

TESTIMONY TO CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Thursday, May 21, 2020

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By Dance/NYC

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Prepared by Dance/NYC

On behalf of Dance/NYC, a service organization which serves over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, and 500 nonprofit dance companies based in the New York City area, including dance workers of color, immigrants, and disabled dance workers, I join colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking the Council for your leadership during this time and in requesting:

1. The City include the Arts and Culture communities in their economic support and relief plans and pass legislation to protect our organizations and workers;
2. The City reduces its proposed cuts to discretionary funding, which disproportionately impacts smaller organizations run by and serving communities of color, immigrant and disabled communities, among the hardest hit by COVID, most in need of the healing and community strengthening that culture provides; and
3. The City reduces its proposed cuts to the Department of Education, particularly ensuring that arts workers, organizations, and services, continue to remain essential educational services provided to students and their communities.

The need and opportunity for funding is urgent. Culture is what makes NYC the most important cultural capitals in the world, and a leading force that has led the City's economic recovery in past crises including 9/11. Dance workers and organizations are significant contributors to this cultural landscape contributing over \$300 million to the NYC economy. During this crisis, dance organizations, artists, and educators have remained active providing online dance classes; digital performances; conversations on recovery; and by developing and providing mental health support for members of and outside of the industry. Dance/NYC has undertaken comprehensive research on the impact this moment is having on the dance sector, particularly its impact on organizations and individual dance workers, all while providing nearly \$1 million in relief support to individual freelance dance workers and organizations, and providing digital content. Despite this, dance workers and organizations are facing the stark reality of possible closings due to insurmountable rent prices, inability to pay their workers, and inability to earn income from in-person gatherings or digital content. This is further exacerbated as City contracts remain unpaid at their full capacity, even for services already rendered, and with budget cuts to the DOE that represent a significant portion of organizational and individual revenue streams for the dance community.

While the needs of the dance community might be similar to other performing arts disciplines, dance is of these disciplines the least unionized and with the lowest degrees of wage standards and protections. While this has allowed us to remain adaptable to changing tides, this moment has revealed a multi-system failure which our data shows may change the landscape of our City's cultural workforce for the long-haul. Dance/NYC's Coronavirus Impact Survey that we have been disseminating to the field since March 11, 2020, has revealed total revenue loss for dance organizations and groups exceeds \$22 M including \$16.5M in earned revenue and \$5.5M in contributed revenue. Smaller organizations, groups and projects are likely to sustain significant negative financial impact, projecting losses that amount to up to 82% of their operating budgets. Additionally, trends show that there is a flight of artists leaving the City because people don't have work and are experiencing overwhelming difficulties in accessing Unemployment benefits and aid, particularly our freelance dance workforce.

Further, with an average annual income of \$32,886, very near the poverty line, individual dance workers suggest they will lose at least 18% of their annual income due the crisis, though this figure is conservative given unknowns around the longevity of the impact, particularly on live performance. Individual dance workers report a cumulative loss of at least \$4.2M in income related to 28,705+ cancelled engagements. Moreover, survey responses reveal disproportionate needs and impacts for dance workers who identify as disabled, ALAANA, and genderqueer/nonbinary as well as older dance workers, and immigrant dance workers.

This poses a direct and pervasive threat to the survival of the Arts and Culture communities in the City. Locally, the increased funding is needed to ensure our City's arts and cultural institutions are positioned to survive and be a part of the building of the City during the aftermath of COVID-19. As the City continues to build out its recovery framework, Dance/NYC strongly advocates for a vision rooted in inclusivity, equity, and sustainability for the arts and culture industry. Culture is critical to the health and well being of NYC's neighborhoods during this crisis, and will be central to the city's recovery going forward. We are in crisis and need continued support now.

For Dance/NYC and its constituents, the most urgent three priorities are:

1. Increase funding levels, including funding for individual freelance dance workers, fiscally sponsored artists, and dance organizations who are most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and recession. As underscored by Dance/NYC's Coronavirus research the public and the funding community often overvalue the individual artist's final works and prominence, leading to an inequitable funding landscape that has failed to consider the value of their process and personhood — access to healthcare, liveable wages, affordable housing, unemployment benefits, etc. Similarly, organizations are asking for the very same thing with nearly 64% of them experiencing cash flow issues and 94% of them reporting salaries and wages as the most critical need right now.
2. Include artists in your decision-making and cross-sector task forces. Survey respondents and Fund applicants are seeking platforms to share their stories and want to prevent being further anonymized. It is crucial for City officials and leaders to listen and respond more equitably to the needs of their constituent base. We need to create funding structures that value artists and art workers, too, as necessary members of our society and workforce and as key participants in the recovery of our City.
3. Ensure that legislation and structures tied to recovery and the safe opening of our City do not place overwhelming financial burden on individuals or organizations already strapped for financial support, without proper City support and guidance. It is our joint responsibility to ensure the survival of the cultural institutions that ensure NYC remains the cultural capital of the world.
4. Establish structures and best practices for funding artists and organizations rooted in equity, ensuring culturally specific groups, and smaller organizations are not left out of relief support.

Community and culture are inextricably linked. These principles are the driving force behind Dance/NYC's organizational priorities and the lens through which we view the New York City arts and culture ecosystem at large. It is in this vein that Dance/NYC advocates for the dance community, and stands in solidarity with our colleague advocates across disciplines in the City to request increased funding and integration of

dance and arts workers into the decision-making that will envision our future post-pandemic.

Dance/NYC recognizes the Council is facing a crushing budget deficit, and that our entire city is facing enormous hardship. We believe that together, we can navigate this moment and ensure our united survival. We thank the City Council members and the City at large for its partnership, and for your labor of love in serving our city during these unprecedented times.

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