

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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Wednesday, June 7, 2023

Start: 10:23 A. M.

Recess: 12:31 P. M.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Chi Ossé, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Amanda Farías
Shahana K. Hanif
Crystal Hudson
Rita C. Joseph
Farah N. Louis
Francisco P. Moya
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Nantasha Williams
Kevin Riley

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations
A P P E A R A N C E S

Joy Bivins
Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in
Black Culture

Shakira Smalls
Executive Director of Queens Public Library
Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural
Center

Dominique Jean-Louis
Chief Historian of the Center at Brooklyn
History at Brooklyn Public Library

Judith Insell
Executive Director for Bronx Arts Ensemble

Dr. Charlene Thomas
Representing Def Jam Recordings

Regina Bain
Executive Director of the Louis Armstrong House
Museum

Leah C. Johnson
Executive Vice President at Lincoln Center and
Vice Chair at Large of the Cultural Institutions
Group

Gabriel Khagani Godi
Representing Himself (Accompanied by Translator)

Leroy McCarthy
Representing *Christopher Wallace Way*

Melody Capote,
Executive Director at Caribbean Cultural Center
African Diaspora Institute

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations

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

Lucy Sexton
Representing New Yorkers for Culture & Art

Cheryl Warfield,
Representing More Opera

1 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Check one, two, check one,
2 two. This is a prerecorded sound test for the
3 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
4 International Intergroup Relations. Today's date is
5 June 7th, 2023. This is being recorded by Michael
6 Leonardo in the Council Chambers.
7

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to
9 today's New York City Council Hearing for the
10 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
11 International Intergroup Relations.

12 At this time, we ask that please place all cell
13 phones and electronic devices to vibrate or silent
14 mode to minimize disruptions throughout the hearing.

15 If you would like to submit testimony for the
16 record, you may do so via email to
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again that is
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

19 Please do not approach the dais at any time
20 during this hearing. We thank you for your
21 cooperation.

22 Mr. Chair, we are ready to begin.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ:

24 [GAVELING IN] [GAVEL SOUND]
25

1
2 Good morning, I am New York City Council Member
3 Chi Ossé, Chair of The Committee on Cultural Affairs,
4 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. My
5 pronouns are he/him/his.

6 Welcome to our oversight hearing on The Schomburg
7 Center and the Role of Libraries and Cultural
8 Organizations in Preserving New York City's History.

9 Today the committee will also be hearing ten
10 resolutions, many of which are indeed related to our
11 hearing topic of preserving New York City history --
12 including our multicultural history as we approach
13 the Juneteenth holiday and all that it represents.

14 Six of these resolutions, four of which I have
15 sponsored, and two of which, Council Member Williams
16 has sponsored, commemorate leaders in the Hip Hop
17 revolution over the decades and celebrate the
18 undeniable place of Hip Hop in New York City history
19 and culture.

20 Resolution 624 is a Resolution designating July 8
21 annually as Reggie "Combat Jack" Ossé Day, my father,
22 in the City of New York and honoring his multifaceted
23 contributions to the Hip Hop industry as a lawyer,
24 executive, editor, and podcaster.

1
2 Resolution 623 is a Resolution designating May 21
3 annually as Christopher "Biggie Smalls" Wallace Day
4 in the City of New York and recognizing his
5 contributions to the cultural landscape of his home
6 borough of Brooklyn and to Hip Hop worldwide.

7 Resolution 622 is a Resolution designating
8 September 10 annually as Big Daddy Kane Day in the
9 City of New York and celebrating his influence on
10 generations of Hip Hop MCs.

11 Resolution 621 is a Resolution designating
12 November 15 annually as Ol' Dirty Bastard Day in the
13 City of New York and honoring his legacy as a founder
14 of the legendary Wu-Tang Clan and as a unique MC.

15 Resolution 346 is a Resolution recognizing the
16 contributions of Hip Hop to arts and culture by
17 designating August 2023 as Hip Hop Recognition and
18 History Month and August 11, 2023 as Hip Hop
19 Celebration Day in the City of New York.

20 Proposed Resolution 450-A is a Resolution
21 recognizing the contributions of Def Jam to the music
22 industry and to music lovers everywhere by
23 designating January 2024 as Def Jam Recognition Month
24 in the City of New York.

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2 Now, let me welcome my colleague, Council Member
3 Williams, to provide brief remarks on her
4 legislation.

5 Council Member Williams?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you so much, Chair
7 for holding this hearing.

8 Good morning, everybody. Uh, 2023 marked the
9 50th year anniversary of Hip Hop. Hip Hop is an
10 artistic and cultural movement emerging in the
11 streets of New York City, primarily driven by Black
12 people.

13 The vital role of Hip Hop has given marginalized
14 voices a platform embracing culture in and addressing
15 social issues through various artforms.

16 Hip Hop's impact extends beyond entertainment
17 fostering community engagement, empowerment, and
18 cultural diversity acting as a catalyst for social
19 change.

20 The influence of Hip Hop in New York City
21 continued to flourish and paved the way for creatives
22 to thrive in spaces made for them by them. For
23 example, Def Jam, a pioneering record label founded
24 and created in a NYU dorm room -- also by a person
25 who is from my council district. Def Jam has played

1
2 a transformative role in shaping the landscape of
3 popular music for over three decades. From its
4 humble beginnings, Def Jam has been a driving force
5 behind the rise of Hip Hop, and has consistently
6 pushed boundaries, introduced new talent, and
7 fostered cultural diversity within the industry.

8 Both Def Jam and Hip Hop have had a profound
9 impact on American Culture; they have revolutionized
10 the music industry, transformed it into a platform
11 for marginalized communities to express their
12 experiences, struggles, and aspirations.

13 Hip Hop's unique blend of rhythm, poetry, and
14 storytelling has become dominate cultural force
15 influencing fashion, language, and art.

16 Def Jam has fostered the careers of numerous
17 iconic artists, elevating their voices and providing
18 a platform, again, for them to tell their stories.
19 Together, Def Jam and Hip Hop at large, have
20 challenged societal norms, sparked important
21 conversations, and shaped what we know as America.

22 By designating August 2023 as Hip Hop Recognition
23 and History Month, we honor the rich legacy of Hip
24 Hop and its immense influence on our arts, culture,
25 society internationally.

1
2 And I will deviate and say that the first time
3 that I actually traveled outside of the country, I
4 was in Paris, and there was all this stuff about Hip
5 Hop, and it was in that moment, I'm, like, Wow,
6 this... this music genre really has far exceeded, I
7 think, anyone's wildest dreams, and it is so integral
8 to international culture. People really look to Hip
9 Hop and learn, and steal sometimes, from the culture.

10 So, August 11, 2023, will be designated as Hip
11 Hop Celebration Day serving as a focal point within
12 Hip Hop Recognition and History Month, aka, the
13 Birthday of Hip Hop, and January 2024, as Def Jam
14 Recognition Month in the city of New York.

15 We honor the profound contributions of these
16 cultural movements, embrace the diversity, and
17 promote the rich artistic heritage within our great
18 city.

19 I think I got all of that out. And, with that,
20 thank you so much, Chair, for having me. And thank
21 you to Def Jam for being here today. And I am
22 excited to hear their testimony later on.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Council Member
24 Williams. And I wholeheartedly agree with all of the
25 sentiments you just shared.

1
2 In addition, we will also be hearing two
3 resolutions, which I have sponsored, that speak to
4 the equity that is still being fought for in funding
5 for the arts. This funding will address the
6 importance of financially supporting, at both the
7 state and the federal levels, diverse arts and
8 cultural organizations that address racial and social
9 justice, especially those that are led by and/or
10 serve BIPOC communities. Resolution 643, is a
11 resolution calling on the New York State Legislature
12 to pass, and the Governor to sign, S.5714/A.4912 to
13 increase access to resources by culturally diverse
14 arts and cultural organizations that advocate for
15 diversity, equity, inclusion, cultural preservation,
16 and racial and social justice.

17 And Resolution 644, is a resolution calling on
18 the United States Congress to pass, and the President
19 to sign, legislation to support arts and humanities
20 programs that address and fight systemic racism.

21 It is fitting that we are hearing these two
22 resolutions today in a hearing about Juneteenth and
23 what it signifies for our country. The work of
24 social justice is not just about commemorating
25 holidays, we also like to take action, and we need to

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2 invest in Black people, and people of color-led and
3 serving organizations as well.

4 Finally, we will be hearing two additional
5 resolutions, both of which are also of special
6 interest to our BIPOC communities here in New York
7 City.

8 Resolution 645, a resolution designating June as
9 Fatherhood Recognition Month annually in the City of
10 New York to honor and support the contributions of
11 fathers to family and community life, sponsored by
12 Council Member Riley.

13 Resolution 199, is a resolution declaring June
14 Caribbean Heritage Month, sponsored by Council Member
15 Hudson.

16 Wow, there's a lot of resolutions today!

17 [LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: My family and I pleased that
19 the resolution commemorating my father's role in the
20 Hip Hop revolution is being heard alongside a
21 resolution about Fatherhood Recognition Month. One
22 of my favorite clauses in the resolution about my
23 father says this: "According to journalist and critic
24 Juan Vidal, who interviewed Reggie Ossé for a book
25 about Hip Hop and fatherhood, Ossé said that family

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2 came first for him, noting that 'no guest, no event,
3 no conference call, nothing... being a father comes
4 first'", this month thanks all of the fathers like
5 him.

6 Now, let me welcome my colleague, Council Member
7 Riley to provide brief remarks on his legislation.

8 Council Member Riley?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RILEY: Thank you, Chair Ossé, and
10 good morning, everyone. It is a privilege to be here
11 with you, Chair Ossé, as you celebrate your father's
12 heritage and his history to our cultural today.

13 As stated, on May 25th, I introduced Resolution
14 645, a resolution designating June as Fatherhood
15 Recognition Month annually in the City of New York.

16 This is vital to highlighting fathers across New
17 York City and the positive impact all involved
18 fathers, father figures, and organizations have on
19 uplifting families and our communities, especially in
20 underserved neighborhoods.

21 This piece of legislation cultivates pathways to
22 giving all fathers the recognition they deserve.

23 Today specifically, I would like to take this
24 opportunity to say what this piece of legislation
25 means to Black fatherhood in reinforcing the notion

1
2 that Black fathers are responsible, nurturing, and
3 sound paternal figures to their families and to their
4 surrounding communities.

5 Historically, Black fathers have gone
6 unrecognized and have been inadvertently labeled as
7 absent fathers. Resolution 645 will seek to dispel
8 these harmful narratives, and replace misleading
9 rhetoric with facts about the work being done by
10 Black fathers across the City.

11 For far too long, Black and Brown fathers have
12 been underrepresented and disinvested in our
13 communities. Fatherhood Recognition Month would help
14 restore these injustices, honoring Black fathers as
15 some of our city's strongest changemakers who we rely
16 on to serve, guide, and protect our future leaders.

17 Resolution 645 celebrates responsible fatherhood
18 and its connection to healthy families, successful
19 employment pathways, as well as celebrates
20 organizations designed to create safe spaces for our
21 fathers and strengthen New York City families.

22 Thank you to organizations like the Real Dads
23 Network, and my organization, The Dad Gang, for
24 submitting testimony today. I appreciate the support
25 of my colleagues who have already signed onto

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2 Resolution 645. I continue to urge my fellow
3 colleagues to join me as a co-sponsor in this
4 resolution, and show fathers across the city that you
5 stand with them in acknowledging June as Fatherhood
6 Recognition Month. Thank you, Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Council Member
8 Riley.

9 Lastly, let me start our oversight hearing on the
10 Schomburg Center and the Role of Libraries and
11 Cultural Organizations in Preserving New York City's
12 History, by stating the obvious. Libraries are not
13 just about books in print, at least ours are not,
14 they are not even just about books in print and a
15 limitless supply of digital ones; they're not even
16 just about all of the special programming libraries
17 do for so many groups of New Yorkers they serve --
18 from toddlers to school children, to teens, to
19 seniors, to newly arrived immigrants, to people with
20 disabilities, to people out of work, and to people
21 just out of prison. To be sure, libraries do all of
22 that, and we have heard testimony in our hearings
23 over the past six months about the wide ranging work
24 our libraries do -- they could not be more
25 impressive. But, they do something else too, which

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2 is less often seen by the public, but which is
3 invaluable to future generations. Libraries preserve
4 our history by serving as a public repository and
5 critical resource for the professors and scholars,
6 and social activists, and journalists, and others who
7 research and write about that history.

8 Today, as we approach the upcoming Juneteenth
9 holiday, we are especially interested in how our
10 libraries and their unparalleled research centers and
11 collections have preserved Black History, starting
12 with one of our city's most impressive treasures, The
13 Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture.

