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RIDLEY-THOMAS URGES COUNTY OFFICIALS TO FIND FUNDING TO SAVE IMPERILED SUMMER ARTS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

LOS ANGELES -- In an effort to avert the cancellation of the County's Summer Arts Internship Program, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas today urged County officials to identify funding sources to continue the program threatened by the County's budget problems.

The County's Chief Executive Officer is expected to report back at next Tuesday's board meeting on possible options to come up with the \$250,000 needed to keep the program afloat, including a loan that would be repaid through fundraising.

"The longer we delay, the more unlikely that we can implement the program," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said.

The 10-week program -- administered by the County of Los Angeles Arts Commission -- provides paid internships for college performing and literary arts students at various non-profits and municipal arts agencies.

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said the County reaps "huge dividends in the form of educational and income opportunities for its participants." Last year, the program provided more than 120 paid internships. Thirty of the interns resided in the Second District.

The \$250,000 Supervisor Ridley-Thomas is requesting would provide funding for 75 internships in the County this summer.

Participating student interns, as well as representatives of hosting organizations, have praised the program.

“The interns gained priceless skills in an organized, nurturing and practical environment, which cannot be duplicated in a classroom,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “The organizations also benefited from the addition of a high-energy, motivated member of their staff, who brought fresh and creative ideas to the table.”

Two weeks ago, speakers wearing buttons that stated: “ART MAKES L.A.,” addressed the Board of Supervisors on the importance of maintaining the program that has a proven track record of developing life skills for its participants.

Laura Walters, who provides creative and visual arts services for people with developmental disabilities, said interns have been instrumental in helping participants work toward vocations with local radio stations

Gabriel Perez, a former Arts Program intern, praised the program for helping to change his life.

Jim Hurr, a representative with the Boeing Company, said the corporation has benefited greatly from the program and has witnessed growth in the participants.

“Without a doubt, the program is essential to help developing youth for a 21st Century workforce,” he said.

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