



MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART | 4005 CRENSHAW BLVD. 3RD FLOOR, LOS ANGELES, CA 90008 | WWW.MAAALA.ORG

TESTIMONY/POEM BY KEASHA DUMAS HEATH

**CA State Assembly Committee on Arts, Entertainment, Sports, Tourism & Internet Media
Informational Hearing: "Restarting the Arts: Best Practices for Safely Reopening"**

Tuesday, February 2, 2021 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

*Good Morning and thank you to the Assembly Committee and to the Chair, Assemblymember Quirk-Silva,
for your efforts to listen to ALL voices at today's Informational Hearing on Restarting the Arts.*

As I submit this formal testimony,
I hope the committee will forgive the time
because you're inspired by the arts
and we all listen more closely when words rhyme.

To Assemblymember Kamlager,
who has been listening from the start.
Greetings from the 54th District
and the Museum of African American Art.

Our members are dying.
Many from COVID-19,
others from good old age.
Still more from isolation,
unemployment, and rage.

We've shown our longevity
and now there's a necessity
for our museum to seek funding
in ways we might not have before,
so that we won't be ignored.

ALL the arts are equally essential,
and budget size is not a credential.
We want to be eligible,
even if our budget seems negligible.

In grantmaking circles,
there seems to be some fear
that if your organization is small
you might disappear.

Let us counter that notion:
We are still here.
The Museum of African American Art
is in its 45th year.

We received a small CARES Recovery grant,
and we will continue to apply
for all funding opportunities
for which we qualify.

Our revenues since the shutdown
have decreased by 68 percent
for rentals, gift shop sales, and memberships,
which all relied on in-person events.

When we host events, we offer food.
Some people come for the turkey wraps,
or send their kids into the museum
for a much-needed snack —
because we don't turn our backs.

Anyone can visit for free,
and no one will ask
for their ticket or their sticker
or for their pass.

No one will turn them away
or ask them to leave.
We say, "Thank you for coming.
Enjoy the art, please."

When the event is ending,
we ask, "Why don't you wait
just a few more minutes
and take home a plate?"

Now we're planning virtual events
and launching new communications.
Seeking funding not for projects,
but for reopening and operations.

We've been shuttered,
and the guidelines for reopening
have seemed cluttered.

We are inside a retail space that is *open*,
people don't understand why we're closed.
Does one guideline fit all museums?
That's one of the questions we pose.

When it's all done and spoken,
we would like to reopen,
even for limited activities.
We can be part of the remedy.

We are an art museum
inside a retail place,
compelled to redefine
how we use our space.

Our large Event Hall is
one of our few surpluses,
and we could reopen for
public health purposes.

METRO, Center Theatre Group, and the
Commissioners of the Los Angeles Police
have all come to our museum
for community outreach.

We're ready to activate
that same outreach "machine"
to help the museum's neighbors
GET THAT VACCINE.

We don't have an endowment.
What we have is empowerment
from a community that trusts us
to educate creatively,
from health to social justice.

We are an important part
of an arts eco-system
that is not yet
an equal system.

It still discriminates
on the basis of size.
We ask you to revise
your understanding
of what it means to be
an "anchor" institution.
Museums of all sizes
can be part of the solution.

Even on the smallest budget,
we will leave you with our two cents:

The arts are feeding your constituents.

*Thank you for your time. California has been called "the State of the Arts."
We encourage you to legislate accordingly. Thank you.*