

NEW YORK, N.Y., May 19, 1961.

HON. FRANK THOMPSON, JR.,
*Chairman, Select Subcommittee on Education,
Committee on Education and Labor,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. THOMPSON: Thank you very much for your letter of May 10, in which you informed me of the hearings to be held on May 15 on H.R. 4172. I appreciate your suggesting that the committee would be interested in my views as an individual and as the chairman of the board of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

I regret very much that I was not able to be present at the hearings but I had a longstanding commitment which required that I be in New York on the day proposed. Under the circumstances, you suggested that I set forth my views in writing.

The role of the arts in American life has increased with each passing year so that today participation, support, and enjoyment of the arts is no longer the prerogative of the few. They have become a part of the daily lives of a vast majority of our population in all walks of life. A very tangible indication of this development is the substantial increase in the number of local symphony orchestras, amateur dramatic groups, museums, and cultural centers. These have come about through the interest, initiative, and support of individual citizens through out the land.

This has been a wholesome development and one which is almost inevitable in the light of the industrial advancement of the country. Increasingly our people have had a desire and have felt a need for some form of self-realization, some means of creative fulfillment. In less complicated times most of our citizens could find this in their daily labors—in the quite visible products of their hands. But today society is more complex and mechanized and it is difficult for most of our citizens to gain from their labor alone the satisfactions they desire. Accordingly, they are turning more and more to the arts as one means—and as a very important means—for gaining such satisfactions.

While this development has come about primarily as a result of individual initiative and local interest, the arts have become such a significant part of our national life that it does seem to me that recognition of their importance, as well as their encouragement, are matters of appropriate concern for the Federal Government. It is also highly desirable that there be a focal point for such concern within the executive branch of the Government.

The Federal Advisory Council on the Arts, as proposed in H.R. 4172, is well designed to achieve this result. The very existence of the Council will give recognition to the importance of the arts. The bill provides a vehicle through which those interested in the arts may appropriately bring matters of significance to the attention of the Federal Government—matters which are appropriate for the consideration and concern of the Federal Government. In addition, the Council is not vested with such executive powers as will enable it to interfere with the healthy, normal development of our culture through individual initiative. For these reasons I sincerely hope that H.R. 4172 will be favorably considered by the House of Representatives.

If there is anything I can do to further this legislation either individually or in my capacity as chairman of the board of Lincoln Center, I hope very much that you will not hesitate to call upon me.

Sincerely,

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER 3d.