



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

Brooklyn Black Elected Officials Coalition fight to have Weeksville Heritage Center designated as a Cultural Institutions Group (CIG).

VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY May 13, 2019

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION, COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT, CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS, AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY, SAVE WEEKSVILLE**



The Brooklyn Black Elected Officials Coalition wrote to Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) to urge the inclusion of Weeksville Heritage Center into the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG).

The Department of Cultural Affairs' mission of fostering dynamic public partnerships with private cultural organizations has its most dramatic expression in its relationship with the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). The 33 members of the CIG group are each located on City-owned property, and receive significant capital and operating support from the City to help meet basic security, maintenance, administration and energy costs. In return for this support, these institutions operate as publicly-owned facilities whose mandate is to provide cultural services accessible to all New Yorkers.

The CIG designation would provide Weeksville Heritage Center with a baseline of support for their operational expenses and help stabilize this historic cultural institution.

May 13, 2019

Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl

The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

31 Chambers St.,

New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Finkelpearl,

We write to you to address the evolving situation regarding the Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn. As you are aware, historic Weeksville was first established in 1838, just 11 years after New York State abolished slavery. The Center, named after the historic community, was founded in the 1960s by the late Dr. Joan Maynard, and has been an integral part of the Black history of Brooklyn and New York alike.

Located in the epi-center of three culturally rich historic black communities, including Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Crown Heights, directly across from Kingsborough Houses and near Boys and Girls High School. The Weeksville Heritage Center serves as a local cultural headquarter, and is home to cultural artifacts that contextualize historic Weeksville as well as celebrates the self-supporting community of African-American freed men, which grew to become the second-largest free Black community in Antebellum America.

Today, over 6,000 school children and 8,000 adults visit Weeksville's historic Hunterfly Road houses annually, as well as its 19,000 sq.ft. cultural arts building, 700 sq.ft. arts gallery, and 200-seat performance space (there were twice as many visits in 2018 than in 2017).

Weeksville is now facing critical operating needs, and as a result, has engaged the public in fundraising efforts. Without an influx of financial support, they are at risk of closing their doors in July 2019. The community has raised \$30,000 within the first week, and while we commend and praise the public support demonstrated here, this cannot be how New York City funds one of its prized Black institutions.

Given its storied past and culture, we strongly urge you to consider the inclusion of Weeksville Heritage Center into the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). We can no longer deny one of Brooklyn's cherished historic cultural institutions from inclusion in the CIG, when other Black cultural institutions across Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx – including The Studio Museum, El Museo, Jamaica Arts Center, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts – have been afforded inclusion.

The borough of Brooklyn is long overdue to receive such a designation – one that provides the very financial stability that Weeksville now needs.

As members of Brooklyn Black Elected Officials Coalition (BBEOC), we are a voice for the vibrant African American community in Brooklyn, and we are committed to improving the quality of life for families and children we are honored to represent. Please feel free to reach out to BBEOC by emailing famtaylor3@aol.com or by calling Anita Taylor 917-544-6839.

Sincerely,

Congress Member Yvette D. Clarke

Public Advocate Jumaane Williams

Majority Leader New York City Council Laurie Cumbo

Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams

Assembly Member Walter Mosley

Senator Kevin Parker

Senator Velmanette Montgomery

Assembly Member N. Nick Perry

Assembly Member Tremaine Wright

Council Member Robert Cornegy

Assembly Member Latrice Walker

Assembly Member Jaime Williams

Senator Zellnor Myrie

Congress Member Hakeem Jeffries

Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel

Assembly Member Charles Barron

Assembly Member Mathylde Frontus

Council Member Mathieu Eugene

To visit the Weeksville Heritage Center and to learn more about this cultural gem, visit

<http://www.weeksvillesociety.org>

To learn more about Senator Montgomery's work with Weeksville, visit:

<https://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/articles/velmanette-montgomery/senator-montgomery-celebrates-co-naming-dr-joan-maynard-way>

<https://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2017/J5783>