



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
APRIL 20, 2021**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations for holding this very important hearing today.

Our City's arts and culture industry has been severely and disproportionately affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Data shows during the first month of the New York State on PAUSE executive order, the arts sector lost 52,100 employees, or 60% of its workforce. And when comparing July 2020 with July 2019, our City had a 69% decrease in artists employed. To make matters worse, the City is cutting funding to the Department of Cultural Affairs in the preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2022 by 23.36 percent. This reduction is detrimental to our artists, who are essential to helping our arts and culture sector recover. Although we are in a much better position at this stage of the pandemic than we were at this time last year, with museums having reopened in August and Broadway theaters reopening this year, we have to remain cognizant of the impact the past year has had on our arts community, especially the members of that community who are people of more color and LGBTQ.

The Mayor has implemented the Open Culture program to restore our arts sector, and the Governor is aiming to do the same with the NY PopsUp festival, which launched in February and is running through Labor Day. While these are positive first steps towards reviving our arts and culture industry, the City and the State must ensure BIPOC artists have access to these programs. The Open Culture program allows cultural organizations to apply for single-day permits to provide outdoor ticketed performances at about 200 locations across the City. Applicants must submit one application per location for each month. BIPOC artists have expressed concerns around the fees associated with this program, as not every artist can afford to pay multiple application fees to obtain several permits. They have also communicated hesitancy in interacting with City agencies, which stems from a history of inequity in distribution of support and services for BIPOC individuals. I recommend the Mayor's Street Activity Permit Office allow for one application to be used when applying for up-to four events permitted in a given month. This way, applicants would only be required to pay one application fee of \$20 for all events submitted, instead of a fee for every single application. The City must make certain

that people of more color, especially those who are LGBTQ artists, have equal access to these initiatives. BIPOC and LGBTQ artists have contributed significantly to the history of our City and our arts & cultural industries, and as such the City must ensure these communities have equitable access to these opportunities.

COVID-19's impact on the arts and culture sector has also significantly affected our City's queer artists. My office has come in contact with artists who, at the onset of the pandemic, had little to no access to sources of income, due to scheduled events where their contracts did not cover any cancellation fees. Artists, who had their shows cancelled, received little to no compensation. Instead, many of them took to social media to share their performances and conducted crowdfunding. Following the city's lockdown, numerous relief efforts for LGBTQ artists – including that of the The PATH Fund, the Arts and Culture Leaders of Color Emergency Fund, the NYC Dancers Relief Fund – coupled with grants from foundations provided some assistance for freelance artists. Nonetheless, publicly administered funding for LGBTQ artists is disproportionately low, and the City must make a concerted effort to ensure its resources are reaching LGBTQ artists. The City should engage in public-private partnerships to ensure NGOs can provide grants and funding to these artists for their work.

Last June, hundreds of workers in the arts and culture industry issued an open letter urging local and state governments to defund the police and invest in BIPOC communities. Today, the importance of that demand remains relevant, as the preliminary budget for the coming Fiscal Year seeks to increase the NYPD's budget, while our local artists are still struggling to make ends meet. Our City needs to do better because our Black, Indigenous, artists of more color, and queer artists deserve better. Thank you.

ADVANCE | MORE OPERA

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

Testimony to the New York City Council

Cultural Affairs Hearing Oversight:

T2021-7293 Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts,

Submitted by

Cheryl Warfield

Performing and Teaching Artist, Producer and Founder of ADVANCE/MORE Opera

Tuesday April 20, 2021

Greetings. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer, Majority Leader Cumbo and Members of City Council for reading my testimony. I am writing in support of increased funding for arts in marginalized communities and for Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled, and other artists of color, and cultural organizations led by such persons.

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Cheryl Warfield, an African American opera singer, and a long-standing member of SAG-AFTRA, Actor's Equity and my parent union, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA). In New York City, I have performed at the Metropolitan Opera and on Broadway, and I am a producer of innovative arts programming and the founder the Association for the Development of Vocal Artistry and Neighborhood Cultural Enrichment (ADVANCE), a 501(c) 3 non-profit and the director of MORE Opera.

ADVANCE/MORE Opera showcases outstanding and diverse talent while providing outreach and educational programming to youth and seniors in underserved communities. As an African American performer and arts administrator, I am determined to contribute to the musical education of young people, showcase black themes, and spotlight diversity in opera. As a producer of color, I strive to highlight outstanding professional talent from all backgrounds who otherwise may be overlooked or ostracized. For 20 years in New York City, ADVANCE/MORE Opera has mounted dozens of public performances and conducted educational workshops and no-cost community choral training to hundreds of young people and adults.

I provide testimony today for the following reasons:

1. to urge the formation of new funding systems to provide equity for BIPOC artists and artist led organizations rendering services to underserved NYC communities but not eligible for DCLA funding,
2. to change the grant awarding system to provide greater equity and sustainability for BIPOC programming,
3. to support increased funding for CASA and Su-CASA initiatives in underserved communities, and
4. to inform Council that artists and cultural organizations never stopped providing services during the pandemic, and to heighten awareness that many smaller organizations like mine in the trenches increased services to help our communities in this time of great need.

The reality is that under current funding models and granting mechanisms, neither I as an independent artist nor my BIPOC organization with its diverse members that truly reflect the ethnic makeup of New York will ever see a penny of the multi-millions of dollars anticipated to be distributed to artists and organizations that have a seat at the table. At best, minute amounts may trickle down through other organizations with which I may forge a collaboration.

Cheryl Warfield

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Small BIPOC led organizations like mine were started due to the needs of underserved communities, and from inception have been in the trenches providing services often without or with limited funding, and without an invitation to the table to help us flourish. Despite these limitations, we have been able to pivot our services online to continue to serve our communities.

There also needs to be a more equitable way to distribute council funds, and I urge council members to expand their outreach to identify all artists within their own communities. Artists live in every part of NYC from Wall Street to unfortunately homeless shelters. NYC needs a vision and plan to put artists back to work and provide a living wage to pull artists out of poverty.

Throughout the pandemic, arts and culture has never stopped. My organization pivoted to online programming and has presented several online concerts, all free and available on our social media platforms. Last March when the pandemic hit, I was a teaching artist and music director leading an active JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Center chorus for the Bronx Opera under a Su-Casa grant. When all activities were cancelled due to COVID-19 effective March 13, I explored ways to move the seniors, most who live alone and now were isolated, to Zoom and Microsoft Teams, assisting them with getting online by the first week of April. Knowing how important this connection was for the seniors' emotional support, I promised them that our weekly virtual rehearsals would continue regardless of whether the FY 2020 grant would be paid.

Because Ben Spierman at the Bronx Opera and the administration at JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Center valued the choral program, they took measures to sustain it beyond the original Su-Casa grant, and I have worked virtually with Bronx seniors continuously for over 13 months. Since June of 2020, the seniors have demonstrated their artistry and preserved testimony of their hopes, aspirations, and fears during the pandemic with seven beautiful online concerts that can be seen at www.Youtube.com/moreopera. My teaching has been a primary source of income during the pandemic. I am extremely grateful that in 2021, the Bronx Opera is funding the JASA Van Cortlandt Virtual chorus' spring rehearsals and online concert.

Council members need to understand that my commitment to the seniors is not something extraordinary among artists. Every day artists give back to their communities often without compensation, sometimes to their own detriment, because the need for artists' services is vital and the work is so important.

Arts education is an ideal way to put artists to work while helping their communities. Although I have been a successful teaching artist through Su Casa in the Bronx, I have been excluded from similar participation in my own borough, Manhattan. I applied for a 2019 independent artist grant and even networked with a Harlem senior center, but my application was denied. I counted 101 zip codes in Manhattan ranging from 10001 to 10282. The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council announced that a mere 18 artists and organizations were supported through Su-Casa in 2021. Given the effectiveness of programs like Casa and Su Casa reaching targeted communities as well as supporting artists, the number of awards to artists and organizations should equal or exceed the number of zip codes.

Now is the time for our leaders in government to be forward thinking and to plan effectively for reopening and stimulating the economy with arts initiatives, being mindful of new and pandemic related expenses for organizations and the need to increase artists' pay to keep up with inflation.

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Let NYC be a guiding light for bringing back culture by valuing and supporting all its artists and cultural organizations, thus renewing and restoring itself to its rightful place as a mecca for worldwide culture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Warfield

Singer, Educator, Producer

Founder, ADVANCE/MORE Opera

255 West 75th Street, #3-I

New York, NY 10023

212-595-7084

<https://vimeo.com/527382731/0d6e0eee30>

www.moreopera.com

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

City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations
American LGBTQ+ Museum
Richard Burns remarks
April 20, 2021

My name is Richard Burns and I am the Chair of the Board of Directors of the developing American LGBTQ+ Museum, a museum of history & culture here in New York.

The concept of a queer history museum in New York has been talked about for over twenty years, and there have been a few efforts that have come and gone over that time.

Elsewhere, there is a significant LGBT history museum in Berlin, there is an effort underway in London called Queer Britain, and there are small LGBTQ history museums already open in San Francisco and in Ft Lauderdale.

In addition there are numerous LGBTQ archives around the country – the One Archive in Los Angeles is the oldest and largest. Here in New York we have the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, the archives at the LGBT Community Center and the Cornell Sexuality collection in Ithaca.

In 2017, about five years ago, this group of LGBTQ activists began conversations to create this museum for New York.

