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Legislative Leaders Form New Cultural Caucus

Boston—Elected officials created the first Cultural Caucus in the Massachusetts Legislature yesterday to advance an agenda to harness the assets of Massachusetts' \$4 billion cultural sector and help the state's economy recover from recession.

The Cultural Caucus drew more than a dozen Senators and Representatives from every region of the Commonwealth, who voted to elect Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz of Boston and Rep. Smitty Pignatelli of Lenox as Co-Chairs, at the State House. Chang-Díaz already serves as Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development; Pignatelli is a member of the Committee. Rep. John Keenan of Salem, the Joint Committee's House Chair, organized the Caucus. To see a short video of the Caucus go here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/MassCulturalCouncil#p/u/0/lqjfGgpRnqU>

"The arts, humanities, and sciences are central to our economic vitality in Massachusetts," said Chang-Díaz, who is also a member of the Joint Committee on Education. "They also contribute significantly to the quality of our schools and the life of our communities. The Cultural Caucus will give us a chance to broaden and deepen support for this vital sector in the Legislature as we face continued budget challenges in the year ahead."

Pignatelli added: "In my district, the arts are a major economic engine, as they are in the districts of Co-Chairs Chang-Díaz and Keenan. Together, we have made the case effectively that state support has helped fuel that engine to create jobs and revitalize communities. With state finances still tight, we need to redouble those efforts and find new and innovative ways to tap our cultural assets to get our economy growing again."

The Caucus was created one day after Governor Deval Patrick proposed a state budget that would dedicate \$9.4 million for arts and culture through the MCC. That is roughly \$300,000 less than the current fiscal year and less than half of cultural funding levels a decade ago.

"We know we have a tough year ahead," said Keenan. "But we also know that we must continue to make strategic investments in sectors of our economy that create jobs and add to our quality of life. The cultural sector is one of those investments."

In fact, recent data from the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund shows that \$37 million in state fund for building projects in the arts, humanities, and sciences have helped generate the following:

- \$14.3 million new visitors to Massachusetts cultural venues, nearly a third from out of state.
- Nearly 8,000 full-time jobs and \$417 million in collective wages and salaries.
- Jobs for more than 5,384 architects, engineers, contractors and construction workers.
- 1,163 new permanent jobs in Massachusetts.

“These organizations are the foundation for tourism, the third largest industry in Massachusetts,” said Anita Walker, MCC’s Executive Director. “Investments in this sector through the MCC pay dividends to the state.”

Other legislators who attended the caucus included Reps. Steve Walsh of Lynn, Ellen Story of Amherst, Sarah Peake of Provincetown, Stephen Kulik of Worthington, Jason Lewis of Winchester, Benjamin Swan of Springfield, Rosemary Sandlin of Agawam, Kevin Aguiar of Fall River, Pamela Richardson of Framingham, Mark Falzone of Saugus, Timothy Madden of Nantucket, and Dan Bosley of North Adams. Top aides to Senate President Therese Murray of Plymouth, House Speaker Robert DeLeo of Winthrop, and many other legislators also attended.

MCC Board Chair Elyse Cherry of Brookline, and members Ira Lapidus of Williamstown and Lisa Wong of Newton also attended. MassHumanities, the state’s humanities council, was represented by Board member John Dacey and Executive Director David Tebaldi.