still reeling from **hardships exacerbated by the pandemic. And these hardships are most frequently met by the many creative responses we have generated from our own cultural practices and artistic traditions; and the networks, organizations and institutions we have created.**

Unfortunately, **these organizations and institutions lack adequate funding to fully realize solutions to the challenges faced by BIPOC communities.**

A Chicago-based study commissioned by The MacArthur Foundation examined the relationship between the arts and neighborhood capacity and community life found that **initiatives led by small arts organizations connected to local social networks significantly impact the wellbeing of communities.** They provide: access to new and existing resources to be shared by residents, opportunities to learn new skills, a gathering space for residents of differing socioeconomic status, and for cross cultural dialogue and a structure for meaningful social interaction and to build positive social relationships.²

While initiatives like IDNYC make free access to cultural institutions possible, at Cool Culture, our 20 year experience with providing free access to 50,000 families through the Cool Culture Family Pass, we know that free admission must be coupled with programs like those run by Cool Culture, and other BIPOC and immigrant led organizations, that bring resources to BIPOC children and families to engage in arts and culture locally.

Cool Culture urges the City Council and the Administration to:

[Build on the CreateNYC's Plan to Create More Equitable Cultural Funding](#)

- **Revisit and radically reimagine the existing antiquated funding model so that DCLA and the administration play an active role in redressing historic inequities in government funding, and to support BIPOC organizations that play essential roles in their communities. The city's antiquated model of funding the arts was**

² [Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefit Neighborhoods](#), MacArthur Foundation, Diane Grams and Michael Warr, 2003.

established in the 1800s, and has perpetuated and reinforced racial inequities in who has access to cultural resources; and far more bold action is needed to address the extreme disparities it has reinforced.

- Increasing funding for Arts and Culture by dedicating 1% of the NYC budget to the Arts Sector
 - The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) and private philanthropy should immediately amass and distribute a fund of \$100M to BIPOC organizations
 - Create a baseline budget item for BIPOC arts entities with guaranteed support in the annual budget every year, in the same way the CIG is a baseline budget item.
- **Establish a clear system of reporting progress towards goals outlined in the CreateNYC Plan, with priority given to equity and access goals.** In the process of creating the first-ever CreateNYC Cultural Plan, tens of thousands of New Yorkers named cultural equity and inclusion as their top priorities and expressed a desire to access culture within their own neighborhoods.³ At the time of its publishing, the largest 139 NYC cultural groups received 82 percent of all revenue (public and private), while 1,807 with budgets under \$1 million received 6 percent.⁴ **A clear, concise set of publicly reported data on progress towards equity and access goals is needed to understand progress towards goals rectifying historic inequities. With emphasis placed on marginalized, BIPOC and immigrant communities.**

Invest in Capacity

- **Increase DCLA staffing and funding** to provide the agency with the bandwidth to provide assistance to funding applicants and grantees, to coordinate and direct funds that will support access to cultural resources for immigrant and BIPOC communities, and to allow for more transparency in the funding process as well as initiatives such as Project Open Arms.
- **Support BIPOC organizations by ensuring that the CUNY Cultural Corps emphasizes placements in BIPOC led organizations.** Historically, cuts to funding for this important program have resulted in preference given to larger cultural institutions, with greater resources.
 - Further, the City should build on the NYC Cultural Corps model by funding paid internships and fellowships at BIPOC arts entities—in partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY), State University of New York (SUNY), and other local diverse colleges, universities, and high schools.
- **Reduce delays in funding release** by changing the 80% threshold for NY City Council Member allocations. 80% of council members need to submit their allocations before money moves to DCLA. Delayed funding is particularly harmful for smaller groups without capacity to spend money executing programs and wait for reimbursement.

We strongly urge you to ensure the necessary support for arts and culture and to include the priorities of cultural organizations, particularly BIPOC-led institutions that have deep relationships with historically marginalized communities in New York City. This support will

³ [Create NYC a Cultural Plan for All New Yorkers, 2017.](#)

⁴ [Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy](#), Helicon Collaborative, July 2017

⁵ Research conducted by The Social Impact of the Arts Project found 4,700 nonprofit cultural programs in NYC. [The Social Wellbeing of New York City's Neighborhoods: The Contribution of Culture and the Arts, 2017.](#)

enable Cool Culture and other arts and culture community members to continue providing critical programs as many communities struggle through the city's recovery phase.

And finally, **we applaud the Resolution 331-A recognizing Lunar New Year as an annual school holiday and as an official holiday in the City of New York.** Opportunities for BIPOC communities to share their artistic practices, and for New Yorkers to honor the diversity of the City's cultures and traditions - including Lunar New Year traditions - provide opportunities to build a cross-cultural understanding that can strengthen NYC's social fabric, during a time of extreme division.

COOL CULTURE'S ROLE



Health + Wellbeing through the Arts: *We Are A Work of Art*

The pandemic has both shed a light, and exacerbated long standing structural issues and oppression. Cool Culture's ***We Are A Work of Art: Health + Wellbeing Initiative*** is an ongoing community dialogue, series of gatherings and informational campaign that supports wellbeing among families. Family Festivals, artmaking events and

activations feature BIPOC artists and health practitioners. Gatherings and resources highlight ancestral and western wellness practices to ensure that information about vaccinations comes from trusted sources. Activities are co-designed with museums, educators, families and other community stakeholders.

Art Access and Cultural Equity: *CityWide Cultural Access Program*

Cool Culture's ***Citywide Cultural Access Program*** ("CityWide") connects families and NYC's cultural institutions. The largest program of its kind in the country, we facilitate a network of 450 Title I Schools and early childhood centers, and 50,000+ member families who enjoy free access to 90+ museums, historical societies, science centers, botanic gardens, and zoos. CityWide families make over 180,000 museum visits each year across the city. Multilingual resources support engagement with arts and culture at home and in the community. In response to requests from families and museum partners, we are in the early stages of designing a **Cool Culture Digital Platform**. A tool to support, complement, and organize in-person creative gatherings and community building. Long-term, the goal is to reform publicly funded institutions so that they work in service of BIPOC communities and families.

Culturally Competent Family Engagement & Early Education through the Arts

Cool Culture's ***We Are All Curators*** initiative brings families, educators, teaching artists and cultural workers together to create new practices that support equity in schools, museums and communities.



- ***Curators for Educators*** is a seminar series and peer exchange that supports educators to create equitable learning environments. It also prepares educators to discuss the real world issues that shape the lives of young children and families.
- ***Curators for Families*** is a place-based initiative that builds community among families with young children. Families, educators, teaching artists and museum staff co-create projects that include experiences in galleries, art making, storytelling and curation of exhibits that center community priorities.



January 12, 2023

Thank you to the committee members for hearing my testimony today as a representative of Dance Parade, Inc.

My name is Carlye Eckert and I'm the Community Engagement Director for Dance Parade, New York City's largest dance event and a dance education provider to two dozen schools and community centers. As our events are a "United Nations of Dance" we present and employ thousands of immigrants, who are a cornerstone of the artists and audiences we serve which is why we think today's testimony is so important. This year, on May 20th we will hold the 17th Annual Dance Parade and Festival in NYC. We believe that live performance has the potential to awaken a communal human experience and helps build a more equitable and vibrant society.

My responsibilities are to coordinate year round dance education outreach in schools and community centers across the boroughs which culminate in the Annual Dance Parade down Sixth Avenue and across Saint Marks to the culminating Festival in Tompkins Square Park.

Our mission is to celebrate diversity, inclusion, and cultural equity through the promotion of dance in all its forms. We foster DIVERSITY by recruiting over 100 unique styles of cultural dance to be presented in the dance parade every year. We foster INCLUSION by making Dance Parade a participatory parade for each and every person who wants to be involved. We demonstrate CULTURAL EQUITY by respecting and promoting all cultural, socio-economic, genders, identities, and political affiliations.

Throughout the year, we serve the dance community by employing scores of teaching and performing artists, of which 94% are BIPOC artists and immigrants. And through our programs, we reach over 150,000 New Yorkers each year. Through donor and board support, Dance Parade has created a Marginalized Community Fund to support the increased participation of Black, African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Central and South American peoples, and People with Disabilities in the Parade and DanceFest through free registration, audio rentals, parade floats, festival booths, and performance stipends of \$1-\$2K.

In 2023, Dance Parade's Community Engagement Programs, will work closely with public schools across the five boroughs to bring dance education programs to K-12 students exposing them to cultural forms of dance study, and giving them the opportunity to participate on a global stage at the Parade & Festival. Thanks to the work and partnerships in our city that we have developed over the last 17 years, our programming also extends to older adult centers in immigrant communities such as Corona, Bayside Queens, and Parkchester Bronx where we offer joyful physical activity that supports coordination, improved circulation, honors life experiences, and strengthens connections between older Americans, their culture, and the vibrant NYC arts community.

Through continued efforts, we pledge to continue our work of bringing the joy of dance in all its forms to New Yorkers and to help strengthen the visible presence of dance and culture in our city. We are grateful to the City Council for financial support as well as the New York State Council on the Arts, The National Endowment on the Arts and Spectrum News NY1 who we are working with to one day telecast the parade live on television.



We are grateful for the Council's effort for recognizing the importance of immigrants' artistic and cultural contributions which make the City of New York so special and for the support of involving these communities in continuing to shape the city's arts sector.
Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carlye Eckert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Carlye Eckert
Community Engagement Director

Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations: [Oversight Hearing on NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts](#)

Submitted to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations on January 12, 2023.

Prepared by Dance/NYC

Presented by Milena Luna, Interim Executive Director

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC ([dance.nyc](#)), a service organization that represents over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, 500 non-profit dance companies, and the many for-profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area. Its areas of service are of special benefit to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color), immigrant, disabled, low-income and small budget dance workers.

Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines to acknowledge and celebrate the important contributions of immigrant communities to arts and culture in NYC and reiterate the ways that the artistry of this community must continue to be supported.

Dance/NYC supports both [Res 0424-2022](#) and [Res 0331-2022](#) that have been proposed by Council Members Sandra Ung and Christopher Marte, respectively, to recognize Lunar New Year as a school and official New York City holiday.

