

Good afternoon respected members of the Commerce Committee. My name is Jeff Hamilton, President and General Manager of Mohegan Sun. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for you today. We are here today in support of H. B. 6119 - An Act Concerning Arts, Culture, and Tourism Funding. This legislation would bring additional funding to bear on behalf of Connecticut's fantastic tourism industry, and it would come at a critical time as local businesses work to bounce back from the hit they have taken during the pandemic.

The Mohegan Tribe is proud to call Eastern Connecticut home; the region is a hidden gem in our state and should be celebrated as such. We are fortunate to have access to beautiful beaches, charming towns and bustling cities. Our local leaders in government and commerce are working hard even during these challenging times to ensure that we are creating and maintaining a bountiful business climate that meets the needs of our communities by supporting economic growth and development.

Despite these incredible efforts, additional aid is very much needed, and warranted. At Mohegan Sun, full time employment is down more than 21 percent since before the pandemic, representing more than 1,000 full and part time jobs and millions in wages. This lost economic activity has a compounding effect across the region and especially on the many local businesses we rely on. The additional state aid this bill would provide would only amplify the good efforts underway here at Mohegan and at businesses in the tourism industry throughout our region, helping achieve a faster recovery for all.

It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed nearly every aspect of how Connecticut residents go about their daily lives, and will also change how the state and municipalities budget. While we must all remain mindful of its budgetary demands, it's imperative that we continue to prioritize additional dollars towards arts, culture, and tourism. These goals are not in conflict: investments in tourism can and will have a positive impact on our communities, boosting our state's economy and therefore revenues. There has in fact never been a better time to invest in tourism.

Connecticut's tribal nations are invested in our local communities through charity, education grants, providing local first responder services, support for local projects, as well as being huge drivers for tourism in our region. We are committed to continuing these efforts because when our neighborhoods do well, we all do well.

Similarly, tourism is an economic bright spot in our state's economic recovery. By establishing a solid foundation of funding for tourism in our communities, we can make a significant impact on our state's economy. Despite the road blocks we are facing due to the pandemic, now is not the time to forget the importance of shining a light on what we all love about our own backyards.

Thank you for your time.