



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

Oversight Hearing: Fiscal Year 2022 DCLA Preliminary Budget, Capital Commitments, and Mayor's Management Report

March 9, 2021, 10:00 am – Virtual Hearing

Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Gonzalo Casals

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Good morning, Chair Dromm and Chair Van Bramer and members of the committees. I am here today to testify regarding the Mayor's proposed preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2021. I am joined by my colleagues, Deputy Commissioner Sheelah Feinberg and Finance Director Phillippa Shao.

I'll start with a review of the figures from the preliminary budget. The FY22 Preliminary Budget for DCLA is \$143.6 million, which includes:

- \$107 million for the Cultural Institutions Group
- \$28.5 million for the Cultural Development Fund
- \$1.25 million for energy at groups on DCLA property
- \$6.9 million for agency operations and other expenses

At this point in the budget process, these figures do not include any funding items typically added at budget adoption like City Council member items and Mayoral increases. This represents a \$4 million decrease from this point in the budget process last year, or 2.7%. We're committed to maintaining robust funding for New York's cultural community, despite the extraordinary fiscal challenges caused by the pandemic.

The agency's current FY21 budget now stands at \$187.5 million. This includes a \$1 million cut implemented as part of the PEG, which all agencies were asked to meet. Despite the ongoing fiscal challenges faced by the City, this budget remains high by historical standards, and an important source of support for cultural nonprofits across the city.

One year ago, I was appointed Commissioner of DCLA. In the early days of the pandemic no one could predict the severity of the challenges that lay ahead. In my last weeks as director of the Leslie Lohman Museum, we participated in a weekly check-in call with peer institutions to determine when to reopen, thinking that the temporary shutdown would be measured in days. I know we weren't alone in underestimating the impact the pandemic would have on our cultural institution and on our whole city.

Since then, we've all seen and experienced loss, trauma, and upheaval of our daily lives. But not everyone has been impacted by the pandemic in the same way. What we are facing is really a triple crisis: the public health crisis of COVID-19, the crisis caused by systemic racism and inequity, and the unprecedented economic crisis.

And the cultural community, despite going through tremendous suffering, fear, and loss alongside their fellow New Yorkers, has been incredibly resilient in dealing with this unprecedented scenario, while still connecting with New Yorkers in the ways they need it most.

Early on, DCLA worked with cultural groups to transform their public facilities into staging sites for ambulances, COVID testing sites, and food pantries. Now, as we look to recovery, we're transforming cultural spaces into vaccination sites, and spaces for healing and wellness. We partnered with Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment and NYC & Company to collect and highlight the incredible range of virtual offerings. We convened the sector to discuss urgent topics and connect them with resources for reopening safely and programming in outdoor spaces. We allowed more than 1,000 Cultural Development Fund recipients to change the scope of work in their applications so that they could continue to receive city support and provide cultural services to New Yorkers.

As commissioner, I want to commend my team for their enthusiasm, passion, and care for the sector, even as they dealt with the challenges brought by the pandemic.

There's so much more work to do. On the one hand, we need to focus on the recovery of the cultural sector itself. Layoffs, lost revenue, and cancelled programs have devastated the organizations we work with. We conducted a survey early in the pandemic that tried to measure this loss. What it showed was not surprising, over \$500 million in lost revenue, and 78% of artists working in arts education laid off. Thanks to the Council's continued partnership, we were

able to target investments to these hardest hit areas in the FY21. Just yesterday, we closed responses to the follow up to this survey, results of which will be released later this spring. We hope it will contribute to a powerful tool for advocacy and help direct resources where they are needed most.

We also need to focus on culture's contribution to the city's recovery as a whole. Culture is essential to every community in New York City, where it provides local jobs and makes healthier, safer neighborhoods. It's also a cornerstone of New York City's status as a world cultural capital, attracting artists and visitors from all over the world. What's good for culture is good for New York City.

We're just starting down the road to recovery. We look forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead toward a budget that supports the needs of our cultural community at this critical time, and to fighting for a fair and equitable recovery for all New Yorkers.

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



**Statement by Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO, Queens Public Library**

**New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
International Intergroup Relations Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget  
Hearing**

**March 9, 2021**

Good morning. I am Dennis Walcott, President and CEO of Queens Public Library (QPL). It is a pleasure to be here. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer, Speaker Johnson, and the members of this esteemed committee for the opportunity to speak with you about our budget priorities for the next fiscal year. Additionally, thank you for the years of support you and all the members of the City Council have shown this dynamic institution. While this will be our final Preliminary Budget Hearing together, Mr. Chair, I look forward to working with you and all your colleagues to ensure that libraries receive the funding necessary to carry out our mission. Our services will be needed more than ever, as individuals, families, businesses, and communities look to recover from the pain and suffering this pandemic has brought.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every individual, business, and government in the world. It has changed the way we interact with one another and has forced us to reconsider all the things we take for granted as “normal.” Queens was the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States nearly one year ago. Many of our communities were devastated, and we have all grappled with heartbreaking losses of family members, friends, colleagues, or neighbors.

Throughout this pandemic, Queens Public Library has been there for our communities. When COVID-19 forced the physical closure of our branches, we never stopped serving. Within the first two weeks of our closure, QPL established a full calendar of virtual activities featuring some very popular programs, such as our beloved children's story times, Zumba classes, and weekly Hip-Hop DJ sessions with Ralph McDaniels on Instagram Live. We organized virtual author talks, book clubs, workshops on health and wellness, technology, arts and crafts, civic engagement, and literacy, and other diverse cultural programming. We developed online programs in more than a dozen languages. Last month, QPL hosted a 24-hour Black Health and Healing Virtual Summit to focus on issues including mental health, health equity, parenting, civil rights and racism and the disproportionate effects of the virus. Over 7,000 people viewed the event sessions, and the numbers continue to increase since recordings are available on our website.

We have hosted over 10,000 virtual programs with 182,000 live attendees, with tens of thousands more viewing the recorded material when their schedules allowed. We added over 50,000 items to our digital collection in order to meet the demand of our customers in a virtual world, and our e-books, e-magazines and other multimedia circulated nearly 2.1 million times.

We remained committed to equitable access to library materials and services through programs such as Mail-A-Book, Correctional Outreach services, partnership initiatives with homeless shelters, and the mobile library. QPL's Mail-A-Book Service, which offers homebound customers the convenience of having library materials delivered to their door, saw an increase of 100 program registrants in 2020. In 2020, we mailed over 17,000 items to over 900 homebound customers via the Mail-a-Book program. Our Correctional Librarian sent over 600 books to Rikers Island. Between April and May 2020, QPL distributed over 2,000 items, such as board games, writing journals, pens, and other stationery items to over 700 families in six domestic violence shelters in Queens. We also mailed 13 boxes of books to a Veterans shelter serving 255 people. Between October and December 2020, we hosted a seven-stop Mobile Library Tour throughout Queens, informing the public about to-go service and virtual programming, registering people for library cards, and making Wi-Fi available to 250 people in their communities.

To address the digital divide exacerbated by the pandemic, QPL loaned 475 mobile hotspots to students in 2020 through our ongoing collaboration with the Department of Education. We are working to secure additional devices for the public, but the need remains immense. All our locations have maintained Wi-Fi for individuals to access outside our buildings, and 20 locations currently have extended Wi-Fi available up to 150 yards beyond our walls. In Fiscal Year 2020, over 500,000 New Yorkers accessed QPL's Wi-Fi network, an 11% increase from the previous fiscal year.

The economic fallout resulting from the pandemic has caused significant financial hardship on New Yorkers. Our employment assistance, skills training, and entrepreneurship services aim to get New Yorkers back on their feet. We have offered one-on-one resume assistance, small business and entrepreneurship support, job readiness and interview prep workshops, and training on various software platforms. Since April of last year, we provided over 80 small business and entrepreneurship workshops, reaching nearly 1,700 participants. We delivered over 240 hours of individualized mock interview and resume assistance to over 340 customers during this period. Nearly 8,000 participants attended more than 370 group workshops on job readiness.

To begin reopening our branches for to-go service in July, we implemented protocols to ensure the health and safety of our staff and the public, based on the recommendations and guidance of leading public health experts, in consultation with our union and Tri-Li partners. Our staff worked hard to reconfigure workplaces, install safety barriers, clean our buildings and fully stock them with PPE and hand sanitizers. We adopted a daily health and safety questionnaire and executed a communications strategy to ensure that all members of the staff and public would be able to understand and adhere to our new

protocols. Over these past 12 months, we have continually assessed our service model in light of the evolving public health situation to meet the needs of the public safely.

Despite the magnitude of the challenges they have faced throughout the crisis, QPL staff have responded with professionalism, creativity, and fortitude. Their dedication and resilience have been an inspiring reminder of the Library's enduring commitment to our communities over the past 125 years.

At this moment, 36 of our libraries are open to the public for to-go services. Since reopening for to-go service in July, we have seen over 800,000 visits at our locations and more than 350,000 checkouts of books and other physical materials, with many more on hold. Since December 2020, our to-go locations have also allowed people to pick up remote printing requests, a very popular service.

While transitioning to and innovating on our digital platforms, and providing library service safely in person via our to-go sites, we have collaborated closely with the City in its efforts to combat COVID-19. Specifically, we have:

- Provided locations to Health + Hospitals (H+H) to perform COVID-19 Testing in hard-hit communities;
- Served as a NYC Department of Education Learning Bridges site;
- Served as polling locations for early voting, primary elections, and Election Day to help ensure people can participate in our democracy;
- Operated as cooling centers during heat emergencies last summer to protect our most vulnerable populations; and
- Conducted 2020 Census education and outreach that led to a historic 62% self-response rate in the City.

Additionally, we are currently in discussion with the Administration to host vaccination sites.

**The Mayor's Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget includes a \$1.2 million one-time reduction to our operating subsidy during this current fiscal year, and a \$2.9 million reduction to our Fiscal Year 2022 operating budget.** While no one welcomes any reduction to their operating budget, QPL understands the extraordinary times we are living in and the budget challenges the pandemic has produced at all levels of government. We have been working diligently to minimize the impact of these cuts on our services. However, the \$2.9 million cut for Fiscal Year 2022 means that our collections budget will be reduced from current levels and we will not have all the staff necessary to operate at an optimal pre-pandemic level.

As of now, we do not project having to lay off staff. **However, it is very important that the Council reauthorize the Libraries Initiative to prevent the loss of an additional \$3.3 million for QPL next fiscal year. This loss, coupled with the Administration's cuts, would equal a \$6.2 million cut to our Fiscal Year 2022 budget. This would be devastating.** We have had to make significant investments to

protect our staff, the public, and our spaces in order to reopen and operate during this pandemic. It is clear that we are doing a great deal in our communities, and we simply cannot afford the negative impact on our collections and staffing levels. Like everyone, we are hopeful that economic relief will come from Washington that will either eliminate or reduce these cuts, or at least prevent deeper budget reductions.

With 66 locations across the borough and more than one million square feet of library space, QPL has a large capital program with a variety of needs. Maintaining our physical spaces is no small feat and requires the City to continue to invest in our libraries so they are modern, functional, and inspiring spaces. In our Ten-Year Capital Plan submitted to the City, we have identified a need of \$435 million over the next 10 years.

This fiscal year, while we did not receive any capital funding from the Administration, we were very fortunate and grateful to have received a total of \$18.6 million from the Council, including \$4 million in unrestricted funding that allowed us to address shortfalls in projects and other critical needs.

**While the Administration has been supportive of libraries, we have not received substantial new funding in the City's Ten-Year Plan since Fiscal Year 2016.** Because of this and the time lost while the City paused for COVID-19, it is crucial that we receive a significant capital investment this year. For Fiscal Year 2022 alone, QPL has projected a \$73 million need just to address anticipated shortfalls for several existing renovation and expansion projects planned for our Astoria, Arverne, and Woodhaven locations, among others. One of the most important actions the City can take to help libraries in the capital process is to create a dedicated pool of capital funds, strictly for the use of libraries, to address mid-fiscal-year shortfalls.

Every day, for people of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances, QPL transforms lives by cultivating intellectual and personal growth. As a center of community life, we build strong neighborhoods through the multitude of free programs and services we provide. As the pandemic forced a shift to the virtual world, it laid bare the disparities that exist in broadband connectivity throughout the communities we serve and libraries' essential role in bridging the digital divide. Even as in-person services expand, the public will rely on libraries for connectivity, robust digital content, and virtual programming and services. As we emerge from this pandemic and transition to a new, post-COVID-19 world, demand for our services – for job and small business support, for summer and afterschool learning, for trusted information – will rival that of the Great Recession. We need City Hall's support as we continue to build an equitable and thriving city.

A true recovery for all starts with strong libraries. We are the backbone of every community in this great city. Please continue to prioritize us. Chair Van Bramer, Speaker Johnson, members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
FISCAL YEAR 2022 PRELIMINARY BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS  
COMMITTEE**

**March 9, 2021**

Good morning, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president and CEO of The New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to thank City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, Committee Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, and the members of the committee for their support of libraries at a challenging time and the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Preliminary Budget.

Whether prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, amid its challenges, or in planning for the City's recovery, the New York Public Library (NYPL) has always been on the front lines in its commitment to equitable, safe, and accessible services for all New Yorkers.

Almost one year ago today, the Library temporarily suspended on-site services, prioritizing the health and safety of its staff and patrons at the start of an outbreak we knew very little about. But it is thanks to the support of the City Council and the Mayor, that NYPL found a way to continue serving New Yorkers over the past year. It is your leadership that made it possible for us to quickly pivot to digital services and remote programming, and to gradually reopen 53 of

our 92 locations for Grab and Go service, along with the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library, which operates as a specialized service and fulfillment center.

We are proud to say that we not only maintained our offerings and vast collections during this time, but that we also provided new services for those New Yorkers struggling with the impact of the pandemic.

During this time of economic uncertainty we understand and appreciate the difficult budget choices that will need to be made. The Mayor's FY22 Preliminary Budget proposes a cut of \$10.3M to libraries, with \$4.5M for the NYPL. The FY21 budget also included \$5.3M in City Council non-baselined funds for the NYPL. The proposed cut combined with the potential loss of City Council funding could impact library services. We are already thinking about subsequent years and want to be ready for the next phase of the recovery. The city's libraries have played an integral role throughout the pandemic and with proper funding we will be able to continue to provide the services and programs that New Yorker's will need to succeed through this difficult time and beyond.

As with all New Yorkers, 2020 was a challenging year for the NYPL. Almost immediately after closure in March, we enhanced and expanded our remote services. This quick pivot ensured access to information, resources, and programs for New Yorkers through webinars, classes, book clubs, live tutoring, and career and financial counseling that support schools, job-seekers, and communities. For branch patrons, we launched ShelfHelp, a service that works with them to personally curate a bundle of books that match their interests. For researchers, we expanded our materials and made them more accessible, digitizing our collections and providing a Scan and Deliver service that allows patrons to request selections of books and scholarly journals for digital delivery. Research libraries also expanded remote access to resources such as databases, digital research books, and academic e-books. For students, we partnered with

Brainfuse, an online tutoring company, to make free one-on-one tutoring in English and Spanish available to students of all ages. For job-seekers and those facing financial challenges, we provided online job training courses, one-on-one career and financial counseling, coaching for interviews, and templates for resumes, cover letters, and emails. Many of these courses are specifically geared toward the development of professional skill-sets such as advanced proficiency within the Microsoft Office suite, coding, and website development. We have continued to make adjustments to these offerings, and began offering live virtual storytimes in January. We also established key virtual resources on health and wellness, food security, and housing/tenant rights to patrons and communities affected by the pandemic.

The impact of this swift adjustment to online platforms to our patrons is substantiated by our data. Since closure there have been over 124,000 new library card sign ups through our SimplyE app and 5.2 million digital checkouts. SimplyE signups and e-checkouts are up by 60 and 40 percent respectively from FY18 to FY20. On the research front there have been 2.8 million database item requests since closure, and nearly 14,000 Scan and Deliver and ReCAP orders completed. TechConnect classes are also very popular, with roughly 16,000 patrons attending them from March to December. But numbers only tell part of the story, I have appended a spreadsheet to this testimony that includes additional anecdotes from patrons around the city, expressed through an NYPL survey, which shows their appreciation for a wide array of remote services. I have also included various feedback we have received on remote research offerings and Phase 1 service via a wide range of communication mediums.

During closure, we learned a great deal about the value of digital services, which has informed our decision to maintain offerings like Scan and Deliver and a larger digitized collection moving forward. At the same time, we know that a great deal of our patrons continue to suffer from being on the wrong side of the digital divide. This is why we launched services like ShelfHelp,

telephone story times in several languages, and reopened our physical branches as quickly and safely as possible. We launched Phase 1 of our reopening plan in July 2020. At the start of Phase 1, eight branches opened for Grab and Go service; in the following months, this number expanded to 53. Our acknowledgement of the digital divide is the same reason we supplemented our virtual Summer Reading program with the distribution of 40,000 program kits to students in underserved communities in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. These kits were distributed thanks to our cooperation and partnership with the Department of Education (DOE) and elected officials across the city, including several members of the City Council.

But the digital divide isn't just about providing equitable service to those without broadband access. NYPL has continued to play an integral role in expanding access across the city, with a particular focus on underserved communities. During the throes of the pandemic, the Library kept its WiFi networks on at all locations. Patrons and members of the public were seen on the steps of our buildings, doing everything from completing homework assignments, to unemployment applications and health insurance paperwork. From March to December 2020, there were nearly 270,000 Wi-Fi sessions at our branches. As the Covid-19 outbreak gets under control, we will provide more services and open more locations, maintaining our status as an institution that can be relied on for free public access to computers and internet in all of our branches. We also look forward to the resumption of our critical work as a partner on the Internet Master Plan by offering our branches as infrastructure for the expansion of internet access city-wide. Moreover, we plan to continue our HotSpot program in collaboration with the DOE to provide thousands of students living in homes without affordable internet with hotspot devices.

Throughout this difficult crisis and our efforts to maintain our commitment to New Yorkers, we have placed health and safety above all else. This is why we have introduced a new set of

health and safety protocols and accommodations at our locations. Masks must be worn by patrons and staff at all times. Ventilation at all open locations has been inspected and optimized by our health and safety teams. Physical distancing measures, enhanced cleaning protocols, and protective equipment such as sneeze guards are in place, and all returned materials must be quarantined for 24 hours. To accommodate our patrons at this time, we are also freezing existing fines on all items through the end of this fiscal year, allowing digital cardholders to check out physical materials, and temporarily removing any fine-based blocks on patrons' accounts.

Prioritizing health and safety also means constantly assessing and reassessing our reopening plan, and being ready to make swift adjustments as needed. Within a few days of launching Phase 2 in November, we rolled it back due to an increase in positive Covid rates. We continue to monitor all of the guidance, trends, and our own operations in weighing these decisions carefully. We have had an excellent track record to date, and while we are confident in our protocols and City and State guidance, we are willing to make adjustments and our own decisions if deemed necessary to keep staff and the public safe.

NYPL didn't just maintain its services during the pandemic. We remained a trusted institution to engender participation in civic initiatives, a stalwart force in the fight against racism, and a reliable partner to the City's efforts to manage the crisis. In September, all three of our systems participated in National Voter Registration Day, a national, non-partisan, civic holiday celebrating democracy on the fourth Tuesday of September every year. As part of this effort, we ensured that all of our open branches were supplied with paper voter registration forms. As New York City reopened, Census Navigators, along with library partners and volunteers, safely expanded Census outreach outdoors, and adapted with our neighbors to the new normal. Recognizing that one in five New York City residents does not have reliable broadband access,

the three library systems worked together to bring Census messaging to people's doorsteps. In collaboration with NYC Census, the Library placed multilingual posters in high-priority zip codes, conducted billboard campaigns in high-traffic, hard-to-count neighborhoods, in-person outreach in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, and hosted virtual programming for all New Yorkers. We also worked with the New York City Board of Elections to host four Election Day sites at our branches. As we look ahead to this year's city elections and the introduction of Rank Choice Voting, NYPL is already partnering with organizations like the Campaign Finance Board on trainings that aim to increase voter turnout and education. When Black Lives Matter protests took place across the city over the summer months, we reaffirmed our commitment to social equity and fighting ignorance by expanding our digital collections on Black heritage, Black liberation, and anti-racism through our Schomburg Center for Black Culture. Within the first few weeks of its availability, our Black Liberation reading list had 35,000 checkouts.

