Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony 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 2025. This represents only 0.006% of last year’s federal budget. 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 about .62 cents per capita.

The arts are a national asset, and these agencies are vital to a thriving arts and culture sector which in turn positively affects the American economy as a whole. It has been a tough budget environment, but the arts community is thankful for this Subcommittee’s leadership as well as the entire Senate for its continued support.

The arts and culture help drive our creative economy which is a primer to our country’s economic activity. Last March, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported that arts and cultural economic activity accounted for 4.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), or $1.10 trillion with over 5.2 million jobs. Additionally, America’s arts and culture exports increased the trade surplus from $15.5 billion to $21 billion. This data represents a new high-water mark that represents a larger percentage of GDP than the transportation, construction, and agriculture sectors.

Furthermore, the nonprofit arts sector generated $151.7 billion in direct spending by organizations and attendees and $29.1 billion in tax revenue in 2022. The nonprofit arts sector also supported 2.6 million jobs and provided $101 billion in personal income to workers in communities across America, clearly demonstrating that the arts are an asset to the economy.

The resilience of an artist is evident by these statistics, and the NEA and NEH have helped provide resources to support their creativity and work ethic. 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. 42% 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 programs that have helped children and youth navigate a mental health crisis exacerbated by the pandemic.
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 and with mayors, city managers, county supervisors, and township managers as well as corporate CEOs, real estate developers, 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 grants, CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act state and local block grant funds, and other government sources to support emergency relief grants to arts small businesses, nonprofits, individual gig artists, and entrepreneurs.

Both agencies offer healing programs for those who serve in our Armed Services 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 literature and art. Across nine programs assessed from 2018-2020 by the National Humanities Alliance, ninety-six percent of respondents indicated that humanities materials helped them better understand their experiences. Seventy-nine percent of veteran respondents indicated that their program made them more likely to seek help if they needed it.

The NEA’s Creative Forces program supports military families, a collaboration with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, to serve the unique and special needs of military patients and Veterans diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In clinical settings, creative arts therapists provide art, music, and dance/movement therapies, as well as therapeutic writing instruction, for military patients and veterans. The NEA also provides community engagement services by partnering with nonprofit organizations to provide arts-based programming for military communities.

Understanding our country’s current environment that requires a focus on wellness and mental health, the NEA continues to provide sound leadership on arts and healing throughout our federal agencies and our society. In January, the NEA and the White House hosted a first-ever summit that recognized the profound impact that arts and culture play in shaping our lives, communities, and nation. At this event, NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson moderated a conversation with the U.S. Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy, about the importance of broadening the concept of healing to include our need for joy, social connection and hope. Murthy highlighted how arts and culture are critical ways in which we connect and essential tools for rebuilding the social infrastructure to address the nation’s epidemic of isolation and loneliness and the mental health crisis that young people are facing. With the NEA’s leadership, more work is necessary through interagency partnerships to help solve this epidemic.
The arts and humanities touch Americans in so many different ways, and its two cultural agencies provide the leadership necessary to help sustain livable communities for us and our children. Thank you for your consideration of federal funding for both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) at no less than $211 million each for FY 2025. We also encourage the Subcommittee to build a specific path to index funding for each of these two cultural agencies at $1 per capita.

Americans for the Arts is the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education in America. We have more than 60 years of service and are dedicated to representing and serving the more than 4,500 local arts agencies in every state. Together we work to ensure that every American has access to the transformative power of the arts.