



Joint Finance Committee Hearings Department of State

Delaware Arts Alliance

Wednesday, February 4th, 2015

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Record of Public Comments Representing the Delaware Arts Alliance

Presented by Ashley SK Davis, Pieces of a Dream, Inc., Executive and Artistic Director

Thank you Senator McDowell, Representative George-Smith and to all members of the Joint Finance Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Ashley Davis, Executive and Artistic Director of Pieces of a Dream, an organization member of the Delaware Arts Alliance and also recipient of **arts funding** from the Delaware Division of the Arts.

The Alliance is the unified voice of Delawareans who advocate for the arts to play a central role in our lives. The organization finished 2014 with an unprecedented growth in its history. Our individual membership base swelled from 125 to 550+ individual members while organizations

affiliated went from 29 to 40. Our membership base spreads throughout the state. In a state where two votes make a difference, an organized voice of the arts community can certainly exercise a powerful influence. Furthermore, the organization recently acquired VoterVoice, advocacy software that will enable the Alliance to organize its membership base more efficiently. Additionally, our Executive Director Guillermina Gonzalez was appointed Chair of the State Arts Action Network part of Americans for the Arts, securing with that access to arts advocacy best practices and resources nationwide.

Our presence today is not about asking, but rather, thanking you for your continuous support for the arts. DAA and the arts community understand when the asking needs to become a thank you. *Let me ask by the way to those members of DAA present today to stand up and be recognized.* Our gratitude also extends to Secretary Bullock, Gov. Markell, the First Lady, and Paul Weagraff, Delaware Division of the Arts Director who, like you, understand the importance of the arts and the pivotal role it plays to make Delaware a point of destination.

You have invested wisely. The last iteration of the Americans for the Arts “Arts and Economic Prosperity Report” reports a Delaware industry the size of \$142 million giving back \$9.9 million dollars in local and state revenue. Considering that the total state arts’ funding is a bit above

\$3 million; the sector returns 2.5 times what is invested in it! In challenging economic times this is a terrific return on investment!

We thought important to share quotes and pictures of some of the organizations and leaders across the state that you have helped via arts funding. The images that accompany my remarks are a glimpse of the many artistic options the state has to offer including mine.

Pieces of a Dream for instance, the organization I lead, nearly doubled the number of dancers in the company; from nine dancers in 2013 to sixteen company members today. We are currently developing plans to expand our season to include a total of three productions per year with the unique Graham, Horton, and Dunham techniques. This expansion and subsequent positive impact in the state's economy has been possible through arts funding.

Let me go back to my comment about making Delaware a point of destination. It is in economic development initiatives where the arts could play a pragmatic role. Milford Delaware is an example of how the revitalization of a town is possible via the arts. Most recently, Wilmington Renaissance Corporation, another DAA member, is spearheading plans for a creative district in the historic Quaker Hill neighborhood of Wilmington. The plan aims to increase the city's tax

base, foster a built-in audience for more than 50 cultural institutions in the wider area, reduce crime and create jobs. It seeks to stabilize the city core while filling the gap between Christina Riverfront redevelopment, new residences, shops and restaurants along lower North Market Street. We believe that Creative District initiatives will develop a sense of place and make the City and the state points of destination that are attractive to residents and visitors. The arts, as you can see in the pictures we're sharing with you today, bring not only beauty but holistic economic development solutions that are very much needed in the state at this time.

Thank you for your time, and again, thank you for your continuous support of the arts in Delaware!