

**Testimony Submitted for the Record to the U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and Labor at the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and  
Communities Hearing entitled *“The National Endowment for the Humanities and the  
National Endowment for the Arts: Overview of Programs and National Impact”***

**By Jeanne H. Schmedlen, Board Member and former Chair, Pennsylvania  
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Council on the Arts**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

This past March, modern philosopher Daniel Pink delivered the Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy at the Kennedy Center. He spoke of the future and society’s reliance shifting from the “left to the right” side of the brain, replacing the supposed “left” rational side with creativity and innovation driven by the right side of the brain. He said this shift is absolutely required if the United States of America wants to continue to lead in our new global economy. Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO of Americans for the Arts said in recent testimony that “art is a pillar of creativity and innovation.” So are the humanities. Together they have become our keystone for the future, in our economy, in education in enlightenment. And both inspire and connect citizens of all ages and backgrounds across the country and around the world, from the large, metropolitan cities to the smallest borough in Pennsylvania.

I am Jeanne Schmedlen, Director of Special Projects and Chief of Protocol for the Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Dennis M. O’Brien. Previously, I held senior staff positions with Speakers John Perzel and Matthew Ryan, First Lady Ellen Casey and Governor Dick Thornburgh. I know the Commonwealth well, I am a lifelong supporter of the arts and humanities and I greatly value the contributions of the National Endowments to the well-being of Pennsylvania over the past forty-plus years. The endowments elevate, educate and stimulate like no other government agencies and they do this through direct grants and, more importantly, through support of their state counterparts. Today I will talk about how our partnerships with the endowments allow us to reach some of whom I consider underserved populations in Pennsylvania – those living in the vast region between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and in our northern and southern tiers.

As former chair of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC), I know the value of the state councils in extending the reach of the humanities to rural populations. All over the country, councils use their funding from the NEH’s Federal-State Partnership to do so. And this means more than putting dots on a map: it means starting and developing relationships that can last over many years, and building the capacity of rural organizations to do high quality programming, connect better to their surrounding communities and expand public participation in the humanities. This expansion sometimes means reaching individuals with college degrees who lack opportunities available elsewhere; at other times, it means reaching individuals who are experiencing

what it means to have a good conversation on an important topic, sparked by reading a book, watching a film, walking through an exhibition or enjoying a performance.

In Pennsylvania, I have seen the PHC devote enormous staff effort, funded largely by the NEH, to reach into every county in the Commonwealth, and there are 67. And I have seen rural successes celebrated and treasured as achievements that the council wants to build upon with increased funding. Just last December, in making decisions on grants, we were delighted that the application judged to be the highest quality was from the Northern Tier Cultural Alliance for “*2008: The Year of the Barn*,” for a project on the importance of agriculture in the heritage and culture of Pennsylvania’s north country.

During the 1990s I saw the council extend its reach into rural areas by making a strong commitment to vibrant programming in Pennsylvania history – appealing to the strong sense of place felt in every part of the Commonwealth. We have shaped our speakers bureau, *Commonwealth Speakers*, to be strongest in presentations rooted in state heritage and the arts. We have succeeded in making this a program that produces events in almost every county almost every year. Already in 2008 we have scheduled 173 events across the state, more than 40%, in rural counties

One of our speakers, Paul Ferhnbach, gives a presentation on “Bagpipes: A Historical Perspective.” When almost 60 people showed up for his program at the Brown Memorial Library in remote Cameron County, he told us: “As always, rural areas are starving for more cultural programs. An audience such as this was rather large for such a small community -- which indicates this need.”

Last year, Paul presented at the Mengle Memorial Library in Jefferson County. Following the program, librarian Darlene Marshall wrote: “This was the greatest participation for a public adult program. Greater community support and appreciation! We have found that our community responds well to music history programs, and we would enjoy more of these speakers featured.”

In Huntingdon County, at Greenwood Furnace State Park, educator Paul Fagley told us: “Despite our close proximity to the Pennsylvania State University, the local population tends not to take advantage of cultural programming available in various venues at the university or in State College. Therefore, the local population is underserved by culturally enriching programs. While some of this can be attributed to the cost to attend these programs, much can be attributed to attitudes that prevail with respect to stereotypes concerning ‘culturally enriching’ programs. By providing free humanities speakers, we can target this audience in a way that is interesting to them, to show that humanities programs are not ‘elitist’ or ‘highbrow.’”

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Congressional district, where I live, which includes Adams, Cumberland, and York counties, I know that there has been an abundance of *Commonwealth Speaker* presentations. In the two-year program period of 2006-2007, there were 31. The PHC also has forged a splendid partnership with the General Assembly and annually host the Speaker’s Millennium Lecture, just across the river from Cumberland County. Most of

our audience for the free public lecture by prominent historians, academics and authors in the House Chamber come from the 19<sup>th</sup> district and our Pennsylvania Cable Network sends the lecture far and wide across the state, reaching millions more. We've hosted John Updike and David McCullough for these lectures, among others.