Perhaps the most critical of these efforts was our partnership with the City on initiatives to help manage the pandemic while serving those New Yorkers adversely affected by its impacts. Over the past year, closed branches have doubled as everything from Covid-testing sites to cooling centers. Others have been repurposed as Learning Labs that provide remote learning and after school assistance for K through 8 students.

We also advocated for the ability to safely move forward with investments in the physical infrastructure of our branches while keeping the needs of our communities in mind. Due to the Covid crisis, the City halted all capital projects in March 2020, including the entirety of the NYPL's 54 active projects. Since then, the City has slowly restarted many of our priority capital projects. We were also recently advised that all of our on-hold projects will be restarted by late March. Among these projects are renovations slated for Carnegie branches like Melrose, Fort Washington, 125th St, Hunts Point, and Port Richmond. More recently, we have moved forward,

along with the City, with our plans to build a new, state of the art library in Inwood and completed construction at New Amsterdam and Roosevelt Island, the latter of which opened for Grab and Go service on January 25th. Looking ahead, we plan to move forward with all infrastructure projects aimed at maintaining and renovating our rapidly aging buildings; but this is only possible through sustained funding as part of the City's ten-year capital plan. The NYPL recently submitted details to the City of its new systemwide capital needs totaling \$427.6M. These priorities include complete renovations of the Hudson Park, Edenwald, West New Brighton, Francis Martin, Spuyten Duyvil and Countee Cullen branches, state of good repair projects such as HVAC, Boilers and ADA accessibility, technology upgrades, and funding of project shortfalls. Having witnessed the impact of newly-renovated, welcoming spaces, we aspire to provide this for all communities we serve. Time and time again, we have seen the impact of your investment in branches like Stapleton, Washington Heights, Van Cortlandt, and Macomb's Bridge on circulation, program attendance, and visits. We will continue our discussions with the City around our new capital needs and remain hopeful that we will receive much-needed funding through the ten-year capital plan for our priorities.

This is a difficult time for our city. But I hope you will find that -- as with many other times of crisis throughout this city's history -- the New York Public Library has been there for New Yorkers. In 2020, we showed that we have the capabilities to innovate new ways to reach our communities and patrons with the same accessible and equitable service we always have, all while staying safe. We remained mindful of the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on underserved communities and adjusted our services accordingly. And we were honored to join the City as a partner on vital initiatives like setting up testing centers in our closed branches, and continuing to play an integral role in our democracy through Census, voting, and anti-racism initiatives. We have proven that we know how to operate in a crisis, and to put the well-being of New Yorkers above all else.

We now turn to the final stage of this pandemic: Recovery. We know that this is a difficult budget environment, but look forward to working with the City Council, as we have many times before, to ensure that we can continue providing equitable, accessible, and much-needed service at a challenging time while also ramping up our efforts to help New Yorkers recover from this crisis. While there can be, and in many ways should not be, such a thing as “back to normal,” it is only with your support and wisdom that we can work together to define and enact a “new normal,” one that restores our service to what it was before while incorporating lessons learned. As New Yorkers pick up the pieces from this tragic period in the City’s history, we stand ready to serve them, just as we always have.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I remain available to answer any questions you may have.

## APPENDIX 1 - Patron Survey Results

NYPL OFFERING	PATRON COMMENT
<b>Overall</b>	"The Library has had a positive impact in our kids' education even under these circumstances. Even though it doesn't compare to being in a library atmosphere surrounded by books & great staff, my kids have found very important information for their school projects. Thanks for being an inspiration during these difficult times and not allowing this crisis stopping you from contributing with the best resource that libraries give to our communities which is KNOWLEDGE and other great services to improve our society."
<b>Remote Library Card Registration</b>	I was able to re-register for a new library card online after discovering my current card was expired. The process took a minute, and I was immediately able to begin checking out e-books and audiobooks, which I did not know how to do previously. I have been able to organize a zoom book club with friends, using e-books available on Overdrive through NYPL. The book club has added structure to my totally structureless quarantine life, and has been very positive. Thanks so much!
<b>Circulating eBooks &amp; Audiobooks</b>	"I am a graduate student. Because I typically access resources through my library (most often physical books), I had not yet explored NYPL's online resources. Since quarantine started, I have been delighted to find my favorite non-fiction books available for free (!!!); most of these, published by Verso Books or popular presses, are not available digitally from my research library's database. I had been planning to dip into savings to purchase physical copies of new releases, and then found them online (meaning I can save that money and use it to support my out-of-work immediate family members)."
<b>Databases and eResources</b>	"I have always used your digital research material. The fact that some databases previously non available are now consultable from home has been truly wonderful. My research is usually based on historical data, that you are providing these days in an even better way."
<b>Reference and Educational Services</b>	Brainfuse really helps - thank u
<b>Programming</b>	The TechConnect online classes are wonderful. Please offer more and open up the number of spaces available. They are often closed since they are so popular. The instructors are very patient, organized in their presentation and knowledgeable. I appreciate that they don't just talk in

	<p>generalities about a topic (for example on Shopping Online; Intro to Twitter) but go to the specific site and show exactly how to use it. They truly aim to address the questions of attendees. I wish NYPL could offer the recorded sessions later, but it appears this may not be feasible.</p>
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**BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**FY22 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING**  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations  
March 9, 2021

Thank you Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Cumbo, Chair Van Bramer and Finance Chair Dromm, committee members, our Brooklyn delegation, and the entire City Council for supporting New York City's libraries.

We deeply appreciate your efforts to ensure that Brooklyn Public Library can continue to serve the 2.6 million residents of our borough. Our patrons—who range from infants to older adults—have relied on us through the many months of the pandemic, and they will continue to rely on us as they rebuild their lives in its wake, whether they are seeking trusted vaccine information, improving their resumes, or learning to read.

In turn, we rely on the City's support, and we urge you to maintain the Council's \$3.3 million investment in Brooklyn Public Library from last year and reject the proposed \$2.85 million cut in the FY22 Preliminary Budget. All told, more than \$6 million of our operating funds are at stake.

We understand the daunting financial challenges that the City faces and we have absorbed a PEG of \$1.2 million in the current fiscal year. But a \$6 million loss—combined with slashed state funding, reduced private revenue, and increased pandemic-related expenses—would force us to leave staff positions unfilled and reduce service levels, which would impede our ability to meet the needs of our patrons at a critical juncture. I admit that year after year, I claim that it's 'never been more important to support the work of libraries,' which has always been true, but never more so.

Public libraries are well-positioned to help New Yorkers rebuild their lives and reconnect to their communities. If there is one thing we've proven this year, it's that we are capable of rapidly adapting to meet the needs of our patrons.

Nearly a year ago, when our city went into lockdown, Brooklyn Public Library pivoted on every front. We made it easier for Brooklynites to get digital library cards and expanded our digital collection to keep pace with soaring e-checkouts. Our staff began producing virtual programs nearly overnight; to date, we have offered more than 7,000 high-quality, free, virtual programs for nearly one million attendees, from personalized job assistance to Homework Help to grief support groups. Just last week, NPR featured our Children's Librarian Tenzin Kalsang, whose Tibetan-English Storytimes have attracted more than 20,000 viewers at a time—far more than we could ever fit into Tenzin's Williamsburg branch. Despite all the challenges of 2020, our program attendance surpassed our pre-pandemic record.

For those unfamiliar with virtual platforms, our librarians provided one-on-one phone training. One older adult wrote, "After six months of being alone... your wonderful classes came to me.

I again began to feel that I am still a person able to create, learn, and interact socially with a new group of understanding people.”

And for the hundreds of thousands of Brooklynites with insufficient broadband access at home, we launched the Bklyn Reach Project, installing antennas on our rooftops to extend a reliable unlimited WiFi signal 300 feet in every direction. We started with the highest need neighborhoods and will soon have antennas on 53 branches across the borough.

As the weather warms, we will introduce outdoor seating at several branches and expand our laptop loan program. We are also eager to pilot outdoor book browsing and resume outdoor programming. Our outdoor programs in the fall of 2020 were a resounding success: Open Air Ask a Tech sessions provided free tech assistance to patrons adapting to new technology; University Open Air offered free classes in Prospect Park; and our Open Streets initiative at Macon Library in Bedford Stuyvesant offered storytime and other literacy programs for children and their caregivers.

We began welcoming patrons back to our branches last July, in tandem with New York Public Library and Queens Public Library, following the recommendations and guidelines of public health officials.

Having reconfigured workspaces and implemented new cleaning, ventilation, PPE, and workspace distancing protocols, all of our branches not currently under construction or serving as Learning Labs are open to the public in a limited capacity. A total of 48 branches are now offering grab-and-go lobby service. Patrons can pick up library books, art supplies, tax forms, and more. We also offer on-demand printing at ten branches.

Whenever it is safe to progress to the next phase of reopening, we will welcome our patrons back for limited computer access and in-branch browsing, as well as appointment-based services.

We are not simply waiting for the pandemic to end; we are actively helping the City fight Covid-19, as we have been for much of the last year. In partnership with New York City Test & Trace Corps, Brooklyn Public Library branches have served as PPE distribution and pop-up testing sites. Since August, our librarians and staff have distributed more than 250,000 masks and connected over 44,000 people with accurate information about testing, vaccine safety, and insurance coverage. They are also now helping priority populations secure vaccine appointments.

We are cautiously hopeful that as more and more New Yorkers are vaccinated, we will be able to welcome them fully back into their local libraries. Many patrons have expressed their eagerness to spend more time in their branch—to find new books, use our technology, have space to work, or meet their neighbors. One family wrote, “We can't wait to be back in our neighborhood library on a ‘normal’ basis.” Another: “Thank you for being a beacon within our

community during this challenging year. My family cannot wait to spend time inside our local branch again!”

We expect demand to grow with the expansion of service, and that in-person full-service hours will require intensive staffing. A reduction of \$6 million in FY22 would jeopardize our service provision at the very moment our patrons hope to spend time inside their local branches once again.

Likewise, I am afraid that just as we can safely and fully reopen our buildings, we will be forced to contend with closures due to failing heating and cooling systems and leaking rooves. Last year, as every year, I came before you with the same dismal report: over one million square feet of city-owned facilities without adequate funding to maintain them. Though we received no capital funds from the administration in FY21, we were able to keep going because of the funding allocated by the Council.

This year, we again submitted a Ten-Year Capital Plan proposal. Given the pandemic, we scaled our submission back to \$198 million over ten years for the most urgent infrastructure upgrades, three sorely needed branch overhauls, and funding to cover \$40 million in shortfalls in FY22 alone. To our great disappointment, our proposal was not accepted.

It is indefensible to refuse the long-term funding necessary to maintain the public libraries our patrons rely on. Our system faces millions of dollars in shortfalls on existing projects; the cost of projects stalled by the pandemic is steadily growing; and we are struggling to restart priority renovation projects that have long languished.

With the city’s help in recent years, Brooklyn Public Library has been able to revitalize select branches, but we still shoulder approximately \$250 million in deferred maintenance. The lack of *any* new capital funding from the Administration means we must attend to only to the most critical projects without addressing countless infrastructure needs and preventative work. Year after year, I’m forced to come to you, hat in hand, for limited capital dollars to determine which projects advance and which stall—it is irresponsible, inefficient, and unfair to our overburdened communities.

I implore you to fund libraries’ capital plans for the coming year and beyond. Dipping into our operating budget to solve urgent capital demands will have dire consequences for public service, which will, in turn, have dire consequences for our city.

In order for the people of New York to recover from the pandemic—all the suffering it has wrought and all the inequities it has laid bare—they need public spaces and public resources.

Public libraries are trusted by every generation, located in every neighborhood, and serve absolutely everyone. We are uniquely positioned to help New Yorkers recover and rebuild a more democratic, more cohesive city. I urge you to support this work and preserve our budget.

Thank you.

# NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

## TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

OFFERED BY

YASHIRIS MORETA, VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

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Dear Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs:

Thank you for your continued service to the arts and culture community in New York City, particularly during these challenging times, and thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the New-York Historical Society. For over 200 years, New-York Historical has told the story of our nation's founding and history, using our vast collections to highlight under-told stories and diverse perspectives throughout that history.

The past year has been a transformative time for New-York Historical, and we have worked to respond quickly to unprecedented challenges while remaining committed to serving our audiences to the fullest extent possible. We are proud to have launched History @ Home, a suite of digital and virtual K-12 education resources, only a week after New York City school closures, and our building reopened to the public on September 11, 2021. We have worked tirelessly to ensure that our educational, public, and family programming remain accessible to the broadest possible audience and were thrilled to welcome in-person visitors back to our historic galleries. This work is made possible, in large part, by the city government—in particular, the Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Council.

### PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVITIES

New-York Historical continues to recover from significant setbacks since last March, including major losses in earned income and slow visitation. Despite these challenges, New-York Historical has remained committed to its mission of creating museum programming that highlights under-recognized stories, challenges traditional historical narratives, and enriches public understanding of our shared past.

Under History @ Home, New-York Historical transformed its lauded gallery-based, in-school, and after-school history and civics education programs into powerful online education services, allowing us to serve our youngest and most vulnerable audience without interruption. **History @ Home served more than 31,000 students and teachers in Fiscal Year 2020, and has reached over 94,000 students and teachers in Fiscal Year 2021 to date.** We continue to expand our offerings and develop new and innovative ways of reaching audiences at home; our Education team has developed a virtual Cultural After-School Adventures program for the current year.

With limited staff now working onsite at the Museum, New-York Historical has continued its exhibition schedule, beginning with an outdoor exhibition titled *Hope Wanted: New York City Under Quarantine*. Offered free of charge, *Hope Wanted* documented the experiences of diverse New Yorkers across the five boroughs during the height of the pandemic. Shortly after, our indoor galleries reopened on September 11, following robust safety measures and health protocols. We have mounted new and

exciting exhibitions, including: ***Dreaming Together: New-York Historical Society and Asia Society Museum***, an exploration of urban and natural environments, protest and rebellion, individuals and identities, borders and crossings through the works of Asian and Asian American artists; ***So Ready for Laughter: Bob Hope and World War II***, a look at the life and career of the legendary patriot and comedian that sheds light on this dark time in American history; and ***Holiday Express: Toys and Trains from the Jerni Collection***, our annual installation of toy trains, figures, and miniature models that transport visitors to a bygone era.

### **CAPITAL PLANS**

In Fiscal Year 2020, **New-York Historical partnered with The American LGBTQ+ Museum to bring forth plans to construct the City's first major museum dedicated to LGBTQ+ history and culture.** The Museum will be housed in the top floor of New-York Historical's expansion, encompassing a stunning gallery, roof garden and areas for offices and storage.

Due to financial and logistical setbacks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, New-York Historical will proceed with construction in a phased approach, starting with construction of a single-story expansion in 2022, which will serve as the foundation for a multi-story project. **This project will provide critical workforce development and job creation opportunities, allowing New-York Historical to help advance New York City's economic recovery in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic while bolstering the arts and culture sector.** While the multi-story expansion is under construction, The American LGBTQ+ Museum will partner with New-York Historical to develop programming in the Museum's existing building and outdoor spaces, bringing the voices, perspectives, actions, and achievements of this often-marginalized population to the foreground for hundreds of thousands of annual visitors and New York City schoolchildren, and serving as a major driver of tourism for the City.

The overall project will allow New-York Historical to dramatically expand the number of onsite classrooms, essential to provide service to tens of thousands of New York City public school students through education programs that explore battles for civil rights throughout our history, including our Academy for American Democracy. New galleries and collections study areas will host the graduate students in our new Masters in Museum Studies program, launched in 2019 with CUNY's School of Professional Studies in an effort to help diversify NYC's cultural workforce. During the first phase of the project, vital library stacks will be constructed underneath the single-story expansion, supporting storage and conservation of our impressive collections which serve our education programs.

### **CONCLUSION**

The New-York Historical Society remains deeply grateful for the important programmatic and capital funds from New York City that have allowed us to expand our resources and adapt to the urgent needs of our local community. These funds will become even more essential in the months and years of recovery ahead. In this time of fiscal uncertainty, we remain grateful for the city's investment in cultural education and ask for the Committee's robust support as we work both to extend our service as an institution and to strengthen New York City's vibrant cultural landscape more broadly.

We thank you and your fellow City Council Members for your exceptional service.

*Yashiris Moreta, Vice President of Operations and Capital Projects  
(212)485-9297 // [yashiris.moreta@nyhistory.org](mailto:yashiris.moreta@nyhistory.org)*



**Testimony to the Committee on  
Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations  
John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
March 9, 2021**

Thank you Chairman Van Bramer and members of the Committee. My name is John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Based in New York City since 1895, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which includes the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and Queens Zoo, saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve our mission, WCS, headquartered at the Bronx Zoo, harnesses the power of its Global Conservation Program in nearly 60 nations and in all the world's oceans and its five wildlife parks in New York City, visited by ~4 million people annually. WCS combines its expertise in the field, at our zoos, and aquarium to achieve its conservation mission with the aim of conserving the world's largest wild places in 14 priority regions, home to more than 50 percent of the world's biodiversity. WCS envisions a world where wildlife thrives in healthy lands and seas, valued by societies that embrace and benefit from the diversity and integrity of life on earth. We hold ourselves to the highest standards, adhering to our core values of respect, diversity and inclusion, accountability and transparency, innovation, collaboration, and integrity.

Our five parks are both tourist and family destinations serving diverse audiences in some of the poorest congressional districts in the country. Funded in part by the City of New York, our living collections help save endangered species, educate and inspire tens of thousands of teachers and children in environmental science, and help us maintain our award-winning programming and interactive educational experiences for diverse constituencies. In New York City, our five parks employ more than 2,100 full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. As one of the largest employers of youth in the Bronx and one of the largest youth development programs in the City, WCS employs and supports over 1,400 youth ages 14-24 in a myriad of opportunities that create life sustaining change in our surrounding communities. Additionally, WCS has more than 576,000 online advocates in the city representing every City Council district.

It is no secret culture is vital to the City's economy, generating over \$7 billion in economic activity in NYC alone pre COVID, and employing some 100,000 New Yorkers. Arts and culture have also led the city out of every crisis in my lifetime, from reinventing empty spaces in the 70s, to bringing back downtown after 9/11, to getting tourists back after the financial crisis.

WCS takes seriously its commitment to the neighborhoods it resides in. Our work with these communities has been holistic, addressing a broad range of needs for youth and young adults. Our educational programming is spread across multiple departments within the four boroughs, creating seismic shifts in our organizational culture and common best practices for youth. Prior to this pandemic, WCS has provided essential services through programming and partnerships



that has positively impacted youth and families in underserved communities throughout the city. Through our Community Access Program (CAP), we provide thousands of seniors, youth, individuals with special needs, and community based organizations with complimentary access to our parks. Additionally, WCS has held long partnerships with City agencies such as the Department of Homeless Services and the Administration for Children's Services to provide educational opportunities and experiences to thousands of children and families.

