Correspondence 03

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July 25, 1994

Dear Senator:

I am writing once again on behalf of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the American theatre with a membership of more than 320 nonprofit professional theatres across the United States. I respectfully urge you to support Senator James Jeffords's amendment to restore the 5 percent reduction in NEA funding and to vote against expected weakening amendments to the NEA appropriation in the FY 1995 Interior Appropriations Bill.

The 5 percent cut to the FY 95 NEA budget was achieved by disproportionately large reductions in three NEA programs: Theatre, Visual Arts, and Presenting and Commissioning, as well as a cut in Challenge and Treasury funds. The cut to the Theatre program -- a staggering 42 percent -- represents $3.1 million, and would virtually cripple the program. Each year, the Theatre program loses funding, either through agency-wide Congressional budget cuts, formulaic redistribution of funds to state arts agencies, or, at the very least, inflationary losses resulting from flat budgets. Indeed, the NEA Theatre program's budget is already millions of dollars less than it was in the early 1980's. An additional dollar loss of this magnitude would devastate the field.

Nonprofit theatres across the country -- including in your state -- continue to produce new plays and musicals, plays for young audiences, and American and international classics for an audience of more than 25 million people each year. They offer outreach activities and a wide variety of educational programs designed to make theatre accessible to all Americans, especially young people, and they tour productions to underserved communities. While battling a less than friendly economic climate in recent years, the American theatre has continued to flourish. The NEA has played a large role in the development of these institutions -- almost every Pulitzer Prize-winning play of the past 20 years originated in an NEA-funded theatre, for example -- and has helped shape an industry that generates tens of thousands of jobs, attracts local tourism, and returns millions of dollars back into their communities.

A strong NEA is essential to our nation's theatres. I encourage you to actively support Senator Jeffords in his attempt to restore these devastating cuts to the Theatre program and other programs, and to speak and vote against any weakening amendments. These amendments are expected to contain: content restrictions, which have been addressed by the Senate in recent years; increased budget cuts or further changes in the distribution of funding which would result in even fewer theatres and other cultural institutions receiving this essential federal funding and support; and changes in NEA procedures, which would be more appropriately addressed in the upcoming NEA reauthorization.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Zeisler
Executive Director