

TESTIMONY TO CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION HEARING

Friday, June 14, 2024

Testimony to City Council Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection Hearing

By Dance/NYC

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Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC ([Dance.NYC](https://www.dance.nyc.org/)), a service organization that reaches over 6,000 individual dance artists, 1,700 dance entities, and the many for-profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area. Its areas of service are of special benefit to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color), immigrant, disabled, low-income, and small-budget dance workers. Through its action-oriented research and advocacy, Dance/NYC seeks to represent and advance the interests of the dance field. It embeds the values of justice, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of its operations and frames the following requests through the lens of those values.

Dance/NYC urges you to pass the Fairness in Apartment Rental Expenses (FARE) Act Ending forced broker fees is vital to ensuring that dance workers, and New Yorkers as a whole, are able to live and prosper in New York City.

Dance and cultural workers are a part of New York City's working class. Our constituents, in addition to shaping the lively cultural and tourism landscape of our city, are educators, healthcare workers, food service workers, hospitality workers, and more.¹ Like much of our city's working class, dance workers are struggling under the conditions of the current housing crisis. Based on Dance/NYC's most recent 2023 report, average dance worker wages sit 15% below the New York City living wage. Dancers and choreographers, on average, earn just \$23,000 a year from dance, and \$39,500 total. Immigrant and transgender/gender-expansive (TGE) dance workers earn even less. The median asking rent for a New York City apartment in 2023 was \$3,500²-- this is 82% more than the average dancer's monthly pre-tax income from dance, and \$210 more than the average dancer's total pre-tax income from all sources. When a household would have to earn \$140,000 to not be rent-burdened-- that's three and a half times more than dancers earn from all income streams-- it is clear that dance workers are struggling to afford the city they call home.

This affordability crisis comes to a peak when dance workers move. Dance/NYC's 2021 survey found that 29% of New York City dance workers needed additional funds for housing and 45% needed funds for groceries³. This makes dance workers vulnerable to sudden moves when rents rise or life circumstances change. When these moves happen, the high burden of paying rent, a security deposit, and a hefty broker fee on top of that is simply untenable. For many, this means taking money out of savings. As 62% of artists in New York State have no emergency savings⁴, arts and cultural workers are left with very few options. Many are faced with the prospects of either living in unsafe and unstable housing, or leaving the city altogether.

Dance and cultural workers want to live and stay in New York. Our city is a major cultural capital of the world, with the dance industry alone contributing an estimated \$300 million⁵ annually to the local economy. The arts and culture sector is the number one driver of tourism to the city and accounts for nearly 13% of New York City's total economic output⁶. It is clear that dance and other low-wage workers make New York City what it is. But rising rents and high moving costs are displacing everyday New Yorkers and fundamentally changing the important cultural landscape of the city. We need urgent action on housing to protect low-wage workers as well as our city's status as an arts and culture haven.

By eliminating forced broker fees, the FARE Act can intervene at a crucial moment of instability in tenants' lives. When landlords hire brokers, tenants should not have to be the ones to pay. Lifting this burden increases fairness and transparency, boosting affordability and allowing cultural and other low-wage workers to stay in the city. By passing the FARE Act, the Council has the opportunity to uplift tenants and workers, building a city that is affordable, safe, and culturally inclusive for all. We thank you for considering the needs of our constituents as you move forward.

¹ State of NYC Dance 2023: Findings from the Dance Industry Census. https://hub.dance.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/State-of-NYC-Dance-2023-Report-FINAL-23_12_11_ACC.pdf

² Office of the New York City Comptroller (2024). Spotlight: New York City's Rental Housing Market. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/spotlight-new-york-citys-rental-housing-market/>

³ Dance/NYC Data on Independent Dance Workers 2021. <https://www.dance.nyc/covid-19/Impact-Survey/IndependentDanceWorkerData>

⁴ Creatives Rebuild New York: Portrait of New York State Artists <https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/2024/05/30/portrait-of-ny-state-artists/>

⁵ State of NYC Dance 2016 & Workforce Demographics 2016. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/State%20of%20NYC%20Dance%20and%20Workforce%20Demographics%20Online%20Version.pdf>

⁶ Office of the New York City Comptroller (2019). The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>