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Rhode Island: the state of the arts' economy

In a recently-released survey of 1982 arts agencies appropriations compiled by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Rhode Island ranked third in the nation for the severity of cuts to its state allowance. The Fiscal Year 1982 reduction in the Ocean State for arts council funding was a whopping 23 percent.

Negativity regarding the arts in Washington has its own trickle-down effect; reduced willingness by states to support the arts. What this means in real terms is fewer and smaller grants, a diminishment of services, and a loss of jobs and income.

Since its founding in 1968, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts has funded well over five hundred different non-profit organizations and institutions, as well as outstanding individual artists. Programs of the Arts Council have exposed tens of thousands of state residents to quality arts experiences, providing enrichment, entertainment, and education. The state's Artists in Education Program, to name just one example, in FY '81 reached 5,600 students of all ages in the classroom, and another 22,000 through demonstrations, performances, and exhibits. Seventy-two artists found employment under the program.

Look at the economic impact of the arts in Rhode Island, and you can see what is at stake. According to the most recent economic survey, conducted by the New England Foundation for the Arts, R. I.'s nonprofit arts industry, measured by 287 cultural organizations:

- spent a total of 22.2 million dollars, leading to a total economic impact of 42.5 million dollars;
- provided 5,662 jobs;
- had 2.5 million paid and unpaid admissions to events;
- returned 1.3 million in federal taxes and $248,525 in state taxes.
This industry included over 100 music, theatre, and dance companies, groups, and associations; 70 museums and other visual arts institutions; 66 historical societies and libraries with arts programs; and 44 other organizations such as state and community arts councils, literary presses and magazines, public broadcasting stations, and annual festivals.

Government support of the arts is crucial to sustain operations; not only the state, but the private sector, looks at the federal contribution as a guideline for matching funding.

Rhode Island has the distinction of being a leader in the state arts agency movement - Claiborne Pell introduced the legislation which established the NEA. The programs which the NEA has helped fund here are considered some of the best in the country. We cannot afford at this time to lose any single advantage our state may enjoy in attracting business, and the quality of arts in this state is one of our most visible achievements.

We look to you for leadership in the fight to maintain a strong cultural environment here in Rhode Island. And we urge you to pass these views along, to Representative Sidney Yates, Chairman of the House & Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, and to Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman James McClure. Help us preserve an aspect of life which we in the Ocean State hold dear: the arts - our arts.

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