As you know, this month marks the anniversary of our parks' closure to the public due to the pandemic. Like many cultural organizations throughout the city, our parks were closed for nearly 6 months under the guidance of City and State mandates. As a result of these closures, essential sources of revenue were significantly reduced and we still face severe financial impacts throughout the organization. We have been strongly committed to maintaining our full time staff despite these hardships but have had to pivot much of our services online. During the closure, we undertook necessary unprecedented measures in order to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 for our essential staff while also developing accessible programming to the public. These decisions not only played a role in saving New Yorkers' livelihoods and were unequivocally the right choices, but also provided some normalcy in unpredictable circumstances. However, the economic ramifications of closing proved devastating to our employees, the countless communities we serve throughout the city, the culture community writ large, and their local economies.

However, despite the shutdown, WCS and the greater cultural community never closed its offerings. As a community partner, we continued to work diligently with City and State agencies to provide any support possible. For example, two of our parking lots at the Bronx Zoo were used to help the city and frontline workers respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Our Southern Boulevard parking lot was used by NYS Department of Health and FEMA to stage and deploy the 250 ambulances from around the country that were sent to New York to assist during the crisis. Additionally, we worked with Montefiore Hospital and transformed our Bronx River parking lot into a COVID-19 drive thru test site for their employees. As the City faced initial challenges in procuring adequate hospital gowns and began procuring disposable ponchos to replace the disposable gowns, WCS was able to provide the City with 2,000 ponchos.

As we prepared to reopen, in adherence to NYS guidance, we created enhanced safety guidelines for our guests, including limited attendance and day and time ticketing options. After being closed for five months, like many cultural organizations throughout the city, we at WCS were initially concerned about what our reopening numbers would illustrate. It has been nothing short of a success. The enthusiasm of our guests coupled with their respect and compliance for the new guidelines has been positive. To date, we've had over 1 million visitors come through our parks since reopening on 7/20 and 8/27. WCS is thrilled to once again be able to provide access into the park for underserved communities with attendance of more than 150,000 on its Free Wednesdays at the Bronx Zoo since its re-opening.



Given the trend in visitorship that we are seeing, our public wants to keep visiting, engaging and enjoying our offerings. Additionally, they have expressed their appreciation for the safety measures we have implemented at our parks.

Since the start of the pandemic, WCS, along with our CIG colleagues have been providing support and resources to the greater cultural community through daily Zoom calls that has famously been dubbed "Culture @3pm". What has started as 34 institutions collaborating on how to move forward has evolved into a consortium of over 200+ city cultural organizations coming together to organize data that encapsulates the social and economic impact of culture in the countless communities we serve, using that data to illustrate and advocate on the federal level to ensure we can weather this storm and move forward, and more.

We shifted most of our public engagement and youth development programming to digital platforms. We launched the virtual zoo and aquarium on our website that incorporates a multitude of free resources for our community including exhibit cameras where visitors can view webcams of exhibits, follow ongoing animal stories created by our keepers, and engage in family fun activities that incorporate art, science, and nature, science curriculum for teachers, and Wildlife school online, which provided virtual field trips for schools.

In these virtual field trips, students learn standards-based science content in fun and interactive ways that incorporate our animals and exhibits. All lessons are recorded and then shared out with the broader school community. As a result, this led to reaching a larger audience than previously anticipated due to the nature of moving this online. We will continue to offer either in person programs, synchronous sessions, and pre-recorded sessions to students in active science learning. Additionally, we will meet the needs of the students and respond and adapt accordingly working with teachers and administrators.

Additionally, we have transitioned our youth volunteer and internship program to online engagement. Our Virtual Discovery Guide program has engaged more than 400 young people in dynamic and meaningful programming while also providing social and emotional support to NYC youth. For example, one central part of the Summer 2020 Discovery Guides program was a collaborative project to create a series of Virtual Quests. Designed from the in-person Quest program in which zoo and aquarium visitors stop at a series of interactive stations, the Virtual Quest program is hosted on a website, and produced more than 350 unique digital assets such as games, activity sheets, and videos, which communicate conservation and science messaging in fun and creative ways. Youth helped create and manage these offerings, facilitating over 600,000 interactions.

This has provided the vital programming that 1,400 young people so desperately need during this time of unrest. We remain committed to disrupting the viewpoint of who can engage in a particular science or conservation providing diverse audiences with opportunities to connect with nature, build their scientific literacy, and engage in conservation action through a social justice lens.



Therefore, as the Council determines its budget priorities for FY 2022, we ask for a return to FY21 levels at this point. We anticipate that there will be additional clarity around federal aid to the City and State by the time the Executive Budget is issued, at which point we will revisit our approach and adjust as necessary. Council funding has been and continues to be critical to support our community-led conservation efforts across the city. It is our hope that this committee and the City Council understand what cultural organizations like ours have contributed and continue to offer New Yorkers and that we are responsive to the needs of the people of New York. None of this would be possible without the support and partnership of the City and its investments. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. We appreciate the Council's unwavering support, and ask you to once again ensure that culture remains at the forefront of the City's recovery.

Lucy Sexton

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs hearing on  
preliminary budget March 9, 2021

Thank you Chair Van Bramer and members of the City Council for this important and urgent hearing. My name is Lucy Sexton and I am with the cultural advocacy coalition New Yorkers for Culture & Arts.

While I realize we are talking about the budget, and that this is a time of economic crisis, I think we need to talk about a radical reimagining of NYC---one with arts and culture supported in every community, helping every neighborhood recover economically and emotionally, and laying the groundwork for an equitable and thriving city.

Arts and culture have led the city's economic recovery during past crises, inhabiting and revitalizing the hollowed out industrial spaces in the 70s, creating festivals that drew people back downtown after 9/11, and getting people back on the

streets and into businesses coming out of the 2008 financial crisis. Now is the time to invest in, not to cut this critical economic driver.

The benefits that arts and culture bring extend far beyond economics. Data has shown that neighborhoods with cultural assets have improved outcomes in education, aging, mental health, youth engagement with criminal justice, community strength and safety. Every one of these areas will have hearings during this budget season. I ask you to remember the role culture plays in each area—so when you think of schools remember strong arts programs lead to student success; when you think of safety, remember that community centers with cultural programs can disrupt patterns and lead to reduced crime rates.

And we are insanely affordable. The city spends a mere quarter of a percent of its annual budget on the cultural programs that drive the economy, increase tax revenue, and show measurable improvements in the lives of its citizens.

In recent years the Council has worked hard to increase its support of culture, and we are so grateful. But right now arts and culture are hanging on by a thread—most cultural organizations remain partially or wholly shuttered; more than half our workforce remains unemployed. And the organizations most at risk are the ones most dependent on public funding: organizations disproportionately led by and serving BIPOC communities that have been hardest hit by all aspects of this crisis. I am asking the Council to break with conventional patterns of cutting arts and culture as some sort of amenity. I am asking that we push against a ‘survival of the fittest’ approach and instead invest more robustly in the parts of our ecosystem most likely to disappear. We cannot come out of this terrible time with a decimated arts and culture landscape that is more white and more centralized than it was before.

I want to be clear that we are fighting to hold harmless the support for every part of our cultural ecosystems, from CIGs serving hundreds of thousands of NYC residents, to arts and culture groups of every size who serve every community in the city with CDF funding, to critical initiatives including the

Coalition of Theaters of Color and struggling CASA and Su Casa programs for kids and seniors.

In short, we ask that you protect every cent of the current cultural budget as if our city's life depends on it. Because it does.

**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**  
**92nd Street Y**  
**March 9, 2021**

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on behalf of arts education while the preliminary FY22 budget is being discussed. **My name is Elizabeth Costa, and I am Director of Development, Institutional Giving at 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center located in Manhattan.**

Every year, the 92nd Street Y serves thousands of New York City public school students and teachers through our Center for Arts Learning & Leadership (CALL). CALL connects students with artists of the highest caliber through school-based instruction and live events at 92Y. This year, we are serving students through a new pilot program developed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**While we recognize the tremendous challenges faced by the City in FY22, my request is that budget cuts not fall on arts education for our youth, especially now when young people’s lives are already painfully disrupted by the current crisis. We eagerly hope to continue the type of arts programming for NYC’s young people described below, adapted as needed for what the new school year brings.**

When cultural institutions shut down in March 2020, 92Y was one of the very first to pivot to online events and virtual instruction for our patrons. The deep experience and fluency we gained in a very short time brought a moment of recognition for what we could accomplish: we would use this unprecedented time and experience to expand upon 92Y’s dedication to connect students to arts education. As schools and parents struggled to adapt to fully remote or hybrid models of education, 92Y launched the Young Leaders Series—a fully virtual, humanities-focused pilot curriculum featuring a suite of virtual “field trips” with renowned speakers, writers and performers.

### **Young Leaders Series**

Students learn about poetry, music, writing, and current events from world-renowned musicians, authors, and activists. Master classes and discussions, live and accessible online, with award-winning public figures are tailored for students in grades 1-12.

Speakers include talent with whom 92Y has long-term relationships and who have or will be appearing on 92Y’s virtual stage, including:

- Acclaimed performance poet, activist, organizer, educator and novelist, **Mahogany L. Browne**
- Tap dance troupe **Dorrance Dance** on the legacy of tap dance
- Newbery Medal-winning author of books for young readers, **Kate DiCamillo**
- Writer, professor, social commentator Roxane Gay celebrating poet **Audre Lorde**
- Improvisation memoirist **Casey Gerald** on social inequality in America
- Zoologist turned cartoonist/author **Jess Keating** on getting in touch with your inner scientist
- Innovative, award-winning orchestra collective, The Knights and Grammy Award-winning violinist **Gil Shaham**
- Activist **Amanda Litman** on tools to make real, societal change
- Prize-winning novelist and essayist, **Valeria Luiselli**
- Six-time Grammy Award winner **Christian McBride** on jazz, a uniquely American art form

- New York Philharmonic clarinetist **Anthony McGill** on performing chamber music
- Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, **Viet Thanh Nguyen**
- Urban planner, activist and Long Angeles City Councilmember for the 4th District, **Nithya Raman**
- Poet **Claudia Rankine** on communicating across the racial divide in America
- Award-winning illustrator of Latino-themed children’s picture books, **John Parra**
- Grammy-nominated jazz pianist, **Christian Sands**
- Award-winning author/playwright **Zadie Smith** on life in quarantine
- New York Times journalist **Jenna Wortham** and **author/art curator Kimberly Drew**

Events and curricula are organized by age group: elementary school (grades 1-5), middle school (grades 6-8), and high school (9-12).

The Series provides participating classrooms with live virtual meetings exclusively for participating classrooms; access to the event with the featured presenter (via livestream from 92Y’s virtual stage or via on-demand video from our archive); optional live lessons led by experts in the field; study guides for classroom teachers to introduce students to the featured presenter and the work under study; and curriculum materials and resources for students.

### **Student Impact**

Through this initiative, students are:

- Engaging in civic dialogue and discussion on a range of important topics with leading figures in entertainment and the arts, politics and public policy, science and medicine, and history and religion—as well as with their peers from across the country;
- Discovering their own artistic and intellectual passions through study of the content and concepts explored by the featured presenters;
- Producing original works—poetry, essays, choreography, music compositions—inspired by the virtual programs they attend and the artists they engage with; and
- Observing, creating, critiquing and exploring the issues embedded in various art forms and forums—to prepare to participate fully in determining the future of their world.

**By June, we aim to reach a total of 10,000 students in 375 classrooms at 75+ schools across NYC’s five boroughs. Many of these students will be from longtime partner schools of CALL programming with Title 1 status. Due to budget cuts at the New York City Department of Education, many more schools than usual require full program subsidies this year.**

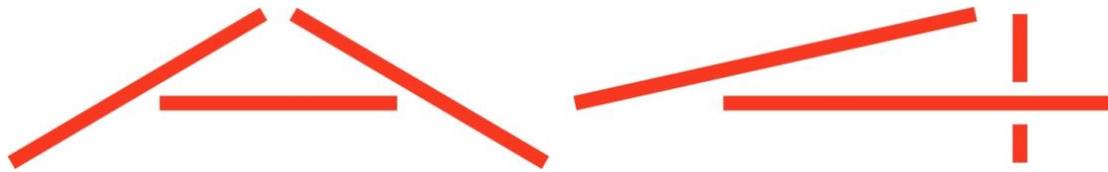
We thank you for the support you have already provided, and we urge you to continue to support NYC’s cultural community and its youth in FY22.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Costa

Director of Development, Institutional Giving



**Testimony to New York City Council  
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and  
Intergenerational Intergroup Relations**

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance or A4. We are a 37-year-old, Brooklyn-based service organization dedicated to ensuring greater representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian American artists and arts organizations, as well as providing a critical voice for this community.

A4 has been extremely fortunate to have received funding through the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs over the years, which has helped us immensely. But despite 37 years of serving and empowering our Asian American creative community, our own organization is in a constant state of precarity. And I am concerned not only about A4, but the general lack of support to the Asian American community which makes up nearly 16% of the city's population. As we face mounting numbers of violent anti-Asian attacks and rampant discrimination, our community's organizations are regularly underfunded while our services are in increasing demand.

Even before the pandemic struck, it was already the case that city funding was disproportionately under-allocated to Asian American-led and serving cultural organizations.

In December of last year, the Department of Cultural Affairs awarded grants to a record number of organizations--1,032--through the Cultural Development Fund. However, of more than 1,000 organizations, only 59 of those were Asian-led or serving, a mere 5.7%.

*continued...*

Only 7 out of those grants, a mere 3%, were for amounts of \$50,000 or more. Yet the total percentage of grants awarded in excess of \$50,000 totaled 211 or more than 20%. And, of course, these figures don't take into account the \$40 million + allocated to CIGs, **not one of which is Asian American-led.**

Again, Asian Americans make up nearly 16% of New York City's population, yet receive far less than our share of city funds. We know that artists and arts organizations are hurting. But we know that Asian Americans and other people of color have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic and we need your support to recover.

I implore you to compound the injustice to Asian Americans by allocating less than our fair share of city resources. And I ask you to ensure full transparency and careful consideration in the FY22 budget to ensure that the city live up to its promises of equitable funding and support for historically underserved communities.

Thank you.

Lisa Gold  
Executive Director  
Asian American Arts Alliance

I'm Meral Agish, the community coordinator of the Queens Memory Project at Queens Public Library and a proud member of Local 1321.

Queens Memory is the community archiving program and oral history collection co-administered by Queens Public Library and Queens College CUNY. I would like to share how my colleagues and I have been connecting with our communities over the last year.

Last April, when the pandemic was at its peak in New York City and Queens was the epicenter of the epicenter, my colleagues and I launched the COVID-19 Project, and invited people from around the borough to contribute their stories of life in the pandemic. We have received hundreds of contributions as photos, text, videos and voice messages.

We received a scanned copy of a Woodside first-grader's hand-drawn book about how to have fun in quarantine. We received voice messages from seniors who were sheltering alone about how they have learned how to use Zoom and FaceTime to connect with friends and family or how they had taken to painting to spend the time and reflect on hopes for better days. An ICU nurse at one of the borough's hospitals sent us a recording of the songs that would play over the intercom when a COVID patient was released.

One of my personal favorites was from a resident of Arverne by the Sea, who left a voicemail on our community storyline about how she had started to howl outdoors as a restorative practice. She was soon joined in her howling by neighbors looking for socially distanced ways to interact and channel the fears of those early weeks of living in lockdown.

We also received touching tributes to loved ones and also to neighbors, shop keepers and others who make up the day to day interactions that changed so much this last year.

Together with an influx of new volunteers and community partners, we recorded oral history interviews with dozens of people and produced the second season of the Queens Memory podcast, "The Borough We Became: Queens Residents On Life During COVID-19." All of these stories now have a permanent home at the library's digital archives and will be available to the public as an expansive record of our losses and our resilience during this time.

In the best of times, Queens Memory has offered ways for people to come together and connect, to share space in person and record interviews in our library spaces. But during this year when we've needed to connect remotely, my colleagues and I have seen first-hand how Queens Memory has met our community's needs to foster connections and share stories, and to make sense of what we've all been going through. It's essential that our libraries receive funding to support programs like ours. Thank you.

[Our COVID-19 Project can be viewed at <https://queenslib.org/covid>, <https://queenslibrary.aviaryplatform.com/collections/943> and [www.queensmemory.org/](http://www.queensmemory.org/)]

**Adriana Mitchell**

**Brooklyn Public Library**

**March 9, 2021 – Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and Intergroup Relations**

Good morning to all members of the Cultural Affairs and Library Committees, and to all present.

I thank you for allowing me time to speak today. My name is Adriana Mitchell, and I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the Brooklyn Public Library and plead for the continued support of BPL's efforts around building strong and healthy communities across the borough of Brooklyn.

I am proud and honored to have worked for the Brooklyn Public library for almost 15 years in different capacities over the course of the years. I am currently the Neighborhood library Supervisor for the Brighton Beach Library. I have had the opportunity to work in different branches of BPL and experience the diversity and different needs each community, we work to tailor services based on the community needs.

At a personal level, my love for the library started as a Brooklynite parent with the need to have a free safe and inspirational environment for my child ( a toddler at the time) and found that attending story times provided the comfort and exposure I needed for me and my child. Growing up in Mexico City, I did not experience the benefits of attending libraries and the valuable services they provide. So, i found a deeper connection and understanding of how important and impactful libraries are in families, individuals lives regardless of who you are, where you come from.

Now that my daughter is a young adult going to College, I am proud to say that Brooklyn Public Library has contributed to her accomplishments and growth by providing her as well as many other young people in Brooklyn with internship opportunities, , safe and inspirational spaces to be in, access to resources, books information etc. Thank you, BPL, and thank you to those who support libraries and believe in their power of improving and making lives better for ALL the people of Brooklyn.

Many of our patrons have are grieving the loss of jobs, loved ones, homes, health, etc. Help and support Brooklyn Public Libraries efforts to contribute to the support and healing Brooklynites need through the access of literature, computer classes for older adults, technology assistance, cultural programming, opportunities for our most vulnerable not to feel isolated or at a loss.

Support us to continue providing and contributing to the joy of reading and storytelling and other educational and cultural programming where the people can continue to feel connected to their libraries even if it's in a virtual world mostly for now. Please helps to continue to move forward to safely open our physical spaces by supporting our outdoor programming and enhancing our outdoor spaces to bring back our library users to the one place everyone is Welcome and unifies communities.

I want to thank the Committee for your time for your continued advocacy, and for all that you have done, are doing and will continue to do in Support of our libraries."



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[ballethispanico.org](http://ballethispanico.org)

**Ballet Hispánico City Council Testimony**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**  
**Preliminary Budget Hearing**  
**March 9, 2021**

“The Latinx world speaks, breathes and communicates through dance. We communicate with gestural movement that connects our diverse Latinidad. Our folk and social dances connect us to tradition and family; and guide us through life’s major events, from birth to death. Music and dance are the cultural godparents of all Latinx communities.”

*Eduardo Vilaro, Artistic Director & CEO*

I want to thank you and Councilman Gjonaj for once again providing such an incredibly rich opportunity for our children to learn about their own, or perhaps a new, culture through dance! The children thoroughly enjoy it, but the parents’ smiles throughout the performances are a true testament to the success of this program.”

*Carol Ann Gilligan, Principal, PS/MS 498*

Simply put, the arts are essential to the proper functioning of our society. The arts continue to demonstrate their ability to provide categorical evidence of their impact on social issues that concern virtually every facet of American society. The arts are especially important for our children. Students with an arts rich education:

- Have better grade point averages
- Score better on standardized tests in reading and math
- Have lower dropout rates

*Americans for the Arts Action Fund*

Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am David Chase, Associate Director of Institutional Relations at Ballet Hispánico. The quotes above speak volumes about the essential role and impact of the arts in all of our lives. Continuing support for the arts and arts organizations is more important than ever. And at a time when arts budgets are at risk, we are enormously grateful to this committee and the City Council for their extraordinary efforts this past year to maintain support for the arts in the FY21 budget. Thank you!

I am pleased to provide the following information about Ballet Hispánico, share with you the exciting work we have engaged in with New Yorkers for 50 years, and advocate for funding in the FY22.

