



February 18, 2021

Testimony in support of Governor Lamont's Proposed FY22 & FY23 Budget for the TOURISM FUND

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony from Neighborhood Music School in New Haven in support of Governor Lamont's proposed budget for the Tourism Fund. We are so grateful to the Governor and to all of you for your consideration of this critical funding.

Each year NMS provides unparalleled arts education experiences to 2,500 students, ages 6 months to 90+ years, from 80 cities and towns throughout Connecticut. In addition to our nationally renowned music and dance programs, we also run an arts-based preschool, a groundbreaking middle school, and a variety of summer programs. Many people don't know that 25% of our students are adults, that we employ close to 150 professional teaching artists and that we provide financial aid to more than 500 students each year. Today, NMS is the largest nonprofit community arts organization in the state and one of the 10 largest in the country. We take great pride that our organization continues to make such a large impact in a state the size of CT.

Like so many, this pandemic has caused catastrophic damage to our institution. This year we are facing a \$1.5 million loss in earned revenue. We were forced to reduce our staff by almost 50 percent, and were challenged with finding ways to provide our students and families the social connection they so desperately need.

Despite these challenges, our dedicated faculty adapted their teaching to provide more than 100 hours of one-to-one music instruction every day online, and more than 40 dance classes per week. We kept our preschool and ATLAS middle school going. We shifted our Dance for Parkinson's and other classes for seniors to a virtual platform, helping combat isolation. We also found new ways to play music together - hosting virtual recitals, plays, competitions, and online concerts, reaching international audiences of more than 15,000 people.

For so many of our students, the one-on-one mentorship they receive from their teachers at NMS is one of the most critical relationships in their lives.

In the words of one of our high school seniors: *"When my entire life has been stripped away, if it wasn't for NMS, I simply couldn't get out of bed each day."*

In the words of an adult student with Parkinson's Disease: *"My movement classes keep me moving physically, but it is what they do for my mind and soul, and the connections I have been able to maintain during this time, that have been the real life preserver."*

The community that has been built within our walls inspires our students, ignites their minds and keeps them grounded. At a time when we all are looking to make sense of this challenging world, the arts are a vaccine for the mind and soul, protecting us from isolation and healing our wounded spirits.



As our state moves forward through these incredibly challenging times, we must revitalize our economy and strengthen our communities. A thriving arts and culture industry is critical to a strong economy, with profound effects on the tourism and hospitality sector, as well as employment of creative professionals and the personal well-being of Connecticut's residents.

Our support of the Governor's budget goes hand in hand with our support of H.B. 6119: renaming the fund from "Tourism" to the "Arts, Culture, and Tourism Fund"; ensuring that 40% of the fund goes towards arts and culture; and allocating 25% of the hotel occupancy tax revenues to this vitally important fund.

The funding we receive from the state is critical to our livelihood. Although it makes up less than 2% of our annual budget, 100% of this funding goes towards financial aid and scholarships and ensures we can focus on our core value of equity, providing vital arts education experiences to all those who seek and deserve them. If our funding is lost, our ability to serve the 500+ students on financial aid will be greatly compromised.

During a recent visit to NMS, Senator Chris Murphy reminded us all that:

"The downfall of every great civilization directly correlates with the decrease in funding for the arts."

We are all thrilled Governor Lamont is proposing to keep the great civilization of Connecticut alive by continuing to invest in the arts. Your support of the arts and culture in our state will provide stability now and sustainability for the future.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noah Bloom". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Noah Bloom
Executive Director