

NYC ARTIST COALITION

September 8, 2017

Honorable Julie Menin, Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment
1697 Broadway, 6th Fl
New York, NY 10019

Honorable Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
31 Chambers St #201
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioners Menin and Finkelpearl:

The New York City Artist Coalition would like to thank your agencies for meeting with us to discuss the creation of the Office of Nightlife. This innovative office can provide critical support that the grassroots cultural communities of our city urgently need. The Office of Nightlife will have a much better chance of promoting a thriving music industry and culture at large by supporting informal cultural spaces, such as small performance and DIY music venues.

The immense value that grassroots cultural spaces bring to a vibrant and economically viable NYC is indisputable, and detailed clearly in your recent report, *Economic Impact, Trends, and Opportunities: Music in New York City*. Our city's small cultural spaces are a critical piece of the \$21 billion generated by the city's music industry. Beyond serving truly diverse big audiences and communities of artists, they are also vital incubators of talent that carry the mantle of legendary venues like CBGB that are associated in the collective imaginary with what is the quintessential New York nightlife culture. In that sense, supporting DIY venues is also a key side contribution to the tourism industry.

An independent small music venue like Silent Barn or the recently closed Shea Stadium is where future emerging artists perform today. The New York band Vampire Weekend got their start in 2006 at Goodbye Blue Monday, a DIY venue that closed in 2014; in 2007 they sold nearly half a million albums in the U.S. and went platinum in the U.K. These venues are severely under threat --- more than 20% closed in the past 15 years according to your report. The NYC Artist Coalition advocates for the safety and preservation of grassroots cultural spaces.

We enclose a list of recommendations on how the newly established Office of Nightlife can become an effective strategy in addressing the needs of our constituents:

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- **Support repealing the Cabaret Law.** This law has a racist and homophobic legacy and criminalizes social dancing today and arbitrarily shuts down nightlife venues.
- **Facilitate transparency on MARCH (Multi-Agency Response to Community Hotspots) operations and on how targets are selected.** Community 'hotspots' are precious and need to be protected and sustained, not targeted.
- **Create a Task Force of Cultural Liaisons.** Cultural Liaisons act as case managers for small cultural venues and work as a connection between the spaces and all City Agencies whose policies may apply. Cultural Liaisons facilitate permitting processes and access to programs by overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, identifying liabilities and addressing legal conundrums. There needs to be confidentiality to reduce fear of retaliation.
- **Open up underused City-owned buildings to artists for performance and for work production after-hours.** Spaces such as school auditoriums in all the boroughs could be used as platforms for artists. Intermediary nonprofits could run these facilities.
- **Establish a fast line in the Department Of Buildings so that work for cultural venues gets reviewed in a timely manner with proper guidelines and advice from plan examiners and inspectors.** The current "small business acceleration team," doesn't address the kind of difficulties small cultural venues face. The NYC Loft board was able to establish itself in DOB, and we should seek something specifically similar.
- **Establish a program that will create a pool of pre-approved professionals from the City, like architects, engineers and expeditors that can work effectively and efficiently with the Department Of Buildings and other relevant agencies for the needs of small cultural spaces.** This initiative could copy the "Design and Construction Excellence Program" by the Department of Design and Construction. Dealing with DOB is the biggest problem when establishing a small cultural venue. The DOB process is extremely intimidating even for professional architects and engineers. The services needed for obtaining the proper permits are very costly while not always easily available up to par because these venues are too small a client for the experts.
- **Create a best-practice sample lease for cultural spaces that ensures some protections for the space and offers incentives to landlords.** For example, some spaces pay continuation insurance as part of the lease and this is very helpful when accidents occur.
- **Appeal to landlords with tax-abatements and other incentives to promote and preserve affordable cultural facilities of all scales in all the New**

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York City boroughs. The City could consider donating time or writing off permit fees for small cultural spaces.

The Office of Nightlife has been successful in other cities only when trust is achieved between all stakeholders and when it interprets innovatively what nightlife means in a contemporary 24/7 metropolis. This new Office needs to expand the definition of nightlife beyond establishments that serve alcohol and aim to make New York City's life after dark more entertaining, livable and equitable at the same time.

Ultimately, we'd like to make sure that the Office of Nightlife is responsive to the needs of New Yorkers of all incomes and backgrounds. The CreateNYC process that led to the recently released NYC Cultural Plan was able to gather meaningful input across cultures, incomes, and ages. You should consider replicating this process to inform the making of the Office of Nightlife. We look forward to discussing next steps with your agencies and we hope that you'll be able to attend the Office of Nightlife town hall meeting that we are organizing on October 11 at 7pm at Market Hotel, 1140 Myrtle Avenue in Brooklyn.

Thank you,
NYC Artist Coalition

Artists of Color Bloc
Babycastles
Bossa Nova Civic Club
The City Reliquary
Discwoman
The Floasis
Flowers for All Occasions
Happy Fun Hideaway
House Coalition
House of Yes
JACK Theater
Market Hotel
The People's Cultural Plan
Secret Project Robot
Sunnyvale
Transpecos