Ballet Hispánico is the nation’s renowned Latino dance organization and one of America’s Cultural Treasures. Ballet Hispánico brings communities together to celebrate and explore Latino cultures through innovative dance performances, transformative dance training, and enduring community engagement experiences.



Founded in 1970 by National Medal of Arts recipient, Tina Ramírez, the organization emerged during the post-civil rights movement on New York's Upper West Side, providing a safe haven for primarily Black and Brown Latinx youth seeking artistic sanctuary during New York City's plight in the 1970s.

With its strong emphasis on dance, achievement, and public presence, the organization has flourished in its three main programs: its Company, School of Dance, and Community Arts Partnerships. The organization serves as a platform for historically omitted and overlooked artists providing them with increased capacity, voice, and affirmation.

During a typical year, Ballet Hispánico reaches over 20,000 New Yorkers through its three main programs:

- Performances by the 14-member **Ballet Hispanico Company** include annual New York Seasons at the Apollo and Joyce theaters as well as special appearances at events such as the Hudson River Dance Festival in Hudson River Park, the annual Fall for Dance season at City Center, and our annual *A Calle* Block Party on West 89<sup>th</sup> Street in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month.
- The Ballet Hispanico **School of Dance** is the direct link to the organization's values of access, opportunity, and pride for all students interested in dance and Latinx culture. The School is a nationally accredited training center that leads with a holistic curriculum for today's young dancer. Throughout its 50 years, the School has held has offered classes for every age and ability level each year to for its diverse student population, providing an inclusive and nurturing environment to over 1,000 students of all ages.
- Since our founding, the pillars of education and community engagement have been at the core of Ballet Hispanico and to this day serve as the backbone of the organization and its mission. **Community Arts Partnerships** (CAP) arts education programs engage and enrich communities by providing exploratory learning experiences of Latino cultures from around the world. BH teaching artists collaborate with schools and community members to tailor each program to align with the needs and interests of the participants. Activities include multi-week dance residencies in schools, interactive performances, and classroom workshops and master classes. For many students, it is inspiring and motivating to engage with Ballet Hispánico teachers and performers who reflect their own cultural heritage.

### **Response to COVID-19**

On March 23, 2020, BH launched *BUnidos* a comprehensive social media program that included content created by the artistic and administrative staff in all of our program areas. Content included streaming of recorded Company performances followed by live Q&A sessions with AD/CEO Eduardo Vilaro and the choreographer, dance classes for students and enthusiasts of all ages, health and wellness classes, inspirational messages, and more. All of this was made available through daily video postings on Instagram and Facebook with new content created on an ongoing basis. *BUnidos* programs continue to provide continuity for our community and makes it possible for us to connect on a social and emotional level



during this period of social distancing—a virtual connection that is likely to continue after the current crisis passes.

## **The Future**

The digital expertise the Ballet Hispanico staff has acquired in the past year is making it possible for the organization to provide high-quality online programs during FY21 and beyond. And the exciting first steps toward reopening and resuming in-person programs is underway. Activities include the following:

### **Virtual CASA FY21**

Ballet Hispanico is currently reaching students in 12 NYC public schools through this invaluable after-school program. Our teaching artists are leading live, multi-week online dance classes where students are learning Latino folk dances and also participating in complementary activities (reading, writing) to learn more about Latino music and culture. A pre-recorded, interactive “Performance for Young People” includes excerpts from the repertory performed by the Ballet Hispanico Company followed by a live dance lesson.

### **School of Dance Classes**

Beginning March 15, 2021, Ballet Hispanico is reopening the School of Dance to a limited number of pre-professionals students for in-person instruction for the first time in a year. The reopening process will continue gradually throughout the remainder of the year as pandemic restrictions are lifted and the safety of the students is assured.

### **Scholarships**

Each year, Ballet Hispanico provides approximately \$300,000 in scholarship support to its students including both needs- and merit-based awards. This support has never been more crucial and necessary since the pandemic has had such a devastating impact on the incomes of so many families.

Ballet Hispanico also plans to launch a life-changing pilot program in 2021 that was put on hold last year. **The Scholars Program** will provide ten young Latino/a students with full, annual scholarships throughout their K-12 education. Scholarships will include full dance training awards covering Ballet Hispanico tuition and all related expenses including shoes, dance specific clothing, and supplies. The program will also provide wraparound services for the students and their families. Auditions will be held at NYC Housing Authority locations and additional sites.

### **Performances**

The Ballet Hispanico Company is returning to the rehearsal studio in April for the first time in over a year. The Company will be rehearsing works that will be presented during our virtual 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration on May 27. Students from the School of Dance will also host and be featured performers in the program.



The Company has also been invited to participate in NYC outdoor performances during the summer. We anticipate that those opportunities will grow as the season approaches.

### **FY22 Support for Arts Organizations**

It has been both heartbreaking and inspiring to see students in our Zoom classes dancing in their living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens. A recent letter from the mother of one of our students simply and eloquently sums up the impact of the pandemic, the impact of Ballet Hispánico, and the need for the arts:

“Just wanted to say thank you for all you are doing. I don't see Gannon smiling as much these days, and to see the huge genuine grin on his face while dancing in your class warms my heart.”

# # #

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations.

The Center for Fiction is honored to have set down roots with its new literary cultural center in an area so rich in literary legends like Richard Wright and Walt Whitman and, more recently, Colson Whitehead, Jacqueline Woodson, and Jason Reynolds. Beginning with the Center's 2019 opening, we were delighted to have such a warm and welcoming community response to such live events as our tribute to Richard Wright with an HBO Screening of *Native Son*, followed by a conversation with the director Rashid Johnson; and our memorial tribute to Toni Morrison with many of the writers she inspired and the Craig Harris jazz band. And because we had honored Toni with our highest literary award the previous year, we have a majestic portrait of her at the Center, where she reigns as muse to all our readers and writers. Community members continued to place flowers beneath her portrait for several months following her death.

Now our programming must all be virtual, and we have recently launched a series of events celebrating Ernest Gaines and his award-winning novel *A Lesson Before Dying*. It began with an introduction by Jacqueline Woodson and a reading by actor Leon Addison Brown. Information is on our website [centerforfiction.org](http://centerforfiction.org). One of the events entitled "Ernest J. Gaines on Criminal Justice: A Discussion," which we are co-presenting with The Center for NuLeadership on Human Justice and Healing, will be moderated by Reverend David Telfort of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church. It will be held on March 16th at 7:30 p.m.

The mission of the Center is to bring diverse communities together as readers and writers to develop and share a passion for fiction in all its forms, not only on the page but on the stage and screen as well, and explore its profound influence on our society. Beginning in our earliest years, fiction elicits our sense of wonder and offers perspective on narrow day-to-day experience and on the subjectivity and selectivity in nonfiction. As Ralph Ellison said, "Good fiction is made of what is real, and reality is difficult to come by." And as Richard Wright once said, "Whenever my environment had failed to support or nourish me, I had clutched at books." At this critical time, the guiding educational and artistic vision of the Center for Fiction, based on the power of storytelling to show us who we are and who we imagine we could be, has heightened value. Creating interest and excitement for the voices of those who are struggling for their stories to be heard is crucial. Immigrant stories must be told to remind us of our shared humanity when fear is threatening to divide us. Authors representing people of color, ethnic minorities, non-binary gender identities, and a diversity of sexual orientations must find audiences and readers who hunger to see their own lives reflected in print.

The best fiction and narrative non-fiction create empathy and reveal what is timeless, universal, and true. But for this to occur, there must be programming to spotlight authors and artists who work their magic on our now virtual stage. These include our public events, where more than 150 authors and artists are featured

annually; our KidsRead and KidsWrite programming, where we work with NYC public schools, grades 3 - 12, and now virtually, through reading groups, writing workshops, and creative writing contests; our Emerging Writer Fellowships; awards, and reading groups and writing workshops for adults. Through all these programs the Center for Fiction supports the creation and enjoyment of fiction in a creative and collaborative environment for readers and writers of all ages to assure the strongest possible future for storytelling.

Last March, the Center sustained devastating losses from the closure of our event and member spaces, including earned income from our bookstore and café; programming income from our thriving events series; and fees from in-person reading groups, writing workshops, and our Writers Studio. Membership renewals slowed significantly. It was the PPP loan, a contribution from the Literary Arts Emergency Fund, and ongoing grants from the NEA, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, NYSCA, and foundations that made possible our transition to virtual programming, which is now contributing to a far healthier budget. Only with ongoing support from government, foundations, and individual donors can we look forward to becoming once again the lively cultural locus for our stimulating Brooklyn community, while also continuing to share our exciting programming online to attract audiences nationally and beyond.



**Cultural Institutions Group Live Testimony**  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**  
**Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup> at 10am**  
**Atiba Edwards, COO, Brooklyn Children's Museum**  
**Committee Chair, IDEA Committee**

Good afternoon, Chair Van Bramer and members of the committee. I am Atiba Edwards, COO at the Brooklyn Children's Museum and Committee Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access) committee. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the CIGs – a coalition of 34 cultural organizations who share a public-private partnership with the City of New York and are located in all five boroughs of the City, employing approximately 11,400 with more than 8,000 additional volunteers. Let me begin by stating how grateful we are for the Council's vital support for culture and the arts in New York City throughout the years. Your support yields a monumental return on investment for all New Yorkers regardless of age, background, or status.

In acknowledgement of my cultural colleagues from across the City who will testify today, I wanted to take the moment to recognize that today's hearing marks approximately one year since we saw COVID take over daily life as we knew it. In the past year, we have seen CIGs, program groups and all types of groups critical to the diversity of culture in NYC struggle with this paradigm shift. According to a recent study put together by the Culture@3 group, CIGs saw a \$410 million deficit in revenue losses in 2020 and approximately \$6 million in additional costs incurred to reopen safely (so far). The picture across culture is equally grim, as we have seen in recent State Comptroller reports and national reports. With all of that going on, we are proud to say that these organizations have intrepidly shifted and reprioritized, finding ways to support their communities.

Collectively, the CIGs spent \$2 million in order to ensure New Yorkers were able to continue to access quality virtual programming. In total, these free offerings reached nearly 10,000,000 individuals - many of them seniors, school children, or members of other communities particularly hard hit by the pandemic and ensuing isolation. Each organization identified unique ways they could lend support. Utilizing their own staff and other resources, institutions served as meal distribution sites and ambulance staging hubs, distributed PPE to members of their communities in need, and housed beds and other medical equipment. As the country moves into this next phase of battling COVID, CIGs have stepped up again, with several volunteering to serve as vaccine distribution sites.

At a time when the opportunities to engage with art are still limited and slowly coming back on line, Brooklyn Children's Museum has provided space and opportunities for artists such as Mincho Vega, Ase Dance Theater, Chinatown Community Young Lions and Asase Yaa Cultural Arts Foundation to help our community grow from the healing and unifying power of art through safe events that have taken place over the last six months. Additionally, we partnered with community-based organizations to distribute over 2,000 art kits to families. As the dependency on the digital space continues to grow, we want to remind and also support families with tactile hands-on moments to create together that do not depend on dedicated devices that have internet access. Brooklyn Children's Museum has also worked with New York City agencies and elected officials to also provide a space for food and meal distribution and to promote health and safety initiatives to Central Brooklyn and the City at large.

Not only are CIGs critical to well-being and our city's identity, CIGs are key to the economic recovery of our city. Museums, zoos, theaters, and other cultural organizations are not only beneficial to



the city, New Yorkers, and countless visitors but also play an important economic role in the financial well-being of New York. The 34 members of the CIG had FY20 budgets that totaled \$1.47 billion and welcomed nearly 24 million individuals through their doors that year. Staff at cultural institutions are largely New York City residents, living in all 5 boroughs and within each of the 51 Council districts, where wages paid to employees are spent within surrounding communities, providing neighborhood economic benefits. By utilizing relationships with smaller program groups and local small businesses, CIGs have been able to help stimulate the local economy even while COVID-related restrictions keep them from operating at 100% capacity.

I also want to express our strong support for colleagues who are not members of the CIG, with whom we have worked alongside this past year, particularly through Culture@3pm call, which were started by and continue to be supported by the CIG. A number of initiatives and projects have grown out of the calls. Funding for the Coalition of Theatres of Color, the CDF, and Council Initiatives like CASA and Su-CASA are critically important.

We deeply appreciate the Council's unwavering support and ask you once again to ensure that Culture remains viable in New York City. **We ask that the cultural budget be held harmless and maintained at FY21 levels as we await further information on COVID federal relief that may be made available to the City and State.**

Hello everyone, my name is Damla Bek. I am the young adult librarian at the Mill Basin branch of Brooklyn Public Library. I'm here to speak upon the value of the public library systems to New York City -- thank you to the Cultural Affairs and Library committees for allowing me to testify.

I'm going to begin by telling you about what the library means to me, personally. I am the quintessential library kid all grown up -- I racked up countless fines on countless books all throughout my childhood. I also volunteered at my local branch, the Midwood branch, and even worked there part-time. I have been working at BPL full-time for almost three years now, and I think I've finally figured out how to articulate what it is that public libraries do for New Yorkers.

Everything. If asked, we do everything we can to help the people we serve. You need books? We got plenty of those in every flavor. You need Wifi? Sure, free to access 24/7. You need ESOL classes? We have the best teachers in the game. You need to call your mom afterschool and let her know where you are? Here's the phone, and here's a snack. I wear many hats as a librarian -- social worker, educator, community advocate. And I'm not going to lie and say it's easy either. What makes it a little bit more manageable is the promise of funding. It is the support of the City Council and recognition of the sheer scope work that we do. The library has been a stabilizing force in my life my whole life. I would love to show other people that it can do the same for them.

For the past year, we've heard all about how New York is tough, New York is resilient -- and I believe these things to be true only because I have faith in the public institutions designed to allow us good quality of life. Our city is what it is because we have parks, libraries, public schools, etc. Beyond that, I have faith in the folks working to keep those institutions from faltering, despite budget cuts, lest we let our communities down. City workers are the lifeblood of New York, and we are your constituents too.

Thank you so much for your time and attention today. I hope I made an impact



**Testimony to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Submitted to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations on March 9, 2021**

*Prepared by Dance/NYC*

*Presented by: Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, Executive Director*

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**On behalf of Dance/NYC ([www.dance.nyc](http://www.dance.nyc)), a service organization that serves over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, and 500 non-profit dance companies and the many for profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color) dance workers, immigrants, and disabled dance workers. Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking the Committee for your leadership during this time and in requesting the City:**

- 1) To maintain the budget for arts and culture without making any budget cuts.**
- 2) To acknowledge that cultural funding is only a small part of the City's budget and that now is not the time to make budget cuts to the arts and culture sector;**
- 3) To affirm that artists are necessary workers that deserve living wages and that arts and culture leads economic recovery and is essential to bringing tourists back;**
- 4) To provide necessary funding in order for dance organizations to continue working with our communities especially our children, the aging population, improving mental health during the pandemic and more;**
- 5) To create and fund initiatives for arts organizations that are BIPOC, disabled and immigrant led and serve our BIPOC, disabled and immigrant communities.**

Arts and culture sector is the number one driver of tourism to the state, generating \$110 billion in economic activity according to the *Comptroller's Report on the Creative Economy*. Of that



economic activity, **NYC’s nonprofit dance sector contributes approximately \$300 million yearly.** This figure is largely understated as it only includes organizations with 501(c)(3) status indicating that the actual contribution is much larger with the inclusion of fiscally sponsored organizations, for profit dance studios and individual artists. Since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic last March, dance businesses had to close their doors drastically reducing their earned revenue and been forced to pivot to on-line programming **for only a fraction of the revenue typically collected from in-person programming, with some earning no revenue at all from these activities.**

In order to maintain social distancing and public health guidelines, arts and culture was forced to close with 95% of organizations cancelling their programs, 88% modifying the delivery of their programs, and 11% not providing products or services to their communities, according to SMU Data Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs’ *COVID-19 Impact on Nonprofit Arts and Culture in New York City*. Dance and cultural businesses are among the last to reopen with many still not allowed to reopen, an entire year later with an inability to generate income. As a result, there is an urgent need and opportunity for comprehensive funding to allow the arts and culture sector to serve our communities, increase tourism and to be leaders in economic recovery. Americans for the Arts published that attendees at nonprofit arts events spend \$31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission, demonstrating that the arts generate income for the surrounding businesses. Our sector drives tourism generating income for other sectors such as restaurants, parking and transportation. The fate of NYC depends on the health of its arts and culture sector.

The Center for Urban Future reports that NYC’s small and mid-sized arts organizations project steep revenue losses—from 17 percent to 50 percent or more of their annual operating budgets. Dance/NYC has undertaken comprehensive research through our Coronavirus Dance Impact Study ([www.dance.nyc/covid-19/Impact-Survey/Overview](http://www.dance.nyc/covid-19/Impact-Survey/Overview)), including quantitative and



qualitative data on the impact this moment is having on the dance sector, more specifically on organizations and individual dance workers. Dance organizations, groups and project budgets contracted by nearly one-third (31%) during the pandemic due to earned and contributed revenue losses. The smallest organizations are most impacted, with budgets contracting by at least 50%. The funding allocated to arts and culture allows the workforce to be paid living wages. Arts and culture is a small percentage of the City's budget and cuts would be devastating to the workforce.

The *Comptroller's Report on the Creative Economy* highlights the vastness of the cultural sector with nearly 400,000 jobs. This is an important workforce in our City. Dance/NYC's *Coronavirus Dance Impact Survey* has documented that the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the size and make-up of the field with 5% of respondents permanently relocating outside of the City and an additional 17% considering relocation. Moreover, 43% of the respondents are considering long term career options outside of the field. Nearly half (47%) of the organizations surveyed are not certain that their organizations will be able to survive the pandemic and may be faced with closure. SMU DataArts and Department of Cultural Affairs' *COVID-19 Impact on Nonprofit Arts and Culture in New York City* report recently estimated an aggregate -\$6.8 billion net effect of the COVID-19 crisis on the nonprofit arts and culture sector equates to a deficit equivalent to 26% of expenses for the average organization, over the course of a year. The exodus of the dance workforce and the permanent closures of organizations and groups poses a direct and pervasive threat to the survival of the arts and culture communities across the State— a loss we simply cannot afford.

During this pandemic, it has been made evident that artists are necessary workers, as dance businesses and workers have remained active providing online dance classes, digital performances, developing and providing mental health support, providing recovery and mutual aid support to their neighborhoods. This is in addition to making countermeasures to ensure the



ongoing payment and care of their staffs, while experiencing steep revenue drops. The arts are necessary for community building and mental health, both of which are largely at risk due to social distancing measures. According to SMU Data Arts and DCLA, community-based arts organizations (especially those that focus on cultural and ethnic awareness, folk arts, and community celebrations) in the City have reported losses of 12%, unanticipated expenses of 12%, and have lowest level of Working Capital relative to expenses. In Dance/NYC's Coronavirus Dance Impact Survey, one organization shared, "We're deeply concerned with the health crisis (physical and mental), loss of jobs and food security for people living in our community who were already vulnerable before COVID-19. Our programs have always served as a place of solace as the arts offer spaces for people to heal and seek solutions. It is important that we exist to help people weather the crisis psychologically and compliment organizations who are offering social services for displacement, health care and food." The Social Impact of theArts Project from the University of Pennsylvania reports neighborhoods with cultural assets show better outcomes for education, aging, crime, health, and community well being. This finding is similar to the World Health Organization's scoping review highlighting the range of research demonstrating the health and mental benefits of participating in arts programming. New Yorkers need the arts more than ever and can not afford a budget cut.

