



TODD NOVAK

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Rep.Novak@legis.wi.gov

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

P.O. Box 8953

Madison, WI 53708-8953

DATE: Wednesday, February 14th, 2024
RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 986
TO: Assembly Committee on Tourism
FROM: State Representative Todd Novak

Thank you Chair Magnafici and members of the Assembly Committee on Tourism for holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill 986 (AB 986), relating to the Artistic Endowment Foundation and the Wisconsin regranting program.

In 2001, Wisconsin was ahead of the curve in identifying the economic and growth potential the state's creative sector has on the overall vitality of the state. A bipartisan legislative council study committee recommended legislation that was included in the state budget and signed into law by Gov. Scott McCallum (R) that created the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation to help fuel the growth of this sector in the state.

After being signed into law, Wisconsin's economy hit an economic downturn and a funding mechanism was never identified for the foundation. The board, which was established by the legislation to guide the foundation and is in the state statutes (Ch. 247), was never populated and has remained dormant.

AB 986 is the first step in reigniting investment in the creative economy. This legislation reactivates the WAEF board and restructures the foundation so it can receive both public and private sector funds. The legislation also provides opportunities for greater regional representation on the board and legislative and executive branch involvement.

The creative sector in Wisconsin contributes \$10.8 billion to Wisconsin's economy and employs nearly 90,000 workers, but there is so much more room for growth.

- The national average share of GDP coming from arts and culture was 4.4% in 2022. The Wisconsin share of GDP coming from arts and culture was 2.9% in 2022.
- Since 2020, economic impact of the sector has grown just 8.44% in Wisconsin, compared to a national increase of 14.43%. Wisconsin ranks 41st nationally in economic growth of this sector.

The arts community is an often overlooked sector of the Wisconsin tourism industry. Beyond the appreciation for these artistic and cultural elements there is also a significant economic component at stake; the creative economy provides jobs.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 986.



Wednesday Feb., 14th, 2024

Rep. Magnafici, Chair

Rep. Swearingen, Vice-Chair

Members of the Assembly Committee on Tourism

Testimony on 2024 AB 986

Relating to: the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation and the Wisconsin regranting program.

Thank you, Chairwoman Magnafici and committee members for hearing my testimony today.

Anyone who has been to Wisconsin knows that it is a great place to live and work. We want to continue boosting arts and culture so that we can beautify our communities, grow our economy, and bring new talent to our state.

This bill revitalizes a great idea, our Wisconsin Arts Endowment Foundation, established by legislation in 2001. The WAEF was designed to be a nonprofit that would support arts endeavors in our communities through tax deductible contributions.

The WAEF was supposed to have a board composed of various legislative and appointed leaders that would get things running, but the board was never filled, leaving the foundation lifeless for all these years.

AB986 involves no financial elements. The bill changes the composition of the board so that it can be refilled and the Foundation can be revitalized. The new board would be comprised of four Assembly representatives, four senators, a Chairperson, secretary, nonvoting member, and four nominees of the Governor. All appointments will be required to be made by July 1st of this year.

Grants awarded to local arts agencies and municipalities by the WAEF require that the funds be matched by another nonstate funding source, including private funds and in-kind contributions.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. We look forward to seeing what the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation will accomplish.

SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN WISCONSIN'S CREATIVE SECTOR

