Date: February 27, 2019

To: Appropriations Co-Chairs and Committee

Co-Chair, Senator Catherine Osten
Co-Chair, Representative Toni Walker

Dear Members of the Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the role and importance of humanities to Connecticut residents, Connecticut’s history and heritage organizations, and Connecticut’s economy. My name is Jason Mancini and I am the Executive Director of CT Humanities.

CT Humanities, also known as the Connecticut Humanities Council, is a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities and has been actively shaping and supporting the history, heritage, and civics foundation of our State since 1974. Our grants, programs, and digital initiatives continue to provide access to high quality Connecticut-based content for all of Connecticut’s residents and visitors.

CT Humanities has received state funds for the CT Humanities Fund since 1995 (with the exception of FY17). Thanks to this Committee’s support and the Legislature’s partial restoration of our funding in FY18 ($680K) and FY19 ($850K), we have restored our statewide partnerships and regranted to approximately 150 organizations under our aegis.

Governor Lamont’s current budget proposal maintains flat funding of $850K for CT Humanities in FY20 and FY21. In contrast, the Governor’s Arts, Culture, and Tourism (ACT) policy committee proposes an increase in funding for CT Humanities from the current budget proposal of $850K to approximately $2.1M. This proposal is supported by Speaker Aresimowicz’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Tourism. We embrace the Governor’s and Legislature’s support of our mission and recognize that increased funding awarded to CT Humanities represents an investment in Connecticut’s history and heritage organizations, education and heritage tourism assets, and commitment to civic engagement and community revitalization. These are investments in our state’s future and in our sense of place.

I, therefore, respectfully request that the Members of this Committee fully support the recommendation of the ACT policy committee and the Blue Ribbon Panel and increase funding to $2.1M.

I would like to share with the Committee a little more about CT Humanities, so that you understand your investment. We oversee three principal areas of public engagement. First, and perhaps best known, is our granting program through the CT Humanities Fund. We have multiple competitive grant lines that are accessible to Connecticut non-profit (501(c)3) organizations with the goal of providing funding and strategic guidance to help improve their operations and to create and deliver new programs and exhibits to the public. Over the past five years, we have awarded 424 grants to Connecticut museums, historical societies, cultural organizations, and libraries.

Second, our Connecticut Center for the Book is organized in partnership with the Library of Congress. Through this, we annually host the Connecticut Book Awards – recognizing the best books by Connecticut authors or about Connecticut places, people, and events. We deliver to Connecticut’s youngest citizens our Book Voyagers program which aims to support young readers and their families as
they develop reading skills and comprehension. To further this investment, we are now working with the Connecticut Storytelling Center to develop and deliver Connecticut stories to Connecticut schools and libraries.

Finally, our digital humanities initiatives guide Connecticut in the 21st century knowledge economy by connecting colleges and universities, history and heritage organizations, K-12 educators and students, and businesses and tourists. ConnecticutHistory.org functions as the encyclopedia of Connecticut history and provides rich, well-sourced content for all of Connecticut’s 169 towns. TeachItCT.org is aligned with Connecticut social studies frameworks and provides educators and students in Grades 3, 5, 8 and High School with accessible and supportive curricular prompts, Connecticut-based content, and primary source material from Connecticut institutions. TodayinCTHistory.com is a partnership with the Office of the State Historian and Connecticut Public that highlights the remarkable people, places, events, and ideas of our state. We are also currently piloting ConnTours, a heritage tourism mobile app that aims to weave together the connective fabric of Connecticut across the state. Themed tours include the Freedom Trail (partnering with DECD), the Revolutionary Trail, Women’s Heritage Trail, and Battlefields of the Pequot War Trail. Imagine a statewide Yankee Ingenuity Trail, Maritime Heritage Trail, Literary Heritage and Connecticut Author’s Trail, Supernatural Places Trail, and much more!

Connecticut Humanities is committed in principle and practice to promoting and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion. In partnership with the Connecticut League of History Organizations, we are embarking on a comprehensive campaign to inventory Connecticut’s historical and cultural organizations and to provide the leadership and guidance that is essential to strengthening and futureproofing this sector of our state’s economy. In this process, we will identify and share more stories about Connecticut that will restore and/or enhance our sense of pride in where we live.

State funding for CT Humanities is augmented by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. State funds are dispersed through the CT Humanities fund with the following five priorities in mind: 1) Reaching broad audiences; 2) Addressing social issues through humanities disciplines; 3) Fostering collaboration among organizations; 4) Encouraging creativity and demonstrating ingenuity and innovation; and 5) Promoting heritage tourism.

Recent studies demonstrate that every $1 invested in humanities organizations generates $63 in economic activity and that every $1 from a CT Humanities grant receives $3 in matching funds from private and corporate donors. We also know that major investments are being made in arts and cultural organizations by all of Connecticut’s neighbors. Connecticut has much to offer and much to benefit from such investment.

I want to thank legislators for your ongoing support, as well as the hundreds of history and heritage organizations and libraries across the state that continue to forge ahead with the public interest in mind, and I would like to acknowledge the contributors to – whether corporate, small business, or personal - and volunteers for all of these organizations. These organizations are the lifeblood of our state.

Sincerely,

Jason R. Mancini, Ph.D.
Executive Director