

# 2022 Create the Vote Candidate Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on Arts and Culture in advance of the 2022 election. We'll post your responses on our website so that voters can make informed decisions about who will best represent the Arts and Culture community at the legislature.

We ask that you complete the survey by Friday, September 23rd. **We know your time is limited so we understand that your responses will be brief.**

Don't miss out on this important opportunity to be an Arts champion!

Email \*

herrongaston@gmail.com

Please share your name

Herron Keyon Gaston

What office and district are you a candidate for?

23rd

Every town in Connecticut can boast cultural assets that contribute to a vibrant community and improve the quality of life for its residents.

*What are some exciting arts and cultural events and organizations that you have experienced in your community?*

I am intimately acquainted with The Bridgeport and Cultural Council. This organization is committed to empowering local artists by providing stimulating conversations, and building leadership through cultural expression. Moreover, I worked closely with Bridgeport BPT. This initiative is dedicated to showcasing artistic cultural expressions that expresses the personality and character of Bridgeport through arts and paintings.

*If elected, will you work to strengthen the arts and culture community in the town(s) you serve? If so, how? If not, why?*

If elected, I would be committed to working with the arts community to curate opportunities for local artists to showcase their talent and to build community by bringing people together to experience our collective talent and artistic expressions--- in an effort to foster joy and to provide inspiration to the local community.

Sandwiched between Boston and New York, Connecticut is often dismissed as a “pass through” state when it comes to tourism. Yet, our state has many world class arts institutions and a rich cultural landscape.

*Why do you think arts and culture are important in Connecticut? What is unique about our state’s arts and culture?*

Arts and culture is important to Connecticut, but especially the 23rd senatorial district, because through art we are able not only bring people together, but we are able to foster a diverse and inclusive community of artists, designers, makers of inspiration, and entrepreneurs. When people come together around creativity, this is where the magic happens. Further research have shown that in urban centers, art and cultural expression is therapeutic and has a positive impact in helping to create joy and to reduce stress and promotes mental health.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people discovered that arts and creativity play a critical role in helping us cope with emotional stress and sustain our mental health. Art helped us process loss, fight loneliness, stay connected and feel hopeful.

*Can you share a way that the arts have helped you, your family or your community get through the difficult times of Covid? How will that experience influence choices about the arts you would make as a legislator?*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our country also experienced another pandemic; a pandemic of officer involved shootings, which claimed the lives of many unarmed black men. The past three years were emotionally charged on both these fronts. However, I helped to lead a black lives matter protest in Connecticut, where we engaged the arts community to help us make social justice visible by creating a sense of community in a time of extreme and dire crisis. People from all walks of life made flyers, painted canvasses, made posters, and painted sidewalks and roadways, expressing their discontentment of where we are in society with respect to forms of injustice-- while at the same time, colored the future with ideas of hope and liberation. As a legislator, I will work indefatigably to support the arts because I know first hand how transformative and therapeutic it is in alleviating stress and reducing anxiety.

The arts and creativity have a proven track record of economic benefit to our state. The National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis report that, in 2020, arts and cultural production in Connecticut added \$8.9 billion to our economy and accounted for 3.2 percent of our gross state product, while the arts and cultural industries employed 49,159 workers with wages and benefits totaling more than \$5.1 billion. ([https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/](https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/))

*Despite these contributions, the arts have historically been first on the chopping block when it comes to budget priorities. What would you do to help keep arts and creativity funded in our state at a level that recognizes their economic importance?*

I will advocate for the arts to be better reflected in our school curriculum, and to promote organizations with rich arts and cultural histories by leveling the playing field when it comes to equitable funding.

Connecticut has not had an Arts Education Specialist at the State Department of Education (SDE) since 2016, when the last specialist left. This position is critical to assuring that our State and National Arts Education Standards are consistently implemented in all of Connecticut's school districts, especially those in under-resourced communities where students' access to the Arts is often extremely limited compared to affluent communities.

*If elected, would you support refilling the Arts Education Specialist at SDE? If not, why?*

Yes

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