7-25-1994

Correspondence 14

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Dear Senator:

The National Association of Artists' Organizations represents over 350 artists' organizations across the country who serve the American public by presenting contemporary visual and performing arts as well as educational programs. All of our member organizations join together with our 400 individual members to urge you to support Senator James Jeffords' amendment to restore the proposed 5% reduction to the National Endowment for the Arts' funding in the FY 95 Interior Appropriations bill. We also request that you oppose any negative amendments that will hurt an agency that serves communities of children and adults all across the country.

The proposed $8.5 million cut was achieved by reducing the appropriation to three specific programs at the NEA: Theater (42% cut); Visual Arts (41.7% cut) and Presenting and Commissioning (40.5% cut). If the proposed appropriation passes, the Challenge Program and the treasury funds which require matching money from nonfederal sources will also be cut by $1.5 million. These cuts will be devastating to an agency that has lost 46% of its purchasing power in current dollars since FY 91. The NEA was cut $4 million last year, leaving the agency with a budget of only $170,229 million with which to fund the preservation and development of our culture.

It is anticipated that there will be at least three negative amendments proposed during the debate. All three strike at the heart of the mission of the NEA by imposing content restrictions, more cuts or changes in the distribution formulas of NEA funds to the states, or unwieldy procedural changes to the grant making process. These amendments are inappropriate, especially in light of the restrictions and formulas currently in NEA's authorizing legislation. If the Senate chooses to re-examine these issues, the upcoming re-authorization of the NEA will provide an opportunity to do so. We are particularly concerned about unconstitutional content restrictions and redistributions of funds that would essentially eliminate the federal role in arts support.

Art organizations are actively working to address problems in our society and re-build America. They are often responsible for the economic redevelopment of abandoned communities, and for working with troubled youth who have no other alternative except gangs or drugs. Individual artists throughout the country also rely on the NEA's support to create the work that represents our national identity both abroad and at home. Artists are often our best ambassadors, whether it is to a troubled school or another country. Working artists are able to reach people and communicate in a way that crosses cultural and economic barriers. We need to maintain the programs that allow them to continue their work, which has the capacity to heal the nation.

We urge you to vote yes in support of Senator Jeffords' amendment and oppose any content restrictions or funding cuts to the agency. The NEA is critical to the health of the arts, and the arts are critical to the health of this nation.

Sincerely,

Helen M. Brunner
Executive Director

Holly Block
President