



Dear Honorable Legislative Council:

Re: HOUSE BILL NO. 1395

Theo Art School is a small nonprofit art school located in the Bismarck-Mandan area since 1992, our students range from 10 months old and school age, teens to seniors, young centenarians and everyone in between. All come to Theo for their desire to be creative, artistic expression, and fun, but they do also come for that wellbeing mental break that indeed can be accomplished in a short amount of time through Art. Many that have attended our affordable art programs have said that Theo Art School has become an important part of their life, their children's lives, and the area's culture.

Like so many other nonprofit organizations, Theo Art School has taken a tough hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. For most of us, COVID-19 gave us our first experience with a pandemic. We had never before -- for such a long period of time -- been so isolated while worrying about the health of everyone near and dear to us and being concerned about our jobs and our future. We had never before felt so removed from our family, our friends, and even our neighbors. History has shown that in times of emotional, economic, and societal stress, the arts become immensely important. While health departments record the statistics and officials manage the regulations, it's Art that allow the expression and recording of the emotions and cultural shifts during times like these. The Arts -- in our case, the visual arts -- provide historical perspective but also give an incredibly important and vital boost to our health.

During the pandemic, we heard the need for Theo's art programs from so many of our students. They asked, could we still hold classes, when could their children return to camp, and would we please reinstate the adult art sessions? To stay open, to offer our art programs at limit capacity, and also to provide us with sustainable income, we did what we could. We developed several "art-to-go" programs, providing projects and all art supplies for curbside pickup. We offered instruction through Zoom and email. And when the North Dakota "Smart Restart" guidelines were developed, we sanitized, set class limits, and implemented distancing and other safety guidelines. Students did start signing up again. But after so many months of limited programming, budget cuts and taking no salary, it's proving difficult to return to a steady financial level. Our attendance is hovering around 40% of pre-COVID capacity.

The North Dakota Council on the Arts' invaluable financial support during the past year on top of the ongoing Institutional Support funds through NEA has allowed us to stay open. We are very grateful for that. Theo Art School is able to continue making an even greater impact on our community; especially after all we've been through with COVID-19. The funds previously received were very helpful- bringing our staff back to work, reopening of our studios, able to pay rent. But funding still is needed **to continue with our mission of Art for All-sharing the Love of Art- to stay open, to get back on our feet, to do what we do best-Art.** We humbly yet entreatingly ask to approve NDCA to be awarded an additional reallocation of unspent through the Coronavirus Relief Fund [CRF] monies.

Sincerely, from the "little art school that could"

Liliana M. Norby, Executive Director
Theo Art School