14 If you have never visited the Schomburg Center,
15 go for the Langston Hughes Lobby, with its *Rivers* art
16 installation, commemorating Harlem Renaissance
17 author, Hughes, for the well-known, *The Negro Speaks*
18 *of Rivers*, but stay for the magnificent original
19 paintings of Harlem Renaissance artist, Aaron
20 Douglas, and so much more.

21 Rounding out this hearing, we will also get a
22 glimpse of how some of our brilliant arts and
23 cultural organizations are commemorating Juneteenth
24 by providing innovative programming open to their
25 fellow New Yorkers. These organizations and the

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2 Juneteenth work they are doing are in fact the
3 impetus for this hearing, and I applaud every one of
4 them.

5 At this hearing the Committee is eager to learn
6 more about the programs and services that are
7 provided by libraries to commemorate and preserve New
8 York City's history, and to make that history
9 accessible to the public.

10 The Committee also wants to learn more about the
11 plans of the libraries and the arts and cultural
12 organizations for celebrating Juneteenth this month.

13 Finally, the Committee wants to understand how it
14 can support the efforts of libraries and the arts and
15 cultural organizations in efforts like these moving
16 forward.

17 Preserving our history and culture, particularly
18 Black history and culture, is crucial especially
19 during a time when lawmakers across the country are
20 actively trying to prevent future generations from
21 learning about it and erase all of our contributions
22 to this nation. The preservation of history and
23 culture is not only beneficial for academia and
24 study, but it is needed for a society as a whole,
25 allowing for all of us to be able to learn from the

1
2 past, to understand our present, and to dream and
3 know what is possible for the future.

4 I want to acknowledge my colleagues who are on
5 this committee and who are present here today:

6 Council Member Louis, Council Member Ung, and Council
7 Member Fariás, and, remotely, we have Council Member
8 Joseph, and Council Member Moya.

9 I would also like to thank my staff and the
10 committee staff for their work in preparing today's
11 hearing: Naomi Hopkins, my Chief of Staff; May
12 Vutrapongvatana, my Budget and Policy Director;
13 Brenda McKinney, Senior Counsel to the Committee;
14 Regina Paul, Legislative Policy Analyst -- who wrote
15 nine of the ten resolutions that we are hearing today
16 -- and, Sandra Gray, our Senior Financial Analyst.

17 Now, I would like to address some housekeeping
18 items before we begin with the Libraries' testimony.

19 Today is an in person hearing with the option of
20 virtual testimony for the public. The Committee will
21 be accepting registrations for testimony throughout
22 the hearing. Anyone who is attending in person, and
23 who wishes to testify in person, should see the
24 Sergeant At Arms to fill out a witness slip, even if
25 you are registered in advance online.

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2 We will begin today's hearing with testimony from
3 the Libraries, followed by council member questions
4 and answers, and, then, we will move to public
5 testimony.

6 We will limit council member Q&A, including
7 comments, to five minutes. During the public
8 testimony portion of the hearing, witnesses from the
9 public will be limited to two minutes.

10 As a reminder to all our witnesses, please state
11 your name prior to your testimony for the record.

12 The Committee will also be accepting written
13 testimony for up to 72 hours after the close of this
14 hearing.

15 Let me ask for Senior Committee Counsel to
16 administer the affirmation to the witnesses from the
17 Libraries, who may then begin their testimony.

18 Brenda?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair.
20 Because the Libraries will be testifying as
21 administration today, we do not need to administer
22 the oath. But, we will invite the three library
23 branches -- or three library systems -- to come to
24 the table at this time and begin with their
25 testimony, thank you.

1
2 And, again, there is no affirmation or oath
3 today, but we would just ask that everyone please
4 state their name for the record when you begin your
5 testimony. And we can begin whenever you are ready,
6 thank you.

7 MS. JOY BIVINS: Joy Bivens is my name, for the
8 record, before I get into the reading of my
9 testimony.

10 Good morning, my name is Joy Bivins, and I have
11 the distinct privilege of serving the Director of the
12 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. And
13 it really is an honor today to address you about the
14 role of the Schomburg Center specifically, and
15 libraries and cultural institutions more broadly, to
16 ensure that New York City's history is preserved and
17 shared with all of its citizens.

18 For the past two years, I have had the
19 opportunity to lead the Schomburg Center in Harlem,
20 which is one of the centers of Black cultural life in
21 the world (sic). And, if you don't know who we are
22 and what we do, and who we are, I am happy to share
23 that with you today. We are one of the world's
24 premier research libraries, a singular institution, I
25

1
2 would argue, in maintaining and preserving the
3 histories of people of African descent.

4 Each year, over tens of thousands of visitors
5 and program attendees benefit from our dynamic
6 offerings. We trace our genesis back to the Harlem
7 Renaissance of the 1920s and for the past 98 years --
8 in two years we will celebrate our centennial -- we
9 have been dedicated to the collection, preservation,
10 and sharing of materials that document and reflect
11 the histories and cultures of people of African
12 descent.

13 In that time, our research library has amassed
14 holdings of 11 million items with the express purpose
15 of sharing them broadly, helping scholars and
16 researchers of all kinds answer their own questions,
17 and create their own meaning. Our holdings, and I am
18 not bragging, include the archives of predominant
19 figures such as Dr. Maya Angelou, James Baldwin,
20 Sonny Rollins, and Malcolm X. We continue today the
21 life's purpose of our namesake, Arturo Alfonso
22 Schomburg, as well as scores of *particularly* Black
23 women librarians, who have helped to provide these
24 materials, to prove people of African descent's
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1
2 presence and contribution in shaping history -- at
3 the global and local level.

4 While serving patrons in our reading rooms and,
5 increasingly virtually, is at the core of what we do.
6 We are also an institution deeply connected to the
7 neighborhood and community that we serve. We are not
8 just a research center and library, but a public
9 cultural space. Our services include a wide range of
10 public programming, educational offerings such as our
11 Junior Scholars program -- which City Council
12 supports directly. We host exhibitions, like the
13 traveling project we have now, *Marking Time: Art in*
14 *the Age of Mass Incarceration*. We also host an Annual
15 Literary Festival, a Black Comic Book Festival, and
16 regular film screenings and lectures. We have
17 dedicated spaces for educational and public programs
18 such as the Langston Hughes Auditorium and the
19 renowned American Negro Theatre, which helped to
20 shape legendary performers like Ossie Davis, Ruby
21 Dee, and Harry Belafonte.

22 So, I have explained a little bit about who we
23 are and what we do, but today I want to speak a bit
24 about our public programming as we prepare to
25 celebrate the Juneteenth holiday.

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2 At Schomburg, we say "every month is Black
3 History month". Our commemoration of the histories of
4 Black people is evergreen. And in line with that
5 mission, we are looking to celebrate Juneteenth,
6 which is known as Emancipation Day, with our 5th
7 Annual Literary Festival.

8 This is an expansive offering which includes pre-
9 festival events and an indoor/outdoor program that
10 occupies our building and takes over 135th Street
11 between Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevards.

12 This year's theme is Literacy as Generational
13 Wealth. Our celebration will include author panels,
14 writing workshops, poetry reading, and events for
15 children, each centering literacy.

16 And as we celebrate the emancipation or the final
17 emancipation of enslaved populations in 1865, it is
18 fitting that we really center literacy, which during
19 enslavement, was considered criminal or was attached
20 to punishment if you taught Black people to read.

21 So, not only are we doing that for our Juneteenth
22 celebration, but this coming summer, the library at
23 large will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Hip Hop,
24 which is the artform that first emerged in the South
25 Bronx in the summer of 1973, and soon gave voice to

1
2 the creative imagination of a new generation of
3 artists and activists. Schomburg Center is proud to
4 hold the archive of one of Hip Hop's impresarios, New
5 York's own Fred Brathwaite, known around the world as
6 Fab Five Freddy. A commemorative Hip Hop at 50
7 library card will be available at all New York City
8 Public Library locations very soon featuring
9 materials from his collection.

10 In addition to the collections, programs, and
11 offerings that preserve New York's history at the
12 Schomburg, are those of other NYPL research
13 libraries. These includes the Library for the
14 Performing Arts and the Stephen A. Schwarzman
15 Building. The Schwarzman Building houses our
16 humanities, social sciences, and fine arts
17 collections while the Library for Performing Arts
18 maintains one of the world's most extensive
19 collections in the fields of dance, theatre, music,
20 and recorded sound.

21 Together our research libraries steward more than
22 45 million items that span thousands of years of
23 human history, with a deep focus on New York City
24 history. Each year, we acquire new items to grow the
25

1
2 collection and expand our commitment to preserving
3 history.

4 The library's research collections have been
5 integral to its identity as one of the world's great
6 research libraries since its founding in 1895. But,
7 what distinguishes it from other libraries is its
8 role as a public research library offering free and
9 open access to its extraordinary collections, staff
10 expertise, and research services -- anyone with a
11 library card has access to this great history that we
12 have the privilege preserve.

13 Our research centers are supported by our Library
14 Services Center in Long Island City, a state-of-the-
15 art facility that houses our preservation,
16 conservation, cataloging, and digitization teams.
17 Through their work, we can be sure that our items
18 will be available in perpetuity for the public.

19 Now, you may have noticed that I have stumbled
20 across many words during my presentation here, I am
21 very nervous... I have been very nervous, because I
22 feel a great and deep commitment to libraries, and I
23 feel very honored to represent myself, my colleagues,
24 and The Schomburg Center. We see ourselves as
25 providing not only a service of depth to our

1
2 community, but a service of depth to the world. We
3 are part of a larger diaspora. We have been at the
4 forefront of maintaining materials that prove our
5 existence on this globe. And, because of that, I
6 take deep pride in what we do. And because of that,
7 I take this to heart, and I take this very seriously.
8 So, please do not... accept what we have presented
9 here with that spirit.

10 We are so grateful to this body for its longtime
11 funding of the Schomburg and recognition of the
12 integral role our institution -- along with all
13 NYPL's research libraries -- plays in preserving New
14 York's history. Your support is what allows us to
15 acquire valuable materials and resources that make
16 our commitment to the lifelong education and
17 exploration of the lives, traditions, and legacies of
18 people of African descent possible.

19 So, I want to thank you for the opportunity to
20 testify, and I remain available to answer any
21 questions that you may have, thank you.

22 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: Good morning, my name is
23 Shakira Smalls, and I am the Executive Director for
24 Queens Public Library's (QPL) Langston Hughes
25 Community Library and Cultural Center. On behalf of

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2 our President and CEO, Dennis Walcott, we thank you,
3 Chair Ossé, and the members of this committee, for
4 the opportunity to speak with you regarding the vital
5 role of libraries play in preserving the history of
6 New York City.

7 Established in 1969 through a grassroots efforts
8 -- and I am going to repeat that -- through
9 grassroots efforts -- the Langston Hughes Community
10 Library and Cultural Center holds a special place in
11 the multicultural community it serves. It goes beyond
12 the traditional idea of a library, as it focuses on,
13 and provides access specifically to Black history and
14 culture. Named after the renowned interpreter of the
15 Black experience and social activist, Langston
16 Hughes, this institution served as a hub for
17 education, research, and community activism. The
18 Black Heritage Reference Collection stands as a
19 testament to the richness and depth of Black history,
20 covering a wide range of subjects including African
21 history, the African diaspora, slavery, civil rights
22 movement, the Harlem Renaissance, Black literature,
23 critical race theory, African-American biographies,
24 racism, African-American art, and much more. The
25 collection, one of the largest public circulating

1 collections of materials on the Black experience in
2 New York State, includes encyclopedias, primary
3 source documents, and writings by prominent figures
4 such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Langston
5 Hughes, and Barack Obama.
6

7 These materials play a vital role in our in-
8 person and virtual programming. So far this fiscal
9 year, we have hosted nearly 900 programs for more
10 than 28,000 attendees from not just Queens, but also
11 throughout New York City and beyond.

12 In the past, we hosted luminaries such as famed
13 poet, Nikki Giovanni, and musician Billy Taylor. The
14 late Betty Shabazz, frequented the library and
15 supported its endeavors.

16 We actively collaborate with educational
17 institutions offering resources for Black studies
18 classes and research projects. Through our diverse
19 programs, customers gain a deeper understanding of
20 the Black experience and contributions of the larger
21 human narrative.

22 Langston Hughes' Collection Development Policy
23 ensures a comprehensive collection that reflects the
24 study and interpretation of Black history and
25 culture. The collection stands as a bulwark against

1
2 cultural deprivation, historical misconceptions,
3 misinformation, and image distortion. Students,
4 researchers, educators, historians, or anyone seeking
5 specialized materials, are able to explore it,
6 whether for informational, educational, cultural,
7 recreational, or research purposes. We believe free
8 access to this resource encourages individuals to ask
9 thoughtful questions, challenge historical
10 misconceptions, inspire empathy, foster critical,
11 thinking, and the exploration of lesser known aspects
12 of history. By continuously expanding this living
13 collection, the library remains a beacon of knowledge
14 and a testament to the importance of preserving and
15 sharing Black heritage.

