Lack of State Art Unit Loses Funds

Louisiana is forfeiting federal funds by not having a state arts council under state government, a legislative subcommittee was told Wednesday.

The statement by Mrs. Peggy Tower of the Arts and Humanities Council of Baton Rouge prompted the Subcommittee on Public Works and Public Buildings to request that the governor's office find out just how much the state is losing.

The subcommittee held a hearing in the Presbytere to "look into the mechanics" of how some $150,000 in National Endowment to the Arts funds are being spent by the Louisiana Council for Music and the Performing Arts.

Mrs. Lucille Blum, LCMPA director, defended the present operation of the council, emphasizing that the volunteer workers for the council work "better than paid workers" and that the state will have a hard time duplicating the council's work if it depends on paid personnel.

In addition, she said council members have been successful in eliciting donations to the council. These donations and the in-kind services of LCMPA volunteers have served as matching funds for federal grants, she told the subcommittee.

The LCMPA is the only state arts council to have developed lending libraries for music scores and slides, a Governor's Honors Programs for art and music students and such groups as the Youth Arts Council of America and Future Music Leaders of America, Mrs. Blum continued.

However, Mrs. Tower said Louisiana is the only state with a "performing council" rather than one providing services to existing artistic organizations in the state.

By being a "presenter, programmer and producer," the LCMPA serves as a "competitor to artistic groups in the state" and fails to help local groups "properly manage their own programs and get grants," she said.

In Mrs. Tower's opinion, LCMPA's primary responsibility is to local groups and artists and she criticized the council for bringing in artists from out of state for many of its programs.

She said the primary job for the council is to provide services to strengthen cultural organizations.

By helping existing groups to increase audiences and ticket sales and to get available grants, the organizations would improve and attract more volunteers, she said.

Dr. Alex Williams, chairman of the drama department at Grambling State University, said that theater was not getting support from LCMPA.

In defense of the LCMPA, Peter Hagan III of Jeunesse d'Orleans called the state's estimate of $200,000 to take over LCMPA's functions "small." In his opinion, the present arrangement is "efficient and effective."

Dr. August Staub, chairman of the drama department at University of New Orleans, said the LCMPA "does for the state what the state could not do for itself and at a lower cost."

The hearing will continue Thursday.