A Show of Solidarity for the Arts in America

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It’s a critical time for the arts and healthcare across the USA. In solidarity with Americans for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and dozens of related organizations, the AATA was a proud National Partner for the 30th annual Arts Advocacy Day, March 20 and 21, 2017, in Washington, DC. Executive Director Cynthia Woodruff and I represented the AATA at the event’s National Arts Action Summit. Hosted by Americans for the Arts (AftA) in partnership with over 85 cultural and civic groups, we joined together with a record 700 enthusiastic participants – and we were noticed! The New York Times and the Washington Post reported on this most well-attended Arts Advocacy Day to date.

The AATA has been represented at previous Arts Advocacy Days, and our support of this year’s event was all the more significant given the planned budget cuts impacting the National Endowments for the Arts (NEA) and the Humanities (NEH). During the months prior, AATA volunteers and staff were part of AftA’s Legislative Planning Team, tasked with preparing materials for this important annual event.

On Monday, March 20, Ms. Woodruff and I attended issue briefings, peer-to-peer learning sessions, and networking opportunities. The day was capped off at the Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts & Public Policy at the Kennedy Center, featuring speaker Darren Walker. As President of the Ford Foundation, Mr. Walker was an ideal selection for this year’s keynote. He was introduced by Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY. The audience was also treated to a special performance by actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith. Mr. Walker left us with this profound statement: “Without art, there is no empathy. Without empathy, there is no justice.”
Advocacy Day on the Hill began early Tuesday, March 21, in the Kennedy Caucus Room of the Russell Senate Office Building. Powerful messaging in support of the NEA was publicized in key sources with factual data about its necessity for a vital US economy. The annual Congressional Arts Kick Off energized attendees for a day of advocacy, beginning with motivational remarks by Robert Lynch, and further inspiration delivered by celebrities Ben Vereen, Gabrielle Ruiz, and Brian Stokes Mitchell; NEA Chairman, Jane Chu; the CEO of the US Conference of Mayors, Tom Cochran; and several Members of Congress. Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski was honored as a champion of the arts.

Conveying her staunch support of the arts, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi said, “This is about America and who we are as a nation.” In a poignant gesture, Pelosi lifted one single strand of her hair to signify the infinitesimal amount of federal funding that supports the arts infrastructure, compared to the entire US budget. During his remarks, Congressman Leonard Lance warned, “Cutting funding would be penny wise but pound foolish.” Senator Tom Udall announced new legislation to strengthen the creative economy, the CREATE Act (S.2648), Comprehensive Resources for Entrepreneurs in the Arts to Transform the Economy. The bill highlights artists as valuable contributors to the small business community.

Following the Kick Off, attendees eagerly joined their designated state groups for the lobbying visits. We were well prepared to address key points including support for issues related to funding for the NEA, arts education policy, and more.
The creative arts therapies professions were well represented – Jody Wager, President of the American Dance Therapy Association, representatives from the American Music Therapy Association and AATA volunteers and staff actively participated and attended meetings on the Hill. We went equipped with talking points, informed by the AftA training materials and the Complete Legislative Issue Briefs and Statements. Of particular interest to us was the information provided in the Arts in Health Issue Brief. Arts and health and arts and the military legislative items were of particular relevance. We urged Congress to:

- Provide increased funding for federal agencies and programs that promote, sustain, and support the creative arts in all areas of American life.
- Support funding of at least $155 million for the NEA and continue funding for NEA’s joint initiative with the Department of Defense, Creative Forces.
- Support programs within the Administration on Aging included in the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2016 that provide access to creative arts therapies and artist-directed activities for well elderly and individuals with Alzheimer’s Disease and other dementias.
- Support access to creative arts therapies interventions in behavioral health treatments and services under Department of Health and Human Services Programs, such as the Medicare Prospective Payment Systems and Centers for Medicaid and CHIP Services.
- Enact the Trauma-Informed Care for Children and Families Act, which addresses the psychological, social, and emotional needs of children, youth and families who have experienced trauma, particularly those in Native communities.
- Support H.R. 102, the Expanding Care for Veterans Act, sponsored by Rep. Julia Brownley to improve access to evidence-based complementary alternative treatments for veterans, including creative arts therapies.

Issues impacting military service members and their families tend to garner bipartisan support. Our military-related requests were particularly well-received by Members of Congress and effectively conveyed the importance of arts funding. This topic has also been leveraged to draw the nation’s attention to our inextricable need for the arts, such as in this NYT article exploring whether programs that help the military can save federal arts agencies.
While venerating the value of the arts and artists in healthcare, it was also important for the creative arts therapies professionals to clarify that we are set apart by such criteria as our education standards, ethical codes of practice, credentials, independent licensure in some states, and distinct scopes of practice. Together we conveyed the overarching idea that accessibility to and active participation in the arts promotes physical and emotional wellbeing and enhanced quality of life for all people.

The AATA’s support of Arts Advocacy Day helps us meet our mission while expanding the AATA’s networks and building on valuable relationships with colleagues in related professions. From AftA and the NEA to the MHLG, NASISP, NCCATA and SAMSHA – we value the connections to these groups and our collective ability to contribute to the furtherance of the arts, creative arts therapies, and mental health and health care nationwide.

Efforts to increase accessibility to art therapy services for all Americans are bolstered by support of the AATA. Our members directly impact our ability to lead the nation in the advancement of art therapy as a regulated mental health and human services profession and help ensure that the AATA has a voice in the various milieus affecting policy, and in the public sphere, illuminating the vital contribution of art therapists to society.

“The arts put America to work” – and our work is not done. We will continue to advocate and communicate opportunities for you to join us. This will be especially important over the coming months, as the federal budget is overhauled with the potential for sweeping changes.

Take action: [http://www.artsactionfund.org](http://www.artsactionfund.org) #ArtsAdvocacy #SAVEtheNEA Advice for effective advocacy Gallery: Arts Advocacy Day 2017 Check out this video

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