16 The idea of preserving one's history, to ensure
17 that it is not forgotten, was the priority of Carter
18 G. Woodson, the namesake of our Carter G. Woodson
19 Reference Collection. An educator, philosopher and
20 more, Dr. Woodson is referred to as the "father of
21 Black history" and founded the Association of
22 African-American Life in History also known as ASALH.
23 The purpose of the association is to "promote,
24 research, preserve, interpret and disseminate
25 information about Black life, history, and culture to

1 the global community", and the collection does just
2 that.
3

4 Dedicated in 1968, the Woodson Collection is
5 comprised of more than 4,000 reference materials
6 covering various aspects of African-American culture
7 and life with a focus on slavery, contemporary
8 African-American life, biographies, slave narratives,
9 and the papers of the nation's most influential Black
10 leaders, including Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther
11 King, Jr., and Booker T. Washington. Our hope is that
12 with the accessibility of this collection, Dr.
13 Woodson's legacy and tradition of disseminating
14 information about Black life, history, and culture to
15 the global community will carry on well into the
16 future.

17 QPL's archive is also located at our Central
18 Library and houses primary and secondary resources
19 documenting our local history. We are working to
20 digitize and catalog the collection, which consists
21 of approximately 36,000 books and volumes of serials,
22 4,500 maps, 105,000 photographs, and more.

23 In partnership with CUNY Queens College, QPL's
24 Queens Memory Project collects personal histories,
25 photographs, and other records of contemporary life

1
2 in the borough. Through hosting programming, such as
3 story sharing and local history events, and
4 collaborating with local groups, the project raises
5 awareness and creates a sense of ownership of a
6 shared historic record that is representative of all
7 experiences and perspectives of those who proudly
8 call Queens their home. To date, they have collected
9 over 1,000 oral interviews, hosted hundreds of
10 community events, and served as a key resource for
11 individuals interested in preserving local history.
12 Queens Memory also produces an award-winning podcast,
13 which is now in its third season, and last year
14 introduced "Queens Name Explorer", an interactive
15 digital map that uses crowdsourcing to collect and
16 share the stories behind the names of our local
17 parks, streets, and schools.

18 Queens Public Library is fortunate to have
19 received a grant from the Institute of Museum and
20 Library Services, also known as IMLS, to honor the
21 50th Anniversary of Hip Hop. Queens' Public Library,
22 along with the Brooklyn and New York Public
23 Libraries, and other cultural institutions across the
24 country, is holding both in-person and virtual
25

1
2 events, focusing on the genre's history and impact on
3 all aspects of culture.

4 Last week at Langston Hughes Library, we
5 collaborated with QPL's Hip Hop Coordinator, Ralph
6 McDaniel's, to host a "Crush on You" hair show with a
7 celebrity stylist MelStylez to celebrate Pride month.
8 This event showcased unique and colorful Lil Kim-
9 inspired hairstyles and culminated with a vogue
10 performance.

11 In August, we are hosting a two day Hip Hop
12 summit at LaGuardia Community College Performing Arts
13 Center. The summit will feature thought-provoking
14 panels, including an examination of Hip Hop's role in
15 social justice, and broadening the Black narrative,
16 and a *Youth Power* segment for children ages 10 to 15
17 years old. This, and all associated programming, will
18 be recorded and catalogued in QPL's digital Hip Hop,
19 archive, preserving these innovative resources so
20 they are readily available for future generations.

21 Continuing with tradition, Queens Public Library
22 is honoring Juneteenth with a number of activities
23 across the borough. This momentous holiday will be
24 celebrated from June 10th through June 17th with
25 programs for customers of all ages. These activities

1
2 will include storytelling workshops, led by musician
3 and storyteller Atiba Wilson, that interweave the
4 history of Juneteenth with one's own personal story,
5 learning the origins of the day through artistic
6 expression, and day-long family celebrations at
7 community libraries. Honoring Juneteenth underscores
8 the significance of reconciling the struggles of the
9 past, while recognizing the ongoing struggles of
10 today.

11 "Then the hand seeks other hands to help, a
12 community of hands to help -- thus the dream becomes
13 not one man's dream alone, but a community dream...
14 Not my dream alone, but our dream." These powerful
15 words inscribed on the other side of Langston Hughes
16 Community Library and Cultural Center, remind us the
17 collective power we possess when we come together to
18 support and uplift one another.

19 Whether visiting the Langston Hughes Community
20 Library And Cultural Center, exploring our Carter G.
21 Woodson Reference Collection, or participating in one
22 of our many dynamic programs we offer, every
23 individual has the right to learn about the history
24 and experience of those who lived before us, and to
25

1
2 contribute to preserving our current shared history
3 at Queens Public Library.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

5 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: For the record, My name
6 is Dominique Jean-Louis, here from the Brooklyn
7 Public Library

8 Good morning, again my name is Dominique Jean-
9 Louis, and I am the Chief Historian of the Center for
10 Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library.

11 Thank you to members of the Committee on Cultural
12 Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup
13 Relations, and the entire City Council, for providing
14 us with the opportunity this morning to celebrate,
15 highlight, and advocate for the work we do in
16 preserving New York City's history.

17 I am eager for our discussion, so I will keep my
18 remarks for today brief.

19 The existence of the Center of Brooklyn History
20 is proof positive that the work of preserving and
21 sharing just the borough of Brooklyn's history is
22 more than a fulltime job. Our Collections team
23 maintains our research library, our special
24 collections, archives and manuscripts, fine art,
25 artifacts, and oral histories -- including the

1 trailblazing Muslims in Brooklyn Project and Voices
2 of Crown Heights. We use these sources to share
3 Brooklyn's vast history in a number of ways from
4 exhibitions to public discussions to teaching in
5 classrooms across Brooklyn and across the country.
6 This fall, we will expand our hours and building
7 access to guide history inquiry on a daily basis. We
8 cannot wait to contribute our efforts in the service
9 of Brooklyn Public Library's broader mission of
10 inspiring discovery, advancing research, preserving
11 history, celebrating cultural heritage, and promoting
12 and expanding access to the library's vast resources.
13 We are proud to serve the public in this way
14 alongside Brooklyn Public Library's 61 other
15 neighborhood libraries.
16

17 Alongside our partnership between CBH and BPL's
18 other locations, there are three branches that merit
19 specific recognition:

20 Macon Library's African-American Heritage Center
21 stewards two special collections: A local history
22 collection built in collaboration with Society for
23 the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant
24 History, and a children's book collection honoring
25 the legacy of cherished librarian, Taneya Gethers

1
2 Muhammad. A junior curator in African-American
3 History will join the Macon Branch this year to
4 further in that mission.

5 The Stone Avenue Library Branch in Brownsville,
6 houses the independent Brownsville Heritage House,
7 and the two collaborate year-round to vividly portray
8 the history of the neighborhood of Brownsville.

9 Finally, New Lots Library was revealed recently,
10 according to new evidence, to be sitting atop and
11 African burial ground containing the remains of
12 enslaved people. Council Member Charles Barron,
13 former Council Member Inez Barron, and many in the
14 community have worked diligently to ensure the once
15 unacknowledged historical significance of this burial
16 ground is officially recognized and honored. With
17 their generous support, BPL is embarking on a major
18 renovation of the New Lots Library that will fully
19 update the library's space, and take care to
20 highlight this profound and immense heritage, and
21 celebrate local culture.

22 All Brooklyn Public branches are celebrating the
23 legacy of Hip Hop through programs that include
24 Learning to DJ, graffiti art, break dancing, spoken
25

1
2 word, poetry, fashion, movies, and music -- all of
3 the elements of Hip Hop.

4 On June 17th, our Night in the Library: *The*
5 *Philosophy of Hip Hop*, will take over Brooklyn's
6 Central Library from 7:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., and we
7 will have keynote addresses, music, discussions,
8 debates, and activities inspired by the genre's
9 music, culture, and impact. We hope you will be able
10 to join us.

11 On June 19, 2023, the library will be closed in
12 honor of Juneteenth. This year marks the fourth year
13 of Council Member Farah N. Louis' Juneteenth
14 partnership with BPL's Central Library. We are
15 honored to work with Council Member Louis to host
16 this once again. In addition, BPL will also host
17 over 20 book discussions, movie screenings, arts
18 programs, and even more. We will also be celebrating
19 the third anniversary of BPL's Black American Library
20 card, created three years ago in honor of the first
21 year Juneteenth was recognized as a city, state, and
22 public school holiday.

23 As a public historian, it is my privilege to
24 share both the delights and the darkness of history.
25 We aim to amplify voices that have not always been

1 heard, and correct, in the words of Haitian public
2 historian, and former Brooklynite, Michel Rolph
3 Trouillot, the "silences" in the historical record.
4 This is a mission I am honored to share with my
5 talented and dedicated colleagues at BPL, our fellow
6 organizations here today, and I am happy to say, with
7 those of you this room who represent us in city
8 government. Thank you so much for your continued
9 support.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for testifying, all
12 three of you.

13 I do want to acknowledge my colleague, Council
14 Member Hudson for joining us, and also turn it over
15 to her to share some remarks on her resolution.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much, Chair
17 Ossé, and thank you all for your testimony.

18 I would first like to thank again, uhm, Chair
19 Ossé for holding this hearing today. I am honored to
20 speak briefly today about one of the bills under
21 consideration, Resolution 199, which would declare
22 June as Caribbean Heritage Month.

23 Currently more than 861,000 New Yorkers of
24 Caribbean descent reside within the five boroughs.
25 New York has one of the largest and most Caribbean

1
2 communities outside of the West Indies, and has
3 served an enormous role in shaping the culture here
4 in New York City. And as the child and grandchild of
5 immigrants, I am proud to be part of our city's
6 Caribbean community. Our city currently celebrates
7 Caribbean culture through celebrations like the West
8 Indian Day Parade that attracts millions of
9 participants and sparks deep community engagement
10 across Brooklyn and the five boroughs. Simply put,
11 New York's culture is Caribbean culture from the food
12 to the music, and everything in between. And nearly
13 two decades ago, the federal government declared June
14 as Caribbean Heritage Month. And, now, I am calling
15 on my colleagues to support Resolution 199, and have
16 our City acknowledge the impact of Caribbean People
17 on New York and name June as Caribbean Heritage Month
18 here in New York City. And I believe... I don't
19 know, Council Member Williams' specific background,
20 but I know...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I'm American.

22 [LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, so she's not
24 claiming Caribbean culture... (CROSS-TALK)

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [INAUDIBLE]

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: But the rest of us...

3 (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: [INAUDIBLE]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: The rest of us up here are
6 all of Caribbean descent. So, thank you so much,
7 again, (LAUGHING) Chair Ossé.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: (LAUGHING) Thank you, Council
9 Member, Hudson.

10 Now, let's dive into... to some questions.

11 So, we have heard this morning about the
12 impressive research and reference centers and
13 collections housed in our library systems. And I
14 really appreciate the three of you for the work that
15 you do, but also the place in which you do this work.

16 Do you believe that the public is sufficiently
17 aware of them, uh, of the three systems and the
18 institutions, uh, and the work that you all do?

19 MS. JOY BIVINS: I will attempt to address that.
20 I do believe that there is a deep recognition within
21 the Harlem community regarding the existence of the
22 Schomburg Center. And judging by the numbers of
23 people who access, not just the Schwarzman Building,
24 but the Library for Performing Arts, and all of our
25 branches, there is deep respect within communities,

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2 uh, for the work that is done. Often; however, I
3 would like to see greater recognition by the public
4 for the ways in which libraries serve them, and many
5 of the ways in which libraries have... are just kind
6 of part and parcel of community life, but also to...
7 I would love to see more support from the public in
8 terms of their representation at meetings such as
9 this, and really backing us as we continue to strive
10 and advocate for public... the availability of
11 public research collections.

12 So, to you answer question in short, yes, I do
13 believe that the public is aware. To answer the
14 question in a more nuanced way, I wish there were
15 greater awareness by the public for all of the
16 resources that we provide on a daily basis to
17 intergenerational communities.

