

Cultural Alliance of Maine

Learning, connecting, making visible, and building public support across our cultural sectors.

Testimony of Mollie Cashwell on behalf of the Cultural Alliance of Maine

In favor of LD 1404 - Resolve, to Create a Working Group on the Status of School Libraries and on Public Libraries in Maine

April 9, 2025

Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs:

The Cultural Alliance of Maine (CAM) is a backbone nonprofit for Maine's cultural sector, strengthening and amplifying cultural organizations and communities through collective action, research, and advocacy. I'm here to testify in favor of LD1404.

Maine's libraries are essential public infrastructure. As you know, they offer a variety of services from internet access, early literacy programs, job search assistance, heating and cooling spaces, local history archives, and gathering places. In many towns, the library is the only free, year-round public space staffed by a trusted professional.

Libraries also power Maine's creative economy, which contributes \$2.5 billion a year—2.7% of our GDP, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. They're where creativity starts. 71% of Mainers participate in creating culture, and for many, the library is where that journey begins.

But support systems for libraries in Maine are fragmented. Some are well-resourced and serve as full-service hubs. Others rely on volunteers, have limited hours, and lack basic tools. Libraries are working harder than ever behind the scenes to provide seamless and equal service, but I know the present system makes it unnecessarily hard for them to plan, collaborate, or respond to community needs.

This working group offers a chance for a fiscally responsible, clear-eyed look at what's working, where the gaps are, and how we can modernize our support for libraries without reinventing the wheel. It's about understanding the facts, improving efficiency, and ensuring libraries can meet today's technological, educational, social, and economic challenges.

It's also about fairness. Your access to a library—and all the opportunities it brings—shouldn't depend on your zip code or the size of your town's tax base.

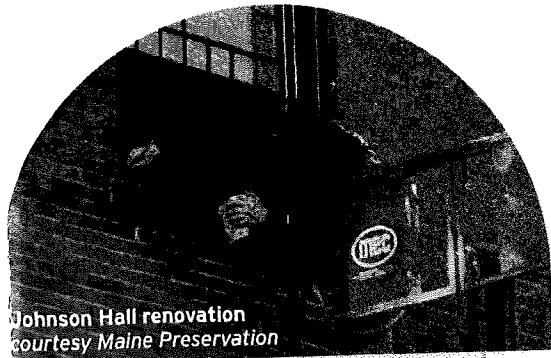
On a personal note—my third grader is mildly learning disabled and his reading level is behind the standard. His school team is fantastic, but we also rely on our local children's librarian, Abby. She's become an essential part of our support team. When he spends time with her he's in a space where reading is joyful, creative, and personal, not something he can fail. She'll be our lifeline this summer to keep him reading and helping us as parents try and get him closer to the standard. I know many parents who feel the same. I stepped up and joined the library board to help our library stay strong and this year agreed to serve as board chair. I need to know that Maine's lawmakers are with me doing the same in Augusta, and hatching a plan to keep our libraries strong spaces of learning and connection for my son and Maine kids everywhere.

Gratefully,

Mollie Cashwell

MAINE IS MADE BY WHAT WE MAKE.