While COVID19 has engendered a multi-system collapse across the country, it has further exacerbated what was already a fragile ecosystem for the dance community, characterized by little to no unionization, poor wage standards and protections, and little to no access to healthcare. These conditions coupled with the financial losses related to the pandemic are particularly acute and disproportionately impacting dance workers and organizations who identify as or are led by disabled; BIPOC; and genderqueer/nonbinary as well as older dance workers and immigrant dance workers, particularly those based in the most under-resourced neighborhoods fo the City. NYC cannot afford to lose these cultural organizations that have



existed for decades as a part of the arts and culture ecosystem and needs to provide funding to ensure their survival.

Dance/NYC strongly advocates for a vision rooted in inclusivity, equity, and sustainability for the arts and culture industry. Artists are necessary workers and in order to continue to be a driving part of the NYC workforce, City budget and funding are needed so that arts and culture can continue to thrive in a City known for its arts and culture.

**For Dance/NYC and its constituents, the most urgent priorities are for the City:**

- 1) To maintain the budget for arts and culture without making any budget cuts;**
- 2) To acknowledge that cultural funding is only a small part of the City’s budget and that now is not the time to make budget cuts to the arts and culture sector;**
- 3) To affirm that artists are necessary workers that deserve living wages and that arts and culture leads economic recovery and is essential to bringing tourists back;**
- 4) To provide necessary funding in order for dance organizations to continue working with our communities especially our children, the aging population, improving mental health during the pandemic and more;**
- 5) To create and fund initiatives for arts organizations that are BIPOC, disabled and immigrant led and serve our BIPOC, disabled and immigrant communities.**

We commend New York City’s ongoing efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19, while safely reopening the City. The arts have been among the last to reopen and are critical to rebuilding the City. The arts can afford to have the budget cut given the devastating effects already endured to the pandemic. We thank the City Council members for their time and efforts in reopening the arts and cultural sector to bring dance to all New Yorkers.

##



# THE JAZZ GALLERY

WHERE THE FUTURE IS PRESENT

AN INTERNATIONAL  
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New York City Council  
Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations Committee  
Council Chambers – City Hall  
Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony FY22  
Tuesday March 9, 2020 11 AM

The Jazz Gallery is America's premier performance venue for emerging artists who challenge convention, take creative risks and lead their field as performers, composers and thinkers. Through residencies, commissions, performances, and exhibitions, we provide a platform for artists to discover their unique voice and a home for established musicians to continue to experiment and grow. At The Jazz Gallery, artists and audiences come together from around the world to explore new creative ideas, collaborate and celebrate jazz as a dynamic art form that reflects our ever-changing world.

The Jazz Gallery continually highlights the diversity and vitality of jazz today by presenting both established artists and talented, younger artists in equal measure, emphasizing the importance of exchange across different generations and musical cultures for the continued renewal of the art form. Among our alumni are 6 MacArthur Fellows (most recently Mary Halvorson in 2019), 18 Thelonious Monk Competition finalists, numerous Doris Duke Artist Award recipients and GRAMMY Award-nominees, and many others who are now headlining international jazz festivals and topping annual "best-of" lists; they all cut their teeth on our stage. Even with such a network of successful alumni, The Jazz Gallery continually seeks out young artists who would benefit from the platform and community that we provide. Since 2002, we have commissioned 58 composers, 71% of them people of color.

All performances were cancelled a year ago, including all 25th anniversary season programming. **In 2020, COVID-19 reduced our admission revenue by 74%.**



## **What did we do in response, to support our artists and audiences?**

- Performing artists were disproportionately impacted by COVID and in response; **The Jazz Gallery paid all artists for their cancelled performances.**
- **We acted swiftly** to develop a suite of innovative online initiatives to connect and sustain artists and listeners during the pandemic. These included:
  - **The Lockdown Sessions**, a weekly event conducted via Zoom that gathers artists of diverse backgrounds who share new original works
  - Happy Hours, Dance Parties, and a live interview series hosted by **GRAMMY- nominated saxophonist and MacArthur Fellow Miguel Zenón**
  - **Livestreaming.** Our livestreams now reach hundreds of audience members a week, and we have now expanded our reach internationally into 47 countries. This has required the acquisition of video and audio equipment, lighting, and additional infrastructure in addition to training of the staff in new performance protocols. Many of our artists had not had a chance to play in months until we started livestreaming.

**TJG continued to employ artists through the pandemic, and the artists are being compensated for livestream performances at the same rate we were paying before the lockdown.**

**Challenges we face right now:** We are working quickly to assess the State's reopening guidelines, so we can safely return to live in-person performances. We are also looking at federal opportunities for support. Unfortunately, guidance on the Shuttered Venues Operators and PPP Grants changes daily. There is still not a release date for applications or a finalized COVID relief bill at the federal level.

The city is facing a budget crisis and a prolonged road to recovery. **Our sector needs relief and support now and going forward.**

Public funding was and is a lifeline for the cultural community and live music is a lifeline for the NYC community.

**More than anything, we need public sector support that we can count on to continue paying our staff and artists until NYC is fully open again.**

**Until we have clarity on federal monies, we ask that all cultural funding for the City of New York be held harmless.**

**Testimony by Sara Espanol, Children's Librarian – Queens Public Library**  
**New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup**  
**Relations**  
**Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget Hearing**  
**March 9, 2021**

Good morning/afternoon Chair Van Bramer and the members of this Committee. My name is Sara Espanol and I am the Children's Librarian at the Glendale Library branch of Queens Public Library. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on such an important topic.

In March of 2020, Queens Public Library closed our buildings to slow the spread of COVID-19. Soon after, I was given the opportunity to join the Library's Virtual Children's Programming Committee, a group comprised of amazing librarians who focus on designing unique children's programming for the virtual realm. We quickly established a schedule of story times on Facebook Live three times a week, including bilingual story times on Fridays. We also added programs twice a week for school-aged children that feature chapter book read-alouds, STEM classes, arts & crafts, and more. In partnership with our Marketing Department, the Committee develops exclusive content for our YouTube channel, which can be accessed and watched at any time and includes videos on early literacy, science experiments and instructional videos on how to access our digital collections.

Prior to COVID-19, I was hosting monthly visits with the local schools in the area. When the pandemic began, it was important to me to continue this practice, and since then, I have continued to conduct monthly virtual story times with the local special needs pre-K class. Not only does this invoke normalcy and consistency with the students, but it also gives me a chance to share digital media content and other key resources the Library has to offer with the families.

In addition to the Programming Committee, I also serve on the Summer Reading Committee. Last summer, we took on the difficult task of transitioning our in-person Summer Reading program to the virtual environment. Summer Reading is critical because we do not want our kids to suffer from the "summer slide," which is even more challenging with the added difficulty of remote learning. Our commitment to give our families the support and tools necessary to keep their kids reading over the summer led to the launch of our reading challenge, ReadSquared. The platform provided families with the ability to easily log and track their reading over the summer.

When to-go service began in July, I worked with my assigned branch on creating grab-and-go craft kits for school-age children. Additionally, along with a fellow children's librarian, I host a weekly virtual early literacy program focused on letter recognition. Families who register can receive a corresponding grab-and-go bag to help them learn at home.

For me, the Library is such an essential part of a community. We work closely with our local schools, and provide our families and communities with the information and tools they need to help their children to succeed. My goal as a children's librarian is to encourage reading and literacy in young people. I live in Queens and have a young school-aged child who had a difficult time with distance learning, and the Library has been an incredible resource for us. Before libraries opened for to-go service, the ability to access and download eBooks for my child was a lifesaver, and now that we have to-go service, being able to get books and other library materials again is wonderful. That is why I am here today. I witness the positive impact libraries have on people daily, and I experience it myself in my personal life. Libraries have been there, and will continue to be there, for all our customers, helping them meet their individual needs.

Thank you for allowing me this time.



March 9, 2021

RE: Testimony for the NY City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs

To the Honorable City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs:

The 52nd Street Project, coming up on its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is a community-based arts organization located in and serving the young people of Hell's Kitchen. We work with underserved kids starting at the age of 9 or 10 and they stay with us for 8 years until they graduate, and even beyond, with scholarship programs for higher education.

Our programs are free to the children who participate and our performances are free to our audiences. Reaching approximately 150 kids per year, we have been running virtual programs since March continuing to engage our members.

I will tell the story of one young woman as an illustration of the impact that the arts and long-term service to a community can have. This child started with The Project when she was 10 years old. She did not really speak to adults. When you spoke to her she looked down and shrugged her shoulders. Whenever she was asked a question, you could barely hear what she said, she spoke so softly never seemed to offer an opinion of her own. Especially when her parents were around, she would just let them speak for her.

We stuck with her and still talked to her, asked her questions, engaged with her even when we knew the conversation would be minimal. We invited her to every program possible. She always said yes. She participated in performing and writing programs as well as backstage crew, to name just a few.

Today at 17, she is extremely vocal, starts topics of conversations, chooses to share her thoughts and feelings with us. She is the most consistent member of the Teen Ensemble. We were in rehearsal for a show when her mother suddenly passed away this winter. She chose to complete the performance. She attends every meeting of College prep, even though she has struggled with school through the pandemic and her mother's illness. She is working with a tutor we provided, to catch up and wants to continue acting in college. These are the types of essential services the arts can provide.

It is critical that DCLA's funding be kept whole in order to support the crucial work of arts organizations during this pandemic and in order that the City survive and recover with the economic energy and community strengthening work of Culture.

789 Tenth Avenue  
New York, NY 10019

212/333-5252  
212/333-5598

EMAIL [info@52project.org](mailto:info@52project.org)  
WEB [52project.org](http://52project.org)

**Five Angels Theater**

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George C. Wolfe



**Green-Wood Cemetery**  
**March 9, 2021**  
**Testimony for the New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings**

Hello Chair Van Bramer.

My name is Lisa Alpert. I am the Vice President of Development and Programming at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. For geographical context, Green-Wood is in South Brooklyn and borders six different neighborhoods including Sunset Park and Park Slope.

In the quality time we're going to share together in the next two minutes, I'd like to make four critical points.

#1: Green-Wood Cemetery is really big, and we are an irreplaceable asset for Brooklyn and all of NYC. We're 478 acres. That's just slightly smaller than Prospect Park. And we feel a responsibility and an obligation to share this incredible resource with the community. And we embrace that responsibility every day. How do we do that?

#2: More than 250 public programs every year, including concerts, performances, and art installations. A fully-staffed education department that serves thousands of kids every year. Workforce development training. Workshops in environmental justice. Groundbreaking work with Cornell on fighting climate change in large, urban greenspaces. High school internships and more.

#3: Something incredible happened at Green-Wood last year. Last spring, when COVID hit, Green-Wood opened and staffed all four of its entrance gates, seven days a week, until 7 pm every night. That changed the number of people who come to Green-Wood annually from 300,000 to just under 600,000 in 2020, which means Green-Wood is now better known and loved by Brooklynites than ever before.

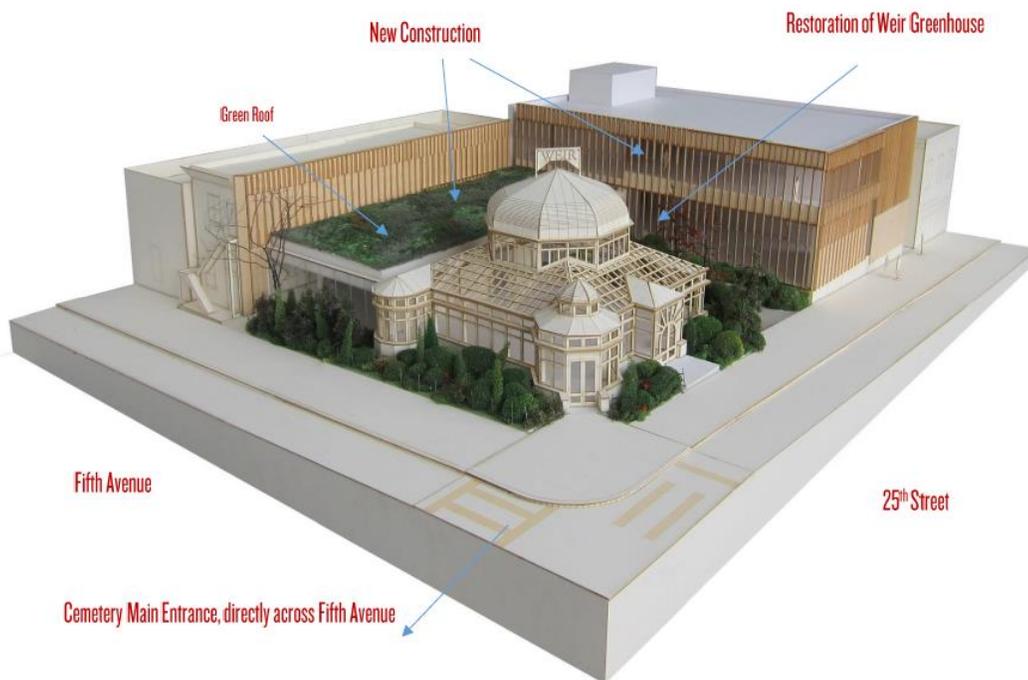
But #4: We have a big challenge and a big opportunity. We currently have no indoor space for programming. That means when it's cold, raining, or snowing, we cannot serve our community. We lose almost four months of the

year. Our capital project - an Education and Welcome Center will allow year-round programming– which is especially important here in South Brooklyn, which is, culturally, significantly underserved. We have already raised 65% of funds. We are seeking the support of the City Council on this important capital project.

Thank you.

*Lisa W. Alpert*  
*Vice President of Development and Programming*  
718-210-3011 | [lisa\\_alpert@green-wood.com](mailto:lisa_alpert@green-wood.com)

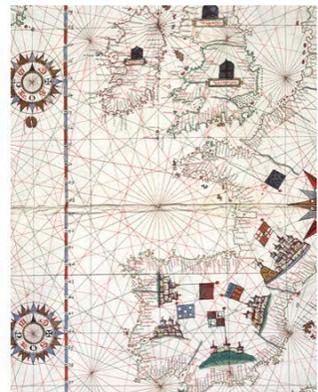
**The Education and Welcome Center  
at Green-Wood Cemetery**





# THE HISPANIC

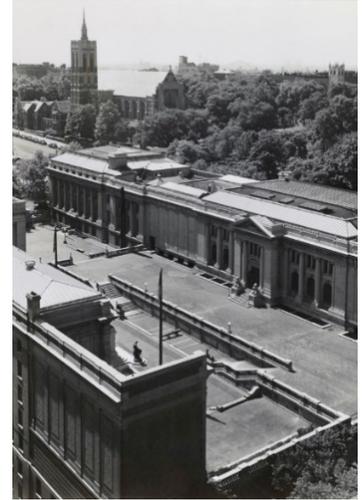
## MUSEUM & LIBRARY

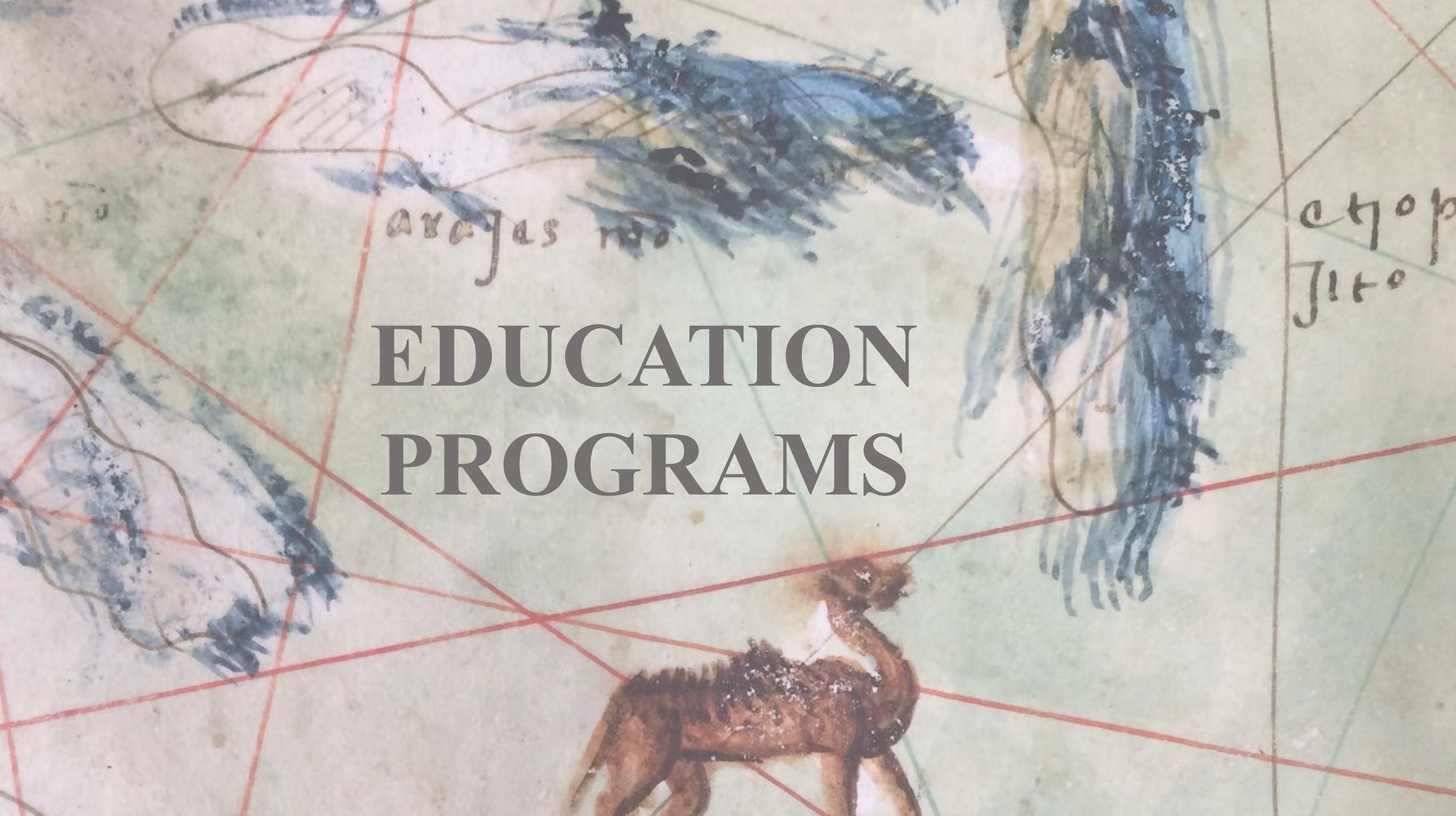


**The Hispanic Society of America**  
613 West 155<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10032

**Testimony: City Council Hearing: Committee on Cultural Affairs  
Tuesday Mar 9, 2021**

1. Founded in 1904, The Hispanic Society is one of the oldest museums and libraries in the City and has since been open free to the public. The Hispanic Society of America is the most important repository of Hispanic art and culture in the world.
2. It is one of the largest, if not, the largest cultural organization north of 125<sup>th</sup> Street and serves as an important cultural resource to the local community and the City, as well as internationally as a tourist site with its world-renowned collection of Hispanic art. Considered one of the most important in the world, the collection includes work by Goya, Velazquez, El Greco, as well as Latin American works by Campeche, Arrieta, Fierro, etc.
3. We provide free educational and artmaking workshops to public schools in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx, which have been meaningful to the students and families in our community. We also present free concerts, exhibitions, and tours to the general public.
4. Our Landmark buildings and Outdoor spaces on Audubon Terrace are a cultural hub for Upper Manhattan; however, they are in great need of restoration and rehabilitation to bring them up to current museum standards, including universal accessibility to all.
5. The area of Washington Heights continues to be one of the communities hit the hardest by the pandemic. While our doors remain closed to visitors, we have been able to provide numerous virtual programs, including a summer camp for families from Upper Manhattan, as well as lecture and concert series as well as an outdoor installation on our terraces. At the end of May, we will open an exhibition titled, *Latinx Diaspora: Stories from Upper Manhattan*, in collaboration with the Northern Manhattan Art Alliance focusing on a mural painted by artist from Upper Manhattan that tells the tells the story of the Latinx diaspora in New York City from the late 1800s to the present. These programs provide meaningful experiences and connections to art and culture that have been more important than ever.





