

**Testimony of  
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**Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities**

**Before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

**May 12, 2022**

Madame Chair, Mr. Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to speak on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities on our budget request for the upcoming fiscal year.

Our Congressional Justification, submitted in March, describes in detail our current activities and our plans for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023. I would like to take today to discuss some of the key features of the request and highlight why funding the humanities is critically important to the health and well-being of American society.

NEH is the only federal agency dedicated to funding the humanities, which include history, philosophy, literature, language, archaeology, jurisprudence, and comparative religion.

Within these topics NEH funds advanced humanities research and books, both scholarly and popular, that expand the horizons of our knowledge of history and culture. We provide education grants that fund curriculum initiatives at colleges and universities and professional development opportunities for teachers at all levels of K-12 and higher education.

We support the archiving and digitization of the nation's cultural heritage materials, historic documents, and collections. This work includes our partnership with the Library of Congress to support the *Chronicling America* database of America's historic newspapers Through this program,

more than 18 million pages of U.S. newspapers published between 1690 and 1963 have been digitized and are freely searchable online.

We fund the documentation and preservation of languages on the brink of extinction through our Documenting Endangered Languages partnership with the National Science Foundation. This program supports the creation of such tools as bilingual dictionaries, grammars, and text collections that document languages threatened with extinction. Of the 6,000 to 7,000 languages currently spoken around the globe, at least 3,000 are endangered, including hundreds of Native American languages. These lesser-known languages constitute an irreplaceable linguistic treasure for scholars seeking to understand the nature of language or study the cultures and natural systems of the region in which a particular language is spoken.

And we provide critical financial support to cultural and educational institutions to allow them to improve their physical and digital infrastructure and strengthen their capacity to serve their communities.

Now—as our nation continues to grapple with the effects of COVID-19, systemic racism, the ongoing effects of climate change, and existential threats to our democracy—the humanities are more vital than ever.

NEH has spent much of the past two years working to stabilize and support colleges and universities, museums, libraries, historic sites, public television and radio stations, independent researchers, and documentary filmmakers struggling to cope with the economic fallout of the pandemic.

The organizations we fund—all experienced severe declines in revenue while being closed to visitors or affected by declines in student enrollment; many were compelled to furlough or lay off staff and curtail public and educational programs.

Thanks to special funding allocated by Congress to NEH by the CARES Act of 2020, and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, our agency has been able to quickly distribute approximately \$210 million in economic recovery funding to help cultural and educational organizations retain staff,

maintain programs, facilities, and operations, and convert physical programs into digital offerings to increase access, even from a distance.

More than 99% of appropriated funds went out the door in less than a year after President Biden signed ARP into law.

This funding helped bring much-needed relief to institutions and programs of every size, in every state and jurisdiction.

But there is much still to be done. Cultural and educational institutions of all sizes are still coping with the financial impact of the pandemic; and there is a palpable hunger within American communities for opportunities to come together to share and discuss ideas and, after so much isolation and trauma, find meaning in history, philosophy, art, and literature. The humanities are a vital part of rebuilding our communities, institutions, and regional economies.

The NEH FY 2023 budget request submitted by the White House is \$200.680 million.

This funding will allow NEH to continue to support the fundamental building blocks of American civil society, and fund projects that help us examine the human condition, understand our cultural heritage, foster mutual respect for diverse beliefs and cultures, develop media and information literacy, and promote civics education.

And it will allow us to expand some of NEH's most impactful initiatives and grant programs in FY 2023.

It will, for example, provide additional support to projects in the humanities and for awards to NEH's partners in each of the 56 states and jurisdictions through our Federal/State Partnership office. Approximately 40% of NEH's annual appropriation is distributed to the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils to help the councils sponsor thousands of family reading programs, K-12 education projects, documentary films, book festivals, symposia, and state and local history projects. These projects reach millions of Americans in rural areas, urban neighborhoods, and

suburban communities. In the last year, projects supported by the state and jurisdictional councils and their subrecipients reached more than 6.6 million participants.

The proposed FY 2023 appropriation will also enable the expansion of NEH's "A More Perfect Union" initiative, which builds on NEH's 57-year investment in projects that catalog, preserve, explore, and promote American history and uses the lessons of history to address today's challenges. In the coming year, NEH plans to build upon successful programs on K-12 civics education, and to continue funding innovative projects that help the American people understand the Constitution, its history, and its meaning in their daily lives.

The FY2023 budget will also provide additional funding for NEH's Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grants program, which leverage federal funding to help stimulate nonfederal investment in the country's museums, historical societies and other cultural institutions, and allow NEH to create new incentives to encourage applicants from underserved communities.

In addition to this expansion of NEH's current projects, the FY 2023 budget will allow us to develop new initiatives. As NEH Chair, I am deeply committed to extending the reach of NEH's grantmaking and the projects and products we support so that all Americans have opportunities to participate and benefit from humanities-centered research, education, and public programs.

To meet this goal, we plan to create an NEH Office of Data and Evaluation to analyze the effectiveness of agency programs and policies, and whether, and to what extent, they advance equity and support for underserved communities. We also are planning on developing an Office of Outreach to focus on increasing NEH's engagement with underserved communities and institutions, such as Tribal Nations, HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, veterans, community colleges, and others. Finally, we are establishing a Chief Diversity Officer position to advise my office and our agency on all matters of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access across our programs, operations, outreach, and communications.

Recognizing our changing climate, NEH is also developing new initiatives to study and address the impact of climate events on our cultural resources, museums, and historic sites. This includes a GIS-based mapping tool that will allow the preservation community to anticipate climate events and changes on cultural heritage sites and humanities collections nationwide so that our country's irreplaceable cultural heritage is better safeguarded against climate risk and natural disasters.

The budget request before you will allow NEH-supported projects to bring the past into sharper focus, thereby bringing about, as the agency's founding legislation affirms, "a better analysis of the present and a better view of the future."

Thank you, I look forward to your questions.