Immigrant New Yorkers are deeply and historically embedded in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of our city. Immigrant New Yorkers are a major economic force in New York City and their contribution is vital to the city's economic health. According to data from the [Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs \(MOIA\)](#), immigrants comprise 36% of New York City's total population and 43% of its workforce, own half of the city's businesses, and in 2019 alone, contributed an estimated \$244 billion to the city's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 23% of the city's GDP. The [American Immigration Council](#) estimated that in 2018, immigrant-led households in New York paid \$35.4 billion in federal taxes and \$21.8 billion in state and local taxes.

Immigrant artists are a cultural force that fuel the city's creative energy, pushing technical and creative boundaries, preserving cultural heritage, and helping anchor New York City's global leadership in contemporary arts and culture. Immigrant artists comprise [a growing share of the city's artists](#) - an estimated 50,964 in 2018, a 69% increase from 1990. In 2021, immigrants accounted for nearly one-third of all artists in New York City, helping drive the growth and

success of the arts and culture sector in the city. Immigrant artists often play multiple roles, their contribution to the city extending far beyond their individual works. They serve as anchors in their communities, mentors to the next generation, and as leaders in arts and cultural organizations serving immigrant communities and facilitating community engagement and cross-cultural conversations. A [Dance/NYC's study](#) shows that the immigrant dance workforce is ethnically and racially diverse, that immigrant dance workers are investing in their communities as leaders, activists and healers, and are innovating new models, challenging traditional rules of dance and tackling pressing social and political issues of our times. Other Dance/NYC demographic findings, include:

- The majority of the immigrant dance workforce (71%) identified as first generation immigrants with almost half of respondents (44%) having been based in the United States for more than 15 years.
- The majority of immigrant respondents (68%) is based outside Manhattan.
- The immigrant dance workforce skews young, with 60% of respondents being Millennials and 26% belonging to Generation X.
- The immigrant dance workforce skews female, outpacing the City's foreign born population that identifies as female (53%).
- The percentage of the immigrant dance workforce identifying as LGBTQ+ is substantial at 19%.
- The majority of the immigrant dance workforce is working predominantly outside the nonprofit structure, with 40% working as an independently/privately financed artist or group and 17% working as a fiscally sponsored artist or group.
- The overwhelming majority of the immigrant dance workforce indicated working in disciplines in addition to dance (88% working across an average of 1.89 other disciplines) and in multiple roles in the dance field (87% working an average of 3.5 roles).

Despite their tremendous output and significant contributions, immigrant New Yorkers continue to face socio-economic inequities and significant barriers to full inclusion.

Immigrant New Yorkers continue to experience [higher poverty rates](#) despite working more hours and participating in the labor force at the same or greater rate than US-born New Yorkers. The higher poverty rate among immigrant New Yorkers can be attributed, in part, to the fact that [median income](#) varies significantly based on immigration status - the average median earnings for immigrant workers is \$38,200 compared to \$52,500 for US-born New Yorkers. In addition to disparity in pay and median earnings, immigrant workers experience persistent gaps in access to health insurance coverage and other work-related benefits. This disparity in median earnings is reflected in a [2020 study by the Center for an Urban Future](#)

showing that immigrant artists in New York City made nearly \$15,000 less than their US-born counterparts, leaving them with less time for artistic pursuits in their daily struggle to survive.

Immigrant artists in New York City face distinct and additional challenges. Immigrant artists struggle to get attention from funders, mainstream media, and presenters, which hinders their ability to build an audience and get mainstream recognition. Immigrant artists also struggle to get paid fairly - a [Dance/NYC 2019 study](#) finds that 22% of immigrant dance workforce reported not receiving any income for dance-related work that they do, feel undervalued in their contributions to our city, and encounter several other legal and societal barriers to accomplishing their work. The immigrant dance workforce ranked **affordable presentation space** and **living wages** as their highest needs, followed by **affordable development space**, **affordable healthcare**, and **affordable living space**, and **affordable legal assistance**, among others. The large majority of immigrant-serving arts organizations do not own their space, making them more vulnerable to perpetual rent hikes and real estate crunch.

[Differential access to funding](#) is a persistent and structural barrier for many. Immigrant artists and immigrant-serving arts organizations earn 14 times less in programming revenues and receive 6 times less in corporate funding. They are more dependent on public funding but receive far less than their counterparts. A comparison of DCLA per capita spending on arts and culture demonstrates the stark difference: \$15.37 in Manhattan compared to \$0.74 spending in ten neighborhoods with the largest concentration of immigrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and made stark persistent structural, institutional racism and pre-existing socio-economic inequities in the city. A [2020 MOIA study](#) shows that while immigrant New Yorkers made up over 50% of the frontline workers providing critical medical care and essential services to the public that kept the city going at the height of the pandemic, communities in the city with significant concentration of immigrants experienced 20% higher case rate and 40% higher death rate from COVID-19 than citywide averages while they faced barriers to accessing health insurance and being shut out of pandemic relief services due to their immigration status.

Immigrant artists and immigrant-serving arts organizations have been hit especially hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that ensued. A [COVID-19 Impact Study by Dance/NYC](#) shows immigrant dance workers reporting a 45% average decrease in annual income between 2019 and 2020 as compared to 33% of US-born dance workers. In particular, disabled, African, Latina/o/x, Asian, Arab, and Native American (ALAANA), immigrant, and older individual dance workers, as well as dance workers who are also parents and dance

workers living in the Bronx, have been disproportionately impacted. Thirty-two percent (32%) of immigrant dance workers needed medical health care coverage as compared to the 15% of those born in the US. Immigrant-led and immigrant-serving arts organizations have reported [revenue losses amounting to 50% or more of their annual budgets](#), a fiscal hardship that many may not be able to recover from.

In times of hardship there is a reason for optimism: Dance [by immigrant artists] is important. It is our legacy beyond frontiers.

- Christopher Núñez, a visually impaired choreographer, dramaturg, educator and disability advocate based in NYC
(Excerpt from “Dancing in the Shadows of Invisibility,” an essay by Christopher Núñez in [Dance/NYC \(2019\): Advancing Immigrant Dance Arts](#).)

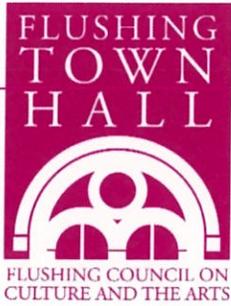
Dance/NYC is committed to advancing justice, equity, and inclusion in the arts and culture sector and we offer the following recommendations for the city government and public agencies to foster the **inclusion, integration, and human rights** of immigrant dance artists, cultural workers, and communities:

- First and foremost, invest in immigrant organizations, programs, and projects:
 - Develop immigrant-specific programs by both arts funding initiatives and project funding initiatives: for example, production support for dance addressing immigrant rights, and general support initiatives;
 - Integrate immigrant matters as a funding priority in existing arts portfolios;
 - Expand purview of funding to ensure small-budget groups, fiscally sponsored projects, independent artists, and unincorporated groups that are immigrant-led or are meaningfully integrating immigrants are served.
- Remove restrictions to funding sources based on immigrant status and, if not possible, provide transparent information on eligibility of noncitizen applicants.
- Support immigrant artists and organizations in identifying and accessing funding by expanding technical assistance and training and offering materials in multilingual content.
- Expand arts education programs and strengthen partnerships between immigrant-led arts organizations and city schools. Artistic practices, such as dance, teaches many lessons that support learning, such as empathy, tenacity, communication, and inquiry. Dance education can be an incentive for students to do well in their academic classes.

By giving immigrant students access to dance education, the DOE supports their core mission to educate young people.

- Expand legal and resource assistance programs to support immigrant artists and arts organizations.
- NYC Council should pass both [Res 0424-2022](#) and [Res 0331-2022](#) that have been proposed by Council Members Sandra Ung and Christopher Marte, respectively, to recognize Lunar New Year as a school and official New York City holiday to recognize and honor the contributions and impact of Asian Americans communities to our city's culture and economy.

Immigrants helped build and continue to shape New York City as the global economic and cultural force that it is today. Dance/NYC calls on the City to do its part to ensure that immigrant artists and cultural workers continue to thrive here.



Sami Abu Shumays, Deputy Director, Flushing Town Hall
Testimony before the NYC Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup
Relations, Jointly with the Committee on Immigration
Thursday, January 12, 2023, 10am

Ellen Kodadek
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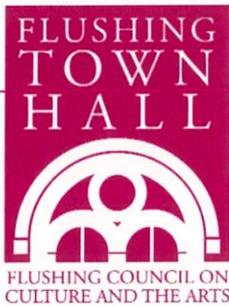
“NYC’s Immigrant Communities and the Arts”

Dear Chairs and members of the committees – Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

At **Flushing Town Hall**, we have been serving the immigrant communities of Queens with culturally-relevant arts programming for 44 years, since our founding in 1979 as the **Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts**, with an explicit mission to promote and present the arts of immigrant communities and to foster “Intercultural exchange.” I am here to speak about the strategies we have used for these last four and a half decades to serve these communities most effectively.

1. First, **Programming**. A majority of our presentations are immigrant arts and cultural forms – world music and dance, visual arts and crafts, and more. We present local immigrant artists on our stage and in our galleries, and international touring artists who represent the communities we serve. We don’t simply present mainstream European/American arts and cultural forms, we elevate the cultures around us, and seek to place them on the same level as what others consider mainstream, seeking to integrate diverse communities. Our programs in schools and senior centers enable students and seniors to see themselves reflected by the artists and artforms we offer. And through our re-granting program we uplift immigrant artists and arts organizations, helping them to reach new audiences in their own communities and beyond.
2. Second, **Staffing**. Many of our staff come from the communities we serve, but beyond that we have many staff with expertise in the arts and cultural forms of diverse communities; education, arts services, and community outreach staff with experience working with diverse groups of people. We have a diverse board (by NYC standards), but we’re constantly seeking to diversify it so that the communities we serve have representation in our leadership.
3. Third, **Marketing**. We utilize multi-lingual marketing, translate our press releases, place advertisements and listings in local ethnic press. We have marketing and community outreach staff who understand the best sources to go to inform the diverse communities around us of our offerings.
4. Fourth, **Partnerships**. We develop long-terms partnerships with organizations both smaller and larger than us to deepen our reach into different communities. Partnerships with local groups like the Kunqu Chinese Opera Society, the Afro-Garifuna Jazz Ensemble, or the Matinecock Tribal Nation help us reach into specific communities, while larger organizations like Carnegie Hall and Queens College help to expand our capacity.

