Subject: Protect funding for the State Arts Agency and look to the creative sector for vital services to rebuild the CA economy

We write to STRONGLY SUPPORT a “workload” budget appropriation in June for the California Arts Council (CAC), which would mean a general fund support level of $26 million. The CAC is California’s state arts agency, and successfully carries out its mission of strengthening arts, culture, and creative expression for all Californians. We understand that the state is facing unique circumstances and that prior investment increases can’t be evaluated because of reasonable delays in understanding California’s fiscal and broader economic condition.

We understand that the Legislature will more fully understand the state’s fiscal outlook in August when the July tax receipts have been received and evaluated. We would urge, if cuts must be made when the budget is reconsidered in August, that the California Arts Council be protected against any disproportionate cuts. California, the center of the creative economy, already lags near the middle-of-the-pack with respect to state funding for the state arts agency.

As we enter this new chapter in California history, we ask for a different kind of support – protect community access to the arts as provided in grants from the CAC and the vital work those funds produce in prisons to reduce recidivism, to veterans coping with PTSD and for students for increased graduation rates as well as many other mental health and economic benefits we know the arts bring to California. Artists, creatives and non-profit arts organizations provide essential services to our communities and they are ready to work to support the State in its priorities to protect public health and safety, to end homelessness and to provide hope, comfort and wellness to Californians as the second responders in disaster recovery.

As 15.4% or 2.7 million of all jobs in California are in the creative industries, generating $650.3 billion per year, we can assure you the arts, culture and creative sectors are ready to get back to work to rebuild California’s economy. As some of the first industries to shut down and likely some of the last to reopen at full capacity, the creative sector has been disproportionately affected by the crisis. This has only served to highlight the inequitable access to resources in communities of color and rural areas, and how arts organizations like many other social service organizations serve as vital lifelines.

Despite unprecedented hardship, artists and creative workers are helping their own communities. Costume shops transitioning to mask makers for hospital workers on the front lines, artists stepping up to design posters and record video messages to encourage people to shelter in place, arts organizations from the mountains to the coast using digital platforms to bring cultural offerings into the homes of millions and maintain a sense of community and connection. Arts instruction and engagement for all ages has forged new partnerships with school systems and others to reach school aged students as well as veterans and seniors who are particularly at risk and therefore isolated as a result of this pandemic.
Artists are second responders, willing to respond to a crisis to rebuild lives but like any other profession, should be compensated for their work and service. There has never been a more needed time for hope, inspiration and healing and the mental health benefits arts and artists can bring to our communities as well as arts education to our students. Please consider the impact and the benefits the arts and creative economy provide for California as you set out on the hard work to rebuild California. Again, we STRONGLY SUPPORT the baseline budget appropriation of $26 million for the California Arts Council and urge you to vote in favor of it when the legislature convenes.