



1001-1003 Surf Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11224

ART'S HOUSE SCHOOLS INC.
A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

To Whom It May Concern,

I am Sophia Harrison, the Executive Director of Art's House Schools of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts located in Coney Island, Brooklyn. I submit this as a written testimony for the New York State Legislature hearing on Economic Development, and Arts held on Thursday February 9, 2023.

I request robust support for NYSCA and capital funding for culture!

As Coney Island's only year-round arts and cultural institution dedicated to children, we believe our responsibility is to engage the culturally under-resourced youth in our community in meaningful artistic activities. Art's House Schools (AHS) serves 55 (27 percent down from pre-covid numbers) on-site students, ages 3-17, in music, dance, and fine arts annually.

AHS' mission is to provide culture in the humanities for children in Coney Island while providing them with the opportunity to build self-esteem and self-confidence and develop poise, grace, and balance. AHS is a unique institution in Southern Brooklyn and one of its longest-standing CBOs for children. We provide formal music, dance, and art training and instruction to children 3-17, year-round, during after-school and out-of-school times.

After our first year, it became evident that the Coney Island community was culturally underserved. In response, Art's House Schools, Inc. was established as a 501(c) 3 organization to increase public access to culture and the arts and provide subsidized art programming. AHS offers free and reduced tuition through grants, private donations, and government subsidies as a not-for-profit organization. Art's House School of Dance offers ballet, tap, hip-hop, modern dance, and acro/tumbling classes.

In November of 2008, AHS expanded its programs to include the School of Music, offering music theory, musical theatre, chorus, and voice and musical instruments lessons. In the fall of 2010, AHS opened its School of Fine Arts, offering photography, painting, arts & crafts, and drawing programs.

Currently, AHS has over 220 on and off-site students (children and senior citizens). About fifty percent of our Coney Island students receive scholarships based on financial need, merit, and community leader's recommendations, and grants fund cover these costs.

Culture is the core of NY State's economy. Culture is a job multiplier, providing work for artists, museum administrators, security guards, sound technicians, costume creators, and the myriad other jobs that make up the creative economy. For the past decade, New York State's creative economy has contributed more than 7% to the GSP** annually, and pre-pandemic, it generated 484,000 jobs and \$120 billion in economic activity.

Every New Yorker needs the community to strengthen the power of culture. Cultural centers anchor small towns and urban neighborhoods, driving street traffic to local businesses and restaurants, supporting communities, providing programs for children and youth, and safer streets for everyone. A robust cultural life, with dance classes for kids, music festivals in town, and shows in local theaters for entertainment, is WHY people move to and remain in New York State! We must invest in our community's human infrastructure, which means investing in our arts and culture organizations if we are to retain residents, many of whom can now work remotely from anywhere. And for too long, there has been a lack of investment in lower-wealth, often Black and brown, neighborhoods and cultural organizations.

NY's economy and communities. A cut of the size proposed in the Executive Budget would devastate our recovery.



www.ahsny.org

1001-1003 Surf Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11224-2619
arts_house1@yahoo.com (718)996-2000



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Fragile recovery. Our State's invaluable arts organizations are slowly recovering from the pandemic shutdown—culture was the hardest-hit sector. Attendance is coming back but is still below 2019 levels. And the costs of safety protocols and HVAC improvements continue to drain resources. Now is the time to invest in a continued recovery so that our cultural centers can continue to lead us to a robust and thriving future.

As a first-time recipient of NYSCA funding in our organization's history, the State's investment in arts programming has allowed our organization to rehire staff, fill empty positions, increase programming, and expand our reach through more targeted marketing. I implore New York State to continue investing in arts and culture and renew last year's funding. Last year NY State distributed \$100M for arts programming through NYSCA. And an additional investment of \$150M in capital funding for cultural groups. We must have that funding renewed if we are to continue to do the work of rebuilding NY's economy and communities. A cut of the size proposed in the Executive Budget would devastate our recovery.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phone at 718-996-2000 or by email at arts_house1@yahoo.com.

Best Regards,
Sophia Harrison
Executive Director
Art's House Schools, Inc.



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