

Dear Co-Chair Senator Hartley, Co-Chair Representative Simmons, Vice-Chair Senator Cohen, Vice-Chair Representative Rochelle, and esteemed members of the Commerce Committee,

The Youth of Elm Shakespeare Advisory Council is submitting this testimony on behalf of Elm Shakespeare Company, Elm Shakespeare students, and the students of theater all around the state of Connecticut. Elm Shakespeare Company is a nonprofit theater that brings people together through Shakespeare. The Youth of Elm Shakespeare Advisory Council, YES!, is an entirely-student-run initiative founded on the principles of Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, and Inclusion. We aim to act as a channel to amplify the voices of Elm Shakespeare's students and the Greater New Haven Community to ensure that the company best serves the multiplicity of cultures and communities surround Elm Shakespeare Company. Elm Shakespeare's commitment to free, accessible, world-class theater, and innovative educational experiences in our parks, classrooms, and neighborhoods impacts the people's lives from widely diverse cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds by making an enduring contribution to the artistic, cultural, and economic vitality of New Haven.

Furthermore, Elm Shakespeare Company deeply enriches the lives of hundreds of students in the state of Connecticut, including each of our seven council members. Many of YES!'s members grew up in Elm Shakespeare's educational programs, and we believe these programs are a unique opportunity for students to both receive and share knowledge. Elm Shakespeare's educational programs promote and encourage mentorship between its students, which fosters autonomous learning. Elm Shakespeare believes "...everyone has something to learn and teach, and that when students are fully integrated in productions along professional artists, the learning is transformative." Mentoring other students or cast members has taught us empathy, problem-solving, and courage, while learning from those who came before has taught us the valuable skills of listening, respect, and collaboration.

Elm Shakespeare's educational programs are student-driven, which means we work as an ensemble to learn our lines, create our set, and tell our story. Through the experience of Elm's programs, YES! members have learned that the most glorious success comes when we work as a team.

Elm Shakespeare Company provides a safe space for all students to be seen, heard, and empowered. They have lowered the barriers of fear surrounding Shakespeare's work and made his language accessible to people of all ages so that we may learn from his stories as a community. Shakespeare's stories and theater as a whole shows its audience a better world or, "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature," reflects back our nature as a society so we may better ourselves. As the next generation, we want and need theater and the arts to be financially supported so that we may occupy a better world.

We ask that you consider H.B. 6119 on our behalf so we may continue expressing ourselves through the art that we love.

Sincerely,

The Youth Of Elm Shakespeare Advisory Council