

# 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 \*

Jenn@leeperforfairfield.com

Please share your name

Jennifer Leeper

What office and district are you a candidate for?

House of Representatives, 132nd 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?*

Fairfield is lucky to have an amazing community that supports our multiple galleries, theaters and historical centers. I am a member of the Fairfield Theatre Company and enjoy their fantastic shows, educational events and fundraisers. The Fairfield Theatre Company serves as a centerpiece and economic engine in our community. My family personally enjoys the summer Friday night Jazz concerts hosted by the Fairfield Museum and History Center.

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*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 would absolutely support strengthening the arts and culture community in Fairfield again if re-elected. I would continue to promote and advocate for arts and cultural spaces in Fairfield. Furthermore, I would work to secure more state funding and grants for these vital contributors for our community. I was happy to support the balanced budget we passed this year which included over \$3 million dollars of funding to arts centers and performing arts theaters.

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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?*

Art and culture is so important in Connecticut because we are state that supports and promotes the inclusion of diverse backgrounds. Our state's art and culture is rich with history as we are one of the first 13 colonies. Connecticut has done a phenomenal job maintaining our National Landmarks, historic sites, libraries and artifacts. Connecticut has a unique blending of traditional art, but Connecticut is quick to embrace and promote modern art forms and bringing new life to our arts communities. I also think that our arts, quaint Connecticut towns and historic trails can be a form of tourism in Connecticut. I have worked on this as a Co-chair of the Connecticut Main Street Working Group, which we often partner with CT Main Street Center and DECD on projects and legislation.

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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?*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, my family would get together for family movie nights on Fridays. It was an important way for my family to spend high quality time together, and we often looked forward to it during the long weekdays of virtual learning and working. During the pandemic, I also had my children participate in online art classes which were a source of joy and therapeutic. I myself, relied on music as a place to find peace and solitude through isolation and anxiety.

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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/](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?*

To ensure that arts and creativity is funded consistently, it's vital that we continue to keep our fiscal house in order. I am proud to have supported the balanced state budget that we passed this year. This budget not only cut taxes and paid down pension debt but still leaves us with a significant surplus and rainy day fund, all while supporting the arts. If re-elected, I would certainly advocate for and co-sponsor legislation again that funds and supports our art centers. I look forward to continuing and fostering partnerships in my community and at the state level to advancing our investments in the arts.

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?*

Yes. This position is important for students, schools, and all communities in Connecticut.

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