

I have been involved with Theatre Arts since I was in college. Although my professional career is not in the Arts, for more than 30 years I have volunteered my time in community theatre and for various arts and educational organizations – designing sets, creating lighting design, running lights during performances and mentoring young people in these areas. I want to talk to you about one specific group that I have worked with in Madison, CT.

I first got involved with the Barn when it was going through a transition. I decided to join the Board of Directors. I felt there was a need in the community for children and teens that needed a creative outlet. Once elected to the Board of Selectmen, I served as a liaison to the Board at the Barn. I have since become an on-demand volunteer, helping with sets, lighting design and making milkshakes for event nights prior to COVID. Over the years I have seen the Barn bring out the best in kids involved in their programs.

None more so than my youngest, Oak Walker. Oak found the support and encouragement for their creative talents. Oak started on stage as a timid actor at one of the Barn's summer programs. The acting bug bit for a while as Oak pursued on-stage roles at both the Barn and Daniel Hand High School. But Oak soon realized lighting design was a passion that they wanted to follow. The Barn encouraged Oak and gave them an opportunity to hone their skills and develop a confidence that eventually lead to going to college for Theatre Arts at Emerson. I am confident that without the Barn, Oak's path would have been very different.

This may not be the typical story of kids involved at the Barn – leading to pursuing education and a career in Theatre. However, it was typical in that kids are supported to try new things, work as a team with other members of the cast and crew and develop confidence in themselves for a job well done. It is all done under the guidance and support of caring adults who want to provide a safe environment for kids to explore and encourage their creative side. The Barn is an invaluable part of our community and I am honored to have been associated with it.

Supporting the Arts is critical to the growth of not only our economy but to us as human beings. There is magic in seeing a live performance – whether it be dance, theatre or music. The capability to go to a museum and see life through the lens of an artist fuels our imagination and fills the soul. It is a commonality that can bring people together and help us be our better selves.

I support HB 6119 and the changes that it brings to Arts funding and ask that you support it as well.