

March 11, 2008

Senator Gary LeBeau and Representative Jeffrey Berger  
Chairs of the Commerce Committee  
Capitol, Room 110  
Hartford, CT 06106

**Re: Testimony in Support of HB 5882: *An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Various Projects***

Dear Senator Gary LeBeau, Representative Jeffrey Berger and Members of the Commerce Committee:

I am writing to urge you to make every effort to support funding the Norwich Arts Council's facility stabilization efforts as proposed in Sec. 2-b and Sec. 17-b of House Bill #5882.

Historically, local arts agencies such as NAC have been an important element in fostering the growth and development of the arts in towns and cities. The Norwich Arts Council has nurtured the arts and art education in the Chelsea Arts District of Norwich and the surrounding towns for over 20 years.

Our past contributions and special programs in the Arts are well known: outstanding theater and musical events along with exhibitions in Galleries One and Two have made the downtown area a destination point for Norwich residents and the surrounding communities. First Fridays, which NAC initiated 8 years ago, has become a regular, important event in the lives of local artists and residents and has added to the revitalization of the "Rose City".

Since we bought the 3 story building at 60 Broadway (9,000 sq. feet of floor space) 18 years ago we have renovated the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor historic theater (now the Donald Oat Theater) and opened two art galleries on the first floor. These endeavors have not come without cost and sacrifice. Currently, our mortgage and loans total \$275,000. The building which is on the Historic Register is in desperate need of improvements and repairs. We have had estimates for repairs: Roof, \$20,000; Window replacement, \$ 50,000; furnace replacement and air conditioning, \$25,000. The wiring in most of the building is ancient and our alarm system needs major upgrading; a conservative estimate would be \$20,000. In spite of a generous grant for operating costs from the City of Norwich, we have not recently been able to afford an Executive Director. We have had two past directors who were very capable but the organization now runs day to day with the help of a part time office manager and volunteers.

In the past we have secured funding from the private sector through event sponsorships, grants, benefit concerts, galas, Federal support (Robert Raushenberg Exhibit) and personal donations as well as membership dues. We have been fortunate in the past to have had contributions from the Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods Casino, the Chester Kitchings Foundation, Katherin Forest Crafts Foundation.

Norwich is in close proximity to Foxwoods Casino and the Mohegan Sun both of which offer venues in world famous entertainment and theater. In order to even mildly compete with these enterprises and to bring tourism and economic soundness to Norwich, NAC is in desperate need of \$500,000 to retire its real estate debts and stabilize its building. Without this funding, NAC, the literal beacon of culture in South Easter Ct. may be extinguished.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Peter Leibert  
President, Norwich Arts Council  
(860) 887-9184