



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMISSION ON THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES**

Fiscal Year 2020 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of

Kay Kendall

Chairperson

Commission on the Arts and Humanities

Before the

Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

March 17, 2021

Via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIRMAN MENDELSON, COUNCILMEMBERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS. MY NAME IS KAY KENDALL, AND I AM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COMMISSION ON THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES. THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO COME BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE TODAY.

EVERY COMMUNITY OWES ITS EXISTENCE AND VITALITY TO GENERATIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD WHO CONTRIBUTED THEIR HOPES, DREAMS, AND ENERGY TO MAKING THE HISTORY THAT LED TO THIS MOMENT. TRUTH AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT ARE CRITICAL TO BUILDING MUTUAL RESPECT AND CONNECTION ACROSS ALL BARRIERS OF HERITAGE AND DIFFERENCE.

I ACKNOWLEDGE WE ARE ON THE ANCESTRAL HOMELANDS OF THE NACOTCHTANK AND PISCATAWAY PEOPLE AND I PAY RESPECTS TO THEIR ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT.

I ACKNOWLEDGE THE NATION'S SHAMEFUL LEGACY OF RACIAL AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE.

I ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMMEASURABLE PAINS FELT BY SO MANY IN THE PAST YEAR.

GEORGE FLOYD'S MURDER SPARKED A NATIONAL RECKONING, AND WE AT THE COMMISSION HAVE BECOME EVER MORE COMMITTED TO CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY IN OUR WORK THROUGHOUT THE AGENCY AND THE COMMUNITY. LAST SUMMER, THE COMMISSION

ASSEMBLED A TASK FORCE ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION. AFTER MONTHS OF OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION, THE TASK FORCE MADE FORTY-FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION ON HOW WE MIGHT BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE AS A DISTRICT AGENCY. SEVERAL OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE ALREADY WELL UNDERWAY, AND I AM CONFIDENT THEY ALL WILL BE REALIZED ON THE PRESCRIBED TIMETABLE. HERE AT THE COMMISSION THE ISSUES AROUND EQUITY, AND THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19, HAVE BEEN AT THE CENTER OF OUR FOCUS FOR THE PAST YEAR.

IT WAS EXACTLY ONE YEAR AGO YESTERDAY THAT THE STAFF OF THE ARTS COMMISSION, ALONG WITH ALMOST THE ENTIRE DISTRICT GOVERNMENT, BEGAN WORKING FROM HOME, AND MANY OF OUR GRANTEES SUSPENDED THEIR OPERATIONS AS WELL.

AND SO, FOR A YEAR NOW, OUR STAGES HAVE BEEN DARK AND OUR GALLERIES HAVE BEEN EMPTY. EARNED REVENUE FROM TICKET SALES, RENTALS, AND CONCESSIONS HAVE BEEN NON-EXISTENT THIS ENTIRE TIME FOR MOST ARTS AND CULTURAL PRODUCERS.

MANY HAVE HAD TO EXHAUST WHATEVER RESERVES THEY HAD TO TRY AND KEEP UP WITH RENT OR MORTGAGE PAYMENTS OR MAKE PAYROLL FOR THEIR STAFF. SOME HAVE TAKEN OUT LINES OF CREDIT TO TRY AND TREAD WATER UNTIL THEY'RE ABLE TO GET BACK TO WORK AGAIN.

A STUDY BY SMU DATA ARTS FOUND THAT IN 2016, ARTS ORGANIZATIONS ON HAD ABOUT FIVE MONTHS OF WORKING CAPITAL AVAILABLE AS A NATIONAL AVERAGE. HOWEVER, ORGANIZATIONS IN WASHINGTON, DC REPORTED A DEFICIT OF WORKING CAPITAL IN 2016. RATHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE OF HAVING FIVE MONTHS CAPITAL ON-HAND, OUR LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS WERE IN TWO MONTHS IN THE RED IN 2016, AND ONLY AVERAGED ONE TO TWO MONTHS OF AVAILABLE WORKING CAPITAL IN THE THREE YEARS PRIOR.

THESE AVERAGES ENCOMPASSED ORGANIZATIONS OF DIFFERING BUDGET SIZES. I MAKE THIS OBSERVATION TO ILLUSTRATE THAT EVEN IN NORMAL TIMES, ARTS ORGANIZATIONS CAN STRUGGLE FINANCIALLY.

