



Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
May 21, 2020
Committee on Finance

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the chair, Council Member Daniel Dromm of the Finance Committee for hosting this hearing. The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and will continue to have, a profound effect on New York City's arts and cultural communities. Our city relies on these institutions for our economic, educational, and community needs. While we may be able to quantify effects such as the boost in tourism we get from these institutions, and the hundreds of thousands of jobs they create and sustain, their impact goes far beyond our economy. The arts and cultural communities also play a significant role in boosting our spiritual needs by touching us in ways that improve our mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and stress. Further, they improve student academic performance by promoting self-confidence, diversity, and tolerance.

According to the New York City Comptroller, in 2019, nearly 300,000 people were employed in arts and culture jobs, representing \$30.4 billion in wages. The arts and culture sector contributed more than \$100 billion to our economy, representing 13 percent of the City's total economic output. It is imperative that we create a sustainability plan to assist our arts organizations as much as possible. Specifically, I am asking you to encourage the Federal government, and our philanthropic partners, to step in and help immediately, as many organizations are laying off staff, are unable to pay rent, and some are about to close their doors, possibly for good.

Each day, I am contacted by our Brooklyn cultural institutions pleading for intervention and support. I understand that New York City has limited dollars because of this crisis and, as Brooklyn's borough president, I have allocated \$32.3 million of capital funding to various arts and culture projects in Fiscal Years 2015-2020 (FY15/FY20), but now more than ever, we must ensure that our cultural institutions remain intact, as they contribute greatly to the fabric of our city. Every one of our smaller independent theaters, museums, performance venues, and arts education organizations and programs are facing the threat of insolvency without some form of intervention.

Our city is world-renowned for being a cultural melting pot. From Broadway, to off-Broadway, to off-off Broadway, and around the five boroughs, theatre and performing arts lend our city a vibrancy that is hard to find anywhere else on earth.

Recently, I wrote to the Mayor on this issue, requesting a briefing on his administration's plans to help ensure that these vital institutions will not disappear. Now I am putting the same question to you: How is this Council planning to protect the viability of these institutions? As elected representatives, we must do all in our power to provide a lifeline to our arts institutions and the thousands whose careers and livelihoods are centered in our arts and cultural institutions. I look forward to working with you all on this important effort.

Thank you.