



# WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

Office of the Director and C.E.O.

February 12, 2021

State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMERCE COMMITTEE  
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via Public Hearing email box = [cetestimony@cga.ct.gov](mailto:cetestimony@cga.ct.gov)

Dear Senator Joan V. Hartley and distinguished members of the Commerce Committee,

Thank you, madam Chair. My name is Tom Loughman and I serve as the Director and CEO of the Wadsworth Atheneum. I'm speaking today in support of HB6119.

There is no question that our State is exceptional for the quality, diversity, and strength of its cultural sector. We have been at the forefront of creating rich and meaningful experiences with the arts—for the public's benefit—for two centuries, and the world has come to know and appreciate that tradition; our community has come to expect that excellence from us. As a survey conducted in Hartford two summers ago revealed, culture is the top asset of our capital city. And as many have heard me say—I'm celebrating this month my fifth anniversary as director of America's oldest public art museum, the Wadsworth—our institutions belong to the public trust, they belong to you, and they are an inheritance in which we can all be proud. Our founder, Daniel Wadsworth, tore down his family homestead at the crossroads of Hartford in 1842 in order to build, at his own expense and for the enjoyment of all, a place for art on Main Street. To this day, we are an institution fully committed to converting private funding into public good.

There is no question about the role that our institutions play in the lives of thousands who come through our state. Each year about 18% of all who visit the Wadsworth come from out of state. An additional 30% come from communities across our state beyond Hartford County. They grab lunch at Pollo Guapo on Front Street or at Max's Downtown. Some stay the weekend at the Goodwin or down at the Madison Beach Hotel. They introduce their children to core STEM concepts at the Science Center and American culture by

way of *Hamilton* at the Bushnell or *Oklahoma!* at the Goodspeed. They continue on to discover justice through the Amistad Trial story at the Old State House and at the Stowe Center. Others come to the Wadsworth having first been drawn to town by the chance of experiencing the home of Mark Twain or learned about us at one of our 22 colleague institutions of the Connecticut Art Trail—places great and small like Weir Farm in Wilton and the Aldrich in Ridgefield, Hill-Stead in Farmington and the Lyman-Allyn in New London, Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, and Norwalk's Center for Contemporary Printmaking. Our sector's self-funded Regional Tourism efforts need more octane and would benefit from the reactivation of the state's partnership through a robust, Regional Tourism Authority approach.

There is no question that a virtuous cycle of benefits flow from the purposeful deployment of the room tax to raise the state's tourism profile and to support arts and culture. The combination worked effectively in Massachusetts, where I used to work (at the Clark in the Berkshires) and served as president of the Williamstown Chamber of Commerce. It has worked famously in Rhode Island, as my colleague Pieter Roos has attested personally earlier in this hearing. It works nationally where there is a strong arts ecosystem and a practical partnership uniting hospitality tax revenue to institutions of cultural relevance and impact. And it has begun working here in Connecticut. While the bed tax funds have not flowed to the Wadsworth, they have been aiding my colleagues and the overall arts ecosystem, and they could do more, as was the finding of the 2018 Blue Ribbon Commission on Tourism. The multiplier effect of reinvesting the bed tax into Tourism and Arts and Culture at a 60-40 ratio works.

I urge you: please consider HB6119 and its practical, proven, and prudent approach. Pre-CoViD we saw the first fruits of this more conscientious way of developing and perpetuating a livelier tourist and arts and culture economy. During CoViD, we've kept it together and prepare for the future. We are seeing the public return in greater numbers each month since reopening the Wadsworth in September. What better time than now, as we reopen our great

state and emerge from the ashes of this global crisis, to install the legislative structures that have the best chance of making a difference!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke, positioned above the printed name.

Thomas J. Loughman, Ph.D.  
Director and CEO  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

cc: Ginger Rodriguez, Clerk