



**Written Testimony in Support of FY09 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by John Legend

Singer & Songwriter

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies

“Role of the Arts in Creativity and Innovation”

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Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to be here. My name is John Legend, and I am a pianist, a singer and a songwriter. It is a pleasure to join Americans for the Arts and to testify in favor of a Fiscal Year 2009 appropriation of \$176 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

I'd like to share with you today some understanding of how I, as an individual, have benefitted from the arts and how I think that federal attention to this area can benefit others.

I was born and raised in Springfield, Ohio where I had many people contributing to my education in the arts. When I just four years old, my parents gave me piano lessons introducing me to my first instrument – I was so little that my feet couldn't even reach the piano pedals. My grandmother furthered my musical education by showing me how to play gospel music on the piano. Soon after I played and sang in the church choir.

I didn't just learn the piano however. In elementary school I took art classes and drama classes, I was in the middle school choir; I was in the high school choir and acted in our musical theater productions. As you can see, I was a participant in many arts programs growing up.

I think that all this training help me develop in several ways. I think that each of those disciplines has given me traits, characteristics and skills that I used back then, and continue to benefit from today. For example, as I learned how to play the piano and performed, the experience gave me a great deal more confidence in everything I did. I was a shy kid and this new-found confidence allowed me to be surer of myself and in speaking up in math, English or history class.

Through the arts I think students are able to explore their world in a more thoughtful, and alternative way than just reading it directly from a history or social studies book. I think that painting, singing and acting allowed me to learn about history in ways that standard curriculum can't teach – it gave me a broader worldview. It can develop your heart and cultivate your soul and I think provides us with a better understanding of our humanity.

As a teenager, outside of school, I took part in the Springfield (Ohio) Arts Council “Summer in the Park” series and I remember being in a production of “Big River”. A few years ago, with a few more performances under my belt I was invited by the Springfield Arts Council to come back and do a free concert at the Summer Arts Festival. In a town of 75,000 people, 18,000 of them came to hear me sing, and I have to say, it was really good to be home.

For college I attended the University of Pennsylvania which was a big change for me. Again, my shyness was curbed by my growing fondness for performing. Moving from little Springfield, OH to Philadelphia was a big change for me, but I joined an *a cappella* singing group which helped to introduce me to new people who had entirely different background than I.

From college I did not go straight into the music business. Many of my friends were exploring investment banking and consulting firms – and with an eye on my student loans I also followed a corporate path. I took a job as a consultant at Boston Consulting Group (BCG), an international consulting firm that has Fortune 100 companies for clients. They hired me because my artistic background demonstrated my creative talents. I was there for three years and became trained in the art of “problem solving.”

I left the consulting world to follow my heart and take a big leap to be a full-time musician. The success I have found through my music has allowed me to continue to give attention to issues that I care about. While I founded the Show Me Foundation utilizing many of the problem-solving strategies that I learned at BCG, I use my music to open the ears of college students and young adults and others to learn about world poverty and what we can do about it.

I’ve become good friends with Dr. Jeffrey Sachs of the Columbia Earth Institute and he and I do tours where some people come to hear my music and then learn from him about ending poverty, and others come to end poverty first and happen hear my music. The Show Me Campaign is an effort to convert this interest in caring into ways to learn about poverty and give ways to be involved. I use music as a “foot in the door” to get into people’s heads – and instill a sense of urgency. I wrote the song “Show Me” to pose questions to God about what is happening in our world, and to urge people to show that they care.

Perhaps this is why so many artists are activists and take up causes – not only because their celebrity allows them to bring attention to problems, but because we have the wonderful fortune to speak through our art about life and all it’s beauty and sometimes it’s ugliness.

I hope that I’ve been able to provide some idea of the power that art has had in my life. It was provided to me through my family, through my public schooling and with the help of the local arts organizations.

Thank you for listening to my story today and I hope it provides you guidance in supporting the arts in Springfield, in Philadelphia and throughout this country.

