

Testimony of Susan Ballek, Executive Director and CEO
Hill-Stead Museum
March 2, 2015
Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee

RE: H.B. No. 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE

Chairwoman Bye, Chairwoman Walker, members of the committee, my name is Susan Ballek and I am director of the Hill-Stead Museum. I would like to offer the following comments on H.B. 6824, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017 and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue.

Hill-Stead Museum is a member of a consortium of seven independent leading art museums in Connecticut formed in 2013 – the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield; the Bruce Museum in Greenwich; the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme; the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury; the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London; and New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain. Our seven museums offer some of the most exciting and stimulating exhibitions to be found anywhere. Our holdings consist of fine and decorative art treasures of incalculable value. Together we enhance the state's identity as a cultural hub, its attractiveness as a tourism destination, and the unparalleled quality of life found here.

First and foremost I want to thank the Administration and the Legislature for including the Consortium as an item in the budget last year. The Consortium was appropriated \$525,000. What is unique about our group is that we have agreed to divide the funding equally between our seven institutions, focusing on unity to attain the flexibility and consistency of steady funding that will enable us to better plan exhibits and programs while strategically targeting our marketing efforts to maximize the use of these funds.

This crucial funding has provided Hill-Stead Museum with the opportunity to supplement our Education and Marketing budgets, allowing us to present higher quality interpretive and humanities-rich programs and reach a more diverse audience from Connecticut and beyond. In addition to off-setting the cost of staff salaries in these departments, funding is being used for an interpretive signage project throughout the museum, beginning with more modern and image-rich panels in our visitor orientation gallery to better engage the public in our unique historic site and world-class art collection. New interpretive panels for outdoor landmarks on Hill-Stead's 152 acre property, such as the circa 1920 Sunken Garden, designed by Beatrix Farrand are also included.

Additionally, we are utilizing this funding to improve our publicity and marketing efforts for the nationally-acclaimed Sunken Garden Poetry Festival, held every summer at Hill-Stead Museum. A new brochure to highlight our educational programs which meet the State's common core curriculum standards is also being created, as is a new museum membership brochure, allowing us to better reach constituents and ultimately strengthen our organization through new donor-based financial support. These projects are important in helping Hill-Stead Museum with its continued goal of sustainability, and the museum's Trustees, Board of Governors, volunteers and staff are grateful to receive directed local funds through this initiative.

Collectively we also represent a significant impact for Connecticut in creating jobs, attracting visitors and increasing State revenue. Our museums employ people locally, purchase goods and services from within our communities, and market and promote our regions. Every year we are host to hundreds of thousands of visitors from New England, New York and New Jersey and across the country. Our visitors stay in hotels, eat in restaurants and purchase goods in our shops. A study in 2012 by AFTA showed that "cultural tourists" spend an average of 65 percent more than other visitors.

We fully understand that these are very difficult financial times for the state. We believe that we have shown that by working together (instead of competing) we have achieved an efficient as well as an effective way for the State to make a relatively small investment that will bring a very good return. The AFTA report clearly showed that there is a leveraged return of \$6 for every \$1 invested by the State. Therefore, the investment requested by our consortium will have a collective economic impact of at least nine million dollars annually or each of us will be able to have an economic impact on our respective regions of over \$1.2 million.

My colleagues and I hope to have the opportunity to continue to build upon our already significant contribution to Connecticut's "creative" economy and ask that funding for the Consortium remain included under DECD Conservation and Development in this new Biennium Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this request with you on this important issue.

Susan Ballek
Executive Director and CEO
Hill-Stead Museum, Farmington, CT