

**General Assembly Proposed Bill No. 6119**  
**AN ACT CONCERNING ARTS, CULTURE AND TOURISM FUNDING**

**Testimony of Ron Katz**  
**Director of Advancement & External Affairs**  
**New England Air Museum**

On behalf of the New England Air Museum, I want to comment on Proposed Bill 6119 concerning funding for arts, culture and tourism organizations in Connecticut. The New England Air Museum has been operating in Windsor Locks for just over 60 years, serving approximately 50,000 visitors each year. Our aircraft collection is one of the largest and most historically significant in the country, and our all-volunteer restoration team is second to none. In 1979 our facility and a large part of our collection were destroyed by a tornado, but in true Yankee fashion, we rebuilt from the rubble and never looked back.

The New England Air Museum showcases one of Connecticut's most significant historic and current economic drivers – the aerospace industry. Our programs teach visitors about the impact that this Connecticut industry has had on world aviation. Our collection pays tribute to the hundreds of companies and tens of thousands of individuals who made this sector of our state's economy so successful for 100 years.

This is the real value of arts and cultural organizations in Connecticut; collectively we are the living embodiment of what Connecticut is and what makes our state different from others. We have a unique ability to not only attract large numbers of visitors to the state, but also to attract new workers of all ages who are interested in living in a culturally diverse region. Add to that the impact of the educational programs provided to schools across the state by our museum and so many similar organizations, and you have a sector that influences Connecticut's economy and way of life more than any other.

Like many similar attractions in Connecticut, the Air Museum struggles every year in our effort to reach large numbers of potential out-of-state visitors who we know would have an interest in seeing our collection and experiencing our programs. Also like many others, we receive no state or local funds to support our operations, educational programming or tourism outreach.

Looking forward to a post-pandemic world, Connecticut must do a better job of supporting this sector of the economy if we expect to compete with other states and regions. If we do not meet this challenge, the decline in attendance that has plagued our state's museums will continue, and likely worsen, and ultimately many of our state's cultural organizations will cease to exist. The Air Museum has made a commitment to significantly increase or own marketing budget with the expectation that we will drive additional attendance over time. Seeing the state make a similar commitment would be a real cause for optimism.

The New England Air Museum fully supports the concepts of HB 6119 to increase funding to arts and cultural organizations with the intent of driving tourism to the state and helping to sustain a vital part of the social and economic fabric of Connecticut.