

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Pamela Green and I am the Executive Director of Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, New York. I am writing to urge passage of legislation amending the education law to provide formula funding to museums and historical societies that offer certifiable standards-based educational programming to school children and teachers in grades kindergarten through twelve and to foster innovation in museum education through a competitive grant program. This initiative, known as the Cultural and Museum Education Act, has been included in the State Education Department's 2008-09 budget proposal in the amount of \$30 million.

Let me give you just a little background about Weeksville in order to put my brief remarks in context. Weeksville Heritage Center is a historic site of great national significance. During the 19th century, the village of Weeksville was a vibrant and independent African American community. Four historic houses, dating from 1840-1883, are the original community's only remaining domestic structures. Our organizational mission is to document, preserve and interpret the history of free African American communities in Weeksville, Brooklyn and beyond and to create and inspire innovative, contemporary uses of African American history through education, the arts, and civic engagement.

Weeksville Heritage Center employs a staff of eleven full-time employees and three part-time employees. Our Board of Directors consists of twenty one members; two are New York City officials. Our annual operating budget is \$1,500,000 and the current visitation to our site is 7,500 per year, but is projected to grow to 30,000 by 2010.

Weeksville recently completed a \$3.5 million restoration project for our historic houses, allowing all four houses to be open to the public for the first time in the 35 year history of our organization. Weeksville implemented a historic furnishings plan, so that the houses are restored to three different time periods, the 1870's, 1900's and 1930's. Both the interior and exterior of the houses are restored and the grounds are appropriately landscaped to compliment the houses. We plan to break ground for a new 19,000 square foot Education and Cultural Arts Building on the site in spring 2008. The new building will serve as an orientation area and provide space for the professional development of educators, exhibitions, performances and community programs. The building will help Weeksville achieve its vision to be a cultural nexus rooted in preservation and African American history – one that offers socially conscious programming that responds to the needs and interests of visitors and neighborhood residents.

Weeksville's Historic Hunterfly Road Houses were designated a New York City Landmark in August, 1970, and were listed in the 1994 edition of the National Register of Historic Places for national significance.

As you may already know, historic house museums across the country traditionally struggle to achieve sustainability while providing essential historic information to children and families. In the case of Weeksville, we are providing information typically absent from our history books and from general knowledge. Our aim is to make African American history relevant to today's youth and to have this accurate portrayal of African American contributions serve as a catalyst for change and a stimulant for life long learning. We are successful at creating and implementing strong educational programming and yet we must constantly look for funding to support this important resource. Our educational programming is an essential supplement to that which is taught in public schools. Our programming focuses on teaching history through literacy, the arts, the environment and technology. We are located directly across the street from one of the largest housing developments in Brooklyn and in a community which is woefully underserved in terms of cultural and educational activities for its young people. Being able to serve this population alone, makes our growth and survival essential.

We recognize that we are more effective and efficient when we collaborate and we have developed long standing partnerships with Brooklyn Public Library, several elementary, middle and high schools, Brooklyn Children's Museum, Brooklyn Historical Society and many other community based and larger cultural, educational and social organizations. We believe these collaborations and strong, substantive educationally based programming can make a difference in student achievement and performance and in the quality of life in the communities we serve.

All of what we and our colleagues in the museum and historic society field achieve requires consistent and meaningful funding. We strongly believe that the inclusion of the Cultural and Museum Education Act in the State Education Department's 2008-09 is fundamental to the continued success of the small, regional and local museums and historic societies in the state of New York. Many of us are emerging and evolving into important institutions on the local and national level. However, the work we do most heavily impacts the stabilization and development of the communities which surround us. Consistent State funding will help us attract the best and brightest staff, plan and execute educational and cultural programming for children and adults, and provide space and activities which address the needs of the communities we are committed to serving. State funding will support us as we become cultural tourism destinations which in turn will support the economic aims of the state and the cities in which we are located.

Museums and historical institutions must play an integral role in the development of our communities. Our presence can help to attract comprehensive services to our underserved and deserving children and families and our stability automatically contributes to the necessary economic growth and enhanced

quality of life of the neighborhoods which look to us for much needed educational and cultural programs.

Thank you so much for your time and attention. I do hope that you will carefully and thoughtfully consider the passage of this very important legislation which will have a broad impact on the education of our children and the sustainability of our communities.

Sincerely,

Pamela Green
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