

**Testifying to the Commerce Committee public hearing on HB 6119, February 11, 2021**  
**Arts Culture and Tourism Fund**

Good afternoon, my name is Kandie Carle, I am the producing artistic director of the East Haddam Stage Company, a live performing arts organization in residence at Gillette Castle State Park, based in East Haddam CT. We perform on the stage built specifically for us on site. This past summer was the first in 12 years that we were unable to share our six-weekend season of free shows, which brings in an average 2-3,000 audience members to the park. We also offer touring shows to various venues throughout New England. I myself am an actress, known as the Victorian Lady. Among other roles, I present living history programming to a variety of arts, culture and tourist driven organizations in CT and beyond. In that vein I am a 'gig' worker, or independent contractor. I am coming to you today as that independent performing artist to urge you to support House Bill 6119.

First off, the name change from the Tourism Fund to the more inclusive Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund will better reflect the entities to which the fund is dedicated. The CT Office of the Arts, as well as the CT Humanities, along with regional arts councils such as the Shoreline Arts Alliance and the Southeast CT Cultural Coalition work hand in hand to offer resources to those of us who make our living in this sector. I will forever be thankful to them for their assistance in navigating the PUA and PPP programs during this pandemic. The arts and cultural councils were a lifeline. When I, and others like me, were in the weeds, they dug around in the barn, brought out their weed-whackers and cleared the path.... so we could stay afloat. Mixed metaphors not withstanding!

Please don't forget that included under this umbrella is HERITAGE tourism. This includes historical societies, small museums, living history sites, libraries, small art galleries and studios, and performance venues. They are the backbone of communities in the 169 towns in Connecticut. These oft times all volunteer run, not-for-profit jewels may not have big celebrity names, get line item status, nor curry favor from wealthy donors, but they are the stars in the constellation of Connecticut. They are the keepers of our stories, of lives lived, past, present and yes, even the future, you can see where you need to go, based on knowing where you've been. The increase in the percentage of the already collected tax going into the Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund means more resources available to enhance the ability of these heritage tourism sites to make real connections and promote their dynamic places. You can do great things when you know someone's got your back.

They not only work to maintain their properties and interpret their collections, but also offer us independent contractors the opportunity to share our creativity and talent with their patrons, whether they be locals from the immediate community, or visiting tourists. We professional artists invest in ourselves, with the research, the supplies, the studio space, the classes, the writing, the directing, the rehearsing, the costuming, the props, the technical, the marketing, the travel, AND we pay the minimum 15% tax as 1099ers. Small groups such as the East Haddam Stage Company, as well as the independent musicians, singers, sculptors, artists, dancers, storytellers, poets, living history role players.... the list goes on... make our living by being hired by these organizations. We invest in our talent with blood, sweat and tears, so we are worthy of their investing in us. So I ask you to invest in them, which is, in fact, your investment in me.

Others have highlighted the economic impact studies and statistics. I hope you see that those numbers reflect just how the arts and culture sector is a thriving part of the economic health of any state. HB 6119 is an investment that will enrich and reward. Think about that school kid who has an ah-ha moment when they come face to face with Nathan Hale, and is wowed by the bravery of Prudence Crandall. Think about every day folks, like yourselves, who are moved, cheered, and touched by being in the presence of thought provoking art, of being given the opportunity to experience human connection reflected in our rich culture, when you vote to increase the percentage of revenue for the newly named Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund.

In closing, I would like to share a story of just how the arts can inspire. In 2018 my East Haddam Stage Company, after 4 years of research and months of writing, casting, directing and producing, and with a Regional Initiative Grant from the CT Office of the Arts, premiered a one-man drama, *Osaki-san*,

*William Gillette's Gentleman Valet* on stage at Gillette Castle State Park. Yukitaka Osaki came to the US from Japan in 1888, with his brother and 3 others, for what was to be a 3-month visit. When it came time to leave, his brother Yukio got on the ship, but Yukitaka decided to stay. He never returned to Japan. The play is based on his life, his eventual employment and friendship with William Gillette, and, as a Japanese man, the impact the events of Pearl Harbor had on him. Gillette is most famous for his creation of the role of Sherlock Holmes, and his retirement home, now known as Gillette Castle State Park, was also the location of Osaki-san's retirement home, built for him by Mr. Gillette, near the Chester Hadlyme ferry on the CT River.

During the research phase, I had reached out to the Japan Society of Greater Hartford, for their input and viewpoint. They had not realized that there was a very important link between CT and their native Japan. Many of their members were at the standing room only premiere of the show at Gillette Castle in the fall of 2018. I had hired a wonderful Japanese-American actor, Taku Hirai to portray Osaki-san, and they made a great connection with him. He is currently contracted to portray Osaki-san for the foreseeable future, and we look forward to his performances as soon as it is possible to get him back on the road.

Jumping ahead 4 months into early 2019, as the show was touring to various venues throughout New England, I received an email from the president of the Japan Society of Greater Hartford sharing that they were fund raising in order to make a very special gift to the park, in honor of Yukitaka Osaki and William Gillette. You see, Yukitaka Osaki's brother, Yukio, was the mayor of Tokyo in 1912 and was responsible for the gift of the, now iconic, Cherry Blossom Trees to Washington D.C. And, as it turns out, the Japan Society of Greater Hartford had been looking for an opportunity to share Japan's Cherry Blossoms with CT. They identified and reached out to the nursery in Japan, which is responsible for the descendant saplings of those original Cherry Trees. They made a purchase of dozens of saplings, which arrived in the US in 2019, and are currently in quarantine at the USDA outside Baltimore, Maryland. While they hoped that the trees would be ready to be planted by 2020, they were not yet ready for release, so, in the meantime, the Japan Society of Greater Hartford purchased 7 Cherry Blossom Trees from a nursery in Farmington, CT, and on a chilly October weekend last fall, a group of us, including park supervisor and staff, volunteers from the East Haddam Stage Company and the Japan Society of Greater Hartford planted 5 of the trees near the pond, one near the Castle and one down at the landing near Osaki-san's house, which while not currently open, is still standing. Once the trees from Japan are released from quarantine, the plan is to plant more around the park, as well as at Cove Cemetery, Hadlyme, where Yukitaka Osaki is buried.

This gift would never have happened had I not reached out to the Japan Society of Greater Hartford, and had they not come to the park to see the show. You may never know the impact you have as an artist, but this time, I was humbled and honored that it was because of the work my small little theatre company had done to bring Yukitaka Osaki out of the shadows and into the light, that inspired a beautiful gift that will be enjoyed by thousands of visitors every Spring.

Because of COVID, we were not able to have a festive celebration of the gift, but as soon as we are able, we will be shouting from the rooftops. Partnerships such as what the East Haddam Stage Company has with a state park, our local business sponsors, and through the bonds forged with other cultural entities, have, indeed, enriched us all.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by Kandie Carle, East Haddam Stage Company

PO Box 176 East Haddam CT 06423

860-873-3421

[www.EHSCO.org](http://www.EHSCO.org)