

February 11, 2021

**TESTIMONY OF SCOTT DOLCH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CONNECTICUT RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION BEFORE THE COMMERCE COMMITTEE**

House Bill 6119: An Act Concerning Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding

Good afternoon Senator Hartley, Representative Simmons, Senator Martin, Representative Buckbee and members of the Commerce Committee. My name is Scott Dolch and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Restaurant Association.

On behalf of Connecticut's 8,500 restaurant and foodservice locations and Connecticut's 160,000 foodservice employees, the Connecticut Restaurant Association appreciates the opportunity to be here today in support of House Bill 6119, an Act Concerning Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding. This timely legislation will provide enhanced resources to the state's tourism budget, which will have a significant impact not only the restaurant industry, but many other hospitality businesses in our state.

Over the past 11 months, our industry has watched more than 600 restaurants close. Even for those that have managed to stay afloat, they have faced incredible challenges as they have adjusted to the limits on their business, and have worked extremely hard to find new ways to operate while keeping their customers and their employees safe.

The purpose of testifying today is to highlight that Culinary Tourism in Connecticut is real and we need to provide the proper resources to showcase this benefit not only to our residents, but to those who travel to Connecticut from around the world. Our state has some of the best dining experiences in the world, however, I feel that we sometimes take this for granted. We have landmark restaurants like The Griswold Inn, Louis Lunch, J. Timothy's, Millwright's, Frank Pepe's, Modern, Sally's, Lenny & Joe's, Carbone's, Rein's Deli, Max Downtown, Abbot's Lobster in the Rough, Union League Café, Colony Grill, Columbus Park and so many more. Even this week, Barstool Sports Founder, Dave Portnoy, tweeted that in his opinion, New Haven was the pizza capital of the world and we even have state legislators proposing a new bill to make Pizza the Official State Food.

Connecticut's restaurants are the cornerstones of our communities, and our restaurants and our communities have been devastated by this ongoing crisis. Even as we look to reopen beyond Phase 2.1 this spring and summer, we need to be encouraging tourists to come visit our sports venues, theatres, museums, aquariums, parks, breweries, restaurants, hotels and more. Our state has a chance to be a leader in business recovery, but without an increase in the tourism fund, we will quickly be left behind by our neighboring states. Just this week, Governor Lamont talked about "Connecticut's Comeback" and I'm hopeful each of you see the value in increasing tourism dollars, as it will allow us to comeback stronger than ever.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.