



State of Connecticut
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2/11/2021

Testimony on: HB 6119 AN ACT CONCERNING ARTS, CULTURE AND TOURISM FUNDING.

Thank you, Madame Chair, Rep. Simmons, Sen. Cohen, Rep. Buckbee and Sen. Martin.

I am Rep. Robin Comey from the 102nd district of Branford. I am writing in support of HB 6119 An Act Concerning arts, culture and tourism funding. As a child growing up in East Hartford, I developed a love for the arts learning an instrument in elementary school. And though I ended up moving frequently throughout middle and high school, music was the one consistent. I was able to find friendship and belonging with the school music programs and with kids who enjoyed it as much as I did. I remained committed throughout high school and eventually had the amazing opportunity of performing with an award-winning marching band traveling the country for competitions. Attracted to the arts I pursued a career in the TV and media industry, a hands-on industry that suited me better than an academic field. Simply stated, without the arts I can safely say I would not be here with you today.

Shortly after I graduated college, in the early 90's and the recession, my husband and I built a family business in media, event and TV communications in the state. We have been operating for the past 30 years experiencing the ups and downs of an industry with inconsistent investments. With the most recent COVID-19 pandemic our business and my colleague's businesses, like many other industries, have been struggling. In early 2021, today we are fortunately seeing business pickup and we are confident we will weather this as we did other downturns.

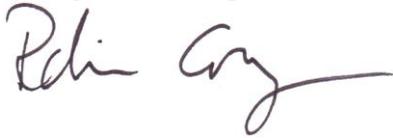
I remember when we were investing richly in the office of the arts. I was shocked when in 2011 the budget was cut to a single dollar and as an employee of the industry, I felt like the state did not recognize our industry as the economic driver that it was. Investments in Arts, Culture and tourism bring value to our local communities and to our state.

Personally, I have experienced a vibrant community theater experience in New Britain, New Haven and Branford. I've explored directing, technical directing, acting, instrumentalists, singing and dancing on stage and even toured for some time with a regional musical theatre performing group. These non-profits and community groups are often under recognized for the dollars they bring into our towns and cities. My story reflects just one of tens of thousands in this state of how students benefitting from a young age from exposure to the arts and who then choose to pursue careers and start businesses in the industry, all good for the future of Connecticut.

I'd like to close by shining a spotlight on a non-profit organization that I have worked with, Projects for a New Millennium or Projects2k, that has produced many live events over the years in Branford. These elaborate highly technical outdoor light shows took place in a working quarry -- the Stony Creek Quarry. One project would take many years to come to fruition. We wrote grants and needed to find extensive funding as a two-week run would cost upwards of 70k. And that was considered working on a shoestring budget and was dependent on many volunteers.

This dedicated group of artists and technical professionals held large-scale outdoor multimedia spectacles every few years for about 10 years. Each one interwove storytelling of science, history, and fostered environmental stewardship for the natural world. Each two-week run attracted 1000's of tourists from throughout New England and maybe some of you here today were fortunate to experience these groundbreaking productions.

We were able to bring this to the residents of the state because of the partial support of the Office of the Arts making meaningful investments into communities. We hired professionals and services for each production. Real jobs for food trucks, school buses, working artists and technicians who rented equipment from local companies and hired people and partnered with universities and agencies to bring this experience to life for many. In my experience growing investments in this industry sends a strong message to our state with job creation and economic development. Thank you to the committee for giving this a public hearing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Comey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Robin Comey
State Representative 102nd District