

February 17, 2010

Sen. Harp and Rep. Geragosian, Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Appropriations Committee:

I am Aaron Kubey, Executive Director and President of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD). I thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak before you today about the NTD.

Founded in Connecticut in 1967, the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) is a touring theatre company composed of Deaf and hearing actors and playwrights, and is the oldest, continuously performing professional touring theatre company in the country.

NTD created the beautiful and unique theatrical style, in which it performs, that links the visually expressive American Sign Language with the spoken word so that **the audience sees and hears every word**. The NTD's original roots were put down at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre in Waterford, CT. We have also made Chester, CT our home from 1980 through 2000, then moving to the Colt Building in Hartford, CT for four years. In 2004, the NTD made its home on the American School for the Deaf Campus in West Hartford, CT, where we continue to employ, train, and inspire state citizens. As you can see, the National Theatre of the Deaf has always been a Connecticut-based organization throughout our 42-year history.

The NTD has a very rich, illustrious, and dramatic history. We were the world's first professional Deaf theatre company in the world; the first Western theatre company to perform in the People's Republic of China (1986); the only Western theatre company invited to the first Tokyo International Theatre Festival (1988); the first U.S. theatre company to tour South Africa after the easing of the United Nations sanctions (1992); and the only theatre company to perform at both the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics Arts Festival and 2009 Deaflympics in Taiwan, Taipei. The National Theatre of the Deaf won a Tony Award for Theatrical Excellence in 1977 and received a Grammy nomination in 2002. In 1998, we became the *only* theatre company in the world to have appeared on *all seven continents*.

Through our 42 years of touring, we are also the oldest, continuously performing professional theatre company in the country – for either Deaf or hearing theatre. The National Theatre of the Deaf and our family division, the Little Theatre of the Deaf (LTD), have provided over 78 national tours, 10,000 performances, performed in all 50 states, and have toured to over 32 countries. We have also been seen by over 5 million people on television with appearances on Sesame Street. Among some of the artists to lend their talents to NTD are John Lithgow, Marcel Marceau, Chita Rivera, Linda Bove, Phyllis Frelich, Bernard Bragg, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Sir Michael Redgrave, Mary Martin, and Peter Brooks.

We were pioneers by introducing Sign Language into the world of Theatre, and by doing so, transforming how theatre is now presented and viewed. We have shown the world how the Deaf and hearing communities can sit side by side and enjoy the same show by seeing and hearing every word. We have been instrumental in opening up other worlds for the Deaf community. Captioned television, telecommunication devices, sign language interpreters, and bi-lingual/bi-cultural programs are all direct benefits from the influence NTD has exerted. Through our art, we have created profound social, educational, and artistic change.

Within the Deaf community, 95% of the Deaf artists have received their training at the National Theatre of the Deaf either by working in the company and/or through our Professional Theatre School summer program. We have produced a Tony-award winning actress, Phyllis Frelich; an Academy-award winning actress, Marlee Matlin; and provided Sesame Street with one of their longtime characters, Linda Bove. I, personally, am a product of the Professional Theatre School and am a former Little Theatre of the Deaf company member. I know firsthand the kind of impact this company makes upon young Deaf and hearing children and the type of role model this company is for those children.

With the support of the Connecticut Legislature and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism since 2006, we have been able to continue operations and the good mission of the National Theatre of the Deaf. In the Fall of 2008 and Spring of 2009, the Little Theatre of the Deaf provided 54 performances and workshops in the state of Connecticut, performing for over 6,000 Connecticut students, teachers, parents, and residents. Unfortunately due to the Great Recession, LTD has already been forced to reduce to the number of performances and workshops in state to 13 this season.

So I respectfully request the Connecticut Legislature and its Appropriations Committee to fight back the draconian proposed 35% reduction in the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism's line-item grant budget. The proposed reduction would severely cripple the National Theatre of the Deaf's mission. I remind the Committee and Legislature to look at the body of work NTD has provided over the past 42 years and continue to support our work for the Deaf and hearing citizens of our state.

In closing, I leave you with this – The National Theatre of the Deaf...

- inspires audiences
- opens cultures
- educates, entertains, and enraptures
- enriches the lives of Deaf and hearing children
- serves not only as a local and national ambassador for the state of Connecticut, but also as an international ambassador

I thank you for your time in listening to what our history and impact has been over the past 42 years and what it can be like in the future with your continued support.