

Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, February 16, 2016

Senator Beth Bye and Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chairs

Subject: House Bill 5044, specifically funding for the Connecticut Humanities Council Inc. within the budget of the Connecticut State Library

**Testimony submitted by Douglas G. Fisher, Executive Director,
Connecticut Humanities Council Inc., Middletown, Conn.**

Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Doug Fisher, and I'm the executive director of the Connecticut Humanities Council, the state's nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Our independent, federal funding from the NEH in essence pays for my organization's annual cost of operations. This is important as you consider potential adjustments to this year's state budget, as our federal NEH funding effectively allows every state dollar we receive to go directly into merit-based grants and the delivery of high-quality public programming.

Since 1975, Connecticut Humanities has produced and supported thousands of public programs and initiatives that tell our state's stories, showcase our history, and enrich our lives. We are perhaps best known for our support of heritage organizations and museums. We also fund and work closely with libraries and other cultural organizations that provide community forums and promote engagement with literature and poetry.

We are proud that our Council is often cited as one of the best in the nation. Its long-standing effectiveness is due in large part to the Connecticut General Assembly, which voted in 1995 to create the Connecticut Humanities Fund, a merit-based, competitive granting pool, which is carefully administered with the help of scholars and subject experts. In the last three years alone, more than 350 competitive grants have supported exhibits, programs, and forums serving more than 1.5 million people statewide.

Please take a moment to look at the map attached to this testimony. You'll note that every Connecticut town, and every legislative district, has residents and institutions -- like museums, libraries and heritage organizations -- that benefit directly from Connecticut Humanities grants, programs and partnerships. Since its inception, the Connecticut Humanities Fund has awarded \$16.4 million in competitive grants to hundreds of organizations. Importantly, this state investment has been matched by another \$40.4 million in corporate, foundation, and in-kind funds, for a total, induced investment of some \$57 million in Connecticut's cultural and heritage assets. This investment is multiplied still further as it ripples through the local economy, in such ways as hotel stays, meals at restaurants, and community retail activity.

In recent years, the Council's state appropriation has been reduced about 25 percent. The governor's proposed budget would erase ALL *dedicated* support for the Connecticut Humanities Council and its re-granting fund, forcing the Council to seek future support from a modest grant pool administered by the State Comptroller, with grant awards to be made in an unspecified fashion by the General Assembly's Legislative Management Committee.

With state resources in short supply, the governor's over-arching goal is laudable. He wants to bring accountability to state budget line items, and put a halt to what may be perceived as seemingly automatic, annual renewal of certain state appropriations, without requiring organizations to justify their ongoing support.

Connecticut Humanities does not argue with this approach. Indeed, we very much believe in accountability, which, by definition, requires ongoing evaluation and demonstrated results. I know what this means, as prior to Connecticut Humanities, I worked 25 years in the private sector where the annual need to show results was the norm. Accountability is necessary, and we should bring it to all public sector investments.

And for this reason – accountability – I ask that you continue the legislature's long-standing, dedicated support for the Connecticut Humanities Council. Unlike 52 other line items targeted for consolidation and potential reduction in the governor's budget proposal – the Council supports a highly accountable, best-practice, competitive grant fund.

We are proven, conscientious stewards of state money. By design, Connecticut Humanities awards merit-based grants that encourage and reward innovative and vibrant programming at community institutions that help Connecticut attract and retain talent. **Elimination of this competitive grant fund would shut off the only source of support for hundreds of the state's worthy heritage, cultural, and humanities organizations. Leveraged in-kind services, corporate money, and federal dollars would also be left on the table.**

Here are a few examples of Connecticut Humanities' investments, to illustrate the breadth of what we support and offer:

- We publish *ConnecticutHistory.org*, the state's online history resource, which is used regularly by teachers, students, scholars and history buffs looking for timely, reliable information on Connecticut, its people, and institutions. This website is growing exponentially and is on track to attract more than 1 million unique visitors this fiscal year!
- Our new initiative, "**Teach It**" supports the state Department of Education's new social studies guidelines in public schools. *Teach It* brings local Connecticut history to life in classrooms statewide, giving students a tangible appreciation of Connecticut's rich heritage.

- We administer the **“Poetry Out Loud”** program in cooperation with Connecticut’s Office of the Arts, involving 6,400 high school students statewide this year alone. Our state winner – who incidentally finished 4th in the United States in 2015! – will compete this spring for the national title in Washington, D.C.
- Connecticut Humanities is home the Connecticut Center for the Book, affiliated with the Library of Congress. Later this year, we plan to launch a comprehensive, online literature portal for authors and readers in Connecticut. One of our Center’s best known program offerings is ***Book Voyagers***, which engages children with literature and builds an early love of reading that is a proven pathway to academic achievement and economic success.
- Connecticut Humanities is the major benefactor of **History Day in Connecticut**, a competition that engages 5,100 students at more than 85 schools across Connecticut in grades 6-12; and the **Connecticut League of History Organizations**, a statewide network of historical societies and heritage nonprofits. We also co-publish ***Connecticut Explored***, the state’s history magazine.
- We help small nonprofit organizations operate more effectively, especially local historical societies that tell our stories and preserve our heritage through collections and images.

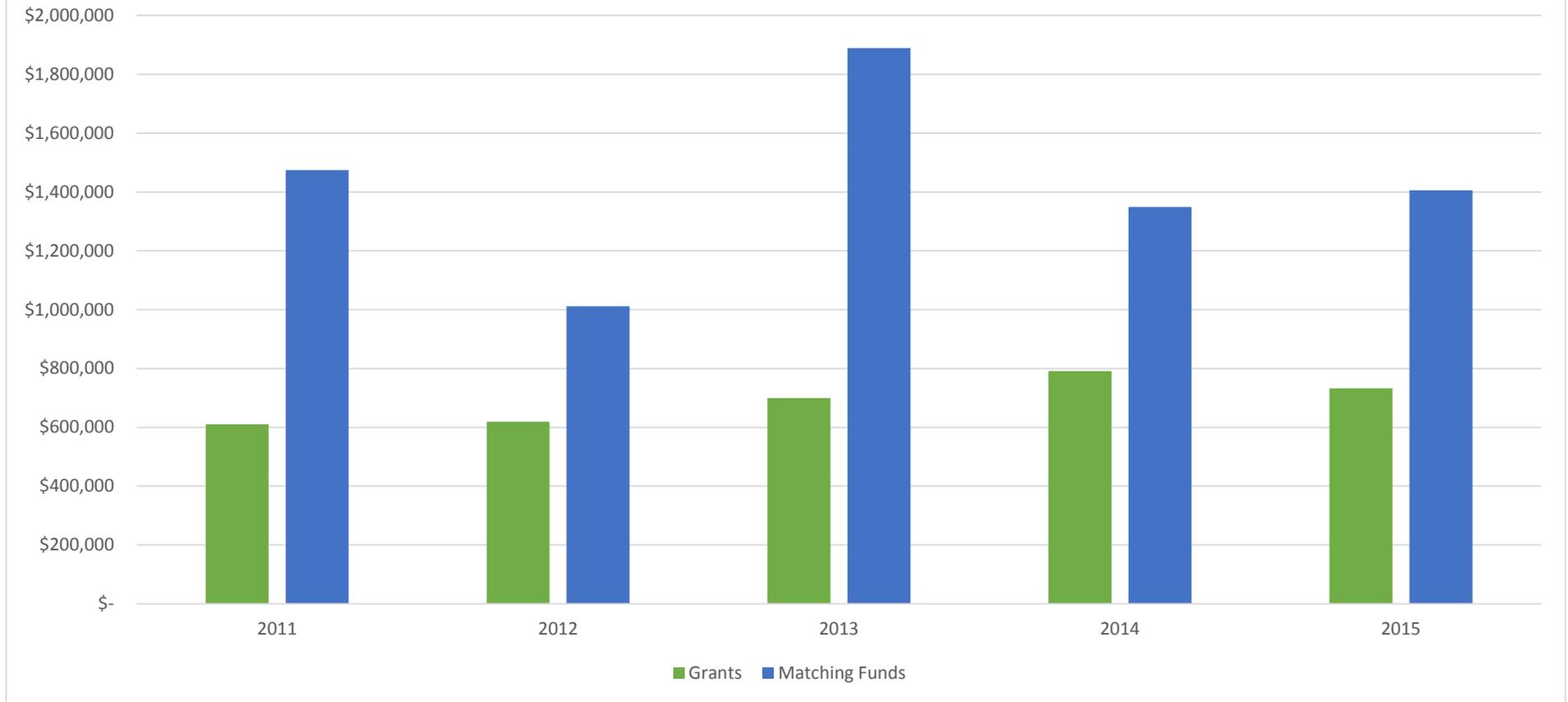
In summary, Connecticut Humanities looks to bring excellence to exhibits, materials, lectures, and community organizations. We take our fiduciary responsibility seriously and seek to make the best use of every dollar entrusted with us. We demonstrate, every day, that Connecticut is a special place, rich in history and with ready access to high quality, unique cultural experiences. Our fully accountable grants and programs remain an integral part of Connecticut’s economic development success.

Thank you for your past support, and please maintain the state’s long-term investment in Connecticut Humanities and keep its competitive grant fund healthy and intact.

Attachments (2):

1. Statewide map of Connecticut Humanities grants, programs and services by town, January 2013-December 2015
2. GRAPH: Connecticut Humanities Grants and Leveraged Funds, 2011-2015

Connecticut Humanities Council Inc. Impact of Granting Funds, 2011-15



Since its inception in FY 1995-96, Connecticut Humanities has made \$16.4 million in grants, which has leveraged \$40.4 million in additional, matching contributions (corporate, foundation, or in-kind grantee cash).