Agency Budget Hearing
Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

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Testimony of
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Less than ten years ago, the State of Connecticut asked a circle of private sector visionaries to join in a partnership to create a statewide learning and tourism destination, the Connecticut Science Center. Together, they invested in the idea that our citizens must be better prepared if Connecticut and its children are to compete in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) economy of the future. They created a powerful learning experience and an iconic showcase of our heritage and promise as an innovating state in which to live and do business. They also agreed to share in sustaining this institution.

Now responsible for operating the Science Center, these leaders have watched the public side of that commitment erode significantly. An original expectation of about 25% of the operating budget is now about 8%. Starting July 1, that number is undefined in the budget adjustments you are considering.

We would like to emphasize perhaps the simplest economic argument for the State's continued investment in institutions such as ours: Even before accounting for the jobs, purchasing and indirect economic activity we create; leaving aside our value to Connecticut's tourist appeal and the imperative of getting our kids and our state ready for the technology economy, the State of Connecticut generates a return of more than $10 for every $1 dollar it invests in the Science Center today, through our operating budget alone. We submit that this is even at its most basic level an outstanding example of how smart public investment can release exponential economic activity by the private sector.

However, as you contemplate further funding cuts, we must understand this reality: While the ratio of private-to-public funding we deliver affords the State an exciting near-term return, we border on an extreme skew that can undermine the public/private model entirely. This can very seriously jeopardize the private investment and other economic activity we enable the State to enjoy.

With regard to the concept of a competitive, grant-making approach to the State support we receive, we and many others compete routinely for grant funding. We know the value of these processes and respect the reasons they have been put forward. At the same time, we propose that the State should provide some stability to assure that its best cultural assets – especially those already generating strong returns – are sustainable. Mid-cycle disruption upsets an already fragile balance. The absence of a sustaining, consistent level of public support has the potential to compromise the viability of these anchor institutions and the vitality they create.