

To the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing to urge you to restore a **\$50,000 Line Item to support Litchfield Jazz Festival** awarded through **DECD** for the first time in 2014. This 20-year-old festival is the culmination of a month of jazz education at Litchfield Jazz Camp for up to 300 CT students ages 12-18 from all over the state accompanied by a month of free concerts open to the public there and around the community. This year, to honor regional citizens who assisted residents of New Orleans (the birthplace of jazz) after the Katrina disaster which marks 10 years around the time of the Festival, we have scheduled an opening concert to celebrate the music of that great city and honor our local heroes. The Festival is the first outside organization to present in the new, \$97 million Performing & Visual Arts Center at Western Connecticut State University, and we hope to use this facility regularly in the future to bring jazz to a broader audience in CT.

Litchfield Jazz Festival provides a bonanza to state tourism, bringing 5000-7000 (50-60% out-of-state) visitors annually to our region and leveraging over **\$3 million in tourism revenues**. They rent hotel rooms, purchase items, dine in our restaurants, and make return visits to the area having been introduced by the Festival.

Litchfield Jazz Festival celebrates 20 years on August 7, 8, and 9 with an all-star line-up and expectations for a record-breaking audience. The Festival has presented Ray Charles, Wayne Shorter, Sonny Rollins, Tito Puente, Arturo O'Farrell—winner of a 2015 Grammy Award, Diana Krall, and hundreds of others. To underscore the esteem in which the festival is held by the public and the field, its Artistic Director recently received a Jazz Hero Award from the Jazz Journalists Association. The value of this program in preserving America's original art form—jazz—and introducing the music to both young and old around the state cannot be underestimated.

Litchfield Jazz Festival also supports a month-long educational program, Litchfield Jazz Camp, from July 12 – August 7 at Canterbury School in New Milford. This program proactively seeks students in need and provides financial support, thanks to an Interdistrict Cooperative grant it has received for many years* and contributions from supporters, to up to 30% of its CT applicants. All students play for the public alongside major performing artists throughout the Festival weekend.

The Festival leverages business for vendors of tents, audio, electrical equipment, 20-30 artists and crafts people and entertainers for children in our Kids Zone. It hires regional food vendors who also benefit financially. Its moderate ticket price makes it family friendly as does free admission for children 12 and under. The Festival partners with a Southbury hotel, the Crowne Plaza, to accommodate artists; in turn the hotel reaps the benefit of out-of-town guests (and the state reaps the benefit of room taxes) and makes income from an after party. The annual cost of mounting the Festival averages \$400,000. Annual surveys aimed at assessing the economic impact of the Festival peg that impact at \$3M +.

The Litchfield Jazz Festival is the largest cultural event in Litchfield County in the summer months. It raises the profile of CT as a tourist destination and a purveyor of high-quality entertainment and top-notch arts education. It is an indisputable and sizeable economic driver for the state.

Please do not eliminate or decrease the DECD Line Item for Litchfield Jazz Festival. The impact of this program is tremendous.

* Funding for Litchfield Jazz Camp is also under siege this year as it is an Interdistrict Cooperative project and the governor has recommended that support for the ID program be halved.

Sincerely,



Vita West Muir

Executive Director & Founder

Litchfield Performing Arts, Inc. (Non-profit presenter of Litchfield Jazz Festival, Litchfield Jazz Camp, and Project Poetry Live!)