In addition to these programs, the council has systematically promoted humanities programming to county historical societies in rural counties and has achieved amazing results there. With Jefferson County Historical Society, the council began with a grant of \$579 in 1995 for a program commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, linking Jefferson County to a statewide project in women's history. Since that time we have awarded over \$30 thousand dollars for 13 projects, and have played a role in building the organization's ability to conduct programming on the people of Jefferson County, variously embracing Native American history, family histories, the heyday of the timber industry, the Depression, World War II and the New Deal. Empowered by the council's support, the society also achieved a major direct grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

With the Warren County Historical Society, the council began with a decade of support for events through Commonwealth Speakers, from 1991 to 2001, before seeing its first small grant activity in 2001. By 2005 the society was producing, with a \$10,000 grant, "The Sugar Grove Convention," a historical festival featuring presentations by interpreters of the social and political movements of anti-slavery, women's rights, and temperance, attended by well over 3,000 people. Now it is collaborating on a national public television project entitled "Country Lawyer" on native son Robert H. Jackson, Chief Prosecutor of the Nazi war criminals at Nuremburg, U.S. Attorney General and Supreme Court Justice, and organizing local events on Jackson's legacy in international criminal law.

The PHC also formed a partnership with the state arts council with the purpose of expanding arts-related programming into rural areas. The council linked art to heritage in order to interest non-traditional audiences more likely to attend history programs than arts programs. This had strong appeal in rural regions. As the humanities and arts partnership grew, by 2006-2007, between 24 and 30 percent of the grants were awarded to groups in rural counties.

A couple of years ago, the council awarded a grant of \$5,264 to the Titusville Council on the Arts and the Arts Council of Erie (Crawford and Erie Counties) for an exhibition exploring the local lumber industry, with presentations by folk artists and musicians and other speakers. The final report indicated that 80% of the participants were new to cultural programs.

Four years ago, the PHC awarded a \$1,000 grant to the Community Education Council of Elk and Cameron Counties for "*Young Mark Twain*," a presentation by the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera's Gallery of Heroes program, which interprets the lives and achievements of major historical figures and offers an entertaining alternative to traditional lectures and books. The presentation at five elementary schools in Elk and

Cameron Counties meant, for many children in this remote rural area, the first time that they had seen a performance by a professional theater company.

The council has worked intensively with public libraries in rural districts to expand their programming for adult and inter-generational audiences, especially in literature, through its book discussion series *Read About It!* Each year the council selects new libraries to participate, providing opportunities for libraries to begin book groups, working with humanities discussion leaders in rural communities such as Blossburg, Danville, Grove City, and Troy. Of the 207 *Read About It!* programs that have occurred from 2000 through 2008, 41%, have been in rural counties. Of the 162 different libraries we worked with, 39% have been rural. The council has been able to expand its work with libraries, thanks to NEH funds available to continue to develop *Read About It!*

The council also has developed special projects with NEH funds, and then leveraged its success to raise private money for specifically rural projects, This was the case with “Technology and Community,” developed with NEH funds and then expanded with a grant from the Heinz Endowments, and, later, “Schools and Communities,” a public engagement project for schools in southwestern Pennsylvania, also funded by the Heinz Endowments. In both of these cases, the PHC actually expanded the reach of the foundation into rural areas – beyond its own comfort zone in Greater Pittsburgh. The council reached the Bedford School District, the Bentworth School District in Bentleyville and the Yough School District in Herminie, all underserved communities.

In addition, the council has taken the initiative to shape the behavior of large institutions located in rural areas, in order to make them more responsive to local needs. The outstanding example of this is the partnership between the council and the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at Penn State. Together, we developed a special program called “Public Humanities Scholars” to match Penn State faculty from the University Park, Altoona, and DuBois campuses with local organizations to both plan and conduct public programs. Focusing on 16 counties in mid-central Pennsylvania, this has led to such events as a Civil War history program at the public library in St. Marys, Elk County; centennial programming in the town of Portage, Cambria County; and, a folk music project in Huntingdon County. One Penn State scholar, Charles Youmans, wrote that the program “allowed me to fulfill one of the central components of the university’s mission, outreach, in perhaps the most direct way that I have found during my five years as a faculty member.”

There are only seven full-time staff members at the PHC who work out of Philadelphia. When one reflects on the fact that this hard-working staff is so small, one has to recognize what an extraordinary job state humanities councils do in Pennsylvania and this country with their NEH partnership funds.

I greatly value my close association with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA), where, for eight years I represented the Speaker of the House at council meetings, and, early in my career, served as press secretary and legislative liaison. Here I have seen a

deep commitment to outreach to previously underserved regions which has been greatly expanded during recent administrations.

Tens of thousands of Pennsylvania students and families have benefited from the expanded reach of federal arts dollars through national NEA initiatives and funding administered by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Just last month, 20 Pennsylvania communities across the Commonwealth participated in the *American Masterpieces* tour of the works of American master choreographer and Pennsylvania native Paul Taylor's dance companies. An once-in-a-lifetime experience, Pennsylvania dance lovers of all ages could see as many as 27 different dances performed over four weeks by the Paul Taylor Dance Company and its six-member second company, Taylor 2. In addition to performances in large and small venues including the newly renovated Majestic Theater in downtown Gettysburg, hundreds of aspiring student dancers took part in master classes given by company members. Students in Wilkes-Barre, Easton, Huntingdon, Shippensburg, the Lehigh Valley and other locations gained an unsurpassable experience and creative opportunity in their own Pennsylvania hometowns that would not have been available to them otherwise.

