

To: Appropriations Committee/ Conservation and Development

We are in support of the restoring \$200,000, and even increasing further the Culture, Tourism and Arts Grants line in the governor's budget..

You may not be familiar with our organization, but it is important to understand that we represent the convergence of the arts, culture and digital industries that are the economic engine of this state. You can't have a vibrant and growing economy without addressing the powerful disruption that tech and creative fields introduce into the marketplace.

When we look to encourage young people to live and work in Connecticut, we must look to provide the opportunities and influences that will enable them to innovate and contribute to our economy -- frictionlessly. By that measure, the arts and creative industries (that include film, digital media, music, illustration, design, craft, sculpture, robotics, art, and so much more) are the building blocks of industries that have revolutionized how we communicate, how we read, and how we write.

This testimony has been sent to you from a Macbook Air. The founder of Apple Computers, Steve Jobs, spent a year studying calligraphy when he was in college. That opportunity, to study letter-forms, was a part of his arts education that led directly to how he viewed how we would interact with the computers that he later invented. Today we look at our mobile devices, with letters that are crisp and clear, and use our fingers to swipe at icons, little graphic images, to communicate to our devices effortlessly.

Wouldn't it have been awesome if the technology we're using today was invented in Connecticut? It almost was. In the 1960s, Xerox, a Connecticut company wanted to build a world class research and development center focusing on computing. Instead of building it in Connecticut, they chose Palo Alto. From Xerox's PARC researchers innovated the graphical user interface we all use today, as well as the mouse and countless other technologies. These technologies then became the building blocks that inspired Jobs, coming off that calligraphy class, and led to the industry that has innovated mobile computers that let today's artists compose music, write novels and create works that awe and inspire us visually. Xerox chose Palo Alto because they knew that providing an environment that was culturally enriching would in turn inspire their employees to great innovations.

We can mourn the lost opportunity or turn to how we can prevent that choice from being made again. Today, we are all witnesses to the powerful role that community-based public art can play in uplifting downtown communities. Whether it is Project Storefronts in New Haven or Art in the Windows in Norwalk, artists have emerged as innovators of dynamic civic engagement, tourism, workforce development, and neighborhood revitalization. These projects are brought to you by organizations such as ours, that do work for the public good that is tangible, that is local, that is impactful.

We have created many events and projects in Norwalk, inviting neighbors, community organizations and businesses to collaborate with our artists in the design and creation of each project. But often we find that although we can secure sponsors, our ability to leverage and scale of our vision and ideas is directly proportionate to our ability to secure grants. The grants you provide are a direct investment into the creative economy in communities throughout the state.

Today, you will hear many requests for funding and appropriations for services and programs that are all worthy. But few that can assure you that you are making an investment in communities that will generate revenue back to the state. That revenue will come in the form of stays at hotels, gasoline purchased, meals eaten, carpenters building, clothes cleaned, cars parked, and most importantly as dollars spent in the communities that we've built to foster culturally engaged future generations in our schools, in our parks and in our shops.

We hope that you see this request, not as an expense, but as an on-going investment into the artistic, cultural and creative economy that represents so many of the jobs that are the backbone of this state.

The State of Connecticut has been generous in its allocation of funds toward open space, trees and preservation over the years. We hope that you see the economic benefit of investing in the creative economy as a part of ensuring the continued work on making Connecticut a place that is fun to live, play and work in.

Sincerely,  
Jackie Lightfield,  
Maribeth Becker