

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CULTURAL COALITION

P.O. Box 95, New London, CT 06320 | (860) 448-5135 | info@CultureSECT.org | www.CultureSECT.org

DATE: March 21, 2019
TO: Joint Committee on Planning & Development
FROM: Wendy Bury, Executive Director, Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition
RE: H.B. 6939 An Act Concerning the Establishment of Municipal Cultural Districts

Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Champagne, Representative Zawistowski and distinguished members of the Planning & Development Committee,

My name is Wendy Bury and I am the Executive Director of the Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition, a nonprofit organization that serves more than 500 arts, cultural and creative businesses in New London County and its surrounding areas. We ask the Planning & Development Committee to support H.B. 6939 An Act Concerning the Establishment of Municipal Cultural Districts.

The Cultural Coalition serves as the “voice” of the cultural sector and the liaison between the cultural sector and leadership entities invested in regional revitalization, and we provide core services to connect, strengthen, and advocate for the cultural community. From sole proprietors, artists and small volunteer-run organizations, to historical societies and sites and professionally staffed museums, tourist attractions and arts centers, the Coalition serves 22 towns and includes a diverse cross section of nonprofit and for-profit individuals, businesses, groups and organizations. Our office is located in the City of Norwich.

Arts and culture represent 5% of CT’s economy, generate \$9 billion annually, and supports 57,000 jobs. CT’s nonprofit arts and cultural organizations generate \$800 million annually. Nonprofit arts and cultural economic activity in New London County alone, \$168 million, is greater than each of the following states: Vermont, Delaware and Maine (Arts & Economic Prosperity 5, Southeastern Connecticut, 2015). Our small corner of the state packs an enormous economic punch, and represents 1/5 of the CT’s total nonprofit arts and cultural economic activity and attracts millions of visitors every year. We have a number of cities and towns in New London County that are already thriving arts and cultural communities. The ability for a city or town to potentially be recognized as a cultural district would generate greater visibility and distinction to capitalize on its assets, both in our region and by the state.

A thriving creative sector is one of CT’s best economic development tools. Establishing municipal cultural districts would strengthen our sense of place, increase visibility of our cultural institutions, foster a robust arts and culture ecosystem, and help to attract visitors and new creative businesses.

Beyond their economic impact, arts and culture are a major contributor to CT’s quality of life and central to the decision-making process for businesses, workers and families looking for a home here. Arts and culture build state pride and our identity stems from our history, heritage and modern arts and cultural assets. More important, these are revenue generators, not cost centers. Establishing municipal cultural districts would allow for budget neutral recognition and optimization of thriving creative communities.

We urge the Planning & Development Committee to support H.B. 6939.

The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition fosters region-wide economic growth in New London County by optimizing existing and new arts and cultural activities to assure that cultural sector and creative business assets are central to the vitality of the region.

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Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Bury', written in a cursive style.

Wendy Bury
Executive Director

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