18 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I would join in that
19 sentiment very much. And I would add that, uh, as a
20 research institution, we are proud to serve academic
21 and scholarly researchers on a daily basis who come
22 to our site. But, I do believe that the general
23 public, uh, we would love for there to be more
24 awareness that those treasures of the collections,
25 our original copy of the Emancipation Proclamation,

1
2 these historic documents are available for everyone
3 to use and that they should use them. You don't have
4 to be a university professor or writing a book for a
5 scholarly audience to go into our research library
6 and touch those original documents, and look at these
7 pieces of fine art and artifacts, and be enriched by
8 them, and have your own story intertwined with them.
9 We would love for the general public to feel a part
10 of that history that we are preserving. Our goal is
11 always to be expanding the knowledge of the many,
12 many recourses that we provide. And, in addition,
13 the fact that we stand on the shoulders of giants,
14 the decades of historical research that sits in our
15 collection and is responsible for what is available
16 at the Brooklyn Public Library, you know,
17 generational activist like Joan Maynard, who have
18 been collecting community history for years, we want
19 people to feel a part of that story of preserving
20 history. Not just creating it now, but recognizing
21 and absorbing the work that's been done by our elders
22 and those who have come before us.

23 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: So, of course, I will agree
24 with my colleagues. I believe that... I think about
25 my first time, my first memory of the library. And I

1
2 think about the curriculum that I had in school which
3 required me to read *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, and
4 I remember falling in love with the book, feeling
5 that it was the first time I read a book that had
6 representation of me and my family --and specifically
7 my brothers, and I remember it warranted it me to
8 take my own visit to the library. And I remember
9 picking up *Native Son*, which is another book by
10 Richard Wright. And when I became a librarian into
11 this profession, and I began to learn that that book
12 is banned -- that was something that was really
13 interesting to me, because it was something that
14 resonated so well for me, and I was able to connect
15 to it. And I bring that up specifically, because I
16 think the community absolutely is aware of the
17 services, but I do agree completely with what Joyce
18 said in reference to being able to have more support
19 in understanding the need to fight and scream a
20 little louder. Because if we did close the doors,
21 you will hear them. Throughout the pandemic we were
22 still rolling. We had a two-month hiatus of not
23 being able to provide service. But, before you knew
24 it, while everyone else's doors were closed, our
25 doors were open whether we had to meet you at the

1
2 door with a book; whether we were printing out
3 documents that you needed, we were able to still
4 provide that support. And I think, during the hard
5 times -- I have been with Queens Public Library for
6 over a decade, so I have also experienced Super Storm
7 Sandy in the Rockaways particularly, with our
8 libraries, and I realized that community really
9 understands our power when everything else shuts down
10 and they see that we are still moving. We were
11 operating out of trailers, and the community was
12 still able to come to get a hot cup of coffee when
13 they had no electricity. We became a distribution
14 center when necessary. We have the power to evolve
15 to whatever our community needs. So, I do think that
16 there can always be more, but they do know that we
17 are there.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how can the City ensure
19 that there is more awareness of these centers? You
20 know, Joy, you spoke about ,you know, we need some
21 more support in order to make people aware of these
22 centers. But, more specifically, what does that
23 support look like especially coming from the City?

24 MS. JOY BIVINS: Well, I think that the first
25 answer is always going to be financial support and

1
2 funding, because the reality is that it takes people
3 to do this work. And when we are not able to, uhm,
4 be fully staffed, or we have to cut staff, or revise
5 staff hours, then it impacts our service. So, that is
6 always going to be the first level of support.

7 The other level of support is literally just
8 letting us know as our leaders and leadership that
9 you are behind us, like this forum here, and that you
10 recognize that work that is being done in these
11 institutions -- to share history, and to preserve
12 history. So, I think that there is a two-pronged
13 approach: and that is financial, that is the verbal
14 support, the building up of the work that we do.

15 And there are probably other aspects of it as
16 well, but those are the first two that come to mind.
17 And I don't know if one of my colleagues has...

18 MS SHAKIRA SMALLS: In honor of Hip Hop
19 [INAUDIBLE], I am going to say what Joy was thinking.
20 "Cash rules everything around me... C.R.E.A.M. get
21 the money..." The money, the money, the money.

22 [LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

23 The reality is financial support is absolutely
24 necessary. When we are talking about the current cuts
25 that we are facing, we are talking about literally,

1
2 uhm, killing Saturday hours. That is the biggest
3 most important and critical day, because that is when
4 parents are off from work and can bring their
5 children to the library...

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Mm-hmm.

7 MS SHAKIRA SMALLS: Evening hours also suffer.
8 Again, these are things where working people can come
9 and visit the library and get the support and the
10 recourse -- the free resources -- that they need.

11 So, I absolutely continue to say, cash rules
12 everything around me. But, nonetheless, the money,
13 the financial support is absolutely necessary.

14 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I would for sure echo
15 my colleagues in terms of the financial support.

16 I will add that, to my perspective, that I am
17 newer to my role, I am just a couple of months in as
18 Chief Historian, but one of the biggest things I have
19 noted in my time at Brooklyn Public Library is the
20 importance of long term employment. Right? The
21 institutional memory that comes with people feeling
22 supported and feeling resourced enough to stay in the
23 institution for career-long length, and retain all of
24 that neighborhood history and institutional history
25 that is only made possible through strong

1
2 institutional support of our libraries, so that
3 people can stay in the communities where they want to
4 stay and provide these recourse on a long-term basis.
5 A revolving door does not build community. And, so,
6 this kind of funding is crucial. I would also urge
7 all of you to lead by example, to be a visible
8 presence at your own local libraries. We would love
9 to have you. We would love to recommend some books
10 to you. But, I think you represent such an important
11 leadership role in your communities, and people
12 respond to that kind of leadership at that example.
13 So, we would love to see you for not only, uh, the
14 books that you take out and share with your
15 constituents, but also at our programs, also at our
16 neighborhood events, making sure that ,you know, we
17 see you as much as... in our branches, as much as we
18 see you in spaces like these.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for that. And, Miss
20 Smalls, I know, "Queens get the money", so, uh reach
21 out to Council Member Williams after. I think she
22 has... She has all the money for you.

23 [LAUGHTER IN CHAMBERS]

24

25

1
2 Uh, what is the average attendance at each of the
3 centers per day, and how many attendees come by to
4 the different programs and events offered on average?

5 MS. JOY BIVENS: I am just going to submit that
6 our pre pandemic... Our numbers are rising. We are
7 returning to pre pandemic numbers where over 300,000
8 people visited the Schomburg Center in 2019, which
9 plummeted extensively during 2020 -- 2021, people are
10 still feeling their way back into the public space,
11 uh, but we are seeing really pre pandemic attendance
12 levels at our programs. Our auditorium seats 323,
13 and typically we will have a sold out show. Which,
14 selling out a show means that those who RSVP or
15 respond is more 600 to 700 in order for us to get to
16 that 300+ number. During our Black Comic Book
17 Festival, we hosted over 6,000 people in our space
18 over two days. Average, I would say ,you know, we
19 have... Our services are still rebounding from the
20 pandemic. So, because of the audience that we serve,
21 which is mostly academic researchers, uhm, we are
22 seeing hundreds as opposed to thousands during the
23 week. But, it is recovering daily.

24 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: At Langston Hughes Community
25 Library, so this fiscal year, we have seen... our

1
2 gate count illustrates over nearly 60,000
3 individuals. For programs, it depends. It depends
4 on our annual celebrations, our annual Kwanza
5 celebration brings in nearly a 1,000 people. We can
6 only fit 160 people within our facility, so what we
7 do in that case is we have an eight-hour festival, so
8 that everyone can get a little piece of the pie. And
9 we also split it up into different program rooms
10 throughout the building.

11 We just recently graduated, through a ten week
12 Spanish speaking incubator program, which was for
13 those who are looking to start their own business,
14 specifically in Spanish. And we had 30 participants
15 who came for a six-week course, with an additional
16 four weeks for one on one support. So, that is a
17 really great class size for us. Some programs might
18 have 15 people.

19 We also have a homeward assistance program that
20 averages 50 to 55 average daily attendance, which is
21 a true homework assistance program that is run by a
22 New York State Department of Education teacher.

23 So, programs can definitely differ depending, but
24 I would say our biggest events are usually our
25 cultural celebrations.

1
2 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: As I mentioned, I am
3 newer to my role, so I am happy to confer with my
4 colleagues and get you some numbers in terms of the
5 systemwide attendance, but I will note that at the
6 Center for Brooklyn History, while we are not
7 currently yet open to the public, and look forward to
8 what our numbers will be when we open in the fall, we
9 have remained open to researchers on a daily basis,
10 and we welcome researchers into landmarked Othmer
11 Library every day, and we plan for those numbers to
12 rise as we are open to the general public.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And what outreach or engagement
14 have the three library systems done to make sure our
15 young people and our schools are aware of/and visit
16 these centers?

17 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: We do have a partnership
18 where we do go inside of the schools, and we
19 coordinate a lot of site visits for the schools. We
20 also partner with a lot of colleges as well -- and
21 high schools -- every Department of Education from
22 kindergarten to 12th grade as well, once again,
23 colleges.

24 We also open our doors and make sure we do unique
25 programs. So, we have two... Queens Public Library

1
2 has... We are opening about six teen centers. Right
3 now we have, uh, one that is a standalone building
4 where it is teens only. So, we try out best to make
5 sure we have these retrofitted spaces to make sure
6 that it is very welcoming for teens.

7 Our teen library actually has no books --shh,
8 don't tell too many people -- but it does have a
9 recording studio. That is what the generation is
10 into, so that is what we are doing. So, we are very
11 amendment about finding out, by going into the
12 schools, going in to the communities, partnering with
13 community based organizations to be crystal clear
14 about what they are looking for.

15 Again, last week, at Langston Hughes Library, we
16 had our Kickoff to Pride, which was also in alignment
17 with the 50th year of Hip Hop, and that was taken
18 over by high school students and Generation Z. It was
19 a wonderful crowd between the ages of 13 to maybe 30.
20 I was a senior in the building, let's say it that
21 way. And it was an amazing event. And they took
22 over that library in a way that they were comfortable
23 with, and that is how we make sure that they are
24 aware that that this is their library.

1
2 So, we try to build off of their visits with
3 schools, and then try to throw some carrots for them
4 to come back on their own time.

5 MS. JOY BIVINS: I referenced earlier a project
6 called the Junior Scholars Program, which is in
7 its... It is more than 20 years now, which is a
8 Saturday program at the Schomburg Center, that
9 engages 6th through 12th graders --about 100 6th
10 through 12th graders -- in a project where the
11 ultimately where they are able to access the research
12 collections, the reference librarians at the
13 Schomburg Center to create their own meaning, to
14 create their own work, to supplement aspects of their
15 school curriculum whereby they may not be learning as
16 much as they possibly could be, about Black and Brown
17 contributors to culture.

18 And, so, that is one of our main ways which we
19 have accessed and engaged young people, and we have
20 been doing that for 20 years. It runs during the
21 course of the regular school year. It ends with a
22 summit where they create an exhibition; they create
23 projects, which they share with each other.

24 The other part of that engagement, again, is with
25 the Black Comic Book Festival, because many of the

1
2 constituents or stakeholders that we serve with that
3 are teenagers and younger audiences. Because, again,
4 of the nature of the work that we do at the
5 Schomburg Center, most of the folks that we see are
6 academic researchers. And, so these projects...
7 These programs and the ways in which we access young
8 people is primarily through our education programs
9 and through public programs where we have aspects of
10 those programs that are specifically geared toward
11 younger people -- children... younger children, but
12 also teenagers.

13 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I would add as well
14 that at the Center for Brooklyn History, or education
15 program is one of our premier offerings that we offer
16 to the public. Throughout the pandemic, and up to
17 today, our Brooklyn Connections program makes it a
18 point to visit school children in their classrooms,
19 throughout the borough of Brooklyn, introducing them
20 to major topics in New York City, and specifically
21 Brooklyn history, including Dutch New Amsterdam,
22 including the history of enslavement and abolition.
23 That program has been running for a number of years.

24 We are also the leader of New York's History Day
25 -- that is the leader for the entire city of New

1
2 York, and we steward our New York City students
3 working on their primary sourced-based history
4 projects for New York History Day to state
5 competition -- which took place a few weeks ago --
6 and we are stewarding those students to nationals
7 very soon. So, we are very excited that New York
8 will be represented by our school children on a
9 national stage.

10 In addition, we also run a teen historian program
11 that has produced publications for our institution,
12 that has produced exhibitions. And that is how I
13 actually got my start at BPL, serving as an advisor
14 for their Teen Historians over a decade ago.

15 So, these programs are long running, and we are
16 overjoyed to be working with some of the best kids in
17 the world, in my opinion, are kids in the borough of
18 Brooklyn. And we are hoping to expand these programs
19 as we continue to our reopening in the fall.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And are there any plans for
21 expanding these centers and collections in the short
22 term or the long term?

