

To: Appropriations Committee; Subcommittee – Conservation & Development
From: Amy Wynn, Executive Director, Northwest Connecticut Arts Council
Date: February 20, 2013
Re: Testimony in support of DECD/CT Office of the Arts and the State Budget

Co-Chairs and members of the Committee,

My name is Amy Wynn and I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Connecticut Arts Council, serving 25 towns, and I am also on the board of the Connecticut Arts Alliance. I am here before you today to urge you to support sustaining the \$2 million budget allocation for Arts Grants from DECD's Office of the Arts.

We recognize the enormity of identifying solutions to the State's financial challenges. The arts and cultural sector has proven that it is a financial asset for the State's coffers. The State's recent Arts & Economic Prosperity study illustrated, once again, that **investing State dollars in the nonprofit arts and cultural industry pays back more than five and a half times in State revenues what the State provides in funding to the Arts** – and those figures are quite conservative. The nonprofit cultural industry in Connecticut **conservatively generates \$653 million in economic activity**.

Any reduction in this investment, such as the more than 10% cut that is proposed in the Governor's current budget proposal, will not only be damaging to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations state-wide, but would likely also reduce much needed State revenues, according to the recent study mentioned.

Your previous support of arts funding is sincerely appreciated and we are proud to say not only has your support of the cultural industry been a wise investment financially, but it has contributed in so many ways to our State's quality of life, the education of students, entrepreneurship in business, civic engagement, and democracy. However, we are not actually producing all these benefits at the industry's full potential – there is so much more we could do with increased grant funding through the Office of the Arts.

Each grant that the Office of the Arts makes reverberates many times through a community. I can assure you that the following stories can be attributed back to the State's support of the arts.

The Northwest CT Arts Council is one recipient of state funds and we serve approximately 200 nonprofit cultural organizations, over 75 commercial cultural businesses and approximately 600 individual artists of all sorts in our 25 towns – in addition to serving the general public as a central information source for cultural events and more. Our mission is to promote and help our region's cultural assets thrive. The reverberation happens when:

- An artist who benefits from exposure through the Arts Council's studio tour, sells work, gets a gallery show, is approached for a commission, and is invited to teach. It doesn't stop there – they are now confident enough to successfully reach for national opportunities.

- A composer learns of a fellowship opportunity through the Arts Council's newsletter. He applies and is given a grant and puts into action an interactive composing program for three schools in the region, performing and recording the resulting works of the students.
- During an Arts Council networking event, a fine art photographer meets an artist in need of his services for her next gallery show, which is wildly successful for both the gallery and the artists – and then the fine art photographer's work is discovered by the gallery owner and another extremely successful show and opportunity for the artist is created.
- A local singing group is struggling each year to raise their operating expenses so they seek help through the State's Peer Advisor Network, administered by the Arts Council. Contrary to their original goal of finding ways to obtain the necessary funds, they emerge from the Peer Advisor sessions with an entirely new organizational structure – one with far less overhead and much more emphasis on creativity – they are still going strong and with more voices on board as well!
- Young students of the arts seek opportunities to learn and to obtain scholarships and find them through the Arts Council and its constituent organizations.
- A new gallery asks for guidance from the Arts Council and introductions to others in the field, including artists and artisans they potentially will feature.

The Arts Council's stories mirrored a hundred-fold when you add the impact of each of our constituent organizations such as the After School Arts Program, The Warner Theatre, Sharon Tri-Arts Playhouse, Litchfield Jazz Fest, Nutmeg Ballet, Music Mountain, Kent Art Association, the Sherman Chamber Ensemble, Pilobolus, Phoenix Rising Center, to name just a few.

Imagine what is lost with reductions to arts funding - the doors closing, the vanished jobs, and the diminished opportunities for growth and enrichment. **Then imagine the opposite** – more funding that moves the creative sector closer to realizing its full potential for our State's economic and cultural health.

I ask, on behalf of all the Northwest Connecticut Arts Council's constituents that you support full, and even increased funding, of the State's CT Office of the Arts grant program.

Sincerely,

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Serving 25-towns in Northwest Connecticut