Federal arts funding also flows to benefit Pennsylvania's school students and help build the workforce of the future through the PCA's Arts in Education Partnership. NEA funding in partnership with state dollars through the PCA assists hundreds of Pennsylvania's schools to support curriculum, enrich the important work of art educators and provide additional opportunities for students to explore and develop their creative abilities. Study of the arts provides children and youth with models for discipline, teamwork, project management, and goal setting, along with occasions for intellectual and emotional discovery.

Other arts education projects in previously underserved regions undertaken by the PCA include:

Aliquippa Middle School in Beaver County, where 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students worked with textile artist Cathleen Richardson Bailey on a collaborative quilt project, "From Our Hands," designed to stimulate creativity, cognizant and tactile abilities. Participating students learned or expanded their knowledge of textile skills, conversation, creative/journal writing, public speaking, and understanding the value of community and working on a team.

Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 in the Lehigh Valley's RESOLVE program hosted a residency by ensemble members of Touchstone Theatre. RESOLVE serves 12 school districts in Monroe and Northampton counties and is part of the intermediate unit's work with students from Partial Hospitalization Program sites and Emotional Support program classrooms. Students participated in theater exercises, exploring characters, techniques, and theme development culminating in a performance for peers, teachers and parents. Evaluations reported a profound impact in a wide array of areas including but not limited to increased self-confidence, greater ability to work in teams and groups, engagement in language arts and improved communication skills.

Bentworth Elementary School in Bentleyville sought out an in-depth artist residency when experiencing a series of unexpected deaths over six years of seven teachers and/or students. Visual artist Wendy Osher worked over a year to plan and create a memorial sculpture garden entitled “Welcoming Butterflies.” The project integrated art, science, social studies, language arts curricula and study of ancient cultures. Elementary, middle school, and high school students incorporated personal mementoes in a mosaic and wrote related journal entries about the items which included a grandfather’s whistle, military buttons, a grandmother’s piece of jewelry, a seashell from a family vacation and 690 other items of personal meaning.

South Brandywine Middle School in Coatesville developed a residency with The People’s Light & Theatre Company as part of their social studies curriculum in exploring Underground Railroad history with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The middle school is located in a region with a rich history that includes a role in the Underground Railroad. It has a multi-racial school community with 42% of the students eligible for free or reduced cost lunch. The residency further included study of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, traditional spirituals and speeches of abolitionist Frederick Douglas.

As a result of its groundbreaking work with 17 Bradford-Tioga Head Start centers across Pennsylvania’s north central region, The Northern Tier Partnership for Arts in Education/Bradford County Regional Arts Council was named one of three international models for its Learning Communications Skills through the Arts program in early education. This rural arts organization is an Arts in Education partner of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and as part of its partnership work holds an annual conference featuring nationally-known speakers and workshops relating to early childhood education and the arts that draws hundreds of attendees to Bradford County from across the Commonwealth and beyond its borders. This outstanding organization was the first in the nation to receive a new national Arts Education Award from Americans for the Arts.

Yet another outstanding example of educational excellence fostered by federal and state arts dollars took place just yesterday in the Chamber of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives during our state’s annual Arts in Education Day celebration. Pennsylvania State Poetry Out Loud Champion, Francesca Fiore, a West Chester Area School District student from Chester County, recited a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins to enthusiastic response from the House members. Fiore had competed against 13 state regional finalists to be named Pennsylvania’s state champion in a rigorous competition that I attended in March. I can attest to a remarkable level of performance by the participating students. Each of these young men and women was clearly motivated, poised, talented, and engaged. From the first year of this inspiring NEA initiative, Pennsylvania chose to undertake a statewide effort with regional contests across the state. Last year, Pennsylvania had 1,000 students compete. This year, we had 7,000 from more than 90 school districts. Next year, the sky may be limit given the growing interest and enthusiasm! The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania commends the National Council on the Arts and The Poetry Foundation for their leadership and Congress for its support of this powerful arts and education initiative.

Congressional Art Caucus Co-chair Louise Slaughter called attention to, and I quote “the stunning gifts American artists make to our daily lives. Their creative force not only helps our children learn, but makes them smarter. It brightens the life of each one of us, bring us joy and comfort, enlightenment and understanding, in ways impossible to find otherwise. The arts and artists of America are our national treasure, which this great Nation needs, deserves and must support as other nations do.” Her words about creativity and artists as “treasures” applies equally to the humanities. Like the arts, the humanities inspire individuals to enrich their lives through the story of human experience across time and around the world. To help tell this story we bring communities together through programs that explore history, literature the arts and ideas.

The arts and humanities truly are our keystone for the future. The ingenuity of the mind can't be computerized or outsourced. The power to create and learn is in all of us and through every citizen's continued access to arts and humanities programs we can cultivate and unleash the innovation and creation that will sustain our country's leadership and enrich and enhance our lives through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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