

To: Members of the Connecticut General Assembly
From: Deborah D. Shapiro, 55 Clover Street, Middletown, CT
Re: H.B. 6119

I am the Municipal Historian of the City of Middletown and the former Executive Director of the Middlesex County Historical Society located in the General Joseph Mansfield House in Middletown. General Mansfield was killed at the Battle of Antietam in the Civil War. I am writing to advocate the passage of H.B. 6119, An Act Concerning Arts, Culture, and Tourism Funding.

The Middlesex County Historical Society has been the recipient of grants from Connecticut Humanities to fund exhibits that highlight the history of Middletown. Two portrayed the role of Middletown's citizens in the Civil War. A third, *A Vanished Port: Middletown & the Caribbean, 1750-1824*, which told the story of Middletown's role in the West Indies sugar and slave trade, received national and state awards and brought many visitors to Middletown. It also helped lead to Middletown being named by UNESCO as a Site of Memory for its role in the African slave trade.

Another grant from Connecticut Humanities helped fund the erection of the Middletown Heritage Trail, a series of 20 free-standing plaques situated in the center core of the city that tell various stories of Middletown's history from its founding in 1650 to the 20th century. Visitors from across the state and region often walk the trail and enjoy eating in our many restaurants. Money spent on cultural and heritage projects translates into many other dollars being spent in the general economy, thus increasing revenue to the state.

Recognizing our past can help foster conversations that lead to an increased understanding of the various people who make up Connecticut's population. This dialogue will contribute to a more egalitarian society, one in which all of our citizens, and especially children, can thrive. Increased culture funding will lead to a fabric of life in Connecticut that will stem the outflow of our older population and attract younger families to our state. I strongly urge the passage of this bill.