

New York City's Cultural Plan Oversight Hearing
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Good Afternoon

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Christine Bruno and I am speaking today on behalf of myself as a disabled artist and advocate. I have lived and worked in the City of New York for 21 years. For the past 11 years, I have also served as Disability Advocate for Inclusion in the Arts, the only service organization of its kind in the United States, which advocates for full inclusion of artists of color and disabled artists at all levels of production in theatre, film, television, and related media. As you heard from Commissioner Finkelppearl earlier, I am also honored to be working with the DCLA and Hester Street Collaborative as a Disability Consultant on the development and execution of NYC's first-ever Cultural Plan.

Disability affects all populations regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identification, socio-economic status, and education. Disabled artists and audiences have experienced a long history of exclusion by New York City's cultural institutions and agencies, as evidenced by the conspicuous absence of disability data in the *Diversity in New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Community* study. This, despite the fact that more than 56 million people – that's approximately 20% of the US population, identify as having a disability. More than 800,000 of us live in the city of New York alone. The DCLA's and current administration's commitment to rectifying this systematic exclusion in a meaningful and substantive way so as to effect lasting change in the way our City engages its underrepresented and underserved communities in arts and culture is encouraging. But, as I hope we can all acknowledge, there is much work still to be done, especially with respect to the inclusion and support of disabled artists, disabled culture workers, disability arts, disabled students, and disabled audiences.

Central to my understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion is advancing the message that no discussion of diversity can be truly authentic if disability is not part of every conversation. Expanding upon the concept of "Nothing About Us Without Us," current thought leaders in the disability community have begun to adopt the phrase "Nothing Without Us." Simply put, this means the perspective of disability, articulated by a disabled person, must be present and represented in every conversation and in every environment, whether or not the conversation is "disability-specific." Our trajectory in the arts should be to create a field in which intentional inclusion becomes standard practice for audiences, artists and culture workers. What we see on and behind our stages, in our galleries, in our public art spaces, in our offices, boardrooms and houses must be an accurate and authentic reflection of what we see in our communities.

Through the intentional commitment to equity and inclusion of disability by the DCLA, disability stands to be given consideration and agency across all sectors of arts and culture in New York City for the first time in its history. Disability must play a key role with respect to increased funding and access to funding, as it relates to programming, authentic representation and the establishment of targeted initiatives designed to support disability arts and culture throughout the five boroughs.

I offer the following seven recommendations in support of creating a truly inclusive and equitable Cultural Plan:

1. Commitment to intentional inclusion of disability woven throughout the Cultural Plan;
2. Commitment to including the perspective of disability, articulated by a disabled person, present and represented in every conversation and in every environment, whether or not the conversation is “disability-specific”;
3. Attention to intersectionality with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, gender ID, socio-economic status, education across disability communities;
4. Commitment to the ongoing intentional inclusion of disability within the DCLA staff, programs, initiatives, and all funding opportunities;
5. Commitment to a substantial increase in funding, specifically earmarked for disabled artists and disability arts;
6. Commitment by the DCLA that in order to receive funding, all grantees must submit a comprehensive plan for the intentional inclusion of disability. The plans would be required to extend beyond ADA-compliance to include programming, artistic and administrative staffing, and board composition; and
7. Support by the DCLA and other city agencies for the establishment of a Disability Arts Task Force and a Center for Disability Arts & Culture.

I would like to add that I wholeheartedly support the testimonies of my colleagues from Disability/Arts/NYC Task Force (DANT) and Dance/NYC.

I look forward to New York City earning its place as the center of truly inclusive arts and culture, one that encourages and equitably supports artists, culture workers and audiences from all communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.