

Testimony for SF 1682 Legacy Budget Omnibus Bill

Dr. Bruce Corrie, Professor of Economics, Concordia University and Cultural Entrepreneur

Dear Chair Senator Hawj and members of the Senate Environment, Climate and Legacy Committee. I write this testimony in reference to funding in the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund Budget allocations.

I am Dr. Bruce Corrie, an economist, professor, and cultural entrepreneur. With others I have pioneered a strategy of economic development leveraging the cultural assets of the ALANA (African American/African Latino Asian and Native American) communities in Minnesota reflected in cultural destinations such as Little Africa and Little Mekong. I recently made a presentation to your committee on the power of ALANA cultural assets in creating Minnesota as a Global Cultural Destination.

Let me provide some context to my analysis:

As Mark Ritchie often shares as he tries to bring the World Expo 2027 to Minnesota, he and the team face an uphill battle because the world sees Minnesota as the place where an innocent man, George Floyd was murdered. In SF1682 you have the power to make a strong statement to the world about who we are as a people in Minnesota.

The denial of value of the human being is foundational to racism. Denied value, a human being becomes a thing, an object, a commodity that could be exploited and destroyed at will. This denial of value of ALANA people was institutionalized in core institutions such as art museums and monuments where ALANA cultural assets were not invested in or preserved. I know this to be true as I am on the board of a mainstream art museum in Minnesota, and we are working very hard to make it an inclusive museum with a lot of success. I am on its executive committee and chair its diversity committee. So I know what it takes to be an inclusive museum.

The Legacy committee has traditionally underfunded ALANA assets and even today, this session, the House Legacy committee does not offer direct appropriations or provide adequate documentation of the investment in ALANA cultural assets. Specially disappointing in a year with a \$17 billion dollar surplus. This year is the opportunity to rectify the past disinvestment in ALANA cultural assets and it is sad this opportunity is slipping by.

I am appreciative of Chair Hawj and members of this committee and staff for offering SF 1682 which does both – direct appropriations as well as competitive grants. Thank you for doing that and honoring the many community members who came forward to testify.

However, SF1682 does not meet the minimum threshold for investment in ALANA cultural assets. ALANA communities make up 20 percent of the population in Minnesota. The legislative POCI Caucus in a recent press conference called on the legislature to ensure at least 20 percent of the budget surplus was allocated directly to the ALANA communities. This does not happen in SF 1682.

If we take the total budget for the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, it is \$191, 952,000. 20 percent of that is \$38.39 million. Adding up all the allocations to ALANA organizations it comes up to \$20.9 million. So, investments in ALANA cultural assets in SF 1682 is around \$18 million short even of the minimum threshold – let alone remedying past disinvestment in ALANA cultural assets.

The largest allocation for the State Arts Board. Yet on the website of the State Arts Board, one cannot find data on what percentage of past grants went to the ALANA communities. A recent research report from researchers at the University of Minnesota for the years 2018-20 estimated investment in ALANA cultural assets by the State Arts Board to be only 4 percent. Both the median grant as well as the average grants awarded to ALANA serving organizations were much lower than all organizations funded through the State Arts Board. So even if I take 4 percent of \$90 million, we still come up short of meeting the minimum threshold for investment in ALANA cultural assets.

Investments are going to several mainstream museums across the state, but we do not quite know if they are inclusive museums.

Senators – you have in your power the ability to change the way we value and invest in ALANA communities this session. You want the world to hear a very bold statement coming from this body that the state of Minnesota invests in its ALANA people and this year made a significant investment in building ALANA cultural assets.

First – meet the 20 percent threshold by investing another \$18 million into ALANA cultural assets.

Second – please stipulate that the State Arts Board dedicates 20 percent of its budget of \$90 million on ALANA cultural assets and provide a report to this body on how it achieved that goal.

Third – the mainstream museums that receive Legacy and state funding, please ask them to provide a report how they are transforming themselves to be inclusive museums and what specific outreach efforts they are implementing to include people from underrepresented groups in Minnesota.

Fourth – the Minnesota Historical Society is allocated \$15 million for historic and cultural grants. Ensure that at least 20 percent of the grants are awarded towards preserving and promoting the missing history of the ALANA communities in Minnesota. The same rationale could be applied to other areas of funding for the State Historical Society.

Fifth – I appreciate the testimony of the Minnesota Council on Disabilities of the rich cultural assets of that community and celebrate the state's investment with them.

Finally, Chair Hawj and members of the committee, I appreciate the work of the Minnesota Humanities Center and see an intentional effort to make their programs and resources accessible to all. Last year I applied for a grant as an individual and experienced the process firsthand. For them to be successful they need to expand their capacity to serve. I encourage you to use the investment in the Minnesota Humanities Center to challenge foundations and corporations to join the State of Minnesota to increase the capacity of the Minnesota Humanities Center to serve and make Minnesota a Global Destination.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. The world is looking to see how Minnesota invests and treats its ALANA communities. You can make a difference both how you talk about the ALANA communities and how you invest in their cultural assets. In this effort I offer to assist you in any way I can.