
Channing Gray

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_81

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_81/66
Arts council is accused of secret grants decisions

By CHANNING GRAY
Journal-Bulletin Arts Writer

PROVIDENCE — A member of the state Council on the Arts has charged the agency's chairman, Daniel Lecht, with "appalling abuses of power" and contends that the council holds secret meetings and violates its own guidelines for awarding grant money.

Mary Gammino-Antaya, a member of the council for two years, says she is so dismayed by council activities and especially Lecht's behavior that she has decided to resign, spelling out her reasons in a letter to Governor Garrahy, dated April 13.

Mrs. Gammino-Antaya said she decided to resign last week after council members convened privately at the Brown University Faculty Club to decide how to hand out up to $30,000 that would revert to the state if not spent by the end of the fiscal year.

Some of that money, she said, is intended for arts groups with direct ties to council members.

TWO MONTHS AGO, the arts council — accused of violating the state's Open Meetings Law — assured the attorney general's office it never again would discuss the awarding of grants in private.

The Faculty Club luncheon, held last Tuesday, violated "both the spirit and intent" of that promise, she wrote.

In her letter to the governor, Mrs. Gammino-Antaya wrote that Lecht said the private meeting "was to be called a luncheon for friends." He also explained how the council would be able to camou-

Turn to COUNCIL, Page A-12
Council

Continued from Page One
flag the decisions it made privately, she said.

He told the council members that when they convened Thursday at their
next public meeting, there would be "no discussion, but that we
would vote for a budget that incorporated the funds -- the allo-
cations themselves would not be mentioned by name," the letter
said.

Lecht declined to comment on
Mrs. Gammino-Antaya’s charges.

Elaborating on her letter, Mrs.
Gammino-Antaya said that at the
luncheon Lecht presented a list of
six or seven arts groups that he
thought should share the extra
money. The council made a few
adjustments and approved the list,
she said.

The decisions made at the private
luncheon came without "any public
notification, any hearing, any pro-
fessional panel review or any-com-
petition, despite our publicly adopt-
ed grant guidelines," she wrote to
the governor.

She said one of the proposed
recipients is Rites and Reason,
Brown University’s black theater
company, whose director, George
Bass, is a longtime council member.
Bass was not at the luncheon, she
said.

Another proposed recipient is the
Westerly Center for the Arts, she
said. Anne Utter, a member of the
board at the center, is also a council
member. She was not at the meet-
ing either, according to Mrs.
Gammino-Antaya.

Other groups on the list, said
Mrs. Gammino-Antaya, included
the Providence Opera Theater, the
Rhode Island Historical Society,
Concerts on the Island, the Chil-
dren’s Museum in Pawtucket and
the New England Foundation for
the Arts, in Cambridge, Mass.

Another council member who
attended the luncheon, Ernest Fal-
ciglia, viewed it as "an informa-
tional meeting" to discuss arts
groups that might get surplus
funds.

But he said he was not aware any
final decisions were made, and he
added that he wasn’t even certain
about the amount of money at
stake.

"I can defend the essence of it," he
said Falciglia of the meeting. "I feel
it’s public money and if there are
groups that deserve more money it
is incumbent upon us to give it to
them."

The council has 12 members, all
appointed by the governor. In the
current fiscal year, it has received
about $390,000 from the state and
more than $400,000 from the fed-
eral government.

This year it has given about
$360,000 to a broad spectrum of
arts groups; from Trinity Square
Repertory Company and the Rhode
Island Philharmonic to small
groups such as the Puppet Work-
shop and Looking Glass Theater.

According to Mrs. Gammino-
Antaya, the council members at the
luncheon, besides herself, Lecht
and Falciglia, were Phyllis
Stanzler, Dorothy Licht, Mahler
Ryder, Norma Merolla and Roberta
Holland.

Those not attending, in addition
to Bass and Mrs. Utter, were Marjo-
rie Lee and former state Sen. Step-
pher Fortunato.

This is not the first time Mrs.
Gammino-Antaya has been highly
critical of Lecht. In February, 1982,
she publicly blasted him for firing
Diane Disney, the council director,
without a formal board vote. Be-
cause only some members were
pollied by phone, she called it the
"Saturday night massacre."

In her letter to the governor, she
mentioned, Lecht’s efforts to get
legislation passed that would ex-
tend his term as chairman, give him
the authority to dismiss council
members and reduce the quorum.
These efforts, she wrote, were an
"appalling abuse of power."

"I can no longer tolerate seeing
good people maligned, the arts
deemed and your judgment ridi-
culed," she wrote Garrity.