



Associated Musicians of Greater New York

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NY City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Testimony regarding “Create NYC: A Cultural Plan for All New Yorkers” on behalf of the Associated Musicians of Greater New York, Local 802, AFM

February 27, 2017

Good afternoon Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. My name is Christopher Carroll and I am the Political Director of the Associated Musicians of Greater New York, American Federation of Musicians Local 802. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony about the important cultural plan process thus far, our role in that process, and the importance of developing policies and recommendations that will help allow musicians, artists and performers to live work and raise a family in New York City.

I also want to thank Chair Van Bramer and the entire City Council for supporting our artist community in the Fiscal Year 2017 budget. Music, performance and the arts are a part of our common heritage, part of our past and present, providing the life-blood of our City’s culturally diverse communities and helping to drive our economy. Your commitment has been extraordinary, and we hope that the cultural community will continue to receive vital support in the coming years, especially in light of the funding priorities currently being indicated by our Federal government.

Lastly, I’d also like to thank Mayor de Blasio for appointing Local 802 President Tino Gagliardi to the Cultural Plan Citizen’s Advisory Committee, upon which we have been working in close partnership with DCLA to develop a process and plan that will benefit all New Yorkers – artists, residents and visitors alike.



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Local 802 and the Cultural Landscape

Local 802 is the largest local union of professional musicians in the world, comprising musicians of all styles and backgrounds, from the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic, to the musicians on Broadway and thousands of musicians playing in recording studios, jazz clubs and venues across the city every day.

Our ultimate goal is to strengthen our City's artistic environment and cultural fabric, working every day to champion live music in our communities, advocate for fair wages and the treatment of musicians, and promote policies that allow musicians to afford to live, work and raise their families here.

Musicians come to New York from across the country and the globe for the opportunity to perform with the most talented artists and be part of the most creative community in the world. As a result, New York City is home not only to the most talented musicians in the world, but also to the most innovative, diverse, flexible and creative.

However, many musicians – students, emerging musicians and even the established artists – struggle to build a career that is economically sustainable and artistically fulfilling. With Cornell University studies estimating musicians' median income to be \$29,600¹ annually, and the Center for Urban Future finding that musicians and singers make less than the national median income when adjusted for New York

¹Lois S. Gray, "*Precarious Workforce of New York State's Arts and Entertainment Industry*": Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations, New York, NY. 2016.



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City's cost of living², it is clear that New York City is quickly becoming a place that the artists who have made our artistic environment world-renowned can no longer thrive or support a living.

A comprehensive cultural plan has never been more important, and we commend Mayor de Blasio, the New York City Council and Commissioner Finkelppearl for addressing these challenges head on. The City must play a proactive and prominent role in supporting this community.

Public Engagement Process

The DCLA and Hester Street Collaborative team have designed and implemented a robust public engagement process designed to solicit input from New Yorkers within and outside of the industry. They have led or been a part of over 100 meetings of various formats, comprising artist organizations of all sizes, community groups, industry and cultural stakeholders, advocates, educators and students, as well as current and prospective audience members.

Communicating and engaging artists can be a challenge due to the nature of their work, as well as the number of workplaces and communities in which their work takes place. DCLA's flexibility and willingness to meet with all stakeholders, audiences, advocates and artists has been a tremendous strength.

Though more can and must be done to solicit input, DCLA has made a concerted effort to engage musicians, performers, and artists in the City's cultural plan. In addition to supporting promotion efforts through our own publications, we were glad to help

² "Creative New York": Center for Urban Future, New York, NY, 2015.



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organize and convene an organized labor focus group designed to discuss the challenges facing artists and workers in the industry. Attendees from throughout the industry were invited to discuss challenges facing artists and workers, as well as recommend solutions that will help ensure that artists, musicians, performers and workers have every opportunity to thrive.

Challenges discussed included those presented by irregular and sporadic work schedules; de-valuation of their work and pressure on the wage floor; the lack of affordable living space, rehearsal space and performance space; the cost of education; employee misclassification; and challenges presented by multi-employer work weeks among many others.

Meetings like these have provided DCLA and Hester Street Collaborative with the insight they need to draft a cultural plan that will make specific, achievable and impactful policy recommendations to the Mayor and Council. It is imperative that this plan results in disciplined and achievable recommendations that support all components of the City's cultural ecosystem.

Create NYC - the plan moving forward

The policies of the Cultural Plan must not solely focus on the “consumer” of performances, museums and our halls of science. Rather, it must place equal focus on the “producer” of our artistic and cultural environment. “Improving access” must not only mean that more New Yorkers can go to a concert or attend a museum or zoo, but that more New Yorkers can become musicians, curators and zoologists. “Affordability” must not only mean that housing and tickets are affordable, but that artists receive the fair



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wages necessary to pay for them. “Equity” must address both the equitability of receiving services from the city, but also on equitable opportunities for artists to survive.

Our cultural ecosystem, vital both to the health of our communities and the vibrancy of our economy, is made possible by the artists, performers and workers who contribute to it, and the Plan must adequately support these uniquely talented people.

Ultimately, that success will depend on whether the plan reflects the needs of the workers who drive the industry and makes recommendations that will encourage financially viable and sustainable careers, implement incentive reform, expand affordable artist housing and space, better fund and celebrate our city’s cultural community, ensure the arts remain in our public schools, and ensure that the Cultural Capital of the World is a place where musicians, performers, writers, dancers, actors, stagehands, teachers and all artists, can afford to live, work and raise a family. Local 802 will be submitting policy recommendations directly to DCLA, and I'd be happy to share those recommendations with the Chair and Committee as well.

It continues to be an honor to serve on the Cultural Plan Citizen’s Advisory Committee and we look forward to continuing to work with the City and our partners throughout the industry to ensure that the City’s first comprehensive cultural plan is a resounding success.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak. I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have now, or at your convenience at any time in the future.