*Flushing Town Hall (1862) is a New York City landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
In 1996 the facility became an officially designated cultural institution in the City of New York.*



NYC Council Testimony 1/12/2023, p.2

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5. Fifth, **Cross-Cultural Collaboration.** One of the things we've learned over decades of presenting culturally-specific work, is that often, immigrant residents – especially first generation immigrants – may not have much interest in the arts and cultures of their neighbors from different countries or who speak different languages. We've even found that intercultural prejudices and conflicts can remain in immigrant communities. So we've utilized the strategy of presenting cross-cultural work to bring diverse groups into the room together to witness and uplift each other. We feel this is a necessary part of our role as a cultural anchor, because different immigrant communities live next to each other, and share common goals and struggles here in New York City.

6. Sixth, **Proximity.** Being located in or close to the neighborhoods and communities we serve impacts every aspect I've discussed above – a fact backed up by the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP). Our proximity enables local audiences and artists to feel welcomed and comfortable, and in their element. It draws staff and artists who have familiarity with the communities around us. It keeps us on the ground long-term, giving us a deeper understanding of which organizations and media outlets will make the most effective partners. It puts us in the middle of the whole mix, good and bad, forcing us to confront the same issues that the communities themselves face. We are a part of the communities we serve in Queens.

We have evolved these strategies over the course of decades of dedicated work, and they reflect the depth of our commitment to working as closely as we can with diverse communities and artists. I happily share these strategies with you all, because I know that other organizations seeking to work with immigrant populations can benefit from our experience.

We applaud all of you – city council members and other arts organizations – who strive to serve immigrant communities through the arts. Thank you very much for your time and attention.



CELEBRATING THE JOY OF DANCING ON ICE

January 12, 2023

62 Chelsea Piers, Suite 308
New York, NY 10011
212-929-5811
212-929-0105 (FAX)
www.icetheatre.org
itny@icetheatre.org

Re: New York City Council Hearing – Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations – Immigrant communities - written testimony

Dear Members of the City Council:

I am submitting this testimony as Executive Director of Ice Theatre of New York, Inc. ® to highlight the contributions of the non-profit arts sector – in particular to immigrant communities - and in support of continued robust funding for the arts.

ITNY's mission is to celebrate and advance dance on ice as a performance art. Through its performances in both traditional and site-specific venues, ITNY presents ice dance that helps to open one's eyes to seeing skating in new and unexpected ways. ITNY was the very first ice dance company to receive dance program funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

ITNY offers four types of programming:

- Creative performances of dancing on ice by our professional ensemble, guest artists and apprentices at our home rink at Chelsea Piers (ticketed) and at multiple seasonal outdoor skating rinks all around the City; free to the public – annually up to 35 performances.
- Live outreach programming for NYC public school children of underserved schools at rinks for the communities in Harlem, Long Island City and Prospect Park, as well as virtual programming for students city wide - serving up to 1500 students annually.
- Edge classes at Bryant Park and Chelsea Piers for skating professionals and dedicated amateurs – serving up to 100 unique participants.
- Junior Ensemble classes and performances – for young apprentice ice dancers

Immigrant communities and immigrant culture are central to NYC. ITNY's mission is to bring joy with our performances to all our audiences. With our outreach programming we target underserved and immigrant communities attending NYC public schools. We expose the students to a new art form, introduce them to a new sport, which they can practice in their local community, in the winter, outdoors, with great health benefits (physical and mental), as well as introducing them to potential local jobs in a new industry. We offer the "New Works and Young Artists Series," in Brooklyn, Queens and Harlem. We are also still engaging hundreds of children in arts programming virtually citywide.

Founder/Director

Moira North

Executive Director

Jirina Ribbens

Ensemble Director

Elisa Angeli

Outreach Director

Sarah France

Chair

William J Candee IV

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Josef Koudelka

Meredith Monk

Ken Shelley

Atoy Wilson

Our outreach program benefits from NYC Council Discretionary funding in one neighborhood – thank you Council Member Abreu – and we would love to expand that support to all the neighborhoods we serve.

Dancing on ice is a visual spectacle set to music and can be enjoyed by all seeing and hearing spectators, regardless of which language they speak.

In October ITNY invited a young Mexican Ice Artist, Donovan Carrillo, to perform at our Fall Frolic performance. We partnered with the Mexican Consulate and invited various youth groups from Latin-American Cultural organizations citywide to attend for free. We honored Donovan and his coach, Gregorio Nunez, with ITNY's Will Sears Award and the Mexican Cultural Attaché was on hand to present the award. The performance played to 400 attendees and close to 200 Latinos had the opportunity to meet Donovan and his coach after the event. A whole new group of NYC Latino immigrants and residents discovered the fine art of dancing on ice.

"...It was truly pleasure for me to be a part of this gala and I will leave here grateful with my coach who received this big [recognition] for our hard work and passion that we put together to get to our goals and to our big dream that was achieving the Olympics. Thank you very much." -Donovan Carrillo

Ice Theatre of New York commissions choreographers and performance artists to create new works for the company, nurtures emerging artists and celebrates recognized artists and coaches. ITNY explores what is possible with artistic theatrical dance movement on ice. We strive to present beauty and emotion on the ice and stimulate the spectator's imagination.

We continue to collaborate with choreographers from both the dance and skating worlds, while exploring creatively, innovative relationships with artists from theatre, music and new media disciplines.

Our latest project, *The Unseen*, with new media artist LaJuné McMillian took place on synthetic ice at the ONX Studio on Fifth Avenue in Midtown.

During *The Unseen*, visuals - generated by motion-capture by the performer and video manipulation by the artist - were projected on the ice, blending the stories of the future-past. This work explores and discovers Blackness both in the context of race, as well as outside of race. Blackness as invisible (transparent), unknown (unseen), and expansive. Blackness as magic, unbound by colonial markers such as time, gender, race, class, sexuality etc. How do we navigate, and heal by accessing the unseen? How might we honor and channel the stories of our ancestors as an embodied experience, and how can we save that information for generations to come?

This new media piece was made possible in part by ITNY, the New York State Council on the Arts and the MAP Fund. LaJuné McMillian is a member of ONX Studio (www.onx.studio), and initiative of the Onassis Foundation (www.onassis.org) with New Museum's NewINC (www.newinc.org), through the XR Track of NewINC.

ITNY's programming creates activities in ice rinks, urban plazas, black box theaters, and parks; activities we hope inspire people's imagination and make the spaces safer by increasing the foot traffic in those neighborhoods. We create participants and spectators for the rich cultural palate NYC has to offer.

We are grateful for the support we receive from DCLA for our NYC programming, but it is clear that annual support in the amount of \$30,000 applied to all the programming listed above covers only a small fraction of the costs. ITNY is grateful for its private and institutional support, which have sustained it for the past 37 years. However, more robust funding for the arts would allow us and our sector to grow and expand our programming.

Here is a partial list of what increased funding for ITNY would allow it to do:

- Grow – each year we start from scratch – difficult to fundraise for the arts in these times - and make only the most necessary expenditures to fulfill our mission – successfully!
- Expand and deepen our programming – engage more artists for longer and pay them more of a living wage. Currently we are a pick-up company (paying for rehearsals and performance) and do not have the funds to maintain – even a seasonal – work force.
- Expand our outreach programming for NYC public school children – more venues in more diverse neighborhoods, more ice time and maybe buy expensive after-school ice time for an ongoing educational program.
- Pay for health and other benefits. Currently our performers only have Worker's Compensation Insurance and our full-time and part-time staff does not receive any benefits.
- Pay our staff a living wage. Currently our staff relies on additional family income and health insurance.
- Perform in a real performance venue instead of the rink – put ice on the proscenium stage – which we have done successful out-of-town – but venues in NYC are cost-prohibitive.
- Archive all our media materials and make a documentary of 40 years of creating dance on ice as an artform.
- Expand our new media collaboration with LaJuné McMillian and bring it back to the Apollo Theater where Harlem on Ice originated.
- Buy a new sound system for our home rink at Chelsea Piers. Buy portable screen for video projection at that venue.
- Spend more on theatrical lighting for our Home Season and Gala in the spring and add lighting to our Fall indoor performance.
- Have a marketing and advertising budget that allows us to be seen/heard in NYC.
- Rent ongoing rehearsal ice at our home rink – private ice for ensemble rehearsals costs \$350 an hour during the day.
- Rent more ice time for our Home Season performances to allow for more set up time and strike time after each night's performance (hockey goes on soon after). The current limited ice time schedule is already priced at \$22,000.

January 11, 2023
Ice Theatre of New York, Inc.®
Page four

I urge you to continue funding the arts and encourage you to keep increasing the support for this vital sector.

Culture is a small part of NYC's budget that returns great rewards. The DCLA budget, the City Initiatives and the NYC Council Discretionary Funding affect not only our constituents, but also the 40 or so artists we employ every year. These artists add to the health, diversity and dynamism of NYC. Culture is what makes NYC different from most other major cities.

Ice Theatre of New York is looking forward to continuing as part of the essential cultural framework of the City, which generates 110 Billion Dollars in economic activity annually.

"Thank you for maintaining a passion for beauty, art, and the unique sport of figure skating. We are all so fortunate to have skating in our lives and the incredibly dedicated skating family to which we all belong. Congratulations to Moira and the entire Board." -Vera Wang

I thank you very much for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jirina Ribbens', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jirina Ribbens
Executive Director, Ice Theatre of New York, Inc. ®

Hearing: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts

Committee on Immigration; Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

January 12, 2023

Written testimony from Susan Hapgood, Executive Director, International Studio & Curatorial Program

Submitted by email January 13, 2023

Thank you, Committee Chairs and Council Members Chi Ossé and Shahana Hanif, for the opportunity to testify about our city's immigrant communities and the arts.

I am really sorry I couldn't attend today's hearing, because the topic is closely related to everything we do at the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP), where I am executive director. We are the fourth largest arts residency program in the world, embedded in North Brooklyn/Williamsburg, in a neighborhood in the middle of District 34 that is home to Latinx immigrant families, interspersed with light and heavy industry, and a multitude of artists' studios. We are a non-profit organization housed in an old three-story printing factory, and our mission is to support the development of artists and curators from around the world, to introduce New York audiences to exceptional international art practices, and to enrich the appreciation and understanding of contemporary art in Brooklyn, New York City, and beyond. We bring in about 60 artists and curators from countries outside the United States every year to participate for long periods in our programming, from three months up to a year. Our most popular events are the Open Studios—in fact Council Member Jennifer Gutiérrez will be guest speaker at the next Open Studios coming up in the Spring, April 21st, and Council Member Chi Ossé was our guest speaker last year! We have two art gallery spaces with exhibitions of contemporary art on view Monday through Friday, and twice a month there are evening art events. Everything is free and open to the public, and I would estimate that half of our audiences, if not more, are immigrants to this country.

