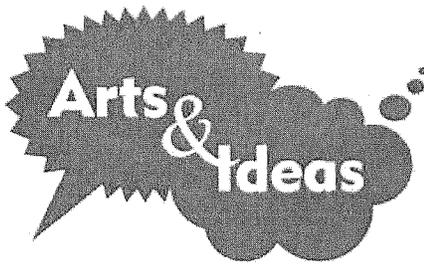


International
Festival of



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Committee on Appropriations
Public Hearing March 2, 2015
Testimony of Mary Lou Aleskie

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Santiago, Senator Chapin, Representative Ziobron, and members of the General Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

I am Mary Lou Aleskie, Executive Director of one of the world's premiere Festivals, the International Festival of Arts & Ideas and I want to thank you for our partnership.

For it has been with your consistent support for almost 20 years that the International Festival of Arts & Ideas has grown into a world class festival which occupies the same rare space as festivals of the world such as Edinburgh, Scotland; Avignon, France; and Sydney, Australia.

Our Festival is now one of the cultural epicenters of this state and nation. Consider what we do year in and year out:

1. The Festival represents a large portion of the overall economic activity from the arts in Greater New Haven averaging about \$25M a year in economic impact, contributing to 160 jobs annually, presenting about 400 Connecticut artists, and paying for about 600 bed nights of hotels for visiting artists alone, each year.
2. The Festival has been able to attract significant investments from international governments in support of US premieres and other international artists traveling to Connecticut to perform at the Festival.
3. The Festival works as a community builder in service to Greater New Haven and the State. We support Fellowship programs, neighborhood pop-up festivals, free master classes, artist residencies, and other educational programs that are offered free to this community. In fact, over 85% of all Festival events are free.
4. The Festival attracts over 125,000 attendees to our events every year which includes a strong Connecticut audience from 149 towns throughout the state, a regional and national audience from the Boston to New York corridor and beyond, and a growing number of international visitors from dozens of countries. In addition, unlike many arts institutions, our demographic surveys show that our audience is largely made up of middle income families and individuals.
5. The Festival spurs the economy of Greater New Haven and our State. This economic activity is spread across the culture and tourism spectrum. There are restaurant dinners, hotel night stays, and a plethora of other activity that are associated with new people spending new dollars in our state. Not to mention the

money spent by the Festival itself on equipment rental, marketing, advertising, printing, and other services essential to producing this world recognized event.

6. The Festival is a world stage for artists coming from every continent and about 50 countries.
7. The Festival is a CNN "Top fifty pick of fifty states in America" as a must attend destination and event.

The Governor's budget, as proposed, not only cuts the arts budget overall by 18% but comes at a time when the arts rival many other sectors in Connecticut for growth in jobs and economic development.

Honorable members, in addition, the Governor's budget eliminates the Festival's funding. His budget proposes to replace this state investment by vastly reducing the pool of funds to support Arts and Tourism. He proposes making the Arts and Tourism sector compete against one another through a "competitive process." A process that does not exist; has yet to be defined; and is not organized with any definitive timeline or parameters.

In June of this year people from Sweden, Jerusalem, England, Singapore, Cuba, West Africa, Canada, and China will be boarding planes to Connecticut. They will be artists, supported by their governments, companies, and in some cases, other private funders. They come here to Connecticut to share their artistry with our State and our nation. It is the reputation that we have built together, with you, members of the Connecticut legislature that brings them here. We cannot breach their trust and send them home. Their talents and efforts, together with our expertise is what makes this work continue to grow our national treasure: Connecticut's International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

Please understand that we take what we do seriously and in these nearly 20 years our partnership has never failed. The line item funding is necessary for our continued success. A festival of this magnitude, with its complexities of international negotiations, takes years to plan and execute. Your help is critical.

I look forward to welcoming all of you to the 20th Anniversary of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas this June. Together we will continue to bring to our State and Nation a Festival that is one of the world's premiere cultural events.

Mary Lou Aleskie
Executive Director
International Festival of Arts & Ideas