Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We write today to express our steadfast support for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). For more than 55 years, the NEA and NEH have put people to work and promoted educational and cultural experiences that generate tremendous economic returns for communities in every single state in the country. As you craft the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill, we urge to include at least $211 million each for the NEA and NEH.

Since its creation in 1965, the NEH has served every congressional district and territory in the country through its mandate to provide humanities access to all Americans. It has funded professional development for educators, documentaries, exhibitions, radio programs, podcasts, archaeological digs and other groundbreaking research, as well as preserved essential cultural resources. A partnership with the Library of Congress has digitized and made accessible more than 63 million pages of our nation’s historical newspapers. Annually, the state and jurisdictional humanities councils provide tens of thousands of free educational programs in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Also, established in 1965, the NEA supports art and education programs across the country. Access to the arts for all Americans is a core principle of the Endowment. The majority of NEA grants go to small- and medium-sized organizations, and a significant percentage of grants fund programs in high poverty communities throughout the country. A full 40 percent of NEA funds are distributed to all 50 states and six jurisdictional territories and districts with the remaining funds helping to reach all 435 congressional districts.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis calculated the arts and culture sector’s contributions to the gross domestic product (GDP). In 2020, arts and culture added $876.7 billion, or 4.2 percent, to national GDP. Between 2019 and 2020, the U.S. arts economy shrank at nearly twice the rate of the economy as a whole: arts and cultural production fell by 6.4 percent when adjusted for inflation, compared with a 3.4 percent decline in the overall economy. That is why robust investment in NEA and NEH must remain a priority.
As an example of the tremendous value NEA and NEH provide nationwide, both agencies offer healing programs for those who serve in our Armed Services and their families, as well as veterans reintegrating into civilian life. The NEH’s Dialogues on the Experience of War brings together veterans and civilians to reflect on powerful literature and art. Across nine programs assessed from 2018-2020 by the National Humanities Alliance, 96 percent of respondents indicated that humanities materials helped them better understand their experiences. Seventy-nine percent of veteran respondents indicated that their program made them more likely to seek help if they need it. The NEA’s Military Healing Arts Partnership provides art therapy for active-duty military patients and their families to improve communication, process traumatic events, and improve neurological and physical function. And the NEA’s Creative Forces program, a collaboration with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, supports military families, and addresses the unique needs of military patients and Veterans diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Thanks to your continued leadership, the NEA and NEH play a vital role in every state. We appreciate your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you on this and other important issues facing our nation.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator
Peter Welch  
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

Tina Smith  
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

Mark Kelly  
United States Senator
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

Ben Ray Luján  
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen  
U.S. Senator

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator

Brian Schatz  
United States Senator