

March 5, 2009

To: The Conservation and Development Appropriations Subcommittee, Connecticut General Assembly

Re: Testimony regarding the importance of the arts and their unique contribution

By: Mel Ellis, community volunteer, past & present member of the governing boards of many arts organizations

Dear Members of the Committee:

I have been very actively involved with the arts in Connecticut over the course of many decades including working for the Wadsworth Atheneum as Educational Services Coordinator for 8 years and eighteen years as Director of Operations at the New Britain Museum of American Art. I continue my involvement with the arts serving on the Board of the New Britain Symphony, the Art League of New Britain, the Greater New Britain Arts Alliance and I am on Committees at the New Britain Museum of American Art and the Swaim Music Committee of the Middlesex County Community Foundation. I live in Haddam Neck and am also actively involved with the Florence Griswold Museum and I frequent the amazing array of cultural offerings at Wesleyan University. My long time and in depth experience with the arts in Connecticut give me a valuable perspective that I would like to share with you.

The arts provide community outreach, education, a balance for life in general. They put all else in proper perspective. As opposed to art reproductions, music via cds, and websites, TV, when a person attends a live concert, a live dance performance, or experiences art "in the flesh" at a museum or gallery, or live theatre, the experience is real. They can interact with their experience; sometimes they can even meet the artist. Sometimes they play in an orchestra or band; they might perform on stage; they might enter their art in a museum members show or a student show. The experience is a stepping stone to conversation, analysis, appreciation. This is a gift that is not readily acknowledged.

With the arts being cut back or even eliminated in schools, arts organizations offer a myriad of options for learning about visual art, music, dance and theatre along with the structure and discipline they get along with it. All of this is a life-long gift. The arts can be an alternative to sports for some kids where they also learn structure and discipline. The arts can be and are experienced by some beyond age 90. Sports, except as an audience, cannot be experienced forever in one's life.

Everyone needs the arts. Many people in the United States, as opposed to other countries, have not been raised with exposure to the arts. It has not been a family adventure, nor has it been a school priority. The arts build communication among family, friends, and often can be the bridge between strangers. They deserve the support of our State government and I hope you will do all that you can to see that they are appropriately prioritized and adequately funded.

Sincerely,

Mel Ellis