Our first decision was to assemble a team that reflects New York's diverse LGBTQ communities BEFORE any specifics or visioning got started

With early seed support from the New York Community Trust and the New York City Council, pro bono legal support from law firm Bryan Cave, and fiscal sponsorship first by the LGBT Community Center and now by the Fund for the City of NY we were able to secure our museum charter from the NYS Board of Regents in 2019 and engage a museum planning firm.

AK Cultural Planning spent a year doing deep research – what do our communities need and want in a queer history museum?

There were interviews with LGBTQ historians, academics and activist leaders around the country

15 focus groups in all five boroughs in English and Spanish

Talks with museum leaders and experts

We engaged a consumer research firm that did an online survey that was sent to 40,000 LGBTQ people

They incorporated LGBT tourism data from NYC & Co

The result?

This will not be the Will & Grace museum – it will be a museum which will tell the untold stories of our people. Tell the stories of those who came before us, those who fought for liberation, freedom, acceptance and equality. We will collaborate with LGBT oral history and archival projects to capture the stories of the Stonewall generation before they're gone

The question we will need to address:

How can this museum enable people who perhaps don't feel comfortable or welcome in a traditional museum feel like this museum belongs to them?

This museum of LGBTQ+ history and culture will be both physical and digital. It will welcome school children and researchers, New Yorkers & tourists.

Museums can take a long time to happen, some as long as perhaps 50 years

We don't want to wait that long to begin and so in late 2019 we developed our partnership with the New York Historical Society.

NYHS president Louise Mirrer and the team there have very generously agreed to incubate our museum effort at NYHS – we hope for many years

Our program committee is working now with curators at NYHS to develop early joint programming, We have just begun the search for our first executive director and have recently launched our website <https://thelgbtqpluseum.org/about/>

We have undertaken this effort with a volunteer board of directors of 24 activists and one part-time administrative staffer. Our team includes activist leaders, historians, academics, writers, technologists and cultural workers. They have helped to create and build the NYC AIDS Memorial Park, the designation of the Stonewall National Monument by President Obama, the LGBT Community Center and lots more.

As with those efforts, our goal is not simply to record, explain, celebrate and commemorate the stories and struggles and the paths to the change we've all made together. It is that and more.

Our goal is to inspire rising generations with these histories to engage in future activism. The progress towards legal and lived equality that we have achieved is fragile and is under assault by the right across our country and around the world.

Rising generations need to have access to this history so that they can lead armed with the lessons, mistakes and victories that we have lived.

We thank the Council for its strong support and ask for your continued support. New York City is the right home for this springboard for activism towards justice and equality, the American LGBTQ+ Museum.

Richard D. Burns is an activist who is the Interim Executive Director of the Johnson Family Foundation. He has served as Interim Executive Director of the Drug Policy Alliance, Lambda Legal, the North Star Fund, PENCIL, The Funding Exchange, Funders for LGBTQ Issues and the Stonewall Community Foundation. He was previously the Chief Operating Officer of the Arcus Foundation and was Executive Director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in New York City for 22 years, from 1986 to 2009. Richard is chair of the board of directors of the incipient American LGBTQ+ Museum and serves on the boards of the Proteus Fund and the New York City AIDS Memorial Park.



Testimony to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Submitted to Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations on April 20, 2021

Prepared by Dance/NYC

Presented by: Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, Executive Director

On behalf of Dance/NYC (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) Acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of slavery and settler colonialism, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts, and repair the harm done by immediately establishing a Commission for Reparations for past and continuing harms inflicted upon Black and Indigenous people -- from colonialism to slavery, through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance;
- 2) Prioritize funding to BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and LGBTQ+ Arts and Culture organizations to decenter Eurocentrism and white supremacy in mainstream New York City cultural representation in order to begin to undo pejorative and hurtful narratives, depictions and associations of/with Black and Immigrant and POC cultures. Substantial investment is needed in the organizations that authentically represent, primarily serves,



are founded by and/or led by these communities;

- 3) To establish funding to ensure BIPOC, immigrant, disability, and LGBTQ+ organizations and artists can own and/or properly maintain their venues, buildings and/or land recognizing land stewardship and ownership as one of the most significant ways to address systemic inequitable distribution of resources;
- 4) To ensure funding streams created to support BIPOC, immigrant, disability, and LGBTQ+ arts and cultural organizations are streamlined for multi-year support, providing expansive technical assistance to facilitate the application process, and award sizes that allow for the payment of dignified wages to arts and cultural workers;
- 5) Ensure that Federal relief funds received by the city prioritize both in allotment and in distribution mechanisms BIPOC, LGBTQ+, immigrant, undocumented and disabled independent arts workers and small-budget organization to ensure those most impacted by COVID-19 and systemic injustice are able to access needed support and services quickly.

These requests are anchored in Dance/NYC's long-standing values of justice, equity, and inclusion (www.dance.nyc/equity/values). As a City we must take concrete actions that result in the material and tangible benefit to our most marginalized communities in order to effectively combat white supremacy and systemic racism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a devastating impact on the arts and culture sector. It has also opened the possibility for fundamental change and a re-envisioning of the sector. We believe it is our responsibility to examine our roles and remain accountable within them by engaging in a sincere process of self-reflection and deep consideration. As we strengthen our



capacity to enact significant change, we recognize that institutions and systems founded under white supremacist values are not leading the change. Centuries of BIPOC and queer wisdom and leadership are the guiding force for how we interrogate racist systems and take action to ensure justice, equity and inclusion in the arts. Ensuring BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and queer-led organizations continue to thrive are important for the survival of artists, arts workers, the cultural life of NYC and the local communities they nurture. Healthy thriving communities are not just spaces of joy, liberation and pleasure, they are also fertile ground for strong economic development and families.

Dance/NYC has been conducting comprehensive research on the impact of the coronavirus on the dance sector. In our recently published *Coronavirus Dance Impact Informational Brief* (https://bit.ly/DNYC_COVID_DanceImpactBrief) Dance/NYC found that 21% of African, Latina/o/x, Asian, Arab, and Native American (ALAANA) dance workers were unable to pay rent/mortgage as compared to 15% of White (non-Hispanic) dance workers. 65% of disabled dance workers have not been able to access all of the medical and mental health resources they need as compared to 41% of non-disabled dance workers. 32% of immigrant dance workers need medical health care coverage as compared to 15% of those born in the US. These data points highlight the ever present inequities in the sector and that more work is needed to protect these dancer workers to make sure they continue to thrive here.

On June 22, 2020, and on September 15, 2020, we testified before this committee and called for the following actions to be taken, in addition to requests already made by this testimony:

- The Committee to reduce the proposed cuts to the Arts and Culture sector, particularly those on BIPOC-led and serving organizations, redirecting funds otherwise used to fund the NYPD to ensure that organizations and their arts workers remain necessary workers and community members in New York City;



- The City to provide financial and rent relief (commercial and personal) for organizations and arts workers being affected by the affordability crisis and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which are disproportionately impacting the City’s marginalized communities ;
- The City pays living wages and funds programs that allow for the payment of living wages for dance and cultural workers treating them as necessary workers and dignified labor.

To act address the challenges faced by BIPOC, LGBTQ+, immigrant, and disabled communities and act on our commitments to ensure that dance workers, organizations, and businesses can thrive, Dance/NYC has:

1. **Examined the racial impacts of our organizational practices and decisions, by removing and preventing racial inequities, and advancing racial justice both internally and publicly.** This includes the establishment of salary floors that better reflect the increasing costs of living in NYC for our dance workers, offering adequate paid leave, providing employees with healthcare, and prioritizing much-needed times of rest to account for the rigorous emotional labor required to remain authentic and present in its services, particularly during moments of national unrest;
2. **Disseminated over \$1 million in relief support (dance.nyc/COVID-19) to dance workers and dance making organizations.** The fund explicitly prioritized communities most impacted by COVID-19, including African, Latina/o/x, Asian, Arab, and Native American (ALAANA), disabled, immigrant, and women-identifying artists, as well as those at high risk, including elderly and immunosuppressed artists. Funds were distributed between March and September of 2020, supporting 734 unique individual dance workers and 125 dance-making organizations and groups with over \$1 million in funds.
3. **Launched the #ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers campaign** (www.Dance.NYC/ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers/Overview) and a 12 week series of



conversations (www.Dance.NYC/ArtistsAreNecessaryWorkers/Tune-In) to highlight the importance of the arts ecology, point to current challenges and offer considerations on our way forward as a field in the midst of a health and racial pandemic;

4. **Collaborated with colleague arts service organizations** that are mission-focused on increasing racial equity, inclusion and access for disabled people, and/or integration of immigrants into arts and culture;
5. **Created resource lists on our website under the issue areas of racial justice, land acknowledgment practices**, disability, and immigration, among others, in order to provide tools and information for how to dance workers and organizations, can best address the manifestations of white supremacy in their work;
6. **Issued calls to action to the sector through two letters in response to the recent and ongoing murders of Black people** by the actions of white people, institutions, and systems, including law enforcement, and the many accomplices, witnesses, and beneficiaries of white supremacy who have actively participated in or stood by and observed in silence.

Dance/NYC strongly advocates for a vision rooted in inclusivity, equity, and sustainability for the arts and culture industry. Artists are necessary workers and need to be treated as dignified labor in order to continue to be a driving part of the NYC workforce and help arts and culture to lead recovery efforts. Funding is desperately needed in order to not lose our most vulnerable organizations and workers and to ensure they continue to thrive here. The time to act is now.

