

Testimony in Support of
House Bill 6119, An Act Concerning Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding.
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Commerce Committee
February 11, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Hartley, Representative Simmons, Senator Martin, Representative Buckbee and distinguished members of the Commerce Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving appreciates this opportunity to testify **in support of House Bill 6119, An Act Concerning Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding.**

As part of the Hartford Foundation's efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation supports arts and culture in our region, with a focus on people of color, who are underrepresented in Greater Hartford's art workforce. The Foundation's efforts are focused on increasing the arts sector's stability and resilience and increasing the racial/ethnic diversity of Greater Hartford's arts workforce.

The arts are a critical asset in our region and when properly leveraged can support community and resident well-being, including physical and mental health, learning, economic growth and community cohesion and resilience. Arts are essential yet, in times of crisis, such as now, many funders and the state must prioritize Basic Human Needs and the nonprofits that provide them. As we move from crisis to recovery and ongoing resilience, we should consider public support for the arts as part of that recovery plan.

Our Arts and Culture grantmaking and other activities are informed by the 2019 Greater Hartford Arts Landscape Study, commissioned by the Hartford Foundation and the Connecticut Office of the Arts to better understand the arts ecosystem in our region. The study found a vibrant sector challenged by financial fragility and a need to address issues of equity, diversity and inclusion related to access, program content, workforce and leadership.

Our research and evaluation of the Greater Hartford arts sector tells us that people of color are underrepresented in Greater Hartford's art workforce, particularly Latinx artists and organizations. Artists/creatives are among the workers most severely affected by the pandemic. Black and Indigenous artists have higher rates of unemployment than white artists due to COVID and have lost a larger portion of their 2020 income. Pre-COVID, one-third of Greater Hartford's arts organizations exhibited signs of financial fragility.

In May, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving announced the formation of an advisory group to lift up and influence resource allocation for artists of color in the region. The Foundation's *Artists of Color Unite!* (AOCU) advisory group closed out 2020 by recommending three grants totaling \$400,000 to support arts projects, capacity building and COVID-19 relief.

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While philanthropic dollars are more flexible and can fill gaps and support more targeted efforts, we have seen how COVID has created the competing needs between vital, basic human services and the arts sector. This reinforces the need for the public sector to be the first and primary funder for both arts and basic human needs. Private funder partnerships can be positioned to bring in additional dollars from the federal and national funders.

The Foundation offers its support for House Bill 6119, as it would provide significant increases in resources for arts, culture and tourism throughout the state at a time when these industries are in dire straits with many organizations either closing their operations or struggling to continue. Creating this new funding mechanism would also help provide some stability to arts, cultural and tourism funding which has seen state support decline over the past decade. We also support current legislative efforts underway to create a more equitable process of allocating state funding for arts and culture organizations, which we hope will create more opportunities for under resourced artists of color.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators, advocates and the business sector to support **arts and culture** in our state and create a stronger infrastructure to ensure the arts sector's stability and resilience and increase the racial/ethnic diversity of Connecticut's arts workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.