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## National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): News Article 23

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# Theater Grant Recommended By Robinson

Journal 6/5/66

William P. Robinson Jr., state commissioner of education, will recommend that federal authorities approve a \$329,024 education grant for the Providence School Department that is the key to bringing Rhode Island high school students a free repertory theater this fall.

Breaking precedent by making public his recommendation, the commissioner said this weekend he will act favorably on the Providence bid and will "give it a high priority."

"If Providence is fortunate enough to be selected for this enterprise, we should certainly lend every assistance to the application, particularly since it involves the entire state," Mr. Robinson said. "This is the kind of thing Rhode Island desperately needs, and needs more of," he remarked.

The Providence application made public last week, represents the final step in a complex and nearly year-long effort to bring to Providence one of three planned repertory theaters, designed for high school

Continued on Page 14, Col. 1

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Continued From Page One

students and financed with federal funds.

None of the three cities has officially been designated or received federal funds yet. It is considered a virtual certainty, however, that Providence will be one of them. Washington authorities report that New Orleans also is seeking federal funds.

The Providence application for the \$329,024 grant is aimed at Title III of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. One of the act's five parts, Title III provides federal grants for local school projects considered to be experimental and innovative.

Mr. Robinson said the state Department of Education recommends approval or disapproval of an application. The U.S. Office of Education makes the final decision in all cases, he said.

"Conceivably a state department of education could recommend disapproval of a project, but it's not likely," Mr. Robinson said.

He said the department will have to file its recommendations on the Providence application, and on 21 others submitted by Rhode Island cities and towns for aid under Title III, by June 20. Federal action is expected in late July.

The commissioner conceded that other experimental school programs for which federal aid is being sought might be slowed somewhat by the priority given to the theater.

"When one project is recommended highly and another not so highly, the second one is bound to suffer," he said. "But it is our responsibility to recommend a project highly if it meets the necessary criteria."

Mr. Robinson declined to say, however, which projects might encounter delays as a result of the theater plan.

Significantly, the application contains commitments from two federal agencies for a total of more than \$400,000 toward the Providence theatre's first year of operation. The agencies are the Office of Education and the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities.

## Home Guarantee

The application also contains a guarantee from the Foundation for Repertory Theater of Rhode Island, operator of the Trinity Square Playhouse, to provide a rent-free, renovated home for the repertory theatre. The foundation recommends that the home be the Rhode Island School of Design Auditorium and estimates the value of its guarantee at \$30,000 to \$40,000.

Thus, the key money now is the \$329,204 sought by the Providence School Department, since it represents the final block of funds necessary to operate the planned theatre through its first year in Providence. The total cost of the first year is estimated at \$785,000.

Behind the Providence application is a complicated effort that goes back at least to last August. It is an effort aimed at making Providence one of the three cities to be selected by Washington authorities as homes for the new repertory theatres.

Based on interviews in Providence and Washington last week, these points about that effort now seem clear:

1. Sen. Claiborne Pell and Rep. John E. Fogarty have played key roles, along with Providence School Supt. Charles A. O'Connor Jr. Mr. Pell and Mr. Fogarty are regarded as having been instrumental in bringing Providence to the attention of Washington authorities, as a prime city in the theatre plans. Mr. O'Connor coordinated action in Rhode Island. He also sought and obtained the approval of school superintendents throughout the state in order to present a plan for all Rhode Island high school students. Finally, he drafted the Title III application and filed it.

2. Though federal authorities have not yet designated Providence as a theater site or selected a theater company to run the program, Providence seems certain to be selected and the Trinity Square Playhouse company reportedly is nearly assured of being named to run the Providence program.

3. Whether the repertory company that stages free day-

time plays for high school students also performs at night for adult audiences, at a charge, will be solely up to the company itself. Moreover, the proceeds of evening performances will go to the company, according to Mr. O'Connor. Thus, if the Trinity company is selected, it conceivably could regain part of its \$30,000 to \$40,000 contribution through evening performances. According to Milt Stanzler, chairman of Trinity's Foundation of Repertory Theater of Rhode Island, Trinity's contribution is firm and was not made "with any consideration of box office receipts."

4. According to Mr. O'Connor, it will not be finally certain whether the repertory company will use the Rhode Island School of Design auditorium or the downtown Albee theater until Providence's grant is approved. The application recommends the School of Design auditorium. But federal authorities conceivably could ask that the Albee be used, the superintendent added.

5. If the School of Design Auditorium is used, the program will bring four free performances to each of the 41,000 high school students in the state in the coming school year. If the larger Albee is used, the program will be geared to the 83,000 youngsters in both junior high school and high school, according to Mr. O'Connor; however, the program will cost an estimated \$229,000 more in the Albee than in the School of Design Auditorium. The Providence application, Mr. O'Connor said, is keyed to high school students only, based on the recommendation by the Trinity foundation that the smaller School of Design Auditorium be used.