23 MS. JOY BIVINS: We are always in the business of
24 acquisitions which is expanding our collections. And
25 we received an allocation as part of our, uh, the New

1
2 York Public Library budget by which we engaged
3 through our collecting divisions which include photos
4 and prints, art and artifacts, manuscripts, archives,
5 rare books, also general research and reference, and
6 moving image and recorded sound. We are always
7 building our collections, filling in gaps within our
8 collection, uh, determining who is missing from our
9 holdings and pursuing those. So, that is what the
10 curatorial team at the Schomburg Center does, so that
11 we can more robustly serve researchers and academics.
12 And as part of every ,you know, grant that we write,
13 and every program that we start, while we may not be
14 expanding the physical space of the building we are
15 expanding the reach of our collection, and we are
16 expanding the... We are expanding how much more we
17 can serve a public. And not just a public that is
18 New York City or New York State, but how our
19 collections, through digitization and through other
20 technological means be made more available nationally
21 and internationally.

22 So, I would say that, yes, the plans -- expanding
23 is always part of the plan, but it typically is in
24 expanding collections and expanding services not

1 necessarily expanding the physical imprint... the
2 physical footprint of the space.
3

4 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: Queens Public Library feels
5 the same way. Uh, we have a lot of materials that
6 our focus is to make it more accessible. So, for
7 example, at Langston Hughes Community Library and
8 Cultural Center, we have more than 5,000 of VHS. So,
9 it is very critical that these VHS that are footage
10 of whether it is Queens Public Library, Langston
11 Hughes specifically, the communities being able to
12 digitize and to be able to have accessible to those
13 who are doing research and to preserve the history of
14 Queens.

15 So, we agree that is not necessarily expanding
16 our collection, but definitely focused on keeping the
17 collection a living collection by making sure that it
18 is accessible to anybody that needs to utilize it.

19 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I absolutely join my
20 colleagues in saying the goal is always to optimize
21 and increase the accessibility of our collections.
22 But, as Joy mentioned, we are also always looking in
23 for what I mentioned before as silences in the
24 historical record, and doing what we can to expand
25 the collection to give voice to those silences, too.

1
2 Our collections team is also involved in the process
3 of determining what the most appropriate acquisitions
4 would be and moving forward with those. Uh,
5 expanding access also looks like digitization. We
6 are very proud that our collection of more than 1,500
7 oral histories are available online, transcribed, key
8 word searchable, and the goal is to expand those
9 collections and make sure that we are listening in on
10 the voices Brooklyn today, because those will be the
11 historical voices of tomorrow. And, so, those, uhm,
12 those collections will be expanding as we are able to
13 make sure that today's history is preserved for
14 future generations.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And speaking of expanded reach,
16 when some states started banning books, which include
17 books on racial and social justice, Black curriculum,
18 our library systems responded to the suppression and
19 made their collections available nationwide
20 digitally.

21 Have the centers played a role in ensuring that
22 these historical collections are accessible in places
23 beyond New York City, and if so, how?

24 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I can definitely
25 start. The Brooklyn Public Library is very proud to

1
2 be a leader in addressing the urgent issue of
3 censorship across the country, and joined the call in
4 making our collections available nationwide. We
5 continue with this initiative, and now in are next
6 phases as more library spaces become ,you know,
7 available and safe to access once more, thinking
8 about ways that this Books Unbanned program can be
9 wrapped in with our other programming. How we can
10 expand not only access to our collections, but the
11 conversation around collections. So, we have piloting
12 programs to connect young people from across the
13 country to our young people in Brooklyn, so that they
14 can be having conversations about the political and
15 economic climate they find themselves in and connect
16 that to the resources and the literature they have
17 available to them -- And, so, making sure that not
18 only access is available, but, uhm, critical thought
19 and critical discussion about that access is also
20 made possible so that the understanding is there as
21 well.

22 MS. JOY BIVINS: I am going to add that as an
23 institution that is committed to preserving and
24 sharing materials related to people of African
25 descent, uh, we have always been on the front line,

1
2 the vanguard, of ensuring or making sure that we not
3 only are at that preservation space, but we are
4 acquiring so that we can make sure that these
5 materials are protected and made available now and
6 into the future -- in the New York Public Library,
7 the Schomburg Center, has been part of the fight
8 against censorship and the banning of books. We
9 highlight those books within our collections, which
10 are readily on banned books lists, which includes
11 some of our ,you know, some of the most revered
12 authors in the African-American canon -- Toni
13 Morrison, James Baldwin -- you raised Richard Wright.
14 These are the bread and butter, these are the
15 foundations upon which our collections are built.
16 And, so we are always making those available, as
17 readily available as we possibly can to the public
18 and including them in programs so that our stance on
19 this well-known. We are anti book banning. We are
20 about celebrating the work of Black authors, Black
21 authors who have engaged the racism, the sexism, the
22 homophobia of their communities collectively. And we
23 will continue to do that and make materials
24 available. We fall in line with, I would say the
25 Executive Director of the American Library

1 Association who says, free people read freely. And
2 we want to ensure that what we present or what we are
3 making available to our audiences is part of that
4 freedom. And literacy and who you read and making
5 that available is what we are in the business of
6 doing.
7

8 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: We appreciate being rebels.
9 So, any time there is a banned book, you will walk
10 inside of one of our libraries, and you will find
11 that banned book right in front of your face. So,
12 that is one of the ways we make sure that people know
13 that we are not supportive of silencing anyone.

14 We also, at Queens Public Library, have an
15 interlibrary loan program, in which physical
16 materials can go beyond New York State. We actually
17 started revisiting the conversation of what that
18 looks like for specifically for Langston Hughes
19 Community Library's Black Heritage reference
20 collection, as well as acquiring more. We are
21 fearful that we have so many rare gems that you do
22 worry about if they are going to be returned, so we
23 are currently updating that policy to come up with a
24 plan to be able to... for people to be able to
25 access additional materials as well.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And what do you all see as the
3 connection between the work that these centers and
4 collections do and provide in preserving New York
5 City's history, including on cultural history and the
6 upcoming commemoration of Juneteenth? Is there a
7 link between some of the work that you do? And if
8 you could elaborate of some of those connections that
9 would be wonderful.

10 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I mean, I will start by
11 saying, uh, given the recent allocation of Juneteenth
12 as federal and state and city holiday, we know that
13 comes off the back of generations doing the research
14 of how emancipation affected this country. That
15 historical research at a deep local level is
16 incredibly important. And so making sure that
17 research is available, and shared, and discussed is
18 at the heart of why we have this new nationwide focus
19 on this particular holiday. And, certainly, the hope
20 is as well that our traditions that are much more
21 local to New York City and New York State can also be
22 recognized by a wider public as well. Brooklyn has
23 always been a place where we celebrate celebrations
24 like Pinkster. And through research and through
25 programming, uh, at our libraries and also the

1 materials we have available at the Center for
2 Brooklyn History, we are hoping that people's
3 appetites are wetted for these kinds of cultural
4 specific, locally embraced holidays that have a story
5 to tell to a wider public -- have a story to tell
6 about the specificity of the Black experience, here
7 in Brooklyn, right down to a neighborhood level as
8 well as on a grander, national scale.

9
10 You mentioned some of the initiatives that we
11 have going on specifically for Juneteenth, uh,
12 whether that is the development of our Black American
13 library card or particular partnerships we have with
14 members of the City Council, but we are also, I think
15 the work that we're doing in schools to bring that
16 history to children means that, unlike many of us, or
17 many people who heard about Juneteenth for the first
18 time after their schooling had already concluded, the
19 hope is that we can continue to be an educational
20 resource, not just for children and people who are in
21 K through 12 education, but really recognizing the
22 lifelong importance of being a learner. And
23 Juneteenth, I think, is a great example and
24 opportunity of how this kind of history deserves to
25

1
2 be in the headlines, deserves to be discussed at an
3 interpersonal, general public level.

4 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: I want to give respect to the
5 founding body of Langston Hughes Community Library
6 and Culture Center. And specifically because these
7 were African-Americans in a specific community who
8 did not feel welcome at local libraries. They
9 decided to create their own library. So, before
10 Langston Hughes Community Library and Culture Center
11 was officially a part of Queens Public Library, it
12 was a grassroots library that was started by an
13 African-American community who felt that local
14 libraries did not reflect their culture, did not have
15 representation within their materials, and they
16 decided to create one, hence why they threw a
17 cultural center in the back.

18 I say all that specifically to give them honor,
19 because while some of us are on our fourth annual
20 Juneteenth celebration, Langston Community Library
21 and Cultural Center is proudly celebrating its 40th
22 as well as the Kwanza celebration, as well as Black
23 August. So, prior to national attention, libraries
24 had that opportunity to continue to do that research
25 and dive into the collection before it even becomes a

1
2 hot button conversation topic to be able to
3 celebrate.

4 So, I take pride in my ancestors who saw the need
5 for their own community. And 55 years later, here we
6 are standing even stronger than it was.

7 MS. JOY BIVINS: I am going to piggyback off of
8 that reverence for the ancestors or reverence for
9 those who had the foresight to consider that these
10 materials would be something that we needed in 2023 -
11 - And, in 1925, began the Division of Negro
12 Literature History in print on 135th Street, at the
13 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library.

14 And, so, while we are only on our fifth
15 celebration of Juneteenth at the Schomburg Center, we
16 have been at the forefront of celebrating and
17 commemorating histories of Black people for nearly a
18 100 years.

19 And, so, the ways in which we see our Juneteenth
20 celebration or our Annual Literary Festival really
21 intersecting with the importance of Juneteenth, is
22 not only just the commemoration of this particular
23 Emancipation Day, but also the fact that literacy is
24 connected to... is connected to liberation; it is
25 connected to joy; it is connected to freedom, and

1
2 that is what we are about. We are about engaging the
3 book, the authors, those who are creatives within our
4 communities to celebrate who we are, and the multiple
5 ways that we are.

6 And, so, I would say for nearly a 100 years,
7 while it may not have been Juneteenth, it has always
8 been about celebrating space... creating space for
9 celebrating the histories of Black people. And this
10 is just the latest iteration of that for the
11 Schomburg Center. And we are doing so in a way that
12 provides the fanfare and all of the -- I don't like
13 this word, but I am going to use it -- the hullabaloo
14 that is necessary to make noise about the end of
15 enslavement. And during enslavement, being literate
16 or reading was seen as a fugitive activity. And, so,
17 the ways in which we want to center our celebration
18 of freedom is by centering the freedom to read and
19 the freedom to create.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how do you anticipate that
21 the City budget, or the budget that is being proposed
22 right now and the budget cuts that exist within the
23 proposed budget, now or in the coming years, will
24 affect your ability to support these centers and
25 their collections?

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2 MS. JOY BIVENS: Well, any budget cut, as we
3 mentioned earlier, is one that causes us to, as
4 leaders within the library system, to think about how
5 we are going to respond. And the proposed budget
6 cuts are being evaluated against the services that we
7 offer, and it will impact what we can offer the
8 community. It will not only impact service, it will
9 impact our collections' budgets, so we will not be
10 able to collect at the level that we do currently.
11 It will mean that we cannot potentially be open on
12 Sundays. It will mean that we cannot potentially
13 have the level of programming that we currently have
14 or have... People may not have the same access to
15 the expertise. So, the reference librarians that
16 they currently have, you know, we don't just serve
17 people in person. We serve people virtually. We
18 make things available digitally. We respond quickly
19 to people's requests for materials. And any cut to
20 the budget will impact all of that. So, that...
21 Those are the things that we are currently wrestling
22 with as we consider what may happen on June 30th.

23 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I would absolutely echo
24 all of what has been said. The current budget cuts
25

1
2 would be disastrous for what we able to provide with
3 and the resources we are able to offer.

4 Our bread and butter is making life easier and
5 more enriched through history. And, frankly
6 speaking, the less money we have, the less we are
7 able to do that, and we cannot fulfill our mission.

8 I would also speak to the urgency of right now.
9 As a public historian, we love to be able to tie
10 major moments of the past to our lives today. And we
11 have several up coming rather exciting anniversaries
12 to celebrate. Joy mentioned the Schomburg is about
13 to celebrate its centennial. We also have upcoming
14 in just a couple years, uh, 400 years of the... We
15 have the commemoration of the end of slavery in New
16 York State, which took place in 1827.

17 So, we are now 200 years out from that particular
18 moment, and it is very important to embrace that.
19 You can't decide on January 1st, 2027 that you are
20 going to do something. This planning takes years in
21 advance. We also have the commemoration of when the
22 first enslaved people were brought to what is now the
23 state of New York in 1626. These are moments that we
24 need to be able to get ahead of, do research for,
25 plan programming for, and the cuts now would directly

1
2 interfere with our ability to bring this kind of
3 historical awareness in its crucial moment to the
4 public.

