

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
AND SHEILA KUEHL**

August 4, 2020

Ensuring the Equitable Recovery of Los Angeles County’s Arts Organizations

The local and national discussion on the troubling inequities faced by communities of color has been renewed and re-energized by the COVID-19 pandemic and recent incidents of police violence. As this robust dialogue has unfolded, many government, business, religious, academic, and cultural institutions have taken steps to address deep-seated racial inequities that have been perpetuated for far too long. To this end, the Los Angeles County (County) Board of Supervisors (Board) has taken several steps, including, most recently, the initiation of the development and implementation of an antiracist policy agenda for the County (“Establishing an Antiracist Los Angeles County Policy Agenda,” motion by Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, July 21, 2020). Given its unique capacity to humanize, heal, and foster cross-cultural dialogue, the arts should be utilized to support the County’s work of addressing these inequities.

Over the past three years, the Board has advanced and implemented several recommendations from the Department of Arts and Culture’s (Department), including the “LA County Arts Report: Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative” (CEII Report), which was submitted to the Board on April 4, 2017. The Board established a “Countywide Cultural Policy;” approved a policy requiring grantees to adopt statements or policies on cultural inclusivity and equity; expanded the Arts Internship Program and created career pathways for youth; and placed creative strategists in County departments (Ridley-Thomas – Solis, June 26, 2017). Further elevating this work, Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl co-authored the historic motion (May 15, 2018) that

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SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

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BARGER _____

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transitioned the Arts Commission into a stand-alone County department. The Board took further steps by approving a motion by Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Kuehl (December 18, 2018) that created the “Countywide Plan for Elevating the Arts as a Criminal Justice Reform Strategy,” an effort to utilize and provide arts-based programs and strategies to support justice-involved individuals and make communities safer. The Board’s work has evidenced its commitment to ensuring that the County’s diverse communities share equitably in the benefits of the arts.

Implementing the CEII Report recommendation to expand the Organizational Grants Program (OGP) would support the County’s small and mid-size arts organizations that are too often disadvantaged in their ability to access arts funding. This lack of access, in turn, makes it difficult for underserved communities to gain access to arts programs and other opportunities. In addition to providing stable funding and technical support to the County’s more disadvantaged arts organizations, every dollar granted out by the OGP is matched one-for-one from other sources. Further compounding these challenges, the recent economic downturn has resulted in decreased revenues for these organizations; and the passage of Assembly Bill 5 (Gonzales) has substantially impacted their ability to employ arts workers and absorb the increased cost of labor. The County’s smaller budget arts organizations – for whom the OGP was structured to ensure more equitable distribution of funding – are the most vulnerable to these challenges.

These recent developments are especially concerning as the region’s creative economy – of which these organizations are a critical part – has been a substantial source of jobs, wages, tax revenues, and economic growth. As described in the “Otis Report on the Creative Economy,” the creative economy, in 2018, supported close to one-fifth of all jobs in the County, and directly employed nearly 10% of all private sector workers. Importantly, the 797,075 jobs generated by the creative economy provide an average annual income of over \$84,000 compared to the Los Angeles County median income of over \$32,000. By wholly embracing artistic and cultural inclusivity, the County will continue to build on its competitive advantage as a center for creative industries. As the home to nearly 1,700 fine arts and performing arts establishments – as well as countless production studios, design firms, animation collectives, and digital media companies – the robustness of this sector, and its capacity to generate major economic benefits,

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demonstrate the clear value of investing in the County's arts organizations.

Despite several years of strong growth, the pandemic and recent economic downturn has negatively impacted many arts organizations. A survey by the Americans for the Arts finds that 29 percent of the County's arts non-profit organizations are "extremely likely" to make temporary or permanent reductions in staff; and 33 percent expect the financial impact of the pandemic to be "extremely severe." A substantial percentage of the County's arts organizations are in danger of permanently closing, leaving the long-term health of this sector in doubt and setting back hard-earned progress in making arts opportunities more accessible to disadvantaged communities.

The County cannot afford the cultural, economic, and other consequences of allowing these arts organizations to close their doors. As a critical part of the region's economy, as demonstrated by several years of substantial growth of the creative sector, and as a provider of arts and culture programs to underserved communities, the small and mid-size organizations that receive funding from the OGP are a key part of the solution to the current crises facing residents of the County. Phasing in funding over three years, compared to the current program of funding over two years, in order to meet the funding needs of these organizations and to provide a stable funding source to allow for short- to mid-term organizational and programmatic strategic planning, will go a long way towards ensuring the resilience of the arts sector and contribute substantially to the County's overall recovery.

WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to identify funding in the FY 2020-21 Supplemental Budget for the Department of Arts and Culture's Organizational Grants Program (OGP) by phasing in \$1,200,000 per year over three years to reach a total amount of \$3,600,000 in ongoing funding through FY 2022-23, which includes \$200,000 for technical and administrative support.
2. In addition, direct the CEO to identify funding for one program staff in the FY 2020- 21 Supplemental Budget to administer the OGP.

(RT/CAS)