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. 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. We thank the City and the Council for hearing our concerns about the prevalent inequities in the arts sector and hope that you will take action to



address these issues and ensure that all marginalized arts workers including LGBTQ+, BIPOC, disabled and immigrant arts workers continue to thrive here.

##

From Us, about the Arts...

When artists first looked to the stars the result was astronomy and, eventually, travel through space. The gift to us? Mae Jemison. When the artists looked to the human body, the result was medicine and common cures. The development of the sciences was, for the longest time, integrally attached to music and poetry. It was through rhyme and song that theory and science was, with discipline, taught...and remembered. We are here now, talking about how to “save the arts”, as a direct result of the systemic compartmentalization of the human spirit.

In 1984 Mable Hampton addressed the New York City Gay Pride Rally and said, “I am proud of myself and my people. I would like all my people to be free in this world. My gay people and my Black people.”

Empirical fact? Black queer artists are responsible for the artistic and cultural impact of the Harlem Renaissance. And yet, in 1923 the New York Age reported that the average Black worker earned 25 dollars per month and spent one half to two thirds of these monthly wages on rent. The report also stated that Black tenants generally paid twice as much for rent as white new New Yorkers. Nothing has changed. Black and Brown New Yorkers are paying disproportionately more in rent in relation to their wages than our white counterparts. We cannot live in and then be expected to create, in these conditions.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation published a study wherein they stated anti transgendered stigma, denial of opportunity, and increased risk factors compound to create a

culture of violence disproportionately impacting trans and gender nonconforming people of color.

What should not get lost on any of us is the fact that conversations around the preservation of the arts in New York City resonate differently now because we are in the midst of the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance. It is no small thing that the conditions of a pandemic and fiscal uncertainty are also the same. At the very same time, the Museum of Modern Art is aware of the times and has no problem displaying art from that era on its walls in rotating fashion, which lets us know that *somebody somewhere* knows *something* about what *this* time is reflective of. So what are we going to do about it? How are we going to make this better?

New York City is not teeming with artists the way it used to be because it is no longer affordable to simply just live here.

What we are acutely aware of in any conversation having to do with putting funds back into the arts community is the enormous degree to which the word “artist” is consistently read as a synonym for “white,” and whenever any mention of Black and brown people is made it is essentially lip service. Inevitably one position gets set aside for a whole bunch of people to compete for, and that one person then has to bear the weight of being the “standard bearer”. And when they break, they are used as the example for why “those programs don’t work.” The same holds true for any conversations about queerness—the default is always to whiteness if the conversation about queerness comes up at all, and it is both depressing *and* enraging at the same time. Because we are Black women and also part of the LGBTQIA+ community, what we say

here should be read from that perspective, with that in mind first...because some of us remember what New York City used to feel like growing up surrounded by all kinds of culture beyond Apple stores, Whole Foods, and H&M. We are tired of the conversation being a talking point for the reelection of elected officials, all the while being a set-up for our failure.

It was just a different time, not that long ago, when New York City had woven into its culture the concept of taking care of its own people at a base level. It was hard as hell here for a whole lot of reasons, but at least you could think here still the more you got into the thick of things.

The idea of graduating from school, hopping on a bus to Port Authority, and grinding until you get your first big break is a kind of history current fiscal realities have turned that into mere myth. The stories *were* true about being able to get a room at the Y for five dollars a night, and a part time job waiting tables on restaurant row, in a book store, or a record store, and then going on auditions and writing your way into existence. You *could* find a one bedroom apartment on the Lower East Side for a couple hundred dollars a month and split the cost with a few other like-minded souls who, even if they were not as disciplined, knew what they arts were about and so they respected you. For the longest time, if you worked in retail, when you took your lunch break you could count on getting a discount at surrounding local diners if your establishment did not have its own cafeteria that fed its employees.

So much of the basic infrastructure that was in place that made it possible for artists to thrive is now gone.

It is frustrating to watch New York City try to build up tourism on a reality of “what used to be”. When de Blasio was running for Mayor the first time, one of the promises he made was to establish affordable housing for artists. It is the reason many of us voted for him. That promise has fallen by the wayside. What we need is a plan for artists that provide spaces to create with a set of deliverables attached that can be spaced out incrementally to ensure that the demonstration of progress is beneficial for both the artists, the programs supporting them, and the rest of New York City.

So much of what we make is in response to our current living conditions, but a lot of it also comes from a place of wonder about what could be.

When the wonder is solely focused around whether or not you’re going to be able to eat, stories of love fall by the wayside. We are angry about the fact that too many people think that being an artist means you’re rich and that your time is free. One thing in particular that shifted the way that artists are able to live in this city is the vampiric encroachment of the real estate industry. There is no reason why places you used to be able to rent for three or four hundred dollars a month now start at a couple grand. But then also think about how inexpensive a ticket to the theater, the movies, the museums, or the zoos and the botanical gardens used to be, so if you wanted to take in a little bit of culture on your days off just to get inspired, you actually could.

We *cannot* have this discussion without talking about the homelessness problem. We *cannot* have this discussion without having long conversation about all of the issues surrounding mental health. We *cannot* have this discussion without talking about police brutality and the prison

industrial complex. We *cannot* have this discussion without talking about institutional racism. We *cannot* have this discussion without talking about institutional homophobia. We *will not* have this discussion without coming out and saying, point blank: all of that has become the culture of the City of New York. And, as writers, it makes us mad as hell because we should be talking about so many other things instead. We *have* to be talking about so many other things instead. But here we are, once again a demonstration of the fact that we can do so many more things at the same time. But we also know what it means to go in a different direction after being sick and tired of being sick and tired one. more time. We know it has not gotten lost on anyone just how much folks were able to sit down and create this past year because, while we may not have had much, at least we had time. Which is a damn shame because it took a global pandemic for us to be able to hear the birds again in the morning and to, for a little while, just breathe. You can feel the machine trying to pick up again, *and that has got to change.*

Deborah Cowell



**Testimony to the New York City Council
Hearing for the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
April 19, 2021**

Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts

Thank you Chair Van Bramer and the entire Cultural Affairs Committee for the opportunity to present today.

My name is Ana Chireno Director of Government and Community Affairs at El Museo del Barrio. As a native New Yorker, Afro Latina, and daughter of immigrants it is a distinct honor to be able to speak on the chosen topic.

Firstly, El Museo is one of 34 organizations within the CIG—the Cultural Institutions Group—that are located on City property. Throughout the pandemic, CIGs have remained committed to providing free offerings for nearly 10 million individuals. El Museo is also a member of the Latinx Arts Consortium of NY, a peer network dedicated to knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and collective action towards systemic change.

El Museo del Barrio, an anchor of the East Harlem community, has a 50 year grassroots legacy of amplifying Puerto Rican and Latinx voices in the arts. In fact, addressing the lack of representation of Latinx artists in the mainstream art world was a main catalyst for El Museo’s creation. Recently the art world has taken steps towards addressing the stubborn lack of inclusivity in its staffing, audiences, and content. But the work of culturally specific institutions like El Museo is still necessary and worthy of support from the City Council now more than ever. A national survey found that Latinx artists represent only 2.8% of artists in museum collections in the US. For comparison the 60 million Latinx people are 18% of the population according to the Census Bureau. In New York City, we represent almost 30% of city residents. There is still work to be done.

Most recently at El Museo del Barrio we continue to amplify Latinx voices, which by the way include Black, Indigenous and Queer Latinx voices, with our recent exhibition ESTAMOS BIEN – LA TRIENAL 20/21, the museum’s first ever national large-scale survey of contemporary art featuring more than 40 artists.

Art writer Barbara Calderon, when reviewing the show for ArtNet stated “La Trienal shows how much latent and under-recognized talent there is in the field. The exclusion of Latinx art from relevant art conversations is a reality. That persistent exclusion in museum collections, gallery shows, etc., is a running testament to the need for surveys like El Museo’s.”

She continues “Though the collected works are but a glimpse into the range of Latinx art, the curators have outlined a communal need for doing justice to its breadth. It’s up to the rest of the art world to respond.” I would add, that it is also up to our partners in government to respond by supporting the



organizations that are correcting the art cannon so that it more accurately reflects the beautiful cacophony of who we are as a city and a nation. We need your support to continue doing this work.

I don't need to tell this committee that arts and cultural organizations will play an essential role in our recovery. But given the topic, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that without intensified support many organizations may have to close their doors permanently. This is especially true for arts organizations led by and serving communities of color that have historically been underfunded. The DeVos Institute reported in its 2015 study of Diversity in the Arts, that "the 20 largest mainstream organizations have a median budget of \$61 million; the 20 largest organizations of color have a median budget size of \$3.8 million." To quote the Ford Foundation, "this difference of 16 times in median budget size is a glaring illustration of disparity." Additionally, many funding opportunities such as the federal SVOG and PPP programs are not profits or do not address barriers to applying such as the need for technical assistance, which a level playing field and either shut out small non-especially affects BIPOC organizations.

It is time to acknowledge and truly honor the diversity of artistic expression and excellence in our city and provide critical funding to organizations and communities that have made a significant impact on our cultural landscape, despite historically limited resources.

We look forward to working together to ensure adequate funding for the entire arts sector and searching for innovations that guarantee more equitable funding in the future.

Thank you.



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Date: 4/20/21

I am here today to give testimony about amplifying the voices of BIPOC and Queer communities in our cultural institutions.

