

Budget Forum Remarks
Susan Abbott, ArtsWestchester

January 26, 2024

On behalf of my colleagues around New York State, we are so grateful for your leadership in securing \$10 million appropriations in the state Senate budget for regional arts council funding for 2023 and again for 2024. This crucial funding has already enabled us to collectively fund 861 projects across 21 counties in 2023. As we look forward to building on this success, we respectfully request the renewal of this \$10 million appropriation in the 2025 budget, which includes a \$1 million allocation for each council including ArtsWestchester. We recognize that this is a significant request in what is expected to be a difficult budget year, but this is a strategic investment that will lead to significant social and economic benefit throughout the state. We have been advised by NYSCA that they will not fund these arts councils in 2024, so your support of this continued funding is more important now than ever.

This investment in decentralized local decision-making via regional arts councils has already had monumental success. In FY23, seven statewide arts councils received \$1 million allocations, with an additional two arts councils receiving \$500,000 each in 2024. The remaining funds were directed to the NYS Council on the Arts for investment in other statewide partnerships.

Reports from these regional arts councils indicated \$2,929,419 was awarded in grants that ranged from \$1,000 to \$5,000 each, and supported:

861 diverse projects for organizations and individual artists
45 libraries, often the sole source of cultural programming in rural areas

Of these funded projects:

38.3% were awarded to first-time applicants

39.7% engaged diverse, historically marginalized, or under-resourced communities

20% supported BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Initiatives

This funding has enabled the respective arts councils to expand their staff, develop new and innovative cultural programs, and expand equitable access to arts funding and diversifying cultural programs across the state.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are strongly advocating for the continuation of the \$10 million appropriation. These funds are already creating positive change across the arts sector and the state, while enhancing the capacity and reach of our local arts councils. This model has proven highly effective and holds great potential to be replicated across New York State.

On behalf of the organizations and artists we represent, we thank you for your dedication to the arts. We are eager to continue this partnership and build an even more vibrant, inclusive, and artistically rich New York State.