AVAJAS MO

# EDUCATION PROGRAMS

etop  
Jito

170

This image shows a historical astronomical chart or map. It features a grid of red and green lines overlaid on a light-colored background. Several figures are painted in blue and brown, including a large figure at the top and a smaller one at the bottom. Handwritten text in a cursive script is visible, including 'AVAJAS MO' and 'etop Jito'. The number '170' is also present in the upper left corner.

Workshop for Kids | Día de los Muertos w/ Artist Felipe Galindo-Feggo

Play (k) 8:28 / 9:45 Scroll for details

Workshop for Kids | Compass Rose Print

6:21 / 6:39 Scroll for details

Workshop for Kids | Holy Week Collage Activity

Choose some townspeople to carry your *paso* (float), and designate a figure to stand atop

1:56 / 2:26 Scroll for details

Art for Kids | Paper Mountains w/ Artist Victoria Febrer

THE HISPANIC MUSEUM & LIBRARY

VISIT | ABOUT US | RESEARCH | COLLECTIONS | PROGRAMS | EXHIBITIONS

MUSEUM | LIBRARY | PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS

SEARCH THE COLLECTION | SEARCH THE COLLECTION | COMING SOON

1:21 / 15:33



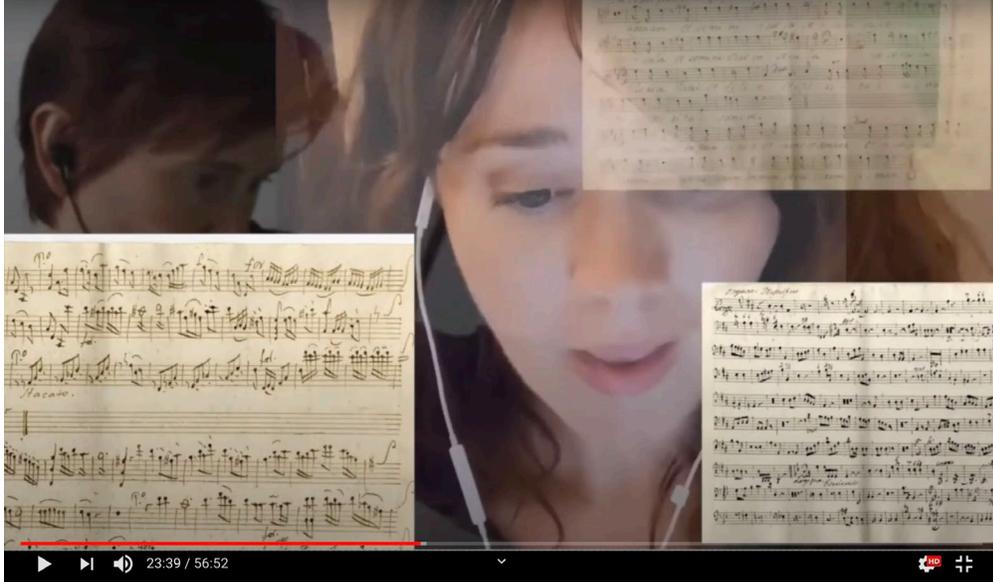
**CONCERT SERIES  
&  
SPECIAL  
PERFORMANCES**

HSM&L | From the Iberian Peninsula to the Antwerp Salon: Leonora Duarte and the Business of Music



18:00 / 1:01:14 Scroll for details

"Saludad a la aurora" Meridionalis performs at The Hispanic Society Music Collection



23:39 / 56:52

HSM&L Music Delights | Preludio Piezas sobre cantos populares Hispanic Society



1:56 / 2:19

HSM&L Music Delights | Asturiana from Siete Canciones Españolas, 1914. Performed by Boyd Meets Girl



1:44 / 3:30

# TREASURES ON THE TERRACE

Highlights from the HISPANIC SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

# TESOROS EN LA TERRAZA

Obras maestras de la HISPANIC SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

# OUTDOOR EXHIBITION



Small text panels and a small image at the bottom of the display case containing the portrait.

Small text panels and images at the bottom left of the page, including a small portrait and a building illustration.



*Treasures on the Terrace: Highlights from the Hispanic Society Museum & Library | 9/24/20 – 12/6/20*



HBO | HBO

#SIEMPREL

# UPCOMING OUTDOOR EXHIBITION

1898

HOBBS

AMERICAN

STANTON

AMERICAN

# *Latinx Diaspora: Stories from Upper Manhattan*



LEFT: *Latinx Identity: the Voices of the Diaspora* (1980s-1990s) by Danny Peguero (@danny\_peguero).  
RIGHT: *The New Diaspora/Hurricane Maria* by Carla Torres (@carlisimaultra)



CELEBRATING THE JOY OF DANCING ON ICE

NYC Council

Testimony for the Committee on Cultural Affairs- March 9

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

To Whom It May Concern:

I am submitting this testimony as Executive Director of Ice Theatre of New York, Inc. ®

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

ITNY would like to see the overall NYC budget for Culture increase, but for now we would be delighted to be held harmless.

NYC's cultural programming and specifically ITNY's programming brings benefits for life in NYC, from our general audiences to the NYC public school children we serve. We bring joy with our free public performances to dance enthusiasts, figure skating fans and all passers-by of our performances on the seasonal ice rinks all over New York City.

In our outreach programs for NYC public school children we expose them to a new art form, introduce them to a new sport, which they can practice in their local community, in the winter outdoors, with great health benefits (physical and mental), as well as introducing them to potential local jobs in a new industry. Even after pivoting to virtual programming, we are still engaging hundreds of children in arts programming. Our programming changes up the sometimes-dreary routine of online learning. The students are engaged, their morale gets a boost and they learn about a potential lifelong healthy activity once the pandemic is over.

Culture is a small part of NYC's budget that returns great rewards. Now is not the time to cut our funding. It doesn't only affect our constituents, but also the 40 or so artists we employ every year. These artists add to the health, diversity and dynamism of NYC. Culture is what makes NYC different from most other major cities.

Government support is especially critical to small non-profits. Ice Theatre of New York is resilient – we have been around since 1984 – but we could not do this without the support of the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Council Member Discretionary Funding. This support goes beyond the actual financial contribution in inspiring support from foundations and individuals.

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Moira North

**Executive Director**

Jirina Ribbens

**Ensemble Director**

Elisa Angeli

**Administrative Associate**

Justice Lee McConahea

**Development Coordinator**

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Atoy Wilson

Page two  
Ice Theatre of New York, Inc.

Like all NYC's cultural institutions, Ice Theatre of New York has been hit hard. A year later, we are still not allowed on the ice at Chelsea Piers to rehearse as a group. We have continued our programming with virtual classes, streaming events, and 5-min long Pop-Up performances by solo or duet performers. Thanks to PPP we were able to keep our artists through June 2020, but subsequently we had to let most of them go. All performances were halted till December, at which time we could re-employ a handful of artists for these pop-up-type of performances. It's a long way from presenting 30-min concerts with a dozen artists and our hour-long Home Season Performances that employ up to 25 artistic workers.

Ice Theatre of New York's Fiscal year 2021 season was completely destroyed by the COVID shutdown and the economic crisis. It is unclear if we will be able to return to live programming in the fall. Will the rink allow us to rehearse and present public programming? Will the ticket buyers return? Will our patrons want to attend a Gala again? If not, how will we find the funds to survive till we can start up again in 2022? And how will our artists be able to remain in NYC?

Ice Theatre of New York is helping to lead the economic recovery with its pop-up ice dance events, by creating traffic to local communities and businesses and enlivening the communities we perform in. We hope that soon – as in the past – ITNY will be part of the cultural landscape that will attract tourist back to our City.

With gratitude for the City's past support and in hope of increased funding for Culture in the future.

Sincerely

Jirina Ribbens  
Executive Director

## Queens Public Library – Testimony

Hello,

My name is Josselyn Atahualpa and I'm the Queens Memory Program Coordinator at the Queens Library. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at the Preliminary Budget Hearing - Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. I would like to formally submit my testimony.

"Good afternoon to all. Thank you Chairman Jimmy Van Bramer and fellow committee members for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Josselyn Atahualpa and I'm the program coordinator for Queens Memory at the Queens Public Library. Queens Memory is a joint community archiving project with Queens College. In my personal capacity, I also coordinate the Centro Corona Mutual Aid Network in Corona, Queens and have been a community organizer for the past decade in NYC. In this past year I've helped hundreds of people survive the pandemic and I don't say that lightly, but even though I know this to be true I find it hard to remember all that we've been through. The human ability to forget so quickly is a double edged sword, and that's why community archiving projects like Queens Memory at QPL are so important.

Not a lot of people understand all of the labor NYC libraries take on. As the City shut down, Queens Memory pivoted to a 100% remote team documenting in real time the devastation caused by COVID-19. We captured the initial shut down, the work of those on the frontlines and the different phases of quarantine. We conducted panels and oral history interviews to learn about the impact of the pandemic on immigrants and small businesses in Queens. We've interviewed hundreds of New Yorkers---nurses, community organizers, those in power and every day people who spoke on their experience in their own terms. We didn't do this alone, we were able to activate over 100 volunteers expanding the work, bringing in more support from QPL staff and exploring new technology. Our adaptability was quick and I commend us for that.

It's surprisingly easy to forget all that's happened since the City shut down in March of last year. I don't say that because the things that happened weren't important or because it wasn't a lot. I say it because our brains tend to suppress trauma and crisis for our own self-preservation. This past year showed us

collectively, more than any other singular event, how precarious life in NYC can be. It's so important that everyday NYC history be preserved. We need to have a material understanding of the ways in which our systems failed us so that we can change and fix them. There were many instances on a federal level but also on a state and city level where NYers were abandoned, and I don't ever want us to live through that again. NYC libraries among many things work to preserve our history and without it we'd be lost, destined to repeat our mistakes.

I've learned so much during this hearing from my colleagues and want to applaud us for honestly bearing our souls fighting for what's right, but it shouldn't have to be like this. The math is not hard and our statements don't exist in a vacuum. There are campaigns like "Tax the Rich" and "Defund the NYPD" that are already proposing the redistribution of funds that could easily be allocated to NYC libraries. We require a bold approach to budgeting in order to have a fighting chance for NYC to persevere.

I hope I've given you some insight into our work and that you can support a strong future for libraries in NYC. Thank you. "

Chairman Jimmy Van Bramer and fellow committee members, thank you for giving my fellow presidents and I an opportunity to testify at this year's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations' hearing on the Mayor's preliminary budget for the three library systems.

I work for the Queens Public Library System at the help desk in the IT department. As you all are aware, since the start of the pandemic everyone has suffered a great deal. Whether through having Medical, Financial or Mental issues, with the closure of libraries many families, children, adults and seniors alike have suffered.

The library had to change its direction to help customers virtually in the past year but many of our customers miss having interaction with us. Many students would go into their local branch to have help with their homework or just to find a good book to read. The seniors would go in to find a good book but also just to have personal interaction with another person. They are so dearly missing that.

The help desk has received many questions about when we are going to open to full service again and we try to help them to understand that staff safety is important along with theirs first. Making sure that people have a safe and clean place to go and get the knowledge that they need is vital not only to their medical health but also their mental health.

Having a customer service person to help a patron check out a book that they have requested, having a librarian help them find a book that they wanted to read or that they need for school or work for advancement in their field. Even having a custodian help to keep the branch clean when staff is working or customers are coming in to get something that they need. These positions are vital to customers both virtually and physically.

Having staff available to order the books and prepare them for the customer to receive. Having staff that keep the website up and available for the customers to read, download and request items. Having staff to do virtual classes for those that need it. Some of the classes were COVID-19 Vaccine Informational Workshop, Women's History Month: Literary Thursdays and Virtual Citizenship Classes these are just a few of the services that the library provides.

Making sure that we are available to provide these services is vital to New York City and its residents. However it takes money to do so. Please do not cut the funding that provides these vital services and so many more that I have not mentioned.

Thank you for your attention on this important matter.

Kathy Brewster-Lee

Queens Public Library

Customer Information Representative II



**New York City Arts in Education Roundtable**  
*Live Testimony - Budget Hearing Arts Education*

Thank you Chair Van Bramer, Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations, and Commissioner Casals and staff at DCLA for your leadership and commitment to arts education. My name is Kimberly Olsen. It's a pleasure to hear from our colleagues in the public library system, as I began my career as a teaching artist teaching devised theater to middle schoolers at the Steinway branch of the Queens Public Library. I am now the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable.

The Roundtable is a service organization who builds its efforts around the values that arts are essential and that arts education is a right for all NYC students. Our 120+ member organizations have worked in long-standing partnership with the DOE to ensure that every child has access to quality arts learning.

As our city begins to rebuild and envision a post-pandemic era, I am here to highlight the importance of investing in arts education as part of the city's recovery process. The long term effects of COVID-19 on students and schools will take years to understand. However, the trauma, systemic racism, and learning loss related to COVID-19 are stark realities that students are currently facing every day as they enter the classroom. The need for investment and equity in arts education access comes when the need for arts in our schools has never been more clear.

New York City is missing the opportunity to invest in authentic ways to build social emotional competencies of youth living through these traumatic times. The city is missing the chance to instill in our youth the power of imagination and creativity, which are needed in not only art-based professions but in a myriad of careers including engineers, educators, health care professionals, and computer software designers. And the NYC DOE is failing to engage a workforce of thousands of artists primed to expand student opportunity and advance equitable access to arts learning (through cultural partnerships). This school year, and every subsequent year, the arts will be key to re-igniting students' learning in the post-COVID-19 era and preparing them for success and joy in a complicated 21st century world.

To rebuild the cultural workforce and sustain arts education programs, we believe the city must restore 70% cuts to arts education services at the NYC DOE and restore cuts CASA programs in the FY22 budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## **March 9, 2021 City Council Statement**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the City Council today.

I am Christine Zarett, Curator for the Black Heritage Reference Collection at the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center. After closing our doors in March 2020, staff at the Langston Hughes branch jumped into action and moved to virtual programming in April. We essentially adapted any in person programming we could to virtual, including Arts and Crafts, Story Time, and Curator's Choice. We created programs for virtual attendance, including a Good for your Soul Cooking program, an Educator's Meetup and a Motivational Mondays workshop.

Since April the Langston Hughes Library has hosted a minimum of three programs a week and attendance remains steady.

Our Saturday Crafts program presented family crafts of paper flowers to origami, and holiday crafts. Our children's librarian held story time and craft programs.

Curator's Choice programs brought people together to discuss films on Black history. Special guests joined the program to talk about Black entrepreneurship and publishing. There was also a 3 week series for young adults. Curator's Choice partnered with Brooklyn Public Library for a special program on African American spirituals. Programs also included presentations on Black artists, Dave the Potter and Quilts including Underground Railroad quilts. All material was accessed from the Black Heritage Collection.

Black Heritage Collection material is shared digitally with Baruch College Black Studies classes including essays, slave narratives and poetry.

The Langston Hughes Library held our annual events virtually.

Black History Month and our Annual Langston Hughes Celebration this year included Black studies students reading poetry from an anthology

## **March 9, 2021 City Council Statement**

“In Search of Color Everywhere,” music performances, and a panel discussion with former political prisoners.

For Hispanic Heritage Month there was a Hispanic Dishes Cooking Series, Health Workshop series, Dance Series, and Crafts series.

The Annual Langston Hughes Literary Arts Festival consisted of poetry readings, author talks and presentations, and a theatre performance.

Our 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Kwanzaa Celebration held 7 events during the last week of December acknowledging each of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. They included a libation ceremony, a cooking program, a vision board workshop, Kwanzaa wreath craft, and a music performance.

We also came together as a branch to create and publish a monthly newsletter with a letter from the Executive Director, monthly spotlight on a community member or library staff, our programming schedule, poems, and an Artist’s Corner feature with a photo from the Langston Hughes Library art collection.

We hold weekly staff meetings virtually and all staff participates in weekly professional development.

In August Langston Hughes Library opened for public service for material pick up, grab and go activities, free tax information and printing.

Thank you for your time today and continuing to support the Queens Public Library.

Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 10AM

**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

**League of Independent Theater Testimony**

**Christina Perry, Member and Venue Operator**

Chain Theatre, 312 W. 36<sup>th</sup> Street

[Christina@variationstheatregroup.com](mailto:Christina@variationstheatregroup.com)

Good Afternoon, my name is Christina Perry and I am here today representing the League of Independent Theaters who represents over 300 theatres with 99 seats or less. I also operate two theater venues in Midtown Manhattan known as the Chain Theatre, and am here not only as a member of the League but to give a personal account of the effects of this pandemic as a venue operator.

Of course our greatest need is Rent Relief, I cannot speak at any local, City or State hearing without first mentioning this. We know you our city representatives have the ears of those in the State and we ask that you continue to voice this overwhelming need. That said, for years now non profit theatre venues such as myself have looked to save funds where ever we can until things like commercial rent stabilization and other tax incentives may be pushed through.

An important ask we would like to address today, is the need for a Not-for-Profit rate from Con-Ed that eliminates our venues from being classified as a Large Commercial Venue (L-9). I can personally share that our organization pursued this five year ago when we first had a space in Long Island City. After numerous transfers and call backs, we were told no as we did not 'own the building.' The reality is, many theatre spaces such as the Chain cannot afford to own our space. If we cannot afford to own our own space, it is reasonable to think that being classified as a Large Commercial Venue is also outside of our not for profit price range. Reclassifying what usage our venues fall under has the potential to save our organizations thousands of dollars. That is money that can go to further programming, community events, and paying artists and gig workers.

Previous attempts from my own organization and the League of Independent Theater to advocate for this change from Con-Ed and learn more about the process have been stonewalled when reaching out to Con-Edison when seeking their guidance in how we may navigate rates that reflect our actual usage and our contributions to the community.

We ask you here today to help us in creating this change. It would save our organizations thousands of dollars each year and is something financially that the city may contribute without actually taking from any pool in the city budget during the most financially devastating event to hit our industry.

I thank you greatly for your time and look forward to further discussions on how we may enact this long lasting and impacting change.

**Testimony of Melody Capote, Executive Director  
Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute  
before the  
City Council Committee on  
Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
March 9, 2021**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the City Council. My name is Melody Capote, Executive Director of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute.

First and foremost, I wish to express my appreciation and admiration for the effort undertaken by the department to create a budget that is as fair as possible, given the extraordinary pressure put on the budget process by the COVID pandemic and the demands of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

That said, the Caribbean Cultural Center is compelled to express its concern regarding some of the budget priorities adopted by the administration and reflected in the preliminary budget. The following is a short list of some of the major concerns that we have regarding decisions made by the administration that directly impact small/medium Arts and Culture (A&C) institutions within Communities of Color.

Before setting forth the list, allow me to refresh your recollection regarding some of the realities that A&C organizations of color experience every single day:

- The closer that an A&C organization of color is to the community of color which they serve, the more likely it is that the organization is missing two things - an audience capable of paying premium prices for performances and a population capable of creating/sustaining an endowment;
- The average A&C organization of color is started by a community member with little capacity to set up a complete organization capable of performing optimally without significant capacity building support;
- The average new A&C organization of color requires as much as \$250,000 to establish a core staff and core program offerings within rented space with proper insurance, etc.
- The maxim that a nonprofit should have between 90-180 days of revenue to address emergencies like those experienced in 2021 was shattered by the reality that most smaller agencies did not have enough resources to make it past 30 or 60 days.

The following are those areas of concern to the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute.