THE CASE FOR CREATIVE SECTOR INVESTMENT

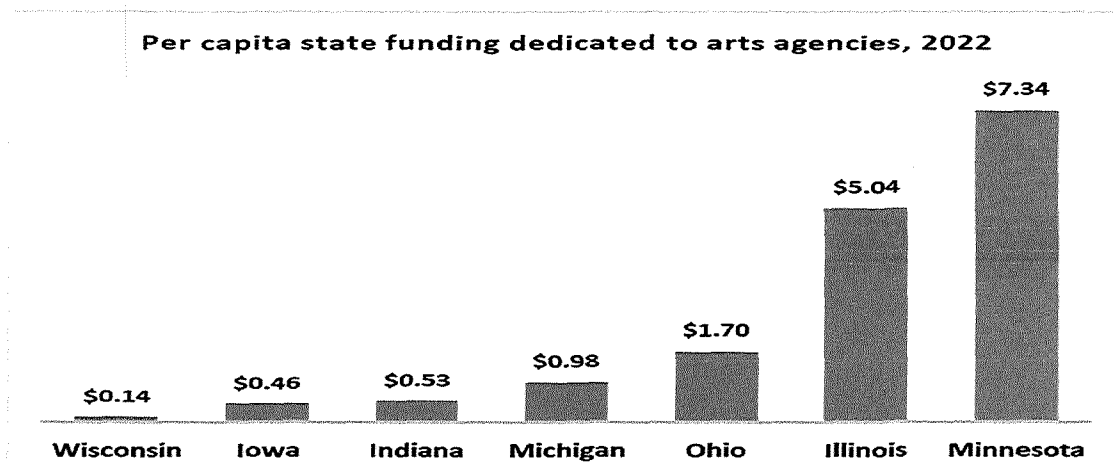


CREATE
WISCONSIN
Arts | Community | Economy

Wisconsin's creative assets are more important than ever as the state and its communities seek to incubate, attract and retain talent, particularly young working age adults. Wisconsin's creative sector is a **\$10.8 billion economic driver** for Wisconsin, encompassing more jobs than the state's beer, biotech, and papermaking industries, according to the US Department of Commerce. Local elected officials and civic leaders in communities large and small are keenly aware that civic, cultural, and artistic initiatives to revitalize and stabilize downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods will help their places thrive. Investment in Wisconsin's creative economy will help the state compete with other states strategically investing in creative economic development initiatives to bolster quality of life and attract residents to their state.

Yet Wisconsin has lagged nationally in investment in its creative economy. One of Wisconsin's long-term weaknesses, attracting and retaining young people, continued between 2012 and 2020^[1]. Data from federal income tax returns show the state lost 106,000 "families," in which the tax filer was under 26 years of age. Often, these are single individuals. "Bright lights, big city" may best describe the reason many left. Only 37% of those who left moved to a state bordering Wisconsin. Of those, nearly 70% migrated to either Minneapolis (42%), Chicago (26%), or Detroit (2%), the three largest metro areas in the Midwest.^[2] To address out migration challenges, Wisconsin policymakers should consider a multipronged approach to attract talent and enhance quality of life through the state, including bolstering amenities that appeal to young adults.^[3]

Despite the economic, workforce, and civic promise of this sector, the state's 0.18 cents per capita spending for arts and culture in 2022 is among the lowest in the nation, and far below Minnesota's \$7.34 per capita, as shown below. Development initiatives like *Destination Iowa*, established in 2022, is a \$100 million investment to bolster the quality of life in Iowa's communities and attract visitors and new residents to the state.



Source: National Academy of State Arts Agencies

[1] 2022 Forward Analytics report, *Moving In? Exploring Wisconsin's Migration Challenges*.

[2] Ibid.

[3] 2022 Forward Analytics report, *Moving In? Exploring Wisconsin's Migration Challenges*.

[4] NGA *Offers Strategies For Creative Sector To Revitalize Rural Communities*, Mar. 12, 2019.

The creative sector is a critical opportunity for Wisconsin. A state investment in the creative sector is urgently needed to grow and stabilize Wisconsin's creative economy, workforce, and communities. While the COVID pandemic is over, many industries, including the creative sector, are dealing with workforce issues, audience engagement and participation changes, sustainability and capacity, and rising costs for businesses and consumers. **Now is the time to invest in creativity.** Contact: Create Wisconsin, info@createwisconsin.org | 608 255 8316.



Amy Mueller
Third Avenue PlayWorks- Managing Director
RE: Testimony in Support of AB-986

February 14, 2024

For over a decade, I have been privileged to lead and support arts organizations in Wisconsin's rural communities. From my experience bringing an outdoor Shakespeare theatre in the woods of Baileys Harbor back to life to serving as a Development Director for the accomplished American Players Theatre in Spring Green to now leading Third Avenue PlayWorks, located in Sturgeon Bay, during its time of reinvention and growth, it is evident that the arts are a catalyst that makes rural areas thrive. I have seen firsthand how the arts serve as a central function of a healthy economy and culturally sound rural community.

