

September 25, 2020

Board of Directors
Museum of Chinese in America
215 Centre Street
New York, NY 10013

Dear MoCA,

As a longtime supporter of Chinatown, arts, culture, history and of the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA), I am deeply disturbed by the Museum's recent actions and lack of transparency in connection with the Mayor's borough-based jail plan.

For over two years, community members across sectors have been working to combat this ill-conceived jail plan to demolish the Manhattan Detention Center and replace it with a massively larger one at Chinatown's doorstep. Throughout this process, Chinatown residents/businesses/leaders banded together with Tribeca neighbors, formerly incarcerated men and women, and others to fight the plan. It was disappointing, by contrast, to see MoCA's muted response to this plan that threatens the very survival of Chinatown and perpetuates a carceral system that disproportionately harms communities of color. This is sadly ironic for an institution whose core mission is to protect the history of a marginalized people.

While our community organized rallies, marches, meetings, petition drives, protests and other actions to oppose the jail plan, MoCA was observed publicly lobbying for funds for their own institution as a benefit. At one hearing on Sept. 27, 2018, MoCA's President is documented telling the City, "...You're spending \$300 million dollars to expand a detention complex in Chinatown, we ask for just some money to make a permanent home for the museum...."

In fact, the subsequent October 18, 2019 Points of Agreement (PoA) between the Office of the Mayor and the New York City Council shows that, by far, the largest community concession included in the approved jail plan was \$35 million for MoCA. The PoA states, *"...In addition to the new borough-based facilities, we are bringing crucial investments to the neighborhood....You will find a comprehensive list of the City's commitment attached. Many of these commitments are related directly to the borough-based jails system. Other commitments address separate investments in the local neighborhoods to meet needs that have long gone unmet....."* The pay out to MoCA is evident in this excerpt from page 16 of the PoA.

Investments in Cultural and Community Institutions

12. Support the acquisition and construction of a permanent museum and a new performing arts space for Chinese music, dance, and theater groups at 215 Centre Street

The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) has been a cultural anchor for the community in Chinatown. In order to secure a permanent home in Chinatown, and to provide a new performing arts space for local Chinese music, dance, and theater groups, the City will invest significant public funding alongside private investments, towards the acquisition and construction of a permanent museum home and a new performing arts space for Chinese music, dance, and theater groups at 215 Centre Street.

Cost: \$35M including \$5M in FY20; \$15M in FY21; \$15M in FY22

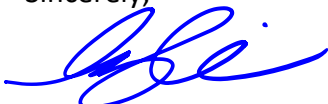
Since the release of this information, members of the community have asked MoCA for an explanation and been met with public silence, private denials or personal attacks. MoCA has claimed they submitted applications for this funding years before the jail project materialized and that this \$35 million award is merely the result of their previous efforts.

Having worked with City government agencies, I know firsthand that multi-million-dollar capital allocations are not suddenly given to institutions solely as a result of a public application process. The application is the beginning, but success requires focused advocacy with elected officials who ultimately provide those budget allocations. One has to ask how MoCA did not get major capital funding until it was included in the Mayor's jail plan? MoCA would have us believe that they were awarded \$35 million in the Mayor's jail plan without any political deal-making or lobbying on its part.

How can we trust an institution that claims to represent our community history while it partners with forces that harm it? These are not the actions of an ally. Allies listen and respond thoughtfully to the concerns of community partners and constituents. Allies work together to forge a path forward that benefits all of us.

After the January 23rd fire that damaged the MoCA archives, many of us came out in full force to help in the recovery. I hope that MoCA will now step forward in that same spirit to help mend the damage to Chinatown and our allied communities. At the very least, a public statement, an open Town Hall meeting to address concerns, an apology, and clear delineated steps for repairing relationships is in order.

Sincerely,



Amy Chin