

**Written Testimony in Support of FY08 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by the Hon. David N. Cicilline

Mayor of Providence, Rhode Island

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies

“Role of the Arts in Creativity and Innovation”

March 13, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to testify before you today. My name is David Cicilline and I am Mayor of the City of Providence, Rhode Island. It is a great pleasure to be here on Arts Advocacy Day - which is organized by Americans for the Arts on behalf of 93 national co-sponsoring organizations - including the United States Conference of Mayors. On behalf of the City of Providence and our nation's mayors, I am here to ask the Subcommittee to approve a budget of \$176 million for the National Endowment for the Arts and to recognize the profound impact the arts have upon the quality of life of our residents and our communities.

As mayor, I am responsible for the vitality of my city and the well-being of its residents. That means keeping my city economically viable, by maintaining and increasing businesses and jobs, and ensuring a strong quality of life for its residents. It also means ensuring that Providence is a safe, healthy and appealing city in which to live and visit. Innovation and creativity are key characteristics to achieve those results, and the arts are key components of them.

Vision for Arts and Culture in Providence

Art holds the power to create a shared cultural language, to connect communities and to transform the urban environment. Our vibrant arts and cultural community is essential to the health and well being of our residents, and it guarantees a quality of place that makes our city uniquely Providence. From classical arts institutions to organizations based in our diverse neighborhoods, Providence's artists and cultural organizations continually develop new vantage points from which to understand our world.

Providence is known nationally and internationally as an extraordinary cultural destination. In September 2003, the *New York Times* described Providence as "a Mecca for Tourism and the Arts." It is my goal to harness that power to further transform Providence. By providing centralized support for our arts economy and forging cultural connections across neighborhood boundaries, we will become even more than the sum of our parts.

The Providence of 1790 was the city whose investors would launch the career of Samuel Slater, an innovator who came to America with nothing but a dream to start his own business. The Industrial Revolution that they launched powered our City for a century and a half, and helped build America into the world's preeminent economic power.

Today, this is a New Providence. We are home to institutions that teach the world's most creative minds how to turn ideas into life-changing solutions. We are a city that values creative excellence among its most critical assets. We are inventors, creators, innovators and achievers. Best of all, our identity is a perfect fit for the challenges of the 21st Century.

Our city is charged with harnessing the economic and social energy that our arts community contributes to civic life. Historically, the city's economy has relied upon artisans, designers, and the creative industries to set it apart from others in the northeast. This fact was recognized in the 19th Century and led to the establishment of the Rhode Island School of Design, the nation's top art and design school.

Today the city's arts economy contains some of the highest quality agencies in the region. Providence arts organizations and artists lead the way in implementing high quality programs for youth engagement, job training, neighborhood development and social change.

Arts and Culture: Economic Development, Tourism and Revitalizations

Over the past few years, I have been working to build the capacity of the arts to contribute to the economy and to community revitalization. Perhaps, most important, I formed a new Department of Art, Culture, and Tourism, and gave it a prominent place in my cabinet. The heightened visibility of our local arts agency within city government has given it prestige and clout. The process of creating the new department included: meetings with local stakeholders, community forums, and engagement with city staff. I also charged the Providence/Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau and Providence Tourism Council with developing a collaborative working relationship and joint marketing effort.

As evidenced by the *Creative Industries* report from Americans for the Arts, Providence is home to 466 arts-related businesses employing 3,606 people. These arts-centric businesses play an important role in building and sustaining economic vibrancy. They provide jobs, generate local spending and additional revenue streams, and are a cornerstone of tourism and economic development. Over the past ten years, the Providence arts and cultural scene has burgeoned. The city's arts organizations and artists have been leaders in changing the face of Providence. Today, the city boasts an arts economy that is the envy of the region, with more arts organizations and artists per capita than in any other New England city.

For example, Trinity Repertory Company – which has been a recipient of NEA funding – has offered *Project Discovery*, a 40 year-program enriching the lives of thousands of young people by offering opportunities to attend live theatre, and allowing for the production of new work. Festival Ballet, and Rhode Island Philharmonic are also arts and culture organizations on upward trajectories, well recognized by national publications and foundations. These organizations lead the way in our cultural tourism initiatives and within our cultural economy. The quality of their artistic product is high and draws visitors from throughout the region.

The Providence Performing Arts Center has been restored to its original beauty, and is programmed with nationally touring shows. It now serves as a cultural center for the city. Trinity Repertory Company regularly receives NEA funding and celebrates its native son, Senator Claiborne Pell, and his legacy to the National Endowment for the Arts in an annual awards dinner. Combined, these organizations draw more than two million visitors to the city each year.

The Veterans Memorial Auditorium Arts & Cultural Center has reinvented itself, and is contributing to the revitalization of a long-ignored corner of downtown. Waterfire, a public art installation in our city's Waterplace Park & RiverWalk, has captivated millions and reawakened the city's spirit. The Rhode Island School of Design Museum will expand to its fullest potential with a new wing opening in 2008.

