

Committee on Appropriations
Public Hearing February 15, 2012
Testimony of Mary Lou Aleskie

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the appropriations committee.

My name is Mary Lou Aleskie, and as Executive Director of the International Festival, I want to thank the committee for seventeen years of enthusiastic support and unwavering commitment to this private public partnership, and all that it brings to the State of Connecticut economically, culturally, and in unparalleled national and international recognition.

It is with pride and gratitude that I tell you tonight of the growth and accomplishments of the Festival. Last June, using art, innovation, and the efficiencies of scale, we returned 20 million dollars in economic impact – more than seven times our budget, and 27 times the state's investment. More than 100,000 people from the state, the region and the world converged on New Haven for our world-class, internationally recognized event. For two weeks, New Haven and the State of Connecticut became the center of gravity in the world of arts, culture, and their intersection with global dialog.

In 122 days, the Festival will again play the lead on the world stage, bringing artists and arts funding to the state of Connecticut from as far away as Taiwan, Pakistan, Australia, France, Argentina, and Scotland. It will be a celebration of all that is good in us. YoYo Ma said it best: The Festival... "speaks to our ideals, it challenges our performance chops, and it's something we all believe it" We are singular in our ability to bring international companies, visitors, and funding to the state of Connecticut. With these things, we bring joy.

As you know from many years of testimony and the independent, documented studies we have provided, the Festival's annual economic impact is an outstanding return on the State's investment, and the Festival's continued existence is a joyful reminder that money spent well, returns not only tangible benefits but intangible benefits, too. The spirit of the Festival uplifts us all. With this in mind, we respectfully ask the committee in their deliberations to consider not just meeting the current level of support but restoring the state's annual investment in the Festival to its longstanding yearly contribution of one million dollars.

The Festival, in partnership with the State of Connecticut, is an international success story. With your continued financial investment, we will remain so for many years to come.