

Public Testimony Before the Joint Appropriations Committee
Regarding Line-Item State Appropriation for the National Theatre of the Deaf
March 2, 2015

Sen. Bye and Rep. Walker, Co-Chairs & Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Dr. Harvey Corson, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) and Past President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf. Thank you for the opportunity to speak you about Connecticut's National Theatre of the Deaf.

Touring the nation and the world for nearly 50 years, the National Theatre of the Deaf has performed in all 50 states, 33 countries, on all 7 continents, performed on the Disney Channel, on Sesame Street, BBC Television, the Summer Film Festival at Lincoln Center, at the White House, for royalty the world over, and on Broadway. NTD was the first company to tour South Africa when sanctions were lifted; first company from the West to tour The People's Republic of China; before "détente" and "glasnost" gained currency, traveled to Russia to perform with actors of professional Moscow Deaf arts theater, represented the USA at the Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival; performed in Taiwan through the American Cultural Center to represent the United States during the Deaflympics; and received a Tony Award.

Connecticut is the birthplace of the first truly American art form as created by NTD in the mid-1960s. Each performance unfolds simultaneously in two languages; one for the eye, the American Sign Language, and one for the ear, the Spoken Word. Thus, "you see and hear every word."

Connecticut still is the site of the nation's first deaf professional theatre company established in 1967 and is the oldest continuously performing professional touring company in the nation. This acting company, NTD, is composed of deaf and hearing actors and actresses, playwrights, designers, and producers from its inception to the present.

Throughout its existence, the NTD has continued to perform in many cities, towns and schools in Connecticut. The NTD has collaborated with many theaters in Connecticut on appropriate, creative, and artistic approaches and adaptations to make their productions accessible to deaf and hard of hearing citizens. Also, NTD has made casting recommendations to those mainstream theaters asking for assistance.

Attached is a four-page summary of the 48 years of creative and innovative work of the historic Deaf theatre arts company founded in Connecticut.

The proposed budget elimination (100%) of the line-item appropriation for the NTD and many other arts and cultural organizations under the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) in the Governor's FY 2016 & FY 2017 Biennial State Budget. As stated in the State Budget, this recommendation "reduces line item funding for various arts and cultural programs and reallocates the balance to the Arts Commission for competitive disbursement."

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The arts and cultural organizations are concerned about this recommendation. As of now, we do not know of plans or criteria for such competitive bidding. Many concerns and questions have been raised - - lack of clear guidelines on how the funds will be divided or allocated; by what criteria: for general operating support, place-making grants, competitive grants or something else? Timelines? Continuity? Will the funding be distributed timely? Will there be line items after this budget cycle is over? Too many unknowns to have a good handle on planning for the new fiscal year and the second year on the part of these arts and cultural organizations affected by this major budget shift.

As for the NTD, this draconic budget change would seriously affect the continued operation of the historic, non-profit, and one of its kind Deaf theatre arts company, endangering its survival.

For these reasons, the NTD Board and the Connecticut Deaf Community ask you to seriously consider restoring the line-item appropriations to the NTD and other arts/cultural organizations or other possible alternative constructive solutions to enable Connecticut's National Theatre of the Deaf to survive as part of the vital and needed cultural diversity in Connecticut arts and cultural landscape.

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Connecticut's National Theatre of the Deaf

Founded in 1967

Connecticut Roots

1. Founded in Connecticut nearly 50 years ago, the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) has brought its touring theatre company to every city and most every town in Connecticut.
2. NTD/LTD sprang from an underserved population which serves all audiences equally where they “see and hear every word.” Deaf and hearing audiences enjoy the same theatrical experience without accommodation, sitting side by side.
3. In its nearly 50-year history, the NTD has maintained an unbroken symbiotic relationship of service, resource and support.
4. Created as a touring theatre that serves all audiences but specializes on serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in schools as no other state funded theatre arts organization in Connecticut can or does provide. *Role-modeling, personal inspiration and artistic adventure* through the unique NTD style of performance are additional resources given to all audiences.
5. NTD produces theatre for everyone which is an aesthetic and communicative approach to theatre, creating a style of acting that is unique and has been acclaimed and copied throughout the world.
6. American Sign Language is the fourth most used language in the U.S and is our artistic medium to illuminate original and world literature as well as social and cultural values to Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Hearing audiences.
7. We are gratefully, *Connecticut's National Theatre of the Deaf* and this can be underscored by the U.S. State Department's asking NTD to meet with a delegation from Argentina to have NTD help them form a theatre of the Deaf. The U.S. State Department Representative stated, “...this unique troupe is nothing short of amazing and makes me proud to live in Connecticut...”
8. This past November, NTD again represented the Connecticut and the United States by being the only theatre company invited to perform at Japan's inaugural theatre arts conference for theatre arts, sign language, and education. Through our direct influence from previous tours in Japan and our actor training program, NTD has been instrumental to Japan now having Japanese sign language theatre and having Japanese sign language as an accepted part of the curriculum. During the opening remarks of the conference, the Governor of Totottori Prefecture fluently signed his opening speech, and the Prefecture government offers sign language classes to all Municipal Employees. In our November tour, NTD was also honored by being given an audience with the Crown Princess of Japan.