I come to you today inspired by the philosophy of Ubuntu; I am because we are. We are a city of an expanding convergence of diversity; multiple languages, undulating perspectives, and a fierce hunger to be heard.

Black indigenous people of color and queer voices can be found on stage, in front of a camera, behind a microphone and even in an executive office.

What is not readily accessible are opportunities to decide what content populates our airway, theater, tv, cinema and the myriad of digital gateways we have all grown to accept as standard mediums.

My name is Courtney Ffrench. I have worked in the arts, culture and education industry for the past twenty years. I am a dancer, choreographer, writer, educator and currently the Artistic Director for the Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning.

The initiative I would like to propose, is based on a pilot program initiated with the help of New York Community Trust in partnership with the Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning; Building Equity.

Building Equity was developed as a two-year program that creates an advisory council, made up of Queer, Black, Indigenous People of Color. The council is tasked with the creation and presentation of programmatic ideas and events that are directly driven by their collective cultural and community interest.

The council works directly with the CIG, in this case the Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning or JCAL. JCAL provides all material support; access to creative space, technical assistance, marketing and promotions, stipends and administrative assistance. All of this is done with the help of funding from New York Community Trust.

The programs created through the council, have gone in directions we never dreamed of; films on the essentially invisible indigenous population in the city, exhibits by

161-04 Jamaica Avenue
Jamaica, New York 11432
Tel. 718-658-7400
Fax. 718-658-7922

Queer South Asian artists living among us, lectures on Taino culture and much more.

It is my professional experience that programming generated by arts institutions are often crafted on the norm; whatever was done last year and the year before that. The lineage of programming can be traced to a time when a Eurocentric ideal and or white dominant cultural was the only lens through which art was seen. There was not much room for other voices.

It is imperative that we take a revolutionary turn and develop more funding streams for programs that are driven by the voiceless and the underserved.

We are here today, standing with freedoms and liberties that many before us didn't have. Some of whom we don't know, have never celebrated, but did the work quietly and often without thanks. We are who we are today because of them.

I close as I began, Ubuntu; I am, because we are.

We must amplify the voices of the Black, Queer, Indigenous, People of Color in our community,

Ubuntu.

My name is Courtney Ffrench

Thank you

LA MAMA

EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE CLUB

April 22, 2021

TO: New York City Council
RE: Written Testimony for City Council Hearing, Tuesday, April 20 @ 10am - Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
VIA: McKinney, Brenda <BMcKinney@council.nyc.gov; cc: testimony@council.nyc.gov.

Dear Chairman Van Bramer and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony about our request #96549 toward the re-opening of 74A East 4th Street and our Radical Access Plan. We appreciate your tremendous support of our City's arts and culture community, especially during these unprecedented times.

La MaMa was born out of a need for unconventional and marginalized artists to create. Founder Ellen Stewart, and a Black woman herself, made a home for anyone excluded from the American Theatre: queer, disabled, Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, immigrant, and international artists. For six decades, La MaMa has supported an alternative artistic ecosystem that values relationships, risk-taking, and discovery, and de-emphasizes commercial success.

As the pandemic unfolds, the insidious symptoms of a sick society have become glaring. Beneath the atmosphere of trauma, grief, and isolation, there is an underlying need to find the connective tissue of our culture. Just as Ellen felt the need for a countercultural movement, we now feel the need to present new models of cultural connectivity. We must establish a grassroots movement of local communities across New York City, the United States, and the world, sharing their perspectives, practices, stories, and rituals, and rethinking the role that art plays in our lives.

Our industry systemically favors artists with wealth and privilege and often excludes those who are of color, queer, disabled, or living in poverty. How do we integrate the arts equitably into our society? How can we create the conditions under which artists can not only sustain themselves, but also sustain our communities? La MaMa's Radical Access Plan is our initiative to build an infrastructure of opportunity that embraces new ways of connecting through art and meets the specific needs of our artists and audiences.

By radical access, La MaMa means a comprehensive type of access that includes physical and economic accessibility, opportunity, representation, and relevance. We are:

- committed to physical accessibility that will make our entire campus ADA-compliant and incorporate technology for innovative accessibility solutions;
- redesigning our website to be ADA-compliant;
- creating economic accessibility by maintaining low ticket prices, offering ticket subsidies, free programs, and a "pay what you can" ticket pricing model; and
- finding new ways to be present in the lives of our constituents, through digital content and community programming.

La MaMa's Radical Access Plan will establish the newly renovated 74A East 4th Street, as a place of recovery and community building in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our community has been traumatized by the pandemic on many levels. As we have grieved family members and neighbors, we have been shut out of our community spaces. We believe that the arts will be integral to healing from this time of intense loss and seclusion. The building allows us to embrace all the lessons that we have learned throughout the past year. We

will be able to gather together again without abandoning the online audiences. We will connect these in-person and online audiences to promote unity and empathy across the country and the world.

La MaMa requests funding to launch onsite activities and expand our community programming in conjunction with the reopening of our flagship building at 74A East 4th Street during our 60th season in fall 2021. We see the building as a hub for immersive public programming that meets people where they are. It will be a vehicle for cultural exchange, where people in the East Village can connect to the world through free and low cost arts experiences that reflect them and their issues. To increase access to the building, La MaMa will use funding to invest in program development, performance fees, marketing, and a community outreach coordinator.

In the renovated building, our community programs will take on hybrid (both online and in-person) formats. These programs include: LA MAMA KIDS artist-led workshops and performances; LA MAMA SQUIRTS for NYC's queer performers; INDIGENOUS INITIATIVE for Native communities; POETRY ELECTRIC: spotlighting emerging spoken word artists, beatboxers, and beat rhymers; EXPERIMENTS play reading series; COFFEEHOUSE CHRONICLES series exploring Off-Off Broadway and NYC history; COLAB, a free arts and technology intensive for teens, with hands-on, artist-led workshops; and arts workshops for seniors. A brief video of samples of our online work during the pandemic: [Excerpts from La MaMa's Online Happenings \(vimeo.com\)](https://vimeo.com/584848484) – 2:49 minutes.

La MaMa is in Community Board 3 (CB3), *“one of the largest and most densely populated districts in the city...over 164,000 people and 43,000 of them require income assistance... The demographics of the district also illustrate our diversity and reflect our immigrant population. The 2000 census shows 35% Asian/Pacific Islander, 28% white non-Hispanic, 27% Hispanic, 7% African American, as well as residents from other parts of the world represented in smaller numbers.*

Community Board 3 has a rich history of cultural arts, but we have seen all too many local arts organizations extinguished owing to rising rents. City development, zoning, and housing policies need to be adjusted to support the few remaining groups and lure back those which have been displaced. It would be all too ironic if the artists, musicians, poets, and playwrights who made our neighborhood so desirable were to fall victim to the very development they attracted.” --CB3 FY22 Needs Statement

La MaMa's visitors include those from all boroughs who represent more than 70% of NYC's zip code. Our community is expanding with online programming. Since March 2020, our online programs have served 930 artists and received over 73,000 live views from audiences around the world. In addition to the nearly 30,000 in-person audience members we typically serve, La MaMa expects to serve at least another 30,000 or more online viewers each season.

Given the diversity of our programming and constituents served city-wide, we ask the council members who sit on the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations and those on the LGBT and BLA Caucuses to support this request. The city has invested more than \$15 million to restore 74A East 4th Street. As we prepare to reopen the building, we now ask for an investment in programming that has the potential to greatly increase our activity and reach, providing jobs for artists, and activities for New Yorkers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mia Yoo,
Artistic Director

THE CENTER

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
Oversight - Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts
April 20, 2021

Testimony of
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
New York, NY

**THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL &
TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY CENTER**
208 W 13 ST NEW YORK, NY 10011

T. 212.620.7310
F. 212.924.2657
gaycenter.org

THE CENTER

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the Oversight Hearing on Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts.

New York City's LGBT community formed The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center (The Center) in 1983, in response to the AIDS epidemic, ensuring a place for LGBTQ people to access information, care and support they were not receiving elsewhere. Now the largest LGBT multi service organization on the East Coast, The Center sees more than 6,000 weekly visitors and hosts over 400 community group meetings each month. The Center has a solid track record of working for and with the community to increase access to a diverse range of high-quality services and resources, including our substance use recovery programming for adults and youth; HIV/AIDS programming; youth programs; and our families and opportunities work.

The Center's services

The Center offers the LGBTQ communities of NYC advocacy, health and wellness programs; arts, entertainment and cultural events; recovery, parenthood and family support services.

For over three decades, The Center has worked to ensure that the LGBT community of New York City has access to the highest quality and most diverse range of services and resources. Though we are living in a time of unprecedented social, legal and political acceptance of the LGBTQ community, there is still much work to be done on a local and state level to ensure that our community members can successfully combat the social and economic injustice they face daily. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony today on an issue of great importance city-wide. We look forward to continuing working with you to ensure New York City's future as a safe space for all New Yorkers.

The LGBT Community Center National History Archive is a community-based archive that collects, preserves and makes available to the public the documentation of LGBTQ lives and organizations centered in and around New York. Through our collections, we enable the stories and experiences of New York's LGBTQ people to be told with historical depth and understanding.

