



**Testimony in Support of Appropriations  
For the National Endowment for the Arts**

By Sheila M. Smith, Executive Director, Minnesota Citizens for the Arts  
and Chair, Creative Minnesota Project

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the budget request for the National Endowment for the Arts. I would like to particularly to thank Chair Betty McCollum who has been a life long advocate for and participant in the arts.

Minnesota Citizens for the Arts' mission is to increase access to the arts for all Minnesotans. We are the only organization in the state that advocates for all 1900 arts organizations and their audiences and 109,000 artists and creative workers.

We are pleased to have a chance to testify in support of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at the level of \$170 million, a small increase of \$7.75M over FY20 funding. The National Endowment for the Arts hasn't been funded at this level since 1994. It's important to note that this is a step towards restoring that funding level, notwithstanding adjustments for inflation. In reality, the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts should be doubled and indexed to at least \$1 per capita because it has fallen behind due to inflation for several decades.

We support the National Endowment for the Arts because it has had a tremendous impact across the country and particularly here in Minnesota. I would like to talk about how the NEA serves as a catalyst to increase access to the arts for all Americans.

In four short minutes I can only provide a taste of the great impacts the arts are having, so let me start with some data from Creative Minnesota, a collaborative research effort that produces hard data about the arts and culture sector for education, advocacy and policy making.

Minnesota's nonprofit arts and culture organizations, artists and creative workers and 23 million arts and culture attendees have an annual economic impact of well over \$2 billion annually. While arts and culture organizations are spending locally on printing, catering, personnel and building supplies, their audiences are also spending nearly \$21 per person on their way to and on their way home from arts events at local restaurants, gas stations, shops and other businesses. These dollars ripple out into the community, supporting the growing economies of cities, towns and tourist areas across the state.

Polls repeatedly show that Minnesotans have a special relationship with the arts and culture, attending and participating themselves in the arts to a higher degree than the rest of America. This is perhaps the reason why they voted in 2008 to create dedicated funding for the arts and culture in the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, which supports access to the arts for all Minnesotans in every corner of the state.

By a wide popular vote Minnesotans voted to increase support for the arts because they agreed that the arts bring benefits to their quality of life and economy. There are many polls that suggest that Americans support arts funding, but in Minnesota we took it to the ballot box and received a very strong yes.

The National Endowment for the Arts set the stage for this extraordinary action by investing in and encouraging the arts to flourish in every state through its highly effective grant programs. The NEA serves as a catalyst for additional state, local and private investments in the arts such as the bi-partisan Legacy Amendment by providing examples to the states of highly effective creative and cultural projects as well as organizations that promote access to and involvement in the arts for all citizens.

The majority of NEA direct grants go to small- and medium-sized organizations, which often support projects for audiences that otherwise might not have access to arts programming.

For example, the Lakes Area Music Festival is a young music festival in Brainerd, Minnesota - one of the poorest downtown communities in the state. Funding from the National Endowment for the Arts enables this rural arts organization to present 200 classical artists from the top orchestras and opera companies in the world in world-class performances. These musicians then help to transform the community, performing for a diverse audience of over 15,000, connecting world-renowned musicians with victims of domestic abuse in women's shelters, kids with autism, and seniors in eldercare facilities.

Another program supported by the NEA is the VocalEssence WITNESS program which celebrates the contributions of African Americans to our shared American heritage through concerts, recordings and school programs. This educational experience gives students an opportunity to learn from exceptional role models, increasing their self-esteem and creating a desire to continue exploring ways to express themselves through the arts. The program has served more than 150,000 children since its beginning, and evaluations of the program have shown that participants demonstrate increased tolerance and understanding of diversity, build self-esteem through engagement with positive role models of color, and increase exposure to the contributions of African Americans to the arts.

The National Endowment for the Arts is an important catalyst in promoting opportunities for Americans to participate in the arts, spurring employment for artists and for encouraging economic activity. For this reason I would like to conclude by affirming our request that the Subcommittee fund the National Endowment for the Arts at \$170 million. The dollars provided by the National Endowment for the Arts draw other private and public investments that make our communities thrive.