1. **Budget Code 0704 – Capacity Building Initiative.** This budget category is absolutely critical to the life of A&C organization of color. CCCADI strongly supports the creation of an annual revolving fund of two types of capacity grants: capacity building and capacity enhancement. The **capacity building fund** would provide grants of \$10,000 - \$50,000 to be used for infrastructure and organizational development for an organization with a budget under \$2 million. To be eligible for this grant, an applicant would have to demonstrate compliance and completion of the capacity building assistance program sponsored by MOCS, the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services. The **capacity enhancement fund** would be open to A&C organizations of color with budgets of \$2 - 4 million. An enhancement grant would be designed to move the organization to the “next level” based upon a submitted strategic plan that includes a programming plan, an organizational plan, a fiscal accountability plan and a sustainability plan. CCCADI recommends funding for this initiative at the \$4 million in FY 22.
2. **Budget Code 3603 – Coalition of Theaters of Color.** This budget item recognizes the difficulties theaters of color experience in generating basic GOS income that allows the organization to create a sustainability plan aimed solely at enhancing the ability of an organization of color to survive. For many small, African Diaspora organizations, the definition of “theater” is as diverse as the definition of performance. CTC funds should be provided as GOS to serve as a vehicle for “getting off the ground” without utilizing all agency funds while waiting for reimbursement, “Up front,” CTC funds have proven to be critical to economic survival and for many organizations, served as a vehicle for leveraging matching funds from other philanthropic organizations. CCCADI recommends that the CTC funds be awarded at an equitable level for all members of the Coalition and that the Coalition be required to conduct an annual retreat setting forth the state of the system for theaters of color.
3. **Budget Code 0152 – Artist Residencies.** CCCADI would respectfully point out that this pandemic did, at least, help all of us to understand the value of “our artists” in the overall continuum of arts and culture. For decades, we have been underpaying our artists and overpaying their overseers leaving us in the unrealistic position of using nonprofit staff earning five and six-figure salaries paying artistic staff with an hourly rate or a set fee that requires them to get one or two supplemental "gigs" in order to pay their bills. While it is difficult to label one item as the highest priority, CCCADI believes that economic equity begins with paying our artists fairly. CCCADI strongly supports a minimum hourly rate for

artists in residence. CCCADI recommends that a small task force on residencies can easily come up with an appropriate formula. What is asked is that \$1,000,000 be set aside for this purpose.

4. **Budget Code 3600 – DCA CASA Funding.** This funding is the core of the relationship between community-based nonprofits and local schools and, now more than ever, serves as a critical lifeline for injecting arts and culture into the larger curriculum of public school education. It is the CASA money that now provides almost 100% of the afterschool artistic programming conducted in public schools. CCCADI strongly supports the program but recommends that the average grant should be \$40K as opposed to \$20K so that the sponsoring organization is not required to take a loss and a greater per capita share can be made available to the teaching artist who is at the heart of the CASA program.
5. **CIG Funding.** CCCADI has addressed on several occasions the structural inequity associated with the CIG funding. The bottom line is that CIG funding is authorized by a procedure that favors organizations responsible for setting up the process. Back in the day when real estate was a reasonable trade-off, cultural institutions, who agreed to reside within a city-owned structure were ultimately rewarded for their willingness to do so through participation in the CIG revenue sharing program. By the time the program was set in stone, there were very few buildings left that would qualify for entry into the legacy program. This opportunity was designed to preserve the primacy of white A&C organizations who split up the pie in a way that unfairly excluded organizations of color while rewarding organizations who sat comfortably in buildings constructed by people of color. While CCCADI supports CIG as a revenue sharing program, it is our strong belief that the criteria for selection cannot be drawn in such a way that 85% of all revenue goes to mainline, white institutions. CCCADI is not opposed to CIG funding. Rather, we are opposed to the criteria created for CIG funding eligibility. The City gives valuable real estate to predominantly white institutions and, in exchange for their willingness to preserve Eurocentric values, they get priority funding to maintain the status quo.

As I stated in prior testimony, **“I can’t breathe”** when the City Council and the administration speak about the special role of arts and culture in healing a community whose culture has been stolen from them only to find that the stolen culture is on display somewhere on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This is the very definition of systemic, inequitable funding that favors European culture purveyors as opposed to authentic representatives of the African Diaspora who are forced to fight for nickels and dimes while the folding money is passed out downtown.

To honor George Floyd and the other martyrs in our community, I ask that:

DCLA establish a special capacity building fund for organizations of color with a budget of under \$4 million who will be required to use their capacity expansion grant to address racial and social injustice;

DCLA establish two artists incubators which will train artists of color to provide arts & culture services using the new digital platforms and assist artists to develop entrepreneurial ventures through culturally competent technical assistance – a program that already exists in a pilot form at CCCADI;

DCLA fund, on a pilot basis, the CCCADI Institute for Racial and Social Justice for Arts and Culture in anticipation of a competitive RFP after completion and evaluation of the pilot.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, our community needs you to demand that we be “at the table” not to provide input but rather to engage in good faith partnership discussions aimed at addressing the systemic racism that everyone admits exists but is afraid to publicly articulate.

Thank you for your time. **Black Lives Matter.**

###



Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup  
Relations  
Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Dear Chair Van Bramer and Members of the Committee,

The time prior to the Museum's temporary closure had been one of the most transformative in its history. Beginning in May 2019, the Museum welcomed over 160,000 visitors through its doors, with 73% of the 60,000 student visitors from public middle and high schools. The Museum partnered with NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio and the NYC Department of Education to schedule visits for 14,000 students—from communities with the greatest rise in antisemitic acts—following Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposal for the creation of an education curriculum for New York schools that focuses on diversity and tolerance in response to the rise in antisemitic incidents across the state.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected New York's arts and cultural institutions in profound ways. Like so many non-profits in the city, the Museum closed its doors in March of 2020. Despite this, the Museum was able to grow its online presence through virtual school tours and public programming to continue to serve New Yorkers through this challenging time.

With on-site student visits and teacher professional development courses on pause because of the pandemic, the Museum's education team shifted these year-round learning opportunities to a virtual environment—allowing the Museum to expand its audience to include those outside of the New York City region and reach students and teachers across the country

Online educational opportunities for students supporting the Museum's mission and advancing the study of the Holocaust and Jewish history and culture are offered through remote classroom lessons as well as learning activities on the Museum's website—geared toward upper elementary and early middle school students—that aid in the exploration of heritage, history, and learning through artifacts. Professional development courses for public, independent, and Jewish schoolteachers are available on a weekly basis and allow New York State teachers to earn CTLE credit. A number of both student and teacher sessions incorporate excerpts from Holocaust survivor testimonies or Zoom conversations with members of the Museum's **Speakers Bureau** of survivors. Since March 2020, more than 2,321 students and 2,148 teachers have participated in remote learning.

The Museum's free online **Holocaust Curriculum**, on which the remote student lessons are largely based, offers ten lesson plans to teach students about Jewish life during the Holocaust. To date, more than 1,766 teachers have registered for access to the curriculum. The curriculum is regularly promoted to the over 7,500 teachers subscribed to the Museum's newsletter as well.

Further programming that will be conducted remotely this year includes The **Interfaith Living Museum**—a program that brings together fifth graders from Jewish and Muslim day schools to visit cultural and religious spaces, and teaches them how to narrate their own stories using personal artifacts, and open cross-cultural dialogue to find similarities between Jewish and Islamic values and traditions.

The Museum's monthly *New Families, New Traditions* series continued to welcome children younger than four and their families to join musical group Yellow Sneaker and their puppet pals for an



engaging and creative Jewish experience before COVID-19. While the Museum reopened to visitors on September 13, *New Families, New Traditions* is currently not offered in consideration for the safety of our family visitors, but we look forward to welcoming these families back to the Museum when public health guidelines allow.

Unfortunately, the Museum experienced a hate crime shortly after the January 6 Insurrection in Washington. In the middle of the night, self-proclaimed members of the “Proud Boys” tied a Confederate flag to the front of the Museum, and photographed themselves giving it the Nazi salute. Thankfully, no one was hurt, and the police were notified. The Museum was extremely touched when the Principal of the Battery Park School across the street offered their support in the form of an anti-hate vigil the next day in front of the building. Here, students showed their support with hand-drawn signs and recited poems for the crowd. Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer joined, and gave a message of resiliency and togetherness.

**The effects of the COVID-19 on the Museum, coupled with this rise in hate, make the City Council support for the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust more crucial now than ever before.**

The Museum generously received \$200,000 in funding from the City Council in FY21 through the Speaker’s Initiative. The Museum is thankful for this allocation and has used the money for educational programming that reaching tens of thousands of students and visitors every year. Thanks to City funding over the years, countless families have deepened their bonds across generations by participating in activities designed to foster an appreciation for Jewish culture and traditions in children. The Museum respectfully requests that this funding be renewed in FY22 to continue to provide Holocaust education to students across the City. The Museum also requests your support of its FY22 capital application to support technology upgrades that will allow the Museum to continue to deliver virtual programming in a more efficient manner as we recover from COVID-19.

The Museum continues to create a safe space for visitors on the three days it is open to the public, with social distancing measures, and timed entry tickets. The Museum looks forward to having you and your constituents return to the Museum in person when appropriate. Thank you again for the continued fiscal and emotional support of the Museum in this trying time and thank you for your service to the City.



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

**Cindy Lawrence, Executive Director and CEO  
National Museum of Mathematics**

**March 10, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for this important hearing.

The National Museum of Mathematics (also known as “MoMath”) is the only math museum in North America, and its mission is to enhance public understanding and perception of mathematics. Its mission takes on an even greater significance in today’s environment, since competency in math can impact success in all aspects of a student’s life. The Museum features more than 40 interactive exhibits and hosts a broad variety of programs that stimulate inquiry, spark curiosity, and reveal the wonders of mathematics.

Prior to COVID-19, MoMath hosted multiple school trips every school day and regularly offered free community programming. During the 2018-2019 school year (the last full school year before the pandemic), the Museum hosted almost 400 field trips for NYC schools, 80 of which were free for Title I schools through MoMath’s *Maxima* program. These trips gave students the opportunity to experience the wonders of math through exploration of dynamic exhibits and participation in hands-on, educator-led sessions. The Museum also consistently offered free in-person programming, such as *Family Fridays*, where families come together to enjoy a diverse array of engaging, interactive mathematical activities, and *Math Encounters*, a popular public presentation series celebrating the spectacular world of mathematics.

MoMath ceased in-person programming at the Museum on March 13, 2020 due to COVID-19. While closing the Museum had a profound impact on operations, MoMath was resilient, immediately pivoting to providing every one of its programs online in a virtual format. In fact, the Museum’s first online field trip began before it wrapped up its last in-person field trip. Since shutting its doors in March last year, MoMath has hosted almost 160 virtual field trips reaching nearly 8,000 students, almost 5,000 of whom attended free of charge. In addition, more than 83,000 participants have engaged in approximately 3,000 online and virtual programs offered by the Museum since March 2020. Many of these programs were offered for free to the public, while the Museum’s fee-based programs are available free to families with financial need.

MoMath’s online field trips offer a variety of inspiring mathematical themes for grades Pre-K through 12; the available options include topics such as Möbius Madness, Secrets of Cryptography, and Topological Tic-tac-toe. These trips have proven to be very successful; teachers have raved about the level of their students’ engagement and pointed out that this program has been one of the few options available for educational online field trips during the pandemic. One teacher emailed to say, “Feedback has been amazing. You made the day of my students and teachers. Please let us know how to register for more of the Title I experiences. You truly helped make education come alive for



students who normally would not get such an experience.”

While we eagerly look forward to the day when we can welcome visitors back to MoMath, we’re also thrilled to continue providing free online programming for New York City students and families. With many schools closed and limited opportunities for youth this summer, it is vital that we keep the city’s youth engaged. In addition, due to COVID-19, many students are falling behind academically. In December, *Education Week* reported that schools nation-wide were seeing “dramatic increases in the number of failing or near-failing grades” on report cards, and a study in February by NBC News and Challenge Success found that 50% more high school students report feeling disengaged from school this year than last year. MoMath is uniquely suited to address both issues of youth engagement and academic challenges through engaging and educating students in a core subject. MoMath’s online programs captivate students by using games, puzzles, and crafts to connect math to other subjects like sports, music, visual arts, card games, astronomy, and engineering. In short, MoMath helps students realize that math can be fun.

I’d like to thank the Council for its dedicated advocacy on behalf of the cultural community and our city’s youth. We at MoMath are excited to continue to work together to provide free and engaging educational programming.



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## REVISED TESTIMONY FOR MARCH 9, 2021

Dear New York City Council Members,

I am Francine Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera Company. For 51 years, Regina Opera has offered fully-staged operas with full orchestra and English supertitles, as well as many concerts. We provide affordable entertainment in accessible venues for audience members who may not otherwise attend live performances. The performances bring happiness and empathy to our audiences, and bring people together, especially Senior Citizens which make up about 65% of our audience.

For each of the 3 full ticketed operas we perform each season, we also present one totally free full opera, complete with supertitles. The many free concerts in public venues such as parks, libraries, and festivals, and ticketed concerts in our theater, located in Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Sunset Park bring foot traffic to local restaurants and shops, assisting them financially in this difficult time.

The need for this cultural enrichment is reflected in the fact that over 4000 people usually attend these live performances, most of which were in Sunset Park, an underserved and low income community with a large percentage of Latino and Asian residents and workers.

Our 2020 Season was cut short by COVID-19 and Regina Opera lost 1 year of live productions, but we have been posting our archived free full operas and opera selections as well as newly recorded concerts on our YouTube page, for a total of 12 full operas and almost 30 opera scenes. Since the pandemic began, we have had over 19,000 views.

Our offerings are particularly vital to NYC. They are uplifting to the spirit, especially for Senior Citizens who may live alone or may be alone during the day.

NYC Cultural groups bring in a significant percentage of the revenue for NYC. At this time, our cultural institutions are just beginning to reopen, with a limited number of audience members. We will continue to present our operas "Free and On Demand", and plan to present some outdoor concerts as well.

As with all arts organizations, we don't know when we will again present "live" performances to the extent that we had been doing previously, and be able to again earn sufficient income through ticket sales and donations.

As a result, we are reliant upon DCLA and City Council Members funding, such as that of Council Members Menchaca and Brannan. This funding will help alleviate some of the pain and insecurity that we, like many cultural institutions have been facing.

Sincerely,

*Francine D'Arbo-Cohen*

**Svetlana Negrimovsky**

**Brooklyn Public Library**

**March 9, 2021 – Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and Intergroup Relations**

My name is Svetlana Negrimovsky. I am the Neighborhood Library Supervisor of the Sheepshead Bay branch, Brooklyn Public Library. I'm here to speak about the importance of public library systems to New York City -- thank you to the Cultural Affairs and Library committees for allowing me to testify.

Brooklyn Public Library has always been a cultural, educational, recreational center and favorite place for all Brooklyn residents. I've been working for Brooklyn Public Library for many years. In all my years of working for Brooklyn Public Library, I have never seen the patron benefit more from our programs than this past year. Now more than ever I am learning that the services we offer to the community are essential

Library workers are not considered the front-line workers; however, Brooklyn Public Library enthusiastic workers save, especially the elderly, from loneliness, depression and despair through virtual programs and services.

For example, "Talent Without Borders" virtual program gives an opportunity for people to come together and share their original music and poetry with community. This relevant program went far beyond Brooklyn and attracts participants from many countries.

Our program participants always tell me that this program changed their life dramatically, save them from loneliness, depression and gives them hope for the future.

I want to thank the committee for all the support that they have offered us in the past years. Now more than ever we are asking you do not cut our library budget, so we can continue this wonderful mission.



Seven Loaves DBA GOH Productions  
309 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street Suite 3B  
NEW YORK NY 10009  
212 777 3891 \* [www.gohproductions.org](http://www.gohproductions.org)

March 9, 2021

My name is Bonnie Sue Stein, Executive Director of Seven Loaves DBA GOH Productions, and we are grateful for many years of support from the Department of Cultural Affairs, for programming that would not be possible without this support.

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen and from the viewpoint of a non profit arts leader who has been in the arts field since the 1970s.

The long and short term impact of COVID-19 on Artr and Cultural Educational programming in New York City is unprecedented, and we will only see the longer term impact as the years go by.

Please consider making a plan for DCLA to negotiate and confirm a reduced non profit energy rate with Con Edison of NYC. It is odd that our small non profit was able to do this in 2011, when we opened a dance studio on Avenue C (now closed as of 12/31/20). We were able to find a way to get someone at Con Edison to help us with providing a reduced rate, however this was never announced publicly and is not the case for many of my colleagues.

As a non profit leader, I used to run a dance studio as a location for youth after school and weekend dance education programs for 10 years, which was forced to close due to inactivity during the last year.

Arts and Entertainment were the first industries to be affected and will be the last ones to re-open. Therefore, I am writing to you today to implore you to advocate for this reduced rate. This seems to be a simple thing that does not effect a more general budget, but would mean using the power of DCLA to have a conversation with Con Edison immediately.

The arts employ thousands of people in NYC, and serve many thousands more. While they may not seem to be “essential” to the time of the pandemic, the closing of our arts centers and organizations and the lack of arts educational programming will have a considerable negative economic impact on NYC when the pandemic is over.

Thanks for your considered attention to solving this problem. My hope is you do the right thing for the citizens that make the fabric of New York City vibrant like no other place in the world.

With Gratitude,  
Bonnie Sue Stein  
Executive Director, Seven Loaves DBA GOH Productions

**Testimony by Shantel Johnson, Case Manager & Social Worker – Queens Public Library  
New York City Council’s Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International  
Intergroup Relations  
Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 9, 2021**

Good morning/afternoon Chair Van Bramer and fellow committee members. My name is Shantel Johnson and I am the Case Manager/Social Worker for the Queens Public Library’s Adult Learner Program. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent my program and testify on the Mayor’s FY2022 Preliminary Budget for the three library systems.

I am here today to represent my colleagues and clients, who rely on our continued services that provide support and connections to community organizations that enhances the quality of their lives. I want to offer a glimpse on how your funding has addressed the needs of the borough’s undeserved communities and how the people we serve have made us cognizant of the difficulties of accessing gainful employment, food, housing, physical and mental healthcare and child care-- just to name a few-- as the pandemic is ravaging these communities. Students are enrolling in our adult learning classes, however they need more support. In order for them to successfully complete their classes, they also need continuous case management assistance and guidance.

As we are becoming aware of the increasing and wide-ranging needs among our students, we also recognize that to properly address them additional monetary support is required. Many of my colleagues and I have met these challenges through educating the disenfranchised communities we service on how to advocate for themselves during this period of uncertainty. Our staff has worked tirelessly and have stepped into any role necessary to support our diverse student population. Our staff and students have built a rapport with each other that has a high level of trust and comfort. They rely on us for help and have regularly shared personal, vulnerable details of their lives, at times to the point of tears. This a great task that has befallen on us, and this requires a larger team of professionals, as well as more time to work through each of their unique cultural, language and economic barriers.

With your increased support, you can aid us in improving the lives of our clients. We need your help so we can continue to be a beacon of hope during these uncertain times for our customers. As I conclude today, I represent the dedicated members of our Adult Learner Program and I can definitively testify that we have worked hard to keep our “virtual library doors” open, along with our hearts, while undergoing the trials and tribulations of our own lives. Please help us so we can help the communities we serve. We do not want to turn anyone away because our caseloads are too high. We want to spread hope for them and not fear. You can help us in meeting this goal, and in doing so, we can properly assist our students in achieving their own.

Chair Van Bramer, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

# The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

## Written Testimony

### **About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum**

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is an internationally renowned art museum that stands as one of the major cultural touchstones of New York City. Serving as a bellwether of modern and contemporary art since its opening in 1939, the museum has presented to its audiences some of the most striking exhibitions of the 20th and 21st centuries in one of the most significant NYC-landmarked architectural icons of the 20th century, now recognized on the UNESCO Heritage Site list. While the Guggenheim's catalytic Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building was temporarily closed due to Covid-19 restrictions, the museum emerged as a virtual community committed to igniting ideas, discussion and creativity—connecting individuals to the museum's curators, artists, exhibitions, and collections.

