

Good morning Madam Chairs Hartley and Simmons, Vice Chairs Cohen and Rochelle, and Honorable Members of the Commerce Committee, I'm Christopher Tracy of Guilford, and I'm here today in strong support of HB 6119, AN ACT CONCERNING ARTS, CULTURE AND TOURISM FUNDING.

As a native Nutmegger born under Governor Ribicoff and raised by a UConn Art Professor and E.O. Smith Educator on Moulton Road, my earliest memories (apart from Mountain Creamery) are of productions my elder siblings performed in at the Jorgenson Center for the Performing Arts; and though raised in upstate New York, educated in State College PA, earned my Equity, SAG, AFTRA and AFM Cards in Manhattan and married in Nantucket, as a newlywed we returned to the hills of my Connecticut and started a theatre company in the Greenwich Arts Center that soon earned Governor O'Neill's Award for our production of "The Stronger" as part of Connecticut 350th. Since then I've started three theatre companies, two of them union which employed actors from across the state in Greenwich and Westport and the third providing production and performing opportunities to developing Connecticut playwrights and performers; I've taught and performed all along our shoreline; and I've worked with most of the theaters and many of the performing artists across the state

Starting out we had John Simon and then John Ostrout as Arts Commissioners, and for a time funding grew; at the same time we lost the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, the Darien Dinner Theater, Hartford Summerstage, the Hartman in Stamford, and Lucille Lortel's White Barn Theatre in Westport, all enormous tourism draws for shopping, restaurants, lodging and the general economy of their communities and regions. And while the Rowland Administration started out strong for the Arts at the end of the millenium, by 2004 he had merged them with Tourism, Culture, History and Film, and soon Jennifer Aniskovitch was replaced by Karen Senich under Governor Rell who raised their budget \$3.6M to \$10M for Culture & Tourism and bonded \$20M for Arts, Tourism, Culture & History capital improvements.

When Governor Malloy took office he named Kip Bergstrom of Stamford's Urban Redevelopment Commission to consolidate Culture & Tourism under Economic & Community Development, and while Governor-Elect Lamont's Administration met with an Arts, Culture and Tourism Transition Policy Committee of 20 CEOs from major attractions and resources across the state and offered hope for a new commitment to tourism, arts and culture in a State long-known for resources recognized internationally. Unfortunately, the last year's virtual shutdown of gatherings has left our arts and humanities communities struggling to survive, and this return of their status as a recognized and funded component of Tourism is critical to their vary survival.

I therefore implore you to vote in support of HB 6119 as a step toward restoring our state's glorious legacy going back to James & Eugene O'Neill, William Gillette & Christopher Plummer, Mark Twain & Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the countless actors, dancers, singers, designers, directors, writers, painters, sculptors, producers and audiences who come to see their work which have made up a significant part of our economy and an even greater portion of our culture for which we are so righteously proud.

Christopher Tracy

31 Water Lily Lane, Guilford