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JFC STATEMENT | Neil Kirschling

February 13, 2025:

Members of the Joint Finance Committee:

Thank you, your staff, and the Controller General's Office for the opportunity to testify today in support of increasing the Division of the Arts grants budget. Congratulations Secretary of State Patibanda-Sanchez for your appointment. We look forward to working with you, and we echo your praise of Deputy Knight, Director Ball and the Division of the Arts for their excellent track record supporting our sector.

My name is Neil Kirschling and I am here as the Executive Director of the Delaware Arts Alliance. The DAA (Delaware Arts Alliance) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the unifying voice for the arts in Delaware. We represent 50 organizational members across the state, as well as nearly a thousand individual advocates, artists, educators, and patrons.

On behalf of those members, I am here to ask that you increase spending authority for the Delaware Division of the Arts by \$1M. This would accomplish two goals:

- 1. Cover increased costs of grant programs (to account for inflation and new grantees that will be matriculated into annual grants – and request this be explored as a door opener) and
- 2. Provide new essential workforce development, professional training, and technical assistance to the entire sector

This past year, following two years of research and stakeholder engagement, the DAA released the CREATE Plan – a recovery and growth plan for Delaware's creative economy. We are the first state in the country to release this sort of plan that firmly positions the arts in economic development conversations.

- **Why/What the CREATE Plan found to support this ask:**
 - Small businesses account for 70.7% of the creative economy, and an additional 17.8% are self-employed/freelancers, yet largely do not access existing small business supports and programs.
 - The creative economy requires additional funding structures, with 67% of individual creatives and 68% of institutions not receiving grants in the last two years. Every dollar of output in the creative economy generates another 60 cents return on investment for other non-arts industries.



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- Those working in the creative economy – whether running their own small business, working at an arts nonprofit, or independent artist -- all expressed desire for more accessible and structured professional development in areas like marketing, fundraising, operations, and business and financial management. This would contribute to the overall independence and sustainability of the sector and help make Delaware a more enticing place to start and operate a creative business. With greater support, the creative economy can grow as a revenue generator for Delaware.
- A lack of professional development pipelines, including formalized pathways and apprenticeships starting in K-12 schools, contributes to “brain drain” from the state.
- **Areas for further opportunity to explore:** We look forward to discussing with members of the General Assembly and Governor’s Administration steps that can be taken to advance the following CREATE Plan recommendations:
 - Develop a statewide cultural economy brand to benefit tourism, economic development, export, and audience development
 - Include the creative economy in statewide business and economic development communications and programs
 - Catalyze the development of K-12 career and technical education pathways for creative industries – including coursework and internship/apprenticeships
 - Modernize the state’s film and media-production infrastructure to make Delaware an even more attractive a destination for this industry
 - Establish a creative economy council to build cross-sectoral collaboration and engage stakeholders

I am joined today by a group of stakeholders who are excited to give public comments and share how your investment is supporting a thriving creative economy in Delaware. In every county, they are developing vibrant local cultural scenes to attract people to live, visit, and work here; they are creating jobs and generating ROI for other sectors like hospitality and restaurants; they are building healthy, connected, resilient communities and leading tough conversations about equity and social change. There are so many exciting things underway exploring the intersection of the arts with workforce development, small business supports, apprenticeships, tourism and still so much untapped potential.



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Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this budget increase. I will provide my email address with my written testimony and welcome any follow up questions or request for information.

Lastly, I invite you to learn more about the CREATE Plan at an Arts and Culture Caucus meeting this year chaired by Senator Lockman and Representative Shupe. They will be hosting a CREATE plan briefing just for legislators and staff on Feb 28th 12pm on Zoom.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Kirschling". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Neil Kirschling

Executive Director

Delaware Arts Alliance

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