

Local arts getting a boost

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N.M. legislators introduce act to invest in creative workforce

WASHINGTON D.C. — U.S. Senators Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., and Alex Padilla, D-Calif., and U.S. Representative Teresa Leger Fernández, D-N.M., introduced the Creative Workforce Investment Act on Jan. 11. The Act would empower the creative workforce through the creation of workforce grants programs and expand access to the arts in communities nationwide.

“New Mexico is known for our vibrant arts culture, which has shaped and defined New Mexico for generations. New Mexican artists enrich our communities, preserve our traditions, and boost local economies,” Luján said. “I’m proud to introduce the Creative Workforce Investment Act to establish a workforce grant program that both supports local New Mexican artists and creates public art for communities across New Mexico to enjoy. This legislation provides vital support and opportunities for New Mexico creatives to continue their contributions to our state.”

The Creative Workforce Investment Act would:

Establish a grants program to support arts and creative workforce initiatives that create publicly accessible art while employing individuals in the local community.

Specifies a range of programs eligible for funding, including concerts, storytelling initiatives, murals, films, theatrical productions, and support for arts in educational and community spaces, among others.

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Mandates annual reporting to Congress on grant outcomes, employment duration, earnings, and employment status of individuals involved in the programs.

Authorizes \$300 million in appropriations for fiscal years 2024 through 2026 to support the program.

"In New Mexico, we know that our creative economy — the people who make the beautiful art we get to enjoy — have the power to move us all while creating good-paying jobs and growing our economy," Leger Fernández said. "We often overlook this economic engine and don't invest publicly in this important industry the same way we do in agriculture or manufacturing. This bill would change that, it will create a new, competitive grant program so every community in America has the chance to capitalize on the transformative power of art, so artists have the backing they need to create innovative public art, and so our creative economy can continue to grow and thrive."

This legislation is endorsed by 56 organizations across the country, including Actors' Equity Association, Americans for the Arts, Authors Guild, Californians for the Arts, Creative New Mexico, Department for Professional Employees - AFL-CIO, Etsy, Inc., gallupARTS, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, the City of Albuquerque's Department of Arts and Culture, the City of Santa Fe's Arts and Culture Department, the National Guild for Community Arts Education, and New Mexico Arts.

"In McKinley County, New Mexico, where one in five residents work in the arts, we know first-hand the transformative power of strategic public investment in the creative sector," Rose Eason, the executive director of gallupARTS and board member of Creative New Mexico, said. "Artists and creative workers significantly strengthen our nation--especially small and rural communities like ours--in so many ways, from weaving cultural ties to earning family livings, yet they are largely under-employed. The Creative Workforce Investment Act will fully leverage the talent and entrepreneurship of the country's creative workforce to promote economic and community development at all levels."

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