



neighborhood music school

in tune · in the arts · in the community

Statement of Lawrence Zukof  
before the  
Commerce Committee  
in support of  
House Bill 5024  
March 11, 2008

Sen. LeBeau, Rep. Berger and members of the committee:

My name is Lawrence Zukof. I am the Executive Director of Neighborhood Music School, which is located in the heart of New Haven's arts district on Audubon Street. I am here today to offer our support for House Bill 5024, *An Act Establishing a Cultural Treasures Account*.

Before I address the specifics of the legislation, please permit me to tell you a little bit about the School.

- NMS is the largest independent not-for-profit community arts school in Connecticut and one of the largest in the country. Our mission is to provide quality education in music and dance and to make instruction and performance accessible to people of all ages, backgrounds, economic means and levels of ability.
- NMS was established in 1911 as part of the settlement house movement to assist New Haven's new and growing immigrant population. It became an independent, non-profit corporation in 1950 and flourished for many years on lower Chapel Street in the Wooster Square neighborhood. We then moved in the late 1960s to Audubon Street and were the first tenant in what has become the "arts district" of New Haven. You'll find the area to be a diverse and eclectic center of cultural endeavors.
- In addition to this main facility, NMS holds weekly classes for students at several public, parochial and private schools, and at branches in Guilford and Woodbridge. Our students come from a wide range of socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.
- 3,000 students from 80 Connecticut towns and cities are enrolled in classes in a given year. We have 125 artists and educators on the faculty and provide

\$220,000 in financial aid and scholarships to over 400 students who, absent this benefit, would not be able to take advantage of our programs.

- We offer instruction in 30 instruments; provide a dance program that incorporates everything from ballet, modern, salsa, and jazz to hip-hop; and hold over 300 public performances and concerts a year.
- Lastly, we want to highlight something that we know is a top priority with Governor Rell and the General Assembly: *NMS has a state certified arts-based preschool and 20 weekly early childhood education music and movement classes.* . These NMS programs serve over 200 students and it is always wonderful to see the “little ones” engaged in productive school-readiness learning activities.

We are delighted to support House Bill 5024. It will create a Cultural Treasures Account in the state budget to provide grants to individuals and organizations in the areas of arts, culture and tourism. Although I realize the specific funding for fiscal 2009 is not included in this particular authorizing legislation, we nonetheless are thrilled that Governor Rell has proposed an initial allocation of \$10 million.

One-third of this amount is new funding. We sincerely hope that the Appropriations Committee will see their way clear to approve the request.

There are three reasons why the Cultural Treasures Account makes sense:

- This investment in Connecticut’s Cultural Treasures will provide greatly needed, stable resources that will boost the well-being of this vital sector and the state as a whole. An increase in the appropriation will allow for greater investment in capital projects and infrastructure along with increases to project-based grants and general operating support. For example, the latter would allow NMS to make high-quality arts education programs accessible to an even broader student body through increased financial aid and support numerous performances of Connecticut-based artists to a range of social service agencies (for example, adult day care and group homes who attend our free performance series).
- As a non-profit corporation, we have made it a point to direct most of our efforts in the fundraising area to individuals and private sector entities. We are *not* dependent on government funding—but it still helps to have that

option available when the need arises. There are many occasions when state funding has enabled us to increase our scholarships for needy students or expand programs that have a high demand.

- Finally, I cannot stress enough how wise it is to make this a *nonlapsing* account. Too often, there is a tendency for government to take a “use it or lose it” approach to budgeting. As the close of a fiscal year nears, money is committed and sent out the door because, if it is not, the funds will lapse and be reallocated somewhere else. A nonlapsing account will provide stability and continuity to funding, and this is very important to not only the taxpayers, but the grantees.

On behalf of the Neighborhood Music School, our students, faculty, staff and supporters, I thank you for hearing testimony on this important legislation. We support House Bill 5024 and urge your committee to approve it. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