The creative economy of Wisconsin provides over \$10 billion in economic activity annually. The arts sector gainfully employs over 90,000 artists and administrators throughout Wisconsin. However, this state invests markedly less than our neighboring states in the midwest- only .14 cents per resident. It is time, if not long overdue, to commit to supporting the creative economy and acknowledge the industry's undeniably significant impact on the people and towns of Wisconsin.

AB-986 will allow the Legislature and the Governor to work together to compensate for years of under-investment in the creative sector and commit increased support for arts organizations across the state. Investment in the arts will have a lasting impact on Wisconsin residents and guests for decades to come.

On behalf of the artists and administrators we employ, the students we teach, the audiences we welcome, and the communities we serve, I thank you for supporting AB-986 and acknowledging the undeniable economic and cultural value of the arts industry in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,
Amy Mueller
Amy Mueller
amym@thirdavenueplayworks.org
920.743.1760



Overture
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

overture.org

Testimony on Assembly Bill 986

Chris Vogel
Chief Financial Officer
Overture Center for the Arts
Assembly Committee on Tourism
Wednesday, February 14th, 2024

Chair Magnafici, esteemed Members of the Assembly Tourism Committee,

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today in support of Assembly Bill 986, which concerns the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation. My name is Chris Vogel, and I serve as the Chief Financial Officer of Overture Center for the Arts, located blocks away on State Street in downtown Madison. Overture Center is Wisconsin's largest performing arts center, showcasing a diverse range of programming and hosting many local, national, and international artists.

At Overture, we take pride in our role as a cultural hub, offering over 600,000 educational and artistic experiences annually. We serve as the primary home to nine Resident arts Organizations in Madison, including the Madison Symphony Orchestra, Madison Opera, Forward Theater Company, and Children's Theater of Madison. One of our flagship programs, the Jerry Awards, engages over 11,000 high school students annually across nearly 100 high schools throughout Wisconsin.

The economic impact of Overture Center alone is significant, totaling \$34.5 million and supporting roughly 270 full-time equivalent jobs. However, our impact is just a fraction of the \$10.8 billion in economic impact generated annually by Wisconsin's creative sector, supporting 90,000 jobs.

Despite the creative sector's immense cultural and economic contributions, Wisconsin ranks as the worst state in the country for per-capita support of the arts. AB 986 seeks to address this underinvestment by making important changes to the Artistic Endowment Fund, allowing the Legislature and the Governor to increase investments in Wisconsin's arts and culture sector.

Investing in the arts is not just about supporting performances and exhibitions; it is an investment in the heart and soul of our communities. Cultural experiences and quality of life factors are among the top reasons people choose where to live and work. By supporting AB 986, we are not just investing in the arts; we are investing in the future prosperity and vibrancy of Wisconsin.

Thank you for considering this important legislation, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Testimony on Assembly Bill 986

Kevin Giglinto, President and CEO

Marcus Performing Arts Center
Milwaukee, WI

Assembly Committee on Tourism

Wednesday, February 14th, 2024

Dear Chair Magnafici, and Members of the Assembly Tourism Committee:

My name is Kevin Giglinto, the President and CEO of the Marcus Performing Arts Center (MPAC) in Milwaukee. I sincerely apologize that I cannot be with you in person today, due to previously scheduled commitments. However, I am extremely grateful that you are conducting this public hearing on Assembly Bill 986, relating to the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation, and allowing my colleagues and me the opportunity to share our support of this legislation.

For over fifty years, MPAC has been hosting world class performances as a cornerstone cultural institution, launched by Milwaukee County, and serving audiences from almost every county in Wisconsin, and many from the surrounding states. With over 300,000 attendees annually, and hundreds of ticketed and free events that range from touring Broadway to leading dance and music ensembles, and community celebrations, it is our mission to be a cultural gathering place for all.

The arts give voice to our entire culture and provide so many opportunities for us to come together.

The economic impact of people attending performances is well documented. The Wisconsin Department of Tourism has shown that day-trippers spend an additional \$75 on top of their ticket purchase when attending an event, while overnight visitors spend an average of \$157 each. Our venues and institutions provide artistic experiences that are joyful and engaging and create a positive financial halo effect to surrounding businesses that keep our neighborhoods vibrant.

Additionally, unlike many states, Wisconsin charges sales tax for non-profit arts institution ticket sales, which translates directly into income for the state, as well as the county and city.

