

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

**Testimony of Daniel Donovan
Chairman of the Discovery Museum Board
on Governor Rell's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan**

December 9, 2009

**IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNOR RELL'S PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS FOR THE
BRIDGEPORT DISCOVERY MUSEUM**

My name is Daniel Donovan and I am the Board Chairman for the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I am here to object to Governor Rell's continuing budget cuts proposed for the Discovery Museum. The Museum is a vital source of math and science learning to Bridgeport school children as well being one of the key partners for the new Discovery Magnet School K - 8 magnet school now being built adjacent to the Museum. The Discovery Museum has been opened to the public since 1962 and its mission is to educate, excite and engage visitors in the exploration of science and technology. A mission that is now severely threatened by the Governor's proposed cuts.

The Discovery Museum Plays a Crucial Role in Bridgeport's Science and Math Education

The Discovery Museum undertakes many programs in its mission to bring science and math to our children. Over the year, the Museum is visited by **tens of thousands** of school children from **the greater Bridgeport region, throughout the State, and beyond.**

One of the Museum key goals of which I most proud of are the programs targeting the educational needs of low-income children in our community. These include:

- 1) Weekly science enrichment for hundreds of children whose families are taking advantage of afterschool care at 16 Bridgeport public schools;
- 2) Administrative support for three afterschool "Lighthouse" programs serving 350 children each day,

including children from Bridgeport's most impoverished neighborhoods;

3) Scholarships allowing young people from low-income families to attend the museum's summer programs for little or no fee (120 children last summer);

4) Summer Youth Employment which during the summer of 2009, the Discovery Museum provided summer employment opportunities for a dozen teens identified as "at risk".

In addition to these programmatic elements, The Discovery Museum is also working with partners to establish The Discovery Magnet School. Once fully occupied, this regional science magnet school will enroll 350 Bridgeport children and another 150 from the surrounding suburbs. As a public school, this program will be open to all families in the community free of charge. Admission will be determined by lottery. This school will help meet the needs of the region's low-income families by providing:

1) Bridgeport children with a high-quality public school choice;

2) Educationally rich before and after school care programs as well as preschool starting at age three, which will help low-income families gain access to affordable day care and help bridge the experience gap between poor children and their more affluent counterparts;

3) Additional programs for parents to help them learn how to support their children's education and become connected to service agencies in the community that offer assistance to struggling families.

The Museum Has Produced Results

The Museum has been a center of scientific education and involvement for greater Bridgeport's children and the results speak for themselves. For example

1) Between 2004 and 2009 the museum's overall education program grew by 40% with a 65% increase in services to Bridgeport public and parochial schools.

2) The museum has significantly increased its programming and outreach efforts related to environmental sustainability and green technologies - themes that are vitally important to the future of

our planet. This work includes educational programs for families and outreach classes for students as well as new indoor and outdoor exhibits. With the exception of the indoor exhibits, which are included in general museum admission; all other programs listed here are offered to participants free of charge. Over the last year, approximately 700 people took part in “green themed” family activities and more than 1,650 students were engaged in educational programs related to climate change, environmental stewardship and energy efficient technologies.

3) After nearly 5 years of planning and advocacy, construction has finally started on The Discovery Magnet School. Slated to open in January 2011, this school will provide high-quality educational opportunities for the families living in Bridgeport and the surrounding suburbs. By using science as the spark that inspires learning across the curriculum, and taking full advantage of a unique partnership between The Discovery Museum, the City of Bridgeport, the Bridgeport Board of Education, Sacred Heart University and the surrounding communities, this school has the potential to be a national model for exceptional urban education.

The Museum has always prioritized its services to the community resulting in deferred capital expenditure on facilities and exhibits. Now, Governor Rell’s proposed budget in conjunction with the current economic environment threatens the Museum’s existence and would eliminate many of the Museum’s vital programs. We ask that the Committee reject the Governor’s proposal for further reductions to the Discovery Museum for the benefit of the people of Connecticut.