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Friday, March 11, 2022

Testimony to the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations preliminary budget hearing

By Dance/NYC

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Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC (dance.nyc), a service organization that reaches over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, 500 non-profit dance companies, 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. Dance/NYC is the only service organization for the dance sector in the metropolitan NYC area, and its action-oriented research and advocacy seek 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 joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking you for your leadership and requesting:

1. The restoration of the FY2022 PEG cut to the Cultural Development Fund and \$35 million in FY22 funding to the Department of Cultural Affairs;
2. The establishment of a \$15 million Cultural Equity Fund within DCLA to advance equity across its programs and expand the Cultural Institutions Group;
3. \$780 million in total allocations for arts education through the Department of Education and Office of Arts and Special Projects, with a specific focus on equity;
4. \$100 million to support BIPOC-led and -serving cultural entities and address gaps in cultural equity through a Citywide Percent for Art initiative; and
5. The ongoing prioritization of all new and existing funding programs for small budget arts and cultural organizations—inclusive of profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and sole proprietorships—led by and primarily serving historically marginalized and underserved communities experiencing the highest levels of impact from the pandemic.

The City's budget represents far more than a financial statement; it is a social contract that articulates to the public the values that the Council and administration place on specific constituencies and communities, including industries and workers. The growth and resilience of the cultural sector has long been impeded by historic underinvestment and underrepresentation in policymaking by the city government and agencies. Dance is consistently the least funded of all the performing arts, and dance workers face additional barriers to economic viability due to low levels of unionization in the field and a corresponding lack of wage standards and labor protections. Dance workers are a necessary and vital part of the City's social and economic fabric: dance workers are neighbors, parents, educators, service providers, and community leaders whose work deserves increased visibility and sustained, long-term investments.

Historically underinvested communities, including BIPOC, disabled people, and immigrants, face persistent systemic barriers that have long perpetuated patterns of inequity in the field. Arts workers and small budget organizations led by and serving these communities face a lack of access to funding at the governmental and philanthropic levels. These barriers translate to gaps in representation in the organizations and businesses that make up and serve the dance sector, due in part to barriers to accessing the training and resources needed to integrate into the workforce pipeline. Low wages within the sector can also be a deterrent for historically marginalized workers to remain employed sustainably in the field, particularly in small budget organizations that operate within their communities. Taken together, these factors demonstrate to BIPOC, disabled, and immigrant arts workers that their work is undervalued and unsustainable, when the truth is that their work is essential. These systemic obstacles point to the overall impact of white supremacist structural perpetuation of longstanding, intentional underinvestment, extraction, and inequity that negatively impacts disinvested communities, workers, and businesses. In order to move the dance field and the cultural sector as a whole from an economics of survival into a new era of thriving, the City must prioritize proportional investments in the sector to reflect its substantial economic contributions. These include:

- \$110 billion in economic activity generated by the creative sector, comprising nearly 13% of the city's total economic output;¹
- \$300 million contributed annually by the dance industry, not including fiscally sponsored organizations, for profit enterprises, sole proprietorships, and individual dance workers;
- \$1.6 billion generated by the expenditures of cultural tourists and the proceeds of touring companies as the number one driver of tourism to the City;²
- 293,000 people employed and \$30.4 billion in wages paid, of which over 62,000 workers are self-employed;³
- Over 1,000 theaters, venues, dance companies, and musical groups employing over 16,000 workers and paying over \$1 billion in total compensation; and
- Interconnection with other industries and local economies: The average arts attendee spends approximately \$31.47 per person per event beyond the cost of admission on meals, retail, parking, lodging, local transportation, childcare, and souvenirs.⁴

These findings clearly indicate the scope of the cultural sector's direct economic impact and demonstrate the scope of support that the City must provide to correspond to the cultural sector's economic production.