Each week, The Center's Archives Manager speaks to people from across the country and globe, many of whom seek to connect to the rich history of the LGBTQ community, a movement that has impacted all of us. The archive has grown to become a leader among LGBTQ archives across the country by virtue of the size of its collection, and its advocacy efforts to widely share LGBTQ history. Hundreds of researchers, academics, historians, filmmakers, etc, pore over the files annually in search of information on LGBTQ history, dating back to 1878. The Archive regularly collaborates with artists, authors, curators and filmmakers to provide primary source material, seen in recent documentaries including "The Life and Death of Marsha P. Johnson" and "CURED"; books including *We Are Everywhere*:

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THE CENTER

Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation and Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Media Technologies; and exhibitions such as Brooklyn Museum's "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall." Without these archives, our history may be erased or not accurately depicted in the rich texture of advocacy it brought forth.

During COVID-19, in addition to providing remote collections access to digitized and born-digital material, The Center Archive launched [The LGBTQ Quarantine Archive Project](#) to collect stories representing the impact of the pandemic and quarantine on our community. The goal of the project is to connect the LGBTQ community in solidarity and to preserve our perspectives during this unique time in history. Hundreds of contributions have been submitted from around the world, and scholars and filmmakers are already able to use the collection to begin considering the pandemic's effects in a historical context. The Archives Manager also continues to process new donations, a recent example being the photographs and papers of the Chilean-born, New York-based artist Matías Alvial who documented protests and other actions in support of Black Trans rights during summer 2020.

We would like to take a moment to thank Chair Van Bramer for his vision and leadership with the archives funding the Caucus supports in the Council. As the council prepares for its budget negotiations, we ask that you prioritize funding the services that we mentioned above. Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony today on an issue of great importance city-wide. We look forward to continuing working with you to ensure New York City's future as a safe space for all New Yorkers.

**THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL &
TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY CENTER**
208 W 13 ST NEW YORK, NY 10011

T. 212.620.7310
F. 212.924.2657
gaycenter.org

Dear Committee Chair Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, NYC Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Gonzalo Casals, NYC Council Members and staff, and esteemed colleagues working in the arts and culture sector:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our testimony for this City Council Hearing on Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts. On behalf of the staff and Board of Trustees of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, it is my pleasure to add the Museum's voice on the importance of BIPOC and Queer voices in the arts sector, most particularly in New York City. As a culturally specific institution born from the civil rights movement era, amplifying marginalized voices was critical to our founding, and is the vision we have for the future of our institution.

The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art is the only Museum in the country dedicated to LGBTQ+ art and culture. Our mission is to exhibit and preserve LGBTQ+ art and foster the queer artists who create it. We embrace the power of the arts to inspire, explore, and foster understanding of the rich diversity of LGBTQ+ experiences, and forefront diverse perspectives reflected in the work we exhibit.

The museum has been hosting remote programming throughout the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and recently reopened to the public in February after almost a year of temporary closure. We are proud to reopen with *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*, an exhibition that celebrates queer Latinx photographer Laura Aguilar, and *Dissolution*, a two-part exhibition featuring emerging artists from the 2018 and 2019 Leslie-Lohman Artist Fellowship. These exhibitions are, respectively, the first retrospective of Aguilar's work in New York, and the first in a series of exhibitions highlighting the now 48 artist alumni who have taken part in the Museum's Fellowship program, which grounds LGBTQ+ artist's work in queer theory and art business practices.

The Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art serves as a cultural home for the LGBTQ+ community in NYC and beyond. We were born over 50 years ago just before the Stonewall Uprisings, from our founder's belief in the importance of preserving LGBTQ+ identity and building community. We understand the importance of our over 30,000 object collection to the preservation of LGBTQ+ history and cultural identity in New York, and particularly during this moment of social distancing, the value of our shared space in our historic, landmarked SoHo location. With so many queer spaces closing the Museum is a unique space for expression of identities that we must protect.

Furthermore, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, there are 504,393 cultural workers in New York State, and a significant number of those are BIPOC and LGBTQ+ identified people. In some cases, like our Museum, most of the team is LGBTQ+. We are committed to an ongoing fight for equity and diversity within our space. Arguably, many more BIPOC and queer folks are audience members of cultural institutions as well, and most of these workers and audience members are in New York City, the cultural capital of our nation. In this moment of recovery from the devastating economic effects of the pandemic, it is paramount for the voices of our community to be reflected in our work, and the vision for institutional rebuilding. This is

the only way we to build an equitable recovery for the arts and culture sector in our city. We, like our colleagues who have also testified, support further amplifying the voices of BIPOC and queer voices to reflect the beautiful and powerful diversity of New York City. Thank you for creating this space, and for your commitment to championing robust creative opportunities for our sector.

With gratitude,

Alyssa Nitchun
Executive Director
Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art

Lucy Sexton

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs hearing on
Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices April 20, 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.

When we talk about raising the visibility of BIPOC, Queer and other marginalized artists, we must talk about money. It is the historic and intentional underfunding of Black and immigrant communities that makes those voices hard to hear. It is the long-held fear of funding radical queer voices that keeps them out of the mainstream. I think we need to talk about a reimagining of NYC---one with arts and culture supported in all communities, one that invests in the economic and emotional recovery of every neighborhood, one that raises up the voices of those still suffering all kinds of oppression. It is time to be bold with our

budget and intentional in laying the groundwork for an equitable, just, diverse, and thriving city.

The benefits that arts and culture bring extend far beyond economics. As I've said in hearings many times, data shows that neighborhoods with cultural assets have improved outcomes in education, aging, mental health, youth engagement with criminal justice, community strength and safety. Yet what are the neighborhoods lacking in cultural assets --even before the pandemic? Economically disadvantaged and historically Black, brown, and immigrant sections of our city. We must direct investment there now if we are to lift up those voices.

We are at a pivotal moment in our city's history. As we emerge from this crisis---a crisis that has devastated the cultural sector across the board---we must not simply refill the buckets of funding that existed before. We must find new ways for funding to flow. 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 that we intentionally invest in the parts of our ecosystem most likely to disappear. We can do this via existing structures like providing long overdue stability for the Coalition of Theaters of Color. And we can find new ways to initiate and sustain funding for BIPOC and queer communities going forward. We cannot come out of this terrible time with a cultural landscape that is more white, more homogenous, and more centralized than it was before. We need to act decisively to fund and lift up voices in every community of our city.

Testimony of Sade Lythcott, Chief Executive Officer of the National Black Theatre before the "Preliminary FY22 Budget Hearing - Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations" March 09, 2021 - Submitted for the April 20, 2021 Oversight hearing on Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts

- Good Morning and thank you to you chair Van Bramer, for your leadership, passion and tremendous heart. Thank you also to all of the esteemed members of the Committees present today for having me today my name is Sade Lythcott. I testify today as the:
- The CEO of the National Black Theatre and I also proudly serve as the Chair of Coalitions Of Theaters of Color (CTC). A coalition that Rep the largest body of culturally specific theaters in all 5 boroughs.
- What BIPOC communities have endured this past year is nothing short of war. And I'm not sure why we are not calling it that. The numbers make it poignantly clear, Between the pandemic, the uprisings and the tyranny of systemic racism it has felt like an all out assault on our communities *SPECIFICALLY*. From the exponential rise of anti Asian violence to the disproportionate Covid 19 deaths in black & brown communities, Life has been fragile and fleeting but most starkly uncertain.
- The BIPOC organizations that are funded through the CTC initiative have been on the frontlines of this war as "safe havens" for the communities in which they operate. We have doing this work work for generations,
- Even in this year of extreme challenges and trauma our CTC organizations have continued to serve hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in the hardest hit communities with vitally needed cultural, educational, social and economic resources for youth, seniors and families, in local neighborhoods and to the broader residents living in the outer

boroughs; From the free Anti Racism training courses conducted by Caribbean Cultural Center in East Harlem to the digital education and activism of Chinese Theater Works in Queens to Art therapy that Mind-Builders in bronx offers their kids, some who have lost both parents to covid-19.

- For us this testimony is not about money, This is about our lives and the wellbeing of the communities we serve.
- CDF/Discretionary funding & cuts to the CTC would be destabilizing and will undoubtedly mean that over half of our theaters will be gone for good, some, that represent the only theaters of their kind in the country like AMERINDA serving and empowering American Indian Artists Inc.
- Last year, I came to you to remind you that budgets are moral narratives. They hold up a mirror to our values. They reflect back our priorities. Every vote, decision and cut tells a story. And you heard us and we are grateful.
- We are asking you to continue to stand with us and that not only, NO HARM come to the CTC initiative, but that our funding become baseline so that support from our beloved City is no longer is uncertain or insecure (as is our DCLA funding through CDF is competitive and uncertain as well). We are asking that you make an secure annual investment in our organizations So that at least on this front we can have peace of mind that we can plan a future.
- Together, we have the sacred responsibility of imagining and manifesting a new and more equitable city. This is your chance like the artists we all revere so, to be creative, to be bold, to take courageous risks towards budget justice! To shine light in these dark times into the spaces that need it most.
- Thank you!



National Queer Theater
1854 7th Avenue #7B
New York, NY 10026
510-813-0396
Nationalqueertheater.org

TESTIMONY Re: Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts

April 20, 2021

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

Good morning. My name is Adam Odsess-Rubin and I am the Founder and Artistic Director of **National Queer Theater** (www.nationalqueertheater.org), New York City's leading LGBTQ theater. We produce diverse new plays by, for, and about the LGBTQ community to promote empathy and pride, and build a creative community working collectively towards queer and trans liberation. We also provide free acting and writing classes to homeless LGBTQ youth, queer elders, undocumented queer college students through the CUNY system and PEN America, and to HIV-positive writers.

