

Testimony on behalf of the Federation of State Humanities Councils

Prepared for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies by Judy Salter, Board Member, Cal Humanities, Addressing the National Endowment for the Humanities, March 18, 2015.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the state humanities councils, the state affiliates of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am an independent consultant and member of the board of Cal Humanities, the California affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am here to request **\$155 million** for the National Endowment for the Humanities and **\$46 million** for the Federal/State Partnership for FY 2016.

As a board member of the humanities council in California, I can attest to the careful stewardship of federal funds by the councils and the remarkable impact they achieve with a very modest investment of those funds. As full partners of the NEH, councils receive their core funding through the Federal/State Partnership line of the NEH budget, which they use to leverage additional support from foundations, corporations, private individuals, and state governments. For the past several years, councils have leveraged, on average, \$5.00 in local contributions for every dollar of federal funding awarded through their grants. Councils further extended their resources in recent years by forming partnerships with more than 9,000 organizations throughout their states.

Making connections is at the very heart of the humanities, and the councils forge partnerships not just with the NEH and other organizations, but also with and among the millions of citizens who take part in their programs every year. These partnerships lead to stronger communities, enlivened local economies, healthier families, reinvigorated teachers, and a more engaged citizenry. In just the past few weeks, these partnerships brought together citizens in Jamestown, North Dakota, for the first of three scholar-led discussions of changes in their state since the oil boom. Residents of Bronzeville and Humboldt Park, Illinois, joined in conversation with teams of journalists to talk about how the media can more effectively tell the stories of gun violence. In Providence, Rhode Island, seven fifth-graders premiered their play, "Open for Business," written collaboratively in a council-supported afterschool playwriting class.

These diverse examples only hint at the tapestry of council programs that enrich the individual and civic lives of Americans every day. Several areas of programming deserve special notice. These include programs that serve 1) veterans, 2) diverse populations, 3) rural communities, and 4) teachers, as well as programs that 5) preserve our local and national cultural heritage, 6) boost local economies, and 7) promote lifelong learning.

Veterans and their communities. Over the past year, under the auspices of the NEH special initiative, "Standing Together: The Humanities and the Experience of War," councils have carried out programs throughout their states that help to re-integrate returning veterans into civic life and educate their communities about the impact of the war experience on all of us. As part of Cal Humanities' "War Comes Home" initiative, 43 library systems, encompassing over 240 branch libraries across California, participated in programming developed around *What It Is Like to Go to War* by Vietnam veteran and *New York Times* bestselling author, Karl Marlantes. Grants

from Cal Humanities enabled the libraries to provide over 500 programs, including reading and discussion events, story-sharing projects, art-making activities, community forums and dialogues, presentations and panel discussions, film screenings, oral history projects and civic engagement and community service projects to support veterans and their families. “CA Reads” forged and strengthened connections between libraries and hundreds of community partners, including local veteran- and active military-serving organizations, colleges, museums, cultural organizations, social service organizations, government agencies, and booksellers.

“Serving: Standing Down,” a reading and discussion program developed by the New York Council for the Humanities, brings veterans together around an anthology of readings compiled and published by the Great Books Foundation of Chicago, also using NEH grant funds. This program offers veterans a unique opportunity to use literature to discuss the challenges and opportunities of transitioning to civilian life. Currently running at six locations in New York City, the program has also been adopted by humanities councils in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Montana, New Mexico, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington.

The Oklahoma Humanities Council focused on an often overlooked veteran population, Native American soldiers. In collaboration with Native American tribal members and Oklahoma Educational Television Authority (OETA), which is Oklahoma’s statewide public television station, the council planned a documentary video to show tribal traditions that help soldiers and veterans of each tribe to acclimate to service and adjust to civilian life upon their return. Scheduled to be broadcast statewide on Vietnam Veterans Day, March 26, the documentary involves the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Cherokee, Osage, Comanche, Choctaw, and Creek tribes.

Bringing together diverse populations. Learning to live together is one of the great human challenges. The humanities are one of our best tools to help us do this, whether it involves re-integrating returning veterans or crossing cultural borders. The arrival of new neighbors from other parts of the world can unsettle long-time residents of the nation’s communities, and immigrants and refugees can feel alienated and disoriented in their new homes. The Minnesota Humanities Center’s “Reading Together Book Project” seeks to ease the transition for Asian-Pacific families, while also educating other residents about this unique culture. In collaboration with the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, the humanities council provides children’s books that explore the experiences of Asian Pacific Islander (API) children and youth in the United States. More than 10,850 copies of the six titles have been distributed to schools and community centers around Minnesota. The audience is elementary age students, and the books are written to be enjoyed by all Minnesotans. The New Hampshire Humanities Council focuses on adults in their “Connections” reading and discussion project, offered in collaboration with adult basic education and ESL classes. The program uses the best of children’s literature and council-trained facilitators to reinforce family literacy, promote English language skills, foster a culture of reading, and nurture conversation in which readers contribute their own ideas and stories. Above all, the program enables immigrants and refugees from a variety of cultures to develop skills and tools to adapt to their new culture.

Serving rural communities. The United States may be an increasingly urban nation, but vast stretches of this country are still dotted with thousands of small towns, whose residents actively seek the intellectual stimulation and civic participation offered by humanities council programs. Throughout rural areas, the humanities councils offer what are often the only live cultural

programs available, through speakers bureaus, traveling exhibits, and reading and discussion programs in local libraries. The library in the small western Maine town of Norway became the hub of such programs when the Maine Humanities Council funded a cultural festival with talks, music, food, film and book discussions throughout the summer and fall of 2013. The success of this program led the library to apply for a follow-up grant from the council to conduct a series of thoughtful discussions of Muslim culture, addressing questions residents had about this culture. The long-standing and highly valued Museum on Main Street program, a collaboration between the state humanities councils and the Smithsonian Institution, has been a presence in small rural communities for more than 20 years, bringing portable Smithsonian exhibits to local libraries, museums and community centers in nearly 700 small towns and engaging their citizens in several weeks of community-initiated cultural activities related to the exhibit. Such programs leave behind a vibrant legacy of collaboration and creative programming.

Supporting the nation's teachers. In both rural and urban areas, our nation's teachers are among our most valuable resources, providing the educational foundation for the children who represent the future success of the nation. But many teachers lack professional development opportunities that increase the confidence, collegial connections, and subject knowledge that are vital to their success as educators. For many years, humanities councils have helped to address this need through weekend workshops, online resources, and summer institutes, offering a rich variety of educational opportunities at a remarkably low cost. The Idaho Humanities Council hosts annual, weeklong, residential summer institutes for K-12 teachers to bolster their understanding and teaching of such topics as the history of the Cold War, the presidencies of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, the history of the American West, the works of Ernest Hemingway, Native American Literature, the Harlem Renaissance, Willa Cather and more. The West Virginia Humanities Council offers resources to their teachers through their e-WV state encyclopedia, which includes a selection of lesson plans designed by West Virginia teachers on such topics as the story of statehood, the daily lives and culture of Native Americans, music by mountaineers, and the history of coal mining in West Virginia.

Exploring local history and heritage. Exploring our local and national history not only helps us gain perspective on past challenges and achievements, but also contributes to a sense of community. Throughout the country, humanities council programs educate and inform citizens and increase civic participation. These programs include speaker events, radio broadcasts, traveling exhibits, and reading and discussion of works by local authors. The Georgia Humanities Council helps its residents explore a 100-year arc of the state's history through their "Civil War to Civil Rights" initiative. The Kansas Humanities Council lets community members study the impact of significant moments in their history through the "Turning Points" documentary film initiative. Humanities Montana educates residents about the year their state became a territory through the council-produced "Montana 1864" publication. These programs and many more illuminate the history of the places citizens throughout the country call home. Some councils achieve this through online sources, such as the Online Nevada Encyclopedia (ONE), which offers articles, images, maps, and interactive media about Nevada, drawing on not just subject specialists but also community voices. Together they tell the constantly evolving story of the people, places, and events that have shaped that state's politics, economy, and culture.

Boosting local economies. Council programs help revitalize such institutions as libraries, museums, and schools, creating thriving communities that attract potential investors, as well as new residents and businesses. Councils also support specific programs that bring business to local restaurants and shops. Councils in Ohio, Colorado, and Nebraska conduct weeklong summer Chautauqua programs that not only engage entire communities but also attract tourists. The Ohio Humanities Council brings history to life in four rural or exurban communities each year with its Ohio Chautauqua program, in which scholars present living history portrayals on stage each evening and conduct daytime workshops for both adults and children. Now in its 17th season, the Ohio Chautauqua has appeared in more than 50 towns across the state. Book festivals in Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, Utah, Colorado, and South Dakota draw thousands of attendees and multiple sponsors, enriching communities both culturally and economically.

Providing lifelong learning. The most consistent benefit of the partnership councils form with the citizens of their states is the learning that occurs when people gather to engage with ideas, question, converse, and debate. This learning spans generations, ethnic groups, and socio-economic categories. The learning offered through the councils begins early with the many family literacy programs that councils support and conduct. For example, at the library in Port Townsend, Washington, third- and fourth-grade schoolchildren struggling to gain critical reading skills gathered with their parents in recent months for transformative learning experiences offered through the Humanities Washington-sponsored Prime Time Family Reading program. These children improved their reading skills and their comfort discussing complicated social and ethical themes, while also becoming avid library users. Thousands of children and their families throughout the nation have received a critical boost in learning through such council-supported literacy programs.

The Utah Humanities Council recently launched an accredited interdisciplinary humanities course for underserved 10th and 11th-grade students as an offshoot of their long-standing Clemente Course, which offers college level learning for low-income adults. The pilot for this intellectually rigorous course of study, using primary documents, writing, discussion and group projects as the basis for learning, was launched at East High School in Salt Lake City. Illustrating the tremendous leveraging power of the federal investment in humanities council programs, the project is also supported by East High School, the University of Utah Honors College, Westminster College, and University Neighborhood Partners and receives major support from Alternative Visions Fund.

The desire to learn is what draws hundreds of thousands of Americans to council-supported speaker programs, book discussions, community conversations, traveling exhibitions, online encyclopedias, and book festivals. The joy of discovery prompts them to tune in to council-produced radio broadcasts, such as the Virginia humanities council's "Backstory with the American History Guys," and "Ideas Matter," sponsored by councils in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. It brings them to libraries, museums, and community centers to engage with ideas and discuss issues that matter. We urge you to support our request for \$155 million for the NEH and \$46 million for the Federal/State Partnership so humanities councils can continue to partner with the citizens of their states to foster these experiences all across the country.