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Community Arts Partnership Act: Correspondence (1994): Correspondence 26

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August 8, 1994

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

On behalf of America's 100 professional nonprofit opera companies, we write to thank you for your support of the Cultural Partnerships for At-Risk Children and Youth program in the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act (ESEA, S. 1513). However, we are deeply concerned about the program's "trigger mechanism" which would defund the initiative unless the NEA, NEH, and the IMS receive FY95 funding at their FY94 levels.

As you know, the House approved a 2% cut to the NEA's FY95 appropriation, and the Senate approved a 5% cut. With the trigger mechanism in place, these proposed reductions in the Endowment's budget could eliminate the Cultural Partnerships program before it even has a chance. Therefore, we urge you to eliminate the trigger mechanism during conference.

The Cultural Partnerships for At-Risk Children and Youth would encourage local school systems and community cultural organizations to form creative partnerships that provide innovative, positive learning experiences. Through demonstration grants, the initiative would use the power of art to improve the educational performance of at-risk children and youth and prepare them for productive adult lives.

Opera companies nationwide understand the value of involving children and youth in the artistic experience. Over 93% of opera companies in our membership maintain unique, imaginative, and effective educational programs. For instance, Los Angeles Music Center Opera works with children in prisons and shelters to create original music-theater pieces about their experiences. Cleveland Opera assists children with developmental disabilities in collaborating on musical projects with their colleagues in regular classrooms. Seattle Opera reaches out to homeless kids in addition to providing rich educational experiences to children in classrooms throughout Washington State.

These programs and many more like them repeatedly demonstrate that the arts powerfully promote learning and help instill self-esteem and self-confidence. These are qualities that our country needs more than ever.

Please let us know how we can assist you in working with you and your staff to ensure the viability of the Cultural Partnerships for At-Risk Children and Youth.

Sincerely,

Marc A. Scorsca
Chief Executive Officer

Laura J. Young
Public Affairs Director