

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CULTURAL COALITION

February 16, 2017

Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, Senator Cathy Osten, Senator Paul Formica, and Representative Toni Walker

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition and our more than 480 partners, I am pleased to submit this testimony urging the restoration of funding for the Connecticut Humanities Council Inc. within the budget of the Department of Economic and Community Development.

The Cultural Coalition represents a diverse cross section of Southeastern Connecticut's creative economy, including cultural attractions, museums, libraries, galleries, graphic artists, creative businesses, and individual artists.

Our partners also include forty historical societies, historic sites, and heritage organizations and businesses representing 8% of our total partners.

Connecticut Humanities provides vital programs and services across the state to hundreds of organizations. Many of our partners have directly benefitted from those programs, including grants and support for lectures and exhibits. Expertise and institutional knowledge provided by Connecticut Humanities staff to our organization through collaboration and participation in our events and activities has been invaluable.

One of Connecticut Humanities programs, StEPs-CT, has been extremely valuable to a number of our partners in Southeastern Connecticut. Based on a national curriculum model, StEPs-CT, "Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations," is a 26-week commitment that helps local museums and historical societies build professionalism and ensure their programs and collections remain vibrant community resources through this two-year program.

Organizations from Southeastern Connecticut had the following to say about the benefits and impact of participating in Connecticut Humanities' StEPs program:

- "Participation in the StEPs-CT program has been an invaluable opportunity for East Lyme's Smith-Harris House. StEPs-CT provided connections to state resources for small museums like our site, networking among colleagues to creatively trouble-shoot challenges, opportunities for professional development for an almost all-volunteer staff, and access to a qualified peer mentor to advise and educate our governing organizations on best-standards practices." – Smith-Harris House in East Lyme
- "The StEPs program had a rejuvenating effect on the Society of the Founders of Norwich/Leffingwell House Museum. It enabled us to 1-review our museum and what we can offer to the public, 2-how we "do business", 3-readjust our manner of presentation and the content of our exhibitions. As a result of the StEPs program our visitation has increased 50% over the past several years and has revitalized the museum within the community and State." – Society of the Founders of Norwich/Leffingwell House Museum in Norwich

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- Two librarians from the Groton Public Library participated in StEPs- from 2015 through 2017 with funding provided by CT Humanities. The training coincided with the expansion of both the Library's local history collection and local history room and helped ensure that funding provided through a State Library Public Library Construction Grant was spent effectively. – Groton Public Library, Groton
- This has been a great learning and educational experience for my volunteers, my board, and myself. They had grant funds in both years for those who participated in the StEPs program, which helped with getting to the next level. Without this funding the smaller organizations wouldn't be able to achieve that goal." – Avery Memorial Association in Groton

And, about Connecticut Humanities in general:

- "In these two short years, Connecticut Humanities has made it possible to bring a Pulitzer-prize winning author on Slavery and the War of 1812 to a local and regional audience in Stonington; provided the professional training and expertise, as well as the financial underwriting, for a strategic plan for the Stonington Historical Society; the professional guidance and peer networking provided by the StEPS-CT program. As a small organization, this program has raised the bar through the study and bench-marking of professional standards in six areas, including *Mission, Vision, and Governance, Collections, Audience, Management, Historic Structures & Landscapes, and Interpretation*. We are better as an organization with the support of Connecticut Humanities and more poised to serve our communities, both locally and regionally. – Stonington Historical Society in Stonington

Delivering on its mission statement, "Connecticut Humanities encourages curiosity, understanding and critical thinking, providing leadership through grants, partnerships and collaborative programs." The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition strongly encourages the restoration of funding to Connecticut Humanities to continue the important work being done for history organizations and the preservation of history in Southeastern CT and across the state.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Wendy Bury
Executive Director