



April 13, 2010

Dear Member of Congress,

South Arts (formerly the Southern Arts Federation) is a National Co-Sponsor of Arts Advocacy Day 2010. We are a nonprofit regional arts organization with the mission of strengthening the South through advancing excellence in the arts, connecting the arts to key state and national policies and nurturing a vibrant quality of life. We work in partnership with the nine state arts agencies of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Together, we serve a very large and diverse population. South Arts carries out its work with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts.

We feel strongly about the importance of the issues coming before this Congress. Specifically, we urge you to support the following:

National Endowment for the Arts

We urge Congress to support a budget of \$180 million for the NEA in the FY 2011 Interior Appropriations bill to:

- Restore and rebuild funding with an increase of \$27.5 million for the creation, preservation, and presentation of the arts in America through the NEA's core programs—*Access to Artistic Excellence*, *Challenge America: Reaching Every Community*, *Federal/State Partnerships*, and *Learning in the Arts*.
- Provide for the President's request of \$5 million to fund a new initiative, *Our Town*.

Arts in Education

We urge Congress to:

- Appropriate \$53 million for the Arts in Education programs in the FY 2011 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to produce timely and comprehensive reports on the status of all arts education disciplines in America's public schools, when implementing future *Fast Response Statistical Surveys* and *National Assessments of Educational Progress*.

International Cultural Exchange

We urge Congress to:

- Increase funding by \$10 million for the Cultural Programs Division of the State Department's Office of Citizen Exchanges in the FY 2011 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill. This increase should be designated for the Professional Exchanges and Cultural Grant Program and the Performing Arts Initiative.
- Direct the State Department to increase operational capacity within the Cultural Programs Division to strengthen its ability to process and oversee grants and programs.
- Direct the State Department to: 1) make information on projects funded through these programs readily available to the public; 2) encourage broad participation in its grant program in support of artistic and cultural exchanges with an emphasis on simplifying the application process; and 3) recruit applicants widely to represent best the opportunities available for freedom of thought and expression in a democratic society.

And, to successfully carry out international cultural exchange, we urge Congress to:

- Enact the Arts Require Timely Service (ARTS) Act, H.R. 1785 and S.1409, which will require U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to reduce the total processing time for petitions filed by, or on behalf of, nonprofit arts-related organizations to a maximum of 45 days. We further call on Congress and the Administration to persuade USCIS to take immediate administrative action to improve the artist visa process.

We believe favorable consideration of all these issues is vital to the future of our nation and our people.

