

Testimony for Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes

From: Cynthia Clair, Executive Director, Arts Council of Greater New Haven

Re: Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism

Date: April 27, 2009

As the Executive Director of a local arts agency serving more than 120 arts organizations and 650 individual artists, I am most concerned about Governor Rell's proposed consolidation of the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism into the Department of Community and Economic Development.

It was just a few years ago, when the then Connecticut Commission on the Arts was merged into the current agency, combining the arts, tourism, history, and film. These four entities share some common constituencies and have missions which are strategically aligned. The merger made sense, particularly for arts and tourism entities who work closely together to attract visitors to the state's cultural institutions and arts events.

Now, the proposed consolidation would bury Culture and Tourism in DECD. I'm concerned that a once autonomous agency would succumb to additional levels of bureaucracy, making for a cumbersome grant making process. Currently arts grants are decided through a panel process, with knowledgeable arts professionals carefully reviewing and discussing grant proposals. While the process may not be perfect, it is fair and equitable, guided not by government bureaucrats but by citizens, who understand the need for both quality programs and those which are accessible to all members of a community. As a result Commission grants are made to a wide variety of organizations throughout the state □ from large cultural institutions to small community organizations, for educational programs, performances and exhibits, which support arts participation and celebrate our cultural heritage.

Connecticut currently receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts through a State Arts Partnership Agreement with the NEA. Currently, CCT receives \$749,000.00, a critical piece of funding which benefits arts constituents. This funding could be seriously jeopardized by the proposed consolidation.

In order to comply with NEA regulations, a state arts agency, "*must have its own board, council, or commission;*" and "*have completed a comprehensive planning process, including public meetings on its state plan, and compiled a list of responses to recommendations from those meetings.*" The NEA clearly expects states to support autonomous arts agencies, which make informed decisions guiding the cultural life of the state. Additionally, a portion of the \$50 million in federal arts stimulus dollars are being granted to the states. The Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism will play a critical role in redistributing Connecticut's small, but important share of \$300,000. We cannot jeopardize our share of federal funds.

Connecticut needs and deserves an agency which promotes a meaningful role for arts and culture in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Thank you.

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