

Testimony given by PlayWrite Executive Director Bruce Livingston before the Portland City Council March 12, 2009 (re the 2008 State of the Arts Report presented by Carole Morse, chair of the Regional Arts & Culture Council Board of Directors, and Eloise Damrosch, Executive Director of RACC):

This morning I received an email from Margot Voorhies Thompson, noted artist, teacher and designer of the PlayWrite logo. Here is the text of her message:

“When I saw a PlayWrite production, I was moved and impressed by the work, imagination and courage expressed by the students. I found myself wishing this kind of personal growth could happen for others, both children and adults. We need more programs such as PlayWrite that focus on personal confidence and development. PlayWrite works with an underserved population, but what is also being done is an underfunded development of an effective model that could find application to whole communities. Arts develop the whole child and adult, and thus our whole community.”

“PlayWrite is a small organization, with an annual budget of \$300,000. We are young, just five years old. The Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC) provided funding for us in the early years. RACC took a risk, which is what artists do. That risk paid off – in five years, we have tripled the number of young people we serve each year.

Last year, because of the very successful Work for Art program, our grant award was significantly increased. I believe that the citizens of Portland support the arts both because of their inherent value, and the dramatic impact that creating art has on everyone.

We work with kids who are variously described as “at-risk,” “disadvantaged,” “underserved” or “marginalized.” Each of these terms is appropriate in its way. Our focus is on students attending alternative schools in the Portland area, including Portland Night High School, Rosemont School and Treatment Center, Mt. Scott Learning Center, and Open Meadow Middle School.

We engage these students with artists, whose positions are funded in part by RACC – hence the City – money. The one-on-one relationship is intense, and has long-lasting impacts. Over and over we are told by students, like Germaine, that *“I hated writing before, and then I did that [PlayWrite], and it opened my mind to creativity... Things just pop out now. My imagination grew bigger.”*

A teacher at one of the schools wrote not long ago *“Prior to this experience, we had almost nightly problems with Nicole for disruptive behavior. Since she took part in PlayWrite, she has gone from sassing teachers to asking teachers what she can do to help. I see the potential for Nicole developing into a true leader at our school.”*

Our community becomes a better place because of RACC and the city’s commitment to the arts. Thank you for your support of RACC’s budget.