

Hearing: Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Economic Development, Workforce Development and the Arts

Submitted to: New York State Senate Finance Committee Chair Senator Liz Krueger and New York State Assembly Ways & Means Committee Chair Assemblywoman Helene E. Weinstein on January 30, 2024

Submitted by: Sarah Bryan, Executive Director, Association for Cultural Equity (New York, NY)

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony regarding the economic and cultural impact of the New York State Council for the Arts, and to advocate strongly for the ample funding of this essential institution.

My name is Sarah Bryan, and I am the Executive Director of The Association for Cultural Equity (ACE), a New York City-based organization founded in 1983. ACE is dedicated to the mission of stimulating cultural equity through preservation, research, and dissemination of the world's traditional music and dance, and through collaboration with communities to sustain and revitalize their living cultural heritage.

- **NYSCA folk arts funding is essential to our work.**

We have been fortunate to receive funding through NYSCA's folk arts grants program – support which has been crucial to the success of our programming, and indispensable for enhancing our organizational capacity.

ACE has a global reach, with social media audiences exceeding two million. Our programs, which are centered in New York, engage partners throughout the US, Caribbean, and Europe. Thanks to NYSCA's support for folk arts, we have also been able to create and sustain programs that support the work of traditional artists from immigrant groups here in New York who would otherwise not benefit from public funding. Our wide variety of programs include, for example, many years of activities to support Afro-Caribbean musicians and Carnival costume-makers in New York's Grenadian and Tobagonian communities, to find new audiences for their work both within and beyond New York's Caribbean communities. We present traditional artists in diverse kinds of community-based and general audience venues and enable artists to secure new performance opportunities.

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The performance and exhibition opportunities made possible by our NYSCA-supported programs not only provide critical economic benefit to the artists, but they raise the visibility of their art forms within their communities, helping to ensure that new generations learn about and sustain their heritage. Further, they foster and strengthen those communities' relationships with the music and visual arts venues in New York with whom we partner to host such events.

- **NYSCA folk arts funding addresses a critical need in the field.**

NYSCA support is of game-changing consequence for New York's folk arts organizations because it provides operational funding, which is so important to sustaining our capacity, yet so rarely available from other grantors. The vast majority of grant opportunities within reach of folk arts organizations like ours are project-based, providing funds for certain activities, but not for the administrative structures without which the activities would not be possible. Because it undergirds all of our work, NYSCA's support allows us to maximize the impact of other funding we receive, increasing the dollar-for-dollar benefit we are able to leverage on behalf of artists and audiences.

- **There is also a great need for the return/increase of NYSCA's partnership funding category.**

NYSCA has, until the past year, provided direct support through its partnership category to regional folk arts programs vital to the living cultural heritage of rural and suburban communities as well as communities of color, for the TravelStorys cell phone tours which are generating sustainable tourism through folklife in many regions of the State, and the New York Living Traditions online site that features the traditions of a number of community based organizations throughout New York State. In 2023, nearly all of the organizations carrying out these projects were not able to apply for support for them, without explanation from NYSCA, resulting in a loss of over \$350,000 in funding. We urged renewed support for these partnerships along with new opportunities for folk arts organizations to apply for partnership funding.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our experiences.