

Full text of former B.C. Arts Council Chair Jane Danzo's letter to Arts Minister Kevin Krueger

Below is the August 16 letter Jane Danzo sent to Minister of Tourism Culture and the Arts Kevin Krueger explaining her resignation:

Dear Minister Krueger,

Thank-you for your kind words in last week's press release that announced my resignation from the British Columbia Arts Council.

I was very proud to have been appointed to the BC Arts Council and even more so to have been appointed Chair. I consider it a privilege to have been asked to serve the government for the past four years.

While my resignation may have seemed sudden, I had been considering stepping down for some time.

With respect and with regret, I felt obliged to resign in order to have a voice. In my opinion, the work of The B.C. Arts Council Board, has not been supported by government on a number of different levels.

According to the Arts Council Act, Council is defined as not more than 15 members, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The Charter of the BCAC further identifies the appointees as "the Board". The Act stipulates that the Board's main purpose is to provide support for the arts and culture sector in British Columbia. In November 2009, Council (board and staff) made a submission to the Committee on Finance and Governmental Services regarding BCAC funding for the following year. Council recommended that the government return to an appropriation for the BCAC and restore its funding to 08/09 levels. This recommendation, which was echoed by the submissions of artists and arts organizations province-wide, was supported by the government's own committee who brought it forward for consideration in the March budget. The government rejected its committee's strong recommendation for restoration. The devastating impact of that decision is now being felt by artists and arts organizations throughout the province as they receive notification of substantial cuts to their core funding.

Instead of restoring the funding to the BCAC, the government announced the establishment of an Arts Legacy Fund- a surprise as much to the Board as to the arts community. Even after the announcement, the Board was not consulted for input, nor was it permitted to know the details as they were developed by ministry staff over a four month period. Meanwhile, the arts community struggled, some members with life-threatening uncertainty, as they reduced their programming, laid off staff and made poignant appeals to patrons and donors for further support. And the Board remained awkwardly silent until the government released more information about the Arts Legacy Fund.

The Act also specifies that the Board support arts and culture through advocacy. This responsibility is virtually impossible to accomplish because the Board's relationship to government is not at-arms-length. It has neither its own funding nor its own staff. It is dependent upon budget allocation for funds and ministry employees for human resources, both managed by a government employee.

Furthermore, it has recently been made clear that the Board does not have a voice independent of government. The only independence the Board has from government is defined by the granting process.

The Board members of the BCAC are chosen for, among other qualifications, their areas of expertise and their knowledge of the sector. Collectively, they represent a broad range of board experience that includes not-for profit, public sector and corporate boards. Given the issues I have identified, it would not be surprising if such capable volunteers were to become frustrated, even disillusioned. I believe that unless government is more consultative, and makes significant organizational changes, it will be difficult to attract and retain qualified candidates for Board positions on the BCAC.

I strongly recommend that the government and the Board review the models used in some of the other provincial jurisdictions where their arts councils are at arms-length from government; where they are respected for their expertise and judgment and where, as a result, the arts and culture sectors are better served. Surely such co-operation could produce only beneficial results for the B.C. arts community.

Minister Krueger, you have been a strong advocate for increased funding to the BCAC, and, more broadly, for the arts and culture sector of British Columbia. I am very grateful for that support, and, on behalf of the community, I thank-you very much.

Yours very truly,

Jane M. Danzo

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