All this activity results in over \$10B of annual economic impact and almost 100,000 jobs. And it is a dynamic industry that is constantly reinventing itself. As our world changes, so does artistic expression.

Given its role as an economic engine, large scale employer, and source of community engagement and pride, it is critical for the state to invest in our creative community. Cultural experiences are a key driver for workforce recruitment, as they can transform spaces and reinvigorate those who participate.



The state must help support the sector to foster Wisconsin-based creativity and artistry, and I believe that AB 986 will do that. Their work will spur more innovation, constant evolution and a vibrant community that will remain inspired by their efforts. And that financial investment will pay dividends for many years to come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to write in support of AB 986, and greater investment in the creative economy. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Giglinto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kevin Giglinto
President and CEO

Testimony on Assembly Bill 986

Jen Uphoff Gray, Madison

Forward Theater Company

Assembly Committee on Tourism

Wednesday, February 14th, 2024

Chair Magnafici and Members of the Assembly Tourism Committee.

Thank you for having this public hearing on Assembly Bill 986, relating the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation, and allowing me the opportunity to speak in support of this legislation.

My name is Jen Uphoff Gray and I am the artistic director of Forward Theater Company in Madison.

We founded Forward in 2009 to provide professional theater artists and technicians with employment, to provide artistic engagement to our community, and to stimulate the local economy. Hiring Wisconsin-based artists is core to our mission and in our 15 seasons we have generated a great deal of economic activity, while also playing our part in keeping a thriving creative class employed here.

In addition to my responsibilities as head of Forward Theater, I also chair regular meetings with the nine resident arts organizations at Overture Center for the Arts, and monthly meetings with the leadership of all of Wisconsin's professional theaters. I also founded World Premiere Wisconsin, a statewide festival in 2023 that drove both arts experiences and tourism statewide. As a result of these experiences I feel quite attuned to the needs of our state's professional arts ecosystem.

I often say that here in Madison we "punch above our weight" when it comes to arts and culture. Both in the number of offerings for folks to engage with, and in their caliber. And that is a huge factor in attracting new residents to our area, and incentivizing them to stay here.

The company I lead, like the other companies represented here today, are used to generating revenue for our communities and our state at levels far greater than the financial support we receive from our city, county, and state governments. In the wake of the pandemic, inflation, and labor shortages of the last few years, this imbalance is becoming increasingly unsustainable.

My theater was founded in the midst of the 2008-2009 economic downturn, when Wisconsin lost three professional theaters in a 6-month timeframe. With a little more support – at levels commensurate with what we contribute to this state – we can avoid similar losses and in fact leverage the work of all our organizations to do even more for our communities, both culturally and economically.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in support of AB 986 and greater investment in Wisconsin's creative economy. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

February 12, 2024

Dear Representatives,

I write to ask for your support of legislation to bolster the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation and the Wisconsin regranting program -- Senate Bill 897 and Assembly Bill 896, whose lead sponsors are Representative Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville) and Senator Jesse James (R-Altoona).

As Chief Executive Officer of the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra -- which delivers life-changing and community-enhancing music education to nearly 1,000 students yearly -- I can testify to the impact of our state's arts sector, and the urgent need for this legislation.

The legislation will allow Wisconsin to take a major step in supporting the state's creative sector -- and in improving our economy, and our quality of life, to benefit every resident.

The legislation reactivates the foundation board and restructures the foundation so it can receive funds from the private sector as well as the public. Also, it provides opportunities for greater regional representation on the board and legislative and executive branch involvement.

The Wisconsin creative sector contributes \$10.8 billion to our economy yearly and employs 90,000 workers.

But our state's share of GDP from arts and culture was just 2.9% in 2022, behind the United States average of 4.4%. **At the state level, on a per-capita basis, government funding of arts & culture is ranked 50th out of 50 states.** Moreover, the creative sector's economic impact has increased 8.44% since 2020, also lagging the national increase (14.43%). Our state ranks just 41st in the country in creative-sector economic growth.

In 2001, Wisconsin leaders saw the impact that our creative sector makes on the overall vitality of the state, as an economic engine creating jobs while generating millions in tax revenues. A bipartisan committee recommended legislation that was included in the state budget and signed into law by Gov. Scott McCallum to create the foundation. Unfortunately, Wisconsin's economy then hit a downturn, a funding mechanism was never identified, and the board was never appointed.

