

**Public Comments by Elena Lacayo at DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities
December Meeting**

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Elena Lacayo, also known as Elena La Fulana. I am a Latin Grammy-nominated bilingual Latin-folk musician based in Washington, DC and am the lead for the band Elena & Los Fulanos. I have made Washington, DC my home for the last 17 years, I have been a practitioner of my art since 2011, and am proud to be a seven-time recipient of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Fellowship grant.

I am incredibly grateful to the support the Commission has provided me throughout my years as a musician. The Commission has truly shepherded me through my career, from my years as a budding local musician and the lead for my own music project, through my catapult into national and international touring as a mariachi bass player with the Latin Grammy-winning and Grammy-nominated band, Flor de Toloache.

I am here to talk about the hardship the decision to change the structure of the Fellowship grant to a flat grant and how this has negatively affected me personally.

I have received the fellowship grant seven times. The first time I applied for the grant, I was denied. I believe it was after my second application that I was finally awarded \$3,000. The following year, I was awarded \$6,000, followed by \$5,500, then \$5,750, then a whopping \$11,000, followed by \$10,000 and finally, this year, disappointingly, the flat \$5,500. Needless to say, this grant has not only provided a great source of funding and support, but it has also allowed me to track and understand my progress as an artist in this strange profession in which measurable progress is often difficult to discern.

Additionally, as the grant amount grew in my life, so did its importance as a source of income and factor in keeping me in the District. When it would have made more sense for me to relocate to New York City where the rest of my touring band was based, it was this grant that kept me in DC. When deciding where to live with my new spouse last year, I argued that I should remain in the District (instead of moving to Baltimore) based on this grant alone! The reduced grant amount this year, while still significant, may not be enough to keep me and other high-level, professional artists in the district. My understanding is that part of the mission of the Fellowship grant is to keep artists in the city, but with the rising costs of living and slashes to our grant funding, it's beginning to feel less and less possible for us to do so.

I love DC, and I love being an artist here. I have always been incredibly proud of the support that the city has provided me and my artist friends to make it possible to create art in a city better known for politics. There is nothing that I want more than to remain in this city I love to call home. But I am afraid that with the new funding structure to the Humanities Fellowship this will no longer be possible for me and for many working artists. I understand there are probably reasons for these changes, but I still feel it is important to express the negative impact this change has brought to my life.

Thank you.