



DATE: February 18, 2021
TO: Appropriations Committee
FROM: Amy Wynn, Executive Director, American Mural Project
RE: Governor's FY 2022-2023 Proposed Budget

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Ranking Members Senator Miner and Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Amy Wynn. I am a resident of Falls Village, CT and Executive Director of the American Mural Project in Winsted, CT. I am also a member of the board of the Connecticut Arts Alliance.

I support the Governor's proposed budget because it pledges to replenish the Tourism Fund to pre-pandemic levels using resources from the General Fund in order to maintain flat funding for the sector. This small but meaningful component of the Governor's revenue plan aims to maintain the state's support for tourism and the arts by transferring resources from the General Fund to the Tourism Fund. The Tourism Fund's revenue source – the hotel occupancy tax – has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The fund is estimated to end FY 2021 with a negative \$9.8 million fund balance, and revenues from the hotel occupancy tax are not projected to rebound to pre-pandemic levels until FY 2023, requiring an additional infusion of \$3.1 million in FY 2022. In total, the Governor's budget includes \$12.9 million in support for the Tourism Fund to maintain the important arts, culture and tourism venues and attractions that contribute to the state's economy as well as our quality of life.

In addition, I ask that the Committee diversify and increase the funding of the Tourism Fund by allocating portions of proceeds from other state taxes and/or portions of new revenue streams into the Tourism Fund. This will stabilize funding for the sector and protect the sector against another event that severely impacts the hotel and hospitality industry.

At the American Mural Project (AMP), where I currently work, young people are engaged in creative learning in a variety of programs, in-person and virtually. Their experiences through the arts education programs at AMP change how they see the possibilities for themselves in the world. The inspiration of AMP's mural and the experiences of the programs are enriching at the very least, and occasionally, life changing.

One of our program participants, a community college student said: "AMP's Digital Story Work program taught me the importance of interviewing and the art of collaboration. AMP inspired me to become a more active member of the community and provided me with a new lens to view the world. The biggest lesson I learned was the concept of diversity, and the importance and value of the workforce. This program influenced me to work in a position that will help others find their own voices, by creating more empowerment through storytelling." She is working now as a social worker in CT.

A Winsted parent whose son participated in AMP's afterschool and summer programs shared that: her 9-year-old son didn't enjoy sports as much as his peers. She said, "AMP is where Evan was able to really start to narrow in on what his passions are. Evan learned so much at AMP like how to take

objects apart and rebuild them into something super cool. He was able to be a free spirit and draw whatever it was he was feeling that day and then talk about it in front of his peers. From this I now have SUCH an artist at home. AMP offers something kids don't do as much as they should, and that's art, whatever it is that art means to them."

The arts also have a tremendous impact on people's mental well-being, which has become especially important with the isolation that COVID has brought on. With virtual and physically distant outdoor programs, AMP and other arts organizations have continued to keep people emotionally afloat. COVID has been traumatizing for many, and the arts can help sooth and heal that trauma.

COVID has devastated a key portion of our state's economy as well with lost jobs in the creative sector and closures, reducing a multitude of revenue streams. The creative sector, which is the cornerstone of Tourism, is a \$9.9 billion dollar industry in CT, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, and, singling out the arts, studies show that for every dollar Connecticut spends, the state receives over \$7 in tax revenue. Economically, the arts are, and will be, an important part of the economic recovery for Connecticut.

It is vital and strategic that the State's budget include replenishment of the Tourism Fund, a wise investment in the arts, culture and tourism sector and the future of Connecticut, which is so important for our state's recovery on so many levels.

I urge the Commerce Committee to support these aspects of the Governor's Proposed Budget to ensure that Arts, Culture and Tourism are able to realize their full potential for Connecticut's imminent recovery and productive future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Amy Wynn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Amy Wynn, Executive Director
American Mural Project