This Pride, we are staging our third annual **Criminal Queerness Festival** outdoors and socially distant at LaGuardia Performing Arts Center in Queens, and at Lincoln Center as part of their Restart Stages initiative. The Criminal Queerness Festival provides a stage in our city to international LGBTQ artists fighting censorship and criminalization in their home countries. To date, we have supported over 100 international and immigrant queer artists, welcomed over 2,000 audience members to our festival from around the world, and presented new work from Pakistan, Syria, Kenya, Venezuela, Lebanon, Mexico, China, Egypt, and Iraq. Our festival represents the best of New York City- embracing New York's diversity, protecting LGBTQ refugees and asylum seekers, and providing affordable, high quality entertainment to residents and visitors across the city. *However, we have lost almost all of our funding for this vital program- \$50,000 from the NYC Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impact, which was cut due to COVID-19. How does the city decide to cut cultural impact at a time when our cultural institutions are threatened with extinction, and our industry faces 66% unemployment?*

Support for queer and BIPOC artists from the city council means resources. We need more funding for our small queer and BIPOC-led arts organizations, as we are serving the city's most vulnerable residents through grassroots community organizing. We know how to support our communities best, but we need the money and institutional support to realize our missions: by providing exciting and relevant arts and arts education to our city. Too much taxpayer dollars go towards the 10 largest organizations, most of which are managed by wealthy, white, straight executives who are removed from our communities and are unaware and unequipped to address



National Queer Theater
1854 7th Avenue #7B
New York, NY 10026
510-813-0396
Nationalqueertheater.org

our needs. The model through which we empower our most marginalized needs to be flipped on its head. In the wake of systemic changes to local politics and the arts sector alike, now is the time to embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion. That takes resources and a serious investment from the city council. We implore you to properly fund our city's small queer and BIPOC-led arts organizations to bring about a truly equitable environment through which our artists can flourish in this city, the queer and cultural capital of the country.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adam Odsess-Rubin
Founding Artistic Director
National Queer Theater

*

My name is Douglas Dubois-Card Sebamala, the Managing Director at National Queer Theater. In this room, as in major theaters across New York City, I am one among very few Black Queer Immigrant Managing Directors, if not the only one. Our Queer and BIPOC communities are hungry for representation, we deserve a seat at the table of decision makers, to shape the narratives of our generation and generations coming after us through community leadership and the transformational power of theater. We want our voices to be heard, for our stories to be told and not told from single narratives and perspectives, but through our undiluted lived-experiences as Queer, Black and Indigenous People Of Color in America. But that starts with you giving us our seat at the table, this table. By supporting our initiatives and all Queer-BIPOC led organizations, enabling the work we do to uplift our communities, providing subsidized housing for marginalized artists, offering government assistance with health insurance, availing Immigration lawyers and contributing to our strife for equality, through social justice and funding programs against marginalization of our people. That's a great place to start.

The formative years of my youth as a teenager were spent in Uganda, surrounded by intolerant anti-gay discrimination and stigma. The government passed the Anti-Homosexuality bill of 2014



*National Queer Theater
1854 7th Avenue #7B
New York, NY 10026
510-813-0396
Nationalqueertheater.org*

which called for a death sentence for all gay people in the country. I grew up afraid of being myself, afraid to love and wary of trusting anyone with my deepest truth for fear of persecution and incarceration because of my sexuality. When I moved to America, I was no stranger to police brutality. Uganda Police had raided Pride Celebrations organized by LGBTQ organizations in 2016, brutally assaulted transgender people, undressed them on live media broadcasting and arrested several who attended Pride that year. To escape police brutality, a 16 year old boy jumped off the 7th floor rooftop of the building that day, broke his spine and spent over two years in surgery and physical therapy. That is the kind trauma our communities experience everyday with unwarranted policing of people of color in our city and brutal shootings of unarmed black men and women; on the streets and in our homes. The recent events of 2020 have proven that if we do nothing in our city of New York, to protect and uplift the voices of underrepresented and marginalized communities, then our stories shall go unheard, and our lives shall end uncelebrated behind the barrel of the gun, every single day. We need your protection and your support.

At National Queer Theater we bring to the fore experiences of Queer and BIPOC artists, through social justice theater and theater education programming. We are dedicated to celebrating the brilliance of generations of LGBTQ artists and providing a home for unheard storytellers and activists. Our Criminal Queerness Festival gives a platform to playwrights from countries that criminalize LGBTQ stories. I implore you to visit our website at National Queer Theater and support our festival that starts on 22nd to 26th of June, so that stories that have been censored in such countries, continue to thrive among audiences who appreciate theater in the five boroughs of New York City.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Sebamala". The signature is fluid and cursive, with some overlapping letters.

Douglas Dubois Sebamala
Managing Director
National Queer Theater

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

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

TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2021

Offered by

Freddy Taveras, Executive Vice President and General Counsel

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.

Founded in 1804, the New-York Historical Society is New York's oldest museum with a collection spanning five centuries and over 14 million objects. With our rich and extensive collections, New-York Historical aims to be an active, accessible community resource and destination for audiences typically underserved by cultural institutions. Past exhibitions include *Art as Activism: Graphic Art from the Merrill C. Berman Collection*, which showcased protest art from the 1930s through the 70s, including that of the Black Panther movement; *Nueva York*, which told the history of the Latino presence in New York from the 1600s through World War II; and *Chinese American: Exclusion/Inclusion*, which explored the centuries-long history of the Chinese immigrant experience. Our groundbreaking traveling exhibition, *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow*, will be on view at the Bullock Texas State History Museum in June.

DIVERSITY AT NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

It is imperative that our exhibitions, collections, and programming reflect the rich cultural fabric of our city and nation. Our aim is to ensure that our museum professionals hail from a wide range of backgrounds, so we can create museum programming that highlights under-recognized stories, challenges hegemonic historical narratives, and enriches public understanding of our shared past. In addition to our diverse staff, our **Frederick Douglass Council** and **Women's History Council** affinity groups promote deeper discussion and engagement by encouraging support for programming that enriches and advances the knowledge and documentation of black history and women's history in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of America today. To ensure BIPOC and queer voices are included in museum conversations, New-York Historical assembled a **Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee** in August 2020, open to all interested employees. The IDEA Committee is responsible for reviewing and checking New-York Historical's systems and norms and works to create short- and long-term goals for the institution, prioritizing diversification of the voices and perspectives

involved in decision-making, and improvements toward becoming a more inclusive and equitable organization.

New-York Historical is committed to amplifying BIPOC and queer voices not only at the Museum, but in the arts and culture field in general. As such, we partnered with The City University of New York's School of Professional Studies (CUNY SPS) to offer a **Master of Arts in Museum Studies** degree—a unique collaboration designed with the goal to diversify the City's museum workforce and address the needs of our increasingly diverse museum-going public. The most successful roll out of a CUNY SPS MA program in the history of the school, the program was launched in the fall of 2019 to address the pervasive lack of accessibility and inclusion in American museum leadership staff, working towards generating an equitable and sustainable cultural workforce of tomorrow. The program is specifically structured to attract and retain students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, including working adults and students with family obligations, and we are pleased to offer scholarship funds for qualifying students.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL AND THE AMERICAN LGBTQ+ MUSEUM

Furthering our commitment to highlight underrepresented narratives in American history and cultural institutions, 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 planned expansion, which received generous funding from the City Council and Administration in Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. The expansion 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 also host the graduate students in our Master of Arts in Museum Studies program.

We are thrilled to continue our partnership with The American LGBTQ+ Museum, and are currently developing 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. This partnership represents a vital part of our institutional mission, and we look forward to offering robust programming on LGBTQ+ history and culture to New York City.

Thank you for your exceptional service to the New York City arts and culture field and for the opportunity to discuss our work at New-York Historical. We remain deeply grateful for the City's important programmatic and capital support which allows us to remain steadfast in our mission to amplify BIPOC and queer voices in public humanities and the arts.



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April 20, 2021

Dear Chair Van Bramer and Councilmembers of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony about the importance of **amplifying BIPOC and queer voices in the arts**. My name is Salem Tsegaye, and I am the program officer for arts, culture, and historic preservation at The New York Community Trust, the largest private funder of New York City nonprofits, and administrator of the Mosaic Network and Fund, a learning network and collaborative fund.

The Mosaic Network and Fund was established in 2018 to increase support to arts and cultural organizations in the City that are led by, created for, and accountable to BIPOC communities. We have grown into an expansive network of 282 individuals representing 160 arts groups of color and 49 philanthropic and intermediary funding organizations. Each year, we organize dialogues to build trust, make connections, and strengthen relationships in an effort to collectively advance racial equity in the cultural sector. While this is our focus, we also consider the needs of LGBTQ+, disabled, immigrant, and other historically marginalized communities.

To date, our collaborative fund of 25 contributing philanthropies has awarded flexible, multi-year grants totaling \$5.1 million to 27 groups such as Pachamama Peruvian Arts in Queens, Mind-Builders in the Bronx, ArteEast in Brooklyn, and Kundiman in Manhattan. These funds have provided meaningful help to groups, particularly during the last year as they navigated (and continue to navigate) disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges—rooted in decades of underinvestment in communities of color, amplified by the compounding health, economic, and social effects of the pandemic and ongoing racial inequity—our grantees and Network members, among many other BIPOC-led cultural organizations in the City, continue to provide critical programs, virtually and outdoors, that have been a salve for their communities.

