The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture
House of Commons
Ottawa, ONK1A 0A6

May 14th, 2025

Subject: A Call for Targeted Investment in Rural and Regional Public Art Galleries and Museums

Dear Minister,

Galeries-Ontario/Ontario Galleries (GOG) extends our warmest congratulations to you on your re-appointment as Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages.

I write to urge your office and the Government of Canada to take decisive action to strengthen the country's Public Art Galleries and Museums, particularly those serving rural and regional communities. These institutions are cornerstones of Canada's cultural fabric, but they continue to operate under significant financial strain due to systemic underfunding, structural neglect, and policy frameworks that do not reflect their operational realities.

It is a common assumption that general increases to the Canada Council for the Arts budget will adequately support the entire sector. This assumption is flawed. The truth is: the majority of federal increases often fail to reach rural and regional visual arts institutions in any meaningful way. Despite decades of advocacy, the refrain remains unchanged—new funds are absorbed upstream, leaving smaller institutions on the margins to compete for limited, inconsistent, and ill-fitting support.

What's more, the divide between the Visual and Performing Arts sectors is both strategic and structural. Performing Arts organizations, particularly those based in major urban centres, benefit from revenue models with built-in returns: ticketing, sponsorship, and private-sector backing. Visual Arts institutions—especially public galleries and museums in rural and regional Canada—operate with far less commercial leverage. They are often free to the public, deeply embedded in educational and community programming, and focused on cultural stewardship over profit. Yet funding policies seldom account for these core differences.

To rectify this imbalance, it is not enough to increase funding broadly. Any new investment must come with a **dedicated caveat**: a **guaranteed allocation**—not a theoretical benefit—for **vulnerable, non-urban** public art institutions. These funds must be ringfenced to support the operational needs, curatorial capacity, infrastructure, and community programming of regional and rural art galleries and museums.

Without such a condition, history tells us that these institutions will once again be left behind, competing with larger, better-resourced organizations under funding models not designed for their realities. This is not only a policy failure—it is a cultural one. Regional and rural galleries are not peripheral to Canadian culture; they are essential to its depth, reach, and inclusivity. Their contributions—educational, historical, and artistic—are often invisible in national funding strategies. That must change.

This is a pivotal moment to ensure equity is more than a principle—it must be a condition. We urge the Government of Canada to:

- Introduce **dedicated funding streams** or **mandatory carve-outs** for rural and regional Public Art Galleries and Museums.
- Redesign or adapt existing models to recognize the structural differences between Visual and Performing Arts institutions.
- Engage directly with rural and regional cultural leaders to co-develop sustainable, long-term strategies.

This is how we move from symbolic support to structural equity. Anything less risks reinforcing the same inequities that have long defined the sector.

Yours sincerely,



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