The arts have also been a pioneer in reviving our city downtown streets. Funded, in part, through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, a block of downtown buildings has been revitalized into a thriving arts and cultural center for emerging artists; it formerly sat in a crime-ridden state of neglect and decay. Additionally, the Dreyfuss Hotel is being renovated to become the home and work space for more than 100 artists and musicians.

We, also use NEA grants to bolster our arts programs in the city. Providence Black Repertory Company - celebrating its 10th anniversary this year - is a symbol of my administration's ability to embrace our rich and diverse culture. It has received NEA funding for the past four years, which has allowed the theatre to grow artistically and programmatically. The Providence Black Repertory Company plays a key role in our arts & entertainment district, diversifying programming in our downtown core and serving as a lead player in our destination festival efforts. Additionally, it allows the residents of my city's neighborhoods to become a part of our downtown's success.

Arts Programs in Providence - Supported by the NEA

Beyond the examples cited above, Community MusicWorks, New Urban Arts, and the Carriage House - which are all NEA grantees - give young people opportunities for inspiration and hope in after school programs. Community MusicWorks is a nationally recognized model, founded in 1997 on the vision that music and musicians have an important role to play in creating and transforming communities. Built around the permanent residency of the Providence String Quartet, its artists live, teach, and perform in an urban city neighborhood. It offers free lessons, mentorships, performances and community-building events for entire families. The quartet resides in a storefront in the West End of Providence, and tours nationally in the summer months. During the rest of the year, it mentors to young, aspiring musicians in the urban neighborhood.

The Carriage House and Everett Dance Theatre teach underserved youth video production, dance, spoken word and theatre. Other culturally based organizations such as the Latin American Film Festival also receive funding from NEA. FirstWorks Prov is another organization that has transformed itself, with NEA support, presenting the highest quality artists in their genres, and reaching deeply into the community through workshops, educational activities and local artist support. I am proud the City of Providence and the NEA have been funding partners in nurturing FirstWorks Prov.

This weekend, The Providence Singers will culminate their American Masterpieces' choral event. The organization was one of only six across the country that received this prestigious honor from the NEA.

Mayors' Institute on City Design

This year marks the 21st anniversary of the Mayors Institute on City Design, a program of the United States Conference of Mayors, the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Architectural Foundation. The Mayors Institute on City Design brings together mayors, architects and city designers to implement a vision for their cities in the best possible way. This incredible program, co-sponsored by the NEA and led by the great, visionary mayor of Charleston, South Carolina, Joe Riley, has found a way to reconnect cities to their waterfronts, highways, new civic buildings and tree-lined boulevards. It is creating a better living environment for its residents, or in the case of disaster-hit areas, helping to rebuild communities.

The Mayors' Institute on City Design is based on one simple premise: that in American cities, design matters. More precisely, physical design is a fundamental tool mayors can wield to positively affect the social well-being and economic vitality of their cities. I was delighted to be a participant of this Institute, from my earliest days as Mayor of Providence.

The successful structure of the Institute has remained the same since its inception: eight mayors and eight designers are locked in a room for two- and a half days (with no media involvement) to talk about design. Each mayor brings his or her city's most critical urban design issue to discuss. Following the case-study method, general principles evolve out of these eight specific problems.

Participating mayors leave with innovative and practical ideas on how to improve their city's landscape, for the benefit of all of its residents. Sacramento learned how to create a new planning requirement, so large buildings couldn't be built directly in front of the state capitol of California. Fort Worth learned how to create a grand boulevard in the place of a torn-down overpass, and then to reorient the city toward its waterfront. In the City of Miami Beach, local design preservation has been credited with a dramatic economic turnaround. Subsequent to Hurricane Katrina, the Institute met several times in Gulf Coast communities to tackle the problems of rebuilding, in the wake of near-total devastation.

The Institute has graduated more than 625 mayors. Many of them still serve; half a dozen more are either in Congress or in a governor's mansion. Mayors from across the country are grateful for the accomplishments and opportunities that have flourished from the Mayor's Institute on City Design over the past two decades, none of which could have happened without the support of the NEA.

As Mayor Joseph Riley so eloquently said, "a decision about the physical design of a city will influence the city and its people for generations."

United States Conference of Mayors National Arts Resolutions

As mentioned at the outset, I am here today representing not only my city but also the interests of cities nationwide. Each year for the past twelve years, the United States Conference of Mayors has unanimously adopted policy resolutions on the arts, steadfastly calling for Congress to increase and fully restore NEA funding. We recognize this increase would help us build our communities, design our cities and dramatically spur our economies. It would contribute enormously to the quality of life. It would encourage city councils, and foundations and corporations, to increase their own contributions. Hundreds of mayors across the nation have, in turn, promulgated these resolutions within their own cities. Today, I am here to speak for them.

No doubt, all of you - as members of the Subcommittee- have seen the importance of the arts within your own communities, both large and small and throughout your districts. I thank you, once again, for this proud honor to appear before you today - on Arts Advocacy Day - and I welcome any questions you might have.

Thank you.