BIPOC-led cultural organizations are a vital but under-resourced part of this City. They commission artists of color, educate New Yorkers young and old, present contemporary and historical works, and engage in cultural organizing. Importantly, they function as incubators of diverse emerging talent, trusted preservers of significant but overlooked cultural legacies, and communicate narratives that reflect the multifaceted experiences of people of color, build power in marginalized communities, and influence broader movements for social justice.

We have learned through our efforts that a thriving arts ecosystem is one where these organizations have access to flexible, multi-year funding, technical support to strengthen infrastructure, and opportunities to engage in peer learning and exchange. We urge you to join us in addressing their needs and establishing pathways for new and increased funding, among other support, for these groups. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Salem N. Tsegaye
Program Officer
Arts, Culture, & Historic Preservation

GUGGENHEIM

April 22, 2021

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum statement to the New York City Council in support of Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum respectfully submits this statement to the New York City Council in support of Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts. The Guggenheim is committed to both internal work on this front and to contributing to a collaborative and meaningful shift in awareness and action in the larger New York cultural community.

With acknowledgement that change must first come from within, the staff and leadership of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum are dedicated to creating paths that lead to a more inclusive and equitable workplace. This goes beyond diversifying our team; we seek to broaden perspectives and thinking within our institution by respecting, valuing, and amplifying the voices of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ staff. We recognized the importance of open communication as well as the challenges that arise when there are not opportunities for BIPOC and Queer voices to be heard. Museum leadership is therefore dedicated to continuing to develop internal dialogues and support systems, in addition to continuing our collective work toward realizing the objectives outlined in the institution's Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion (DEAI) Action Plan. This requires an internal cultural shift that positions ongoing meaningful and important conversations about the actions in the plan at the center of each department's decision-making and planning.

Though the Guggenheim Museum has intermittently endeavored to look beyond the work of white European and North American artists since the 1950s, it was not until the 2010s that a density of concerted, strategic efforts were made to expand the purview of the Guggenheim's interpretation and presentation of modern and contemporary art. In concert with focused collecting efforts, the museum also began to introduce a more diverse roster of exhibitions. Seventeen solo exhibitions, ranging from retrospectives to focused presentations, of BIPOC and Queer artists have opened at the museum since 2010, constituting roughly 35% of the museum's monographic programming. By comparison, roughly 20% of the museum's solo-exhibition programming was devoted to artists of color during the previous decade. Live programs, many organized in collaboration with Public Programs, Special Events, and Works & Process, have complemented these exhibitions, with the majority of performances since 2014 prominently featuring BIPOC artists.

Despite these recent efforts, more work needs to be done to balance the Museum's collection and exhibitions. Though the museum has applied innovative global frameworks to its curatorial activities, resulting in greater regional, racial, and gender diversity of its artists, its work has also reflected certain limitations in terms of marginalized nationalities, ethnicities, sexualities, and gender identities. In the DEAI Action Plan, the institution publicly articulates its commitment to the following, among other specific objectives:

- Acquiring work by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous artists, especially including those of marginalized gender identities and sexualities

GUGGENHEIM

- Including representation of BIPOC artists, especially those of marginalized ethnicities, gender identities, and sexualities, in each yearly calendar (solo and group exhibitions and public programs)
- Creating and collaborating on cross-departmental research programs that engage postcolonial critique, decoloniality, Black feminism, Queer perspectives, and other frameworks

The Guggenheim Museum supports greater amplification of BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts across the cultural landscape of New York City. We seek to contribute to the conversation, collaborate with cultural partners, and play a role in this critical need for greater representation and celebration. This applies both to exhibitions, programming, and education outreach and to welcoming a more diverse audience to the museum.

Within the DEAI plan, the Guggenheim pursues three primary goals as they relate to audience engagement and diversification: 1) look critically at the experience of coming to the museum and engaging with our digital content from the perspective of racial and gender equity, 2) gather more and deeper data so we can track progress on diversifying our audience, and 3) increase resources towards existing programs and initiatives that reach beyond our current audience. While we have made significant strides in diversifying our programming, exhibition content, and collecting practices, these efforts alone are not enough. Building trust and partnership with New York City constituents must anchor and guide our engagement efforts.

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum fully supports greater prioritization on the part of the New York City Council to provide funding opportunities and platforms for cultural institutions and individuals across the city to amplify BIPOC and Queer voices in the arts. We acknowledge that we have a role to play in centering these voices and are committed to collaborate with our fellow cultural institutions, artists, and constituents to create a community wherein they see themselves reflected.

Most sincerely,

Elizabeth Duggal
Senior Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer

April 19, 2021
City Council Testimony
The Studio Museum in Harlem
Delivered by: Evans Richardson IV, Chief of Staff

Chair Van Bramer and the members of the Committee, on behalf of the entire Board, staff and extended community at The Studio Museum in Harlem, I want to express our sincere gratitude for inviting us to participate in this critical conversation about amplifying BIPOC voices in the cultural sphere.

My name is Evans Richardson, Chief of Staff at The Studio Museum in Harlem where, for over a half century, we have committed ourselves to the study, presentation and conservation of the work of artists of African descent. In the fifty-two years since our founding, our mission has been to lift up our community and bear witness to black life through art and culture.

The Studio Museum is a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group, and as such, is committed to supporting the public health, and public life, and public service of all New Yorkers, and of the City itself."

Our commitment to the art and artists of African descent has only deepened since March 2020 when the Museum made its transition to remote work. Today, I want to celebrate for a few moments the accomplishments of BIPOC organizations—of which the Studio Museum is just one example—who have been able to create new opportunities for audience engagement and amplify the voices of BIPOC artists across the five boroughs and, indeed, the world.

One example of this work is the Museum's iconic *Artist-in-Residence* program, envisioned by artist William T. Williams. This program gives emerging artists an unparalleled opportunity to develop their practice in an eleven-month residency, and culminates in an annual exhibition. The program has supported over 150 artists who have gone on to highly regarded careers. Individuals selected for the residency receive institutional guidance, professional development and research support.

On December 10th, we were thrilled to open our annual Artist in Residence exhibition, [*This Longing Vessel: Studio Museum Artists in Residence 2019-20*](#), at MoMA PS1. In its second year, this collaboration with a fellow CIG provides a promising model and exciting opportunities for cross-institution programming and audience-building.

This year, we were also thrilled to present *Chloë Bass: Wayfinding*, a collaboration with NYC Parks and a part of our *inHarlem* initiative, in Harlem's St. Nicholas Park from September 2019-September 2020. The exhibition, made up of site-specific sculptures exploring the structural and visual vernacular of public wayfinding signage, resonated with viewers even as we remained physically distant. Bass's sculptures activated an eloquent exploration of language, both visual and written, encouraging moments of private reflection in public space.

Despite the challenges of the current moment, we understand that the artists the Studio Museum works to amplify will both reflect and shape this time, placing our history in a global context for future generations. We hope the outcome of our collective work in this moment will be an affirmation of the sanctity, complexity, and beauty of black life and humanity.

**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

Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts**

April 20, 2021

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

I am pleased to be here as an African descendant Latina to lend my voice regarding systemic bias in the administration of arts and culture funds. Before I begin I want to express my refusal to use the acronym of BIPOC as this term in itself, erases our identities as Asian, Black, Indigenous and Latinx people.

I come to tell you, as clearly as I can, that the system for funding arts and culture in the City of New York is both inherently and systemically biased against Black, Brown, Native, Asian as people of color and, as well against our Queer brothers and sisters.

Let's be clear. Systemic racism does not require a deep level of motivation by the perpetrator. Edmund Burke said it best: "The only necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

I speak now of the Cultural Institutions Group or CIG as it is known. The CIG was created in 1876 in order to make New York into a showcase of culture. By 1900, major institutions, like the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Botanical Garden, the Bronx Zoo, the Brooklyn Museum and others, were given lucrative leases for a mere pittance and, of course, no institution of color was even considered. Now, 150 years later, only three institutions operated by communities of color have been granted entrance into the hallowed halls of CIG.

This, Council Members, is exactly what systemic racism looks like. It just happened. “We couldn’t find an Indigenous or Black institution qualified to be a member of CIG” – should we ask or wonder why not or do we know the answer?

I am not here to argue that the CIG should be abolished. I am here to argue that in order to address the systemic and inherent bias caused by the way CIG has been funded, there is a need for immediate equitable distribution, in the same way that phrase is used in divorce proceedings, *in order to fairly and equitably share the largess that was created 150 years ago*. And, when I say “created” I am talking about each of those institutions utilizing the services of native people and freed and indentured slaves whose contributions are now memorialized in little plots of land throughout the city called the African burial grounds.

I respect most of the institutions that belong to CIG. But the institution itself needs to be reformed around a new and more equitable paradigm.

Consider this. The CIG institutions lease property from the City of New York for, in some cases one dollar and in other cases, other token payments. My institution, the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, negotiated to purchase a firehouse from the city for one dollar and invested \$10 million into it. In order to create the institution that exists today and for that one dollar, the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute is told that they/we cannot be a member of CIG and receive equitable distribution of the CIG funds.

I leave you with this question, “are you kidding me?”

Thank you for your time.

Black Lives Matter.

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15
YEARS

Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations - April 20, 2021

Topic: Amplifying BIPOC and Queer Voices in the Arts

Kemi Ilesanmi, Executive Director, The Laundromat Project

On behalf of The Laundromat Project (The LP), a Black-rooted and People of Color-centered arts organization that advances Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Arab, and other artists and neighbors of color as change agents in their own communities, I thank the Committee for your leadership and for making this space to amplify BIPOC and Queer voices in the arts. I also want to thank the Department of Cultural Affairs for its leadership on issues of inclusion and diversity, under Commissioner Tom Finkelparkl and now Commissioner Gonzalo Casals.