5 So, the cuts at this moment are urgent to
6 address, so that we can accurately and emphatically
7 provide people with these kinds of history,
8 recourses, and programming.

9 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: I attach myself to what both
10 of my colleagues said. But, just to bring it back to
11 full circle, just looking at the resolutions today,
12 and listening to them just resonated so much in so
13 many capacities with me, but even tomorrow afternoon
14 is our celebration of Caribbean Heritage Month. We
15 have an African-American Music Month, as well as
16 celebrating Caribbean Heritage Month at Langston
17 Hughes Library. That is what we are now in jeopardy
18 of cutting.

19 On Friday, we have an amazing conversation with
20 panelist, Jacqueline Woodson, who is a renowned
21 author, an amazing African-American author; as well
22 as Toshi Reagon, who is a wonderful musician; and
23 Joelle Wellington, who is a native of Brooklyn, and
24 she is publishing her first book come July. These
25 are all programs that we now will not be able to

1
2 offer. These programs cost money. In addition to
3 costing money, the collection -- are supporting these
4 Black authors as well as providing book clubs. We
5 are giving people the resources. So, without the
6 funding, this specially affects the collection,
7 because you may be waiting longer for that book that
8 you wanted to read, or we may no longer have access
9 to be able to purchase these books.

10 So, everything that was today, including --
11 congratulations -- pertaining to your father, and the
12 street we are naming, we have an entire department
13 that is dedicated to making sure that every single
14 street in the borough of Queens, we know exactly who
15 that person was. I am very fortunate and blessed
16 that on July 1st, my father will be getting a street
17 renamed after him. And my father is a local hero.
18 He is not a city council person. He is not anyone
19 that average Joe would know. He just the guy with
20 the great heart who happened to know the right
21 people. And when he saved a few people, someone saw
22 it. So, I am fortunate that the Queens Public
23 Library is going to be able to archive that story for
24 generations to come.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And I hate asking
3 this question, because I'm ,you know, an advocate
4 against the cuts that the Administration is
5 proposing, but these are obviously questions that you
6 will be receiving from the Administration side, and
7 it will be good to get you on record with me asking
8 it to you right now.

9 Are these centers and collections supported by
10 any public funding other than from the City or by any
11 private corporations or philanthropic funding? Can
12 other revenue streams be increased to cover losses
13 from the City if these cuts came into fruition?

14 MS. JOY BIVINS: I will take that question.

15 So, the ways in which the New York City Public
16 Library is funded is city, state, funding, obviously.
17 But, the research libraries also are funded by
18 foundations, government funding, so we do grants, uh,
19 we have... you know, we write grants. We advocate,
20 engage private philanthropy, so there are other ways
21 in which the libraries are funded, but for
22 institutions that primarily serve the public in a
23 location, in a city, particularly for my colleagues
24 at the branch libraries, the City funding is the meat
25 and the milk of the ways in which they do their work.

1
2 The research libraries have different kinds of
3 structures at the New York Public Library system.
4 But, cutting... cutting the type of money that is
5 being proposed would be disastrous for the branch
6 libraries which serve the majority of the people.
7 So, you know, there are other streams of income, yes,
8 but these are critical... that one is critical to
9 the functioning of the library system.

10 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I will jump in here as
11 well. We are also proud to be the recipient of
12 multiple kinds of public funding whether that is from
13 federal, state, and city levels, as well as other
14 sources of funding. And we are happy and proud to
15 give you a breakdown of what those look like.

16 What I will share in addition is that ,you know,
17 a city is only as strong as its budget lines. Right?
18 I always like to say a budget line is a love letter,
19 and it means something when the City is communicating
20 that this is a place they want to cut. Listening to
21 what my colleagues have shared and what we have put
22 together today about the kinds of loving support that
23 we are able to offer to a wide general public, uhm,
24 one of the things that matters in terms of funding is
25 the statement of support, the statement of saying

1
2 that this work matters. And with these kinds of
3 other sources of funding that are available, as a New
4 Yorker, I would prefer that our funding comes from
5 the people that we serve -- that it comes from those
6 strong revenue sources. And, so, we are hoping to
7 maintain a strong partnership with the kinds of
8 public funding that we have and not see less of that.

9 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: Langston Hughes Community
10 Library and Cultural Center, we receive state
11 funding. We put in the ask, and it was not made. We
12 currently receive \$112,000 from state assembly
13 person. And we also receive \$30,000 from New York
14 City Council Initiative -- thank you to Council
15 Member Moya as well as The Speaker. Every other
16 dollar for us comes from the City. There is not any
17 other wiggle room. And the reality is in a
18 hypothetical world, there are other opportunities.
19 But, now when you're cutting three systems, now we're
20 all looking at the same pot of money, and that also
21 becomes unrealistic.

22 So, at the end of the day, we definitely still
23 need our funding, but there are not many avenues,
24 especially when we are talking about the preservation
25 of African-American materials. We are speaking about

1 specifically being able to say, while other people
2 are saying that they have to be in these books, we
3 are being able to still continue to offer things that
4 we see fit for our communities.

5
6 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And how would staffing be
7 affected at these three centers by these budget cuts?
8 I know that, Joy, you hinted at this early on in your
9 testimony, but are there any more specifics that you
10 would like to share about these potential cuts could
11 do to staffing at your centers?

12 MS. JOY BIVENS: So, The Schomburg, uh, would not
13 be able to fill vacancies that are necessary for us
14 to provide the service that we would like to provide
15 -- that we want to provide, that our public is used
16 to us providing. So, what that means is that in a
17 reading room where we potentially need two librarians
18 and we only have one, that person cannot do
19 everything. And then that service would be impacted.
20 Meaning that potentially we would not be able to be
21 open the same amount of hours or the same number of
22 days during the week. Any... And particularly for
23 The Schomburg, I can't speak for every research
24 center within the New York Public Library system, any
25 open line is a threat to our service. Any... We

1
2 don't have fat to trim. We are a lean operation, and
3 anything that we cannot replace or that goes away,
4 then becomes a burden for staff, which then is passed
5 down to our public. So, that is... I can't say
6 right now how many lines are frozen currently, but a
7 number of them are.

8 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I would echo that and
9 say that we also would be forced to make devastating
10 cuts to open positions we have right now. And ,you
11 know, we are a major source... a major employer for
12 the borough of Brooklyn. This would have
13 ramifications -- devastating ramifications for our
14 system, but also for the larger community at large.

15 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: The same for Queens Public
16 Library. We are also currently on a hiring freeze,
17 because the majority of funds supports staffing.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And would you say that the
19 staff at the three centers are appropriately diverse,
20 are lead in the decision making positions such as
21 head librarians, researchers, and curators help by
22 Black staffers and POC staffers?

23 MS. JOY BLEVINS: At The Schomburg, yes, uh, many
24 of my team members work at the Schomburg because they
25 want to work at the Schomburg Center. They have

1
2 great interest in Black history, Africana history,
3 African diaspora history, and they see this work as
4 not only kind of a career mission but part of their
5 identity as I do. This is my life's work. This is
6 their life's work. And my curatorial team is made of
7 women of color. My librarians are people of color.
8 This is very much in the tradition of the Schomburg
9 Center where the leadership was primarily librarians
10 -- women librarians of color. So, that is still part
11 of who we are.

12 MS. SHAKIRA SMALLS: Langston Hughes is also very
13 diverse. Representation is very important to our
14 mission and how to appropriately serve our community.

15 MS. DOMINIQUE JEAN-LOUIS: I would echo my
16 colleagues that our representation of people of color
17 and leadership roles is also robust. And I would
18 particularly like to echo Joy in that it is part of
19 the work that we do; it is part of what draws people
20 to this work of preserving and celebrating history.
21 It is usually that we are members of the community
22 that we are uplifting, and we take a personal
23 responsibility and pleasure in being the stewards of
24 this kind of history.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you for those answers. I
3 just had to ask. I spoke at a college recently, and
4 the entire Anti-Racism Department was non-Black
5 people, which was an interesting experience to say
6 the least.

7 I do have two more questions to ask on behalf of
8 Council Member Joseph.

9 What initiatives has the Schomburg Center
10 undertaken to document and preserve the history of
11 underrepresented communities in New York City such as
12 immigrant populations and marginalized groups?

13 MS. JOY BIVINS: Well, the Schomburg Center sees
14 itself or is a repository of histories of folks from
15 across the African diaspora. I will point to on
16 particular archive that was started by a former
17 archivist, Steven Fullwood, uh, and that is the *In*
18 *the Life Archive*, which is a compilation of different
19 papers from people who identify as LGBTQ. And, so,
20 this represents an opportunity for us to address if
21 not a silence within our collection, because many of
22 the folks whose papers we have, uh, would say that
23 they were... are from that community, but to bring
24 it into the light in a new way.

1
2 And in terms of immigrant communities, one of
3 the things that I had the opportunity to do late...
4 in late 2022, is to travel to Ghana to talk about the
5 Schomburg's collections as it relates to post-
6 colonial Africa, and the communities that were
7 engaged in the Schomburg Center and also the papers
8 that are part of a record of post-colonial Ghana in
9 particular. And I asked my curators to please
10 compile everything that we had. And what they gave
11 me was a very robust list of different archives of
12 which I cannot name right now. But, rest assured
13 that we not only collect from folks who consider
14 themselves Black Americans, but people who see
15 themselves as part of a larger diaspora and the main
16 person being, Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, who hailed
17 from Puerto Rico. And we hold his papers, his
18 collection. His personal private collection is the
19 seed upon which all of our... All of our collections
20 are built and was acquired in 1926. And he collected
21 far and wide representing not just Caribbean but also
22 the African presence in Europe. So, he had... He
23 ultimately is kind of our blueprint for how we
24 collect. And we collect across the diaspora. So,

1
2 there are collections within our holdings that
3 represent the immigrant experience as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And how does the
5 Schomburg Center address challenges related to
6 preserving and digitizing delicate and fragile
7 historical materials such as rare books or fragile
8 photographs?

9 MS. JOY BIVENS: I would say this is where the
10 fundraising kind of takes a divergence from the City
11 budget fundraising. And a good deal of our
12 foundation fundraising in the past several years has
13 been precisely to digitize materials within our
14 collection. Currently we are in the process of
15 digitizing what is known as the Nautilus Records.
16 Nautilus is the company that is the precursor of New
17 York Life, and within their history they insured the
18 lives of enslaved people, and we hold those ledgers
19 within our collection. They are big. They are
20 bound. They are old. They are fragile. And they
21 require the engagement of colleagues across the
22 larger library system -- that is the conservators I
23 mentioned it in my testimony -- the library service
24 center in Long Island City includes conservators and
25 people who make sure that materials can be stabilized

1
2 even if they are fragile, even if they are falling
3 apart, and then they can be photographed
4 appropriately for digitization so that they don't
5 have to be handled again. So, many of our
6 collections have been digitized in house at the
7 library service center, and some of them have been
8 digitized with support from different foundations.
9 For instance, we have eight volumes of Equiano, an
10 enslaved person who wrote his narrative of freedom.
11 And these are part... Many of them are part of Mr.
12 Schomburg's seed collection, and they have to be
13 preserved or conserved, because they are hundreds of
14 years old. So, we... They were sent offsite for
15 conservation, and they will come back to the
16 Schomburg Center not necessarily for researchers to
17 handle them, but so that they could be on exhibition,
18 so that we can show them off and let folks know that
19 these are options for them to engage with.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And do any of my
21 colleagues have any questions for this panel?

22 Council Member Williams?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yeah, as a budding
24 scholar, I am in a PhD program, I really just
25 appreciate all of the work that you are doing to

1
2 conserve and protect the history of New York City and
3 most importantly the history Black people. Because it
4 is really hard to find material. My study is on
5 Black Women and Social Movements, and there is really
6 no information on Black women, no one thought to have
7 them tell their stories. So, I am always just really
8 inspired and also motivated by the work that people
9 to do make sure that history conserved in a real way
10 and people can lean on it, study it, and never
11 forget. So, I just wanted to thank you all for all
12 of the work that you do.

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And, with that, I will turn it
14 over... Thank you, all, again. I know you were a
15 bit nervous, but I think you all did wonderfully.

16 Also, we are experiencing multiple crises within
17 the City, and I am sure we are all well aware that
18 housing affordability crisis is definitely a
19 prevalent one, not only on our minds as elected
20 officials, but as people who live in New York City.
21 As someone who represents ,you know, a predominantly
22 Black community of Crown Heights and Bed-Stuy, and we
23 saw a seismic shift in demographic change based off
24 of race within my district over the past ten years.
25 And the work that you are doing, uh, in terms of

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2 preserving culture, and history, and Black identity
3 within the City is so important now more than ever as
4 we are seeing demographic shifts across our city as a
5 whole. Who are we as a city if we are not preserving
6 our culture, preserving our history, and
7 conserving... preserving the legacy of immigrant
8 communities, of POC communities, BIPOC communities
9 that existed here long before we have? So, thank you
10 so much for being here today and for testifying.