So, who is our community? Who are the people already in ISCP's programs? Wherever ISCP's artists and curators are from, they attract New York City immigrants from those places, who are eager to learn about the latest contemporary art from their home nations. I did a quick fact-check of organized events over the past year and here are the places our lecturers and exhibition artists came from: Albania, Argentina, Cameroon, Canada, Congo, Dominican

Republic, Estonia, Jamaica, Germany, Korea, Luxembourg, Qatar, Norway, Russia, Ukraine, United States and Zimbabwe. There were men, women and non-binary people, people who self-identify as Arab, Asian, Black, Latinx and white. We are super diverse, and our mission is all about the intense cross-fertilizations that take place when accomplished arts professionals converse with one another, nurtured by their immigrant communities. We are deeply invested in international programming that fosters communal, humanitarian and political awareness of the issues that plague us, and likewise shares the joys that sustain us as individuals and radically different cultures. Neighbors are able to drop by on weeknight public programs, to bring their families to weekend Open Studios, without making the long trip into Manhattan's expensive museums. We are the biggest arts non-profit in North Brooklyn, where there is always something great on view.

ISCP has invested significant time and fundraising to work towards providing a level playing field for all, and so we can bring in participants from culturally underfunded areas of the world, and so that all of our participants are receiving adequate financial support while they are here—which means that they are also paying customers throughout our neighborhoods, feeding the local economies around us. We want to be sure they can focus on their work, pay their rent, enjoy the multiple cuisines of the city. We know that New York thrives because of our difference, and the power of the arts to help us understand and respect one another. I say this often, and I really believe it no matter how corny it sounds – artists are truth tellers, meaning makers, visionaries, prophets and dreamers.

Our partnership with City Council is crucial to our strength. In particular I would like to again thank Council Members Gutiérrez and Ossé for coming to ISCP and for their enthusiasm and support. All of ISCP's public programming is funded by City Council District 34, Cultural Immigrant Initiative funding, and the Department of Cultural Affairs. We wouldn't survive without this City government support.

Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations
Testimony submitted on behalf of Intrepid Museum

According to the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, immigrants make up 40 % of New Yorkers and that number grows to 60% if you include the children of immigrants. Keeping arts and cultural experiences accessible to immigrant communities is an imperative. While supporting local community organizations is important, larger New York City cultural institutions have an important role to play in supporting our fellow New Yorkers who are immigrants as well. This is true for arts, culture, history, science or STEM institutions.

At the Intrepid Museum, for example, our mission to educate and inspire is applicable to all New Yorkers including immigrants. While we are a center for history and innovation, arts, design and culture are integrated across our programming to engage all learners. Multi-lingual staff along with education staff members with a background in working with English language learners, as well as multi-lingual teaching artists, work to create relevant, accessible programming for immigrant New Yorkers.

While, like many museums, we offer digital guides and maps for the Museum which can be translated into many languages, we also work to create engaging and important programming across the City. Over the last year, for example, we expanded our Stories Within program for older adults with dementia and their caregivers through borough-based community centers serving immigrant communities. There, teaching artists work with audiences in their own language to use art, dance and music from the historical periods of *Intrepid* to encourage engagement, conversation and memory sharing.

We work with organizations such as Sinergia NY for specific outreach, STEAM and history programming for immigrant families supporting a child with autism.

The City Council-supported Cultural Immigrant Initiative program as realized through the Intrepid Museum, highlights the contributions of immigrants to sea, air and space innovation and history, creating more inclusive and welcoming classrooms. And Language Access funding supported paid multi-lingual interns working to provide translation for programming and translated materials.

We've had longstanding CASA partnerships with schools serving immigrant students such as one with Juan Morell Campos located in Williamsburg, with whom we also had a State Department Museums Connect grant partnering with a museum in Columbia. During that initiative, students collaborated on using arts and science to solve community problems.

Our partner school, PS 51, recently welcomed over 150 recent migrant children from Central and South America. Intrepid Museum Educators prepared and co-taught bilingual lessons to support these students.

Finally the Museum has lowered barriers through its participation in culture pass, providing free entry for all CUNY students, and welcoming EBT card holders and three guests in for free.

Once again, culturally specific, community-based cultural institutions are part of the magic of New York's cultural tapestry, but we urge the City Council to remember that City-wide cultural institutions also have a vital role in welcoming and supporting the newest New Yorkers.

[immigrant communities' contributions to arts and culture](#) in NYC.

The impact and importance of [immigrant communities' contributions to arts and culture](#) in NYC. In order to ensure that immigrant dance artists and cultural workers can thrive, it is imperative that the City invest in immigrant dancemaking, through:

- Developing immigrant-specific programs by both arts and project funding initiatives
- Integrating immigrant matters as a funding priority in existing arts portfolios
- Expanding the purview of funding to ensure small-budget groups, fiscally-sponsored projects, independent artists, and unincorporated groups that are immigrant-led or are meaningfully integrating immigrants are served

KINDING SINDAW HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Dear Committee on Cultural Affairs:

My name is Ryan Morales Green, and I'm the Founder and Executive Director of the Latine Musical Theatre Lab. We're a very young organization, founded in November 2021, that develops and advocates for Latin written musical theatre in order to radically change who gets to tell stories on stages across the country. In our first year as an organization, we've faced a ton of support from our community, as well as the greater arts community in NYC, yet we still continue to face challenges as an organization of color.

The unique group we serve - Latin musical theatre writers - means we work regularly with Latin immigrant groups of all backgrounds. In fact, many of our employees themselves are immigrants. And the majority of struggles we face land in two areas.

First, as a new organization less than two years old, funding pathways, especially through the city, are incredibly limited. Many traditional funding sources require any combination of the following: two years (or more) of programming, 501(c)3 status (which can take 1-2 years for an organization to reach a place where they can obtain this status), or a minimum budget (upwards of \$250,000.) These make survival extremely shaky for young organizations seeking to represent the un-represented and seeking to innovate anywhere within the arts. This means that immigrant and minority run organizations like ours are also surviving on volunteerism from their same communities, and are unable to easily and appropriately compensate their collaborators, which again, are from these same communities.

So this leads to my first ask - more funding to intentionally support organizations in their infancy, until they have time to build up their donor bases and accomplishments, with a focus on organizations like ours that serve the unserved.

In the same vein, there are many things that organizations like ours could benefit from beyond cash flow. Free or discounted spaces for rehearsals and performances, access to free COVID testing to adhere to AEA union testing standards, resources for free or inexpensive printing of scripts and scores, and signal boosting of programs and organizations to attract attention and potential funders to these growing, socially-conscious organizations.

The second struggle we face is access to translation services. We serve a bilingual audience, and by that I mean, we serve an audience with a range of everything from total English fluency and no Spanish fluency, to total Spanish fluency and minimal English fluency - and everything in between. With the nature of our writers - work is often in some arena of Spanglish - meaning we're often required to translate both from English to Spanish AND Spanish to English to truly meet the needs of our audience. Funding and support for tools and services to translate not just programs, but our website, would immensely help our ability to reach our audience equitably.

Another major need for bilingual theatre is the ability to supertitle translations for audiences, to allow them to follow along without staring down at a page in front of them in the dark. This has a long history in the world of opera, and there's a great need to extend the opportunity and use of supertitle technology in presentations of bilingual works for bilingual audiences.

These represent just a small number of needs, and the ones most closely related to our work as strong advocates for immigrant communities and the children of immigrants. Latines make up nearly 30% of the population of this great city, and yet our inclusion in the arts is a

fraction of the number. Just to use a number near and dear to our hearts, Latine musical theatre writers only make up about 1% of all professionally produced musical theatre writers. Our industry isn't creating space for the kinds of stories our organization is championing, and we need support from our city to change that.

Thank you for your time and your work on behalf of our community.

Sincerely,

Ryan Morales Green

Founder & Executive Director, Latine Musical Theatre Lab

Lincoln Center

70 Lincoln Center Plaza, New York, NY 10023-6583 | LincolnCenter.org

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.
Oversight – Immigrant Communities and the Arts
January 12, 2023

Chair Ossé, Chair Hanif and members of the Committees on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations and Immigration, thank you for highlighting the importance of serving immigrant communities through the arts. My name is Eleni DeSiervo, Senior Director of Government Relations at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Created as a place where "the arts are not for the privileged few, but for the many", Lincoln Center was founded with the mission of placing the arts at the center of daily life for ALL New Yorkers. This mission is inclusive of immigrant communities. We believe the arts are an essential part of civic life to reflect and inform the world in a process that is inherently democratic — valuing freedom of expression and an open exchange of ideas.

Whether a newly arrived asylum seeker, a refugee or an immigrant that arrived decades ago, New York City has always been a haven of people from around the world. When St. Ann's Warehouse approached us about Little Amal, the 12-foot-tall Syrian refugee child visiting New York City to raise awareness of the immigration and refugee crises, we emphatically agreed and collaborated with resident organizations.

As a cultural capital it is imperative that the artistic community have spaces to uplift the mosaic of creative contributions in all forms. Lincoln Center has a long history of presenting artists representing immigrant communities globally.

For a recent snapshot:

- The spring 2022 season of Lincoln Center's American Songbook was our first series back on campus indoors since 2020. Titled "A World of Voices," American Songbook showcased nine performers whose diverse global artistic heritage deeply informed their creative expression. These musicians from Honduras, Mexico, India, Guinea, China, Sudan, Venezuela, Tunisia, and Guatemala dazzled with a unique vision in their fields of musical theater, pop, Western and Eastern classical, rock, jazz, and folk.
- Summer for the City culminated with performances by the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra in a call for solidarity with the victims of the war in Ukraine, presented in collaboration with the Metropolitan Opera and the Polish National Opera. They encouraged donations to organizations supporting the resettlement of Ukrainians, such as Welcome.US.
- This Sunday globalFEST, which was founded in 2003 with the mission of breaking down cultural and social boundaries by moving international music to the center of the performing arts field, is doing a takeover of David Geffen Hall. Through strengthening opportunities for artists to reach broader audiences, the festival facilitates a more inclusive cultural sector, a healthier society, and creates more equitable economic opportunities in the arts. The multi-stage event will feature artists from Cambodia, Colombia, Italy, Spain, Haiti, Mexico, Mali and several others in this pioneering global music festival.

