

Members of the Appropriations Committee of the CT General Assembly

Subject: Funding for Arts, Culture & Tourism

Submitted by: William Hosley, Terra Firma Northeast, Enfield, CT

**TESTIMONY HB 6119:
AN ACT CONCERNING ARTS, CULTURE
AND TOURISM FUNDING**

I moved to Connecticut 41 years ago to take a job at Wadsworth Atheneum where I was productively and creatively engaged for 17 years, during which I received an award from the Office of Tourism for *Historic Hartford* and its proposed Gilded Age history and art trail.

Afterwards I was executive director of CT Landmarks and later - the New Haven Museum. I know Connecticut's treasures inside and out. I spent 7 years as a legislatively-appointed member of the State Culture & Tourism advisory board. I was formerly a trustee of Preservation Connecticut. My involvement in and passion for the arts, history, tourism and historic preservation is extensive - my life's work.

I say this as a prelude to a controversial recommendation - which is to **OPPOSE THIS BILL** and defund tourism for a year or two so we can have a serious conversation about what tourism is about, why it matters, and how to properly do the work of supporting that sector of our economy. Defund it and let those who care make the best of it they can regionally. Let it bubble up from the ground, in a time of transition. But most of all let's have a serious discussion devoid of the usual forgone conclusion that the only thing needed is more State funding.

2019 was a year of unprecedented focus on tourism by State government. Governor Lamont appointed a blue ribbon committee. Senator Formica and others a legislative caucus that grappled with tourism issues. Speaker Joe Aresimowicz had a task force - the first time I ever recall the General Assembly being so deliberate and pro-active about tourism.

The agenda was immediately hijacked by the Arts - who lent their support in exchange for a cut of the revenue. Since the performing arts **DO NOT** drive tourism in Connecticut and never paid attention to tourism until now - why merge with the arts to pursue of funding?

I get that some of our art museums - especially Wadsworth and Yale's - are big tourism draws. Historic sites like Mark Twain, Nathan Hale and Hill-Stead are. Historic places like Norwich, New London, Lebanon, Hartford, New Haven, Fairfield and greater Litchfield have huge untapped potential. But this current budget initiative is driven by the performing arts. No one crosses state lines to see the touring version of some Broadway production. Goodspeed draws further because of its utterly unique character. No other performing arts venue does.

As for tourism - its a mess. The State Office thinks it's all about marketing and a costly web site that attempts to do what Trip Advisor does better for free. The key to tourism is a deep granular knowledge of what we have and a coherent sense of who the market is and the various - 100s really - of affinity groups that like what we have to sell. The State Office of Tourism doesn't have that granular knowledge - think its all about marketing but don't actually know the products well. At the behest of a couple Chambers of Commerce, the Malloy administration cut funding for the regional tourism offices. The Chambers didn't care about tourism until they smelled money.

I urge every legislator to ask your constituents - the various museums, attractions, and cultural resources in your districts - if the efforts of our State Office of Tourism drives business to their door. Some might not even know there is a State Office of Tourism.

I love tourism - have been involved in it since I first organized foliage season walking tours in the town where I attended college. I love art. I have attended performing arts productions - from Westport to Norfolk, Middletown, New Haven and, of course, Hartford. I would love to see a coherent and effective tourism agenda for my adopted State - which I love most of all. This will never happen by accident. What better time to **stop, pause and rethink** - then during a pandemic when tourism (and the hotel revenue that supports it) is at a standstill.

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