Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony to you today in support of federal funding for both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) at no less than $211 million each for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. We also encourage the Subcommittee to build a specific path to index funding for each of these two cultural agencies at $1 per capita. Each agency is currently funded at only 62 cents per capita. As Chairman Simpson has stated himself that the nation’s cultural agencies should be funded at $1 per capita and simply put, “the arts make our communities more livable.”

We thank the Committee for working in a bipartisan manner to increase the NEA’s and NEH’s budget last year. The $27 million increase was the most significant in recent history. A further increase in FY 2024 to match or exceed President Biden’s budget number is a small investment compared to other programs appropriated by Congress. More importantly, it represents a true public-private partnership that enables strong economic, cultural, social, and educational impact by the arts, while instilling a sense of connection and community.

Look no further than data released by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis earlier this week. Arts and culture economic activity increased to 4.4% of gross domestic product (GDP), topping $1.02 trillion, in 2021. This new high-water mark represents a larger percentage of GDP than the transportation, construction, and agricultural sectors. Of note to members of this committee are top quintile states, including California, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Washington.

Arts and culture employment nationwide increased by 5.0% in 2021, a year after the BEA stated that, “In year one of the COVID-19 pandemic, few areas of the U.S. economy were harder hit than the performing arts: Performing arts presenters and performing arts companies joined oil drilling/exploration and air transportation as the steepest-declining areas of the U.S. economy in 2020. After adjusting for inflation, the value added by performing arts presenters (including festivals) fell by nearly 73 percent between 2019 and 2020.” Despite the increase, the arts and culture sector has still not regained its employment numbers pre-Covid.

A public-private partnership between the NEA, NEH, and the arts and culture sector benefits and strengthens the economy. When patrons attend an arts event, they may also pay for parking, eat at local restaurants, shop in retail stores, have dessert, or pay a babysitter. Based on the 212,691 audience surveys conducted in the Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 study (2017), the...
A typical attendee to a nonprofit arts event spends $31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission—vital income for local businesses. Thirty-four percent of attendees came from outside the county where the arts event occurred. They spent even more ($47.57 per person). When those nonlocal attendees were asked why they traveled from out of town, 69% reported that the primary reason for their trip was “specifically to attend this art event.” Arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic cultural experiences, all of which support local jobs, generate tax revenues, and fuel a creativity-based economy.

The resilience of an artist is evident in these statistics. The NEA and NEH have helped provide resources to support the creativity and work ethic of artists and creative workers. Every NEA grant dollar leverages at least $9 in private and other public funds, generating more than $500 million in matching support. This leveraging power far surpasses the required non-federal match of at least 1:1 and illustrates why federal support for the arts is uniquely valuable. The federal investment in the arts helps power the creative economy across the country.

For the first time, FY23 appropriations included language to address equity in grantmaking, and have historically had a significant impact on smaller communities and rural areas. NEA grants are remarkably far-reaching, and they touch communities that have fewer opportunities to experience the arts. According to the NEA, the majority of direct grants go to small- and mid-sized organizations, which often support projects for audiences that otherwise might not have access to arts programming.

Forty-two percent of NEA-supported activities take place in high-poverty neighborhoods, and 35% of NEA grants went to organizations that reach underserved populations such as people with disabilities and individuals in institutions. The NEA also funds school- and community-based arts programs that, in addition to contributing to building creativity and other vital 21st-century workplace skills, have helped children and youth navigate a mental health crisis exacerbated by the pandemic by promoting social connectedness and a sense of belonging.

The NEA’s funding to Local Arts Agencies (LAAs) is extremely vital to their ability to serve their communities. LAAs collectively are responsible for approximately $912 million annually in public and private grantmaking. They are also the largest grantmaker to individual artists. LAAs work directly for or with mayors, city managers, county supervisors, and township managers as well as corporate CEOs, real estate developers, schools, healthcare systems, and social service providers in every size community across the country. Additionally, LAAs have taken the lead in equity-centered grantmaking in their cities, counties, and rural and suburban areas. They have been entrusted with federal, state, and local funds, including Community Development Block G Grants (CDBG), CARES Act, and American Rescue Plan Act state and local block grant funds and other government sources to support emergency relief grants to art-based small businesses and nonprofits, as well as individual artists, creative workers, and entrepreneurs.
Another example of the tremendous value the NEA and NEH provide nationwide is that both agencies offer programs for those who serve in our Armed Services and their families, as well as Veterans reintegrating into civilian life. The NEH’s Dialogues on the Experience of War programs bring together Veterans and civilians to reflect on powerful themes of military experience, trauma, and homecoming. Across nine programs assessed from 2018-2020 by the National Humanities Alliance, 96% of respondents indicated that humanities materials helped the community better understand service members’ experiences of military members and their families. Seventy-nine percent of Veteran respondents indicated that their program made them more likely to seek help if they needed it. In 2022, the NEA’s Creative Forces Military Healing Arts Network launched an important new component in the effort to support military-connected populations affected by trauma—the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant program, conducted in partnership with the Mid-America Arts Alliance. In FY23, the inaugural round of grants supported projects at 26 organizations totaling $750,385.

The National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities play a unique role in American culture and have a powerful economic impact in communities across the country. Thank you for your consideration of federal funding for both agencies at no less than $211 million each for FY 2024, as well as a specific path to index funding for each of these two cultural agencies at $1 per capita.

Americans for the Arts is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the arts and arts education advocacy in America. With more than 60 years of service, it is dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.