Additionally, Lincoln Center has made strides in using the campus as a civic hub by creating new opportunities to offer welcome.

- For the second year, Lincoln Center partnered with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to host a naturalization ceremony. In 2021, two hundred new Americans were led in the oath and this year there were 300 new citizens representing 80 countries. Each of the participants and their family were extended a special invitation to attend the Lincoln Center commissions by the New York Philharmonic and Etienne Charles -- *San Juan Hill: A New York Story* -- for the opening of David Geffen Hall.
- Over the holidays, we coordinated with Catholic Charities, Immigrant Arc, and other community-based partners to offer 500 free tickets to the Big Apple Circus for recently arrived asylum seekers.

Culture is a unifying force in extending welcome to new residents, breaking down barriers and offering hope. During the pandemic we worked closely with Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya to feature artworks from her *We Belong Here* series. The installations granted visitors a moment of peace and sent a message of inclusion to New Yorkers from all cultures with a specific focus on confronting the surge in bias and xenophobia against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Surrounded by vibrant floral elements on a sea of periwinkle, the portraits convey courage, compassion, and defiance in the face of adversity.

Lincoln Center is a proud member of the City's 34-organization Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) and participant in the IDNYC program. Founded for the purpose of cultivating, fostering, and centering civically engaged arts, Lincoln Center is home to eleven arts and arts education nonprofits with Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts as the primary advocate. The cultural sector as a whole needs increased funding and coordination with partners in City government to better serve the needs of the asylum seeking community.

We are committed to New York City as a place where everyone is welcome and where they belong, and we continue to engage as lifelong learners to do better as an arts, education, and civic hub for all.

I thank the members of both Committees for your time. Thank you again for your continued leadership.

Please reach out should you have questions or would like to hear more about Lincoln Center's plans.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleni DeSiervo
Senior Director, Government Relations
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Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Oversight: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts

January 12, 2023, 10am

TESTIMONY

Juliana Cope, Assistant Executive Director for Development and External Affairs, Jcope@mind-builders.org,

Thank you all – you, dedicated public officials for your service and for this opportunity to share the work of Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center and other community-based organizations who are continuing to train the next generation of New York City civic leaders and cultural contributors and on behalf of the incredible youth, families, and neighborhoods we are so honored to serve.

Since 1978, for 45 years, Mind-Builders has been located in the underserved and under-resourced Northeast Bronx, offering hundreds of music, dance, theater, visual art, martial arts, and community folk culture programs serving over 750 young people every week alongside a PreK program featuring Suzuki violin. Our public performances include an annual Kwanzaa Celebration and Heroes Day centering building skills and knowledge on the contributions of historical and living cultural immigrant artists and culture bearers in our midst.

Our students come from every zip code in the Bronx and beyond. Our children and families identify as African-American, Caribbean or African, Hispanic/Latino, as well as other ethnic or recent immigrant groups. Participants come from every zip code in the Bronx, but predominantly from the many disinvested neighborhoods and housing projects local to our facility – Olinville, Wakefield, Williamsbridge, and Norwood. Mind-Builders employs 53 dedicated staff coming from the five boroughs: teaching artists, pre-kindergarten instructors, support and admin staff, reflective of the communities we serve. Our work is woven into the fabric of our neighborhood and our staff continue to make transformation in the lives of our young people possible.

Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center is also one of the grateful recipients of funding through the Cultural Immigrant Initiative. Artistic productions and cultural organizations like ours are vital engines in our communities – for jobs, mental health, activism, education, youth development, empowering messages, and access to other local services. Our communities need us and your support is vital.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK TO THE
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS & COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

New York City Council, New York, New York

January 12, 2023

Chairs Hanif and Ossé and members of the committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to share written testimony on New York City's immigrant communities and the arts.

I write to you today as the *Director of Education* at the Museum of the City of New York to share the importance of recognizing cultural heritage and history in our city, celebrating the voices of immigrant communities and their contributions to our city through the arts, and supporting cultural organizations who partner in this work.

At the Museum we engage hundreds of thousands of visitors each year through exhibitions, education and public programs, and more to celebrate, document, and interpret the city's past, present, and future. The Museum is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group. As CIGs, inclusion, diversity, access, equity, and justice are central to our missions as cultural organizations.

This is especially true at the Museum of the City of New York, where this year we are celebrating our historical milestone of one hundred years as New York City's storyteller. Through this storytelling, we strive to reflect the diverse and multifaceted communities of our great city – with the ultimate goal of telling the many stories that make New York, New York.

I have personally seen the importance – indeed, the necessity – of lifting up histories and present-day experiences of the many communities of New York City, including AAPI and immigrant communities. At the Museum, we have for many years celebrated and honored Asian American history in our exhibitions and community programming, including Lunar New Year celebrations. I would like to share a few examples of our work to demonstrate how supporting cultural organizations ensures stories like these can reach all New Yorkers.

Recently, in response to the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes in the city and country, we invited artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya to create an immersive installation [*Raise Your Voice*](#), including selections from the artist's public art campaigns "We Are More" and "I Still Believe in Our City" which depicted the resilience and range of New York's Asian American and Pacific

Islander community. Many of you may have first seen this public art installation in Times Square and Queens—we are honored to be able to have her work on view long-term as part of our exhibition *Activist New York* at the Museum of the City of New York. This installation of her art helps us engage students in building empathy and countering harmful stereotypes.

We co-created a curriculum supplement with the New York City Department of Education, *Hidden Voices*, to ensure that the more than 1 million public school students in the city learn the stories of important but often overlooked individuals who have shaped this city. People like Wong Chin Foo who founded the Chinese Equal Rights League in the late 19th century in the face of the US Government's Chinese Exclusion Act, and Dr. Antonia Pantoja, who advocated for Puerto Rican New Yorkers like my family and was key to ensuring bilingual education in our schools.

In 2023, the Museum of the City of New York's Frederick A.O. Schwarz Education Center will offer a free [virtual program series](#) for students in grades 3 to 5 and educators of all grades featuring the stories of six historical New Yorkers from communities of color from the *Hidden Voices* resource guide in an effort to highlight and honor the individual and collective experiences of a diverse swath of New Yorkers and support educators in bringing these powerful stories into their classrooms. Students who participate in the virtual series will receive access to a diversity of perspectives, develop historical thinking skills necessary to develop an understanding of the past and how the past influences our present and future, and build skills in civic agency through exposure to the stories of people who organized within and beyond the city of New York to improve the city at-large for all New Yorkers.

The [Hidden Voices: Untold Stories of New York City History](#) resource guide for teachers was developed through a partnership of the Museum of the City of the New York and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) in 2018 and aimed to help New York City students learn about and honor the innumerable people, often "hidden" from the traditional historical record, who have shaped and continue to shape our history and identity. The initial guide drew from the Museum's noteworthy [New York at Its Core](#) exhibition, the museum's first-ever permanent exhibition of New York City's 400-year history, and featured 16 profiles of individuals whose stories are told in the museum. In the years since, the NYCDOE has expanded the project by creating a second volume, *Hidden Voices: LGBTQ+ Stories in United States History*, in collaboration with the Museum and other institutions and scholars, with profiles of individuals whose stories draw attention to the lived experiences of individuals and groups in the LGBTQ+ community. The development of additional *Hidden Voices* resource guides is currently underway.

Finally, last month we opened a new exhibition [City of Faith: Religion, Activism and Urban Space](#) that focuses on South Asian American and other communities who have faced religious profiling and surveillance—particularly after 9/11—and how these communities have asserted their right to the city through transformative art and collective action.

I will share one final anecdote: On Monday I had the privilege of listening to a speech from a 4th grade NYC public school student from Queens. This 9-year-old shared that he is afraid to go

outside because he fears being hurt as an Asian American. When I asked Minjae what he would like us adults to do, he said more people need to know about Asian American cultures so they did not seem strange or different. I promised Minjae that I would bring his story here today to emphasize the importance of making sure visibility and representation are always showcased through our cultural organizations and our policy agendas.

I want to thank the members of the committee for receiving this testimony and for your work building bridges between the many communities of New York City. At the Museum of the City of New York, we will continue to share the stories of the contributions and resilience of immigrant communities as we document the past, present, and future of all New Yorkers. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maeve Montalvo', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Maeve Montalvo
Director, Frederick A.O. Schwarz Education Center

NEW YORK FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS – Committee on Cultural Affairs & Immigration

Testimony

Date: January 13, 2023

My name is Ya-Yun Teng, Program Officer, [Immigrant Artist Resource Center](#) (NYC) at the [New York Foundation for the Arts](#), also known as NYFA – an arts service organization whose mission is to provide financial, educational, and professional services to artists and arts organizations. I represent NYFA Learning that offers workshops, consultations, and trainings for artists, creatives, and cultural workers, reaching 10,000 immigrant artists annually. We are fortunate to have DCLA's support to implement these programs.

Our [Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program](#) founded in 2007 has provided opportunities to more than 500 NYC-based artists from 76 countries. Many of them became an important fabric of NYC's communities, teaching and engaging in public activities that enrich New Yorkers' lives. Many mentees return as mentors. In addition, our alumni community benefits from many partnerships. One example is Material for the Arts who arrange shopping days for our IAP artists. Since the partnership began in summer 2022, more than 65 artists have taken advantage of the opportunity.

Last year, we launched the Immigrant Artist Resource Center with the goal of increasing public access to critical resources and information as well as aiming to serve those that we are not reaching yet. Artists need access to resources beyond art-making and presenting. Our public programs on healthcare options, affordable housing, and visa applications have directly served more than 250 artists last year. In the same spirit, the Resource Center compiled a [directory](#) of CBOs throughout the NYC five boroughs from our conversations with more than 40 local organizations. The artist community responded well: almost 50% of our Newsletter subscribers accessed the resource.



This year, NYFA is developing and implementing one-on-one arts career consultations in languages other than English. In order for us to continue our work, we need funding to support artists and to sustain our own operations.

We need to invest in immigrant artists so we can hear their stories in our museums, performing arts centers, public spaces, schools, and community centers.

Artists and cultural workers are essential. They heal our communities and we know that neighborhoods with cultural assets show better outcomes for education, aging, crime, health, and community well being.

