

Thank you, Chairman Ervin, Vice Chair Lee and City Council members, for allowing me to discuss the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE).

Over the past year, DCASE has actively supported Chicago's cultural community through grant programs for individual artists and organizations, and by investing in neighborhoods through place-based projects, public art commissions, and participatory events. We have enhanced our technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives and established new cross-agency collaborations. A few highlights from this past year include celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Millennium Park, the 40th Anniversary of House Music, the remarkable career of Blues legend Buddy Guy, and the return of the iconic Maxwell Street Market to its original location. DCASE also launched innovative partnerships with Sundance Institute and Choose Chicago, attracting global attention and resources to support our independent storytellers and filmmakers.

During my 7-month tenure I quickly realized that access to resources remains a key priority. Our iconic venues welcomed a new group of Millennium Park organizations in residence and expanded opportunities for artists at the Chicago Cultural Center through various programs and events. In March, we introduced a streamlined application process for visual art exhibitions, making our galleries more accessible to local creators.

This year, DCASE awarded over \$8.5 million in grants to 511 recipients. We saw a record 1,012 new applicants for our grant programs, representing 51 percent of total applicants of 1,984. The Individual Artists Program (IAP) received its highest-ever number of applications: 1,325. Community panels made funding decisions, resulting in grants for artists across all 50 wards.

Notably, 54 percent of IAP grantees were first-time applicants, and 60 percent hailed from low-to-moderate-income neighborhoods. Thanks to our ongoing outreach during public community events, virtual and live info sessions and engagement efforts, our grantees now better reflect the diversity of Chicago, with 65 percent identifying as BIPOC, compared to 38 percent in 2016. Grants were awarded to artists and organizations in every ward, a trend we've maintained since 2022, showing significant growth from 94 percent of wards in 2021 and 66 percent of wards in 2016.

DCASE's recovery programs, including Healing Arts Chicago, Together We Heal Creative Place, Chicago Arts Recovery, and a special ARPA-funded cohort of our CityArts Program, are essential in supporting artists and arts organizations throughout the City. This \$18 million initiative has funded new employment models for artists, assisted nonprofits in long-term recovery from the pandemic, and fostered community collaborations for projects that promote healing and transformation. We have also provided critical technical assistance to many ARPA-funded grantees, focusing on long-term improvements in their communities.

Our public art team is managing nearly 80 projects, totaling \$11 million in investments across 25 wards, with 19 projects set for completion in 2025, including several murals supported by aldermanic menus such as the mural located in Ald. Ramirez-Rosa's ward at California at George

which was recently completed, another mural in Ald. Tabares’s ward on 63rd and Central Park viaduct, nearing completion and a mural in the 29th Ward, Ald. Taliaferro, Ray Charles Easley Sculpture, with the artist selected and now proceeding into the final design. Our team remains in close contact with Ward offices as these projects develop.

After a challenging period marked by seven months of strikes, Chicago’s film and television industry is back on track in 2024. All major scripted series have been renewed, and we welcomed four new series and three national late-night talk shows. The opening of The Fields Studios in Logan Square/Avondale is also boosting our production capacity. As of October 1, 2024, film permit revenue has reached \$500,775, already surpassing last year’s total of \$342,625, which was affected by the strikes. We anticipate that 2024 will match 2022 in terms of permit revenue, with the Chicago Film Office processing over 1,300 permits in the first three quarters and filming occurring in every ward.

The film and television industry is expected to generate over \$600 million this year, with more than 90percent of this impact benefiting Chicago residents and businesses in the form of wages paid to film workers who are Chicago residents and invoices paid to Chicago businesses by the studios, networks, or film production companies that film here. This year could be one of the highest-performing years on record. To create equitable pathways for youth entering the film and television industry, DCASE is partnering with the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) to launch the Chicago Youth Media Initiative (CYMI) in 2025. This initiative will provide funding, mentorship, and skill development opportunities for youth media organizations and participants across the City.

This year, DCASE has renewed its commitment to arts education through collaborations with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). We participated in the strategic planning for equitable access to quality arts education for K-12 students, engaged with educators and students through the inaugural Arts Educator Advisory Council, and hosted the CPS arts festival, REVERBER\*ATE, at the Chicago Cultural Center. DCASE staff are dedicated to community engagement and capacity building. We have activated partnerships for a historical markers pilot program, shaped major festivals through advisory bodies, and launched new initiatives like the Creative Worker Rights campaign. Our Special Events Permitting team has conducted new training sessions for community event organizers, in collaboration with aldermanic offices, to raise awareness about City processes and improve event quality.

While DCASE continues to deliver impactful programs, we acknowledge the ongoing challenges faced by the arts and cultural community. The effects of the pandemic are still being felt as organizations navigate uncharted territory and work to maintain as resources that were once available start to decrease. Now more than ever, we understand the necessity for fresh ideas, new approaches and refreshed resource models for our community.

In 2025, DCASE is committed to:

- Sustaining equitable support for the cultural sector as recovery resources wane and finding new ways to support artists and organizations facing economic challenges stemming from the pandemic.
- Amplifying awareness of the exceptional events and world-class artists in Chicago, while ensuring residents are informed about DCASE and its offerings.
- Updating DCASE’s Special Events Ordinance to enhance transparency and streamline the application process for special events.
- Collaborating across government to ensure neighborhood economic development continues to support arts and culture as integral components of thriving communities.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.