11 Brenda?

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much, and this
13 concludes the Administration portion of the hearing,
14 thank you.

15 We will now move to public testimony, so we will
16 just take a minute for people to move to the table.

17 The first panel will be Judith Insell from the
18 Bronx Arts Ensemble and Dr. Charlene Thomas from Def
19 Jam Recordings, and we will begin in just one moment'
20 we are just waiting for transitions. And while we
21 are moving, I am just going to read the names of the
22 first several panels, so that people online and in
23 the room know what the order will be.

24 Public panel number one will be Judith Insell,
25 followed by Dr. Charlene Thomas.

1
2 Public panel number two will be Regina Bain and
3 Leah Johnson.

4 Public panel number three will be Gabriel Khagani
5 Godi.

6 Public panel number four at present is Leroy
7 McCarthy, Sylvia Rodriguez Case, and Hakima
8 Abdulghani. Apologies for any mispronunciations. We
9 will read these again just so people know that that's
10 coming.

11 The first panel will begin now. So, we will
12 begin with our first witness, Judith Insell. And may
13 begin your testimony when ready. There should be a
14 two-minute clock. And when the clock starts you can
15 begin your testimony. Just one moment.

16 All right, and whenever you are ready, thank you.

17 MS. JUDITH INSELL: Thank you.

18 Good afternoon, honorable members of the City
19 Council, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My
20 name is Judith Insell, and I am the Executive
21 Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble.

22 On June 19, 2023 at 6:00 p.m., the Bronx Arts
23 Ensemble and Van Cortlandt Park Alliance will present
24 its third annual collaborative celebratory Juneteenth
25 event, honoring the Enslaved African Burial Ground

1 located in Van Cortlandt Park, as well as all
2 enslaved African people that helped build the
3 foundation of our great city. Together, our two Bronx
4 cultural institutions have presented Juneteenth
5 events for the past two years, providing attendees
6 with content of a spiritually moving nature.
7

8 It is my honor to be this year's emcee, as well
9 as perform collaboratively with actress Ashley Hart
10 Adams, and share a stage with renowned drummer Baba
11 Don Babatunde, Courtney Carey's "Stars of Tomorrow
12 Concert Chorale", and West African drummer/dancer
13 Yahaya Kamate.

14 This year's celebration will also incorporate
15 "Baobab Tree of Life", a public art installation
16 created by Ghanaese artist Tijay Mohammed. Installed
17 just a few feet from the Enslaved African Burial
18 Ground, this magnificent 18-foot work of art promotes
19 a connection between the past and the present making
20 it a powerful addition to our event.

21 Working together, our institutions have created a
22 touchstone Juneteenth event for the Bronx and all
23 citizens of New York City, combining the arts,
24 culture, and nature to commemorate the emancipation
25 of enslaved African-Americans.

Bronx Arts Ensemble and Van Cortlandt Park

Alliance urges [TIMER CHIMES] the City Council to vigorously support the endeavors of all of the City's cultural institutions to expand efforts to celebrate the importance of Juneteenth in our city.

Again, thank you for allowing me to present my statement today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much.

The next panelist will be Dr. Charlene Thomas. You may begin when ready.

DR. CHARLENE THOMAS: Good morning. Good morning Chair Ossé, and esteemed council members.

I am Dr. Charlene Thomas representing Def Jam Recordings. I am here today to testify in favor of the resolution recognizing the contributions of Def Jam to the music industry and to music lovers everywhere by designating January 2024 as Def Jam Recognition Month in the City of New York.

Proudly New York-born and bred, Def Jam was created in a NYU dorm room, and for 40 years running now it has been a Hip Hop love letter to the City of New York. Our very first single released, "It's Yours," was from a Bronx native by the name of T La Rock and set the tone for our ongoing legacy.

1
2 Def Jam has curated the soundtrack of New York
3 City by melodically painting a picture for people
4 around the world of who we are as New Yorkers. LL
5 Cool J's debut album "Radio" brought the world to St.
6 Albans, Queens; Slick Rick took Baychester center
7 stage and had everyone rapping "Children's Story";
8 Jay-Z romanticized the trenches of Brooklyn to the
9 point where kids around the world want to make it to
10 the concrete jungle where dreams are made. Not only
11 have these dreams been showcased through our musical
12 artists, our staff, then and now, reflect the energy
13 and culture of this city as they master their careers
14 and build other entrepreneurial pathways. We have
15 cultivated industry-leading individuals within fields
16 spanning photography, technology, academia, film/tv,
17 fashion, and many others.

18 Def Jam is deeply embedded in the DNA of Hip Hop
19 culture and New York City. We stretch across
20 generations and genres while remaining true to our
21 culture. From our artists to our movie soundtracks to
22 our video games to our partnerships from Def Comedy
23 Jam to Marvel, we are a household name dedicated to
24 bringing quality entertainment. And within all our
25 efforts one thing [TIMER CHIMES] stands out and

1
2 remains true through every decade: Def Jam is New
3 York. We've spent 40 years embodying the culture,
4 seamlessly weaving together the story of NYC through
5 music.

6 We thank you for the honor of this proposed
7 resolution. We look forward to many more years of
8 relentless dedication to celebrating you through
9 music, New York City!

10 Thank you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I am just going to say,
12 Yay! Thanks for coming. I know you guys are really
13 busy, so I appreciate you coming.

14 DR. CHARLENE THOMAS: Thank you, Council Member
15 Williams. You have been supportive in this. We
16 appreciate you, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, thank you so much.

19 We will now move to public panel number two,
20 which will be Regina Bain and Leah Johnson.

21 And we will start this next panel, so the first
22 witness is Regina Bain from the Louis Armstrong House
23 Museum. You may begin your testimony when ready.

24 MS. REGINA BAIN: Excellent.
25

1
2 Hello, I'm Regina Bain, Executive Director of the
3 Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona, Queens,
4 District of Council Member Francisco Moya. I co-lead
5 with Melissa Sandor, the anti-racism working group of
6 Culture at 3, meeting consistently for the past three
7 years.

8 The working group invited New York City's arts
9 and cultural organizations to mark Juneteenth -- a
10 celebration of hard fought freedom from enslavement -
11 - by collectively engaging in conversations and
12 public events that continue the work of equity,
13 equality, and justice in our communities. Many
14 accepted the invitation, including BRIC; Staten
15 Island Museum; FAB NYC Lower East Side; Frigid New
16 York; Bronx Arts Ensemble; Historic Richmond Town;
17 Lincoln Center; Dancewave; Greenwood Cemetery;
18 National Dance Institute; More Opera; Carnegie Hall;
19 Chair Ossé; Weeksville Heritage; Central Park
20 Conservancy; Brooklyn Conservatory of Music; Queens
21 World Film Festival, and growing.

22 You can find those public events collectively
23 listed at:

24 [https://www.louisarmstronghouse.org/juneteenth-
celebration-2023](https://www.louisarmstronghouse.org/juneteenth-
25 celebration-2023).

1
2 This work is firmly within the mission of the
3 Louis Armstrong House Museum, an organization
4 standing in the legacy of New Orleans born jazz
5 genius, 30-year New York City resident, and America's
6 first Black popular music icon, Louis Armstrong, born
7 in the reverberations of slavery, and who achieved
8 artistic excellence. And he did it with joy.

9 We look forward to opening the new Louis
10 Armstrong Center in three weeks to bring more
11 programs, like Juneteenth celebrations, to our
12 community, many of whom are new New Yorkers for whom
13 the story of emancipation, migration and, ultimately,
14 achievement, resonate.

15 This is the culture of New York City. This is
16 culture for All. We look forward to continuing this
17 work together with a cultural field of fierce [TIMER
18 CHIMES] individuals and organizations who work to
19 galvanize, to celebrate, and to remember.

20 Thank you to the Council. Happy Juneteenth.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

22 The next witness will be Leah Johnson from
23 Lincoln Center. You may begin when ready.

24 MS. LEAH JOHNSON: Thank you.
25

1
2 Good morning, Chair Ossé, and members of the
3 Committee.

4 My name is Leah Johnson, Executive Vice President
5 at Lincoln Center, and Vice Chair at Large of the
6 Cultural Institutions Group.

7 Our libraries and cultural organizations play a
8 critical role in sharing, celebrating, and preserving
9 New York City's history.

10 In May 2020, we released a "commitment to change"
11 which has served as a roadmap. We continue to learn
12 from our founding history, present artists and points
13 of view that better reflect our city, and dismantle
14 structures that foster inequity. As we commemorate
15 Juneteenth this year, it is important to support
16 BIPOC artists and the legacies of those that came
17 before.

18 At Lincoln Center, we have the privilege of being
19 home to one of the New York Public Library's
20 incredible research institutions, the Library for the
21 Performing Arts.

22 We are also home to an extensive archives
23 collection. And in partnership with the Center for
24 Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter (CENTRO), and the
25 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, in

1
2 February we launched *Legacies of San Juan Hill*, a
3 digital hub showcasing the history of the Black and
4 Brown people arts and spaces that were part of San
5 Juan Hill before urban renewal displaced them for the
6 development of Fordham, Lincoln Center, and more.
7 This online platform lifts up the history, and
8 cultural legacy of those who lived and created in San
9 Juan Hill, with a growing collection of essays,
10 articles, and archival content.

11 We continued this exploration with a series of
12 talks last month to dig deeper into topics like *New*
13 *York City's Black Bohemia (1900-1920)* and *The Puerto*
14 *Rican Experience in New York City (1920-1960)*.

15 Libraries and cultural organizations provide us
16 with the opportunity to explore ideas and experiences
17 beyond our own. They help us to understand the
18 impact of systemic injustice and inspire action that
19 drives lasting change.

20 Thank you so much.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
22 testimony. That concludes this panel.

23 And the next panel will be public panel three,
24 with Mr. Godi. Whenever you're ready.

25

1
2 So, Gabriel, and apologies in advance for any
3 mispronunciations, Mr. Gabriel Khagani Godi.

4 And Mr. Godi will read his testimony and then the
5 interpreter will speak after. So, we will have
6 double the time on the clock for this witness to
7 allow for interpretation. You may begin your
8 testimony when ready. Just make sure that the red
9 light is on, if you push the button for the
10 microphone.

11 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
12 LANGUAGE)

13 TRANSLATOR: I am glad to greet you.

14 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
15 LANGUAGE)

16 TRANSLATOR: This is a very important day for me.

17 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
18 LANGUAGE)

19 TRANSLATOR: To see all of the various signs of
20 New York presented in such an important and beautiful
21 place.

22 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
23 LANGUAGE)

24 TRANSLATOR: Let me introduce myself, my name is
25 Gabriel Khagani Godi.

1
2 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
3 LANGUAGE)

4 TRANSLATOR: And I would like to share with you my
5 experience and my impressions.

6 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
7 LANGUAGE)

8 TRANSLATOR: As an immigrant, as a representative
9 for LGBTQ community.

10 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
11 LANGUAGE)

12 TRANSLATOR: I saw two phrases that were two very
13 important images for me. I am certain you've also
14 encountered them.

15 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
16 LANGUAGE)

17 TRANSLATOR: Very often we see those phrases.
18 Very often do we encounter them. One sounds like
19 this, "I Love New York" and another one, "We Love New
20 York".

21 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
22 LANGUAGE)

23 TRANSLATOR: I was very curious, I have a
24 question, I wanted to find out what is in between?
25 What divides those two phrases?

1
2 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
3 LANGUAGE)

4 TRANSLATOR: I believe that in the phrase, "We
5 Love New York", when we say we, we understand all of
6 us and each one of us.

7 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
8 LANGUAGE)

9 TRANSLATOR: This is an understanding that each
10 one of us is an individual. And it is an
11 understanding of our contributions to our community.

12 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
13 LANGUAGE)

14 TRANSLATOR: It is our individual, as well as our
15 collective memory, that leads us to cultural
16 institutions, museums, libraries.

17 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
18 LANGUAGE)

19 TRANSLATOR: These are all products of people,
20 individual people. And everything that we use, and
21 will be using in the future, is a product of our
22 activity, our things that we do as people.

23 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
24 LANGUAGE)

1
2 TRANSLATOR: Constant streams of water that fill
3 our lakes, renewing our lakes from year to year.