We want to thank all the committee members for paying attention to how immigrant artists contribute to the city and considering ways to sustain and increase the impact of critical programs and resources. Thank you again for your support.

NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL dba THE PUBLIC THEATER

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Oversight: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts testimony - Thursday, January 13, 2023

The Public Theater's History and Support for Immigrants in NYC throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries

The building that stands at 425 Lafayette Street today was originally built as a home for the Astor family's lavish library. The Astor Library then opened to the public in on January 9, 1854 as a research institute. In 1895, the Astor Research Library, the Lenox Library and the Tilden Foundation consolidated to become the New York Public Library (NYPL). The building subsequently was abandoned by the NYPL in 1911 when the library moved to its Bryant Park location. However, The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society purchased the building in 1920. HIAS then hired architect Benjamin Levitan to oversee the necessary alterations to create a suitable New York City headquarters. Levitan and HIAS wanted to create a place that was welcoming, yet able to provide newly arrived Jewish immigrants the aid, emergency shelter, and sanctuary for religious practice, they sought and deserved as they began their new lives in New York.

Tens of thousands of these refugees and migrants were sheltered and fed in this building before they entered the mainstream of life in New York City. The building's features and services included: Separate dormitories for men and women; Two kosher kitchens—one for meat preparation and one for dairy; A large dining room for comfortable, communal, social eating; An operating synagogue, both for those living within HIAS' walls and neighborhood residents; Holiday celebrations, such as a yearly neighborhood Passover Seder; Facilities for children, including donated toys and games, classrooms, and a playground. HIAS operated within the building from 1921-1965.

Following on the heels of great success with his free Shakespeare in the Park at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, Joe Papp, the legendary founder of the Public Theater, was looking for a place to build his dream. Ever since 1967, the Public Theater has called 425 Lafayette St. home. Joe Papp's mission, over 60 years later, lives and thrives on by creating theater for one of the largest and most diverse audience bases in New York City.

The Public Theater's Board and Staff view the organization's facilities not just as spaces for artistic programming but also for welcoming immigrants. In 2016, The Public Theater and International Rescue Committee presented Welcome Home: A Celebration of World Refugee Day at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. The one-night-only event featured readings and performances by a host of stars, including Bobby Cannavale, F. Murray Abraham, Celia Keenan-Bolger, Hoon Lee and Michael Cerveris; as well as former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, who led a naturalization ceremony for new citizens!

Furthermore, The Public Theater's Mobile Unit presents Free Shakespeare to prisons, homeless shelters, and community centers throughout New York's boroughs. Over the years, the Mobile Unit has served thousands of audiences with critically acclaimed productions. In addition to the community tour, each Mobile Unit show "sits down" at The Public Theater's Astor Place home to perform for Public audiences and community organizations from all over the city. The Public Theater's Mobile Unit breaks down

economic and geographic barriers to the arts by meeting our communities where they are, staging free professional theater productions in local neighborhood venues such as libraries, homeless shelters, and community centers across all five New York City boroughs. This New Year, 2023, the Mobile Unit is performing the work: Comedy of Errors. This show focuses on family reunification. It's related to the experience of immigration and rooted in what it means for a family to be unwillingly separated. We will be premiering February 14th at the LGBTQ Center and February 10th at the Metropolitan Detention Center.

The Public Theater's department of Public Works is all about civic engagement and uniting as a community. Public Works is animated by the idea that theater is a place of possibility, where the boundaries that separate us from each other in the rest of life can fall away. Working with partner organizations in all five boroughs, Public Works invites community members to take classes, attend performances and join in the creation of ambitious works of participatory theater. Public Works deliberately blurs the line between professional artists and community members, creating theater that is not only for the people, but by and of the people as well.

In conclusion, The Public Theater's headquarters has long stood as a refuge both for artists and immigrants. The Public Theater promotes the work and ideas of diverse artists, many immigrants, that continue to inspire audiences. Our Community Engagement Programs (Mobile Unit & Public Works) bring art and resources to outer boroughs and therefore our immigrant neighbors. Lastly, The Board and Staff will continue to expand programs and opportunities for immigrants and immigrant artists alike through 2023.

Thank you to the Committee Chair Chi Ossé, committee members, staff and the New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams for the support and recognition to this institution and all other New York City Arts and Culture Organizations. The Public Theater is proud to work so closely with the city and provide the people with free, accessible, and diverse programming.

Sources

[More than just a pretty facade: HIAS at Lafayette Street | ontherescuefront \(wordpress.com\)](#)

[THE PUBLIC THEATER! The former Astor Library and the quest for a Public Theater - Village Preservation Mobile Unit \(publictheater.org\)](#)

[Astor Library \(Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Building\) \(nyc.gov\)](#)

Testimony Provided by Kate Madigan Government Relations Coordinator, The Public Theater

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts
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Testimony for NY City Council hearing of the Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup
Relations
January 12, 2023
10AM

Thank you Chair Ossé, and City Council. My name is Lucy Sexton of New Yorkers for Culture & Arts, a coalition of more than 300 cultural organizations and artists from across the five boroughs.

Thank you for holding this hearing on the critical role culture plans in NYC's immigrant communities—and the key role immigrant art plays in the city's world renowned arts and culture!

The story of NYC culture has always been deeply informed by its historic waves of immigrants. And it is still the case. One need only look at the lineup of the Queensboro dance festival, which includes an amazing array of dance groups based in the many many countries represented in our most diverse

borough—from Calpulli Mexican Dance Co to Kindig Sindaw’s indigenous Philippine dance group, and more! Or go to any of the Caribbean festivals and work done by Tropical Fete with the kids and adults in Crown Heights and in schools throughout Brooklyn. The list of examples is truly endless. And NY is rightly proud of them. The only thing they need is proper support and more public investment for the work they do—Queensboro Dance Festival is still produced by a single visionary Karesia Batan and a tiny staff. Let’s get her more money!

In recent months we have seen extraordinary response and service offered by cultural groups to newly arrived asylum seekers. From clothing drives at El Museo Del Barrio and other cultural centers, to full art festivals engaging new immigrants at The Clemente Center in the Lower East Side among others, the city’s cultural groups have risen to the occasion. They reach out in culturally connected and authentic ways to welcome and support our newest New Yorkers. Again, all they need is more robust support to do this work which serves the city in times of crisis and beyond.

There is a show opening at St Anns Warehouse next month called The Jungle. My teen daughter actually visited the refugee camp on which the show is based several years ago. A group from the UK set up a large tent in the middle of a sprawling

camp of asylum seekers waiting for months and years on the border. The response was incredible as kids began to come to the tent to draw, to make music, as teens did rap battles and dance shows for each other, and as grownups gathered to tell stories and connect across their cultural barriers. In the words of one of the participants: “In this camp, lots of charity groups think all we need is food and shelter. We also need this—a place to gather to express ourselves and to connect. To remember our humanity and find release and joy.”

My coparent works in the city’s BE HEARD program as a social worker respondign with EMS calls for emotionally disturbed people. She says they are seeing lots of mental health issues in newly arrived immigrants housed in hotels and shelters. And among their children as they are thrown in to new schools. We need to invest in getting people cultural programs in the shelters to help them survive mentally in the hardest of circumstances. And we need to get culturally appropriate arts in those kids’ schools so they have a place to connect and process the anxiety they are experiencing.

I was a Su Casa teacher a few years ago in a Chinatown senior center. The exercise I gave my class—non of who spoke English—was to describe the happiest time in their lives. An elderly man who never said much started crying as he relayed that he had worked in factories since he was 14 and that this

time, doing these classes in this community was the happiest time of his life.

As NY faces economic belt tightening, an increase in new immigrants, and a mental health crisis with houseless individuals, we need to center the central role that arts and culture play in addressing all of these problems. We must invest in people's humanity, in their right to engage in the lifesaving power of music, dance, storytelling. We must build a new city where immigrants thrive and the culture and economic activity they create provides a lifeline to a renewed and revitalized New York.



New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroups Relations
January 12, 2023

Title: *Oversight: NYC’s Immigrant Communities and the Arts*

Thank you, Chair Ossé, Chair Hanif, and the Committee Members for your attention to this issue. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this critical topic and the importance of our NYC Immigrant Communities and the Arts.

The New York Hall of Science (NYSCI)’s mission is to nurture passionate learners, critical thinkers, and active citizens through an approach we call *Design Make Play*. Located in Queens, NY – one of the most multicultural and diverse communities in New York City, NYSCI is committed to creating a world where diversity unlocks innovation, and where people learn to use science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) to tackle complex 21st-century challenges.

NYSCI’s immediate neighborhood of Corona, along with neighboring Elmhurst, has the distinction of being the community district with the highest share of foreign residents – nearly two-thirds of residents are foreign-born. The neighborhood has undergone major demographic shifts over the past fifty years, and today more than half of the population in the district is Latinx, hailing from Central and South American countries including Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and the Dominican Republic. For many families, English is not the primary language spoken at home, where 56% speak Spanish and 25% speak an Asian or Pacific Island language¹. The five primary languages spoken in Corona and its surrounding neighborhoods are Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Urdu, and English. In recent years, the exact numbers of cultures represented and percentages may be inaccurate/outdated due to the under-representation of undocumented families and an increase of newly arrived migrant asylum seekers in 2022.

According to a report by the Citizens’ Committee for Children², published in 2019, Corona residents identified several community assets that support families in the district, including community health centers, parks, libraries, and museums, which play an essential role in creating inclusive environments and offering support to immigrant households. They also identified some of their greatest needs, including affordable housing, more free and affordable options for early childhood education, and more after-school programming. Caregivers also expressed the desire for greater leisure time for families to spend together, especially in the face of long working hours to meet basic economic needs.

Immigrant communities rely on and support each other, but there are some significant needs that are more difficult to address or require deeper support systems. Many families in Corona face

¹ Kimiagar, Bijan & Drobnjak, Marija & Halkitis, Sophia & Mullan, Jack. (2019). Elmhurst/Corona, Queens: Community Driven Solutions to Improve Child and Family Well-Being. pg. 3

² Data drawn from “Elmhurst/Corona, Queens: Community Driven Solutions to Improve Child and Family Well-Being”, December 2019, the Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York.



economic precarity and more than half have incomes that fall below the federal poverty level and require that one or both parents maintain multiple jobs. In addition, many residents are undocumented and unable to access economic resources or consistent healthcare.



As an educational and cultural institution in Corona/Elmhurst, NYSCI embraces our responsibility to be responsive to our community's needs. Inspired by the community's diversity, NYSCI develops programs for children, students, families, and educators that build on the community's interests, and needs, and expands access to STEM opportunities that will nurture curiosity for lifelong learning. As well, we offer our youth pathways to STEM Careers through the Alan J. Friedman Center for the Development of Young Scientists. The Science Career Ladder (SCL) is NYSCI's signature youth and workforce development initiative with a mission to address the challenges brought on by the educational and economic inequities facing New York City's minority high school and college students from under-resourced neighborhoods.

NYSCI strives to create a space where people perceive themselves as people who can do STEM and understand how their experiences and perspectives broaden the ways to explore the world around us. The goal is not just to collaborate but that community members feel that NYSCI is a place that offers multiple pathways for engaging and exploring STEM practices and ideas.

Elmhurst Corona Recovery Collaborative

NYSCI's surrounding community is a poignant example of adaptability and resilience in times of crisis. Local families trying to recover from the pandemic needed access to a support network to begin the process. As a true partner to our local community of Corona and Elmhurst— which were the epicenter of the pandemic — NYSCI helped establish the Elmhurst Corona Recovery Collaborative (ECRC) with 25 other local organizations. By coming together and partnering with these community-based organizations, the ECRC spearheaded a program of targeted vaccine education, resulting in these communities becoming the top most vaccinated neighborhoods in New York City by the summer of 2021. We continue to lead programs focused on engaging our communities about health and vaccines, as well as addressing disparities in public health and medicine.

The ECRC's mission is to ensure that families have access to food and resources for jobs and financial security; pathways for community-anchored health and healing programs; and shared educational and cultural experiences designed to build resilience and support socio-emotional healing.

NYSCI has continued our leadership in the ECRC and continues to offer community resources and events with local groups and partnerships. To date, the ECRC has provided 12 million pounds of food to 700,000 families, reached 750,000 people with vaccine outreach and PPE donations, and brought community members free resources around health care, mental health, job training, and STEM educational programming.



Family Learning and Community Partnerships

To better serve our immediate community, NYSCI relies on the information from our Parent groups and community assessments. These guiding principles help the institution align the needs of the community and how NYSCI can further meet these needs. By establishing the Family Learning and Community Partnerships (FLCP) department, we have created space to provide and address areas of concern for the surrounding area.

Holding this space allows for the institution to develop cultural competencies specific to immigrant communities and STEM, with intentional changes that help improve the museum's ability to be inclusive of our various communities, cultures, and audiences. For example, to address the influx of newly arrived immigrant families, NYSCI has been offering events that welcome families by working closely with local schools and other community-based organizations, such as Make the Road NY. We offer Parent Orientations to introduce newly arriving families to STEM activities and plug them into the resources the ECRC offers.

As well, we partnered with a local food pantry, La Jornada to host Thanksgiving food distributions, and just this past Friday, January 6, we hosted a Three Kings Day event. Many local and newly arrived migrant families participated in the food and gift giveaway event while spending time exploring, playing, and learning at the museum.

Our Family Learning and Community Partnerships exemplifies our *Design Make Play* methodology and ensures that access to the museum is not just singular moments or one-offs but constant interactions that create deep connections.

YOUTH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

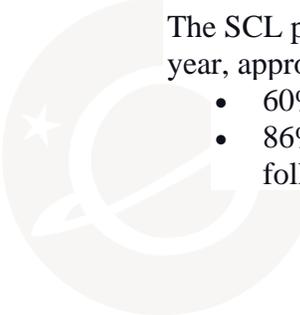
In staying true to our vision to develop a generation of curious, confident citizens, NYSCI has inspired and guided young people to pursue careers in STEM, through the Alan J. Friedman Center for the Development of Young Scientists.

The Science Career Ladder (SCL) has served nearly 4,000 young people and been a model for at least two dozen similar programs worldwide. In a typical year the program serves approximately 125 diverse high school and college students, through paid employment opportunities and a comprehensive system of professional development; near-peer and professional mentorship; college and career readiness; and STEM career exposure and exploration activities.

Participants in SCL's flagship offering, the Explainer program, employs Explainers to work on NYSCI's museum floor. These young Explainers interact with the public and work as museum facilitators, fostering fun and inclusive STEM learning by recognizing and guiding visitors'



interests, nurturing their curiosity and encouraging agency in approaching STEM-based activities, challenges and questions throughout the museum. They also hold residencies and fellowships with designers, engineers, researchers and artists to co-create exhibits, programs, online content and engaging activities for NYSCI's audience. In the process, Explainers acquire communication skills and confidence; STEM literacy, knowledge and habits of mind; and experience with inquiry-based teaching and learning. Through their work at NYSCI, Explainers engage in the kind of deeper thinking and discovery that is the bedrock for developing the skills, agency and confidence to succeed in college and in the workplace of the twenty-first century.



The SCL program serves youth that are often underrepresented in STEM fields. In our current year, approximately:

- 60% of participants identify as female
- 86% of Explainers come from minority backgrounds, and the ethnicity breakdown is as follows:
 - Black/African American- 14%
 - Asian- 18%
 - South/Southeast Asian- 23%
 - Hispanic/Latino- 31%

Furthermore, the demographics of youth participants in the explainer program reflect the diversity of NYSCI's home borough of Queens with:

- 87% come from Queens—
 - 41% are from neighboring communities of Corona (15%), Elmhurst (15%), Flushing (8%), Jackson Heights (3%).
- A typical class of Explainers speak approximately 23 languages.

NYSCI Science Career Ladder is part of SCI Network NYC, which is composed of the eight science-based cultural institutions: American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York Botanical Garden, New York Hall of Science, Queens Botanical Garden, Staten Island Zoo, Wave Hill, and the Wildlife Conservation Society, which includes the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo and Queens Zoo.

SCI Network NYC programs combine education, workforce development, networking, and outreach to increase opportunities for over 1,200 youth throughout New York City. Collectively, the youth working in these institutions earn a livable wage that allows them to pursue their dreams and open them to new experiences that build meaningful careers in STEM.

Investing in workforce development programs such as SCI Network NYC, enables our cultural institutions to continuously provide high-quality internships to New York City youth, especially youth that have historically been excluded from STEM careers - specifically people of color and low-income youth. The investment and community partnerships that this program provides ensures that our interns represent the diversity of New York City.



IMPACT

New Yorkers rely on various cultural institutions, non-profit organizations, programs, and resources to strengthen engagement and learning opportunities. NYSCI's mission and programming extend beyond every visitor and are seen through the work we do to make STEM exciting, appealing, and inviting to everyone. Without the continuous support of our founders, City government, and grants, this work wouldn't be able to happen. It is imperative that funding for the Cultural Institutions Group, cultural groups, and community-based organizations remains whole and continues to receive support going forward. The New York cultural community—in both good and challenging times—supports and continues to provide educational and essential services to our students and communities. Our spaces provide comfort, challenges people to think about solutions that enhance the community experiences of our City.

Funding programs like SCI Network NYC, allows the diverse youth of New York City to build meaningful careers at NYC's cultural institutions, and supports the educational, workforce development and essential services they provide to their communities. It helps build financial awareness and independence, as it empowers teens to feel accomplished and provides greater autonomy to develop our skills and how to succeed in the world around us. Investing in youth and in cultural institutions has lasting prolonged effects on our communities and city.

Science and the arts are tools that must be accessible and relevant in everyone's life. For NYSCI, the work we do at the museum and beyond our walls provides essential educational services to our communities, students, teachers, and families. It is important that our cultural spaces continue to be supported by the City, as they are uniquely positioned to address the discrepancy in STEM education, and provide safe spaces for individuals and families to explore, share ideas, inspiration and encourage collaboration among our groups.

Respectfully submitted by:

Frances Escano

Director of Government Affairs

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TESTIMONY TO NYC COUNCIL - HEARING JANUARY 12, 2023 @ 10AM

Good Afternoon Council Members,

I'm Fran Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera, which offers ticketed and free fully-staged operas and operatic concerts in Sunset Park - an underserved and low income immigrant community of Asian and Latinx residents; and Bay Ridge, a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. Regina Opera also offers an extensive collection of archived, online performances for those people who are unable to attend a live performance.

We provide affordable, professional-level entertainment in accessible venues for people, especially immigrants who are recent arrivals to the US, who may not otherwise attend live performances. Some of our audience members lack the funds to spend on entertainment; some of our Asian Community members are afraid to travel to Manhattan by subway; some may not feel welcome at the major opera houses. Others cannot spare the time to travel to Manhattan as they are working extensive hours to earn enough to pay their bills; or cannot plan ahead and buy tickets in advance. Our performances address these issues of the Sunset Park and Bay Ridge community members. The need for this cultural enrichment is reflected in the fact that a total of over 4000 people usually attend our live performances or watch an online opera each season.

We at Regina Opera hear from our audience members that they wish that there were additional money for local arts organizations in NYC that take into account their needs. Speaking on behalf of the music organizations in New York City, we are dedicated to bringing happiness to our community members, and are frustrated by the fact that NYC is not doing enough to fund us for our work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francine Garber-Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Francine Garber-Cohen, President, The Regina Opera Company, Inc.



January 13th, 2023

Dear Chair Ossé, members of the Committee,

We thank you for convening this important hearing on our City's immigrant communities and the arts. Nearly 30 years ago, several Puerto Rican, Uruguayan, and Dominican literary and performing artists came together to found The Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Educational, to sponsor art exhibits and performances within the facility and in the greater community, focused on the fostering, promotion, and support for Puerto Rican-Latino arts, while establishing relations with like-minded people and organizations regardless of ethnicity. They were guided by the values of radical creativity of our namesake—Clemente Soto Vélez, the famed Puerto Rican poet and political prisoner who mentored & guided dozens of the most influential Latinx artists.

Today, we continue in this relentless pursuit of justice and equity for all people, which cannot be realized without all peoples' ability to develop cultural and artistic expressions. Last year, when thousands of asylum seekers, mostly Venezuelan, began arriving in New York, who are continually being used as political pawns, our communities understood the roles we had to play in this moment. Cultural work is essential in a crisis. Artists provide comfort, reflection, and necessary solidarity during controversial times. They document our stories and are a mirror of the moment. At The Clemente, we work every day to amplify the creativity and ingenuity of artists of color in particular, who are so often excluded from the traditional halls of culture and closely affected by the forced migratory waves of our time.