■ *A report from the Cultural Alliance of Maine, 2025*



Johnson Hall renovation
courtesy Maine Preservation

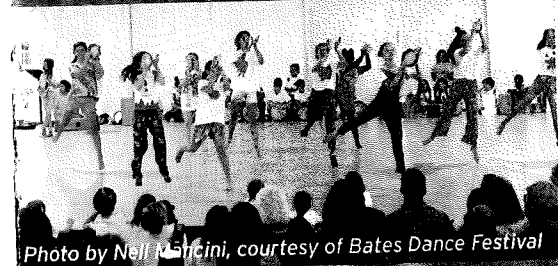
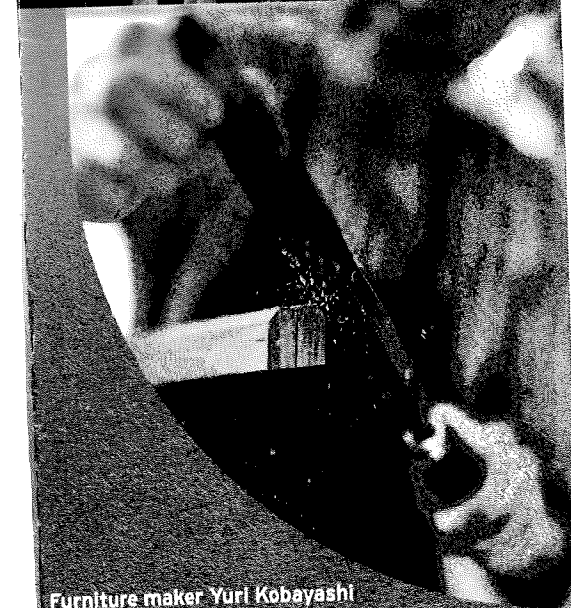
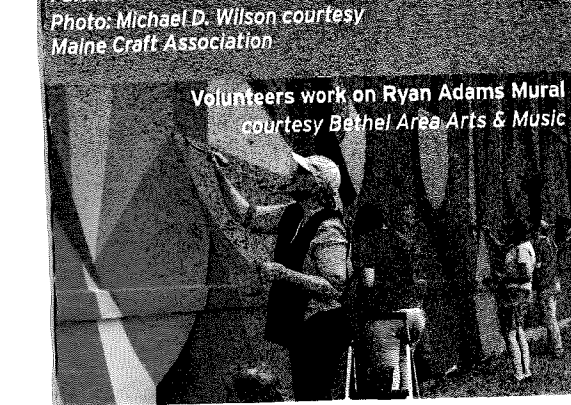


Photo by Nell Mancini, courtesy of Bates Dance Festival



Furniture maker Yuri Kobayashi
Photo: Michael D. Wilson courtesy
Maine Craft Association



Volunteers work on Ryan Adams Mural
courtesy Bethel Area Arts & Music

We make a town feel like home with festivals and murals. We make history and relive it in museums. We take center stage and make audiences roar. We make historic buildings into new businesses. We tell stories that make sense of our world. We make things beautiful in our ancestors' ways and our own. We make sure children grow into lifelong learners. We make films that are screened locally, nationally, and internationally. We make music together. We make new traditions with family, and make up for lost time when they come to visit. We carve, weave, weld, draw, and make the future we want to see.

And we make our economy stronger along the way.



Aman Turner, 2024 Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Institute for Museum Studies
cohort member, Governor's School for the Arts Museum

#10

state in library visits
per capita

artist Jennifer Neptune
Photo: Michael D. Wilson courtesy
Maine Craft Association



4,741

teens studied, memorized, &
performed poems through
Poetry Out Loud in 2023, a
program in schools from the
Maine Arts Commission, Maine
Humanities Council, and National
Endowment for the Arts

2025 first place winner Pendo Dawe & finalists
courtesy Maine Arts Commission



#2

state in craft
artists per capita



Family dance yoga in the Periodicals Room
courtesy Jesup Memorial Library

in 2023, Maine's 257 public
libraries logged:

619,795

program attendees

28,242

children helped with
reading retention
over summer break

6,791,555

books, ebooks, DVDs,
audiobooks, games, tools
& helpful items borrowed



'The Big Question' in Bangor
courtesy Maine Humanities

42

towns hosted a
'Maine Speaks'
event with Maine
Humanities to
tackle complex
topics affecting
their communities

42%

of Maine adults attended live
music, dance, or theater
performances in 2022

John Cariani's 'Almost Maine' at the Stonington
Opera House courtesy Opera House Arts



AT 71% MAINE IS THE #2 STATE FOR PARTICIPATION IN CREATIVITY

Whether knitting at home or performing on stage, Maine residents show **huge demand for culture and creativity** while receiving among the lowest state investments for culture per capita. Nonetheless, that high demand pays a high return on investment to our economy. Maine lawmakers are stewards of a distinct and incredibly active cultural landscape.

