

Agency Budget Hearing
Appropriations Committee - Connecticut General Assembly

February 10, 2016

Submitted Testimony

Matt Fleury, President & CEO - Connecticut Science Center, Inc.

The Connecticut Science Center is dedicated to enhancing science education statewide, providing learning opportunities for students and adults of all ages, and engaging the community in scientific exploration. In addition to being one of Connecticut's top destinations, the Science Center is a leading provider of professional development for teachers, and partners with the State of Connecticut Department of Education, school districts and schools to foster science interest and achievement.

It is with great respect for the challenges before you that I offer the following information as you consider the most equitable and strategic ways to share what support the State can provide to its core educational and cultural assets.

The Connecticut Science Center is among the most prominent, widely appreciated and highly regarded recent creations of the State of Connecticut. The Science Center has served over 2.2 million people since its opening in 2009, reaching deeply into communities around the state to foster student interest and achievement in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. A non-profit organization, the Science Center generates nearly 95% of its revenues from fees paid by customers and donations from philanthropists who support its educational mission. The remaining 5% of funding has been provided by the State of Connecticut. Acknowledging the extremely challenging budget choices before you, the Science Center has absorbed successive reductions in state support in the spirit of shared sacrifice. However, the importance of the state's consistent investment, even at necessarily reduced levels during difficult times, should not be underestimated.

As you evaluate the continuation of funding for the Science Center and many other institutions, it is important to recognize the nearly immediate return this investment can generate both in terms of state and local tax revenues and economic benefit. We estimate that the Science Center's total economic impact approaches \$17 million, including tax revenues which themselves well exceed the current line item appropriation.

However, the benefits of the Science Center extend much farther. The Science Center served over 330,000 people in 2015, including 53,000 school students on STEM-oriented field trips and 32,000 in science outreach programs across the state. Children, families and other visitors enjoyed inspiring experiences with science that enhanced their quality of life and their prospects. Last year we delivered nearly 2,000 professional development sessions to enable teachers statewide to become more effective science educators and partnered with over 25 schools to help them strengthen STEM curriculum in programs that have begun to show measurable gains for students.

The Connecticut Science Center, created by the State of Connecticut and relying on an ongoing public/private commitment, is an immensely valuable asset to citizens throughout our state. Its economic returns are many times greater than the State's annual support. Funding of the Connecticut Science Center is an investment in the future of our state and our economic vitality, as we inspire students with the foundational skills that will transform them into a competitive workforce.

With regard to funding of the State's tourism marketing campaign, the Science Center strongly supports this investment, which in 2015 helped grow hotel room tax revenues such that the revenue increase itself exceeded the total campaign expense.