Contributions of the cultural sector are essential to the City's overall economic health, and the losses during the pandemic have been and remain devastating. Due to the pandemic:

- Cultural organizations have accrued losses of over \$6.8 billion;⁵
- 95% canceled programming, 88% modified the delivery of their programs, and 11% had to stop providing products or services to their communities; and
- Dance organization, group, and project budgets shrunk by 31%, with the smallest organizations losing an average of 52%⁶ and
- Dance/NYC recognizes at least 26 organizations and facilities that have permanently closed their doors due to the pandemic; the majority of which includes studio facilities which are primarily small businesses and beacons in their communities.

These findings demonstrate the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on small-budget groups and individual dance makers, which make up the majority of the dance sector and have historically lacked access to resources and support. These challenges to organizational stability put dance workers and the creative sector as a whole at risk of losing capacity to provide programming and services to their communities and contribute to the City's economy.

Arts workers, who are often independent contractors, entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, and small business owner-operators, remain among the most severely affected segment of the nation's workforce by the COVID-19 pandemic. Long-term factors that have led to this impact include:

- High rates of self-employment and part-time employment;
- Irregular income streams; and
- Lack of access to worker benefits and union labor protections.

The effects of the pandemic and the ongoing affordability crisis is manifesting in a migration of arts workers from urban centers such as New York City. As of late 2020:

- 5% of the dance workforce had relocated permanently
- 17% were considering permanent relocation
- 43% considering long-term career options outside of dance.
- Nearly 50% of dance workers reported being unemployed, with 70% struggling to meet basic needs, such as food and housing, and 44% unable to access needed medical or mental health services.⁷

This data demonstrates distressing evidence that dance workers themselves lack confidence in the economic viability of their work. Additionally, these impacts to organizations and individuals are felt most acutely by those who identify as BIPOC, immigrants, disabled, and with other communities with less access to capital reserves, which in turn stands to exacerbate historical inequities in the field.

The Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) is the only City agency dedicated to supporting arts and culture. The restoration of the PEG cuts to DCLA programs and \$35 million in agency funding from FY22 would bolster DCLA's capacity to provide grants to organizations for operations and capital investments and put individual arts workers back to work through grants, employment programs, and placements within other City agencies. DCLA programs such as the Cultural Development Fund, Coalition of Theatres of Color Initiative, Cultural Immigrant Initiative, CASA and SU-CASA have served as lifelines for arts and cultural organizations and individual creative workers to sustain their work and deepen their engagement with communities. In FY22, the Cultural Development Fund provided \$51.4 million in funding to 1,022 organizations⁸ and the City Artist Corps program, a relief program through the Mayor's office, distributed \$25 million to 3,000 independent arts workers. Many City Artist Corps grantees were Dance/NYC constituents for whom the grants had immediate tangible impact on the sustainability of their artistic practice, financial viability, and personal well-being.⁹ Funding for DCLA must be proportional to the economic impact of the arts and cultural sector and reflect the need for adequate agency staffing to provide programs, resources, and technical assistance to the sector, with a focus on general operating support and direct support to individual workers.

The establishment of a \$15 million Cultural Equity Fund within DCLA can advance equity by securing dedicated baseline support for BIPOC-led and -serving organizations to overcome historic disinvestment and cultivate sustainable growth. As the sector continues to recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic, it is crucial that the FY23 DCLA budget reflects the ongoing needs of organizations and workers in order for the sector to thrive. There is still work to be done to make DCLA's programs accessible to the smallest, hardest-hit businesses that lack administrative and technical capacity to apply and comply with program requirements. This is particularly true for BIPOC-led and -serving organizations that suffer from historic underinvestment and lack of access to generational wealth and resources. Across its program areas, DCLA can advance equity and access through programmatic changes to application processes and fund distribution, such as increasing minimum award levels and disbursing grants in multi-year cycles to provide stability and reduce administrative burden on small BIPOC-led and -serving organizations and individual arts workers. Crucially, the provision of general operating support for cultural organizations can allow organizations the space to augment their programming and ensure the provision of living wages for their workers.

