

Cultural Alliance of Maine

Testimony for Appropriations / Educational & Cultural Affairs hearing

February 7, 2025

Honorable Members of the Appropriations and Education & Cultural Affairs Committees,

My name is Mollie Cashwell, and I'm the director of the Cultural Alliance of Maine, a fairly new cultural sector partnership dedicated to network building, research, and visibility-raising around the statewide creative economy. We work closely with our peer service organizations, including Maine Preservation, Maine Archives & Museums, Maine Library Association, Maine Film Association, Maine Craft Association, and others. Our role as an umbrella sector partnership is to assess and make positive impact on cultural access and the creative economy through workforce development initiatives, collaboration opportunities, impact research, policymaking, and strategic initiatives aimed ultimately at ensuring your constituents have access to history, humanities, the arts, and creative skillbuilding. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today regarding the importance of cultural agency funding to cultural organizations and communities around the state.

I first want to share the big picture role of our state's creative economy as a proven driver of economic growth, local business support, and community well-being.

Quick Facts about the Economic and Community Impact of Maine's Cultural Sector

- **Cultural Industry Clusters include:**
 - Creative businesses: design, art, craft, film, graphic/digital media, venues
 - Museums, libraries, and historical societies
 - Historic preservation initiatives
 - Theatres, arts organizations, humanities programs, and festivals
 - Arts education and enrichment programs
- **Employment:** The cultural sector supports 18,749 jobs across the state (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis).
- **Economic Contribution:** Generates \$2.2 billion annually, accounting for 2.6% of Maine's GDP.
- **Sector Composition:** Includes nonprofit organizations, small businesses, independent contractors, and municipal cultural entities.
- **Statewide Presence:** Cultural assets exist in every Maine community, strengthening economic and community development work.

You heard all about the services and resources provided by these agencies, and I want to offer some insights from the constituents out in the field. What it comes down to is: state investment in culture empowers economic

stability & growth in our field, and our ability to provide outstanding events, services, programs, and spaces that keep Mainers circulating in the community, building relationships and making connections, and spending money at local businesses. The services and grants provided by cultural agencies are really pivotal in small rural communities in particular. Many organizations lack the philanthropic networks that enable cultural offerings to develop. They need a chance to offer programs and attract audiences before they can secure sponsors, donors, volunteers, and other support that will sustain the work in the long term.

Even for larger or more well-connected organizations they're extraordinarily skilled at leveraging cultural agency grants for much greater support locally. Individual donors and communities pay attention when they see something has been vetted by a cultural agency and awarded support, which can encourage additional donations from individuals and businesses. In this way state funds serve as a catalyst for attracting philanthropic and private investment that far exceed the grant.

Cultural institutions do more than support the economy—they bring people together. They provide places for social connection, lifelong learning, and community events. Arts and humanities programs improve well-being, support youth development, and create opportunities for people of all ages to learn and connect. Continued state funding ensures that Maine's rich cultural heritage remains strong and accessible to everyone.

Thank you so much for your support keeping cultural heritage a vivid part of life in every Maine community and combatting isolation and division. We need to feel proud of where we live, grounded in what we've accomplished together throughout history, and connected with our neighbors more than ever. You should know that a Census study determined that 71% of Maine residents participate in creative and cultural activities - that's #2 in the nation. The cultural sector truly makes the legislature's support go a long way toward keeping our state one of the most creative in the nation. I hope that brings you pride. I'm eager to be a resource and will follow up with an email with areas of our website that will help you track the creative economy in your own communities.