In 2022 Milwaukee's **nonprofit arts and culture industry generated more than \$334 million in economic activity** according to a newly released study, generating nearly \$58 million in local, state, and federal government tax revenues.

Our state needs you to revive the foundation and appropriately fund it -- and promote economic growth throughout Wisconsin.

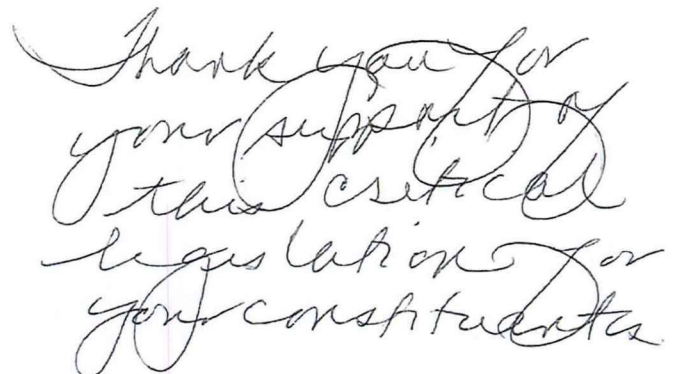
I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have, or to provide more information on how the foundation and its grant dollars would benefit Wisconsin communities. Please do not hesitate to contact me via email at lindaedelstein@myso.org, 414-267-2990, via USPS at the address below.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your support for this vital legislation.

Sincerely,



Linda J. Edelstein
Chief Executive Officer



Testimony on Assembly Bill 986
Susan Varela, Executive Director
Skylight Music Theatre

Assembly Committee on Tourism
Wednesday, February 14th, 2024

Chair Magnafici and Members of the Assembly Tourism Committee,

Thank you for having this public hearing on Assembly Bill 986, relating the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation, and allowing me the opportunity to speak in support of this legislation.

My name is Susan Varela and I am the Executive Director of Skylight Music Theatre. Skylight is a non-profit, professional performing organization located in Milwaukee's Historic Third Ward whose mission is to bring the full range of music theater works to a wide and diverse audience. Skylight makes an impact through the celebration of musical and theatrical arts and their reflection of the human condition. In addition to a performance season featuring five Broadway-style productions and 100+ performances, Skylight also provides arts education programming for Kindergarten through 12th grade students. We continue to prioritize Milwaukee Public School program requests and opportunities for the engagement of underserved children in implementing Skylight's education programs.

After successful runs of *Candide*, *School of Rock*, and *Xanadu*, the season will continue in 2024 with *Spring Awakening* and *From Here to Eternity*. Skylight takes pride in employing local actors and theatre professionals, presenting new works like May 2024's Midwest premiere of *From Here to Eternity* and building greater accessibility through the 2024 production of *Spring Awakening*, which will feature a Deaf and hearing cast, a Deaf co-director and the only Deaf Lighting designer in the United States.

This season we look forward to more partnerships with local arts groups and community organizations. Skylight will continue past partnerships like those established with First Stage and Pink Umbrella which resulted in Skylight's design of ability-inclusive performances. Our partnerships with local organizations like the Milwaukee Public Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center ensure that Skylight will continue to offer access to the arts for underserved youth and families. Additionally, have joined with UWM's American Sign Language degree program students, who will provide backstage sign language (ASL) interpretation for *Spring Awakening's* Deaf and hard of hearing cast members. These, and other partnerships, assist Skylight in exploring opportunities, engaging audiences of differing abilities, and serving our community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in support of AB 986, and greater investment in the creative economy, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,
Susan Varela



PRYME
SOLUTIONS
greater than one

Assembly Committee on Tourism
Testimony on Assembly Bill 986

LaShawndra Vernon

CEO, Pryme Solutions LLC.

Wednesday, February 14th, 2024

Chair Magnafici and Members of the Assembly Tourism Committee,

I'd like to begin by thanking you for having this public hearing on Assembly Bill 986, relating the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation, and allowing me the opportunity to speak in support of this legislation.

My name is LaShawndra Vernon, and I am the founder and CEO of Pryme Solutions LLC., a dynamic system design firm promoting the public good and developing synergistic communities.

