

**Testimony of Vermont Humanities Council Board Member Nancy Pennell  
House Appropriations Committee, March 12, 2015**

Good afternoon, my name is Nancy Linkroum Pennell, I live in Chester, and am a member of the Vermont Humanities Council board. Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for your continuing state support for the Council at its current level.

State support accounts for about 17% of our revenue. Moreover, the Council leverages those funds to raise about \$300,000 annually from private sources – that’s another 22% of our budget. Because our fiscal year is the *calendar* year, any cut you make in the State’s 2016 budget will be a cut in *our current* year 2015 budget. We will be 5 months into our current fiscal year by the time the state budget is signed into law in May. The timing issue would only make what could be a dire situation even worse.

Last year was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Humanities Council. It enters its fifth decade with a strong track record of accomplishment and impact. The Council’s work is woven into the fabric of Vermont – it is present in every corner of our state. A huge cut would dismantle or diminish much that has been built over the last decades.

We deliver quality, effective programs *very* efficiently. We steward our limited resources carefully. One of the ways we do this is by working with other organizations. Virtually every event the Council does is in collaboration with another organization. Last year we partnered with 373 organizations, including UVM, VPR, VermontPBS, the Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission, Historical Society, Arts Council, the National Park Service, Adult Ed and Literacy Centers, Vermont’s correctional system, social service organizations, hospitals, museums, libraries, ~~local historical societies~~, elementary, middle, and high schools. Those partnerships also attest to the high regard in which the Council and our programs are held.

Every five years the National Endowment for the Humanities sends a visiting team to each state to talk with different constituents to assess that Council’s work. The report from Vermont’s most recent NEH evaluation team included the following, and I quote:

*“the VHC is doing nearly everything right. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more striking example of a national humanities mission being fulfilled with excellence and imagination on the state level. . . . [Feedback from numerous stakeholders] affirmed the range and power of the Council’s programs, from its life-changing impact on the lives of vulnerable people to the enhancement of civic discourse and community life across the State. . . . VHC and Vermont appear to be uniquely suited to each other in ways not often discerned during site visits.”*  
Unquote

In your hearing room, written on the white board behind the Chairman’s chair are three questions: “How much did we do, how well did we do it, and is anyone better off?” We have provided to the Committee a chart that clearly states how much we did last year, who and how many we served, and while time is short today, previous testimony before your committee, our annual report, and other materials, outline specifically **how well we did it** and **how people are better off** *because* of our programs.

We know the budget challenge is enormous. We hope you will continue level-funding our State support.

Thank you.