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CARIBBEAN AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATRE, INC.

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Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations concerning the Comprehensive Cultural Plan: **Oversight - Cultural Plan - Next Steps**

Caribbean American Repertory Theatre is honored to present testimony on the cultural plan for New York. The mission of our company is to provide Professional Theatre to underserved Black communities in New York and internationally; by creating a culturally artistic arena for theater artists to display their talents and cultural diversity. The company aims to provide a deeper level of the lives of Caribbean, African-American and African people beyond stereotypical images, while fostering a climate of cross-cultural communication and understanding among patrons in the communities we serve. In that light, the company supports the cultural plan. CART feels that the "next steps" of the plan should include support for theaters like ours to engage in more community and International Intergroup Relations with countries that reflect the various cultures represented in our society. CART is based in the community of St. Albans which the New York Times once described as containing the largest population of African-Americans in the borough of Queens. This population has become a multi-cultural society of predominantly, but not exclusively, African-Americans, Caribbean people of African ancestry and Africans from the continent.

Our company recognizes the importance of theatre in our multi-cultural society and would like to take this opportunity to recommend to the Council the importance of cultural exchanges as a means of building the currency of our communication with each other. The youth of our communities need to see the importance of

careers in the arts through being able to experience artists from their cultural background engaging in professional performances. In our multi-cultural communities, it is important for us to see what each society in the network of our cultures has to offer. The experience of theatre works from the Caribbean, Africa and African-American playwrights are teaching moments of the black experience and our various cultural expressions. Such experiences will encourage the community to embrace the value of creativity which is important for careers in both the arts and sciences. Cultural tours and exchanges are important opportunities to enhance cross-cultural communication, and increase economic development. We are therefore recommending that the cultural plan includes opportunities for arts organizations to engage in cultural exchanges through international travel which would increase performance opportunities for artists and patrons in our communities. We need to elevate the borough of Queens as a global destination for creativity, innovation and excellence in the arts. The cultural plan should include partnerships with airlines to enhance cultural tourism since many passengers traveling through the airports stay overnight in Queens.

The young people in our communities need to develop their craft in acting and other theatre skills through the expansion of such arts education programs like the council's Creative After School Adventures (CASA) initiative. Professional development for teaching artists should include support through grants for international outreach. Small theatre companies in the outer boroughs need to participate in organizations-in-residence programs in prisons and other facilities. We need to have a summer theater program of "Free Cultural Classics in the Parks" in Queens, which would reflect the cultural diversity of the borough through the presentation of plays, including Shakespeare, that reflect our multi-cultural communities.

Small theatre companies, like CART, need to benefit from the conversion of underutilized spaces for cultural uses, and the creation of affordable office spaces for cultural organizations in Queens (similar to the South Oxford Space in Brooklyn which is operated by ART/NY). There is a need for a mentorship program among large arts organizations in Manhattan and small cultural organizations in the outer boroughs so that the work of the small theaters could^{be} strengthened through the use of space and collaborations with the larger organizations.