March 13, 2018

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of America’s orchestras, and as a National Partner of Arts Advocacy Day 2018, the League of American Orchestras asks you to strengthen federal support for the arts. The only national organization dedicated solely to the orchestral experience, the League has a diverse membership of more than 2,000 organizations and individuals across the U.S.—from world-renowned orchestras to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from conservatories to libraries, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. The impact orchestras create is supported by a critical combination of public and private support. We request your support for policies and funding that will strengthen the arts in communities nationwide:

Broaden public access to the arts by supporting $155 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Orchestras serve their communities—large and small—throughout the country, and NEA grants help them to expand public access to performances, to support music education for children and adults, and to foster the creative work of contemporary classical musicians, composers, and conductors. NEA funding directly supports local projects, and the distinction of winning federal support such as an NEA grant is critical in leveraging giving from other sources like private foundations, corporations, and individual contributors that see the grant as a national seal of approval.

Increase community access to vital services and programs by supporting tax incentives for all forms of charitable gifts and encourage more giving by more Americans by enacting a universal charitable deduction. Orchestras and other arts organizations are an essential part of the broader community of approximately 1.4 million nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, working alongside hospitals, educational institutions, food assistance programs, and the full array of charitable organizations. Support from donors across the economic spectrum enables orchestras to respond to local needs and form community partnerships through education, artistry, economic development, and social service programs. Charitable giving does not enrich donors: it is an investment in the public good.

Provide students with a complete education by supporting $30 million for the Assistance for Arts Education programs at the U.S. Department of Education and strengthening equitable access to arts education in a Well-Rounded Education in provisions throughout the Every Student Succeeds Act. As local partners in music education, orchestras collaborate with schools to support arts education opportunities that equip students with the skills, knowledge, and imaginative capacity needed to succeed.

Improve international cultural engagement by enacting legislation that requires U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to implement reasonable processing times for O and P petitions as required in law, and provide reliability for visa petitions filed by, or on behalf of, nonprofit arts-related organizations. U.S. orchestras routinely invite highly sought-after foreign musicians to perform, providing both American musicians and audiences the opportunity to experience a diversity of extraordinary musical talent, and encouraging a supportive climate for our orchestras to perform abroad. We also urge Congress to further improve international cultural exchange by dedicating increased resources for arts diplomacy programs within the Cultural Programs Division at the U.S. Department of State.

I encourage your support for policies and funding that strengthen the arts and help to advance the orchestral experience for all communities.

Sincerely,

Jesse Rosen, President & CEO