

## Wisconsin Arts Board votes to contest Walker's budget proposal

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Threatened with its very existence as a state agency and an independent funder of the arts, the Wisconsin Arts Board earlier this month took the extraordinary step of voting to actively contest Gov. Scott Walker's budget proposal.

Walker's plan would cut state funding for the arts by 73 percent, drop the board's staff from 10 positions to four, and make the arts board a program within the Department of Tourism.

"Normally, if you're seeing a 10 percent cut to the agency or something like that, you remain quiet. It's the governor's prerogative," said George Tzougros, the board's executive director. "But when the agency is essentially eliminated, it's up to the citizen members of the board to take the position that they've taken."

Members plan to lobby legislators and petition the Joint Finance Committee to allow the board to continue to function as a state agency but with a 10 percent cut to its biennial budget. The board's existing budget is below 1992 levels, placing Wisconsin No. 38 among states in arts funding, according to the board.

Currently, Madison artists, arts organizations and education programs receive about \$500,000 in grants from the Wisconsin Arts Board, said Karin Wolf of the Madison Arts Commission.

"We all know the state's in tough times," Tzougros said. "But the arts board members did not find this cut to be in line with everybody else's suffering."