

THE Norwich Historical Society

February 10, 2021

RE: Testimony in support of HB 6119

To Whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of HB 6119 AN ACT CONCERNING ARTS, CULTURE AND TOURISM FUNDING.

The Tourism Fund is a crucial tool that invests in the Connecticut experience – building vibrant communities, attracting tourists and employers, and boosting our economy.

The Tourism fund invests in arts, culture, and tourism through a variety of line items in the budget such as the CT Tourism Office and CT Humanities. Funding to the Office of the Arts and CT Humanities is re-granted through hundreds of competitive grants statewide reaching nearly every municipality.

Thanks to the Tourism Fund's investment in CT Humanities, the Norwich Historical Society has received numerous grants from CT Humanities. Our most recent grant involves creating a lesson plan and distance learning materials to educate Norwich eighth grade students about James L. Smith. Smith was born on a Virginia plantation and escaped slavery in 1838 with the help of Norwich's David Ruggles, a onetime "conductor" on the Underground Railroad in New York City. Smith bought a house at 59 School Street in 1845 and worked as a shoemaker downtown. Smith's home on School Street is listed on the Norwich Freedom Trail. His 1881 autobiography, including the harrowing details of his escape, remains one of the most important first-hand accounts of the era. We are excited to share this important history with our students and we could not do this without CT Humanities support.

Further, the Norwich Historical Society recently received funding from the Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition to create a professional virtual tour of the Norwich Freedom Trail. The Norwich Freedom Trail celebrates Norwich's rich, diverse, and largely untold story of African American heritage, highlighting notable people who played important roles in the movement to end slavery and advance civil rights before and after the United States Civil War. The creation of a virtual trail will increase public awareness about these historic sites in Norwich and will help the Norwich Historical Society enhance our storytelling capabilities. We are grateful to the Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition for funding this important project.

Additionally, the Norwich Historical Society has participated regularly in the CT Office of Tourism's CT Open House Day. The program is wildly successful and draws lots of attention to our historic and cultural assets in the state. The Tourism Fund supports arts, cultural, and heritage programs and projects which help attract and retain residents, employers, and employees.

I am in support of HB 6119.

Respectfully,



Regan Miner

Executive Director

Norwich Historical Society