For these reasons, we quickly teamed up with the pioneering Latinx visual and performing artists, [Yara Travieso](#) & [Guadalupe Maravilla](#), who co-hosted a major fundraiser as part of the annual BORIMIX Festival to support New York's newly arrived asylum seekers. *¡Epa! an Artist Benefit for Asylum Seekers*, raised more than \$10,000 to benefit The Good Shepherd Church and South Brooklyn Mutual Aid. Together we were able to secure top Latinx musical and performing artists. These included Venezuelan Grammy award winner [DJ "Cheo" Pardo](#) from [Los Amigos Invisibles](#), [Carolina Oliveros of Combo Chimbita](#), the Caribbean powerhouse [Xenia Rubinos](#), the Joropo icon [Mafer Bandola of LADAMA](#), & the all-female salsa group [Lulada Club](#).

We have also collaboratively supported many partners to mobilize such resources for new asylum seekers. With our partners, and one of our anchor theater, Teatro SEA, we have hosted refugee families and their children to free theater productions for youth. Most recently, we mounted our annual Three Kings Day celebration, which featured a major toy give away and live music event, in which more than 500 children attended, many of them attending from refugee



shelters Teatro SEA and The Clemente have contacted. We recently worked with local leaders and the group, Artists, Athletes, and Activists, to host a holiday party, food, & clothing give away.

For the EPA fundraiser in particular, we realized the operation in less than two months of planning, without a budget, using every resource at our disposal, and the good will of our community. For the past two years, we have heard the constant refrain that culture is the key to our recovery in many ways. Yet the City of New York is facing PEGs and no federal assistance. We hope that this anecdote alone shows what happens when our government and institutions invest in us.

Over and over we have seen how culture is a great economic multiplier, but it is so much more than that, and urge you to do everything in your power to support our great City's great artists.

Sincerely,

Libertad Guerra
Executive Director

ADVANCE | MORE OPERA

The Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment
Manhattan Opera Repertory Ensemble
Ansonia Station Box 231152, New York, NY 10023

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries,
and International Group Relations

Oversight: NYC's Immigrant Communities and the Arts

T2023-2770

Submitted by

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

Thursday, January 12, 2023

Greetings. Thank you, Chair Chi Osse', Chair Shahana Hanif, and committee members for hearing my testimony. I am soprano Cheryl Warfield, founder and director ADVANCE-MORE Opera that provides music training and outreach to youth and older adults in underserved communities in the Bronx, Upper Manhattan and Manhattan Valley.

A National Academy of Sciences report from the last decade states “ The depth and breadth of civil society constitute a ...marker of integration and can spur or hinder engagement. Immigrants' integration is affected by the degree to which community groups, ... reach out to immigrants. “Barriers to and inequalities in civic and political integration can be mitigated by partnerships among ... community-based organizations – this includes arts groups.”

MORE Opera has worked with elementary school students and with adults for whom English is not their native language for nearly 20 years. I cite two examples. First, a MORE Opera residency at PS 226 in the Bronx for 4th graders aged 9 and 10 to perform in the opera Tosca, with full orchestra conducted by the renowned Anton Coppola. Most of the children spoke Spanish. The faces lit up as they learned to sing in Italian upon their realization of the similarities between Italian and Spanish, and were delighted that they understood much of what they were singing.

In Kingsbridge Heights, MORE Opera presented a vocal music residency in conjunction with the Bronx Opera for grammar and accent reduction that empowered adult ESOL students and gave them greater confidence speaking English using songs like the Sinatra favorite “My Way” and Woody Guthrie's “This Land is Your Land.” Links to videos demonstrating the impact of these residencies on participants can be found at <https://youtu.be/RwugrbaTTFc> (PS 226 opera residency) and <https://youtu.be/1Y-jSuPIIuE> (Kingsbridge Heights - learning English through music).

I strongly encourage increased funding for initiatives for immigrant arts programs to help Arts and Culture organizations continue and expand programs like ours. I testify in solidarity with NY4 Culture and Arts, Cultural Institution Groups, the Coalition for Theatres of Color, and small arts and culture organizations, and encourage the council to utilize and support arts and culture investment, especially in historically under resourced neighborhoods. Now more than ever is the time to find more funding for initiatives that focus on our immigrant populations and for asylum seekers.

We look forward to continued dialogue with the Council and the Administration. Thank you for this important hearing and the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

Cheryl Warfield Singer, Educator, Producer and Founder, ADVANCE/MORE
Opera 255 West 75th Street, #3-I, New York, NY 10023
212-595-7084

www.moreopera.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW2yGc7iTkq>

Chris Whittaker

New York, NY 10033

whittaker.chris@gmail.com

January 12, 2023

NYC Council

Committees on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations & Immigration

250 Broadway

New York, NY 10007

RE: Written testimony for consideration at the January 12, 2023 10:00AM committee meeting

Dear Chairs Ossé and Hanif and Councilmembers,

Thank you for taking time to consider this topic and also for your support for small cultural organizations. Small cultural organizations especially play an outsized role in making New York a place where people—newcomers and immigrants alike—thrive. Community-based arts organizations act as a valuable ‘third space’ that strengthens bonds between neighbors. As we spend so much time cloistered behind our screens, our mistrust of one another ever-amplified by algorithm, local arts organizations provide a way back to community; a place where we can experience a shared sense of value and belonging and feel less alone. This is why it is essential they be preserved, protected and supported.

In my community choir, for example, both long-time residents and newcomers participate not just in the joy of music-making, but nurturing relationships. It’s this sense of belonging that can famously make New York feel like a small town. And these relationships are not just transactional, but centered on creating something beautiful together. In my orchestra, the Washington Heights Chamber Orchestra, we played over 70 free concerts, increasing access to the arts across the Upper Manhattan cultural divide east and west of Broadway. Our concerts featured diverse voices from uptown’s kaleidoscopic community, inviting everyone—regardless of their ability to pay—into an experience where they might join in an act of communal listening and engage with someone else’s story.

As local arts organizations reimagine themselves post-COVID, I want to highlight two key issues for you beyond funding: first, what we like to call “butts-in-seats” and, second, access to affordable space. You can help with the first by *showing up* to the work of small arts organizations in your council district. Your leadership can help to reignite a culture of ‘going out’ which the arts and the city desperately needs. The second—access to space—is a more difficult problem to solve. I know many artists who are doing amazing work in underserved, predominately low-income or immigrant communities who simply need space. Yet, your direct engagement will plant seeds of collaboration that can help organizations develop new relationships that benefit both the residents and businesses of your district.

In District 10 in Upper Manhattan, for example, there are so many amazing organizations worthy of not just city funding but also your time and engagement: Inwood Art Works, Dance Project of Washington Heights, People’s Theatre Project, Music at Our Saviour’s Atonement, Washington Heights Community

Choir, UP Theater, Pied Piper Children's Theatre, Dyckman Farmhouse, The Morris Jumel Mansion, Jazz WAHI, the United Palace of Cultural Arts, and the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance.

Organizations like these are doing good work that makes New York City feel like home to our amazing and diverse uptown community. Please take time to visit and experience the work of these organizations for yourself, firsthand. We are grateful for your support.

In the midst of all the pressing issues our city faces, it may be tempting to allow funding for the arts to atrophy. What I want to reaffirm to you today is that the arts are central in the solution to what ails us. Local arts organizations are essential to solving today's urgent problems and immigrants are part of our fabric. Supporting the arts is supporting immigrant communities and vice versa. The sense of belonging—sparked by joining a choir, a writer's group, a community garden—is the beginning of civic engagement for a new generation of New Yorkers, nurturing citizens who are invested in their city and believe in their power to make positive change.

It can feel as if the world is hopelessly spiraling. We are inundated with stories of violence, corruption, and frailty; fascism and climate chaos. But the arts stand firmly against encroaching nihilism, and make the case that the good fight is worth fighting, and we are worth saving.

Sincerely,



Chris Whittaker

J.D. Candidate at Fordham Law

Former Executive Director, Washington Heights Chamber Orchestra

Former Music Director, Fort Washington Collegiate Church

My name is Violeta Tellez, I am an artist in the dance, choreography and performance field. I just went through surgery on Tuesday January 10th, I heard about this call yesterday. I was diagnosed with breast cancer, finally got a right mastectomy, after months of fighting to just get the right for treatment.

I found out on August 8th and was dismissed by the hospital that found the malignant carcinoma (Brooklyn hospital) because of my immigration status.

During this time I was awarded a parent space grant at BAX which was a lifeline for me, going through this terrible news and situation I still got to create, and I realized how much I can do with having just the minimum support, this grant was mainly space and a stipend, but just having the space felt amazing, free to create. I am so grateful to Bax without them this work (Espacio +=-) would not exist.

It is very important for us to get support, I just had the space, still have to figure out how to get expenses needed for living for me and my family.

The stipend I used it almost entirely to pay a composer so that my work could have music, and I am so happy I could pay her for her amazing and beautiful job but left me with not a lot, but I'm used to that and it shouldn't be.

You can look at my dance piece here:

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=k5EAYGGhjJk&feature=shares>

Thank you very much for listening to my story.

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I represent: DCLA

Address: 31 CHAMBERS

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I represent: Brooklyn Book Festival

Address: 249 Smith St. #106 Brooklyn

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Address: 500 25TH ST BROOKLYN 11232

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Name: DEIDA WONG

Address: 75 Broadway

I represent: _____

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Name: Chi Yeung

Address: Barclay Ave

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Rong Bao

Address: Division Street

I represent: Sau Hai Yee Charitable Association

Address: _____

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Name: Denny Chen

Address: Mott St

I represent: Hotel Chinese ASS.

Address: _____

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Name: YI ANDY CHEN

Address: Elmhurst NY 11373

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: GEORGE XU

Address: 33-66 FARRINGTON ST, Suite 200

I represent: Chinese Business Association Flushing

Address: _____

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Name: Max Scheman

Address: _____

I represent: SEIS

Address: _____

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Name: LANCE POLIVY

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I represent: DCLA

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Name: Lola Byrd

Address: _____ BK

I represent: Avenues

Address: _____

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Name: Alex Farman (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 288th Street

I represent: Avenues School

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Address: _____

I represent: myself - American of Chinese

Address: Descent

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