

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of the DDOA budget request. I am Michael Miller of Felton, and I received a professional artists fellowship in folk music from DDOA in 2023. Professionally I worked as a licensed mental health counselor, now retired. I have performed from Bellevue to Bethany Beach, both as a solo performer and as leader of the band Mother's Highway Junction.

I am speaking to ask you to support this year's budget request from DDOA. As you know, social connection through community is a key factor in creating quality of life and well-being. My work in music has led me across the state and to be part of Delaware's active and growing community of musicians and singer/songwriters. I've been part of communities across the state, from the legendary 4W5 Café in Wilmington, which closed in 2006, to the Delaware Friends of Folk that began in the early 1990s, to the Central Delaware Blues Society that has been active for over 15 years, to the new and rapidly growing Listening Booth nonprofit musical performance space in Lewes.

In addition to essential quality of life outcomes related to the arts, I'd like to share what I see as Delaware's leadership in key areas of quality of life and suggest that we can also truly lead in the arts. In the world beyond the arts, our state has given us three recent examples of how we, as a state, consciously choose to emphasize and enact our prosocial values.

One of these examples is our participation in the multi-state Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, where we have committed to maintaining environmental well-being. Another is the multi-state Regional Public Health Initiative, where we have committed to maintaining public health through appropriate vaccination guidelines and recommendations. The third and most recent is the creation of First State Food Assistance Funds intended to support food security in the absence of federal SNAP benefits. Each are examples of how our state has stepped forward with meaningful policy and action when such is lacking from others.

Delaware's support for the arts can mirror that same unyielding commitment. In that context, I'd like to ask you to not just support DDOA's budget request but consider adding to it. Arts dollars are spent effectively and efficiently and provide immeasurable returns. Delaware is a leader in so many critical areas of policy, and our support for the arts can again demonstrate what is possible when we translate our values into action. Thank you.

Michael Miller