

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Committee on Educational and Cultural Affairs.

My name is David Greenham and I am the Chair of the Maine Arts Commission.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today to provide a brief introduction about the agency and to share our efforts in responding to the Covid pandemic.

Maine has been a leader in state support for the arts since 1933, when the Maine legislature created the Maine Art Commission, a three-member board appointed by the governor. The Commission advised the governor about the acquisition of works of art for state buildings and existed until 1965.

After that, Governor John Reed created the Governor's Council on Arts and Culture in Maine, which recommended the founding of an independent state agency, the Maine State Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Its mission was to expand support for the arts in Maine, and it was one of only two agencies in the country dedicated to supporting freedom of artistic expression.

At the same time, the National Foundation on the Arts & Humanities, parent to the National Endowment for the Arts, is created in Washington, D.C.

A few years later, the Commission become part of the new Department of Educational and Cultural Services (DOE). Federally funded humanities activities were separated from state government, and the private Maine Humanities Council was established to carry out some of the work formerly managed by the Commission. In the 1980s, the Maine State Commission on the Arts and Humanities was renamed the Maine Arts Commission (MAC).

In the early 1990s, the Arts Commission, along with the other cultural agencies and were separated from the Department of Education. They, along with the State Archives, Maine Historical Society, and the Maine Humanities Council were linked together under the umbrella of the Cultural Affairs Council. As Chair of the Arts Commission, I also sit on the governing board of the Cultural Affairs Council along with the chairs and vice chairs of all the other member organizations.

In 2016, the Maine Arts Commission celebrated its 50th Anniversary!

Our funding today comes from a combination of state and federal sources and is sometimes augmented by special project opportunities offered by the National Endowments for the Arts.

Our small agency has been working hard through Covid, like all other agencies to try to respond to the many needs for individuals and organizations in Maine.

Many sectors of the economy have suffered, as you know, but the arts have been particularly hard hit. A recent Brookings Report on the effects of Covid revealed that the fine and performing

arts industries have suffered estimated losses of almost 1.4 million jobs and \$42.5 billion in sales. These estimated losses represent 50% of all jobs in those industries and more than a quarter of all lost sales nationwide. Maine is no different. And in some ways are suffering more. Maine's losses from the creative economy businesses are estimated at \$325 million. Employees working in those businesses are suffering at a 76% unemployment rate.

Individual artists and so-called "gig" workers have suffered even higher rates of income and job loss. I'm sure that you each are familiar with individual artists who have lost their livelihood in this pandemic. They're in every single Maine community. A recent survey revealed that 57% of all individual creative workers in Maine reported that they have experienced a drastic decrease in work. There is a tradition in Maine of coddling together jobs to make a living, and for visual and performing artists, an important part of the economic puzzle simply disappeared overnight last March and shows few signs of returning any time soon.

Thanks to the National Endowment for The Arts, the New England Foundation for the Arts, budget savings and other small sources of funding, we have been able to grant just over half a million additional dollars for Covid Relief.

We have also helped to connect organizations to available funding through the PPE opportunities. In the fall, we cohosted a webinars with DECD Commissioner Heather Johnson and one with Senator Angus King for cultural organizations to learn more about opportunities for Covid relief funding. We will also be sharing information for the upcoming SBA Shuttered Venues Grants as it becomes available. And any other promising opportunities for organizations and individual artists.

On behalf of the Cultural Affairs Council, our staff stepped up to administrate the series of grants that were awarded throughout the state to organizations and communities for the celebration of Maine's Bicentennial. Almost all of those events were postponed, of course, so we've been working with the grant recipients to help them maneuver their way through the process to ensure their adjusted plans will fit their projects.

Additionally, today we are posting grant announcements because we have identified an additional \$120,000 in funding to grant to organizations and individuals in need.

We are working with our partners at ArtsEngageMe, a not-for-profit group whose mission is to support the work of the Arts Commission to find more funding, specifically to support individual artists.

We also anticipate the receipt of some additional funding through the National Endowment for the Arts thanks to Covid relief efforts that are currently being considered in Congress. And, of course, we hope the State of Maine will continue to find ways to support the field of cultural workers as they work to survive this pandemic.

The need is great right now. Even as the spring and summer comes and opportunities for opening small and outdoor venues arise, we all know that we're still a long way away from packed houses at the many theaters across the state, large crowd openings at museums or galleries, or

even the very popular social atmosphere of artwalks or community festivals of the arts that bring Mainers together to celebrate our culture.

As you endeavor on your important and challenging work through the spring, we ask that you please remember the power of the arts and artists who are just as critical to Maine's landscape as the rocky coast, the beautiful lakes and trails, and all the other natural wonders of our state.

To conclude, I'll share a quote from the application of one person who received a \$500 grant through our Maine Artist Relief Fund program. The artist wrote:

"The pandemic has dissolved opportunity for career artists. Many long-time, quality venues are completely shuttered while others are valiantly on hold. It is difficult to assess exact monetary loss to the demise of the structure within which I have supported myself for so long. However, I have significant professional losses which are the result of repercussions from the Corvid 19 pandemic, stemming from my practice here in Maine."

The loss is compounded. The applicant adds: "My current project with an MFA candidate (via the MFA Program at Maine College of Art) whom I have been engaged in helping with his thesis and professional texts has been cancelled. He is unable to pay because he is forced to use his own allocated funds for living expenses in light of the duress from the pandemic. I am saddened not to help this student."

Thanks for listening, and thanks, in advance, for any funds that you can provide to help the artists and arts organizations in Maine survive the remainder of the pandemic.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Greenham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Greenham
Chair, The Maine Arts Commission