In our first 16 years, The LP has supported over 200 artists across the city -- predominantly BIPOC, immigrant, and/or LGBTQIA+ -- through residencies, training, monetary awards, teaching assignments, and community building. We believe that art, creativity, and culture play an essential role in bringing people together to share stories, challenges, and creative solutions while also nurturing joy, celebration, and liberation. We believe that BIPOC artists play an essential role in making our city more vibrant and just, especially as we look to recover and heal from the pandemic and what may come after.

To truly recover and rebuild a city that allows all of us to thrive, it is critical that Black, indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Arab, LGBTQIA+ and so many other diverse voices, artists, organizations, and community efforts be not only amplified -- but also valued, supported, and resourced. Here are just a few BIPOC artists making a difference right now in our city:

When the pandemic hit last year, **Xenia Diente & Jaclyn Reyes of Little Manila** in Woodside, Queens immediately set up a mutual aid network that supported local Filipino restaurants and businesses, fed local healthcare workers, and designed outdoor murals, art workshops, and exhibitions last summer.



**1476 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, NY 11216
P: (718) 574 - 0798
www.laundromatproject.org**

**MAKE ART.
BUILD
COMMUNITY.
CREATE
CHANGE.**

Ogemdi Ude and Rochelle Wilbun of AfroPeach blend dance and movement healing practices and birth work to provide holistic care for Black people after pregnancy and birth in Bed-Stuy, Brownsville, Crown Heights and other parts of Central Brooklyn -- areas with troubling maternal health inequities for Black residents.

Gabriel G. Torres, in partnership with our peer organization Loisaida, is currently working on a theater, digital, and garden project that supports and educates Queer Latinx communities struggling with substance use on the Lower East Side -- an issue on the rise during the pandemic.

Xenia, Jaclyn, Ogemdi, Rochelle & Gabriel are all LP artists of color, working with communities of color, and pushing their creativity to the limit to make a difference in their neighborhoods They are working with communities of which they are a part -- bringing intimate knowledge to how they engage and harness the creativity, challenges, and dreams of their neighbors.

We believe artists work in the media of hope, connection, and truth. New York City is blessed with a population that is majority people of color and the same rings true for our artists population. Yet, given the structural inequities of our city, BIPOC and Queer (especially Trans) artists have been disproportionately affected by the loss of jobs, income, housing, and mental wellness as a result of the pandemic.

As we work to recover from this pandemic and rebuild our city, we must invite BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ artists to the table at every stage. These artists will open us to unrealized potential and can help to make sure we don't replace the old broken systems with more of the same. They can instead help ensure we center community, compassion, empathy, sustainability, and joy as we rebuild. Therefore, we ask for the City's support thus:

1. BIPOC artists should be boldly integrated into the City's plans for recovery, including funding public art and performances as well as hiring cultural workers to foster and rebuild community connections and wellbeing; e.g. the Artist-in-Residence program that has embedded many BIPOC artists in various city agencies and departments;
2. BIPOC-led and community-based arts organizations that also serve as critical community centers in times of crisis should receive robust and increased funding to help them help their communities survive and recover from the pandemics. So many BIPOC arts organizations are not sure they will survive the pandemic, which would be a deep loss for our overall arts ecology. The Council's funding for immigrant arts organizations should continue, increase funding, and sharply simplify its application process ;
3. Continuously affirm that BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ artists are critical workers that deserve living wages, especially while they help the city recover and rebuild. We must normalize paying artists well and always -- and that investment must be encouraged and reflected in all awards and grants from the city;

4. In light of the City's history and participation in forming and perpetuating the structural racial inequities that still harm Black lives, the City must convene a commission on reparations that offers genuine reckoning and repair for African Americans; and
5. As the City hopes to soon receive federal funding for infrastructure and recovery, those funds should be allocated with a sharp and focused equity lens that prioritizes BIPOC communities at all levels, including BIPOC artists and arts organizations.

As the University of Pennsylvania's 2017 study on Culture and Social Wellbeing commissioned by the City asserted, smaller community-based arts organizations are a crucial part of our arts and community ecosystems. They are often BIPOC led, BIPOC serving, and BIPOC investing. These are the local arts spaces that nurture and sustain BIPOC artists and creativity first and always. One cannot thrive without the other. Thus, it is imperative for the city to amplify, value, and fund BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ creative voices & institutions in this time of crisis and healing. Our future depends on it. We thank the City Council members for their time and efforts to amplify and support diverse voices in the arts.



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April 20, 2021

Dear Chair Van Bramer and Councilmembers of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony about the importance of **amplifying BIPOC and queer voices in the arts**. My name is Salem Tsegaye, and I am the program officer for arts, culture, and historic preservation at The New York Community Trust, the largest private funder of New York City nonprofits, and administrator of the Mosaic Network and Fund, a learning network and collaborative fund.

The Mosaic Network and Fund was established in 2018 to increase support to arts and cultural organizations in the City that are led by, created for, and accountable to BIPOC communities. We have grown into an expansive network of 282 individuals representing 160 arts groups of color and 49 philanthropic and intermediary funding organizations. Each year, we organize dialogues to build trust, make connections, and strengthen relationships in an effort to collectively advance racial equity in the cultural sector. While this is our focus, we also consider the needs of LGBTQ+, disabled, immigrant, and other historically marginalized communities.

To date, our collaborative fund of 25 contributing philanthropies has awarded flexible, multi-year grants totaling \$5.1 million to 27 groups such as Pachamama Peruvian Arts in Queens, Mind-Builders in the Bronx, ArteEast in Brooklyn, and Kundiman in Manhattan. These funds have provided meaningful help to groups, particularly during the last year as they navigated (and continue to navigate) disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges—rooted in decades of underinvestment in communities of color, amplified by the compounding health, economic, and social effects of the pandemic and ongoing racial inequity—our grantees and Network members, among many other BIPOC-led cultural organizations in the City, continue to provide critical programs, virtually and outdoors, that have been a salve for their communities.

BIPOC-led cultural organizations are a vital but under-resourced part of this City. They commission artists of color, educate New Yorkers young and old, present contemporary and historical works, and engage in cultural organizing. Importantly, they function as incubators of diverse emerging talent, trusted preservers of significant but overlooked cultural legacies, and communicate narratives that reflect the multifaceted experiences of people of color, build power in marginalized communities, and influence broader movements for social justice.

We have learned through our efforts that a thriving arts ecosystem is one where these organizations have access to flexible, multi-year funding, technical support to strengthen infrastructure, and opportunities to engage in peer learning and exchange. We urge you to join us in addressing their needs and establishing pathways for new and increased funding, among other support, for these groups. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Salem N. Tsegaye
Program Officer
Arts, Culture, & Historic Preservation



Good morning,

I am Aaron L. McKinney, Interim Executive Director of Hi-ARTS located at El Barrio's Artspace PS109 in East Harlem.

Charlie Smalls penned a song for one of my favorite musicals, the Wiz. It begins, when I think of home, I think of a place where there's love overflowing. I would add that when I think of home I think of a place where I am safe to be my full self. But where can Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, other People of Color, queer, and other historically marginalized artists call home. Are there enough safe spaces that allow these artists to bring their full selves to their art. Hi-ARTS is one of those safe spaces, both literally and metaphorically, for marginalized communities to share their stories. We are a leading cultural hub within the urban arts movement. For over twenty years, we have provided unique development opportunities to artists of color, always placing issues of equity and social justice at the forefront.

We invite our artists to bring their full selves, and our staff do the same. While many organizations only devote resources to late-stage work, we invest in the development phase of artistic creation rather than a final product. For artists of the global majority, especially those in Hip-Hop and the urban arts, this kind of support is rarely afforded. Development takes time. Our artists need this time—with pay.

Additionally, we work with our artists to design residencies that are tailored to their specific needs. Many are used to catering to the aesthetic or structural norms of white-led institutions. Hi-ARTS residencies subvert this structure, asking artists to tell us what they need, and providing it. We have heard time and again from our artists that this sets us apart from many other institutions.

I want to take a moment to discuss this word: institution. There have long been tensions between artists and institutions. For many, those power dynamics reached a breaking point in the past year. There are countless stories, some documented, mostly undocumented, of artists who comment they never want to work with an institution again. The trickle-down system from institutions to artists isn't working, and the safety net is fragile at best. The COVID pandemic highlighted these failures that we know are not new. In 2020, Americans for the Arts found that 62% of arts and

cultural workers were fully unemployed, and more than 69% were Black, Indigenous, and other POC. As leaders of organizations, as leaders in government, we need to provide direct financial support to our artists and cultural workers during this emergency—and on an ongoing basis.

For me, it will always be about process over product, artist over art, human being over funder deliverable. When our residencies, exhibits, and productions are over, it means everything when artists tell us that they felt loved and supported or that they want to work with the Hi-ARTS team again. Developing those relationships with and building pipelines for historically marginalized artists is the reason why we do what we do.

We thank Chair Van Bramer and the members of the Committee, Commissioner Casals and DCLA, and the City at large for its partnership. Let's work harder, provide resources, and continue to make NY HOME for these artists!

Thank You,

Aaron L. McKinney

Executive Director, Hi-ARTS

aaron@hi-artsnyc.org