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January 24, 2024

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
120 Broadway, 31st Floor
New York, N.Y. 10271

Re: Testimony in support of Zoning for Economic Opportunity / Proposal 9
specific to Dancing

My name is Jamila Holman and I'm a professional dancer, choreographer,
and the Dancefest Producer for Dance Parade New York.

I'm writing to the City Planning Commission in support of Zoning for
Economic Opportunity proposals that recategorizes dance as "scheduled
entertainment" and allows dancing to occur intermittently and in venues with
less than 200 patrons.

Institutional racism is in the DNA of New York City. After 250+ years of
enslaving African Americans in this country, institutional racism is evident
here in New York with significant disparities between the racial majority and
marginalized communities and can be seen by vast differences in our wealth
gap, housing and healthcare. Archaic zoning laws stem from Jim Crow era
laws such as the notorious Cabaret Law that has no place in modern society.

I'm proud to serve for the non-profit organization Dance Parade who stood
up in protest to the Cabaret Law in 2007 and who was a leading advocate in
the law's 2017 appeal. This racist era law was indiscriminate in its

enforcement and suppressed dance and culture for 91 years. But today, each year in May, 10,000 dancers showcase over one hundred unique dance styles that reflect the strength of our multicultural roots and the vast diversity of the cultural ecology.

The 1961 Zoning Text Amendment came at a time when segregation was still rampant in the city and similarly needs to be reexamined. As a black member of a marginalized community, I have witnessed the impact of zoning laws on our ability to express ourselves and build vibrant social spaces. Zoning laws that limit or prohibit dancing only to high density areas disproportionately affect communities that have historically been marginalized. These restrictions not only curtail our freedom of expression but also contribute to the economic disenfranchisement of our neighborhoods.

By imposing restrictions on dancing, authorities inadvertently stifle the cultural richness that defines my Hip-Hop community in the Bronx as well as Hispanic cultures with salsa, merengue and bachata in Queens, Soca, DanceHall and Polka in Brooklyn and Swing, Voguing and Waacking gatherings in urban and LGBTQ+ venues in Manhattan.

The impact goes beyond the dance floor; it extends to economic opportunities. Social establishments that are unable to host dance events may struggle to attract customers and thrive. This economic disadvantage perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limits the potential for community growth.

We applaud the Department of City Planning for critically examining and reforming our zoning laws. There must be a concerted effort to eliminate regulations that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, allowing us the same freedom of expression and economic opportunities enjoyed by others. It's time to dismantle the structural barriers embedded in zoning laws and create inclusive policies that promote equality and cultural diversity for all New Yorkers.



Jamila Holman

DanceFest Producer