March 22, 2010

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education And Related
Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC  20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education And Related
Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC  20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

We urge you to support $53 million for the Arts in Education program at the United States Department of Education in the Fiscal Year 2011 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill. The Arts in Education program at the United States Department of Education funds model arts education programs in schools and communities throughout the country, the professional development of arts educators, and the ongoing national arts education initiatives of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and VSA arts, a program which ensures that people with disabilities can participate in the arts. Years of research demonstrates that a significant link exists between arts education and students' academic performance, as well as their social development, motivations, attitudes, and disposition toward learning.

Thanks to your leadership, the FY 2010 spending bill increased funding for the Arts in Education program by approximately $1.9 million to $40 million. At a time when model programs supported by the Department are showing impressive results and the need for arts in education could not be greater, it is imperative that we continue to increase funding for this program. Indeed, President Obama agrees and stated as part of his arts policy platform that “in addition to giving our children the science and math skills they need to compete in the new global context, we should also encourage the ability to think creatively that comes from a meaningful arts education.”

As Congress and the Administration work towards re-writing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), support for arts education can be strengthened by taking immediate action to support funding for the Arts in Education program through the annual appropriations process.

The President’s budget request proposes consolidating the Arts in Education program into a new, broader funding pool entitled “Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education.” The budget proposal does not indicate exactly how or how much of this funding would be available to support arts education, as the fund would also support other subjects of learning. (The proposal does indicate that previously awarded Arts in Education competitive grant projects would continue to receive funding to support the remaining years of their
Congress has a record of supporting the Arts in Education programs, despite their elimination in the Bush administration’s budget proposal. Congress has funded the Arts in Education programs each year since the start of the program in FY 2001, currently providing $40 million. We are seeking to keep the Arts in Education programs intact for FY2011 and recommend that any major restructuring of the Arts in Education programs be considered in the context of ESEA reauthorization.

Funding the Arts in Education program is an excellent way to provide meaningful arts education to our children. Increased Arts in Education funds will also provide unique federal support for projects that strengthen student learning through standards-based arts education and integration of arts instruction into other subject areas. Funding will also help provide grants that identify innovative models that improve instruction for arts specialists and classroom teachers. Moreover, funding VSA arts and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts supports national networks that ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities and other underserved populations. Without this funding at the federal level, inclusive programming for young people with disabilities in the arts could be greatly diminished.

Arts education has a role to play in developing our nation’s workforce as well. According a 2007 Conference Board report, there is overwhelming support from school superintendents and corporate leaders that creativity is of increasing importance to the United States workforce. A report released in December of 2006 by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce said, “The best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services.” The arts are an essential skill for fostering the type of innovative thinker that will thrive in the 21st century creative economy.

Our states, schools, and communities are poised to further strengthen arts education, but they need our help. We urge you to support the educational development of our schoolchildren and the professional development of our teachers by including $53 million in funding for Arts in Education at the United States Department of Education.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter  
Member of Congress

Henry A. Waxman  
Member of Congress

John M. Spratt, Jr.  
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.  
Member of Congress
Barney Frank
Member of Congress

Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Doris O. Matsui
Member of Congress

Laura Richardson
Member of Congress

Donna M. Christensen
Member of Congress

Nick J. Rahall, II
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John A. Yarmuth
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Jim McDermott
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Niki Tsongas
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Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress