March 23, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Mikulski, and Chairman Murkowski:

We write to express appreciation for your continued support of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and to urge you to support President Obama’s $147.9 million funding request for each of the endowments. Federal support for the arts and humanities is a vital economic, educational, and cultural priority that impacts many communities across the United States.

For nearly 50 years, the NEA has provided strategic leadership and investment in the arts and has proudly expanded arts activity across the nation with the mission “to bring arts to every American.” Every dollar spent on federal arts initiatives leverages eight non-federal dollars enriching children and communities through access to the arts that they would otherwise not have.

Federal funding for the NEA acts as seed money that generates massive economic return. The non-profit arts industry generates over $135 billion annually in economic activity and supports 4.7 million full-time jobs. Additionally, the federal government enjoys a direct return of $9.59 billion in income taxes, as well as the indirect benefit of improved education, community development, and increased business activity from across the country.

The requested funding for FY16 for the NEA will help the endowment maintain its extremely successful programs, including The Big Read, Our Town, Challenge America, The Mayor’s Institute on City Design, Blue Star Museums, Shakespeare in American Communities, Art Works and Poetry Out Loud.

The NEH is the primary source of federal support for humanities research and related activities in the United States. It provides support for professional development to scholars, educators, curators, librarians, historians, filmmakers, and more. Through the endowment’s efforts, our national heritage is preserved, civic institutions are strengthened, and Americans are better prepared to address the challenges in a constantly changing world. In addition to appropriated funding, the NEH is able to leverage significant, non-federal contributions through competitive grant awards, with direct matching totaling more than $2 billion over the last few decades.

Federal funding for the NEH includes support for state humanities councils that work in partnership with the endowment to reach millions of Americans each year through teacher institutes,
family literacy programs, and thousands of other efforts. With this extensive network of state humanities councils and general NEH programming, the endowment reaches every state and territory across the nation. NEH grants have supported thousands of projects, including The Civil War, the landmark documentary by Ken Burns viewed by 38 million Americans, The U.S. Newspaper Project, which catalogued and microfilmed 63 million pages of historic newspapers, and has supported more than 56,000 lectures, discussions, exhibitions and other educational programs each year.

FY16 funding will continue to support the Standing Together Initiative which aims to promote understanding of the military experience to support returning veterans. Other programs such as the NEA/Walter Reed Healing Arts Partnership was established in 2011 to explore how creative arts therapy and arts engagement programs can improve health and well-being in military healthcare settings. This successful partnership supports writing, visual arts, and music arts therapy for patients at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICOE). In the program, a creative arts therapist works with patients using art therapies to improve communication, externalize and process traumatic events, as well as improve and restore neurological and physical function.

The healing arts program has been so successful, the NEA expanded the partnership in 2013 to bring visual arts therapy and expressive writing activities to military partners at Fort Belvoir Community Hospital’s satellite NICOE center in Virginia. With the growing demand among military treatment facilities wanting art therapy programs, and with the proposed increase, the NEA will be able to bring healing arts program to more of our service members.

Thanks to your leadership, the NEA and NEH continue to play a vital role in every state. We urge you to continue to support federal funding of the arts and humanities in FY16 with a $147.9 million funding level for each of the endowments in the final appropriations legislation. We appreciate your attention to this vital funding, and look forward to working with you on this and the other important issues facing our nation.

Sincerely,

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Kristen Gillibrand
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Gary Peters
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator
Mark Warner
United States Senator

Bob Menendez
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator