

Mayor Adams Appoints Laurie Cumbo as Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner

March 18, 2022

NEW YORK – New York City Mayor Eric Adams today announced the appointment of Laurie Cumbo as commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA). In that role, she will direct cultural policy for the city and oversee city funding for hundreds of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations across the five boroughs that deliver quality arts programming for New Yorkers. Additionally, Commissioner Cumbo will advise on strategies for equitably supporting and strengthening the city’s diverse cultural community, which is essential to New York’s status as a global capital leader and makes major contributions to the city’s economic vitality and social well-being.

“As we work to revitalize our city, the Department of Cultural Affairs will play a vital role in our economic recovery — expanding access to the arts for outer-borough children and providing increased support for local artists,” said **Mayor Adams**. “Laurie Cumbo brings a breadth of experience in the arts, community advocacy, and city government to her role as commissioner. She will be instrumental in leading our efforts to strengthen New York City’s vibrant cultural life and connect New Yorkers to cultural experiences and institutions in all five boroughs.”

“Our arts and cultural organizations were particularly hard hit by the pandemic, and investing in that sector is a central part of our Blueprint for New York City’s Economic Recovery, as well as this administration’s broader efforts to build a safer, more equitable, and resilient city,” said **Deputy Mayor for Economic and Workforce Development Maria Torres-Springer**. “Commissioner Cumbo has a strong record of leading and partnering with cultural organizations across the city, and I look forward to working with her to support the entire cultural community, create quality creative jobs, and expand access to the arts for all New Yorkers.”

“Every single moment in my life — from my first internship at the age of fifteen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and founding Brooklyn’s first Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, to teaching at Pratt Institute and serving on the Committee on

Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations as a New York City councilmember — has led me to this incredible opportunity to further serve the city as the Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs,” said **Commissioner Laurie Cumbo**. “I thank Mayor Eric Adams for appointing me to this position. Together, we will center the arts in New York’s economic recovery and bolster the educational and cultural experiences of every New York City student from Pre-K to CUNY. I also believe we can help address public safety issues in New York City — taking a gun out of the hands of a young person and replacing it with an instrument, paintbrush, camera, or script will redirect the talent and passions of our youth towards building a better and more vibrant New York City.”

DCLA represents and serves nonprofit cultural organizations involved in the visual, literary, and performing arts; public-oriented science and humanities institutions including zoos, botanical gardens, and historical and preservation societies; and creative artists at all skill levels who live and work within the city’s five boroughs. The agency provides hundreds of millions of dollars in expense and capital funding to more than 1,000 cultural nonprofits each year. Additionally, the agency commissions permanent public artwork and provides free materials to public schools, nonprofits, and city agencies with arts programming.

“With Laurie Cumbo’s appointment to be the next commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs, we look forward to continuing our partnership with her and with the agency. Theater artists never stopped making theater, even when our venues temporarily closed, and we now have a tremendous opportunity to work together with Commissioner Cumbo and DCLA to provide workers with the resources they need to thrive in this new endemic phase of the pandemic and beyond,” said **Deadria Harrington, board chair, Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York; and Risa Shoup, interim executive director, Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York**. “The Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York is confident that we will find collaboration and support in DCLA as we seek new and enhanced resources to meet our mutual goal of an ever more vibrant, equitable, and inclusive theater that reflects the vitality and diversity of our great city.”

“I am both excited and hopeful about Laurie Cumbo becoming the new commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs,” said **Diane Fraher (Osage/Cherokee), founder and director, American Indian Artists Inc.** “Laurie Cumbo knows and understands the real needs of all artists and cultural workers in New York City, especially the artists from underserved communities.”

“We congratulate Laurie Cumbo on her appointment as DCLA commissioner,” said **Viviana Bianchi, executive director, Bronx Council on the Arts**. “She has been a staunch supporter of the arts and culture throughout her career. We look forward to working closely with her to enhance resources for artists and arts organizations in our borough and throughout New York City. We wish her extraordinary success.”

“On behalf of the Brooklyn Arts Council, I am thrilled to congratulate and welcome Laurie Cumbo as New York City’s next commissioner of cultural affairs. As the Council’s majority leader and a member of the Cultural Affairs committee, she has long been a champion of arts and culture for all New Yorkers from within city government,” said **Charlotte Cohen, executive director, Brooklyn Arts Council**. “She is also trained in arts administration and, as founder of such an important museum, MoCADA, has a deep understanding of the workings of nonprofit cultural organizations, as well as artists’ experiences and needs. With her keen understanding of the importance of arts in people’s lives, to our economic vitality, and to our mental and social well-being, Commissioner Cumbo will be an incredible partner and advocate and leader for our sector.”

“Laurie Cumbo has been a tireless advocate for arts and culture organizations and, more particularly, organizations led by people of color. Her reach extended to every borough, and her advocacy helped to maintain New York City’s role as a leader in arts and culture,” said **Melody Capote, executive director, Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute**. “Laurie will, for sure, continue Gonzalo’s leadership and enhance the ability of the department to support our artist community.”

“On behalf of the Coalition of Theatres of Color, we are thrilled that our longtime champion Laurie Cumbo will continue to serve the city of New York in her new role as the next commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs. Her historic appointment marks a turning point in New York City’s recognition of underserved communities and marginalized arts organizations throughout New York City. We applaud the mayor for this groundbreaking appointment,” said **Sade Lythcott, chair, Coalition of Theatres of Color; and Carl Clay, vice chair, Coalition of Theatres of Color**. “Ms. Cumbo brings a unique and distinguished history to this position as a former advocate, elected official, and community arts administrator. We believe this appointment will strongly position New York City to remain the arts capital of the world, while pushing for quality arts programming and bold new cultural policies and ensuring that the contributions of our cultural communities remain both vibrant and equitable in the growth and economy of New York City.”

“The Cultural Institutions Group is thrilled to welcome former majority leader Laurie Cumbo as the commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs. During and prior to her tenure in public office, Laurie has served in a variety of strategic capacities as an advocate for the cultural community and understands the broader role that culture plays in the city’s ecosystem,” said **Taryn Sacramone, chair, Cultural Institutions Group and executive director, Queens Theatre**. “We look forward to working with her on continuing to serve New Yorkers — demonstrating the value of New York City’s arts and culture to the wider global community.”

“Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy is thrilled by the news of Laurie Cumbo’s appointment as the new commissioner of DCLA. She has been a strategic advocate and trusted partner to community-based arts and culture organizations throughout our diverse city. As we stand ready to open the doors of our new, 5,000-square-foot home in a few short weeks, we would not have been able to reach this transformative moment without Laurie’s extraordinary efforts,” said **Naima Oyo, executive director, Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy**. “As a Black female executive director of an African-centered community-based arts organization, I look forward to continuing our partnership with Laurie and her new colleagues at DCLA to further promote an equitable arts agenda for the city. We applaud Mayor Adams on his wise choice of selecting Laurie to lead at the critical time, and we wish both the mayor and Laurie great success.”

“As theaters begin to bustle again, and arts and culture claws their way back, we must not forget the lessons learned over the last two years,” said **Randi Berry, executive director, Indie Theater Fund**. “While fighting dual pandemics of Covid-19 and systemic racism, small arts organizations have had an uphill battle maintaining their venues and keeping their programming intact. Arts and culture will be central to the economic recovery of New York City, and I look forward to working with Commissioner Cumbo to support artists who have been most marginalized.”

“Congratulations to Laurie Cumbo,” said **Devorah Halberstam, co-founder, Jewish Children’s Museum**. “She is a gift to the cultural community, understanding that the pulse of our communities are our cultures. It is what unifies us, all through our wonderful diversity. I look forward with great anticipation to her creativity and brilliance as she brings the city into a new and exciting space.”

“Our city has a true arts and culture advocate in Laurie Cumbo,” said **Kemi Ilesanmi, executive director, Laundromat Project and chair, Cultural Affairs Advisory**

Commission. “I look forward to supporting her vision as the new DCLA commissioner and know that her firsthand experience in building cultural institutions and on the City Council will greatly benefit the cultural landscape in our beloved city.”

“On behalf of Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, we celebrate the appointment of DCLA Commissioner Laurie Cumbo,” said **Ana Fiore, director of artist services, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.** “A groundbreaking leader and champion for New York City’s artists, arts organizations, and local communities, the commissioner will usher our city’s arts landscape into an era of expanded hope and creativity following the pandemic.”

“We look forward to seeing the agency thrive under Commissioner Cumbo’s leadership and welcome the emergence of exciting new opportunities for partnership and collaboration throughout the field,” said **Diego S. Segalini, CFAO, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.**

“New Yorkers for Culture and Arts welcomes and congratulates Laurie Cumbo as new commissioner for DCLA,” said **Lucy Sexton, executive director, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts.** “As someone who founded and built one of the city’s cultural treasures, MoCADA, she has an extraordinary passion for culture and a deep knowledge of the field. We were so grateful for her dedicated work with and for the creative sector during her time as majority leader of the Council, and we look forward to working with her to build a just and thriving cultural city.”

“It’s been a challenging few years for all New Yorkers, especially the arts and culture community,” said **Joe LoBello, board chair, Queens Council on the Arts; and Rodney Fuller, interim executive director, Queens Council on the Arts.** “As we recover from the devastating impacts of the pandemic, having a lifelong arts advocate, supporter, and leader like Laurie Cumbo will bolster the city and the arts community. We are excited to work with Commissioner Cumbo to continue promoting and advocating for arts programming in Queens — the city’s most diverse borough — and across the city.”

About Laurie Angela Cumbo

Laurie Angela Cumbo previously served as majority leader in the New York City Council and represented the City Council’s 35th district for eight years. She wrote over forty

laws and resolutions in that role, including creating the first-ever Mayor's Office to End Gun Violence and the Mayor's Office of Victim Services. Cumbo focused her career on institution building and worked diligently throughout her tenure in the City Council to secure permanent cultural homes for the Noel Pointer Foundation, Ifetayo Cultural Arts Center, the West Indian American Day Carnival Association, African Voices Magazine, Creative Outlet Dance Company, Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA), 651 Arts, the Brooklyn Music School, The Brooklyn Pride Center and Digital Girl.

Prior to her time in the City Council, Cumbo founded MoCADA in Brooklyn and previously worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the High Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Brooklyn Children's Museum. At MoCADA, Cumbo was instrumental in expanding the museum to a newly renovated space at the James E. Davis 80 Arts Building in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, and pushed to build a multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art museum into its new home in the BAM South Building in partnership with BAM, The Brooklyn Public Library, and 651 Arts.

Cumbo is a lifelong Brooklynite. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History from Spelman College and a Master of Arts degree in Visual Arts Administration from New York University.

###