

Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County
Remarks
Saturday, November 18, 2007
Buffalo Museum of Science, NYS Budget Town Meeting
Submitted by
Celeste M. Lawson
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Good afternoon, thank you for making the time to come to Buffalo, New York and spend time listening to our thoughts and concerns regarding the 2008 State budget. My name is Celeste Lawson, and I am the executive director for the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, and on behalf of the many arts organizations in this region, we are asking support for the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), which you know is a component of the executive branch of our State government.

NYSCA has just brought on a new executive director, Heather Hitchins, and just had confirmed a new Chair for the State Arts Council, Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, who is Dean of the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. The field is filled with excitement at the installation of these individuals who have a solid history and proven track record in arts administration and programming. They need and deserve to have the highest level of support available to them.

This past year Governor Spitzer, the Senate and the Assembly approved over \$54 million dollars for the New York State Council on the Arts – a monumental achievement for New York State and the Council as this represents the most significant funding appropriation for the agency since 1989 – even though less than the approved budget for NYSCA 25 years ago at approximately \$69 million.

This budget year before you is an appropriation of \$55 million for the New York State Council on the Arts - \$49 million for the field and \$6 million to support the operations of the agency. NYSCA desperately needs this money, and the field desperately needs NYSCA support.

Locally, in this region, Erie Niagara, art and culture directly sustains over 2000 jobs. The sector also generates more than \$153 million in positive economic impact on this area's economy. As you know, New York State is the acknowledged arts and cultural capital of the United States, and New York State relies heavily on tourism dollars generated by arts and cultural organizations.

Here in the Erie Niagara region we make our contribution to the State's international and national reputation as an arts and cultural hub by the ranking of Buffalo as the nation's number one mid-size city to enjoy the arts, a designation published in the Summer 2007 edition of American Style Magazine. Our arts and cultural community could never accomplish this or do the necessary work without help and support from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Any cursory or in-depth examination of communities that have rebounded from reversals of fortune have stated, without equivocation, that including art and culture was an essential ingredient in their recipe for success.

It's no different here in Western New York. We cannot achieve our best potential without the full participation and full integration of the arts and cultural sector into our vision for the future. With that in mind, we all believe the budget appropriation for the New York State Council on the Arts must stay in tact with no reductions to the field or its operations; and ideally be open to receive an increase in support. It is clear to the members of the arts and cultural sector that this community, and New York State simply cannot afford any more reversals of fortune.

Again, thank you for your time and good luck with your remaining Town Meetings.

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