



**BEFORE THE HOUSE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

**April 11, 2019**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, my name is Emily Prince and I serve as Education Director of Stuart's Opera House in Nelsonville Ohio. I also serve on the Ohio Citizens for the Arts Board of Directors, a statewide grassroots organization that collectively represent hundreds of thousands of Ohioans who participate in the arts in every county in our state, and the Ohio Alliance for Arts Education, the mission of which is to ensure that the arts are an integral part of the education of every Ohioan.

Today I am here to ask for an increase to arts funding—specifically a \$5 million increase per year over what the Governor has proposed in his Executive Budget -- and also to share with you the value of public funding for the arts and the impact the Ohio Arts Council has on nonprofit organizations like Stuarts.

For twenty years, Stuart's has been a community center for the arts. On average, Stuart's provides 25,000 visitors with over 75 events a year, including concerts, theater performances, free concerts, educational events, and private rentals. Our art programming and educational outreach keep us heavily involved with the underserved population of Nelsonville and surrounding communities through cooperative participation in and preservation of the arts. An average of 7,000 students participate yearly in our Arts Education Program! The goal of the Arts Education Program is to offer an affordable, broad based program in the performing arts. The arts are a gateway for critical thinking and broadening perceptions. Our program's mission not to train people to be musicians, rock stars, or actors but rather: to train compassionate citizens, Active listeners, communicators, and participants in the wider world.

In increasing the Ohio Arts Council's budget you are providing funding support for arts education. At Stuart's and across this state the arts organizations and artists receiving funding from the Arts Council know that arts education works for children. Children who are immersed in the arts in school do markedly better in all other academic subjects. Scientific research supports the effectiveness of arts education to help students learn. Arts education fuels the creative and knowledge-based economies in our communities. Given that one of the Ohio Arts Council's core departments provides support to arts education it is important for us to pay close attention to research. For example, studies suggest that arts education may be especially useful for students in economically disadvantaged families and/or in need of remedial instruction. The arts succeed when everything else has failed.

The Arts Council makes it a priority to directly fund arts and culture in all 88 Ohio counties. The agency now works every year with local government, schools, nonprofit arts organizations, and other providers in underserved counties to ensure that all Ohioans have ongoing access to the arts. As you can see from just one small spot in the state, your support of the arts and the Ohio Arts Council – and the millions of taxpayers who are touched by their work – sets Ohio apart in this great nation. And the programs and services that OAC funding makes possible allows organizations like the Stuarts to change lives.



We are pleased to report that we have received four grants from the Ohio Arts Council for FY19. A Sustainability grant of \$28,981.00, an Arts Partnership grant of \$14,542.00 for our Arts Education Program, an ArtsNEXT grant of \$9,054.00 in support of a new Audio Production Program, and a grant of \$5,000 in support of our regional coordination of the National Poetry Out Loud competition.

Stuart's programming furthers its mission by providing much needed inspiration to the underserved of the region. In addition to presenting art, entertainment, and educational resources to the population of Nelsonville and the surrounding communities, Stuart's serves as a venue for local and regional film festivals, local and regional dance performances, and a visual art gallery. Stuart's is also home to many community events, such as weddings, business meetings, and church concerts. Stuart's will always strive to be available to any and all community members. Our first priority is to give our community access to national and international art opportunities provided by world class performers and educators.

Without the funding from the Ohio Arts Council these activities would be more difficult or impossible to present to the community and make our mission harder to reach.

OAC grants must be matched at least one to one with private dollars and it has helped us leverage additional funding from Epstein Teicher Philanthropies, Rocky Community Improvement Fund, The Athens Foundation, Athens County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Johnny B Foundation, Rocky Brands, Ed Map, Individual Donations, etc.

Increasing public support for the arts is one of the best investments you can make in our state's future, and so today I ask you to invest an additional \$5 million dollars per fiscal year for arts and culture via the Ohio Arts Council.

People ask me what is my favorite part of the Ohio Arts Council supported Arts Education program- it's hard to pick. But, my favorite is when a kid comes up and tells me about something they've seen or done at Stuart's and they brag on it as if I'm a stranger. I was out at our new library stage recently and a couple of kids were jumping from rock to rock and doing other feats or acrobatics. I stopped one of the kids so I could tie his shoe- trip hazard-- and he said to me "have you ever seen Galumph?! I just saw them at the Opera House and I'm going to be an Acrobat in Galumph! You should go see them if you get the chance!" So, I thank you. Because you provided when the Arts Council needed you to and we and you and us have a need again. There are thousands of kids and adults and "us"es who need these programs and YOU can make it happen.

The cultural sector has long been good stewards of public funding, and will continue to make our communities great places to live and work. I would not be here without it; Stuart's would not be here without it; and people in rural and disadvantaged areas would have a much harder time accessing the arts without the Ohio Arts Council. With that, I again offer my thanks to you, Mr. Chairman and am happy to answer any questions.