



April 5, 2023

TO: Members of the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

FROM: Amy Cunningham, Interim Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

RE: Supporting Vermont's Film and Media sector and H. 434

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about state support of the film and media sector and the H. 434 bill to create a film office.

The Vermont Arts Council (VAC) has been the state's primary provider of arts funding, advocacy, and information since 1965. We believe that engagement with arts transforms individual lives, connects people more deeply to each other, energizes the economy, and sustains the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to visit and live.

In addition to our core work as the state's arts agency mentioned above, the VAC has led the development and growth of the [Vermont Creative Network](#) (VCN), which was established by the Vermont Legislature in May 2016. The VCN is a broad collective working to advance Vermont's creative sector through the lens of economic development and community development.

We launched the [CreateVT Action Plan](#) in 2021, as a strategic roadmap to investment in our state's vital creative sector. This plan is the culmination of economic analysis and engagement with thousands of Vermonters. In this process of this planning, we identified several assets and opportunities for this segment of Vermont's creative economy:

- Film & Media is among the highest paying and highest grossing creative industries
- Film & Media jobs and activities are growing quickly across the United States
- The Film & Media segment holds strong appeal for younger people with native digital skills
- Film festivals are growing across the state and have a large economic impact for communities

We strongly support state investment in the film and creative media sector. Evidence from other rural states shows that it can reap many benefits: generating tax revenues, providing skilled jobs, and creating opportunities for graduates who are receiving high quality training in the field to stay. The Film and Media task force convened by the legislature last year (chaired by

VAC communications director Catherine Crawley) identified key investments that have the potential of moving the needle to create a more robust sector in Vermont:

- A dynamic and centralized database to help media producers find locations, talent, and equipment
- A database of employment and internship opportunities in the film and creative media industry to retain Vermont's highly skilled film and creative media graduates
- Research and propose a production incentives model, including the possibility of grants

Research conducted by the task force also indicated that five years is the amount of time generally needed for these projects to become well-established.

We support H. 434's intention to make such investments. We do not believe that the creation of a Film Office within the Vermont Arts Council is the most effective way to advance this work. As a small and nimble state arts agency (and the only such agency in the country that exists as a separate nonprofit), we have an obligation to provide support for all types of artistic endeavors. Because of our scale, we have taken a "generalist" approach to our work – we don't have the capacity for a separate visual arts office or specialty staff for theater, as examples. But more importantly, we know that there are entities working specifically in this sector, who are already on the ground in media production and are better positioned to directly support the industry.

We are ready and able to assist the state in the process and oversight of distributing the funds to do this work. As this committee knows, we have a strong track record of effectively granting state funds to the creative sector.