

2022 Create the Vote Candidate Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on Arts and Culture in advance of the 2022 election. We'll post your responses on our website so that voters can make informed decisions about who will best represent the Arts and Culture community at the legislature.

We ask that you complete the survey by Friday, September 23rd. **We know your time is limited so we understand that your responses will be brief.**

Don't miss out on this important opportunity to be an Arts champion!

Email *

senatorcohenct@gmail.com

Please share your name

Christine Cohen

What office and district are you a candidate for?

State Senate, 12th District

Every town in Connecticut can boast cultural assets that contribute to a vibrant community and improve the quality of life for its residents.

What are some exciting arts and cultural events and organizations that you have experienced in your community?

There are so many to name, but a few that are wonderful include Shakespeare on the Green, Guilford Art Expo, Branford's Jazz on the Green, Madison's concerts on the Green, Legacy Theatre in Stony Creek, the Henry Whitfield Museum, Hyland House and so much more.

If elected, will you work to strengthen the arts and culture community in the town(s) you serve? If so, how? If not, why?

I have been working closely with our local arts organizations for the past four years (my short tenure in the legislature). In that time I have worked hard to secure important funding to ensure arts programs can continue, acted as a conduit for much-needed information flow during the pandemic and sat as a vocal member on the Arts, Culture and Tourism Caucus. I intend to keep in touch with those in the arts and culture community to best understand the needs and work to bring those issues to solution. I would also ensure that the funding used on promoting Connecticut through our Department of Economic and Community Development continues to hold arts, culture and tourism central to its messaging.

Sandwiched between Boston and New York, Connecticut is often dismissed as a “pass through” state when it comes to tourism. Yet, our state has many world class arts institutions and a rich cultural landscape.

Why do you think arts and culture are important in Connecticut? What is unique about our state's arts and culture?

From our state of the art science museums, our exquisite art galleries and museums to those museums centered around Connecticut's rich history, we have a plethora of collections to suit any interest or exploration of our heritage. Additionally, we boast theatres large and small bringing drama, dance, musicals and concerts from end to end, corner to corner of our beautiful state. The arts are an inspirational and central component that makes Connecticut so incredibly special. Steeped in culture, Connecticut and its people have a unique appreciation for all we have to offer and unlike many states where theatre-goers are limited to driving into the big city for a show, we have remarkable venues in towns across the state like Ivoryton or East Haddam, Stony Creek or Westport. It is what makes us special and unique. You needed travel to one particular city in our state to experience arts and culture - you'll be surrounded by it no matter your destination.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people discovered that arts and creativity play a critical role in helping us cope with emotional stress and sustain our mental health. Art helped us process loss, fight loneliness, stay connected and feel hopeful.

Can you share a way that the arts have helped you, your family or your community get through the difficult times of Covid? How will that experience influence choices about the arts you would make as a legislator?

Growing up, the arts was a central part of my life. I had the privilege of going to Broadway shows regularly, taking part in dance lessons, singing in choral ensembles, learning to play instruments and attending art exhibits. I learned from an early age that arts and culture can inspire and invigorate, can heal and sooth the soul. I have worked to provide many of these experiences for my children as they grow. We have always taken trips to local museums, attended musicals and plays, watched local dance programs and music ensembles, encouraged creativity and exploration. COVID brought a lot of those outings to a screeching halt, but we were able to fulfill our needs through television programming, local outdoor theatre and musical performances and remaining in touch with instruments and art in our home. There was certainly a void when most programming was shut down and it prompted me to reach out to organizations to see how I might help them through the struggle. It has already significantly influenced my choices about the arts as a legislator getting involved in and participating on the Arts, Culture and Tourism caucus, fighting for necessary shuttered-venue funding and ensuring we funded advertising for all this amazing state has to offer. I will continue my work in the vein, listening to our arts providers and my constituents to continue to bring the richest cultural experience we can offer.

The arts and creativity have a proven track record of economic benefit to our state. The National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis report that, in 2020, arts and cultural production in Connecticut added \$8.9 billion to our economy and accounted for 3.2 percent of our gross state product, while the arts and cultural industries employed 49,159 workers with wages and benefits totaling more than \$5.1 billion. (https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/)

Despite these contributions, the arts have historically been first on the chopping block when it comes to budget priorities. What would you do to help keep arts and creativity funded in our state at a level that recognizes their economic importance?

I have been a vocal advocate of increased funding and have worked to bring legislation forward with my colleagues to enhance the arts in CT. I will continue to be an outspoken legislator touting the benefits of this industry to our local economy, in addition to our psyches.

Connecticut has not had an Arts Education Specialist at the State Department of Education (SDE) since 2016, when the last specialist left. This position is critical to assuring that our State and National Arts Education Standards are consistently implemented in all of Connecticut's school districts, especially those in under-resourced communities where students' access to the Arts is often extremely limited compared to affluent communities.

If elected, would you support refilling the Arts Education Specialist at SDE? If not, why?

I would indeed support the refilling of the Arts Education Specialist at SDE. As a former Board of Education member, I advocated for the district to take a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) approach to curricula rather than STEM. Ensuring versatility and enhancing the learning experience for all students. Proficiency in arts education is vital to excel in other areas of study as well. All too often we allow the arts to be placed on the chopping block of education budgets and curriculum, but it is an integral pedagogical model.

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