

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 9, 2025

Mary Anne Carter
Senior Advisor
National Endowment for the Arts
400 Seventh Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Ms. Carter:

I write to urgently request the immediate reversal of the cancellation of \$20,000 in federal grant funding to the Lowell Festival Foundation and Merrimack Repertory Theatre. These funds were already allocated for Fiscal Year 2025, and both organizations rely on this support to continue their vital programming. The funding must be reinstated to ensure that they can continue serving the residents of Lowell and the greater Merrimack Valley through high-quality arts education and performance.

The Lowell Folk Festival, organized by the Lowell Festival Foundation, is the longest-running and second-largest free folk festival in the nation. For more than 40 years, with the exception of a pause during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been a cornerstone of the region's cultural and economic vitality. Drawing over 150,000 attendees annually from across the country, the festival generates approximately \$7 million in local economic activity each year, boosting patronage at restaurants, hotels, and institutions such as the Lowell National Historical Park.

Lowell National Historical Park, a key producer of the festival, has already experienced damaging cuts this year, leading to the loss of three staff positions, despite welcoming more than 250,000 visitors annually. These concurrent setbacks threaten a cultural ecosystem that has long distinguished Lowell and fueled regional pride and economic growth.

The Lowell Folk Festival's roots date back to 1988, when Lowell was chosen as the host site for the National Folk Festival's 50th anniversary, honoring the city's industrial history and rich immigrant heritage. When the National Festival moved on, local organizers sustained and expanded the event, which now includes five stages, a folk craft area, foodways and artisan demonstrations, a family activity zone, and global cuisine from local community groups. After a two-year pandemic hiatus, the festival returned in 2022 with double the attendance of 2019, a testament to the community's deep appreciation and enduring support.

The Merrimack Repertory Theatre (MRT) is equally essential to the cultural fabric of the Merrimack Valley. Over the past four decades, MRT has served more than two million residents, producing seven plays annually – many of them original or world premieres. Beyond its artistic achievements, MRT is a champion for arts education, providing thousands of young people with access to theater, whether through discounted matinees or immersive youth productions with professional-level staging.

Together, the Lowell Folk Festival and MRT represent the heart of the arts in the Third District. They showcase local musicians, actors, and artists while providing residents with meaningful opportunities to engage with culture and creativity. Their loss would be a profound setback for our community.

I respectfully urge you to restore the \$20,000 in grant funding to these institutions without delay. The return on this modest investment is immeasurable for our economy, our culture, and our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lori Trahan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lori" and last name "Trahan" clearly distinguishable.

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress