

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, my name is Owen Elphick, and I am the current Poetry Out Loud Connecticut State Champion. It's an honor to be here today speaking on behalf of CTHumanities, and Poetry Out Loud, and on behalf of myself as a new voter. Let me start by saying that my ability to stand here without completely losing my nerve and making a total fool of myself can largely be attributed to the skills and self-confidence I have gained from participating in Poetry Out Loud. This program teaches thousands of high school students across Connecticut alone performance and public speaking skills that are crucial to life as an adult, and to a wide range of careers and professions, not just those associated with the arts and humanities.

Poetry Out Loud also, obviously, exposes students to poetry. It demands that participants engage with challenging texts on a deeply intellectual, and often emotional, level, something that, quite apart from being an incredibly personal experience, fosters better citizens—thoughtful, conscientious individuals who actively contribute to society, rather than simply existing in it.

When I was in Washington, D.C. last April, competing in the National Competition as one of nine finalists, I got the chance to meet with Senator Chris Murphy. Beforehand, I was told I would spend about two minutes with him—but after going in and thanking him for his support of the arts, he told me, “I want to show you something.” And he took me outside of his office, and pointed down the hall to this old statue. He told me how there had been a motion to remove it because of the cost of its maintenance, a motion that he opposed. He told me that it's important we hold the line on giving the arts their due, because in the long term they're incredibly important to our culture and to our society.

Those three or so extra minutes he spent to tell me this, which doubtless threw off his entire schedule for the rest of the day, made me so grateful that I have grown up and gone to

school in a state where the importance of art funding, particularly in the context of education, is recognized by the legislature; where long-term benefits are valued as much as short-term ones; and where the people who will eventually inherit this society are encouraged, through programs like Poetry Out Loud, to embrace, sustain, and even improve it.

I am participating in Poetry Out Loud again this year, not because I feel I have anything to prove, but because there's so much more I want to learn. And I am here today because I would really hate to think that I am one of the last students in Connecticut who will get to learn from being part of this amazing program. Thank you for your time and consideration.