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Testimony from Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy's Executive Director, Sandra Bowie regarding NYC Cultural Plan Creation.

February 27, 2017

Good Afternoon,

My name is Sandra Bowie. I am the Executive Director of Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy, an arts and cultural organization celebrating 28 years of service in Central Brooklyn. Our programs assist youth of African descent to realize their goals and survive and thrive as leaders in their community.

About the Plan as Announced:

The goal of the Cultural Plan (NYC) is to assess cultural needs in each of the five boroughs and find new ways to support existing groups, especially in under-resourced communities." The bill's co-sponsor, Council Member Stephen Levin, said that preserving all types of culture is key to the city's identity; "Our culture is who we are."

Dr. Marta Vega, President of Manhattan's Caribbean Cultural Center, noted the importance of diversity in the cultural planning process as essential to a city's character. "Diversity within the Cultural Plan can be maintained by funding small, community-based organizations. Currently, a handful of large institutions receive the majority of city funding, when programs run by local organizations often have a more direct effect than a big institution might. (Gotham Gazette, May 2015)"

Two frontline issues that address critical cultural needs in under-resourced communities have been pushed to the periphery of the outreach and planning process thus far: 1). Historical under-funding of smaller community-based organizations and those owned and operated by people of color. 2). The rapid gentrification of the City of New York and the displacement of families, artists and cultural organizations in many communities.

Four months from the submission date of the Cultural Plan, the process of accessing and addressing the needs of smaller community-based organizations, and those owned and operated by people of color, have been avoided, eluded, or dismissed due to the complexity of the issues.



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“The vast majority of DCLA public funding supports large organizations with budgets greater than \$5 million, which comprise less than 5% of the landscape of arts and cultural nonprofits in New York City and guarantees 80% of the DCLAs’ expense budget year after year. These institutions focus primarily on art and culture rooted in the Western European canon, and their programs serve audiences that are predominantly White and wealthy” (Nicole E. Reiner, January 2017).

It was decided, according to Reiner’s article, that the mandatory DCA Diversity study would not be connected to the cultural planning process and will not affect arts and cultural organization funding. Therefore, there will be no definition of diversity mandated in the plan as would be required to create standards of compliance for groups receiving taxpayer support.

The gentrification issue has been raised in every Cultural Planning meeting thus far, according to a February 2017 article by Seph Rodney. When the DCA Commissioner was asked by three artists, “How can arts policies and programs preserve neighborhood character and prevent displacement?” The Commissioner responded that “DCA and Hester Street are not yet talking about answers and solutions. Right now, they are focusing on understanding what the pertinent questions are.”.

As DCA and Hester Street are focused on the pertinent questions, my testimony contains questions that need be addressed if this Cultural Plan is indeed in service of all New Yorkers in all communities.

My Questions:

- As the New York City Cultural Plan was designed to address issues of funding equity and neighborhood character or gentrification, why has there been an ongoing reluctance to address these systemic issues of inequality? When and how will these issues and policy solutions be seriously addressed in the final four months prior to Plan submission?
- A number of meetings have been held with large, well-funded NYC arts and cultural organizations, and the DCA Commissioner, to discuss the NYC Cultural Plan as reported by Seph Rodney. In terms of equity of outreach, when will substantive meetings be planned with the DCA Commissioner and smaller, under-resourced organizations owned and operated by people of color to address the direction of the Cultural Plan based on their goals and needs? *
- The current policies espouse preferential valuing and support for Western-European forms and the larger organizations rooted in those forms. When will



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the Cultural Plan address policy changes that will demonstrate an authentic valuing and support for the City's diverse forms of arts and cultural expression?

- To correct the diversity deficit in art and cultural organizations, given the less than adequate findings of the mandated DCA Diversity survey, what was the reason for the decision not to connect the survey's results to the Cultural Plan?
- What vetting criteria was used for evaluating Cultural Planning lead organizations? Was the diversity of plan leadership considered? How diverse is the Cultural Plan's current leadership team?
- Since the Create NYC research phase has ended, where can the data that is driving the plan be accessed? Does the research and data collected accurately represent the demographics represented?

* Ifetayo was invited to attend focus groups to discuss the Cultural Development Fund Process with the **Hester Street Collaborative** on Feb. 28th and Mar. 1st

Articles Referenced:

Policy Matters: On the Necessity for the NYC Cultural Plan to Address Equity Among City-Funded Arts Groups – Nicole E Reiner/January 2017

A New Cultural Plan for NYC Runs into Objections from Artists – Seph Rodney, February 2017