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Testimony of Manhattan Borough-President Brad Hoylman-Sigal Before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations on Arts and Cultural Funding in the FY2027 Executive Budget

May 26, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

As Manhattan Borough President, I represent a borough that anchors New York City's cultural economy – from Broadway and Lincoln Center to the Jewish Museum to El Barrio to the Studio Museum in Harlem to the Museum of the Chinese in America. I could go on!

I am here to join the chorus of calls, including from many of my Council colleagues here today, for a \$30 million baselined increase for cultural programming in the Department of Cultural Affairs.

I want to acknowledge real progress in the Mayor's FY27 Executive Budget. DCLA's FY27 budget has been raised to \$239.6 million, an increase of \$23.6 million over the Preliminary Plan. \$10 million of this increase is dedicated to supporting the Cultural Institution Group (CIGs) and Cultural Development Fund (CDF) Organizations. That is an important step, and I thank the Administration for moving in the right direction. But even with that restoration, the FY27 budget still falls \$60 million below the \$299.7 million the Council secured at adoption for FY26. An additional \$20 million increase for cultural programming, completing the Council's and advocates' full \$30 million ask, would give cultural organizations the stable, predictable support they need to plan, hire, and serve their communities.

And the stakes could not be higher. I don't have to tell you that arts, culture, and freedom of expression are under attack.

Already, compared to peer nations, the United States invests significantly less public funding in the arts. In Germany, roughly 80% of arts funding comes from public sources (roughly €174 or \$207 per capita). France spends over €4 billion annually on national cultural subsidies (roughly €58 or \$69 per capita). But U.S. federal arts funding amounts to only around \$4 per capita each year!

To compound this, the Trump administration is dismantling our federal cultural infrastructure, one institution after another. Thousands of previously approved NEA grants have been abruptly canceled. The President's FY26 budget even proposed eliminating the NEA, the NEH, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services outright. He has already signed into law a \$1.1 billion clawback from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, defunding PBS, NPR, and the local public media stations that serve our communities. Trump has installed himself as chairman of the Kennedy Center, and is now reviewing Smithsonian exhibits for ideological compliance, targeting shows on race and American sculpture, and singling out the National Museum of African American History and Culture by name. Just last week, Stephen Colbert aired his last show after CBS pulled the plug days after Colbert criticized his parent company's settlement with the President.

At such a dangerous moment, local government must step up, both as an expression of New York values and as a matter of fiscal self-interest; because what is under attack in Washington happens to be one of this city's most important industries.

The creative sector employs 326,000 New Yorkers, a larger workforce than the finance and insurance sectors combined. It is one of our city's core economic engines and a defining competitive advantage. In fact, the density of artists itself feeds directly back into our economic vitality. It enables a gallery and museum ecosystem to flourish in a way that only a few peer cities can match. Research published just last year shows that authors strongly increase their publication output after moving to New York City *because* of the presence of publishing houses and other authors. The creative sector is the reason talent

moves here, the reason tech giants expand here, and the reason tourists fill our hotels.

And yet, artists are being priced out of our city.

As you are well aware, a recent report from the Center for an Urban Future showed that New York's share of the national creative workforce has fallen from 9.3% to 8.6% since 2019. Adjusted for cost of living, creative workers here earn 23% less than the national average. This is an unsustainable trend; reversing it will require the city's focused attention and investment.

Addressing affordability begins with expanding housing supply, and I commend the Council for advancing legislation to do exactly that. The City must also move proactively to convert underutilized public assets into affordable artist workspace and modernize benefits structures to meet the needs of a growing freelance workforce.

The return on this investment is measurable. Research from the University of Pennsylvania shows that in lower-income neighborhoods, cultural assets correlate with a 14% reduction in child abuse and neglect, an 18% increase in student achievement, and an 18% reduction in serious crime. Cultural infrastructure *IS* civic infrastructure. We must treat it that way.

Beyond the data, there is a stark human reality: in difficult moments, we gather in our theaters, galleries, and museums. They become the safe harbors where movements are born, where communities are built, and where our collective resilience is forged. We need them now more than ever.

That is why this Fiscal Year, I am dedicating the entirety of my FY27 capital funding allotment to affordable and accessible arts and cultural projects.

We are calling this initiative the Manhattan Multiplier for Arts and Culture.

The Manhattan Multiplier will leverage Borough President capital funds with private and philanthropic matches, prioritizing projects that expand access, preserve affordability, and strengthen long-term cultural infrastructure.

The operative question is: how can we turn ~\$50 million of taxpayer dollars into a combined \$75 million with private philanthropy?

But capital alone cannot substitute for operating support. Buildings need programs, and programs need staff. A \$30 million baselined increase for DCLA could be the operating-side companion to the capital investment Manhattan is making.

If New York intends to remain the cultural capital of the world, we must support that culture with commensurate resources and policy.

Thank you for your time and for your stewardship of New York's artistic and cultural legacy.