

Testimony Re: HF991 White Bear Center for the Arts

MN House Workforce Committee

Alex Legeros, Development & Communications Director

Thank you, Chair Xiong, and good afternoon, to all the House committee members.

My name is Alex Legeros, Development & Communications Director at White Bear Center for the Arts. We want to provide an equitable path for youth, particularly from low-income and underrepresented communities, to have a career in Minnesota's thriving nonprofit sector.

White Bear Center for the Arts is all about creating community through art. Our reach is from Minneapolis/St. Paul to the suburban and rural cities around the Greater Northeast Metro region. We employ 22 staff and engage more than 500 artists annually, in a facility that includes five flexible classrooms, three gallery spaces, a clay center, resource library, and outdoor campus. Annually, we serve 20,000 people of all generations and abilities, through more than one thousand arts classes, events, contests, and exhibitions. That includes over 6500 youth each year, and three of those young people join me today to speak about their formative experiences in these programs.

Our workforce development program translates experiences like these into a lifetime of service. According to DEED, there are nearly 370,000 nonprofit jobs in Minnesota, the land of 10,000 nonprofits. Yet, unpaid internships and low-paying entry jobs stop youth from pursuing a career in nonprofits.

A 2015 Study by Americans for the Arts detailed the art center's economic impact, and in 2023 we will support the equivalent of more than 90 full time jobs in our community and return \$2.6 million into Minnesota's economy.

We are asking for two years of public funding to start up this program, \$600,000 per year. Public dollars will provide for fair pay and a safe environment, equipped for youth to develop skills in a variety of areas. From classes and events to communications, fundraising, membership, gallery, community outreach, and the retail store, this internship opportunity is about providing youth a holistic foundation. A foundation that accounts for their needs for transportation, food, mental health, and housing.

Our art center is an independent nonprofit that receives no local government funding. We are seeking just what we need to pilot a program we hope becomes a model for more equitable participation and representation in nonprofits. I welcome any questions you have about this proposal, and thank you for your time hearing our testimony for this important legislation.