In addition to expanded access to DCLA's funding programs, the expansion of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) to include more BIPOC-led entities can initiate and support greater agency and representation for BIPOC stewardship of City-owned facilities and parkland. The CIG empowers organizations to steward city land and property, provide stable employment to community members, contribute meaningfully to the local economy by driving revenue to community businesses, and improve overall quality of life by revitalizing and enriching neighborhoods. Expanding BIPOC access to property ownership, land stewardship, and reparations can open opportunities for BIPOC-led organizations to expand capacity to provide sustainable programming from permanent homes anchored within their communities. By privately maintaining public facilities and land, BIPOC-led entities can partner directly with the City to scale up their operations in lasting, meaningful ways. A focus on identifying and investing in facilities and land in BIPOC communities and cultural deserts can ensure equitable distribution of publicly-accessible cultural programming throughout the City.

Alongside DCLA's support of the cultural sector, the Department of Education and its Office of Arts and Special Projects (OASP) funds and administers arts programming and partnerships with community-based arts organizations. A total investment of \$780 million in arts education can ensure that New York City schools lead the way by advancing the arts as a core component of every student's education. This total includes:

- Continue 20% allocation of American Rescue Plan Act Academic Recovery Funding to expand standards-based arts instruction in order to promote academic recovery and social, emotional and academic support for all students, amounting to a ~\$44,000 allocation per school;
- \$115 million increase (total \$180 million) to the Arts Supplemental Funding thru the Fair Student Funding School Allocation Memorandum;
- \$24 million toward Arts Services, including Arts Partnership Grants that provide targeted opportunities for diverse groups of students, with a focus on English Language Learners (ELLs) and Students with Disabilities (SWD);
- \$40 million increase (\$451 million total for personnel) in the training and certification of arts teachers, with a particular focus on engaging BIPOC teachers and hiring certified arts teachers; and

- \$50 million for funding and hiring for the multi-year implementation of the Department of Education Office of Arts & Special Projects Strategic Arts Plan to close the equity gap and address high-quality arts instruction for all students.

Arts education encourages participation and enjoyment of arts and cultural programming, contributes to student well being, and advances essential contributions to the creative economy through arts partnerships. Particularly important during the pandemic, arts education supports social and emotional well being while fostering creativity, critical thinking, team-building, self-reflection, and communication skills.¹⁰ Students are still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic on their learning, and arts education is key to strengthening student well-being and overall academic achievement and must continue through every student's future education. Even as arts instruction continued throughout the pandemic, cuts to arts education budgets have limited schools' capacity to deliver equitable, quality arts education and devastated partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, and funding must be restored and increased to recoup these losses. These pressing issues must remain at the forefront of the OASP's Strategic Arts Plan, with prioritized funding to support and execute the measures required to foster equity in the arts classroom, specifically in neighborhoods hit hardest by the pandemic. Teachers must also be supported with investments in training and certification for arts educators, with a particular focus on engaging BIPOC teachers through programs to encourage teachers to earn their arts content and supplementary certifications. By providing universal access to arts education and championing equity in its planning and execution, the City sends the message that the arts are a viable pathway to success for all students, which supports the cultural diversity of the arts workforce and the economic health of the creative industry.

In addition to the above agency-specific requests, Dance/NYC requests the establishment of a \$100 million fund to establish and administer programs to support BIPOC-led and -serving cultural entities and address gaps in cultural equity through a Citywide Percent for Art initiative. This measure would allocate 1% of the City's total budget toward arts and culture—a nominal ask for a sector that contributes 13% of the City's total economic output.¹¹ The equity gap remains distressingly wide for cultural organizations and workers struggling to survive in an increasingly unaffordable New York City, and this support can enable existing BIPOC-led and -serving organizations, their workers, and communities to thrive in meaningful ways. For cultural organizations specifically, gaining ownership of their facilities and land can provide stability to these organizations and the communities they serve. For BIPOC arts workers, these funds can help them meet the actual costs of living to remain in the City and contribute to the cultural legacies of their communities. A long-term investment from the City would go a long way towards supporting the cultural sector so that its organizations and workers can have the tools and resources they need to be better prepared to survive future pandemics, climate emergencies, and global economic shifts.

