



My name is Lauren Miller and I am the Advancement + Alliance Director of The Bushwick Starr, a nonprofit theater dedicated to innovative performance and our community in the 18<sup>th</sup> Senate District and 54<sup>th</sup> Assembly District. Our theater employs 500+ artists and 10 year-round staff, engages 6000+ audiences from Brooklyn and beyond, and educates 120 learners aged 9 to 90 in Bushwick each year.

Organizations like ours who specialize in the development of emerging artistic voices represent a critical part of the cultural ecosystem. Artists working in small venues like ours today, may one day define the future of NYC's world-class cultural institutions and the American canon at large. Tracking arts organizations closures since 2020, you'll see that our state has largely lost mission-driven developmental spaces like our own that offer free and affordable admissions. This is a direct result of the fact that federal relief like the Shuttered Venue Operator Grants was intended solely to recover lost earned income—consequently, **those organizations who offer the most affordable access subsidized by private and public support are now most at risk of shuttering our venues.** We have been left behind at the federal level, so we depend even more on the state to ensure our survival. This is why the Starr stands firmly with our colleagues to insist on robust support rather than the proposed NYSCA cuts.

**This is not an ask for “extraordinary funding for extraordinary times” – retaining NYSCA funding at least at FY23 levels is a necessary level of investment relative to the extraordinary arts economy of New York.** This funding will retain and grow our world class workforce, create opportunity for emerging leaders, and share the wealth of culture in every district, rural or urban. Our work directly benefits the state's general health and welfare, and the activity of our arts businesses indirectly generate even more economic activity in dozens of related industries in hospitality, tourism, and more - some studies have determined that every dollar spent on the arts compounds into \$11 back to our local economies. If ever there was a time to invest in that eleven-fold return, it's in this urgent moment of recovery. The Starr for example expends over \$1M annually, largely on personnel costs for fairly paid creative jobs, but the result of this expenditure also drives traffic to local business. Take each audience member and artist's dining and shopping while they visit our theater – conservatively, we estimate that our performances alone account for \$300K+ in direct effect on local business each year. **Even as a small theater, we make a resounding impact, not just in dollars and cents, but in the hearts and minds of our neighbors.** By providing affordable, accessible arts experiences and fairly paid arts jobs, we are able to generate an extraordinary amount of cultural and economic activity with comparatively little public support (typically, only 10-15% of our activity is supported by federal, state, and city funding combined.)

**We urge you to baseline FY23's level of \$250M for NYSCA program and capital expense funding, which would represent just 0.1% of the FY24 state budget.** Cutting it to \$40M as proposed would jeopardize communities statewide, and our standing as the nation's cultural capital. Compare these cuts to the proposed extension of tax breaks for commercial theater and film/TV producers, coupled with the payroll tax increases to fund this budget rather than commonsense revenue-raising reforms that would ensure that the wealthiest New Yorkers and corporations pay their fair share - this budget seems to pick winners and losers, enriching the already-powerful and devaluing the nonprofit arts in the process. We provide so much to the state with such modest support, and we deserve a budget that reflects our value.

Sincerely,

Lauren Miller

Advancement + Alliance Director – The Bushwick Starr