

Testimony from Pieter N. Roos  
Executive Director of The Mark Twain House & Museum  
351 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105  
To the Commerce Committee  
**In support of HB6119**

Thank you Madame Chair. I am Pieter Roos, Executive Director of the Mark Twain House & Museum here in Hartford, and I am speaking in support of HB6119.

- CT has an outstanding arts and cultural community, one of the richest in the region and that community is also situated in tandem with amazing natural beauty and great attractions across the length and breadth of the state.
- Arts and culture are sometimes hard to quantify, but there can be no doubt that they supply much of the “why” for both living in and visiting our state.
- The pandemic has hit our state hard, and it has hit the arts, cultural, and hospitality industries in a devastating way. The Twain House will survive, but it has not been hard. Our own budget took nearly a million dollar hit. The museum employs 70 full and part timers. Most of the part timers were laid off as there was no work for them at a shuttered venue. I and all of my full time staff are on 20% furloughs right now. We want a way to work our way back and our earned income is crucial to that. In a normal year we see over 70,000 visitors a year that come from all 50 states every year and 60-65 countries every year as we give people an experience of Connecticut’s nationally significant history.
- Although I am first and foremost a museum director, I speak to you not only as a career museum professional but one with long experience in tourism and the hospitality industry. I was a member of Speaker Aresimowicz’s Blue Ribbon Panel in 2018 and for nine years I was a tourism official in the state of Rhode Island. With this expertise and experience in mind I note that for a number of years now, every state that borders us, has substantially outspent us in tourism marketing. Even Rhode Island outspends CT by many millions of dollars – double what we spend. Pound for pound we have as much or more, but we don’t have the budget to market ourselves. We are getting beaten by other states as travelers to the rest of New England drive right through CT on our interstates. We can and should be doing much better.
- We have an opportunity and the time is now. The pandemic created a tourism desert in the northeast. As that devastation starts to recede with the vaccine, people will travel but they will keep it in driving distance. We can bring them here with a solid marketing effort. I cannot emphasize this enough- the New England states that act first in marketing will reap rewards.
- Tourism, arts and culture are an investment in our future, the dollars that you invest here will not only make the CT economy healthier, they will also be returned manifold in tax revenue from increased usage in the form of bed taxes, food & beverage taxes, retail taxes and income taxes. This will also support small business, create jobs and offers visitors a truer picture of the best that we have to offer. For more information on

this I would direct you to the findings of the 2018 Blue Ribbon Commission. Economic impacts were very carefully spelled out in that report.

- As a last note, CT's tourism marketing budget has risen and fallen over the last several years, but when it took its largest dive in the middle of the last decade, we have noted a gradual erosion of our visitation. The museum's statistics are very clear here. When marketing at the state level took a hit, our tourism numbers declined. This bill would be a very smart way for the state to inject economic health into our economy, and we will all see a return on investment at many levels.

I will finish with a Mark Twain quote, because, why not? "Thunder is good, thunder is impressive, but it is lightning that does all the work."

My thanks to the Committee and I urge you to support HB 6119.