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March 7, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
B-308 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
B-308 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

The Authors Guild and the undersigned authors urge you to strenuously oppose any attempt to cut federal arts funding in this year's budget. The Authors Guild is alarmed by reports that the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities will be defunded, despite the fact that they each account for only .003 percent of federal spending and are the only federal agencies that promote our thriving arts culture.

All great societies have one thing in common: they value their writers and artists. That is because the arts help us understand our world better, both present and past; they allow us to discover who we are and who we can be, as individuals and as a society. Books, in particular, help educate us and expand our thinking; they push us to consider others' points of view, ensuring the cultivation of new ideas. Indeed, our founders put copyright protection in the Constitution because they understood the absolute necessity of authors and artists to a democracy.

The creative arts not only educate, enlighten, and entertain us; they encompass a major and growing part of our national economy and support many jobs. The creative arts contributed $704.2 billion to the U.S. economy in 2013, as well as 4.2% of GDP, and employed 4.7 million wage and salary workers. Between 1998 and 2013, arts and cultural production accounted for a 32.5% growth in GDP. Since 2006, U.S. arts and culture has run a trade surplus that's grown every year, to $24.1 billion in 2013.

Creativity is an area where the United States truly excels. No other country comes close to the quality and quantity of movies, TV shows, music, literature, design, and artwork as the U.S. And yet, the NEA and NEH are the only federal agencies currently dedicated to fostering the arts and humanities, respectively.[1] It makes no sense to defund support for a sector where the U.S. stands heads and shoulders above any other nation. Remember that no movie is made without writers and other creators; no music is written or played without support for the musical arts; and no book, screenplay, or play is written without education and support of literature. If anything, we should be putting more, not less, money into fostering the arts in the U.S. and ensuring the continued participation of new talent.

With rare exceptions, writing books and creating art or music have never been particularly lucrative jobs. The vast majority of creators barely make it into what has been referred to, somewhat optimistically, as the "creative middle class." For authors in particular, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a living, especially for those just starting out. A 2015 Authors Guild survey found that between 2009 and 2015, full-time authors' income had decreased by over 30%, from a mean of $24,000 to only $17,500. Making it particularly hard for younger writers to launch writing careers today, the Internet economy has fostered expectations that authors write for free or for nominal fees. As a result, now more than ever, writers and other creators need financial support to launch or sustain their careers. The NEA and NEH have important roles to play in supporting future generations of talented authors. Many wonderful books have been written because the NEA or NEH provided grants to the authors and organizations that support them. This support is crucial.

The NEA and NEH support countless authors, literary organizations, and artistic endeavors; they are particularly important because they allow the arts to flourish in geographic and economic areas otherwise underserved by the arts. Artist Tega Brain created this list of the projects the NEA funded in 2016. These projects included support of seven-week residencies for writers in Sitka, Alaska; a creative writing fellowship in East Grand Rapids, Michigan; and spoken word artist residencies in Chattahoochee, Georgia.

Among other projects, the NEA has funded seven thousand important books, 16 of which have won Pulitzer Prizes, and 20 of which have received the Bancroft Prize, as well as the Library of

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[1] The NEA "gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities." https://www.arts.gov/about-nea. The NEH describes its purpose as such: "Because democracy demands wisdom, NEH serves and strengthens our republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans." https://www.neh.gov/about

America editions of novels, essays, and poems celebrating America's literary heritage. It also provides funding to 56 states and territories to help support some 56,000 lectures, discussions, exhibitions, and other programs each year to cultivate learning and discourse, which are so key to democracy.

Some notable expamples of specific projects funded by the NEA and NEH in the past are the publication of Jonathan Kennedy Toole's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, and the University of California's Mark Twain Project Online. Additionally, 13 individual Authors Guild members have received grants from the NEA in recent years.

Let's not let the U.S. fall behind other nations in this sector that contributes so much to our economic welfare and to our cultural status in the eyes of the world.

We thank you for your attention and assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,

Mary Rasenberger
Executive Director
The Authors Guild