



# Greater New Britain Arts Alliance

Linking People and the Arts

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Stephen Hard

March 5, 2009

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

**Re: Testimony regarding the reorganization of the  
Commission on Culture and Tourism**

**By: Stephen F. Hard, Executive Director, Greater New Britain Arts Alliance**

On behalf of the forty-seven nonprofit arts organizations that belong to the Greater New Britain Arts Alliance, I would like to thank the Committee for their diligent efforts to be both responsible stewards of the State's resources and continue to provide services that are critically important to our maintenance and progress. In tough times tough decisions have to be made and I appreciate the predicament that you are in. However, there are a multitude of reasons why, especially at this time, Connecticut must not diminish its support for the arts. You have, I am sure, heard an abundance of these arguments from others. I also realize that some people very sincerely do not see the folding of the Commission on Culture and Tourism into the Department of Economic and Community Development as being necessarily negative for the arts. Funding levels for the arts might, in theory, actually be enhanced by this association of the arts with economic development. While I have my doubts about that, my concern is that the arts are fundamentally not about the money.

Several years ago I attended a workshop at the Mark Twain House where the focus was on promoting the economic value of the arts. Willard Holmes, former Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum, surprised everyone by verbalizing his concern that our focus on the arts as an economic engine could end up haunting us. I think he was right; the time he foresaw is now.

In these tough economic times, the normal practice of predicating the value of State funding on its economic impact is being even further exaggerated. The arts, in particular, are being challenged to demonstrate their economic value to the State in order to justify funding of their activities. I am delighted that so many people have done the economic impact studies regarding the arts. Many have spoken accurately and eloquently about how important arts and culture are to our economy. But arts and culture are more, much much more than a mere tool of economic development for Connecticut, as valuable as the contribution on that front is. But for us as a State to focus solely on arts and culture as an economic engine diminishes their true importance. Arts and culture are all about who and what we are as a people and who and what we want to become.

Individuals involved in the arts and arts organizations themselves have done a lot to create the way we are viewed. Large arts organizations have a great deal of financial

and political clout and have been able to focus the attention of our government leaders on how important they are to our economy. But the arts in Connecticut are much more importantly about the little people and small organizations that do not get as much attention or alone have a splashy financial impact.

I am talking about Patricia Martin and her husband David who struggle to engage hundreds of low income children and their families in our area in the excitement and leaning that comes from involvement with music, dance, and theater. I am speaking out for the 60 members of the Plainville Wind Ensemble and the thousands of people who experience their free concerts where they raise money for charity. I represent the Hole in the Wall Theater Company who selected an old downtown building for their new performance space explicitly to be a part of New Britain's revitalization. Volunteers did all of the demolition work, a great deal of the actual reconstruction, and all of the finish work on their new venue. They have no paid staff.

In addition to the importance to our State of the efforts of thousands of ordinary people who volunteer or work in the arts and the millions who benefit from these efforts, our arts organizations are poster children for doing more with less. Even a relatively large institution like the New Britain Museum of American Art with over 20 employees also has over 600 volunteers who exponentially increase what the Museum is able to do. While \$5 million from the State of Connecticut was the single largest contribution toward the construction of the Museum's new building, the Museum itself raised over 21 million additional dollars for this project from foundations and private sources.

The reason the arts are so successful in doing more with less is because so many people are so passionate about the arts and give generously or are willing to work for the arts either for free or for much less than they could make in some other job sector. It is absolutely in the best interests of the State of Connecticut to do what it can to foster this passion in light of the benefit to Connecticut and all its citizens that accrues by virtue of our dynamic arts environment.

Mergers and consolidations can be an effective way to strengthen organizations, in particular their bottom line. A good example was when Connecticut merged everything to do with art, history, culture and tourism into the Commission on Culture and Tourism. That made a lot of sense. It solidly placed all of our State's cultural assets where they belonged, i.e., linked to tourism, understood broadly. Even if the merger of the Commission on Culture and Tourism into the Department of Economic and Community Development ends up in greater support for the arts in Connecticut, and I have my doubts, it diminishes the true value of the arts for our State, a value that far transcends their financial impact.

The arts have an important economic impact, but that's not why we love them and want to support them, and it's not why State government should support them either. Please do what you can to see that the cultural treasures that help make us who and what we are not be sacrificed on the altar of "economic development."

Sincerely,

Stephen F. Hard, M.Div., M.A.  
Executive Director