



February 27, 2017

Testimony before the Committee for Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Thank you Chairman and Council members of the Committee for Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. We sincerely appreciate your consideration in inviting us to speak to you today. I am Diane Jacobowitz, Executive/Artistic Director of Dancewave, here today with Development Associate Lily Altreuter to address you on the subject of New York City's Cultural Plan. Dancewave has been on the frontlines of arts and culture in New York City since our inception in 1995, and we attribute much of our success to the support we have received from the distinguished NYC Council members.

Dancewave is the dance education nonprofit that focuses on the development of the whole person through a dance experience accessible to all. We serve over 3,000 students per year through School at Dancewave classes, youth performing companies and ensembles, and in our D-Wave in Motion program which provides free dance residencies to underserved NYC public schools. Over 80% of students who participate in D-Wave in Motion come from low-income backgrounds in underserved communities, and many are English Language Learners from first-generation immigrant families. Dancewave reaches youth in all five boroughs through D-Wave in Motion; this spring alone, we are providing 25 residencies to 14 schools. Thanks to the generous support of Councilman Andrew Cohen in the Bronx and Rafael Espinal in Brooklyn, Dancewave is expanding our scope to include senior citizens. We are planning a Chinese Dance residency at JASA Van Cortlandt Senior Center this spring and at a senior center in Bushwick. We are grateful recipients of CASA and Discretionary support from Councilmembers Steve Levin, Mathieu Eugene, Rafael Espinal, Jumaane Williams and Brad Lander. Funding for the arts is resulting in a better, more well-rounded education for our young people in the public schools. Dancewave is proud to be a dedicated provider of this service to people of all ages. Additionally, we are working with young people on the autism spectrum at AHRC, a public high school based in Bensonhurst that through quality developmentally appropriate instruction provides the foundation for independence, autonomy, and a sense of individual worth. Lastly, Dancewave is very proud to be breaking ground this year on a city-funded capital project. With support from DCLA and DDC, Dancewave is renovating an industrial space in Gowanus to create an arts and culture center, extending the BAM cultural district down 4th Avenue.

New York City is famous for its cultural diversity and vibrant arts community. However, as you all know, the distribution of resources across the five boroughs is vastly unequal. This phenomenon is particularly true with regard to dance; it is an art form that demands a significant investment both in terms of time and money. Thus, it comes as no surprise that people from low-income backgrounds or with little disposable income are all too often locked out of the dance world. People of color, particularly women of color, face a disproportionately greater struggle in the dance world than in any other art form. A recent study conducted by Dance/NYC revealed that 68% of dance professionals (including both artists and administrators) identify as white non-Hispanic, and although the dance workforce is 65% female, only 30% of female dance professionals identify as women of color.



Many large cultural institutions remain inaccessible to an overwhelming majority of people who cannot afford hundreds of dollars for a concert ticket or professional dance school tuition. For many years now, small and mid-size dance organizations like Dancewave have done the lion's share of work towards making dance accessible to all. As the Committee moves forward in creating New York City's Cultural Plan, I urge you to consider the following suggestions:

1. **Create institutional incentives for small and mid-size dance organizations.** Small dance organizations give performance opportunities to emerging artists and prioritize work by people of color, members of the LGBTQ community, immigrants, refugees, and other artists who may not be invited to more established theaters. These artists need a platform to share their work, and the connections forged between individual choreographers and dance organizations and presenters create long-lasting partnerships that launch careers. These partnerships deserve attention, cultivation, and support.
2. **Promote communication between nonprofits and community members in concrete, measurable ways.** Just as elected officials have a duty to their constituents to make themselves available, arts leaders have an obligation to ask the communities they serve what they want and need. This can easily become a measurable metric for success. Ask arts leaders to connect with their communities on a regular basis and make an effort to build those connections outside of their existing network. From these conversations, arts professionals will learn about the myriad of challenges in the journey toward accessible art. When we understand our communities, we can learn to address and overcome these obstacles.
3. **Create opportunities for different age groups and intergenerational arts programming.** Thanks to Mayor de Blasio's push for arts education, many public schools are now gaining access to some kind of arts programming. This is a terrific success that needs to keep growing! According to Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, SU-CASA, the city's funding for arts organizations and senior centers is now the largest creative aging program in the country. I urge you to continue to grow this program and to incorporate and prioritize intergenerational arts programming within the city's Cultural Plan. There are exceptionally few opportunities for middle-aged and senior adult populations. As Dancewave and other dance organizations across the city are slowly beginning to offer more programming for seniors and special needs populations, I encourage the Committee to consider how we can more effectively fill this void.
4. **Allocate space to the arts.** Without a space, the arts cannot thrive. Real estate developers have grown pricey condos on every corner. If we keep pushing artists to the fringe, there will be no art. We need affordable housing for artists and affordable spaces for dance so we can keep living and working in this city. Public buildings and public schools can offer space readily to the arts on weekends and off hours. Why not require a percentage of new construction to allocate public space for dance and the arts? Public school



space permits take months to approve and get caught in bureaucratic webs. If we make the public school permit process easier for arts organizations, public school students will have increased exposure to the arts and a ready example of adults in successful artistic careers.

- 5. Improve access for the next generation of arts professionals.** The arts community is constantly lauded for being diverse, a haven for all kinds of people. However, as long as arts organizations rely on a constantly rotating cast of underpaid interns for their most basic operational and administrative needs, professional positions in the arts will always be held by the same privileged groups. Young people who come from disadvantaged economic backgrounds cannot afford to take on unpaid internships and are thus unlikely to be hired for paid positions in arts administration. I urge the Committee to take this opportunity to support paid internships, particularly in arts organizations. For small to midsize nonprofits without the budget to hire more employees, create funding opportunities or fellowships that support paid internships. The young people nonprofits have served and supported all through childhood are now entering the workforce, and they are no less deserving of our support now as young adults than they were as children.

Once again, thank you for inviting us to address you today. You all have been presented with a unique opportunity: to codify and enhance government support for the arts. Now more than ever, our city's population needs these nurturing, safe communities that inspire confidence, trust and inclusion. I trust that with the Committee's guidance, NYC will continue to uphold the values of diversity, acceptance, and creativity that have characterized our city since it was founded.

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