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Subject: Testimony for budget hearing -re: DECD

**Testimony – Submitted by Lisa M. Scails
On behalf of the Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut**

TO: APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING: February 22, 2013

I am Lisa Scails, a resident of Bethel and Director for the Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut a non-profit regional arts organization. We are based in Danbury serving towns in Northern Fairfield and Southern Litchfield Counties: Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, and Sherman. We promote and advocate for arts, history, and culture as a primary driver of the economy and as an enriching influence for people in the Housatonic Valley.

I am writing to you on behalf of our Board of Directors as well as our constituents. There are many of arts, history, and cultural organizations, annual events, festivals and projects that have helped to define the rural and suburban towns we serve - influencing lives, educating children, connecting with other service providers, and creating a sense of place for people who live there and for those seeking to relocate and to visit.

Creative resources in Western Connecticut contribute to the state's economy: The Ives Concert Park serves as one example of many. The Ives is an exquisite outdoor amphitheater with a seating capacity of 5,500, located on the Westside campus of Western Connecticut State University. This non profit organization hosts a variety of world class performances with over 60,000 patrons traveling from all over New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Approximately 733 jobs are created each year. In addition, over 100 Ambassadors learn new skill sets by volunteering.

In every town, we have Cultural Legacies: nonprofit and informal organizations that help to preserve unique culture and heritage, passing a state's precious cultural character and traditions along to future generations. Arts organizations are Civic Catalysts: They have the power to bring people together to share ideas, to be inspired and engaged as a community. The arts also have the power to heal. One example is the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra and a music project they are working on for the benefit of the Western Connecticut Health Network. HealingNewtown through the Arts is another example (Reference Chair of the Newtown Cultural Arts Commission, Jennifer Johnston's testimony)

The Cultural Alliance continues to assist the Newtown Cultural Arts Commission along with the CT Office of the Arts, in managing what began with hundreds and now has grown to more than 1000 creative contributions from across the country. We have assisted our neighbors by setting up a website and the technology tools to manage ongoing donations. An Arts Fund has been established and the Alliance will be working with the Commission to establish criteria for the disbursement of those funds.

The Commission can facilitate arts activities in a donated art space, share artwork and create a happy place for children and their families as well as manage operations. We continue to offer resources and facilitate getting the proper channels in place for sustainability. The grand opening last week received more than 500 people – and festivities help put smiles on the faces of children and their families. Workshops are operating successfully and fully attended. We support the resident's of Newtown and any effort for funding a permanent arts location as a living memorial to the tragedy. Newtown will need our support well into the future.

I ask you to continue supporting the arts and maintain the Culture, Tourism Arts Grant line at a minimum of \$2 million. I am concerned the budget does not make room for operating support to organizations with limited to no staff. Many of our constituents are not equipped to compete for the high profile catalytic opportunities that have gained so much attention. **I urge you to make room in the budget for operating support so smaller arts organizations can survive.** Finally, **I hope you will consider regional arts organizations such as the Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut in your deliberations.** Across the state, we are in the trenches working side by side with local arts resources; building stronger networks, providing resources, coordinating, facilitating, advising, marketing, deliberately seeking cross sector partnerships and more.

Thank you for your consideration.



Lisa Scails, Executive Director

Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut

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