



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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**City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries,  
and International Intergroup Relations  
Testimony on the FY24 Preliminary Budget 3.20.23**

Good afternoon and thank you to the City Council and Chair Ossé for holding this hearing today. I want to focus my testimony on three issues: libraries, Cultural Development Fund allocations, and the capital budget.

I want to start by being absolutely clear: the proposed cuts to our city's libraries are unacceptable. I understand that our financial future is currently precarious, and that some belt tightening may be necessary. However, cutting essential services that serve all New Yorkers, including our most vulnerable populations, in their communities is not the answer. Here is a list of FREE services that the Brooklyn Public Library provides, in addition to lending out books:

- Programs to promote early childhood literacy, including virtual and in-person storytime
- A 24/7 writing lab for students
- Live tutoring sessions and practice tests, including SAT prep
- Citizenship exam coaching and legal services for immigrants
- A safe space for teens to do homework and socialize
- Language classes and conversation groups
- Resume building, career coaching, and business development resources
- Skills courses in everything from crafting to podcasting
- Financial coaching and tax help
- Jail-based services for incarcerated individuals, and connections to re-entry services for the formerly incarcerated
- Emergency resources, such as providing test kits, PPE, and critical information during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Technology assistance and health resources for older adults
- Lending laptops and wi-fi hotspots, vinyl records, board games, telescopes, and musical instruments
- Virtual and in-person lectures, book talks, cultural performances, and historical programming

I could go on, but we'd be here all day. Yet the administration wants to cut \$8 million from BPL's budget over the next four years, which their CEO has said would mean, "agonizing choices about shortening hours, cutting programs and collections, and rolling back services." We

cannot in good conscience allow this to happen, especially with the NYPD on track to charge our city over \$800 million in overtime in this fiscal year.

Next, I want to address how DCLA prioritizes its allocations for the Cultural Development Fund. Last year in my testimony, I encouraged the agency to develop an equitable methodology that considers both organization size and populations served. While I know DCLA has taken steps toward this goal, last year's allocations have left many cultural organizations scrambling. Advocates A.R.T. New York conducted a survey of the groups they support, and found that the FY23 awards led to significant confusion and stress, especially among mid-sized organizations. According to their survey:

- 50% of respondents had their budgets cut, including 11% that were entirely defunded.
- These cuts disproportionately impacted organizations focused on arts education, presentation, and service; as well as more broadly, dance and theater production groups.
- While 90% of large organizations (budgets over \$10m) did receive funding, 88% of mid-sized organizations (budgets of \$500k-\$1m) also received reduced funding, while only about 45% of smaller organizations (budgets of \$50-99k and \$100-249k) received increases.

In short, the updated methodology deeply impacted many organizations, especially mid-sized ones. This added further stress to groups that were already struggling due to the pandemic. I would like to see more transparency around DCLA's allocation decisions and ensure that struggling institutions are made whole before it's too late.

Finally, I want to address DCLA's capital budget. One of my main priorities as Borough President is to help our borough's public-serving non-profit organizations find permanent homes. Being at the mercy of a private landlord in our competitive real estate market can make long-term planning difficult. These groups should be focusing on their work, not worrying about losing their space. That is why it is extremely disappointing that DCLA does not facilitate property acquisition with its capital dollars. My understanding of the reason for this is that DCLA does not have the resources it needs to manage a complicated acquisition process. I have substantial capital resources to allocate to Brooklyn, and I want to use it to help groups find permanent spaces. I find it extremely frustrating that I cannot extend this resource to cultural organizations due to this unnecessary limitation. I encourage the Council and administration to work together to address this in FY24.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to working with you to support our borough's libraries and cultural organizations as they continue to navigate uncertain times.