

HOWARD COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL
Testimony submitted to Howard County Council
Bill #CB 29- 2023
June 20,2023

Good evening Chairwoman Rigby and members of the County Council. My name is Coleen West, Executive Director of the Howard County Arts Council located at 8510 High Ridge Road in Ellicott City. I am here this evening to thank you for your ongoing support of the Arts Council's efforts and to ask you to support CB 29-2023 which provides us with a five-year lease at 8510 High Ridge.

Recognizing the important contributions the arts make to community life, the County Council adopted Section 12.804 of the County Code to establish, and provide support for, a private non-profit arts agency to foster the arts. In 1984, we were authorized by the Council to fulfill that role. For 40 years, we have worked together to provide grants to local and regional arts organizations and to provide affordable arts space and programs at the Howard County Center for the Arts located at 8510 High Ridge.

The Art Center, which opened in 1983, is a community resource where artists work, teach and perform and where people of all ages and abilities can engage in the creative, intellectual, social and transformative power of the arts. The Center has two galleries, three classrooms, a large space for meetings, a dance studio, a 100-seat black box theatre, and low-cost studios and offices for artists and arts groups. Today, the Center is home to 14 visual artists, 3 arts organizations, and 6 Arts Advancement groups along with 50 or so other groups who use the space on an ongoing or occasional basis.

The majority of the annual Community Service Partnership grant we receive from the County is devoted to providing grants to local and regional arts groups.

While this grant is critical to our mission, the remaining portion of the CSP grant only covers 24% of our annual operating and programming costs. To cover the remaining portion, we need to draw on a number of other earned and contributed revenue streams. We rely on program revenue generated from Center studios, classes, camps, and rentals along with individual contributions, foundation and corporate support, and grants from the Maryland State Arts Council to cover 76% of our day-to-day activities.

The Arts Council has been a tenant at 8510 High Ridge since 1983. Over the years, we have been a good steward of public resources while providing accessible arts programming to the community. A multi-year lease will enable us to continue :

- To provide stable and affordable studio, performance, rehearsal and office space for visual artists and small dance, music and theatre companies;
- To ensure artists and groups who use the space have opportunities to adequately plan, schedule and promote their programs and activities in advance;
- and to raise additional dollars to make improvements to the art spaces.

Each year, we provide hundreds of artists and arts organizations with opportunities to present and showcase their work and we provide nearly 30,000 annual visitors with opportunities to participate in the arts through classes, exhibits, and performances. We also provide full-time studio space for 14 visual artists and office space for Ballet Mobile, the Columbia Orchestra, and Columbia Pro Cantare. In addition, the building is busy with ongoing and occasional usage by artists and small arts groups looking to grow their audiences and businesses. Pre-Covid, we were averaging 250 theatre bookings, 250 dance studio bookings, and 700 classroom bookings annually.

The theatre, dance studio, large multi-purpose room, and galleries are heavily used and we have raised money to improve them. In the past, we have purchased:

- curtains and light, sound and audio equipment for the black box theatre,
- hard wood sprung floors for the dance studio and black box theatre,
- lights and flooring for the galleries,
- art display cases for the large meeting room,
- and we paved the courtyard along and commissioned a stunning outdoor mosaic sculpture by Susan Stockman and a mosaic mural made by the students enrolled at the Ellicott City Head Start Center, who we share the building with.

In addition, we've hired local businesses to refinish the hard wood floors in the dance studio and theatre and partnered with Comcast Cares to make cosmetic improvements to the bathrooms and other common areas. These and other improvements to the building would not have been possible without the previous long-term agreements with the County.

For 4 decades, the Arts Council has worked tirelessly to advocate for the needs of artists and arts organizations, engage the public, and enhance the quality of life in Howard County. A 5-year lease, would allow us to continue to serve artists and the community in a supportive manner in a space dedicated to creativity and the arts.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak with you.

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