



**131st Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

March 15, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I'm David Greenham, Executive Director of the Maine Arts Commission. Thanks for the opportunity to testify in favor of LD 669.

When we spoke back in January, I shared with you a report from the G-20 entitled the *Economic and Social Impact of Cultural and Creative Sectors*.

Arts and culture is "a driver of innovation," they wrote, "a source of creative skills with strong backward and forward linkages in the economy."

They added that thriving arts and culture has "significant social impacts, from supporting health and well-being, to promoting social inclusion and local social capital."

"There is an opportunity," she said, "for culture to play an even greater role in driving economic, social and indeed environmental outcomes."

Representative Collings' proposal on public art gets to the core of the societal benefits of arts and culture in our lives.

Let's first discuss just what we mean when we're talking about public art. The phrase can generally be defined as art that is available to the general public outside of museums, galleries, and other visual and performing arts venues that require some sort of direct effort to engage with them. By that I mean purchasing a ticket or even entering a building.

We had one of our bi-monthly meetings of our Commission yesterday and Commission members and staff discussed this bill. One of our Commission members, Donna McNeil, the director of the Ellis Beauregard Foundation, described public art beautifully as "an unintentional encounter between an individual and art."

I'm a theater guy, and one of the tenets of building great improvisational theater is the phrase "yes, and...." So, to Donna's wonderful comment about the unintentional encounter, I'd add a 'yes, and.'

In recent years, public art has moved beyond the idea of a single art piece in a single spot. Public art is a national and international movement, often referred to as creative placemaking.

Our equal partner in funding the arts in Maine is the The National Endowment for the Arts. The NEA matches the funding that the state provides for the Maine Arts Commission to operate.

The NEA has a robust national creative placemaking program. They say that “Creative placemaking integrates arts, culture and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities. It requires partnership across sectors, deeply engages the community, involves artists, designers and culture bearers, and helps to advance local economic, physical and/or social change, ultimately laying the groundwork for systems change.”

They note that arts, culture, and design can help to strengthen communities by:

- Bringing new attention to or elevating key community assets and issues, voices of residents, local history, or cultural infrastructure.
- Injecting new or additional energy, resources, activity, people, or enthusiasm into a place, community issue, or local economy.
- Envisioning new possibilities for a community or place - a new future, a new way of overcoming a challenge, or approaching problem-solving.
- Connecting communities, people, places, and economic opportunity via physical spaces or new relationships.

Just looking at the communities that are represented by members of this committee it’s clear that public art and creative placemaking has made an impact, and additional support for this work could be a wonderful catalyst for future growth.

Most Mainers, I think, recognize the impact that the arts have played in revitalizing Portland and Belfast. While there are wonderful things going on in both cities, I’m sure Representatives Brennan and Dodge would agree there is much more that can happen.

Representative Worth’s community of Ellsworth has a main street dominated by the historic Grand Auditorium, and many craft and artisan businesses, but it’s a public art mural project led by the Heart of Ellsworth that’s generated a great deal of excitement in the past couple of years.

In Representative Bagshaw’s community, the Windham Summerfest brings the whole town out to the school grounds for a day are music and celebration. More of that would certainly be welcomed.

And representative Polewarczyk knows better than any of us that it’s great to wander in and out of the galleries in Wiscasset while someone from your group waits in line at Red’s for lobster rolls. Wiscasset’s art walks and special community events have made it a place to stop rather than a place to drive through on your way up the coast, and lovely recent restoration of their downtown wouldn’t have been so badly needed if people weren’t stopping.

Public art and creative placemaking take our communities beyond those moments. Like those I've mentioned, the communities of Kennebunk, Standish, Falmouth, Livermore Falls, Cape Elizabeth, Scarborough, Alfred and York all have unique events in the year that make them stand out. But imagine a program that helped encourage more local activity and celebration.

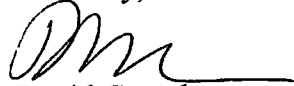
A state fund to support public art and creative placemaking would show that the state legislature recognizes that those moments build community pride and inclusion. They make communities more welcoming to visitors from other communities as well as those who visit from outside of the state. And, of course, those events and programs directly support the bottom-line success of the many local small businesses that too often struggle to survive.

A public art fund from the legislature would begin the process of developing a valuable statewide program. We would be able to leverage your investment to attract national public art and creative placemaking funding to bring it to Maine.

I urge your support of LD 669 and any support you can provide to encourage more public art and creative placemaking programs in Maine.

Thank you and I'm happy to work with you as you develop the details of this proposal.

Sincerely,



David Greenham

Executive Director

The Maine Arts Commission

David.greenham@maine.gov