

Submission of Written Testimony for Individuals Giving Oral Testimony

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Good afternoon, I'd like to thank Chairperson Stirpe, and the Assembly and Senate for your time and focus today to hear my testimony regarding New York's Creative Economy.

My name is Rachael Lorimer. I am a visual artist, specializing in painting and printmaking and received my BFA from the Cooper Union in 2006. I'm a small business owner, operating a printmaking studio in downtown Troy, NY, where I live with my husband and son.

I'm here to help make the case that New York needs a Statewide Creative Economy Plan, and urge you to allocate resources for an intergovernmental effort to advance this work.

In 2022 I was hired as a full-time artist through CRNY's Artist Employment Program, or AEP.

This program established a framework for my employment as an artist in a non-arts organization. This is the only position I've ever held where I could leverage my unique combination of creative, organizational and leadership skills in an artistic capacity and be paid a full-time salary. This financial stability translates to AGENCY and CAPACITY. The short-term impact of this stability jump-started my capacity to produce high-level, professional, community development initiatives. I had energy and attention to devote to my work because my basic needs were met, and I was no longer chasing gig work, smaller projects or writing grants.

Our AEP project was a community development and arts partnership between myself, co-artist Justin Relf, the Troy Rehabilitation Improvement Program, Inc. (TRIP, Inc.) and the Oakwood Community Center. Our project focused on housing challenges in Hillside North, a long-disinvested neighborhood in Troy, NY, negatively impacted by red-lining, the continued loss of employment opportunities, and physical fracturing by the development of the Collar City Bridge in the 1970's. **Our partnership amplified the voices of Hillside North residents by inviting them to explore their relationship to their homes and community.** Over two years, we conducted 40 one-hour resident interviews, four facilitated community conversations, eight arts workshops, four art exhibits, a year-long afterschool k-3 arts program, two years of afterschool music programming, wrote and performed an original play with community youth, and welcomed over 300 volunteer hours from neighborhood residents. **We leveraged music and art to build trust and dialogue.** We centered their stories as true and valid historical records.

This Artist Employment Program allowed us to be fully committed, to bring dedication and consistency to our community without the constant worry of grinding to a halt because funding might be cancelled or unavailable. Unfortunately, this financial and project security is nearly unheard of in the arts landscape. Project-based grants are the norm, but they often create more competition than collaboration, and do not provide sufficient funding to produce quality work over time. **If we had ongoing funding to continue this work and support of Artist Employment Programs, we would have continued the project indefinitely.** But as one resident put it, “Everyone disappears when the money dries up, and then we start all over again”. The yo-yo of funding appearing and disappearing creates inconsistency and lack of trust in our communities. **As artists, just like any other industry, we cannot sustainably do our work for free. A statewide creative economy plan that promotes and values our artistic contributions through supporting the financial stability and employment of artists through programs like the AEP is essential to the improvement of our communities.** It could give organizations a road-map for extended partnership with artists that sustains both their work and ours.

The impact of our partnership over two years was tremendous. I was invited by the Rensselaer County Historical Society to archive the interviews and artwork we generated, and create an exhibit at the Hart Cluett Museum that documents our process – a project I’m currently writing grants and seeking funding for. The impact of our project haunts me: what could we have achieved in four years, or ten?

How I see my role in the creative economy and professional arts landscape has completely changed, and I now prioritize my service as a leader, mentor, and advocate in my daily work even though I receive no financial advantage to do so. In the nine months since my employment ended, I’ve become the Studio Director for the Upstairs Arts Collective, serving as liaison between 15 individual artists who rent (at market rate) studio spaces from a commercial landlord in downtown Troy, NY. I also founded the Printmakers Guild of NY, a statewide professional association of printmakers who meet monthly to share resources, technical advice, and establish a community of artistic support.

I take on these unpaid roles to make my experience in the Artist Employment Program accessible to other artists, and I’m willing to fight for it. I will steer them toward free resources, peer-review their grant applications, and edit their resumes. **I encourage them to seek day jobs when they must to experience periods of financial security – just so they can know what it feels like.** If I could find full-time employment as an advocate for the creative economy and uplifting the work of artists, I would take it in a heartbeat because I’m already doing it for free. **I do it because I believe that my agency, capacity, and skills will have lasting impacts on the wellness and strength of my community.**

I urge you to support a Statewide Creative Economy Plan. CRNY's Artist Employment Program provided a glimpse of what could be accomplished with consistent employment opportunities and statewide recognition of our impact as a creative workforce. It's also vital that a Statewide Creative Economy Plan include feasibility and benefits analysis of creating artist employment programs to address environmental, health and safety needs in communities. **These three areas of need were mentioned in all of our community interviews as top concerns from neighborhood residents. Our work is often aligned with government efforts to address these very issues in our communities.**

Artists are leaders, listeners, facilitators, public speakers; project managers, translators, event producers. We are educators, strategic planners, writers, analysts. We are entrepreneurs, small business owners, and consultants. We pay rent, taxes, and insurance. We drive economic activity and create engaging youth programming outside of school hours. We interpret, translate and reflect on our world and build resilience and capacity for change within our communities. We are specifically trained to create something from nothing. **I urge you to investigate what we could achieve if we built something from something.**