I want to thank the members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you. My name is Susan Coen. I am the Director of the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs and a Board Member of both ArtPRIDE and the Advocates for New Jersey History.

On behalf of the 80 Union County organizations and individuals who benefit from grant awards and fellowships from the NJ Historical Commission and the Arts Council, and the several hundred thousand residents of our 21 municipalities who benefit from their resulting programs and services, I want to say “thank you” for the landmark legislation which established a dedicated funding source for the Arts Council, Historical Commission and the Cultural Trust.

I’m sure you are aware of the economic impact of cultural resources; research shows that investment in the arts and history returns needed dollars to local communities and the state treasury. Cultural tourism is a billion dollar industry in New Jersey.

But funding reaches the public in more ways than you may realize. The Counties manage Regrant programs, which provide funds directly to local organizations, bringing performances, exhibits, lectures and discussions everywhere in the state, reaching pre-school children to the most senior of our citizens. Regrant dollars support some of New Jersey’s finest community cultural organizations, such as Hillside and Kenilworth Historical Societies, Summit and Plainfield Symphonies, Westfield and Cranford Community Theaters and most of the public libraries.
There is also the direct service we provide to non-profits. We use our state grant to offer workshops, hiring experts no one organization could afford, to teach new skills to volunteers and staff for fundraising, board and audience development, marketing and public relations, challenges that every organization faces. We facilitate a History Network and a Youth Arts Consortium, which develop partnerships and shared resources. We work with major agencies such as the Mental Health Association and United Way, using creative arts participation as a strategy to help those most in need. Our State grants help support the staff necessary to accomplish this work.

Grants help support inclusive public programs, the Teen Arts Festival, Operation Archeology, the Senior Art Show, the “Arts for the Caregivers” Respite project, our recent African-American history series and the award-winning Heritage Festival, “Four Centuries in a Weekend,” which not only relates our primary sources of history to the Department of Education’s social studies standards; it’s also a family day, with costumed docents and children’s activities, and a heritage tourism event, bringing more than 3000 people to spend money in Union County the third weekend every October.

County agencies are unique. We benefit from direct funding and have the pleasure of passing on both money and services to others, revealing the true power of the multiplier effect. Thanks to the “products” of grants from the Historical Commission and the Arts Council, New Jersey boasts a creative, sustainable quality of life. You have the ability to support and strengthen this healthy trend.

I urge you to support the budget proposals: to preserve the dedicated funding in the hotel/motel tax for the New Jersey Historical Commission, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the New Jersey Cultural Trust.