

2/24/11

Members of the Appropriations Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today as a representative of freelance workers employed by the International Festival of Arts and Ideas.

My name is Charles Alexander. While I spend 10 months each year teaching theatre and technical theatre at Hamden Hall Country Day School, I have also spent the last 3 years working in various capacities at the Festival. I have been hired as Technical Director, Master Carpenter, and as a Stage Carpenter. My wife, Janie Alexander, has worked at the Festival during those years, as well. She currently fills the post of Company Manager, though she has also acted as Technical Director of the Green.

Working in the arts is not traditionally stable. Most of us have spent large portions of our careers piecing work together from multiple venues and organizations. The Festival provides, for many, a source of income they plan around. We moved to New Haven 5 five years ago. And finding work that we could count on during those years has been a challenge. Since we discovered the Festival we have been able, as a couple, to feel secure in the fact that we would have money coming in from February through June. My wife has a six month contract with the organization, and then in June I work with them full time. This accounts for no small portion of our annual income. Last year, our earnings through the Festival counted for 20%. And yet, that number is deceiving. The networking my wife and I have been able to do at the festival has led us to additional jobs that make up a much larger portion of that income.

This has enabled us to afford a home in Naugatuck, and we gave birth to a son this year. My wife was able to stay at home through the fall, directly because we knew she could expect to work at the festival this spring. In the current economic climate it is increasingly hard to find and maintain freelance positions. The stability provided by the Festival has been an immense relief. The Festival provides us, and many others, with a steady source of income and an opportunity to participate in a truly valuable organization for the greater New Haven community.

As you face the unenviable task of writing this year's state budget, and are deciding what cuts you feel are necessary, please remember the families that rely on organizations like the International Festival for consistent employment. The New Haven arts scene is a boon to the state of Connecticut, fiscally, and as a community building enterprise, your continued support will help to ensure its future prosperity.