



February 24, 2020

Testimony to the United States House of Representatives
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior-Environment

Chairwoman McCollum,

Thank for this opportunity to provide testimony on the Interior-Environment Appropriations bill. I am Sue Gens, executive director of the Minnesota State Arts Board.

The Arts Board believes that all the federal cultural agencies are important and need to be supported. However, because we work most closely with the National Endowment for the Arts, I will confine my testimony today to that one agency.

Specifically, we hope the House Appropriations committee will fund the National Endowment for the Arts at a level of \$170 million in fiscal year 2021.

I'd like to share three ways that funding for the Arts Endowment has an important, positive impact Minnesota.

The financial impact of the National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts has a significant financial impact in our state. Within the past five years—2015 to 2019—the Arts Endowment has invested just under \$28 million dollars in Minnesota. That is an average of \$5.6 million per year, approximately \$1 for every Minnesota resident. If the Arts Endowment's investment in every state was as high, it's budget would need to be \$330 million per year, double what it is today.

So, while the Arts Endowment's current appropriation constitutes approximately .003 percent of the federal budget, it's financial impact in Minnesota is tremendous and is deeply felt.

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The public impact of the National Endowment for the Arts

The arts are increasingly being recognized as an important asset in addressing key public needs and priorities. I'll share just a few recent examples:

- An Arts Endowment grant to Four-Directions Development in Red Lake, MN is an economic investment. It is supporting a collaboration of three tribal nations that will provide business training for Native creative entrepreneurs and help develop a market for Ojibwe arts and culture.
- Another Arts Endowment grant to ANEW BAM, is an investment in academic achievement. It is a research grant to study the impact of intensive, culturally relevant arts education on the academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for African-American youth on St Paul's east side.
- And an Arts Endowment grant to the Five Wings Arts Council is enhancing community resiliency and encouraging social cohesion among residents of Little Falls while its downtown is significantly disrupted by a major road construction project.

The human impact of the National Endowment for the Arts

At a time when many forces seem to be working to divide us, the arts are a powerful tool to unite us—they foster understanding and build community.

- World Fest, a program offered by Arts Midwest with Endowment funding brings performing ensembles for across the globe and imbeds them in rural communities for week-long residencies. Through this program, Minnesotans have had a chance to meet person to person with artists from Israel, China, South Africa, Turkey, Pakistan, and other countries and learn about their culture and traditions.
- And grants that the Arts Board has made with Arts Endowment funds help us understand the lives of our fellow residents. For example, a grant to a photographer will allow him to capture year in the life of people whose community is the Peace House homeless shelter in Minneapolis; and a Japanese American artist will produce an exhibition and photobook that addresses his family's incarceration during World War II.

I've shared only a few examples of the hundreds of activities and projects that will cease to exist if the Administration's FY 2021 budget proposal, eliminating all funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, is approved.

Thank you, Chairwoman McCollum, for inviting our input on this important bill, for your unwavering belief that the arts are vital to all Americans, and for your tireless advocacy for federal funding for arts and culture.

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Gens", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sue Gens, executive director
Minnesota State Arts Board