

**Public Testimony Presented to the Joint Committee on Appropriations Regarding H.B. 6439 -
State Appropriation for the National Theatre of the Deaf - Connecticut**

by

Dr. Harvey J. Corson, Board Chair
National Theatre of the Deaf - Connecticut
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Senator Osten & Representative Walker, Co-Chairs and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Dr. Harvey Corson, Board Chair of the Board of Trustees of the National Theatre of the Deaf - Connecticut (NTD-CT) and Chair of Education and Legislative Committee of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf (CAD). Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written testimony on H.B. 6439 on the State Budget for the Biennium FY 2022 and FY 2023 regarding the state appropriation under the Department of Economic and Community Development for the National Theatre of the Deaf – Connecticut.

The state funding support was integral to the strengthening and restructuring of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) with the addition of a strategic consultant to provide crucial upgrades to our infrastructure to prepare the organization for the future. The infrastructure changes included a new website, reviving our social media, and adding new technology to support communications.

Through our work with the strategic consultant and the pro bono law firm, we completed a two-year process of restructuring the NTD organization into 1) a National NTD and 2) forming a new organization in Connecticut called the National Theater of the Deaf - Connecticut, to focus on local, state and regional arts programs and services. The formation of the new NTD-CT organization went into effect on June 14, 2020. The National NTD moved to Washington, D.C. on September 1, 2020 to focus on national and international programming.

The COVID – 19 pandemic has negatively impacted the arts and cultural programs throughout the state, including NTD-CT. Our original plans utilizing the facilities at the American School for the Deaf during the Summer of 2020 had to be drastically changed. We had to cope with the transition from an in-person to an online format within three months before the start of the three NTD programs: Theatre Immersion Program (TIP) and Deaf Playwrights Convening, both of which were funded by the Beatrice Fox Auerbach Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and Deafenstein Virtual Workshop, which was funded by the State of Connecticut, DECD, Office of the Arts.

Despite these challenges, NTD-CT soldiered on! These three virtual programs were successful:

- 1) The 5th Theatre Immersion Program (TIP) for 27 Deaf high school students from different areas of the United States with workshops and theatre classes were conducted online through video classrooms from June 15 through July 25, 2020. The Deaf high school students in the TIP program learned about the artistic development process from beginning to end and engaged in a hands-on process putting together their performance.

Sixteen (16) expert Deaf theatre professionals from different areas of the United States provided lessons on the following areas: comedic acting, dramatic acting, American Sign Language (ASL) songs, dance, improvisation, ASL translation, auditioning, marketing, playwriting, technical theatre, and make-up. These skills were developed through theatrical exercises designed to stimulate creativity, imagination, and techniques. Every participant in the program had his/her opportunity to perform in the final performance.

- 2) Deaf Playwright Convening was a revival of a long-time program which had been offered several times in our history. This is a collaborative space for the creation and development of new original short plays written by Deaf playwrights. The convening aimed to develop short new plays and build a national play production pipeline by bringing together aspiring and talented Deaf and hard of hearing storytellers, primarily playwrights and theatre makers, from June through September 2020 for four months of periodic sharing, ideating, planning, and networking. The sessions were held online via video sessions & interactive messaging platforms.

There were seventeen (17) participants from different areas of the United States. The outcome was the production of 8 short new plays of 10 minutes in length and the theater makers developed a draft action plan and timeline that would sustain the theater pipeline.

- 3) Deafenstein Virtual Workshop was conducted during the month of June 2020 as part of the programming for the revival of our Mainstage program with the eventual *Deafenstein* production. This is our Deaf take on the horror classic, *Frankenstein*, with a modern twist! Written by Deaf playwright, Anna Wood-Jacobowitz, produced by Nikolya Sereda, NTD Producer, and performed by 9 artists.

Deaf students do not have an array of opportunities to gain experience in theatre arts and thousands of such programs for hearing students are not provided in an environment that is receptive to the Deaf community's language, culture, and norms.

With the State of Connecticut's continued financial support, Deaf and hard of hearing students, theatre professionals, and artists are afforded the opportunity to enhance their experience in the arts.

The NTD-CT Board will set programming goals for FY 2022 for state and regional arts initiatives, including the 6th Theatre Immersion Program for Deaf high school students and the inaugural launch of the Community Theatre.

Thank you for your continued belief in and support for our work and the impact that we have on Deaf theatre talent in the State of Connecticut and the United States. This work is treasured by the Deaf Community. Our Connecticut board looks forward to providing a variety of educational, enlightening, and entertaining theatrical experiences to the low-incidence population, known as the Deaf community, to be shared with the larger community in Connecticut.