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For immediate release

Media Arts advocates deplore BC Government Arts Policy

The Independent Media Arts Alliance, a national association of artist-run media arts organizations, expressed its concern Monday about the British Columbia Government's approach to arts funding.

In an August 30 letter to BC Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts Kevin Krueger, IMAA Interim National Director Timothy Dallett deplored the impact of British Columbia's policies on BC's artists and arts organizations, calling the provincial government's approach "*distressing and misguided.*"

Canada's arts community is "*astonished that 30 million dollars has been found*" for BC's Spirit Festivals while professional arts organizations in the province have received cutbacks of up to 80% in their support from the BC Arts Council over the last 2 years, said the IMAA.

Dallett pointed out that even before major cuts in 2009, British Columbia was dead last among Canadian provinces and territories in cultural spending per capita. In 2007-8, according to statistics compiled by the Alliance for Arts and Culture, BC's investment in cultural spending per capita was less than half that of the next-lowest province, Alberta. "*The combination of major cutbacks to the British Columbia Arts Council and the withdrawal of provincial Gaming funds from many arts organizations are devastating the province's professional arts community.*"

"These cutbacks will destroy decades of work by volunteers, artists and low-paid arts administrators building centres of artistic excellence in their communities," added Dallett. "*Hastily conceived, one-time 'Spirit Festivals' are not a credible substitute.*"

Dallett acknowledged that the BC government had recently made some changes to the Spirit Festival program, such as having peer juries select projects, and including some dedicated funding for professional arts organizations, but maintained that the overall impact of the BC government's policy is profoundly negative. The Campbell government "*has done real damage to British Columbia's reputation – it's pushing away the creative talent it should be looking to retain and attract.*"

According to IMAA board member Bryan Skinner, from Victoria BC, the real solution is to restore the BC Arts Council's funding to its former levels, and make it an arm's length agency as in other provinces. "*I think Jane Danzo's resignation and the statements of other former BC Arts Council members who have been coming forward to voice their displeasure with the mess the BC government has made of its arts policy are really heartening to those of us working in arts administration. Their recent statements about freeing the BC Arts Council from political interference need to be heeded by this government.*"

Skinner added, "*While seemingly visionless regarding arts policy, the Campbell government is very astute in the politics of division. The Spirit Festivals can be seen as a cynical attempt to split the cultural community, and dilute opposition to the government's arts policy. Our organizations will need to apply to that program to keep afloat next year, even if we don't think it's the right approach. There's no long-term vision.*"

The August 10 resignation of former BC Arts Council Chair Jane Danzo has put the spotlight back on the BC government's approach to provincial arts funding.

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