

3/12/2021

Dear Representative Fue Lee, Representative Mary Murphy, and the Capital Investment Committee:



This is a letter of support for the Funny Asian Women’s Kollektive to receive state bonding support for the development of an Asian-American led arts center on St. Paul’s East Side. We have had the great pleasure of working with Saymoukda Vongsay, one of FAWK’s leaders, as we develop the Victoria Theater Arts Center. Saymoukda’s clear and authentic voice has helped shape our approach to community building and engagement, and we’re thrilled to hear that FAWK is hoping to develop another community-centered space.

Art spaces are vital components to communities. They are places where traditions are preserved, where heritage is celebrated, and where residents can feel safe to be themselves. As white supremacist culture continues to threaten communities of color, art spaces can be places of organizing and understanding, providing us with the tools and connections to forge a better future for everyone. To have such a space on the East Side, led by a powerhouse group of Asian artists, would be a major victory for the community, and just one more big step toward addressing the racial disparities in our state.

As another arts center located in Saint Paul, we would be part of a larger ecosystem of neighborhood-centric art spaces. The more accessible the arts are to everyone in our city, the better the chances that everyone receives the benefits the art have to offer. The possibility for collaboration, the sharing of resources and opportunities, and the creation of a larger network of venues will only make Saint Paul that much more of a creative destination.

On a personal note, I happen to be an “uncle” to two amazing Karen families on the East Side. As they have participated in singing groups and community theater over the past seven years, I have watched them transform- building skills, confidence, and accountability through creative opportunities. Tears come to my eyes as I imagine them being able to walk down the street to a new arts center that centers their voices and dreams in its programming.

The organizers of FAWK, with their almost overwhelming experience in arts and community, know the power of such a place. I wholeheartedly support their efforts and this project.

Sincerely,

Tyler Olsen  
Executive Director  
Victoria Theater Arts Center