



Fairfield Museum

EXPLORE *the past*, IMAGINE *the future*

www.fairfieldhistory.org

Testimony in Support of

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

**By Michael A. Jehle, Executive Director of the Fairfield Museum and History Center,
370 Beach Road, Fairfield, CT.**

Good afternoon. My name is Michael Jehle, and I have been the executive director of the Fairfield Museum since 2006.

Founded in 1903, the Fairfield Museum is today one of southwestern Connecticut's most important cultural organizations, thanks in large measure to the state's ongoing support of arts, culture and tourism funding. The Fairfield Museum believes in the power of the arts and the humanities to inspire imagination, stimulate thought, and transform society. Through our dynamic programs and exhibitions, the Fairfield Museum sparks dialogue, inspires meaningful collaborations, and deliberates the challenges of the future. Central to our community-focused mission is a desire to provide important historical context to pressing issues of our time, and to offer a safe, trustworthy environment where multiple perspectives can be heard and collective solutions explored.

Thanks to vital support from CT Humanities and the CT Office of the Arts, Fairfield Museum has become a vibrant nexus of community life that welcomes more than 35,000 visitors annually who in turn generate more than \$4 million in related economic activity for our region. State support for the Fairfield Museum's community-focused mission has ensured our success in becoming a focal point of civic pride, a prominent center for the study of arts and humanities, and an award-winning institution of statewide renown. Our research library is among the best resources for Connecticut history in the state, used by hundreds of students, scholars and researchers each year.

Education and civic engagement are at the core of the Fairfield Museum's mission. Each year we welcome more than 4,500 students and teachers from 65 schools from across southwestern CT for high-quality educational programs. Funding from CT Humanities and the CT Office of the Arts has allowed us to provide valuable programs to underserved students from Bridgeport and Norwalk schools, who visit free of charge. During the 2020 pandemic, thanks to generous support from CT Humanities, the Fairfield Museum created a new online learning platform so that students could continue to learn about their community's history and civics during the remote school year.

Fairfield Museum believes that sharing diverse stories about our past, celebrating the individual's role in catalyzing social change and promoting the value of an informed and active citizenry help empower students and their families to become engaged lifelong learners, and more active participants in our democracy. Our student programs vividly connect the past to the present, sparking the notion that we all have the power to make history and that by working together we can shape a better, more inclusive future for all.

CT Humanities and the CT Office of the Arts support the Fairfield Museum's public exhibitions and adults programs that delve deeply into the history and context behind important issues of our time, explore those issues through multiple perspectives and inspire informed discussion about the future of our community and nation. State funding has also made possible the revitalization of Fairfield's historic Town Green, helping to create an important learning campus that features free outdoor art installations, theatrical performances and music concerts that attracted diverse audiences of multiple ages and support broad economic and cultural development. Over the past 5 years, state funding has directly supported the Fairfield Museum's employment of more than 300 arts and culture independent contractors.

Passage of HB 6119 would have a direct and profound impact on the Fairfield Museum by supporting our efforts to provide expanded educational resources to underserved communities in southwestern CT by strengthening civics education and fostering important community dialog about our future. The Fairfield Museum has lost more than \$215,000 in income during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the expanded support for regional tourism proposed in HB 6119 would help restore our vital community programming so that we can once again be an economic engine for southwestern Connecticut.

State funding for arts, humanities and tourism significantly strengthens the economic development infrastructure of our communities and supports essential civic engagement that is needed in our nation now more than ever. I urge you to support the passage of HB 6119, and help make our state a national leader in arts and culture economic development. Thank you!