

**APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
February 11, 2020**

TESTIMONY OF

CONNECTICUT FLAGSHIP PRODUCING THEATERS (CFPT)

Good Evening. My name is Michael Barker and I am the Managing Director of Westport Country Playhouse. I joined the Westport Country Playhouse in 2016.

I am here today speaking on behalf of the Connecticut Flagship Producing Theaters, which include Hartford Stage, Goodspeed Musicals, Long Wharf Theatre, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Westport County Playhouse and Yale Repertory Theatre.

I first would like to thank the Appropriations Committee and your colleagues in the legislature who continue to recognize and support us. Today I am here to update you on the continued struggles our theaters face in the continuing pandemic shutdown of our venues, the successes we have achieved in our state in spite of these obstacles, and to ask that you consider restoring additional funding to our organizations.

For performing arts organizations, 2020 was, in a word, difficult. "Impossible" might be more accurate. The support of Governor Lamont, Lieutenant Governor Bysewicz, you and your colleagues in the legislature; and Commissioner Lehman, and Director Shapiro at DECD manifested in an allocation of relief funding at the end of 2020 from the federal CARES Act. My colleagues and I have said, and we have heard you say, that this 2020 funding was not the end of a process of support for the arts in our state but rather the beginning.

So in that spirit, let us turn to the 2021 budget. Over the last several years, setting aside the extraordinary one-time allocation, our funding has remained level and we are sincerely appreciative of the commitment to maintaining this funding. However, we strongly believe the economic, social and educational benefits we bring to the state make a case for increased funding.

Unlike many of the Performing Arts Centers with which you may be familiar, the Flagship Producing Theaters, formed in 2014, are non-profit organizations that create theater from scratch right here in Connecticut. Collectively, in nonpandemic times, we annually infuse the state with \$42 million in economic activity.

- We create more than 1,700 jobs for artists and administrators right here in Connecticut;
- We spend just under \$26 million in taxable payrolls;
- We purchase local materials in excess of \$6.6 million;
- We spend over \$2.5 million on local printing and advertising and over \$1.3 million on hotel nights and apartment rentals for guest artists;
- We attract nearly 388,000 regular patrons; and

- The return on the State's investment is consistently over 400%

In this moment of pause in live performance, certainty is at a premium. But what is certain is that every additional dollar spent on the Connecticut Flagship Producing Theaters at this pivotal moment will immediately result in increased payrolls, artistic and educational programs for youth and adults, and economic recovery for our communities.

Beyond our *economic* impact, we also have an essential *community* impact. All of our organizations have partnerships with schools and local organizations, offering a vast array of programs ranging from student matinees to library discussions on inclusivity to training teachers and young theater professionals. Collectively, **we serve over 40,000 students of all ages throughout the state—even as the pandemic rages, we have innovated and pivoted to digital delivery of our programs.**

Our impact can be exemplified through the words of Will Clifford, 7th Grade Team Leader, Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy in Windham, whose students participated in Goodspeed's Arts Education Collaboration:

“It [AEC] is a fantastic program that brings the power of live theater to many students who, whether it be lack of exposure or resources, would not be able to attend. For the vast majority of our students, this program is their first exposure to the magic and significance of live theater.

...

The entire day of the performance activities is truly a transformative experience for our students... Students are singing along, applauding wildly to their new favorite performer—all because of that shared experience, coupled with the intimate space of the Goodspeed makes for an unforgettable experience.

...

I had the good fortune of having attended a similar experience at Hartford Stage when I was in school and it changed my life. It turned me into a consumer and supporter of the arts from an early age- and my life has been richer for that experience. Showcasing the arts is a more important endeavor than ever given this climate of tight school budgets and closed curriculums, but the program infrastructure and implementation at the Goodspeed is a beacon of inspiration for public-private partnerships.”

Finally, our organizations have all received national recognition which has enhanced Connecticut's reputation. Most recently, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* won four Tony Awards, including Best Musical. This show premiered at Hartford Stage Company. Connecticut was also represented in New York with the musical *Anastasia* originally produced at Hartford Stage, *The Realistic Joneses*, which premiered at Yale Rep, and Long Wharf's production of *Satchmo at the Waldorf*. In addition, the Eugene O'Neill Theater received the National Medal of Arts from President Obama at the White House in 2016. Our productions have collectively won nearly 100 national awards, including 5 Tony Awards for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

We appreciate and applaud your continued investment in our future. However, level funding over the last few years has had a direct and negative measurable impact on the local economy, and immeasurable impact on the quality of life for the students and citizens of our state. As businesses and residents make decisions to relocate outside of Connecticut, it is essential that

organizations such as ours sustain the ability to fulfill our missions. In this pandemic, with at minimum months more of uncertainty leading into years of rebuilding, the state's support of our work is more important than it has ever been. **Please consider restoring additional funding to our appropriations.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

