

Testimony to the Assembly Budget and Appropriations Committee
May 2, 2006
Department of State
Nina Mitchell Wells, Esq.
Secretary of State

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Nina Mitchell Wells and I am the 32nd Secretary of State. It is my distinct privilege and honor to appear before you today.

Before I begin my testimony, let me say how excited I am to lead this great Department. I would like to thank Governor Corzine for this unique and very important opportunity. However, I recognize that, as the governor has advised, we have a challenging road ahead of us with regard to getting our state's finances back on track. This is a tough budget with tough choices that will put New Jersey on a path to fiscal stability and responsibility. Getting our state back on sound financial footing is going to mean both shared sacrifice and shared ingenuity as we work together to do more with less. That is what my department will do.

It is my vision, with the assistance of my dedicated staff, to inspire public pride in New Jersey's rich and diverse historical and cultural programs that improve the quality of life for all residents. We encourage all of our citizens to become Ambassadors of this Great State.

The Secretary of State's office performs a myriad of services and provides funding for literally thousands of programs that enrich children, families and residents statewide. In fact they make significant contributions to virtually everything of importance on the civic agenda. We foster strong non-profit cultural organizations, revitalize our cities, contribute to our growing economy, boost tourism, celebrate our past and yes, advance our children's academic achievement through cultural arts and history education.

I would like to quickly highlight several of my divisions and discuss how funds are allocated and the impact that their resources have on our citizens, particularly our youth.

Let me begin with the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives ("OFBI"), which funds so many critical programs for youth, primarily at-risk

youth. The name of this Division does not adequately reflect the breadth and depth of the organizations that are funded through it. In Fiscal Year 2006, the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives funded numerous anti-violence programs for young people, as well as programs to prevent our children from joining gangs. As we all know, early intervention is key to preventing violent anti-social behavior. The funding under the Faith-Based Initiatives also assisted young people, who have had a brush with the law, re-enter society provided with the educational support and tools needed to become successful, well-educated members of society.

Another one of our Divisions, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission focused its funding on scholarships for college students and support for 29 different programs that address violence prevention, conflict resolution and mentoring programs for young people.

Through funding provided by the hotel/motel occupancy fee, the funding programs and services of the Council on the Arts, the Historical Commission and the Cultural Trust have enabled hundreds of thousands of school children annually to be exposed to the treasures of our museums, theatres, concert halls and

performing arts centers and historical venues throughout the state. Education is a primary goal and priority of these agencies.

Whether it is through the Historical Commission, Cultural Trust, Arts Council, Martin Luther King Commission or Office of Faith-based Initiatives; whether it is through putting art and artists in schools or bringing busloads of children to our cultural gems, education is one of several vital priorities of our department.

Let me also assure you that our grant distribution process is a rigorous, highly structured and well developed process that ensures that funds are awarded fairly to arts and history organizations, both large and small, located throughout Northern, Central and Southern parts of New Jersey.

This year, the State Council on the Arts awarded more than \$22.3 million to over 700 non-profit arts programs, with over \$1.5 million supporting arts education alone. I recently attended a performance of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (“NJSO”) and twenty second and third graders from Newark who attend the NJSO music education program performed with classical violins. It was magnificent, and made possible as part of the Arts Council

funding, but the best part was that the students in the program have raised their standard test scores by 30%. We know that enrichment in art, history, music and culture greatly enhances academic achievement for all children. In addition, research has shown us the great health benefits the arts provide to people of all ages and conditions including persons with disabilities. That's why it is so important that we continue to provide grants to healthcare and arts initiatives such as the Haddonfield Symphony's Arts Education Programs which serve developmentally disabled children at the Bancroft School and Kingsway Learning Center.

Despite the fiscal challenges we all face with the FY 2007 budget, it is crucial that we think outside the box to ensure that our school children have access to an array of arts enrichment programs. To this end, my department is working in collaboration with the Department of Education on two important fronts: 1) to assess the status of arts education in every school in our state, and 2) to greatly enhance after school arts education opportunities everywhere. As part of this collaboration, a comprehensive survey of all New Jersey K-12 public schools, will give valuable information on arts education in our schools as well as after the

school day. The survey is a public/private partnership and it will be completed this month and its results presented to the State Board of Education in the coming months. We have also started a task force to explore ways to coordinate, bolster and proliferate after school arts education opportunities. It is also the goal of this collaboration to encourage greater private sector investments so that our in school and after school programming can be universally robust throughout the state. The Governor is partnering with my office and the Department of Education to assist in raising the private funding necessary to make this collaboration a success. One of the biggest hurdles is the cost of transportation so that all schools can have regular field trips, which we intend to address. Currently, approximately one million school children in New Jersey visit museums annually. But we can do even better!

