

Appropriations Committee - Governor's Revised FY 17 Budget and Revenue Plan
Public Hearing Testimony of The Garde Arts Center
February 10, 2016

Good Evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, ranking members, and other members of the Appropriate Committee.

I am Rosetta Jones, Vice President of the Board of Trustees for The Garde Art Center, Southeastern Connecticut's non-profit regional center for the performing arts and education located in downtown New London.

First, on behalf of the Garde Board and our executive director Steve Sigel, I'd like to extend our gratitude and appreciation for the financial support that has been provided to us in past years. Your legislatively directed support provides the oxygen for economic sustainability for downtown New London, and the Southeastern region of our state.

I am here tonight to voice our concern over the Governor's current budget proposal too, which includes:

- The reduction of our legislative support by an additional 25%, on top of the recent 10% reduction,
- The elimination of our direct support by its consolidation with all "miscellaneous" funding and its transfer to Comptroller's Office for a competitive grant pool process.

In a state-wide report titled Arts and Economic Prosperity IV CT., Connecticut's nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences spent \$653 million in 2010, and delivered more than \$59 million in combined local and state government revenues. Even during the down economy. The industry generates over 18,000 full time jobs. Arts and culture organizations are strongly rooted in their community, where these resilient and creative employers provide a diversity of local jobs that cannot be shipped overseas.

One of the resounding themes of the report, and a clear message for policymakers, is that "... a vibrant arts community not only keeps residents and their discretionary spending close to home, it also attracts visitors who spend money and help local businesses thrive."

In these most challenging of economic times, individually and collectively, arts organizations like the Garde have been very providing catalytic energy to the State's economic, innovation, housing, transportation, education, tourism, historic preservation and social service goals.

Since 1988, the Garde has been the prime community-owned cultural activity generator and economic catalyst for the City of New London and Southeastern Connecticut. The historic Garde Theatre and its facilities are a central cultural gathering place that presents and hosts top-quality performing arts and film events, fosters community arts organizations, and provides critical educational facilities and programs for the City and region.

The Garde serves primarily 63 towns in greater New London County. The largest cultural employer in the City and the region, the Garde provides jobs and internships throughout the year for production staff, stage crew, event managers, area students and local artists.

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With direct funding from the general assembly, the Garde is able to keep its doors open to provide exhibit space for local colleges, program partnerships, and production services, and main performance spaces for numerous local arts and civic organizations. In partnership with the New London Film Commission and the CT Film Office, the Garde has facilitated new film development in the city and State. The Garde most recently has been able to play a lead role in developing with the New London Public Schools and the State Department of Education a regional K-12 arts education pathway, and help plan a new regional magnet high school for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Whether providing the venue and funding for community responses to teen violence, such as the New London Youth Talent Show, or raising funds for the social services, coat drives for the homeless, or involving and educating more than 10,000 young people each year with performances, workshops, and after school and summer programs, your reinvestment provides multiple and multiplying returns to every aspect of the City's and region's economic, cultural, and educational quality of life. Based on multipliers from the CT Arts and Economic Report IV, the Garde's annual economic impact exceeded \$5,000,000 including audience spending, household income impact, and state and local revenues, and created 93 FTE jobs in the region. Your legislative grant under our stewardship is multiplied 18 times over.

The Governor's budget proposal puts our organizations in jeopardy. The uncertainty of funding could directly impact our ability to hire or maintain staffing levels and directly impact our ability to deliver on subsidized programs to educational institutions, local arts organizations and other non-profit groups.

We understand the State is facing enormous financial challenges and appreciate the need for reasonable and equitable cuts to be endured by all. With that, we do stand united with our colleagues in our request to maintain our legislatively directed line of support and to allow us to effectively and responsibly manage those funds for the betterment of the state and your constituents.

Like other urban-based "not-for-profit" performing arts centers, which rely on private and public support to insure achievement of our missions, we especially appreciate your acknowledgement of and continued financial support for the critical role we play in enhancing our state through the power of the arts.

We are grateful for your support and leadership. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosetta Jones, Vice President

Garde Arts Center

New London