



Power of culture

Mass Cultural Council Testimony Joint Committee on Ways & Means – FY24 H. 1 Budget Friday, March 31, 2023 | Cruiseport Gloucester

Presented by Deputy Director David T. Slatery and Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner

Good afternoon, Chair Edwards and Chair Ferrante, and through you to the Members. It is a pleasure to be with you today in Gloucester.

For the record, my name is David Slatery, I am the Deputy Director of Mass Cultural Council. With me is our Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner.

We are here on behalf of the Agency's governing Council, staff, and of course Executive Director Michael Bobbitt. It's a busy time for all and unfortunately Michael could not join us this afternoon as he is in the Berkshires with a number of your colleagues, our board members, and more than 125 grantees celebrating \$9 million in pandemic recovery grant awards made to artists, creatives, and cultural organizations in western Massachusetts. Please know Michael sends his best regards and is certainly available if you have follow up questions for him directly.

The Healey/Driscoll Administration's House 1 budget recommends \$25 million for Mass Cultural Council. This figure represents an 11% increase to our current operating budget, and, if enacted, would be the largest budget appropriation the Agency has received since the late 1980s.

Mass Cultural Council deeply appreciates the Administration's recommendation, and we are here today to ask the Committee to embrace it as you begin to craft your spending plans.

\$25 million will allow Mass Cultural Council to invest more into the creative and cultural sector. Specifically, we hope to use this increase to build a FY24 spending plan that allows us to

make grants supporting more Massachusetts artists and creative individuals, more cultural organizations, more youth arts and education programming, and arts and culture in every community.

I wish to pause to reflect upon that – Mass Cultural Council is truly proud to be one of the few state agencies that makes grants in every city and town every single year. Through these investments we are able to fulfill our mission, which is to bolster the creative and cultural sector in every community of the Commonwealth.

Mass Cultural Council believes that arts and culture are essential – not only for economic prosperity, but for innovation, creativity, and good health. We know the sector is vibrant and strong and key to a strong state economy in Massachusetts.

In fact, new data just released by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis states that the arts and culture sector was a **\$27.2 billion** industry in Massachusetts in 2021 – this represents **4.2%** of the Commonwealth's GDP, and **135,181 jobs** from Pittsfield to Provincetown, from Gloucester to Gosnold, and everywhere in between.

When considering this new data, it's interesting to compare arts and culture to other notable industries. Here in Massachusetts, in 2021, arts and culture – a \$27.2 billion industry – was more impactful than construction (\$23.7 billion) and transportation (\$10 billion).

Given this, we're so pleased to come before you today, and for the first time in almost a decade, with a fairly conservative ask – please embrace the Governor's \$25 million funding recommendation for the Agency in FY24.

As we reflect on this current fiscal year, we recognize that FY23 is a historic high-water mark for state investment in arts and culture. The Administration and the Legislature charged Mass Cultural Council with stewarding and investing almost \$100 million into the creative and cultural sector -- \$60.1 million in one-time pandemic recovery grants; \$23.4 million in the FY23 state budget; \$10 million from the FY23 capital spending plan for the Cultural Facilities Fund, and

\$5 million from casino tax revenues for the Gaming Mitigation Program. With these resources Mass Cultural Council will award approximately 7,000 grants totaling almost \$100 million.

We know the need for public investment in the arts will always exceed our state appropriation. Even with an extra \$61 million in one-time pandemic recovery monies we were unable to fund every eligible application.

In fact, due to those pandemic recovery monies Mass Cultural Council is now in direct communication with thousands of new stakeholders, both individuals and cultural organizations, across Massachusetts. And just as we know they will continue to seek funding opportunities from us, we recognize that it is our job to engage with them and support them.

Our pandemic recovery program for individuals broke all previous Agency records for size and scale of grant programs. We received 7,593 applications and had enough funding - \$20 million – to make 4,000 awards, each worth \$5,000.

We intentionally made outreach and recruitment to potential grantees an Agency-wide priority during the application period. And we are so thrilled to note that 98% of these 4,000 grant recipients are receiving their first-ever award from Mass Cultural Council!

Further, 27% of these grantees self-identify as a person who is Deaf or has a disability; 55% live in a priority, under-resourced community in Massachusetts; and 59% self-identify as BIPOC. We are so thrilled that our staff outreach resulted in a diverse and equitable distribution of these resources across the sector.

Our second recovery grant program, for organizations, received 1,359 applications, 1,219 of which were deemed eligible for funding. Mass Cultural Council was able to fund every eligible organization – 42% of whom received their first grant from us through this program.

Funding Mass Cultural Council with \$25 million in FY24 will allow the Commonwealth to continue to prioritize arts and culture as essential – and will allow us to foster this vibrant economic engine and ensure that it continues to contribute robustly to the state economy.

I will close with two additional thoughts. The first, is that our governing Council just approved a new 3-year Strategic Plan for the Agency, which launches in FY24. It has been the practice of the Committee to reference the goals of our past Strategic Plan in the text of our line item. If the Committee intends to continue this the wording should be updated to reflect the goals of our new Strategic Plan. Earlier this week Mass Cultural Council emailed suggested text to the Committee, and we would happily provide additional copies to you if necessary.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention earmarks. If it is determined that Mass Cultural Council should serve as the agent to disburse these funds, we are, of course, willing to partner with you to do so. However, I cannot stress how imperative it is that those items be funded. We strongly request and recommend that the Committee hold the Agency's operating budget harmless and add to the bottom line to account for these local priorities.

We thank the Committee for its partnership and support of the creative and cultural sector. We ask that you embrace the Governor's recommendation of \$25 million for Mass Cultural Council. And we are here to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.