

June XX, 2026

Dear Council Members Restler and Dinowitz,

We – teaching artists – are writing to urge you to hold a joint hearing on contracting and education for the thousands of NYC teaching artists who work under increasingly untenable conditions.

Years of inconsistent funding, slow contract processing, and an unresponsive bureaucracy have eroded the infrastructure teaching artists and schools depend on. The economic pressures of the post-pandemic period have made things worse: wages have largely remained stagnant while the cost of living in New York City has climbed sharply. According to a recent study, the median income for teaching artists in 2023 had not meaningfully increased since 2018, even as the cost of living rose by 28% over that same period. Nearly seven in ten teaching artists live in households below the [NYC median income of \\$76,577](#), a figure that is already less than half of the city's [estimated](#) 2026 True Cost of Living (TCOL) threshold of \$159,197. Meanwhile, eight in ten report that their earnings as a teaching artist do not allow them to afford to live in or near the city where they work. The vast majority of us also lack access to employer-provided healthcare or benefits.

A central driver of these challenges is a city contracting system that fails us. A 2024 survey of organizations using the city's Multiple Task Award Contract (MTAC) contracting process found that most reported serious problems with contract negotiations, renewals, and timely payment. Arts organizations described slow or non-responsive communication from city agencies, a troubling lack of visibility into contract terms and timelines, and prolonged delays that put real financial strain on teaching artists and the institutions that employ us.

This matters for students, too. Teaching artists have long served as a critical bridge for lower-income communities and schools that lack the resources to employ full-time arts teachers. As of 2025, more than 290 New York City public schools still do not have a certified arts teacher on staff. Teaching artists step in to fill that gap. When contracting dysfunction and unaffordable living conditions push us out, it is students, particularly those in the most underserved communities, who bear the cost.

So that's why we urge you to:

- **Demand transparency in the contracting process.** Teaching artists and the organizations that employ us deserve clear, accessible information about contract

timelines, payment negotiations, and application and renewal processes. The Contracts Committee has both the jurisdiction and the responsibility to demand better.

- **Establish and enforce clear timelines for contract awards and payments.** Chronic delays are not merely inconvenient – they are financially devastating for artists who depend on timely payment to cover rent, healthcare, and basic expenses. We urge the Council to push for binding timelines and accountability mechanisms.
- **Invest in teaching artist compensation and stability.** Wages that have not kept pace with the cost of living are not sustainable. We ask the Council to support funding increases and to explore pathways to portable benefits for teaching artists – so that the professionals who carry out the city’s arts education mandate can afford to remain in New York.
- **Develop a dedicated support system for arts organizations.** Create a centralized resource center or help desk that can provide guidance and assistance throughout the MTAC process. Hire more staff with expertise in arts education and the associated program costs.

With all that, we urge you to hold a hearing so you can hear from us directly about what needs to change. Because when you fail arts teachers, you fail students.

Sincerely,

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