

**Testimony
of
Angela Meleca
Executive Director
CreativeOhio
Before the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
March 7, 2023**

Chairwoman Manning, Ranking Member Jarrells, and members of the Committee thank you for allowing me to testify today on the proposed budget appropriation.

I am Angela Meleca, and I serve as Executive Director of CreativeOhio, formerly known as Ohio Citizens for the Arts.

CreativeOhio is the statewide organization whose purpose is to advocate essential issues for the well-being of Ohio's arts and creative economy. We aim to increase public support and funding for the creative industry through advocacy, engagement, and education and promote Ohio as The Creative Capital. Our more than 300 members include world-renowned institutions such as Playhouse Square, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Toledo Museum of Art, and the Cincinnati Symphony, to name a few. Also, community-focused groups such as the North Ridgeville Arts Council, Marathon Center for the Performing Arts, Greater Columbus Arts Council, Dayton Live, and the Magical Theatre Company, individual artists, and civic and community champions of creatives.

Ohio is blessed with world-class and historically recognized arts and culture institutions. These assets, and many more, contribute not only to the vibrancy and quality of life in communities across Ohio but also comprise a \$55 billion industry for the state, according to our 2022 Economic Contribution Study conducted by Bowling Green State University. Ohio is home to hundreds of entrepreneurial, creative organizations that have spent years building strong customer bases and stable revenue streams. Our creative community is responsible for the nearly 330,000 jobs, \$18 billion in payroll, and roughly \$4.5 billion in tax revenue.

Though 70% of the creative industries' impact is in Ohio's seven metropolitan areas (Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, Akron, and Youngstown), the economic impact is more than just urban areas. Rural Ohio comprised nearly 30% of the creative economy, with more than \$12 billion in annual activity.

Funding through the Ohio Arts Council is a lifeline for many arts and culture organizations in Ohio. The State Programs Subsidies line item is the primary source for arts grants awarded to hundreds of organizations across the state. A significant part of the funding is the Sustainability Grant Program which provides crucial operating support. The Executive's proposed appropriation for the State Programs Subsidies remains flat compared to two years ago. But Ohio's creative sector remains in a challenging business climate.

According to the Ohio Arts Council, more organizations are now eligible for operating support grants. This represents a 58% increase in organizations previously qualified. If the Ohio Arts Council funding is flat, all operating support grantees may face a reduction in their grant to accommodate these newly eligible organizations. In addition, like all Ohio businesses, the creative economy is also facing soaring costs to do business in a competitive job market. We still face recovery from two years of crippling earned revenue loss, soaring production costs in shipping and materials, and increased demand in employee pay.

So, it will be no surprise for you to hear today that we are asking for an inflationary increase in investment. We urge the committee to consider recommending an increase in the State Subsidies Line Item from \$18M to \$22.5M each fiscal year. This represents a \$4.5M increase per fiscal year, the level requested by the Ohio Arts Council to the Administration. This would ensure that no existing grantee suffers a cut and also accounts for the growing inflation rate that has challenged all of us.

We are incredibly grateful to live in a state that supports the creative industry. Thank you for your leadership in deepening the state's investment in the creative sector, including one-time business relief.

Thank you,

Angela Meleca
Executive Director
CreativeOhio