

# Sheila Jackson Lee

## 1. Do you have an Arts & Culture policy plan or policy statement?

**If so, please send a copy.**

The arts and culture community must be an integral part of the life and governance of the city of Houston. To achieve this, I will prioritize regular meetings with the arts community to ensure their voices are heard and to understand the diverse aspects of the creative community in which the city can actively participate.

As mayor, my plan would be to foster increased collaboration among all facets of arts and culture, including performing arts, visual arts, neighborhood arts, and small arts — the city would facilitate this collaboration. No community can thrive without adequate funding, so I would seek to expand the availability of funding for Houston's arts and culture community. Our administration would explore creative opportunities within the bounds of the law to enhance public financing. I would also seek additional funding from the national endowment of the arts and utilize incoming state funds to the city, working diligently to secure more support and ensure a wide variety of arts and culture organizations receive sufficient funding to keep their doors open and programs running.

Throughout my life, I have been a strong advocate for diversity in all its aspects, including gender representation. Houston's creative community is richly diverse, and our administration will continue to foster that diversity while ensuring that no group feels underfunded or unrecognized. This commitment is essential for positive and inclusive policies. Additionally, I believe that entertainment is an integral part of the arts. Therefore, our administration will have a special focus on building up the entertainment sector within the creative community. We will seize opportunities such as traveling Broadway shows and performers to position Houston as a destination city and an internationally renowned hub for entertainment, arts, and Culture.

Finally, my policy, developed through continued discussions with the creative community, will include a rebranding of Houston to establish it as the best and most diverse arts and culture community in the nation. This is not an impossible task. By recognizing the immense assets of Houston and the diversity within our arts and culture community, we can communicate to national opinion makers the numerous levels of art forms, from physical structures to performing arts, visual arts, and large and small arts companies and organizations. It will be a vital part of my

administration to utilize the entities that promote our city to showcase the arts as one of the defining stories of Houston's identity. This will firmly establish Houston as a premier destination city for the arts.

## **2. How do you personally participate in the arts and culture both in Houston and when traveling?**

I view the arts as a vital lifeline in Houston and any city in America. My involvement in the arts has been long standing and I might say extensive. I am very pleased to have been a member of the Houston Industrial Board that created one of the most significant art facilities in the country, the Wortham Theatre. The creative work the board did was to use industrial bonds to help provide the city's contribution to this facility. I have been a member of the Houston Grand Opera Board, a member of the Ensemble board, a founding member of the Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC). I have worked to provide resources to MECA, and the Houston Ambassadors Folklorico. I am excited to have also been a founding member of one of our special museums, the Children's Museum. I have advocated for and supported the new downtown mural initiative, and as a member of Congress, I have been one of the strongest supporters of the National Endowment for the Arts. I also believe in supporting small art organizations and cultural events and neighborhood arts, and I encourage and participate in the High School for Performing Arts in their artistic presentations. When traveling, I view the art and culture of my destination as an important part of my visit if I have the appropriate time to do so. But in Washington, D.C., I have been a strong supporter of the Kennedy Center and have hosted a musical program at the Kennedy Center highlighting the art of gospel music for ten years. I am the Chair of the Jazz Caucus in the US Congress, and was the leader and initiator through legislation to bring the historic sculpture of Sojourner Truth to the US Capitol and supporting bringing the statue of Rosa Parks to the US Capitol. I would like to think that my view of the arts is, again, that it is living, that it gives life, and that it gives substance to our communities, and I will want to continue that in a large way with Houston's arts and culture community.

## **3. What specific strategies would your administration undertake to ensure the growth and stability of the creative sector?**

I would seek to meet with the creative sector of our community every quarter and listen to their needs and suggestions for amplifying the uniqueness and excellence

of Houston's art community. I will establish in my office a cultural arts ambassador outside of the regular structure where the ambassador will seek to engage with every part of the cultural art community. Through this process, we will gain a better understanding of the needs of the cultural arts and the visual arts community. We will emphasize that the arts are essential for education and bring more students into the activities of the arts. We will strengthen education by giving more students access to the arts. My administration will amplify and ensure the growth of all of the arts. Finally, through the regular meetings held every quarter, we will consistently be able to stay ahead of the needs of the creative arts community and seek collaborative partners in corporate Houston and through Houston's foundations to seek additional stability and growth for the creative sector.

#### **4. What opportunities exist for Houston's artists and creative community to work more closely with city departments?**

The city will benefit from the creative community working with its many departments, as it will be an open door to have collaborative activities with the city and the creative community. Specifically, our parks and recreation could benefit from more art installations. The people in the parks will benefit from more arts — new art installed will be for our neighborhoods and their visitors to enjoy. I'd like to have more open space in the parks: hearing from the creative community, I will take suggestions as to how that would be best utilized. I will put together time at the Houston Planning Department for the arts community to speak, so that they may contribute to enhanced planning that would reflect the input from the creative community. And it would be helpful that the Public Works Department would engage with our creative sector to contribute to the overall beautification of our city and the public works projects that are built regularly. Finally, it is important that the mayor's cabinet is aware of the creative community, and as we continue our quarterly meetings, we will maintain a good relationship that will further develop creative art input. This will help establish Houston's brand as a destination city, which in reality has the best art assets and the best creative community that is welcoming to artists around the world and around the nation. We will ensure artists are welcome and that we support the creative community.

**5. The amount of public funding for the arts through grants is currently limited to HOT funds. Would you consider any additional funding mechanisms and if so, please explain?**

Regarding additional funding mechanisms for the arts, yes, I would consider them. I believe Houston has the best arts program in the nation and is competitive with other major West and East Coast cities. We must tell the stories of the different museums, musical forums, dance, visual arts, and sculptures that exist in this city. Besides the HOT funds, a mayor must take leadership in seeking an enhanced corporate funding investment. We must explore potential use of capital funds and general funds, and my team would study the possibility. However, in addition, I have been very effective in bringing federal funds to Houston, and I will seek enhanced opportunities to receive federal grants and direct funding through the National Endowment for the Arts, supported by the city's applications. I also know that national foundations, not tied to a specific state, offer possibilities for specific programmatic arts, including our unique museums. I believe that a unified arts community would be successful in securing these additional funds, and I will be a real partner to the creative community in seeking more resources. I will also promote the arts community through our channels, such as Houston First, among others.

**6. Which recommendations would you prioritize from the FY22 Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (MOCA) Equity Review?**

Every artist and every art community must be valued. Houston's art and creative community is strengthened when every aspect of our arts community has a seat at the table and no part of the creative community is diminished. Our priorities will be increasing opportunities for women artists and ensuring that art diversity is represented in all neighborhoods, from River Oaks to the East End, from Fifth Ward to Southwest, from Third Ward to Northeast, and everywhere in between. We should actively seek ethnic and racial diversity, and I believe my administration will be able to include all aspects of the creative community. Specifically, I will also ensure that we include a focus on increasing gender diversity in our creative community. We cannot be fearful of broad outreach and must strive to reach the ultimate diversity of our city. My administration will discover the hidden art treasures in Houston, such as downtown's Sam Houston Park, the historic homes, and the heritage house in the midst of downtown Houston. We will also highlight the various sculptures in downtown Houston. We will achieve equity by recognizing and supporting both

visual and performing arts all over Houston. Our funding will reflect that equity. My funding approach will be a reflection of the different art types, from performance to visual arts. By meeting with the arts community, we will receive input from artists. We cannot be fearful of broad outreach and must strive to reach the ultimate diversity in our city.