

My name is Jennifer Eifrig, Development & Communications Director at Judy Dworin Performance Project, Inc. (JDPP), and, on behalf of the organization, I am writing in enthusiastic support of H.B. 6119.

A founding principle of JDPP is that the arts are an invaluable avenue leading to the health and well-being of our community and our individual selves. The arts ensure that we are creative and vital, processing our world and making positive contributions to it. The arts give us new perspectives and awareness to be the best that we can with a shared understanding of our collective humanity.

The arts are not optional—they are key to our survival.

JDPP's mission is to harness creative expression as a catalyst for positive change. JDPP uses dance theater performance and multi-arts engagement to examine social issues, build bridges of understanding across diverse communities, and inspire both individual growth and collective action. Participants in JDPP's programs discover untapped resources in themselves and others as they grow and heal, opening new and productive channels in the present and for the future.

In 2020, JDPP engaged approximately 4,000 adults and youth, many the most marginalized in our population, through its three program umbrellas: the JDPP Ensemble of professional dance, spoken word, and music artists who explore social justice issues such as gender, race, oppression, immigration, and mass incarceration and contemporary culture through dance/theater performances; the *Moving Matters!*TM Multi-Arts Residency that brings movement, dance, narrative, and song into Hartford Public Schools as a catalyst for academic achievement and personal growth; and the Bridging BoundariesTM Arts Interventions that support incarcerated men and women, their families, and returned citizens as they span the forced separations imposed by incarceration.

The past year has been among the most challenging in our 30+-year history. We have had to move all of our rehearsals and performances online, and switch to recorded video instruction for our school-based residencies since visitors are not allowed. We can only engage participants in our prison-based residencies through mail sent back and forth through the prison counselors. We have had to invest over \$10,000 in new hardware, software, and online services to accommodate these shifts and strengthen our digital presence, all of which was unbudgeted. We cut \$20,000 out of our FY2020 operating budget to avoid running a deficit and revised our FY2021 budget downward by \$35,000. At the same time, we need to expand our investment in professional videorecording, which is currently the only way to reach our performance audiences.

H.B. 6119 would solidify the funding base for the entire arts and culture sector, which has been critical to helping individuals and families, especially children and young people, stay resilient and mentally healthy through the pandemic crisis. When students at Expeditionary Learning Academy at Moylan Elementary returned to the classroom in September, JDPP was there with video dance and movement exercises, writing prompts, and art activities to ease their anxiety and support their academic engagement. While the prisons are closed to visitors, our program participants rely on booklets designed and printed by JDPP to share their artwork, poetry, and essays with their families and relieve some of the loneliness and separation. When people of color and their

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allies erupted in anger over police brutality and systemic racism, JDPP's performers went online to give voice to their struggle. The arts are a basic human right, and Connecticut needs to better support the organizations and individuals who do this work.

No one can make the world a better place without a strong infrastructure. This bill is an important step in recognizing the centrality of Connecticut's creative economy and ensuring its long-term health and impact. We will all celebrate the passing of this bill as a clear endorsement of what we can and must contribute. Thank you.