

**Written Statement of Mary Lou Aleskie, Executive Director
International Festival of Arts & Ideas**

Committee on Appropriations
March 11, 2010 Public Hearing

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator DiBecella, Representative Miner and Members of the Appropriations Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening.

My name is Mary Lou Aleskie and as Executive Director of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas I want to thank the committee on behalf of our Board of directors, our employees, businesses and the vast network of constituents we serve, for your past commitment to this proven private/public partnership that generates outstanding results for the State of Connecticut both culturally but more importantly today, economically.

I am here today to respectfully ask you to reject the Governor's proposed deficit mitigation plan that would reduce our contract with the State by \$285,000 and to share with you the hardship that we have managed to date and the details of the devastating implications of this recommendation, should it be approved.

This is my third time testifying in less than three months. Each time I have come to thank you and give you the facts that support your investment in this Festival. Those facts have not changed. We still generate over \$21M in economic activity for the State, support 162 jobs, fill hundreds of hotel nights, and keep countless vendors and retailers animated during the summer. Even in the face of these challenging times, we reduced our budget by 30% and yet have maintained our commitments to our State, our audience, our artists, our vendors, and our employees.

But we have not been treated with consistency with regard to our State Funded Grant Contract.

Our contract for the period October 2009 through June 2010, which already reflects a 20% reduction from the prior year, clearly states that these funds are to be expended towards the 2009 International Festival of Arts & Ideas. We are currently less than three months away from the 2010 Festival. It takes two years of planning to put together such an endeavor. On the strength of the commitment from our State, we have raised money and entered into contracts worldwide to produce the 2010 Festival, but if we cannot rely on commitments from our single largest partner, the State of Connecticut, it will be difficult and likely impossible for us to fulfill our obligations.

The Governor proposes to eliminate the final payment due April 1 on the Festival's 2010 contract that reimburses us for the cost of last year's Festival. Today is March 11th. How can any organization be expected to manage such a material change in the State's commitment with less than a month's notice?

In our case, the first of three payments due on our contract in October came three months late requiring us to borrow money adding unnecessary cost to our operations. The second payment, although it came very close to the expected due date of January 1st, was 15% less than we expected. And now the Governor is proposing to eliminate the final payment on this contract.

This inconsistency, thus far, has delayed our audit, the filing of our Form 990, and payments to vendors. It has unnecessarily increased our operating costs. And this proposed deficit mitigation will hit us not only as we are about to launch into full steam production for the upcoming Festival but also as we begin to renegotiate our line of credit at the bank.

I am here to tell you that any further reductions of this magnitude will result in the collapse of this Festival and the loss of dollars and jobs for our State.

I ask you, please, as you consider the many challenging situations you face, that you consider the implications of these decisions carefully and avoid those that will negatively impact jobs and revenue as these proposed cuts to the Festival undoubtedly will.

Thank you for listening.