

Remarks by Elaine Ng, CEO, TSNE

Covid-19 Recovery Hearing: Nonprofit Human Services Sector Relief, Docket #0436
May 3, 2022

Chair Bok, Councilor Breadon, and City Councilors:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I echo the sentiments of my esteemed colleagues.

TSNE is a nonprofit capacity-building organization in Boston that works with hundreds of nonprofits a year. We also own and operate the NonProfit Center near South Station which houses over 50 nonprofits, and fiscally sponsor over 50 nonprofits across the region and the country.

And through this unique lens and our work, we've witnessed the myriad ways COVID has impacted the sector.

Prior to the pandemic, nonprofits, and especially those with budgets of \$1M or less serving communities of color, were already struggling with significant issues, including

- Finding and retaining staff because of endemic low pay and high burn-out
- the never-ending fundraising to support core programs and overhead costs, and
- dealing with high rents and finding affordable space for programming

Many nonprofits working under these stressful conditions are "frontline" organizations led by and/or serving people and communities of color, and when COVID hit, they immediately pivoted, with staff risking their own health to respond to community needs and to the calls of action from our government.

Now, these historic, once-in-a generation funds provide an opportunity to support the important and critical role that nonprofits play in our City's ecosystem and their work to advance equity — especially in neighborhoods that are historically marginalized and disproportionately impacted by systemic and structural racism as Chief Solis Cervera and others have mentioned.

And over the past two years, what we have heard again and again from leaders is not that they need funds to take on new work and to do more work, but the need for relief – relief for their staff, relief for themselves, and relief for their organizations.

As my colleagues on this panel have pointed out, ARPA allows for direct nonprofit relief and the opportunity to think creatively and boldly. We don't need to be boxed in to the old paradigm of the City contracting nonprofits to do more work.

So in addition to what my colleagues are recommending, I encourage you to:

- Provide funds for rent relief so organizations can retain and improve their space.

- Provide funds focused on mental health and physical well-being so that nonprofit staff can get some relief.
- Provide funds to create wrap-around capacity building for small nonprofits so they can decrease their administrative burden and find economies of scale.
- Provide funds for leadership retreats focused on well-being.
- And most importantly, provide unrestricted funds for core operations so that nonprofits can support these activities and pay their staff a real living wage in Boston.

I hope the City Council and Mayor Wu will be audacious, be bold, and discard the old thinking of contracting nonprofits to do work on behalf of the City.

Allocate funds for direct relief to support the sustainability of our City's nonprofits and the health of our workforce — a workforce that is worn down and exhausted from two years of direct crisis response, so that we can continue the work of supporting our City and its residents.

Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing support of nonprofits in our City.