



February 9, 2021

TO: Commerce Committee

RE: HB6119

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of the Eastern Regional Tourism District, I am writing in support of An Act Concerning Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding, HB 6119. These areas and adjacent hospitality industry represent a significant sector of the eastern Connecticut economy and an essential area of economic recovery and growth following the devastating COVID downturn.

Traditionally, tourism and related industries represent \$14.7B in sales revenues, \$1.7B in tax revenues, and over 120,000 jobs for Connecticut. Securing funding in support of this key economic driver promises significant returns in a typical year. Now, coping with devastating losses due to the COVID pandemic, these industries need dedicated support from the state more than ever in order to recover and rehire thousands of workers.

Eastern Connecticut is home to the largest tourist venues in the state, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. The Chamber serves the Eastern Regional Tourism District in an administrative role, and we are further invested in the success of the tourism, arts, and hospitality industries as many of our benefactors and small business members work in this sector. Since COVID, tourism, hospitality and the arts have been the hardest hit industries locally, with jobs losses in the thousands, down as much as 30% year over year in the food service sector. Arts venues have been shuttered with no significant means of earning revenue. Recovery is at a standstill as air travel is down almost 70%, and hotel occupancy has dropped by more than half.

Passing HB 6119 now prepares our state for recovery in the near future. The Arts, Culture, and Tourism Fund will benefit from a sustainable funding source by increasing the 10% allocation from the Hotel Occupancy Tax to 25%. Increased support for these sectors has been a stated goal for years and a recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Tourism. Building on the previous commitment is economically sound and advantageous to the state long term as we realize increased revenues from out-of-state travelers. Tourism and the arts initiate ripple effects across the economy, which will be essential as small businesses recover or emerge as COVID recedes and pent-up demand drives consumer spending in this area.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS WHO CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO PROGRAMS IN SUPPORT OF THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY.

Mohegan Sun	ConnectiCare	Equinor	The Simon Konover Company	Putnam Bank
Eversource	Dime Bank	Aer Lingus	The Day Publishing Company	The Bulletin
Pfizer	Charter Oak Federal Credit Union	Liberty Bank	Genesys Diagnostics Inc	Vineyard Wind
Foxwoods Resort Casino	Chelsea Groton Bank	Groton Utilities	Mystic Aquarium	Backus Hospital
CT Municipal Electric Energy Cooperative	Cross Sound Ferry	Comcast Business	General Dynamics Electric Boat	Lawrence + Memorial Hospital/Yale New Haven Health
Ørsted	NTE Energy	Atlantic Broadband	Quinn & Hary	
Dominion Energy	People's United Bank	Hocon Gas	Antonino Auto Group	
		Suisman Shapiro		

I strongly urge the Commerce Committee to forward HB 6119, An Act Concerning Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding, in support of a long-identified opportunity for economic growth in the state and a response to immediate pressures in a sector disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Tony Sheridan, President and CEO

Thank you to our supporters who contribute significantly to programs in support of the small business community.

ConnectiCare	Dime Bank	People's United Bank	The Day Publishing Company	Antonino Auto Group
Mohegan Sun	Charter Oak Federal Credit Union	Aer Lingus	Mystic Aquarium	Putnam Bank
Eversource	Dominion	Liberty Bank	General Dynamics Electric Boat	The Bulletin
Pfizer	Chelsea Groton Bank	Groton Utilities	Saybrook Point Inn & Spa	Backus Hospital
Foxwoods Resort Casino	Cross Sound Ferry	Comcast Business Class	Webster Bank	Lawrence + Memorial Hospital/Yale New Haven Health
CT Municipal Electric Energy Cooperative	NTE Energy	Suisman Shapiro	Quinn & Hary	