

TESTIMONY TO CITY COUNCIL ON IMMIGRATION

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Testimony to City Council on Immigration

By Alejandra Duque Cifuentes, Executive Director

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My name is Alejandra Duque Cifuentes. I am a proud Rego Park, Queens resident, Cultural Worker, and Immigrant. Currently, I serve as the Executive Director of Dance/NYC.

As a dance service organization, Dance/NYC's mission is to promote the knowledge, appreciation, practice, and performance of dance in the metropolitan New York City area. It embeds values of justice, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of the organization and works in alliance with Dance/USA, the national service organization for professional dance. Dance/NYC acts on its values and delivers public services through its core programs of action-oriented research, convening and leadership training, service technology, and grantmaking.

On behalf of the more than 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, and over 500 dance nonprofits based in the New York City area, Dance/NYC joins New Yorkers for Culture & Arts and colleague advocates to call for:

- 1) Investment in immigrant organizations, programs, and projects;
- 2) Transformation of internal funding practices; and
- 3) Strengthened collaboration among funders.

In the dance community, immigration has been the medium through which we have learned about and encountered some of the most innovative artistic questions and forms. Immigrants have for generations, not only contributed but shaped the dance ecology we know today. It is for this reason that in a current political climate that dehumanizes and threatens the welfare of more than three million immigrants in the New York City metropolitan area, the time for the cultural and artistic community to rise as advocates for the human rights of immigrant people is now. Immigrant rights are human rights.

Dance/NYC believes that the dance ecology must itself be just, equitable, and inclusive to meaningfully contribute to social progress, and envisions a dance ecology wherein power, funding, opportunity, conduct, and impact are fair for all artists, cultural workers, and audiences. It is for this reason that we are committed to advancing immigrant dance makers and cultural workers in the local creative sector, thereby contributing to the efforts of generations of people and organizations committed to this work, and by extension, contribute to the movement of immigrant rights.

Launched in 2018, Dance/NYC's Immigrants. Dance. Arts. Initiative aims to extend the role of dance artistry in fostering the inclusion, integration, and human rights of the more than three million immigrants in the New York City metropolitan area. The initiative is supported in part by the City of New York, Bill de Blasio, Mayor, and the New York City Council, Corey Johnson, Speaker, through the Department of Cultural Affairs, Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner. Dance/NYC thanks the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs for its partnership.

The need and opportunity for equitable funding are urgent. This is a moment when the criminalization of immigrants is outlined at every level, from the rhetoric that flows from the highest governing bodies of the nation to local policies that police and disproportionately incarcerate black and brown people. New York City's increased investment in culture and the arts of immigrant communities will have both symbolic and tangible significance. It will strengthen the City as a beacon for artists and audiences around the globe and ensure New York artists and cultural groups have the resources they need to rise as advocates for the human rights of immigrant people.

Locally, changes to funding practices are needed to ensure the City's arts and cultural institutions are positioned to respond to the recommendations of Dance/NYC's latest research, [Immigrants. Dance. Arts.: Data on NYC Dance](#). For Dance/NYC and its constituents, the most urgent four priorities are:

- 1) Investing resources toward immigrant dance making by developing immigrant-specific programs by both arts funding initiatives and project funding initiatives, integrating immigrant matters as a funding priority in existing arts portfolios, and expanding purview of funding to ensure small-budget groups, fiscally sponsored projects, independent artists, and unincorporated groups that are immigrant-led or are meaningfully integrating immigrants are served;
- 2) Transforming internal practices by training funding decision-makers in immigrant matters, overhauling data-gathering practices to better understand grantees' demographics (including foreign-born status) and engagement with immigrant matters and inequities that exist in funding to drive accountability over time, and employing intersectional and racially explicit frameworks while ensuring that immigrant populations are present at every stage of developing, implementing, and evaluating funding initiatives impacting their work, including on funder boards and staff;
- 3) Strengthening collaboration among funders traditionally focused on the arts and funders focused on immigrant rights, racial justice, and broader equity matters to increase resources available and to define and achieve common objectives, and leveraging funder affinity organizations that can do more to move the needle with respect to funding by demonstrating best practices to their members, cultivating partnerships, and delivering relevant field advocacy, research, communications, training, and convening with a focus on immigrant matters.

For Dance/NYC, the City's cultural plan is a significant milestone and a launching pad for strengthened and new advocacy. With the City's vision for a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable sector in place, it is now incumbent on the City to operationalize that vision, fund it at adequate levels, and measure progress over time. As the City establishes its evaluation framework, Dance/NYC strongly advocates for seizing the opportunity to extend artistry's role in fostering the inclusion, integration, and human rights of immigrants, and driving creativity and social progress.

In calling for equitable funding for cultural organizations, immigrant artists and organizations serving immigrant audiences, Dance/NYC thanks Chair Carlos Menchaca, the members of the Committee, and the City at large for its partnership.

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