

**Testimony to House Finance Committee
Wednesday, February 26, 2020
Arts and Historic Infrastructure: Housing and Infrastructure Bond**

Supporting capital improvements for Rhode Island's arts, cultural and historic facilities is not just a nice thing to do: it's central to the economic health of the state.

Why reinstate funding for capital grants for Rhode Island's arts, cultural and historic facilities?

- Historic and cultural sites are key economic drivers for Rhode Island.
- Restoration of a cultural or historic place has the ripple effect of creating vital and attractive neighborhoods.
- Our prized historic structures are starved for money to make vital repairs – roofs leak, safety systems are outdated, sills and foundations are compromised; the list goes on and on.
- Heritage tourism is vital to Rhode Island's economy and relies on buildings in good repair.
- State grants catalyze broad community support. A state grant acts as a stamp of approval and confidence, unleashing local appropriations and philanthropic dollars to match the state investment.
- Repair of the cultural and historic facilities creates good jobs for Rhode Islanders -- roofers, carpenters, electricians, masons, plumbers, architects, engineers and other specialized craftspeople.

Arts and Historic Infrastructure Grants will continue the companion grant programs established in 2014 at both the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) where funding is now exhausted. The list of prior grant projects reads like Rhode Island's best historic hits: Pomham Rock Lighthouse in East Providence; Marble House in Newport; Providence Public Library, Providence; the Steel Yard, Providence; and this list goes on to a combined total of more than 100 grantees across the state.

Repairs to historic and cultural facilities invests in key community assets, building civic pride in the cultural institutions and historic places in every city and town. And both grant programs invest in the infrastructure upon which the state's tourism economy rests. Visitors come to Providence and Newport, Bristol and the Blackstone Valley, to experience Rhode Island's unique blend of arts and historic places. Tourism is big business in Rhode Island: studies commissioned by *CommerceRI* have found that one-in-eight jobs is sustained by the tourism industry. In Rhode Island, 45% of visitors fall into the category of "heritage tourism" – that's 9.8 million visitors per year. The economic spin-off is estimated at \$1.4 million to Rhode Island's economy, including 19,000 direct jobs and 7,000 indirect jobs.

The \$6 million proposed for Arts and Historic Infrastructure Grants will not meet the demand. The grant programs authorized in 2014, capitalized at \$6 million for RISCA cultural facilities and \$5 million for State Preservation Grants, and were all oversubscribed. These grants programs are important seed money to leverage municipal and philanthropic investments – efficiently extending state dollars. We support the call to increase the allocation to Arts and Historic Infrastructure to \$20 million.