



**New York City Council
Committee on Finance &
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

Oversight Hearing: Fiscal Year 2027 DCLA Executive Budget

Tuesday, May 26, 2:00PM - Council Chambers - City Hall

Testimony Presented by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Diya Vij

Good afternoon, Chair Lee, Deputy Speaker, and members of the committees. I am Diya Vij, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. I am here to testify today in regards to the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget for DCLA.

Even amidst a major financial crisis facing New York City, I am very proud that our budget includes a \$10 million increase to the agency baseline from Mayor Mamdani. As the federal government attacks our sector and other funding sources contract, a sadly common trend is to cut arts and culture first when times get tough politically and economically. We are doing the exact opposite here. A budget is a statement of values and this investment shows that Mayor Mamdani and this administration understand that a vibrant and accessible cultural life is critical to the wellbeing of all New Yorkers.

For context, for a full decade from FY15 to FY25, there was no change to DCLA's baseline funding for the 1,000+ groups receiving support through the CDF and CIG. This new \$10 million in baseline means more stable, long-term funding for the 1,000+ organizations who rely on DCLA funding to deliver incredible cultural programming for all New Yorkers. I'm grateful to our partners in the Mayor's Office and OMB for making it possible.

Now, I'll review the numbers. Mayor Mamdani's proposed budget allocates a total of \$239.3 million for DCLA in FY27. This includes:

- \$57 million for the Cultural Development Fund;
- \$104.4 million for Cultural Institutions Group operating subsidies;
- \$68.8 million for energy costs at groups on DCLA property;
- \$1.17 million for CreateNYC initiatives; and
- \$7.9 million for agency staff and operations.

Note that these figures do not include one-time additions typically added at budget adoption, such as City Council member items and initiatives. Council initiatives like the Cultural Afterschool Adventures, SU-CASA, and the Coalition of Theatres of Color provide critical support for programs that reach New Yorkers in every Council district, and we're honored to administer this support in partnership with you.

At this same point in the budget process last year, the executive budget allocated \$214.7 million for DCLA – about \$25 million less than the Mayor's proposed FY27 budget. We recognize that this is a moment of precarity for our cultural institutions, and for the residents they serve. This budget is

also a recognition of rising costs of doing business and the impact of the affordability crisis on our sector. And it demonstrates the administration's priorities, even through a difficult budget year. This is part of looking at our sector through an economic justice lens, ensuring that all New Yorkers have the time and resources to enjoy a full and vibrant life, which includes experiencing the joy, community, imagination, curiosity, and wonder that arts and culture affords. This baseline add shows our commitment to be a solid, stable partner for the entire ecosystem – for large and small organizations alike. I believe, this diversity of scale, discipline, and geography of our cultural organizations keeps the density of cultural life that New York City is globally recognized for, and which wouldn't be possible without our robust public funding to support it. We look forward to working with the Council toward adopting a budget that continues to build on this strong foundation of support.

As part of the citywide saving initiative, DCLA identified \$2.9 million in savings. This included a vacancy reduction of \$300K, and reduction of \$2.6 million in funding held in reserve due to volatility at the federal level and the city's challenging fiscal outlook. But thanks to smart budgeting and better-than-expected fiscal outlook, we're preparing to distribute \$2.4 million in supplemental funding to both CIG and CDF recipients for FY26. The vacancy reduction savings are also paired with a lifting of the hiring freeze, which means that we are moving ahead with filling five vacant positions across the agency. This will make a major difference for our lean agency, and I'm grateful for OMB's partnership in making sure we have the staff needed to deliver for our constituents. And the \$2.6 million in savings for FY26 was a one-time reduction. This means our baseline was not reduced in the out years - as I've mentioned, it was increased by \$10 million, a huge boost for the field at large.

While FY27 Capital additions are not included in the budget until adoption, I would like to share an update on the process where it stands. This year, DCLA received capital funding requests from 97 organizations for 110 projects totaling \$651 million. The DCLA capital team is currently reviewing requests. Capital requests are often made after collaborative dialogue between the organization and DCLA's Capital team to ensure better outcomes for the organizations. As you know, the Council and the Borough Presidents are crucial partners on making targeted capital investments in our cultural sector. We will have workshops in July for organizations that receive funding. I appreciate the hearing that Deputy Speaker Williams recently held on cultural capital construction projects, which has accelerated the dialogue between DCLA, DDC, and your office to prioritize ways we can improve the capital funding and construction process to deliver these essential projects better and faster. DDC Commissioner Ochoa and I are working to convene a roundtable with cultural organizations, our respective teams, and Deputy Speaker Williams in the near future to continue to listen to the issues and find solutions. I believe this would be the first time our agencies have held this type of dialogue, and I look forward to continuing this interagency partnership inclusive of those receiving our services.

I'll now turn to agency programs and operations that make distributing this funding possible. For the FY27 Cultural Development Fund, I'm pleased to report that panels officially began last week. From now through September, our Programs team will convene 44 peer panels with 220 panelists from across the cultural field to review a total of 775 applications for grant support. We have an additional 689 organizations that will be in a renewal cycle. More than 175 of this year's applicants were new to the process or had not applied in recent years. We appreciate the Council's partnership in sharing this funding opportunity with your constituents. Together, we can make sure that CDF funding reaches every corner of our city and supports first-time applicants and emerging organizations, which is critical to elevating new voices, reaching new audiences, and building the field of tomorrow.