As a whole, funding and grant programs administered by the DCLA, Small Business Services, and other City agencies must adapt to the needs of the cultural sector. Across agencies, inclusive funding programs in the form of grants, loans, and emergency relief must prioritize the needs of small budget organizations—inclusive of for profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and sole proprietorships—led by and primarily serving BIPOC, disabled, immigrant, and other historically marginalized and underserved communities. Equity must be at the center of all budget allocations and funding programs in all City agencies. Communities of color, disabled people, and immigrants continue to endure disproportionate economic and social impacts of the pandemic, and individuals and small-budget organizations serving these historically underinvested communities should be prioritized throughout the City's programs to support arts and culture.

Dance/NYC joins the arts and cultural sector in asking for the City to ensure the vitality and sustainability of its industry and workers. Arts and culture can lead the City's recovery and these investments can help ensure the sector's continued resilience, growth, and long-term survival.

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

1. The restoration of the FY2022 PEG cut to the Cultural Development Fund and \$35 million in FY22 funding to the Department of Cultural Affairs;
2. The establishment of a \$15 million Cultural Equity Fund within DCLA to advance equity across its programs and expand the Cultural Institutions Group;
3. \$780 million in total allocations for arts education through the Department of Education and Office of Arts and Special Projects, with a specific focus on equity;
4. \$100 million to support BIPOC-led and -serving cultural entities and address gaps in cultural equity through a Citywide Percent for Art initiative; and
5. The ongoing prioritization of all new and existing funding programs for small budget arts and cultural organizations—inclusive of profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and sole proprietorships—led by and primarily serving historically marginalized and underserved communities experiencing the highest levels of impact from the pandemic.

The above measures stand to support arts and culture as an essential driver of New York City's economic health and cultural vibrancy. Dance/NYC expresses gratitude to the City officials and other dedicated workers who have contributed to the recovery of the arts and cultural sector. Now is the time to act so that arts and cultural institutions, organizations, and workers continue to thrive for years to come. Dance/NYC thanks you for your consideration and commends your leadership and ongoing efforts to ensure that New York remains a capital for arts and culture.

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Footnotes

¹ Office of the New York City Comptroller. The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City. 2019. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>

² Americans for the Arts. The Arts As an Industry: Their Economic Importance to the New York-New Jersey Metropolitan Region. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/the-arts-as-an-industry-their-economic-importance-to-the-new-york-new-jersey-metropolitan-region-0>

³ Office of the New York City Comptroller. The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City. 2019. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>

⁴ Americans for the Arts. Arts and Economic Prosperity 5. https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/aep5/PDF_Files/ARTS_AEPsummary_loRes.pdf

⁵ SMU Data Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs' COVID-19 Impact on Nonprofit Arts and Culture in New York City. <https://culturaldata.org/pages/covid-19-impact-on-nonprofit-arts-and-culture-in-new-york-city/>

⁶ Dance/NYC. Coronavirus Dance Impact Study Informational Brief. 2021. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/Covid-Impact-Study-Brief-210316.pdf>

⁷ Dance/NYC. Coronavirus Dance Impact Study Informational Brief. 2021. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/Covid-Impact-Study-Brief-210316.pdf>

⁸ Department of Cultural Affairs press release, December 9, 2021. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/about/pressrelease/PR-2021-12-09-DCLA-CDF-FY22-Announcement.page>

⁹ Department of Cultural Affairs press release, August 27, 2021. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/about/pressrelease/PR-2021-08-27-CAC-Awards.page>

¹⁰ Department of Cultural Affairs press release, August 27, 2021. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/about/pressrelease/PR-2021-08-27-CAC-Awards.page>

¹¹ Office of the New York City Comptroller. The Creative Economy: Art, Culture and Creativity in New York City. 2019. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-creative-economy/>

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