

Testimony For FY 2007 Public Hearing April 6, 2026

I am Jennifer Russel and I have the privilege of currently holding the role of Chairman of the Board of Trustees at BlackRock Center for the Arts in Germantown. At this week's public hearing you heard testimony from Steve Barber and Onnie Watson, colleagues of mine on the Board as to the great impact the loss of \$125,000 in anticipated community planning funds from the FY'27 budget will have on the operation and purpose of BlackRock as a "force" within an emerging newly branded Germantown. Both speakers did an excellent job of reminding everyone present at the hearing that BlackRock plays a pivotal role in the community, beyond its obvious arts programming. In recent years, we have assumed some of the responsibilities normally attributed to government by providing a venue and support for many festivals, forums and meetings that **must** continue, but may **not** continue due to the unexpected omission of this much needed \$125,000.

My perspective, however, is a bit different from theirs, due to the number of years I have been on and off the BlackRock Board of Trustees. I have served intermittently on the Board since 2007, initially as a representative of Rodgers Consulting, but later following my retirement I was lured back to the Board simply because I love BlackRock. I am even in awe of the building's innate beauty. I have seen this wonderful building evolve and become a symbol of its incredibly diverse population.

Those of us on the Board recognize that our beloved venue is at a critical crossroads, where we are pivoting to represent before the community as a cultural arts center. Our fascination with the arts will certainly continue, because that is our heart and soul, but the Germantown community deserves the type of critical civic programming available throughout the county. This is exactly what the "missing" \$125,000 will buy. Please find that money for us. We know you will do the "right thing."

To know BlackRock is to love it.

Jennifer Russel

Chairman -Board of Trustees

BlackRock Center for the Arts