

The Discovery Museum – Appropriations Testimony – February 10, 2015

The Discovery Museum is a major science learning resource in Connecticut specializing in hands-on STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) experiences that resonate with the innate curiosity, learning desire, and spirit of exploration of young learners. We serve over 63,000 people annually through our dynamic exhibits, after school, summer, and daytime programming for our region's youth, including outreach sessions to underserved communities.

The line item funding the Discovery Museum receives from the State of Connecticut is critical in enabling us to achieve our mission. While we obtain grants, sponsorships, donations, and earned revenue, the need in the Museum's immediate community is greater than what we can meet through these channels.

We specialize in STEM literacy, which is vital in preparing today's students to become the informed decision makers of tomorrow. As the committee is aware, the largest achievement gap in the nation is here, in Connecticut. In Bridgeport, where the Museum is located, only 19.4% of 5th grade students are performing at goal for science compared to 59.6% of 5th graders statewide. Many Bridgeport schools that we serve lack the basic materials and training necessary to deliver adequate science content. Our education staff maintains a very strong rapport with Bridgeport educators and actively works with them to provide opportunities at the Museum and on an outreach basis that complement and enhance what is taught in the classroom.

We run science sessions and workshops for The Bridgeport Lighthouse Program, which is an after school program designed to provide Bridgeport youth with an

opportunity to learn and grow in a structured environment. In the last three years, we have taught 36,000 hours of STEM programs in nine schools through this venue.

At the Museum, we run a fully-funded after school program for 40 STEM-savvy students who attend Bridgeport Public Schools that has provided over 2,500 hours of hands-on learning in the past 2 years. An additional 30 students have joined the program this year. Last summer, our seven-week summer programming provided over 15,000 hours of STEM learning instruction to 509 young learners ages 5-14 in 35 different week-long programs.

In the last year, we have reinvested significantly in new guest experiences and capital improvements, including new exhibits and facility upgrades. These enhancements complement an array of unique assets and programming that support our ability to inspire learning through STEM education.

- Discovery is home to Connecticut's only Challenger Learning Center, part of an international network of mock mission control and space craft environments that run simulated space missions to promote teamwork, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving. Discovery's Challenger Center is now the only one in the world that is equipped to enable young learners to conduct live communications with real satellites and high altitude balloon payloads.
- Our space science programming is so impactful that NASA has funded a multi-year, K-12 program that teaches young learners math basics in the lower grades to advanced engineering in the upper grades all through the lens of rocketry,

making Discovery the only place I know of that can say our six-year-olds are rocket scientists.

- This year, in partnership with Energize CT, we will introduce a brand-new energy exhibit which teaches visitors about different types of energy, their origins, and responsible energy usage.
- In April, we will become the only science museum in New England to have NOAA's "Science on a Sphere," which is a room-sized animated globe that teaches visitors about Earth systems, weather, and the environment.

In terms of broader reach within the State, in our last three years through our library membership program, we have welcomed 12,000 individual visitors from over 30 Connecticut towns who may not have otherwise been able to afford admission.

We are also members of ASTC, the Association of Science and Technology Centers, which is a nationwide network of 400 science museums and centers. Over the past 2 years, as a participant in ASTC's Passport Program, we have provided over 7,000 tourists with free admission. We have welcomed an additional 10,000 tourists outside of this program and know they have been contributors to Connecticut's economic vitality.

The Discovery Museum and Planetarium has been an important, multi-faceted, and valued regional resource for over 50 years, with more than 80 STEM education programs for students, as well as numerous outreach projects which enhance the education of socioeconomically underserved children. Through our focus on STEM, we work to help our State meet the challenges of the achievement gap by

working with educators to create and deliver learning experiences that are impactful, and that resonate with students long after they return to the classroom. Additionally, the Discovery Museum benefits visitors through engaging and educational exhibits, Planetarium shows, lectures, and popular public event days that bring a large community together to learn and celebrate science.

I respectfully ask the committee to join me in recognizing the value the Discovery Museum and Planetarium brings to our State by preserving our appropriated funding level as a line item, and not through competitive grants.

Thank you for your time.