



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT  
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**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Group Relations  
Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 8, 2022**

Good afternoon, and thank you to the City Council and Chair Chi Ossé for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I am Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, and I am here to ask the Mayor and the Council to support the cultural institutions that serve a vital role in our communities and to ask that you consider equity in these funding allocations.

Though all the city's cultural institutions provide critical arts, cultural, and historical education and programming, not all of these cultural institutions are created equal. The pandemic hasn't been easy on any institution. Yet the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan has a \$3.3 billion endowment, and even as the pandemic raged, had \$50 million set aside to purchase art. Meanwhile, Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, which celebrates one of the largest free Black communities in pre-Civil War America, was struggling just to keep its doors open.

Now, Weeksville is part of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), along with five other amazing cultural institutions in Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn Children's Museum, and the New York Aquarium. Of these, the Brooklyn Museum has the largest endowment, which even before the pandemic was only about 5% of the Met's. Today I ask that the Council work with the Mayor to restore all proposed cuts to the CIGs, and that DCLA develop an methodology for allocating these funds equitably that considers not only organization size, but also populations served.

I also want to call your attention to a recent report from HueArts NYC, which researched the impacts and needs of arts organizations in NYC led by people of color. In contrast to the larger CIGs, these small organizations tend to have less stable funding sources, and they often rely on DCLA's Cultural Development Fund (CDF). HueArts NYC found that these small, POC-run organizations often provide much more than just arts programming in communities of color, for example, many have pivoted to community service during the pandemic. Additionally, these organizations often lack stable space, face chronic underinvestment, and are less able to call upon individual donors for support due to the lack of disposable income in communities of color. Meanwhile, there is a lack of transparency in the allocation of CDF funding, and no clear priority placed on addressing these disparities.

Even with the supposed “one-time” supplemental funding allocation made last fiscal year, DCLA’s budget still represents less than 1% of the City’s total budget. And yet, now cuts are being proposed, cuts our communities simply cannot afford.

So, I am calling on the Mayor to not only restore the proposed cuts and add new funding to our cultural institutions, but also to implement new systems to ensure that arts and cultural funding is allocated equitably and with transparency. The City doesn’t need to give an organization with a \$3.3 billion endowment and billionaires on its board more money. It does need to lift up organizations that share the history of communities of color, educate Black and Brown youth, and serve as community anchors in underinvested neighborhoods. Thank you, and I look forward to working on this alongside DCLA, Mayor Adams, and Chair Ossé.