

Thank for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 2357. I'd like to speak to my support of the bill as an artist and citizen of the State.

My name is Harry Wong, and I'm Artistic Director of Kumu Kahua Theatre. I grew up in Liliha, graduated from McKinley High in 1982 and, except for the one year I worked at a theatre in Washington DC, have lived and work in Hawaii. Kumu Kahua is a 501-c3 non-profit dedicated to the to the fact that the history of these Islands and our lives in this State are as rich a source of drama and theatre as any other place, as any other culture. For more than forty years Kumu Kahua has produced local writers, telling Hawaii's story to locals and visitors alike. Kumu Kahua is a recipient of State Foundation grants, and while I'm grateful for all the support and belief in our work the State continues to provide us, it's a fact that the grants have drastically shrunk over the past few years. HB 2357 would provide a more consistent and stable form of funding for the performing arts, which now receive monies allocated by Legislature. Yeah, I know, it sounds like I just want to make sure that my handout is there; let me back up a little.

The original "works of art special fund" was an inspired piece of legislation, and I am already a benefactor of its work whenever I go to a State building and see a painting or a sculpture. The spirit of the "special fund" is to provide access to the works of the human spirit as expressed in art in our public spaces, and that these expressions are our common cultural heritage; they belong to all of us, not just those who can afford to buy them. But the individual experiencing a painting or sculpture is only half of what the arts have to offer.

Community is created when a group of people come together and have a shared experience. The performing arts are one the last secular ways to create community. You have to leave you home, gather in a public place and sit next to people you don't know. While there you, as a group, laugh, cry, share in an experience and for a moment become a community sparking lively discussion amongst what where once strangers. This experience of art is what half of that one percent would go to support.

SFCA grants help defray production cost, so ticket prices are kept low and no one is excluded from access to a performance because they can't afford it. I also believe that with the infusion of monies the SFCA will again institute touring grants so the whole State can have access to such performances.

With half of that one percent, the State Foundation can better meet what I believe to be its mandate of providing access for the larger public to all the works of art being created in the State. Please support the spirit of the "works of art special fund" and give HB2357 you highest consideration. I will be available for any and all of your questions. Thank you for you time.