WHAT IS EVEN MORE CRITICAL TO REMEMBER IS THAT A SINGLE ORGANIZATION MAY SUPPORT DOZENS OR EVEN HUNDREDS OF FULL AND PART TIME JOBS FOR ARTS WORKERS. THOSE WORKERS HAVE LARGELY BEEN UNEMPLOYED FOR MUCH OF THE PAST YEAR.

EXPERIENCING THE ARTS OFTEN INVOLVES A GATHERING OF PEOPLE IN A PLACE LIKE A THEATRE, CONCERT HALL, MUSEUM OR GALLERY. THIS OF COURSE MEANS THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, THE ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR WILL LIKELY BE ONE OF THE VERY LAST TO BE BACK IN BUSINESS FULLY.

A SURVEY OF DC-AREA THEATREGOERS CONDUCTED BY LIMELIGHT INSIGHTS LAST MONTH, FEBRUARY 2021, FOUND THAT A MAJORITY DON'T BELIEVE THEY'LL BE WILLING TO RETURN TO THE THEATRE UNTIL DECEMBER 2021, DUE TO ONGOING HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS. SIMILAR TRENDS COULD BE SEEN FROM AUDIENCES OF THE OTHER PERFORMING ARTS AS WELL, WHICH COULD INDICATE A PROTRACTED RECOVERY FOR PARTS OF THE ARTS SECTOR.

FOR OUR PART, THE ARTS COMMISSION HAS EXPLORED AND CONTINUES TO EXPLORE EVERY AVENUE WE CAN THINK OF TO PROVIDE SUPPORT. MATCHING REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTS HAVE BEEN WAIVED, GRANTEES HAVE BEEN GIVEN FLEXIBILITY TO ADJUST THEIR PROJECT SCOPES OR EXTEND THE PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE GRANT AWARD.

NEAR THE END OF FY20, WE IDENTIFIED APPROXIMATELY \$2 MILLION IN FUNDS WHICH WE USED TO ENHANCE THE EXISTING AWARDS OF CURRENT GRANTEES AS WAY OF PROVIDING RELIEF FUNDING.

A PORTION OF THOSE FUNDS CAME TO US FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AS PART OF THE FEDERAL CARES ACT. EACH OF THE 56 STATE ARTS AGENCIES RECEIVED SOME FUNDING FROM THE ARTS ENDOWMENT FOR THE PURPOSES OF MAKING RELIEF GRANTS TO THEIR LOCAL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS. MOST OF THE STATE ARTS AGENCIES CAN ONLY MAKE GRANTS TO NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, BUT WE FORTUNATELY HAVE THE

ABILITY TO GRANT TO INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS AS WELL, WHICH HAS BEEN A FOCUS OF OURS DURING THIS PANDEMIC.

FOR THE CARES ACT GRANT, WE RECEIVED A TOTAL OF 502 APPLICATIONS FROM INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS. NEA FUNDING WAS ENOUGH TO PROVIDE GRANTS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$2,500 EACH TO 134 OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS. WE THEN TOOK IT UPON OURSELVES TO USE OUR OWN FUNDS TO AWARD \$2,500 GRANTS TO THE REMAINING 241 QUALIFIED INDIVIDUAL APPLICANTS. THIS IS SOMETHING I'M PARTICULARLY PROUD OF, AND I'D LIKE TO THANK ALL THE COMMISSIONERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF THE INITIATIVE, AND SPECIAL THANKS TO THE STAFF THAT MADE IT HAPPEN.

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, WE PROPOSED A TEMPORARY AMENDMENT TO OUR STATUTES TO ALLOW US TO UTILIZE THE CAPITAL PROJECTS GRANTS PORTION OF OUR BUDGET TO MAKE GRANTS FOR RENT AND MORTGAGE RELIEF, AND WE THANK THE COUNCIL AND THE MAYOR FOR ENACTING THAT. WE ALSO HAVE AWARDED GRANTS TO ARTS EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHERS FOR THE PURCHASE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT, IN ORDER TO HELP FACILITATE A SAFE REOPENING TRANSITION.

WE WANT TO DO MORE, AND WE ARE CONTINUING TO LOOK FOR MORE WAYS TO HELP.

WE CONSIDER IT OUR MANDATE, AS EXPRESSED IN THE COMMISSION'S STATUTES, TO "TAKE ACTION CONCERNING THE

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF ACTIVITIES IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.”

IT IS THEREFORE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THIS AGENCY TO PROVIDE FOR THE RECOVERY OF THE CITY’S ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR, AND WE HOPE TO BE ABLE TO WORK WITH THE COUNCIL AND THE MAYOR IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THAT RECOVERY.

THANK YOU.