My family has been in Wisconsin for 6 generations. My great great grandmother Lucy Ann of Art owned a bed and breakfast in Bronzeville. My great grandfather Charles Warren was a photographer and his archives are held at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society. His role in supporting performing artists travel throughout Wisconsin for more opportunities to perform earned him the nickname "Mr. Mojo". I come from a long line of creatives in Wisconsin. I am an artist, an arts administrator and a creative mitigator. I believe all creatives have the right to work and earn within their creative gifts and talents. I've committed my career to ensure this is possible for all.

I recognize the importance of supporting creative ecosystems in Wisconsin and the reactivation of Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation in supporting arts initiatives throughout the state of Wisconsin. By expanding the membership to include nominees from the governor, representatives to the assembly, senators, and designated Arts Board officials, the bill promotes a shared decision-making process. This broader representation will lead to more equitable distribution of resources and better alignment with the needs of Wisconsin's creative ecosystems.

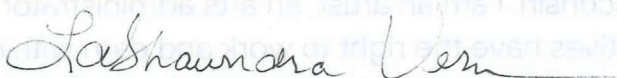
While I supports the objectives of Assembly Bill 986, I also encourage the Assembly Tourism Committee to consider the importance of aligning with emergency management systems and activating a statewide network of creative ecosystems across the state. The creative sector was disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and will require intentional collaboration across the state.

Coaching sessions aimed at helping arts organizations build their capacity will be necessary. Crisis Analysis & Mitigation (CAM) Coaching Program for Arts Responders is a nationwide network coaching distressed communities in developing or expanding mitigation efforts using the arts and creativity. CAM coaches support disaster preparedness and are FEMA Incident Command System (ICS) certified. .

Successful mitigation efforts facilitate creative solutions to disaster recovery process improvement. Coaching sessions equip creative ecosystems with the necessary tools and strategies to identify potential risks, develop contingency plans, and strengthen their resilience in the face of adversity. By investing in disaster preparedness, the state can empower local creative ecosystems to proactively address challenges and ensure their long-term sustainability and success.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in support of AB 986, and greater investment in the creative economy, and I would be happy to answer any questions. If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at lashawndra@absolutepryme.com.

Sincerely,



LaShawndra Vernon

Founder/CEO

Pryme Solutions LLC.

lashawndra@absolutepryme.com

absolutepryme.com

Testimony on Assembly Bill 986

Megwyn Sanders-Andrews, Ph.D.
Managing Director
Milwaukee Chamber Theatre
February 14, 2024

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today about this exciting opportunity to put in place much-needed support for the arts and culture sector in Wisconsin. Thanks to Chair Magnafici for hosting this hearing, and to Representatives Novak, Kitchens and Mursau for introducing the bill and to Senator James for co-sponsoring.

My name is Megwyn Sanders-Andrews and I am the Managing Director of Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. Milwaukee Chamber Theatre (MCT) creates community-centered professional theater that engages and challenges the audience while employing and nurturing principally local Milwaukee theatre artists. Founded in 1975, MCT is the second-oldest producing theater in Milwaukee and will celebrate its 50th Anniversary season in 2024/2025. MCT is a dynamic, inclusive, home for local artists, telling Milwaukee stories with Milwaukee talent and sparking conversations wherein Milwaukeeans can build, as a community, who we are and who we are going to be.

As part of our mission, 83% of the artists MCT employs reside in Milwaukee, and an additional 11% live elsewhere in Wisconsin. We also work to reflect our home city of Milwaukee, with 47% of MCT's artists identifying as Black, Indigenous or people of color and 56% identifying as women.

We recognize the importance of the arts and culture sector to our larger economy. We contribute to this by paying living wages to all our artists and keeping 90% of each season's expenses in Milwaukee through compensation to local artists, vendors, staff and by maintaining our home base in the Third Ward. Too many talented Wisconsin artists feel that they must find their careers elsewhere; MCT is dedicated to supporting a robust and equitable arts economic ecosystem in our city so that stellar Wisconsin artists can work and live in Wisconsin.

