

Dear Co-Chair Senator Osten, Co-Chair Rep. Walker, Vice-Chair Senator Hartley, Vice-Chair Rep. Dathan, Vice-Chair Rep. Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am submitting this testimony in support of the Governor's proposed budget for the Tourism Fund on behalf of the Arts Council of Greater New Haven, a nonprofit service organization that amplifies, empowers, and unites artists, creative organizations, and residents. Our region's creative ecosystem produces \$135 million in direct economic activity, supports 5,600 full time equivalent jobs, and attracts 700,000 attendees annually. Artists and creative organizations have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but are critical for restoring social connections, building cultural equity and racial justice, and supporting vibrant, healthy communities.

To be specific, the pandemic has devastated Connecticut's creative economy, losing an estimated \$2.4B in revenue with unemployment or underemployment reaching 60%. The federal government, private foundations, and individual donors have made critical investments to help our sector, but the financial crisis is far from over. The state must provide significant support now to avert dire consequences.

The Arts Council supports the Governor's budget proposal because it refills the Tourism Fund with resources from the general fund. As you know, the Tourism Fund is a special fund that invests in the Connecticut experience through the arts, culture, and tourism industries. However, [a recent OPM report](#) anticipated a negative balance of \$14M in this fund due to underperforming hotel occupancy tax during the pandemic. Stable support from the legislature is critical. The responsibility to at minimum maintain level funding through the Tourism Fund now rests with your committee.

Additionally, there are several proposals moving through the legislative process that would bolster the Tourism Fund. The Arts Council strongly supports HB 6119, which changes the name of the "Tourism Fund" to the "Arts, Culture, and Tourism Fund"; specifies that 60% of this fund is invested in tourism and 40% is invested in arts and culture; and allocates $\frac{1}{4}$ of the hotel occupancy tax revenues to this fund.

We so need this now

Sincerely

Louisa Calio, Poet, Writer & Performer
Former Executive Director City Spirit Artists, Inc.
Member of Arts Council