I understand my mandate as DCLA Commissioner is to address the affordability crisis for our sector in ways both visionary and operational. The CDF payment delays from the previous administration have had a significant negative impact on the field. In FY24, CDF notifications weren't sent until February of that year – over halfway through the fiscal year. For FY26, CDF notifications were sent in mid-December. I am pleased to report that we are on track to get CDF award notifications several weeks earlier this year. By the FY28 cycle, we are working toward a notification date even earlier in the fall, more in line with historical timelines. The earlier groups get their award notifications and receive initial payments, the earlier they begin to plan and pay for their programs and operations. It also prevents them from having to take out bridge loans to support programs that take place earlier in the year. This administration is committed to delivering excellence in our city's public services, and advancing these timelines is one key way DCLA can do that for our constituents.

The CDF also includes support for our partners in the borough arts councils, which distribute city funding to individual artists and grassroots organizations on our behalf. In recent weeks, I've participated in three of the arts council grantee celebrations, giving me a chance to meet the artists and arts workers who rely on this support to maintain their art practice and public offerings.

In FY26, we provided \$3.4 million for the councils to distribute, reaching nearly 700 working artists across the city. This year marks DCLA's 50th anniversary as a standalone city agency, and the relationships with the arts councils stretch back to the very beginning of our work. As commissioner, I am deeply committed to these historic partnerships and am working with the arts councils to deepen our support for New York City artists to make it more possible for them to live and make work in the city they love.

The FY27 budget also includes funding for CreateNYC initiatives, which provides support for, among other things, the CUNY Cultural Corps workforce development program. This fall will mark the tenth anniversary of the program, which this year placed 151 students in paid internships with dozens of cultural partners across the city. As we know, CUNY students represent the breadth of New Yorkers. This program creates a vital pipeline for CUNY students to enter careers in arts and culture, at no cost to cultural groups.

The Public Artists in Residence – or PAIR – program also comes out of CreateNYC. I am proud to have launched and directed this program just over a decade ago under then Commissioner Finkelppearl. PAIR embeds artists in city agencies, where they're invited to use their practice in service of seeding creative bureaucracy to reenvision how the city serves and communicates with its residents, and in turn how residents can activate their civic imaginations to build a city that holds all of us with care. One of our current PAIRs, Singha Hon, recently installed a mural called "From Root to Bloom" in Harlem's Marcus Garvey Park. Growing from her tenure as PAIR with the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice, the mural traces the history of movements for racial justice whose work we continue to build on today. PAIR artist Caitlyn McCain, in residence with the Commission on Human Rights, is working on Know Your Rights live performances and videos for housing tenants to uplift the NYC Fair Chance Housing Law, which prohibits housing discrimination for people with criminal records.

Our public art team has made major progress on commissioning a permanent, public artwork honoring the great Billie Holiday on the grounds of the Jamaica Performing Arts Center in Queens. Last week, we released six very different proposals from a fantastic group of artists sharing their visions for what this monument can look like. We're collecting feedback from New Yorkers on the

six proposals, which are also on display at JPAC through the end of this week. You can visit our website for more information and to share your thoughts on the proposed designs. We thank the Deputy Speaker for her ongoing partnership on this exciting project in her district.

Last, and certainly not least, Materials for the Arts in Long Island City, our beloved material reuse program, has had a record-setting year for donations which are, as you know, provided free of charge to arts groups and public schools across the city. Over the last 12 months, MFTA has collected 3.4 million pounds in donated materials, valued at a total of \$16.6 million. These items are essential to the bottom lines of MFTA's member organizations. Last fiscal year, 2,500 active members received an average of \$6,800 worth of supplies, completely free of charge – a huge boost to schools and organizations dedicated to providing affordable, accessible arts programming. Recent donations include a beautiful set of instruments provided to a Queens high school; the Central Park Zoo received palm trees and tropical plants from the Javits Center; a sewing machine was donated to the Latin American Art Triennial; and designer suits from a Netflix production went to a nonprofit helping residents prepare for job interviews. Added up across the city, each of these donations means items that found a new life outside the landfill, and an organization that was able to sustain or level up its programming – all at no cost.

In just a few weeks, the World Cup will come to our region, and we are thrilled to see the way that our cultural sector is working to make this a citywide event that can welcome every New Yorker into the excitement - whether they're soccer fans or not. Announced earlier this month by Mayor Mamdani, the NYC Neighborhood Passport is one way that the city is highlighting this programming. The citywide passport program will encourage people to explore New York City's immigrant communities, cultural institutions, small businesses, and community events throughout the tournament. Beginning June 11, the passport will be available at every public library branch in the city and at certain events. Participants will be able to collect stamps from hundreds of cultural institutions, community organizations and public events. Dozens of DCLA grantees will be featured, and I encourage everyone to sign up.

I'm just over two months into the job, but I have been energized by the level of enthusiasm and eagerness to collaborate on some of the existential challenges our cultural sector faces – most urgently, a troubling national political climate and the affordability crisis we're collectively facing. I appreciate the Council – in particular, Chair Williams – for joining us with a keen interest in listening to our constituents, and finding ways we can make public services work for them. I've been meeting with groups directly, and participating in dialogues and listening sessions around the city, including just this morning at New Federal Theatre, where I met with the Coalition of Theatres of Color. DCLA may be a lean agency – 97% of our agency's budget goes to support the field - but we are part of a powerful network of cultural practitioners who care deeply about artists, audiences, and their role in bringing them together. I believe our ability to meet the challenges of the day and shape a sustainable, equitable, and courageous future requires transparent and ongoing dialogue with artists, cultural workers, cultural organizations, and audiences. Our listening tour will continue, our work and collaboration with the Council will continue – and we look forward to working toward adopting a budget that continues to invest in and support our incredible cultural sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.