I'm here today to ask you to support us in that endeavor by correcting Wisconsin's under-investment in the arts. Building a vibrant arts and culture sector, supported by public dollars, drives the tourism industry and Wisconsin's economy as a whole. Every event attendee in Milwaukee spends an average of \$31.37 in our local economy – in addition to the price they paid for their tickets. So, in 2022, Milwaukee arts and culture non-profits spent 191.8 million and then attracted another 142.8 million in other spending in our communities and generated 57.8 million in tax revenue. And we did this in Wisconsin, while being dead last, 50 out of 50 in the country, for per-capita support of the arts.

Yesterday I had the privilege of being part of a First Rehearsal for MCT's next production. At a First Rehearsal the actors read the script and the designers present their visions for the set, lights, costumes and other elements. It is an imagining of what is to be. And today, I am delighted to do something similar with you. To imagine, with you, how increasing Wisconsin's investment in the arts

can bolster our vibrant arts and culture sector and drive economic growth in Wisconsin's tourism industry and state-wide economy as a whole.

Thank you again, Chair Magnafici, Representatives Novak, Kitchens and Mursau and Senator James, for the opportunity to speak today in support of greater investment in the creative economy.

Chad Bauman
Executive Director
Milwaukee Repertory Theater
RE: Testimony for Assembly Tourism in Support of AB-986
February 14, 2024

Good afternoon. My name is Chad Bauman and I'm the Executive Director of Milwaukee Repertory Theater located in Downtown Milwaukee.

Before I proceed, I would like to thank Representatives Novak and Todd for today's hearing and Representatives Novak, Kitchens and Mursau for introducing AB-986 and Senator James for co-sponsoring.

Eleven years ago, I relocated to Wisconsin from Washington, DC because I wanted to return to the Midwest to have a family and Milwaukee was well known for its world-class arts and culture organizations. Today, I have the privilege of leading Milwaukee Rep, which is Wisconsin's largest performing arts organization serving 300,000 people annually from 1,200 zip codes including every legislative district in the state generating \$40 million in economic activity and supporting 550 full-time jobs.

Soon after arriving in 2013, I received a call from Jane Chu, the 11th Chair of the National Endowment of the Arts. She wanted to visit Wisconsin to learn more about our creative sector. She asked me what we should focus on during her visit and I replied the abysmal state of public funding for the arts in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's amazing cultural assets only exist because of robust private sector philanthropy, as Wisconsin had been and still remains the worst state in the country for per-capita support of the arts. With a \$7B surplus in 2023, Wisconsin invested \$0.14 per resident on arts and culture compared to \$7.34 in Minnesota and \$5.04 in Illinois. Rural Wisconsin is even further behind due to the lack of private philanthropic investment seen in larger communities.

While Wisconsin's creative sector brings \$10.8B in economic impact every year supporting 90,000 jobs, sector growth has not kept pace with the rest of the nation. Since 2020, economic impact in the sector has grown just 8.44%, compared to a national increase of 14.43%. Wisconsin ranks 41st nationally in economic growth. The creative sector also provides quality of life, amenities and cultural experiences — all top reasons people choose a place to live and work — particularly young people, for which Wisconsin ranks poorly as well.

Decades of public sector underinvestment has pushed arts and culture organizations to the brink. The time for a change is now.

AB-986 makes important changes to the Artistic Endowment fund which was established more than 20 years ago to address this under-investment. The changes will give the Legislature significant oversight of the Endowment in partnership with the Governor. This new structure gives both the Legislature and the Governor the opportunity to make increased investments in the arts and culture sector of Wisconsin, which will pay dividends for decades to come.

Whether it is American Players Theater in Rep. Novak's district, Peninsula Players in Rep. Kitchens district, the Sadoff Center for the Arts in Rep. Plumer's district, the Pump House Arts Center in Rep. Billings district, or the even the number of constituents from all your districts that attend Milwaukee Rep – we know the arts mean business for Wisconsin. As Linda says in Arthur Miller's masterful *Death of a Salesman*, "attention must be paid." We have seen how quickly public support can materialize for sports teams supporting American Family Field and Fiserv Forum, but the truth is more Wisconsinites attend arts and cultural events every year than professional sports, so public dollars should reflect that.

On behalf of your constituents, the people we employ, the small businesses we support, the tourists we attract, the students we serve, the patrons that attend, and the communities we build – thank you for support of AB-986 and for soon ending Wisconsin's long and undistinguished run of worst state in the country for arts and culture support.