

## Testimony in Opposition to

SUBJECT MATTER: Governor's Proposed FY 24-25 Budget for Conservation and Development Agencies.

H.B. No. 6659 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Greetings Representative Walker and Senator Osten and

Conservation and Development members.

My name is Brett Thompson and I'm the Executive Director of Connecticut Arts Alliance. We're a statewide network of more than 100 arts organizations, artists and professionals who work to bring the benefits of the arts to our state's economy, our communities and the health and wellbeing of our residents.

I join my colleagues at Connecticut Humanities, Connecticut Tourism Coalition and members of the arts, culture, and tourism industries in opposition to HB6659 on the grounds that the

Governor's \$13.8 million proposal for the Tourism Fund takes us back to 2021 and threatens to reverse two years of significant investment by the legislature. It will leave our state's cultural community once again scrambling for scarce resources and make it impossible for Connecticut to compete with neighboring states for tourism dollars.

Our industries represent more than 1,000 organizations and tourism destinations that contribute \$40 billion annually to the state gross product and employ directly and indirectly a workforce of 175,000. When adequately funded, we produce a \$3 return for each dollar invested.

The Office of Legislative Research and Office of Fiscal Analysis report that the legislature has invested \$82.7 million of state funds (\$51.1 million in FY22 and \$31.6 million in FY23) in these

industries in the current biennium, excluding ARPA. HB6659 slashes that funding and returns us to funding levels of 2021 and earlier. This is barely enough to keep these key industries on life support.

As an alternative, Connecticut Arts Alliance , Connecticut Humanities and Connecticut Tourism Coalition have formed an historic partnership to offer the Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding Roadmap, an investment strategy that moves Connecticut forward rather than back. It proposes meaningful, reliable, and equitable support and builds on your investments over the past two years.

This proposal gathered input from more than 200 members of the arts, culture, and tourism communities and was guided by a steering committee that included both tribal nations, Senator

Heather Somers and Representative John-Michael Parker, as well as the Connecticut Office of the Arts and Office of Tourism.

We propose an investment of \$58.5 million to fully support cultural organizations and tourism marketing as key components of Connecticut's economy. We ask that you direct these funds to Connecticut Office of the Arts, Connecticut Humanities, and Connecticut Office of Tourism, which are trusted public and private partners with established metrics that can collect the data needed to demonstrate value and ensure accountability.

We oppose HB6659 for taking the Tourism Fund backwards when it is essential that we continue moving forward. We thank you for the historic investments you have made in our industries over the past 2 years and urge you to sustain them as recommended by the Funding Roadmap. Together, we can leverage the value of arts,

culture and tourism for our state's economy, our cities and towns,  
and our residents. Thank you.