The New Jersey Historical Commission offers many programs for the state's schools. The agency collaborates on the production of a multimedia web site and CD-ROM that enables teachers to integrate the history of our state into the teaching of American history in grades 7 through 12. This program also includes summer institutes for teachers.

The Commission has coproduced radio and television documentaries for classroom use from the elementary to high school levels, including "New Jersey Legacy," "Coming from India," "America the Dream of My Life," and "Paul Robeson." The Commission publishes books and pamphlets for classroom use on topics in New Jersey history such as the Underground Railroad, immigration, African American history, and women's history. The Historical Commission has worked with the New Jersey Department of Education to develop the state's core curriculum content standards.

We should and can do so much more for all of our children and we know that these kinds of cultural investments will pay off by educating children who are smart, creative reasoners with good critical thinking skills, self-disciplined and confident, and who are socially well adjusted. A sound arts education is one of the leading indicators of success in the 21st century workplace where creativity is at a premium. This is the type of excellence the Governor asked all of us to strive for.

Several final points: we need go no further than our own state resources in my Department to assess the tremendous impact we

are having on children and families right here in Trenton. Our own planetarium is a jewel and when we reopened it last month, we had 2,000 children and adults in attendance. Our planetarium is the largest between New York and Philadelphia. We also recently re-opened a newly renovated Museum Auditorium with several exhibition galleries. The auditorium will be the forum for hundreds of children attending our science camp this summer. We are working tirelessly to renovate our State Museum and when it reopens next year, we are sure it will put the State of New Jersey on the national cultural map! Our own Patriots Theatre at the War Memorial continues to be the site of numerous children's programs and enriching school performances for children and families throughout the year. All of these venues allow us to demonstrate to our residents exactly how these very important investments of State Government enhance their lives, and return dividends in far greater amounts.

Our many diverse arts, history and cultural venues are destinations of choice for many citizens and tourists and contribute to the economic growth of this State. Those museum visits, attendance at performing arts events, concerts, cultural programs and historical tours, fuel the economies of many cities

and towns. The arts are a billion-dollar business in New Jersey and we've all watched our state's arts groups grow in number and size the last few years. As a result, an estimated \$30 million in tax revenues were generated from their activities and spending of their patrons. There's more good news: direct spending by arts organizations totaled over \$220 million in 2005, meaning they over match state grants 10 to 1.

Arts, history and culture in New Jersey equal big business and they guarantee economic stimulation for our towns and cities. In 2001, the arts directly employed more than 6,000 full-time employees in the state, and supported the employment of another 85,000 persons in local businesses, restaurants, hotels and service sectors.

The Governor has asked us to find efficiencies in our operations. The best example of this is my Division of Archives and Record Management. This Division has saved enormous sums for municipalities and counties, savings that can be passed on to property owners, through employing technology wisely to reduce public agencies' record creation, maintenance and storage costs and to improve user access to recorded information. Based on

New Jersey's experience with the Public Records and Archives Infrastructure Support or PARIS Grants Program, and analyzing the positive impact of local records grant programs in other states over the past decade, our strategic investment of \$25 million per year in building and infrastructure improvements of county and local public records, will yield up to \$100 million in direct savings and cost efficiencies statewide.

Through the division's Storage Ways Assessment Team, known as SWAT, the State has been able to successfully initiate a global review of all state departments' records retention practices and procedures in partnership with the Department of Treasury. As a result, we have been able to improve the efficiency of public records management and reduce the number of state warehouses, saving additional dollars.

The Cultural Trust inspires and leverages new and increased private sector dollars for the nonprofit cultural industry in New Jersey. The Cultural Trust encourages greater and more effective philanthropy for our state's cultural organizations. Its interest earnings, now surpassing \$2 million, are helping to build stronger organizations. And with a broader and stronger capital base, the

organizations are able to contribute more fully to the community by providing rich arts and history experiences, including educational experiences.

Finally, I want to stress one last thing. The programs and services of the Divisions in the Department of State uphold the highest standards of public accountability to ensure that we get the results we seek.

Thank you for your time this afternoon and I am happy to answer any questions on the budget.