Contributions To The State Of Connecticut and the United States

1. Life changing motivation and inspiration for the tens of thousands of Connecticut residents who have experienced NTD live, film and video taped performances over nearly 50-years and will hopefully continue with the State's commitment to on-going support.
2. Actor training begun in Waterford at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center in 1968 and continues today and having produced such creative Deaf and Hard of Hearing luminaries as: Tony Award-winning actress Phyllis Frelich, Oscar Award-winning actress Marlee Matlin, Emmy Award-winning producer Julianna Field, Linda Bove, from Sesame Street as well as internationally known First Actor and Sign Master Bernard Bragg. The majority of well-known actors and actresses in the mainstream of theatrical entertainment today have come from NTD's training program or being member of the NTD touring company.
3. The National Theatre of the Deaf has the unique distinction of being the longest existing touring theatre company in the U. S. NTD has toured all 50-states, 33 countries, and performed on all 7 continents.

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4. What NTD accomplishes with state funding is remarkable and shows that even within the constraints of a limited budget, it maintains its core mission and performing for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Hearing communities within the State while providing the services for which it is intended as well as information and referral.
5. NTD represents the State of Connecticut as a center of arts education and the Deaf Theatre Arts to the rest of the country and the entire world. An example of the State's forethought and commitment to the diversity and acceptance of all people can be exemplified during the 375th anniversary of Connecticut's founding where the NTD performed its acclaimed production of *Journeys of Identity*. Performances took place in the historic Old State House legislative chambers where the enactment of the very first state funding of special education in the United States took place in 1817. This established the first state aided school in the new world, the American School for the Deaf. This production based on Connecticut archives is part of Connecticut History, USA History and is proudly acknowledged.
6. The National Theatre of the Deaf with its recent collaboration with the Mark Twain House performed in the "Twain on Stage Festival" and was one of the events along with Hal Holbrook's 90th Birthday at which our State Governor and Mayor of Hartford attended and gave presentations.
7. Connecticut's National Theatre of the Deaf has been asked twice in recent years by the U.S. Department of State to represent the United States/Connecticut. First, by bringing us to perform in Taiwan at the Deaflympics where people from all over the world attended. Secondly, by asking us to meet with delegates from Argentina as part of the State Department's International Visitors Program. In the list of groups they wanted to meet, we were the only group specifically named and in December 2011, they came to Connecticut to meet with us in hopes of creating an arts/theatre/ education program in their own country.
8. Earlier in NTD history the US Department of State brought NTD to perform in Japan, Korea, Singapore, and India.

Creation of a Unique American Art Form

1. Connecticut is the birthplace of the first truly American acting style as created by NTD in the mid-1960s that culminated into actors signing in American Sign Language (ASL) while at the same-time voicing the action and dialogue, "you see and hear every word." This art form has since been replicated and imbedded into numerous companies throughout the world who respectfully credit Connecticut's National Theatre of the Deaf as their mentor and creator of theatrical art form that meets the needs of *everyone* in attendance.
2. This new acting art form has provided a link for two heretofore different life-groups that have been historically isolated—Deaf and Hearing populations.
3. Prior to the inception of NTD and the new art form, there was a dearth of opportunities for the integration of Deaf actors, playwrights and designers into the mainstream. Today, there is an unbreakable bond between Deaf and Hearing artists and the audiences for which they perform in schools and public venues throughout the State of Connecticut as well as every state in the Union and all seven continents. **This performance record cannot be matched by any other touring theatre company and thus Connecticut's own National Theatre of the Deaf stands alone.**

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National Theatre of the Deaf

Sample Listing

Connecticut

Performances/Workshops/Collaborations

(Public Schools not listed)

American School for the Deaf

Bristol Library

Bushnell Theater

Chester Meeting House

Connecticut College

Connecticut's Old State House

Fairfield University

Garde Arts Center

Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts

Hartford Children's Theater

Hartford Stage

Hygienic Art Park

Ivoryton Playhouse

Long Wharf

Manchester Community College

Mark Twain House

Middletown Community College

Middletown Library

Mohegan Community College

Morningside Productions

Mystic Seaport

New London Library

Norma Terrace Theatre

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Northwestern Community College

O'Neill Theater Center

Sacred Heart University

Saint Joseph College

Sonalyt Studios

South Windsor Library

Stone House, Deep River

Thomaston Opera House

Trinity College

University of Connecticut, Storrs

Wadsworth Athenaeum

Wesleyan University

White Barn Theatre