



Long Island Traditions

382 Main Street

Port Washington, NY 11050

(516) 767-8803

E-Mail: info@longislandtraditions.org

<https://longislandtraditions.org/>

Hearing: NYS Joint Legislative Public Hearing on Economic Development and Arts

Submitted by Violet Baron, Executive Director and Nancy Solomon, Founding Director

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in conjunction with the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2024 Executive Budget Proposal on the topics of Economic Development and the Arts. I am writing to request robust support for the New York State Council on the Arts and for capital funding for culture!

NYSCA has helped support funding for the arts throughout NY State and in recent years the legislature has provided substantial increases, for which we are grateful.

We are writing today as the leadership of Long Island Traditions, a regional nonprofit organization that serves over 500 traditional artists and culture bearers of Nassau and Suffolk Counties. We are the only organization on Long Island that provides services to folk and traditional artists and produces programs that serve a variety of communities on Long Island. This includes K-12 school programs, programs produced with libraries and museums throughout Long Island, exhibitions, and support for artists, enabling them to obtain nysca funding.

LI Traditions is also a leader in the state in developing sustainable cultural tourism through TravelStorys, a self-guided tour app that brings visitors and residents to underserved communities where they can learn about local landmarks, stories and celebrations that are critical to local heritage infrastructure efforts throughout New York State. From 2020-24 LI Traditions had partnership support from the NY State Council on the Arts to work with folklorists and heritage sites to develop these engaging tours, so that families and younger people could learn about the untold

stories of rural, suburban and urban communities through the state, reflecting the experiences and stories of fishermen, boat builders, Native Americans, African Americans, farmers, iron workers and other groups whose stories help connect residents and visitors to communities throughout the state.

These tours generate economic development through increasing tourism and providing local perspectives on living cultural heritage. Tour sites include the [Mohawk Valley](#), [Genesee Valley](#), [Lake George](#), [Battenkill](#), [Elmira](#), [Niagara Frontier](#), Long Island's [North Shore](#), [South Shore](#) and [East End](#), [Roosevelt](#), [Hempstead](#), [Mineola](#), [Port Washington](#) and [Southampton](#). New tours include Haverstraw, Poughkeepsie and Kingston.

In 2024 LI Traditions learned that its partnership grant from the NY State Council on the Arts would not be extended, despite the success of the tours. We were denied permission to apply for support, with no explanation provided. As we know, NYSCA funding has more than doubled in the last three years. According to TravelStorys over 20,000 visitors have taken these tours in person, using the TravelStorys app, generating significant economic development activity in the tour site communities. When asked why our partnership grant would not be renewed, no explanation was given. We do know that our efforts have been successful, as we have received new requests to develop these tours, especially upstate where communities value economic development from heritage efforts, and on Long Island. While other partners including the National Park Service and the Gardiner Foundation are supportive of our efforts, without the NYSCA match we cannot submit compelling applications, thereby hindering cultural tourism efforts throughout the state.

We therefore request the following:

1. Require NYSCA to convene full panels where partnership applications can be reviewed by individuals with expertise in the appropriate artistic disciplines, especially in folk and traditional arts; often people without expertise in this discipline do not recognize the artistic value of community and family based cultural arts and traditions. In 2024 ONLY TWO partnership applications were invited to apply in Folk Arts by NYSCA's executive leadership, eliminating direct funding to regional folk arts programs, our cultural tourism initiative and nys living traditions, an online portal for community based organizations involved with folklife. Such defunding is extremely damaging to the infrastructure of folk arts activity

throughout New York State and shocking at a time when funding has more than doubled.

2. Increased funding to Long Island arts organizations, which are severely underfunded relative to the population and total NYSCA funding. where the challenges for raising funds are acute. Nassau County arts organizations receive less funding proportionate to the funds it sends to Albany than almost any other region in the state. In Nassau County the total is \$588,193 for 2024, down from \$697,193 in 2023, a 15.5% decrease, despite increased funding to NYSCA.
3. A meeting with Erika Malin, the new executive director of NYSCA, as requested by NY Folklore and over 70 folk and traditional arts organizations including LI Traditions, immediately. We have requested a meeting with NYSCA's executive leadership since march 2022 but have yet to receive a response to schedule a meeting.