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State Audit Is Critical
Of R.I. Arts Council
Discretion for Grants

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PROVIDENCE (AP) — The
Rhode Island Council on the Arts
gave a grant to an organization
that used the money illegally and
funded groups not eligible for its
aid, according to an audit releas-
ed today.

The council should not have
given $1,566 to the Rhode Island
Arts Advocacy Alliance because
the money came from federal
sources and was used for lobby-
ing, a "clear violation of federal
law," said the report by Auditor
General Anthony Piccirilli.

The alliance said in its grant
application that it would "at-
tempt to persuade members of
(Congress and the General
Assembly) to enact legislation
favorable to the arts cause or to
repeal unfavorable legislation."

The fiscal 1984 report also
criticized the council for giving
$15,000 to the Providence Opera
Theatre, which the audit said
was ineligible because it did not
have an artistic director and a
professional business manager
in full-time positions.

Iona Dobbins, the council's ex-
cutive director, defended the
alliance grant and the council's
overall fiscal practices.

Dobbins said the pool of money
from which the grant was made
also contained state money, and
there are no restrictions on the
use of state funds for lobbying.

She added that the alliance
"had a long way to go before it
could become a professional lob-
bying organization."

In addition, Dobbins criticized
the audit report for focusing on
one small grant in light of the
large amount of aid the council
hands out, and said the media on-
ly was interested because of the
financial scandals at the Rhode
Island Housing and Mortgage
Finance Corp.

"The reporters are just trying
to create sensationalism out of
this," Dobbins said. "For the
most part, the recommendations
are just small hints for
housekeeping."

The auditor general also said
several recipients of money
under the council's Artists-in-
Education program violated
regulations by using other
federal grants to provide mat-
ching funds.