



March 12, 2026

Honorable Scott Slater, Chair
House Finance Committee, Subcommittee on Education
Rhode Island State House, Room 35
Providence, RI 02908

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

Dear Chairperson Slater and Subcommittee Members,

I am honored to submit into the record this testimony in support of our arts and culture community. My name is Todd Trebour and I am privileged to serve as the Executive Director of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) where I have had the pleasure of working in various capacities since 2018.

On behalf of RISCA, we respectfully thank you for your support, and for adding the Creative and Cultural Economy Bond Initiative to the ballot in November 2024. With that funding, RISCA awarded \$2.75 million in matching grants to 17 arts and cultural facilities throughout the state in December 2025. These funds will be used to enhance accessibility, ensure ADA and code compliance, improve energy efficiency, and expand community impact.

Nonprofit cultural facilities provide spaces for arts education, community gathering, and arts and cultural programming. We know that the projects funded by this bond create statewide economic impact, as 90% of the funds from the projects supported by the 2014 and 2021 cultural facilities bonds were spent in all 39 cities and towns.

I'm going to focus the balance of my testimony on RISCA's increasing number of strategic partnerships throughout state government, in alignment with the reality that the issues Rhode Islanders are collectively facing are arts and culture issues, and that arts and culture have a critical role to play in addressing them.

For FY26, RISCA applied for and received \$75,000 in funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to support our continued work on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. In this rapidly growing field, Rhode Island is recognized as an early leader, having created the first-in-the-nation State Arts and Health Plan in partnership with RIDOH. Since 2017, RISCA has had an Arts and Health grant program which supports arts interventions in the health and public health sector. In collaboration with the Office of Healthy Aging and RISCA's Council, RISCA will reconvene the Arts and Health Network, expand our Arts and Health grantmaking, and invest in evaluation and field building.

In recognition of this critical work, we are thrilled that the Governor's proposed FY27 budget includes \$50,000 in support of a one-time Arts and Health Incubator Grant program. This grant program will fund organizations or artists for planning, professional development, capacity building, pilot projects, or coalition building that utilize the arts to address one of the *Creating a Healthier Rhode Island* priorities in the RI 2030 Health Plan: physical health and well-being, behavioral health, older adults and caregiving, healthcare system strengthening, and/or equity for underserved communities. Complementing our annual Arts and Health grant program, this will allow us to leverage the funding received from the NEA and maintain and grow Rhode Island's position as a leader in this field.



Moreover, our agency was notified recently that we received a competitive national grant of \$77,500 to advance Creative Aging programs for older adults in the state. This award includes support for a Creative Aging grant program in FY28. The grant was a joint venture between the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy. Rhode Island is aging faster than the United States as a whole, with 23 percent of residents over age 60 and the highest percentage of adults 85-plus in New England. Abundant evidence shows that arts participation improves the emotional well-being of older adults, supports good health, strengthens social bonds, and brings a heightened experience of purpose and joy to our lives as we mature.

Outside of our work with the Office of Healthy Aging, RISCA staff are working with the multi-agency Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council's advisory board on a project addressing communications about climate change. Local RI artists will develop and enact creative communications with their communities about climate change. This project was approved for \$85,000 of funding in FY26, and will be managed by a RISCA staff member. Additionally, we are in regular conversation with colleagues at RI Commerce and are working together on amplifying RI's Buy Art Tax Free program; as well as our colleagues at RIDE with whom we are determining how to support the #AttendanceMatters campaign with data from the recently updated RI Arts Education Data Dashboard.

Given our rapidly expanding grant portfolio – and the increasing complexity of public grantmaking – RISCA continues to be in need of an additional Arts Program Specialist focused on the Arts and Health program and grants management. National funders are turning their attention increasingly to Arts and Health including foundations like Barr, the Heinz Endowments, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation. With this position, we can expand and continue this work and pursue additional resources locally, regionally, and nationally outside of state government.

We appreciate the Governor's FY27 recommended budget including the restoration of the indirect cost recovery of federal funds of approximately \$115,000 from RISCA's annual state partnership agreement with the National Endowment for Arts. The resulting reductions in general revenue for FY26 required RISCA to charge even more of our agency's administrative expenses to our partnership agreement, straining our ability meet to meet the required cost share with eligible expenses and reducing our General Operating Support for Organizations program budget significantly.

Sixty organizations benefit from our General Operating Support program, including large budget organizations like Trinity Repertory Company and RISD Museum. But 70% of the organizations in the program have average annual budgets under \$500,000, including small community -based organizations like the Providence World Music Institute, Rhody Center for World Music and Dance in Coventry, and Hera Gallery in Wakefield. The restoration of the indirect cost recovery for FY27 will return our grants budget to FY25 levels. If these general revenue funds were restored for FY26, the funding would increase the FY26 grant awards for these organizations.

I have transmitted this letter electronically along with additional collateral materials that illustrate the critical need for our work. Please enjoy our [FY25 Annual Report](#) online.

On behalf of RISCA, we respectfully thank you for your support. Please be in touch with us with questions.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jedd Zim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jedd" being more prominent than the last name "Zim".

Executive Director
Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

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