

Public Testimony to Joint Appropriations Committee
Regarding the National Theatre of the Deaf
February 24, 2011

Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and the Committee members about the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD). I am Dr. Harvey J. Corson, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Theater of the Deaf.

We understand that the State of Connecticut is facing a budget crisis in this present state of economy. The State sees a need to reduce the number of state agencies through consolidation and restructuring and manage the level of expenditures as reflected in the Governor's Proposed Budget for FY 20112 and FY2013.

The following points are presented for your consideration:

1. Connecticut is the site of the world's first deaf professional theater company since its establishment in 1967 and the oldest continuously performing professional touring theater company in the nation. This company is the National Theatre of the Deaf composed of deaf and hearing actors, directors, and playwrights from its inception to the present.
2. In 2012 the NTD will be celebrating its 45th year of operation and has a commendable history of providing performances in its beautiful and unique theatrical style which links the visually expressive American Sign Language with the spoken word that enables both the deaf and hearing audiences to **see and hear every word**. Although over the years the company has performed in all 50 states and toured to over 30 countries, the NTD and its Little Theater of the Deaf (LTD) have continued to perform in many cities, towns and elementary schools in Connecticut.
3. In recent years, the NTD has collaborated with several theaters in Connecticut on appropriate, creative, and artistic approaches and adaptations to make their productions accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing citizens. For example, in 2009 the NTD recommended a young deaf actor, who was a junior high school student at the American School for the Deaf, for the role of young Helen Keller for the Ivoryton Playhouse's fall production of "The Miracle Worker ". This young deaf actor, Jenilee Simons Marques, received a Debut Performance award from the Connecticut Critics Circle at the Westport Country Playhouse in the Spring of 2010 for this role.

Because of the involvement of the NTD with various theaters and media, this interaction, cultural exchange of information, creative artistic approaches and accommodations, and use of modern technology provide greater access and acting opportunities for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Recently this same Jenilee was given an opportunity to audition for a role in a new forthcoming TV series under ABC to be shown during 2011. Although she was not selected, she was notified that she would be invited as a guest actor in that TV show sometime in the near future. Next

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month on March 27, 2011, the National Convention of the Lions Club in Middletown, CT plans to have Jenilee make a presentation as "Helen Keller" with "Anne Sullivan" on stage during its banquet event.

Also, the NTD has made casting recommendations to those mainstream theaters on Broadway and off Broadway asking for assistance.

4. During the Fall of 2010, the NTD collaborated with the Old State House, the O'Neill Theater, and the American School for the Deaf to present "The Journey of Identity"-- a dramatic story about the Connecticut legislation that offered the first public support of Deaf Education in America -- as part of the State of Connecticut's 375th Anniversary Celebration.

5. The proposed budget line-item grant for the NTD in the State Budget for the Commission on Culture and Tourism under the proposed restructured Department of Economic and Community Development would maintain the critical funding support for the NTD.

It is for these reasons that the NTD Board and the Deaf Community thank the State of Connecticut and you for your continued interest and support to enable this small theater company to survive during this time of economic difficulty as part of the vital and needed cultural diversity in Connecticut.

Thank you.