

Agency Budget Hearing
Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

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Testimony of
Matt Fleury, President & CEO
Connecticut Science Center, Inc.

Background

The Connecticut Science Center (CSC), a state-initiated science learning destination and economic development project, opened June 12, 2009 in the capital city of Hartford. The CSC has surpassed attendance projections to date, drawing nearly 250,000 visitors, including approximately 28,000 school students, and visitors from every single one of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns. The Science Centers is especially popular with school districts due to its direct support of the state science framework, which demands specific science learning outcomes which are uniquely fostered by the Science Center. The Science Center's operations rely on a combination of funds, 90% from sources other than the State of Connecticut. The CSC was modeled on an annual State appropriation of \$1.2 million (15% of budget), which was reduced to about \$650,000 for each of the 2009/10 and 2010/11 fiscal years during the 2009 session of the General Assembly. The administration's proposed budget reduces state funding to \$405,000 in FY 2010/11, which would lower the state's contribution to 5% of a total budget, even after the total CSC operating budget has been reduced by \$500,000 through cuts. The balance (more than 90%) of CSC's operating funds come from earned revenues, including general admission and service fees, grants and fundraising.

Presented Testimony

The new Connecticut Science Center has broken through dark economic skies with a welcome ray of hope for beleaguered families, stressed educators and anxious students of our state. Thanks to the investment of the State, businesses and private philanthropists, families who have been forced by hard times to make many sacrifices are finding an entertaining, enlightening, forward-looking center of science and learning that they can call their own right here at home. In an environment when individuals, corporations and the State of Connecticut itself are forced so often to say "no", we are saying "yes" to the next generation of promising young people who represent our best hope for a brighter tomorrow. Most importantly, hundreds of thousands of these young people, engaged by the drawing power of the Science Center, are once again saying "yes" to science.

Significantly, our visitors are also saying "yes" to their capital city. Restaurants and other attractions downtown already note the frequent appearance of new faces wearing Science Center wristbands, as we work to leverage the Science Center to support the downtown revitalization. In the longer view, the iconic Science Center should inspire a new phase of development, led by the same kind of innovators, inventors, and researchers who built our community to begin with.

As the committee is aware, State support for the Science Center has ranged from the originally anticipated funding level of \$1.2 million (15% of the operating budget), to zero. Thanks to many very thoughtful legislators, funding was restored in the current budget to about half of what was proposed, or \$650,000 per year, 7% of the operating budget. In response, we have put the shoulder to the wheel and made up the difference through cost reductions and revenue enhancements, including fundraising and admission prices. We have reduced our budget by \$500,000 to less than \$8 million for 2010. This is an exceptionally lean budget, supporting nearly 100 new jobs and serving close to

365,000 visitors per year. Having carved pennies-at-a-time out of our costs, we are now confronted with a painful reality, should state funding be further reduced: We must either find the money elsewhere in a gripping recession, raise prices paid by visitors who are already pinched, or reduce staff and service levels. Clearly, no-one on this committee likes these choices, and without question the Science Center is not alone in facing them at this difficult time. We respect the awesome challenge of your responsibilities and unpleasant options before you.

As you confront these untenable options, we wish to reaffirm the idea that the Science Center, and other cultural destinations in Connecticut, are marginal expenses in context that distinguish themselves by their generative value. We have created 100 new jobs, we employ contractors and vendors who create jobs, and we generate consumer spending that replenishes the economy. Perhaps most important of all, we offer reasons to live here in Connecticut, and reasons to visit. We are fighting through these hard times with you, we make diligent use of such support as you can provide, and we continually send a message to our community and your constituents that Connecticut – even today – has not forgotten about its future, and the young people who must be prepared to lead it.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to your questions.

Results Summary

The Connecticut Science Center's past performance and operations, starting this spring, respond to the State of Connecticut's Results Based Accountability Initiative.

1. Before opening its doors, the CSC leveraged the State of Connecticut's investment into \$45 million of new funding from businesses, individuals, foundations and the federal government to create the cultural destination of a generation. It created hundreds of construction jobs and replaced an undeveloped urban Brownfield site with an iconic architectural landmark for Connecticut.
2. The CSC has exceeded attendance projections by serving nearly 250,000 in its first nine months of operations, including visitors from every single Connecticut city and town, as well as visitors from surrounding states. As a catalyst, the Center generates millions of dollars in new revenue and spending, and provides approximately 100 jobs, all producing more tax revenues for the State of Connecticut than its originally anticipated \$1.2 million state appropriation.
3. The CSC is specifically aligned with the State's Science Education Framework, creating a powerful experiential learning asset for school teachers to help Connecticut students meet new science learning requirements. More than 25,000 school children have attended on field trips to date, and the CSC has trained nearly 1,000 educators from schools across the state to be more successful science teachers for these children.
4. The CSC has engaged an unprecedented array of businesses, individuals and leaders from throughout Connecticut in the cause of preparing the state and our children for the economy of tomorrow. They are responding with urgency and commitment to the increasing gap in science learning and ability between US and foreign students and economies. The Science Center is a beacon of innovation in a state built on innovation, but at risk of losing its leading edge.