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American Art Therapy Association
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Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
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Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of federal funding for the **National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at no less than \$167.5 million for FY 2020**, a \$12.5 million increase over FY 2019 funding.

I am a retired Marine master gunnery sergeant who has served with multiple conventional and special forces units as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician, deploying six times to Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as multiple locations in Africa, Kosovo, Macedonia, and other CENTCOM countries over the course of my 24-year career. I have also served as a Congressional Fellow for former House Veterans Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) as a professional staff member on the Committee, working on veterans' legislation and oversight of the Veterans Affairs Department.

Today, I am testifying at the invitation of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, non-partisan, professional, and educational organization dedicated to the growth and development of the art therapy profession. Founded in 1969, AATA is the nation's leading art therapy membership organization. I appreciate the opportunity to provide public comment on the budget request for the NEA, specifically in support of creative arts therapies and community arts engagement programs like Creative Forces—the NEA Military Healing Arts Network, a partnership of the NEA, the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and state and local arts agencies that serves the special needs of military service members and veterans with traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions, as well as their families and caregivers.

Creative Arts Therapies, including art therapy and music therapy, and community arts engagement programs have completely changed how I view therapeutic treatment. The use of creative arts therapies as part of an integrative approach to healing my combat injuries helped me move towards a more “whole of person” approach to therapy—and helped me succeed. No single form of therapy in my opinion is the be-all and end-all. One individual may or may not respond well to traditional forms of therapy but will accelerate greatly in his or her healing when the creative arts therapies, or as in my case, art therapy, is applied in concert with more traditional methods.

A mask-making exercise is typically done as one of the first exercises in the art therapy program at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) at Walter Reed, and I can attest to the mixed emotions that can be felt during a mask-making exercise: guilt, fear, and self-

loathing/self-doubt at first, then, while moving through the making of the mask, feelings of exhilaration, freedom, resolution, and accomplishment can start to emerge. I know that it helped show the way for me as it pertained to how I personally viewed myself. (“Normal” on the outside, demon and broken on the inside.) I also feel that this nonverbal tool allows the member to expose themselves in a safe and controlled setting with an art therapist, without having to belabor long talk therapy sessions in order to draw out the key pieces that a member needs help dealing with, while creating a very visceral trust exercise with the art therapist and the member in a non-judgmental way. Creative self-expression has long been a form of healing throughout cultures around the world. And we are fortunate that the creative arts therapies are being more widely recognized in the medical community. In addition to the numerous benefits to program participants, the Creative Forces programs at NICoE, and 11 additional sites across the country, contribute to a growing body of research.

The readily apparent benefits of increased confidence, mental acuity, physical dexterity, improved self-worth, and decrease in depression have all been wonderfully positive aspects to me that were and are derived from art therapy. However, the incidental positive consequences of art therapy in Creative Forces as well as engaging with traditional nonmilitary communities (local art communities) have been equally beneficial to me.

Some of these positive consequences for me have been:

- increased interaction with other people,
- a much greater appreciation of people that have never served and what their lives and opinions look like,
- a much healthier overall appreciation for human life and perspectives, as well as
- a deepened and renewed commitment to help my fellow service members through the advocacy of art therapy.

I can state unequivocally that art therapy has helped me to be a better human, husband, father, and friend. I can also state unequivocally that art therapy has helped save my life.

One of the more pressing needs to improve reintegration efforts for military and veteran populations back into their respective communities is addressing the very real divide between those that have served and those that have not served from BOTH perspectives. If military members and veterans were honest with themselves, they would acknowledge that we [military and veterans] at times can set up just as many barriers against the civilian population to try and “know” us as civilians can at times set up in order to avoid understanding service men and women. Both sides I think generally feel that one side cannot possibly understand the other. In some instances, that may ring true. I feel that in order to bridge this divide, both sides have to engage in critical and substantive dialogue on the things that matter to both communities.

There can be no greater or organic path to this conversation than through the creative arts therapies and community arts engagement programs. From working with organizations or artists (regardless of whether military or civilian) in local communities to help generate military and veteran arts opportunities, the one thing I have noticed is when you put civilian artists and military and veteran artists together in a program, you end up with a program full of just artists

on the other side. And one of the amazing things you see also is wonderfully expressive and dynamic art that is deeply collaborative and meaningful to both sides.

I sincerely hope this Subcommittee—and Congress—will continue to support creative arts therapies and access to more community-based arts engagement programs for service members, veterans, their families and caregivers by increasing the NEA’s funding for FY 2020 to at least \$167.5 million. I once again thank you all for allowing me to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.