\$2.2 billion
in economic impact

18,749
jobs in the cultural sector

2.6%
of Maine's GDP

\$1.2 billion
in wages and benefits.

#2
state in **museums**
per capita

3.6 million
square feet of **residential**
and **commercial** space
preserved, and

1,300
affordable housing units
created with the *Historic
Rehabilitation Tax Credit*
program 2009-2019 (1,911
housing units total)

28,006
free admissions for
SNAP participants
at 24 Maine museums
in the *Museums for All*
initiative (2.14% of their
visitors; a \$418,757
access investment)

15%
of Maine adults
attended art
exhibits
in 2022

Data sourced from:
*Institute for Museum & Library
Services; National Endowment
for the Arts; U.S. Bureau of
Economic Analysis; U.S. Census
American Time Use Survey;
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics;
Maine State Library; Maine
Office of Program Evaluation
and Government Accountability*

*Photo: Historic Bathel and
Maine State Library; Photo: Maine Preservation
Photo Kenneth G. Smith, Maine Preservation*

PROSPERITY IN MAINE DEPENDS ON CULTURAL ACCESS.

To ensure that future generations can benefit from these opportunities, we must develop plans to invest in Maine's creative workers and steward our aging cultural facilities.

Communities thrive when they can come together, build connections, and share creative experiences. Protecting this access, especially in rural communities, will require collaboration between lawmakers and cultural leaders to create policies that support and sustain the creative economy. Maine can study other states' strategies to strengthen our own creative economy and integrate culture into community development while honoring the character and composition of our unique state.

Policies and programs from other states:

Vermont's annual cultural facilities grant program helps nonprofit organizations improve or expand their buildings.

Indiana has successfully used a revolving loan fund to help creative businesses and entrepreneurs invest in local projects.

Minnesota's dedicated 0.375% sales tax has generated hundreds of millions of dollars for culture and outdoor recreation.

Oregon's Cultural Trust allows taxpayers to direct a greater portion of the taxes they owe toward culture via a Cultural Tax Credit for eligible donations to cultural nonprofits.

Tennessee's Arts Plate supports arts organizations and projects.

Pennsylvania's Regional Asset District directs one penny of every taxable dollar spent to support quality of life in Allegheny County. Half of that penny goes to support culture and recreation, while the other half goes to local county government to support tax relief and local government services.

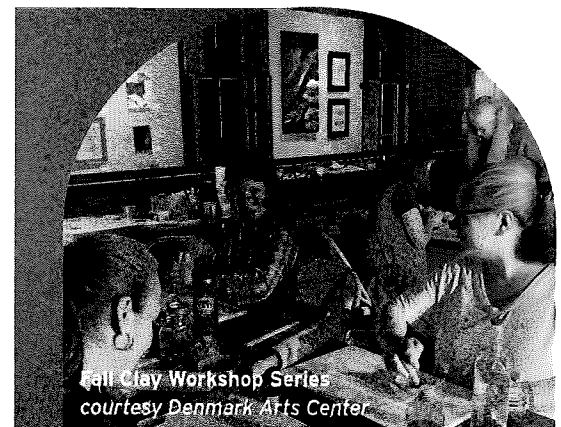
Together, we can make culture, creativity, and community thrive.

Contact:

Mollie Cashwell, Director
mollie@culturalmaine.org

Cultural Alliance of Maine

 culturalmaine.org  @culturalmaine  Cultural Alliance of Maine



Full Clay Workshop Series
courtesy Denmark Arts Center

Rock of Ages at the Waterville Opera House
photo: John Meader



courtesy Maine Film Association

