



March 12, 2026

Honorable Scott Slater, Chair  
House Finance Committee, Subcommittee on Education  
Rhode Island State House, Room #35  
Providence, R.I. 02908

Subject: Budget Testimony from Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA)

Dear Chairperson Slater and Subcommittee Members,

My name is Larry Purtill, Chairman of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA). I am completing my seventh year on the Council, and my third year as Council Chair. I want to thank you for your ongoing support for the arts and culture community.

The Council was established in 1967 with the important mission of making sure arts and culture play a major role in the state's economy and the well-being of our residents through grant making, policy building, convening and education. It is a privilege to be on the Council and partner with such a dedicated and professional staff, who work every day to fulfill this mission.

Today I am asking for your support of RISCA's budget for fiscal year 2027.

I want to highlight the role RISCA plays in supporting the health and well-being of our communities, particularly in the lives of our young people. As a teacher for 22 years and president of National Education Association of Rhode Island (NEARI) for 24, I have seen firsthand the importance and meaning of strong in school and out of school arts programs. They continue to have a profound impact on R.I.'s youth.

One of RISCA's initiatives is arts education opportunities for young people throughout the state. In addition to Project Grants for Education, which supports experiential arts learning in K-12 schools and other dedicated learning environments, and our Big Yellow School Bus grants, which provide support for students to attend in person arts and culture field trips, we oversee the Poetry Out Loud high school recitation competition, a critical statewide program that promotes an appreciation for poetry and performance.

RIDE and RISCA recently updated the RI Arts Education Data Dashboard, hosted and funded by RISCA, which has data on schools' arts education successes and opportunities for growth and development. According to the Dashboard, arts access is strong, with 97% of Rhode Island students having access to the arts in their school. Additionally, a preliminary RI-specific report shows that when students have access to arts in their school, they show greater levels of engagement, are more likely to consistently attend school, and succeed.

This aligns with a strong body of evidence, including studies by the National Endowment for the Arts, Brookings Institute and University of California, which reveal when students have access to arts programs, it leads to higher academic achievement and better problem-solving skills necessary for our 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, as well as improved social skills, mental health and resiliency necessary for individual well-being and of our communities.

One of many local examples in Rhode Island of the importance of arts education is the AS220 Youth program. AS220 Youth provides free arts programming in the Rhode Island Training School (the state's juvenile detention facility), Nowell Leadership Academy, and at its Empire Street Studio. Program evaluations found that more than 90% of students participating in the program graduated from high school or received their GED. Some 99% of students reported feeling more self-confident.

Finally, RISCA supports teaching artists in both the education and health communities through professional development programming and convening. We manage the Rhode Island Teaching Artists Roster, a directory of teaching artists who have been approved by public panels to work in educational settings. Teaching Artists are critical component of effective arts education and are also an important part of Rhode Island's small business community.

Again, thank you for your continued support. I have transmitted this letter electronically, and please enjoy our [FY25 Annual Report](#). For more information, visit our website at [www.arts.ri.gov](http://www.arts.ri.gov).

Sincerely,

Lawrence Purtill  
Council Chair, RISCA  
lpurtill@nari.org

Cc:

Rep. Nathan Biah  
Rep. Terri Cortvriend  
Rep. William O'Brien  
Rep. Sherry Roberts