4 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
5 LANGUAGE)

6 TRANSLATOR: These lakes we call Great Lakes.

7 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
8 LANGUAGE)

9 TRANSLATOR: And this is what our history is like.

10 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
11 LANGUAGE)

12 TRANSLATOR: Our history is our memories. [TIMER
13 CHIMES]

14 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
15 LANGUAGE)

16 TRANSLATOR: What is a person without memory?

17 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
18 LANGUAGE)

19 TRANSLATOR: And what are the groups of people
20 that do not have memories?

21 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
22 LANGUAGE)

23 TRANSLATOR: Phrase, "We Love our City, We Love
24 New York"...

1
2 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
3 LANGUAGE)

4 TRANSLATOR: Is an internal confidence, an
5 internal comprehension.

6 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
7 LANGUAGE)

8 TRANSLATOR: That each piece, each particle that
9 is consists of are us...

10 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
11 LANGUAGE)

12 TRANSLATOR: in that we remember our contribution,
13 uh, contribution of our families or individuals into
14 the history of our city, to our memories.

15 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
16 LANGUAGE)

17 TRANSLATOR: It reminds us that we are the keepers
18 of the human thoughts, of these precious stones.

19 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
20 LANGUAGE)

21 TRANSLATOR: In between these phrases, I saw
22 another word, the word "trust".

23 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
24 LANGUAGE)

1
2 TRANSLATOR: Perhaps trust is that very step that
3 takes us from the word "I" and leading us to the
4 concept of "we".

5 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
6 LANGUAGE)

7 TRANSLATOR: Some would ask, what is trust?

8 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
9 LANGUAGE)

10 TRANSLATOR: Is it joy or pain?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'm sorry to interrupt, we
12 just... The clock went off, so we have to keep going
13 shortly. If you can wrap up your testimony; there is
14 another hearing at one o'clock. We still have
15 several more panels.

16 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
17 LANGUAGE)

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. But, everything
19 you submit for the record becomes part of the public
20 testimony, and it is closely reviewed.

21 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
22 LANGUAGE)

23 TRANSLATOR: Okay, [INAUDIBLE] to finish...
24 (CROSS-TALK)

1
2 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
3 LANGUAGE)

4 TRANSLATOR: Trust is it pain or joy?

5 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
6 LANGUAGE)

7 TRANSLATOR: Trust is hope.

8 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
9 LANGUAGE)

10 TRANSLATOR: It is hope that there will be no
11 longer any pain.

12 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: New York (SPEAKING
13 FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 TRANSLATOR: New York, you are the harbor of our
15 hopes.

16 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: New York (SPEAKING
17 FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18 TRANSLATOR: New York, we love you.

19 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: New York (SPEAKING
20 FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 TRANSLATOR: New York, we love you.

22 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: God bless you,
23 America. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

25 MR. GABRIEL KHAGANI GODI: Thank you so much.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

3 Okay, the next panel, I will read the names of
4 the next two panels.

5 The next panel will be Leroy McCarthy, and Hakima
6 Abdulghani, followed by a remote panel, Melody
7 Capote, Lucy Sexton, Risa Shoup, and Cheryl Warfield
8 will be panel five.

9 So, next, we will go to Leroy McCarthy, and
10 Hakima Abdulghani, apologies again for any
11 mispronunciations.

12 Okay, and I think it might just be Mr. McCarthy.

13 So, you... If you are ready, you may begin your
14 testimony.

15 MR. LEROY MCCARTHY: All right, hello, City
16 Council, thank you for allowing me to speak.

17 I would like to commend the City Council on
18 honoring Hip Hop art and culture with the resolution,
19 also the individuals being honored, Ol' Dirty
20 Bastard, Big Daddy Kane, Reggie "Combat Jack" Ossé,
21 and many others that are worthy of being honored. It
22 has been a long time coming for New York City to
23 honor the indigenous art and culture of Hip Hop. I
24 travel to New Orleans, you will see jazz being
25 recognized. I travel to Nashville, and you see

1
2 country music being recognized. In New York City,
3 Hip Hop has been here for decades, but it has been
4 not treated as... other countries, cities, other
5 places honor their indigenous art and culture. Hip
6 Hop has come from the basements; come from the parks;
7 come from the streets, and now it is being honored in
8 City Hall, which is commendable.

9 I have worked with Council Member Williams to
10 honor a Tribe Called Quest with a street name, which
11 is forthcoming. I have worked with Council Member
12 Crystal Hudson, when she was a staffer for Laurie
13 Cumbo, honoring Notorious B.I.G. So, it is very
14 commendable that Big is being honored with a day by
15 the New York City Council, which was previously done
16 by Borough President Adams in 2016, I believe, when
17 he had honored Biggie with a proclamation then.

18 On Saturday, we had a block party for Notorious
19 B.I.G.'s birthday, which was postponed from May, and
20 it went very well. The community turned out.
21 Businesses turned out.

22 So, I want to just share the appreciation from
23 the Hip Hop community, as I have been working towards
24 honoring Hip Hop in each borough. Uh, Wu-Tang Clan,
25 district in Staten Island and street name for former

1
2 council member Debbie Rose, and ,you know, in the
3 Bronx [TIMER CHIMES], I am working with the family of
4 Big Pun.

5 So, I just wanted to just say thank you to New
6 York City Council for honoring Hip Hop. And I look
7 forward to all of the summer activities, and more
8 activities to honor Hip Hop, going into November, Hip
9 Hop History Month. Thank you very much.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
11 testimony.

12 So, we will now move to our final panel, public
13 panel five, which is remote.

14 As a reminder for anyone here or who is online,
15 you may submit written testimony for up to 72 hours
16 after the close of this hearing. If you wish to
17 submit testimony, you may do so via email to
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov , and it will part of the
19 record.

20 If there is anyone that is here who we have not
21 called, and you have submitted a slip to the
22 sergeants -- or please submit a slip to the
23 sergeants.

24 We will also be checking for anyone that we
25 inadvertently missed or who is still registers before

1
2 we end the hearing. So, if anyone is here and would
3 like to testify, let us know.

4 So, with that, we will move to our remote panel,
5 which will be Melody Capote, Lucy Sexton, Risa Shoup,
6 and Cheryl Warfield.

7 So, Melody Capote, you are next witness, and you
8 may begin when the sergeant calls the clock.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 MS. MELODY CAPOTE: Mr. Chairman and Members of
11 the City Council, my name is Melody Capote, Executive
12 Director of the Caribbean Cultural Center African
13 Diaspora Institute. I'm here today to testify about
14 several items on today's agenda.

15 On the issue of oversight, and as I have
16 testified before, communities of color were and
17 continue to be victims of cultural genocide. That
18 means that in order to truly subjugate people of
19 African descent, it wasn't just necessary to enslave
20 our ancestors, it was necessary to remove and destroy
21 our culture. As important as we know it is to
22 preserve culture for the benefit of future
23 generations, decisions regarding who gets tax levy
24 dollars are still made on the basis of what
25 institutions have access to free city land over

1
2 hundred years ago. Let us resolve to find a better
3 way to reward long-standing institutions and simply
4 use the fact that they are long-standing. We heard
5 this morning from the Schomburg Center, which was
6 founded in 1925. The Apollo Theater was created in
7 1934. The Caribbean Cultural Center was founded in
8 1976. Let's get serious about equity.

9 And, if we are going to get serious about equity,
10 recognizing Hip Hop as an indigenous art form of the
11 African descendant community in the same manner as
12 jazz is a good place to start. But, we need more than
13 platitudes, proclamations, and resolutions. As we
14 celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Hip Hop, we should
15 also be celebrating a significant financial
16 investment in an art form that we know conclusively
17 unifies Black and Brown people, and, yes, even white
18 young people, young and old, in a good way.

19 Next, I want to address an issue near and dear to
20 my heart, and that is the skewed priorities and the
21 enabling legislation that that creates the New York
22 State Council on the Arts and the New York City
23 Department of Cultural Affairs.

24 Before you is a resolution asking The City
25 Council to support state bills S.5714/A.4912 and

1
2 similar legislation being proposed at the federal
3 level. While we don't have time to go [TIMER CHIMES]
4 line by line on these, I urge you not just to
5 support... (CROSS-TALK)

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

7 MS. MELODY CAPOTE: these initiatives but also to
8 roll up your sleeves between now and next year's
9 deliberations to see how these changes should be
10 operationalized at both the state and city level.

11 I will stop there; I know my time is up.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for
13 testimony. And, again, please submit anything else
14 for the record. It can be added up to 72 hours after
15 the close of the hearing as well.

16 And thank you to everyone who has been waiting
17 online or in person for your patience.

18 The next witness will be Lucy Sexton from New
19 Yorkers for Culture & Arts.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 MS. LUCY SEXTON: Hi, and thank you Chair Ossé and
22 members of the City Council for this important and
23 joyous hearing. My name is Lucy Sexton, and I am with
24 the cultural advocacy coalition New Yorkers for
25 Culture & Arts.

1
2 When we talk about the role of cultural
3 organizations in preserving New York City's diverse
4 history, we must talk about money. It is the historic
5 underfunding of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and
6 immigrant communities that makes those cultures less
7 visible.

8 I salute the City Council for all of the
9 initiatives it is raising today. It is critical that
10 we, as a city, lift up and publicly recognize Black
11 artists for their work and their impact on our city
12 and the world.

13 And we need to talk about increasing funding to
14 cultural organizations led by and serving Black and
15 Brown communities, so we invest appropriately and
16 sustainably in the artists and work they nurture.

17 I think we need to talk about a reimagining of
18 New York City ---one with arts and culture supported
19 in *all* communities, one that invests in the economic
20 and emotional recovery of every neighborhood, and
21 raises up the voices of those who continue to be
22 disenfranchised and discriminated against.

23 It is time to be bold with our budget and
24 intentional in laying the groundwork for an
25 equitable, just, diverse, and thriving city.

1 We are at a pivotal moment in New York history.

2
3 As we emerge from this crisis---a crisis that has
4 devastated the cultural sector across the board---we
5 must do more to provide sustainable support to
6 organizations in every community.

7 In recent years the Council has worked hard to
8 increase its support of culture, and we are grateful.
9 But right now, arts and culture are hanging on by a
10 thread. Large anchor organizations are cutting
11 programming and readying to lay off staff. Smaller,
12 already fragile, primarily BIPOC organizations are
13 struggling to simply survive. Relief has ended but
14 culture is still facing deficits.

15 One positive outcome of this trying time has been
16 an unprecedented coming together of cultural
17 organizations of all sizes from all five boroughs.
18 The Culture@3 calls, and antiracism working group,
19 led by Regina Bain of Louis Armstrong House Museum,
20 who we just heard from, and Melissa Sandor [TIMER
21 CHIMES] have launched a sector-wide effort asking
22 every cultural organization...

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 MS. LUCY SEXTON: to engage with the recognition
25 of Juneteenth, and to make a pledge to continue to

1
2 take real anti-racist actions in our organizations
3 throughout the year.

4 I will end there, because I know time is tight.
5 There is more in my written statement.

6 Thank you so much for allowing me to testify.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
8 testimony.

9 Next we will move to Cheryl Warfield, and you may
10 begin your testimony when ready.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

12 MS. CHERYL WARFIELD: Good afternoon, thank you so
13 much, Chair Ossé, and members of the Committee for
14 having this hearing and allowing us to speak
15 specifically about Juneteenth.

16 More Opera, a small budget New York City
17 nonprofit, providing vocal arts, education, and
18 culturally responsive musical programming to
19 underserved New York City communities, will present
20 two Juneteenth performances in 2023.

21 Our second Annual Juneteenth Jubilee is a free
22 outdoor concert of traditional folk songs and
23 spirituals from the Black experience with a
24 historical text to celebrate Juneteenth held at the
25 James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center's Farmer's

1 Market -- which is a family friendly outdoor garden -
2 - and it is free and open to everyone -- as is our
3 second performance on June 19th, a Juneteenth Tribute
4 to Harry T. Burleigh, the New York City based 20th
5 century composer and cultural preservationist of
6 African-American spirituals -- which are the words
7 and thoughts of an enslaved people whose voice was
8 unheard otherwise.
9

10 The information that will be presented,
11 especially the educational component through the
12 historical text, is so important for people to hear.
13 Not only people of color -- all Americans need to
14 hear this. And I just thank the Council for at least
15 acknowledging the importance of preserving the
16 history.

17 Thank you so much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
19 testimony.

20 At this point, this is our final witness today,
21 so we will be checking for anyone we may have
22 inadvertently missed on Zoom or in person.

23 If we have missed you, please raise your hand
24 virtually on Zoom if you are online?
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2 And, we not seeing any hands in person or in the
3 room, so at this point, this will conclude testimony.
4 And just as a reminder, you may submit written
5 testimony if you would like to add any up to 72 hours
6 after the close of this hearing.

7 And I will hand it back to Chair Ossé, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Brenda.

9 And without further ado, we are going to close
10 today's hearing.

11 [GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 28, 2023