

TESTIMONY TO COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS ON JUNE 22, 2020

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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 Committee for your leadership during this time and in requesting:

1. The Committee include the Arts and Culture communities in their economic support and relief plans and pass legislation to protect our organizations and workers;
2. The Committee acknowledge the ongoing lasting impacts of slavery, 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; and
3. Committee reduces the proposed cuts to the Arts and Culture sector, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led and serving organizations, ensuring that organizations and their arts workers remain necessary workers and community members in New York City.

After this pandemic and the recent national unrest due to the ongoing murders of Black people at the hands of a white supremacist system and those who benefit and uphold it, there is no returning to business as usual. The need and opportunity for funding, legislation, and actionable responses is urgent. Culture is what makes NYC the most important city in the world, and a leading force that has led the city's economic and social recovery in past crises including 9/11. During this crisis, it's been made evident that artists are necessary workers, as dance organizations, artists, dance workers, and educators have remained active providing online dance classes, digital performances, conversations on recovery, developing and providing mental health support, providing recovery and mutual aid support to their neighborhoods, and making all of the countermeasures possible to ensure the ongoing payment and care of their staffs, all while experiencing steep revenue drops. Dance workers and organizations play a significant role in the cultural and social landscape contributing over \$300 million to the NYC economy and employing thousands of workers; however, the crisis has increased the likelihood of many organizations having to shut down completely for failure to pay rent and pay their workers especially now as full use of PPP, and PUA funding has expended made and possibilities for engaging audiences, one of the primary forms of revenue for dance related nonprofits, remains limited. Similarly, we are at risk of losing dance workers who have had to relocate recently due to the severe affordability crisis artists and arts workers are facing.

Dance/NYC has undertaken unplanned comprehensive research on the impact this moment is having on the dance sector, all while providing nearly \$1 million in relief support to individual freelance dance workers and organizations, providing digital content and continuing to advocate for the dance sector at the City, State, and Federal level. To date the findings reveal that the losses are devastating: Individual dance workers report a cumulative loss of at least \$4.2M and dance related organizations a loss that exceeds \$22 Million. The highest areas of need include rent, food, and groceries, and cleaning supplies. The research highlights that 7% of respondents have recently relocated, with most leaving the City to stay with family to "escape the virus," and due to the overwhelming difficulties they are experiencing in accessing unemployment benefits and aid and inability to pay rent, particularly our freelance dance workforce. These concerns are further exacerbated as multi-system failures come to light during this moment.

For example, defunding the police and funding social services, passing housing and healthcare reform, and ensuring Black and POC- led organizations continue to thrive are all important for the survival of artists, arts workers, the cultural life of NYC and are steps towards the envisioning of what anti-racist systemic reform could look like. Furthermore, the recent budget cuts to Arts and Culture reflect real life changes for arts workers. In NYC the majority of dance company's make a huge portion of their revenue from teaching through the: Department of Education, community centers, or after school programs. When this City and State funding is taken away from their budgets, it sets a precedent on the value and existence artists will have post-COVID.

All of these issues are inherently connected to the Black Lives Matter call to action. White supremacy continuously manifests itself in violence at the hands of law enforcement and in interpersonal interactions, our government's response to COVID-19, and our cultural institutions. A step towards reparations is defunding the police by \$1 billion and funding equitable opportunities aimed at creating accountability and dismantling white supremacy in arts and culture and amplifying the voices and autonomy of the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community. There is no going back to life pre-COVID. We all hold a responsibility to dismantle white supremacy in all the ways it manifests at our cultural institutions, policies, funding, and interpersonal interactions and envisioning justice. We are in a crisis and need continued support now.

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

1. Maintain levels of funding for dance organizations who are most severely impacted by the COVID-19, unemployment, and the 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.
2. Include BIPOC 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 by providing them living wages and health care.
3. Establish structures and best practices for funding organizations rooted in equity, ensuring culturally specific groups, and smaller organizations are not left out of relief support, particularly those led and historically serving BIPOC communities. It's time for NYC government to address its historic debt to Black and Indigenous communities.
4. 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.

Community and culture are inextricably linked; and the planning and execution of racial justice work requires all hands on deck. 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 City is facing a crushing budget deficit, and that our entire City is facing enormous hardship; however, we believe that together, we can navigate this moment and ensure our united survival. We thank the Committee 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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[< back](#)

[previous listing](#) • [next listing](#)