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LGBTQ+ cultural groups bemoan loss of state funding

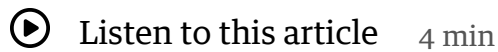


Image: Ginny Dixon Photographics

Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida

GINNY DIXON PHOTOGRAPHICS

By [Dina Katgara](#) – , South Florida Business Journal
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As Robert Kesten, executive director of the Stonewall National Museum, Archives and Library in Fort Lauderdale, prepares to host the world's first reenactment of the Stonewall Uprising this weekend, he can't help but think about the future of his organization.

Earlier this month, Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed over \$32 million in state funding for arts and cultural organizations, a move that will affect about 630 organizations statewide.

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"We're remembering the Stonewall Uprising 55 years ago, but also reflecting on what's been going on in this state for the last couple of years," Kesten said, referring to Florida's charged political climate and increase in laws many LGBTQ+ residents deem threatening to the community.

The museum was supposed to start receiving its originally approved \$90,000 in July, and already took the time to apply for next year's grant, Kesten added. He said this money would have been vital to the budget for salaries, rent and other operating costs.

"At the last minute, the rug was pulled out from under us," Kesten said. "The hardest part of this is the timing."

More than 50 grant requests will now go unfunded in Broward County, an overall loss of \$3.3 million in arts funding, according to Phillip Dunlap, director of Broward County Cultural Division. He stressed that arts and culture have an overall impact of \$386M for the county and contribute greatly to job creation and tourism.

Broward County will not adjust its funding, as it sees a 9:1 return on investment in arts and culture, according to Dunlap. He added that the \$3 million in arts funding withheld from the county could erode that economic impact by more than \$30 million, which will have ripple effects, especially for small, marginalized organizations like those for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The county funds many arts organizations that serve as centers for LGBTQ+ community engagement and education, including the Stonewall National Museum, Archives and Library, and the Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida, which will lose about \$40,000 in state funding due to the cut. This makes up 7% of the chorus' overall contributed income and about 4% of its total income.

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Mark Kent, executive director of the Gay Men's Chorus of South Florida for the past nine years, said the state grants were matched last year, so the chorus could actually lose about \$82,500.

He was already expecting a funding decrease, but was shocked to see it eliminated altogether. While there has been an increase of community support, there is also a burden on donors to support multiple organizations.

"We believe in the community and are working on some special gap funding strategies to try and fill the void," Kent said. "If we are unable to do that effectively, we will reduce our outreach, pare down our concerts, and make it work. That's what we do in the arts. We create magic and make things happen."

David Jobin, CEO of Our Fund Foundation, a local nonprofit that annually grants over a million dollars to LGBTQ+ organizations in Miami-Dade and Broward County, said the governor's veto was shortsighted.

"What a tremendous waste of time that organizations had to go through to apply for these grants," Jobin said. "These are organizations with limited staffing and resources, and they directed all this time and attention with the understanding that that the state of Florida had the integrity to follow through with funding."

The eight local organizations that Our Fund Foundation supports will lose a total of \$170,500 in state dollars. The foundation recently started a fundraiser to secure that amount and is more than halfway at its goal, he said. However, individual fundraising is not sustainable and the state should recognize supporting arts and culture as a wise business decision, he added.

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THE LIST

South Florida's LGBTQ Owned Businesses

Revenue 2023

Rank	Prior Rank	Company name / Prior rank (*Not ranked in year prior) / URL
1	1	American Meetings
2	2	CareerXchange
3	3	Gary Hennes Realtors
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