

February 3, 2026

Dear Members of the Delaware General Assembly,

As a filmmaker, journalist, and lifelong storyteller, I have come to understand the arts not as a luxury, but as essential civic infrastructure. Arts funding matters to me because it shapes how communities see themselves, care for one another, and find language for experiences that are often carried silently—especially pain, resilience, and healing.

In my forthcoming PBS documentary *Friends & Neighbors*, Congresswoman Sarah McBride reflects, “When we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and heal, we give other people permission to do the same.” That idea sits at the very center of why I believe so deeply in the arts. To me, art is public vulnerability. It is the act of taking what is private, painful, or difficult to name and offering it in the open—not for spectacle, but for connection.

My forthcoming Broadleaf Books on men and mental health continues this work by confronting stigma, emotional isolation, and untreated trauma that quietly affect families, workplaces, and communities across our state. These projects are not abstract creative exercises; they are tools for public good. They invite conversation, reduce shame, and help people feel less alone. Arts funding is what allows this kind of work to reach broad audiences—on public television, in libraries, schools, and community spaces.

My 2025 DDOA didn’t enable me to write my book, but it did help me create the space by offsetting some of the financial risk months before I landed my book deal. Moreover, it helped find a community of writers, painters, and performers telling the kind of personal stories that capture universal experiences. My three decades of experience at MTV News and Facebook, I’ve seen how these stories shape behavior and culture at scale. When local, values-driven storytelling is underfunded, the narratives that fill the void are often louder, rife with agenda, and low on accountability.

In Delaware, investing in the arts strengthens civic life, supports mental health, fuels local economies, and ensures that diverse voices are not just heard, but valued. Funding the arts means investing in people—and in the shared vulnerability that allows communities to heal and move forward together. Now more than ever, it’s a vital investment.

Respectfully,

Benjamin Wagner