For over 50 years, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's Education and Public Programs department, an 8,200 square-foot learning laboratory in the lower level of the museum, has been the epicenter through which the museum develops and implements arts-based learning opportunities, including multi-session school partnerships, engagement with artists and thought leaders, performances and film screenings, classes for teens and adults, accessibility programs for children on the autism spectrum and those with impaired sight, and daily tours of the galleries. In addition to fostering a long-lasting relationship with art, art history, and the museum itself, the Guggenheim's education programs strengthen valuable academic and life skills including critical thinking, visual literacy, and communication. The Guggenheim serves close to 15,000 students annually across the five boroughs through its dynamic learning opportunities.

### **Guggenheim Covid-19 Impact and Response**

The Guggenheim suffered an approximate \$12 million dollar revenue loss during as a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic. A pandemic that left New York City with an unforgiving education crisis that is impacting students in every district. In an effort to address this vital need for educational outreach, the Guggenheim is working tirelessly to benefit students by delivering the museum's educational resources, staff time, and programming directly to the communities in-need, at no cost to the constituents. Historically, the Guggenheim associated programming fees with its educational initiatives, however in 2020, the museum eliminated the fee structure as a community response to the global pandemic.

At the pandemic's onset, the Guggenheim immediately pivoted into a virtual space, implementing a robust suite of online education programs for a wide audience. Through the success of these programs, the museum proved its ability to build a community within a virtual space and engage students via zoom and similar platforms. The Guggenheim seeks to leverage this new expertise to support communities, by providing shared educational experiences that harness the transformative power of art and help children and young adults cope through creativity and find connection through art during this time of isolation.

The Guggenheim is dedicated to serving all New York City residents and to providing support for teachers, students, and parents. The museum is a leader in the virtual museum space, and stands out as one of the five most virtually-visited museums in the world, with a high volume of users specifically accessing the Guggenheim's online educational offerings. The Guggenheim has used four strategic principles to drive responsive content development: (1) Help people find connection through art during this time of isolation; (2) Support educators and parents; (3) Maintain the high-demand programs; and (4) Commit to diversity. The museum will apply these principles throughout the implementation of the proposed programming.

### **Vision for 2021**

In an effort to recoup revenue losses associated with the global pandemic, the 2021 New York City budget reflects a 70 percent cut to already insufficient arts funding for New York City public schools. These devastating budgetary cuts will directly impact the system's 1.1 million students, leaving many without access to arts programming.

Just years prior to this dramatic budgetary cut, a 2014 study conducted by the New York City Comptroller's office found that:

**419 schools in New York City (28 percent) lack even one full-time, certified arts teacher**, including 20 percent of all high schools (76), 22 percent of all middle schools (59) and 38 percent of all elementary schools (232);

**More than 42 percent of schools that lack either full-time or part-time certified arts teachers are located in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn; and**

**Nearly half of the schools that lack both a certified arts teacher and an arts or cultural partnership are located in the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn.**

Through its free programs, the Guggenheim seeks to fill the present educational gap and extend arts programming to students across New York City. In addition to the multitude of proven student benefits connected to arts-based learning—increased self-confidence and self-understanding, enhanced communication skills, and improved cognition—arts education is essential to the city's recovery from the pandemic and to the healing of New Yorkers.

The pandemic changed the world and how people in it access learning resources. The digital world has enabled the Guggenheim to continue to provide services and expand the museum's audience. While virtual programming can present a vast divide due to the technology and wireless services it requires, this gap is rapidly closing, and digital learning opportunities prove to exponentially increase accessibility by eradicating the traditional barriers (transportation costs, time constraints, admission costs, etc.) to participating in museum-based programming. In the digital space, the Guggenheim extends Fifth Avenue's previously geographically and socially isolated Museum Mile to reach individuals in all corners of the city. For example, students who attend school in Coney Island can now participate in Guggenheim programming without a 90-minute bus ride, and children living in all geographic locations can make it to the museum's after-school and teen programs on-time and unburdened from the lengthy trip home in the evening. Providing further advantages, the museum's programs also serve to offer a much-needed change of routine while sparking student creativity. Guggenheim student feedback demonstrates that students miss the human aspect of in-person learning, particularly expressing themselves and getting to

know students. The museum's virtual programming provides the safe environment students crucially need to connect and thrive as budding scholars.

Currently open at 25% capacity, the Guggenheim aims for all New York City residents to feel welcomed. Similar to many New York City museums, the Guggenheim currently has an extremely limited capacity as the museum suffered a tremendous revenue loss as a result of the pandemic and Covid-related protocols. The proposed programs are far more costly than the museum's request for funds. **It is the City of New York's duty to continue to fund arts institutions that provide the in-school and at-home arts-based educational programs for children.**

Preliminary Budget Hearing Fiscal Year 2022  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Testimony of Tara Brady  
Teen Librarian, Queens Public Library, Member Queens Public Library Guild, Local 1321  
March 9, 2021

My name is Tara Brady and I'm a teen librarian at the Queens Central Library in Jamaica. One year ago this week the coding club for teenagers that I'd hosted every week for over two years had what was to be its last meeting. It's hard to imagine now, but at the time I thought if we saw service changes due to COVID we might reduce room capacities, maybe even close for a few weeks, but no more than that. So when two of my long time participants had a breakthrough in the code they were writing for their robot, I told them without hesitation that 'next time, we'll let it run around the room and see what it can do.' Their eyes lit up. There still hasn't been a next time.

In the weeks to follow I was amazed and inspired by all of the ways my colleagues found to keep on serving their communities. You've heard a lot about virtual programming, grab and go service and take home program kits of course. But within days we were also up and running with chat, email and text message reference services from home. That's a service I haven't heard mentioned as much and it's so important. Working remotely I've walked people of all ages through accessing the many services available on our website, worked with teachers to put together electronic resources for their suddenly remote classes, and helped so many people find alternate ways to get the services they'd normally get from us in person. A bit later on we were able to restart phone reference service as well, which for many of our patrons is a lifeline. I'm so glad I've been able to keep reaching patrons in this way. Nobody wants to live through a year like this but if I had to, I can't think of a better place to do it than at Queens Public Library where I have so many opportunities to serve my community every day even from my cute little Kew Gardens studio apartment.

I know this hasn't been the most visible work. You can't stop by a branch for a tour right now and see everything we're doing. But we're finding new ways to help our communities all the time. And we're so close. Once we're finally able to safely fully reopen, our patrons really are going to need us more than ever. We're going to be helping kids who have been desperately underserved by remote schooling get caught back up. We're going to be rebuilding the sense of community that those who gather in our spaces feel. And I know a little robot who's still waiting for the chance to test his stuff in my program room. As we find our way through the coming months and years we're going to need all the help and support we can get. Thank you.



UNIVERSAL HIP HOP MUSEUM

March 10, 2021

Re: Universal Hip Hop Museum Public Testimony

Dear Honorable Council Member Van Brammer,

On behalf of the Universal Hip Hop Museum, I am submitting this letter as the official public testimony to the New York City Cultural Affairs Committee.

2020 has been a year of significant challenges and outstanding accomplishments for the Universal Hip Hop Museum. We began the year with the opening of the museum's [R]Evolution of Hip Hop Exhibit at the Bronx Terminal Market in partnership with the Related Companies, Microsoft, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The exhibit welcomed more than 10,000 visitors between December 2019 and March 2020. Many of our guests were international tourists who have never visited the Bronx. The exhibit was also a favored destination for local educational institutions and students from across New York City's five boroughs who sought to learn more about Hip Hop history and the culture's origins.

Unfortunately, the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 forced the temporary closure of the exhibit right at its peak. The museum was quickly forced to pivot from physical to virtual programming and events. The museum's first significant success was producing an online charitable event called "*Hip Hop Loves NY*", which raised \$73,000.00 to support New York City's frontline healthcare workers. The funds from this charitable event were disbursed to Somos Community Care and the Bronx Community Relief Effort to demonstrate the museum's ability to support the local community's socioeconomic and cultural needs. "*Hip Hop Loves NY*" was one of many virtual programs and events that the Universal Hip Hop Museum produced in 2020 to inspire, educate and empower students, educators, and supporters of Hip Hop culture worldwide.

During the summer of 2020, a completely new redesign of the exhibit at the Bronx Terminal Market was done to show the transition from a Bronx-born youth movement to becoming a global phenomenon. The new exhibit was opened in November 2020 however was also temporarily closed as a result of a second surge of COVID-19. The temporary closure was undoubtedly a setback for the organization and would take months to recover.

On December 24th, 2020, the museum received an early Christmas gift. The city of New York approved the needed financing for the development team (L&M Development Partners and Type A Projects) to proceed with the Bronx Point construction. Construction of the museum's future 52,000 square feet building is now underway. The dream that began ten years ago is now finally occurring. When the museum opens in 2023, Hip Hop will celebrate its 50th anniversary, and New York City will have another world-class cultural institution that annually draws millions of visitors to the South Bronx.

The Universal Hip Hop Museum is seeking \$2M from Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., \$1M from the City Council, and \$1M from NYC DCLA in capital funding to support construction "fit out" of the museum's interior exhibit spaces and program areas. Additionally, we are also seeking \$500K in discretionary funding to support the re-opening of the exhibit space at the Bronx Terminal Market to begin offering new programming to the residents of the Bronx and New York City.

I thank you, the members of the committee and the city council for being a great champion of the Universal Hip Hop Museum.

Sincerely,



ROCKY BUCANO  
Executive Director, Universal Hip Hop Museum



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
March 9, 2021

Thank you Chair Van Bramer, council members, and my colleagues for the time to speak today. This is my 1st time testifying live, thanks to mentors Lisa Gold and Lucy Sexton and so many more.

I am Jessica Chen, Artistic Director of J CHEN PROJECT, a modern dance company founded in 2008, established as a 501c3 non-profit in 2017. JCP has a demonstrated history of diversity and inclusion with immigrants, BIPOC including Asian Pacific Americans, and the LGBTQ community. The company is filled with vibrant, passionate individuals that if given the chance will continue to bring art and beauty to this great city.

Right now, my community is also hurting. I am here in solidarity with my arts colleagues to urge significant investment in arts and culture now.

I want to share Ruby's story with you today. Ruby came to NYC for the first time to attend our J CHEN PROJECT mentee program in 2014. She was a rising junior at the Orange County School of the Arts in California, where I often teach. At age 16, she was already planning and dreaming about the ways she would make a difference in her community. She is now a New Yorker, a graduate from NYU Tandon School of Engineering (class of 2020) and is currently visioning and building for a better New York.

Arts and culture bring bright, talented people to New York every year, whether they work in the arts or not. Like Ruby. Dance and a city filled with artistic expression brought her to New York. We need people like Ruby to revive and rebuild our city.

Arts and culture will play a leading role in New York's economic vitality and robust recovery. To do so we need relief and support, so we are asking that all cultural funding BE HELD HARMLESS. Let's get our creative workers vaccinated and back to work!

Thank you for your time and opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Jessica Chen  
Artistic Director of J CHEN PROJECT

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## **Preliminary Budget Hearing - Cultural Affairs Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**

### **Written Testimony**

**March 15, 2021**

#### **PLEASE SEE CHILDREN OF THE BRONX**

#### **WHO WE ARE**

Founded in 2005, Bronx Children's Museum (BxCM or Museum) is a new kind of multicultural, community-based children's museum operating "with and without walls" and geared to those from infancy through fourth grade. For the past 10 years, we have been developing a city-owned historic site in the South Bronx right on the Harlem River and Mill Pond Park.

We are already a cultural and economic anchor in the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the United States. We are actually at the center of a gigantic development project near the Yankee Stadium with several new mixed housing developments, several schools, and the Universal Hip Hop Museum as well as the upcoming soccer stadium complex.

We are here with you today to underscore the importance of funding for all cultural organizations in New York City - and particularly in The Bronx: the most under resourced borough in the City.

**Without your leadership and help**, we will have to literally end our outreach programs and we will be unable to reach a new generation of our youngest and most vulnerable children. **However, with your support**, we can continue to meet the needs of our borough's youngest constituents regardless of age, ability, or geographic location in a safe and sanitary way. *Culture is critical to community well-being, especially now, dealing with these crises.*

The Bronx Children's Museum is a harbinger for other cultural, housing, and large retail centers and hubs. In the past 10 years, we have worked with local residents and employed dozens of local artists, cultural and environmental educators. We partner with local community-based organizations, schools, and business hubs and major developments in the vicinity of the Museum. Job opportunities and partnerships will continue once the doors of the Museum open, and with funding from New York City, we will be able to play a significant part of The Bronx's and New York's economic recovery.

#### **WE WERE ON A ROLL PRE-COVID**

We engaged more than 16,000 children and caregivers annually without a building and were appearing throughout the Bronx at 25 schools and afterschool programs and at 85 fairs and festivals/public events with and without our iconic purple bus that contains an interactive diorama of the Bronx waterways. Everything was full steam ahead.

The Museum was only four months away from completing construction on a city-owned building in the South Bronx near Yankee Stadium, one of the hardest hit by all neighborhoods in the City by the pandemic, and had just learned that we were granted the monies to procure a new electric bus to replace our beloved 34-year-old bus when the pandemic struck and the world changed for all of us.

Due to the devastating effects of the virus, the Museum is now expected to conduct our soft opening in a City-owned former powerhouse, with COVID-safe interactive exhibits in late 2021. BxCM, along with



the

City and State, will complete the “build out” of our 13,000-square-foot space in May. Our facility, located

just steps away from Gateway Mall and Yankee Stadium, is shaped like a whimsical castle. We plan on seeing nearly 5,000 children each year, operating at 25% capacity due to COVID-related restrictions.

By June 2021, we will be seeing children face to face. Mill Pond Park, on which the facility stands, will offer an excellent outdoor classroom space for the Museum to access and use as a further extension of our walls. Through continued innovative mobile and remote programming, BxCM will engage children outside the walls of the new building in hands-on arts and science experiences and programs throughout the borough—at community-based organizations, schools, shelters, libraries, parks and festivals. When our new electric bus is procured in 2023, we will begin the process of outfitting it with a state-of-the-art waterways diorama with STEAM and maker experiences. We should be back on the road with our new bus by 2024.

All programs and experiences will be tailored to the Museum’s constituency and strive to create stronger families, stronger communities—and a better city for all. BxCM is publicly and privately funded. Our admission prices will be nominal and in line with our constituencies’ economic capacity

#### **NEED**

BxCM is one of a few cultural institutions in the Bronx geared solely toward families with young children, many of whom have been disproportionately hit the hardest by the virus, and cannot afford to go to, or would not normally, visit a museum. The Bronx is also the only borough in NYC without a children's museum or the equivalent. Children’s museums are recognized by early childhood educators, cultural and museum associations and the mental health community as impactful nurturing spaces of learning through play that foster imagination and creativity, as well as offering relief and a space to just be.

Systemic income inequality, food deserts, poor healthcare, fewer hospitals and deteriorating housing has harmed our borough of predominantly Black and Brown residents. In fact, the Bronx ranks the lowest of all 62 state counties in quality of life, health behaviors, availability of clinical care, social/economic factors and physical environment, according to the NY County Health Rankings Annual Report.

According to mental health experts, the Museum will be needed more than ever by the children and families of the Bronx to help recover from the trauma they are experiencing now and will continue to feel for years to come. The Bronx has been hit disproportionately hard by COVID-19, with more cases and deaths than any other borough—and any other community in the country—and far fewer resources. (Example: the Bronx has one physician for every 1,770 people vs one for 750 in Manhattan.)

#### **PROGRAMMING: PIVOTING TO REMOTE**

In the past year, the Bronx Children’s Museum has:

- Reached out to Bronx children and families to learn how we could be most impactful.
- Pivoted to virtual programming; dramatically increased our social media presence and developed/honed new skills, especially video creation and digital outreach.
- Made a concerted effort to reach children without devices or connectivity by developing relationships with BronxNet TV and PBS Camp.
- Created our newest program, Nature of the Bronx. It is a comprehensive STEAM and arts



based school program that is tailored to grade level and CORE requirements, offers lesson plans and training for teachers, includes live Museum educator-led Zoom classroom

instruction and offers “LaunchBoxes”--arts and science supplies distributed to every child in our program ensuring active participation. Participation to date: 1,100 students and teachers in more than 50 classroom settings.

- Produced and assembled “LaunchBoxes” which include such art/science supplies as construction and watercolor paper, markers and crayons, scissors, glue, pipette, color tablets, shaving cream, cups and spoons, student worksheets and a BxCM Scientist- or Artist-in Training button.
- If funded, we hope to continue our Dream Big Summer Enrichment program, featuring Jerome LaMaar, a Bronxite, artist who is creating a high-tech digital interactive exhibit called Bronxtopia. It is a hands-free, digital playground that encourages kids to move and groove in sync with sassy, fashion-forward animal avatars to music and dances that are part of the essence of the Bronx including salsa, merengue, and hip hop.

#### **COMMUNITY IMPACT: OUR FINGERS ON THE PULSE**

In addition to the programming and supplies provided, The Bronx Children’s Museum has had an active presence in the community in the following ways:

- Surveyed caregivers and educators to gather feedback on what educational resources that were needed most while schools were remote--and refined our offerings based on ongoing feedback.
- Distributed masks in cooperation with the Mayor’s Office.
- Shared information with our constituency about the importance of registering to vote, completing the census, bringing children to their medical practitioners for well visits and standard vaccines, information on the COVID vaccine, and more. This has included conducting/posting interviews with local health care professionals.
- Created a special social-emotional learning booklist, in partnership with two Bronx bookstores, to help families navigate these difficult times.
- Became a part of a quickly emerging “think tank” of cultural organizations, museums, and children’s museums.

#### **CURRENT EMERGENCY FINANCIAL NEEDS**

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Museum has launched an emergency/naming campaign. We must raise \$500,000 in emergency money by Q4 2021 and \$2.5 million by 2023 in order to open a vibrant, fun-filled sustainable museum. This includes an anticipated \$100,000 of COVID-preventative measures costs. The emergency campaign needs are above and beyond the funds required to support a general operating budget of nearly \$1.4 million in 2021 and \$1.8 million the following year.

The BxCM is not a CIG and does not receive ANY operational support from the City. We also do not charge required fees for anything we do currently. Once we open, we will charge very nominal affordable fees however. The City and State’s support of arts and culture programs is crucial to the Bronx Children’s Museum and to all arts and culture organizations that have great influence on the people and families in their communities and beyond, particularly during the wake of COVID-19.



The Bronx Children's Museum is already trusted in the Bronx, which will be critical as the community turns from pandemic to recovery. Pediatric mental health experts have shared with us that it is absolutely essential to the well-being of children and the quality of life of all people living in the City to not cut City cultural funding streams. We all rely on this funding to serve our communities and ours is

quite large! We are currently able to offer programs that are free to the public through funding through the City. We are a lifeline for our community. With additional funding from our City, we will be able to play a significant part of The Bronx's and New York's economic recovery.

We will always be a museum with and without walls, committed to being FULLY ACCESSIBLE to all children. And please rest assured, our space and our exhibits will be safe.

**Without your leadership and help**, we will have to literally end our outreach programs and we will be unable to reach a new generation of our youngest and most vulnerable children. **However, with your support**, we can continue to meet the needs of our borough's youngest constituents regardless of age, ability, or geographic location in a safe and sanitary way. *Culture is critical to community well-being, especially now, dealing with these crises.*

Thank you very much for your consideration *during these unprecedented times.*

**WE SEE YOU: PLEASE SEE CHILDREN OF THE BRONX**

In Community,

Carla Precht

Executive Director