


# What is the budgetary and legislative impact on arts, culture and tourism?

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New London — Tourism funding is staying flat, short-term rentals like Airbnb will be taxed, welcome centers will reopen, the lodging tax remains the highest in the country at 15 percent, and municipalities can create cultural districts.

These are a few of the impacts on arts, culture and tourism — or ACT — from the legislative session that ended June 5.

The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition and Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut hosted an ACT policy update Wednesday morning at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum.

The panel discussion featured Cultural Coalition Executive Director Wendy Bury, CT Tourism Coalition President Stephen Tagliatela, Department of Economic and Community Development Deputy Commissioner David Kooris, and Sen. Paul Formica, R-East Lyme, who co-chairs the Arts, Culture and Tourism Caucus.

Kooris said he'll "take it as a bit of a win that we stayed flat," with a "slight little increase" from \$4.1 million to \$4.3 million in funding for statewide marketing. Bury called it a win that ACT funding in general was not zeroed out in early budget proposals, and Formica recognized the legislature for maintaining funding while facing a \$3.7 billion deficit.

But Tagliatela called the flat funding "quite disappointing, because we thought we had a champion." He is also disappointed that the Airbnb tax will be going into the general fund rather than the tourism fund, commenting that "we still have work to do to get that rectified."

Tagliatela was pleased that Gov. Ned Lamont's proposal to increase the lodging tax from 15 percent — already the highest in the country — to 17 percent was killed. Bury noted that 10 percent of the lodging tax revenue now goes toward arts, culture and tourism, but her goal is a floor of 25 percent.

One bill that did move forward was one requiring the licensing of art therapists; this was absorbed into the **budget bill** (<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/TOB/h/pdf/2019HB-07424-R00-HB.PDF>), which awaits the governor's signature. Another bill that passed is **H.B. 6939** ([https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill\\_num=HB-6939](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=HB-6939)), which allows municipalities to create cultural districts. Bury said the Cultural Coalition will be working with municipalities that want to do so.

The budget includes \$550,000 for reopening the welcome centers along Interstate 95, Formica noted.

"We should begin to take the orange barrels off those rest areas and make it look like yes, we are open and we are welcoming," he said. Kooris said this will be implemented for July, but the Westbrook welcome center will remain closed.

**H.B. 7306** ([https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill\\_num=HB07306&which\\_year=2019](https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=HB07306&which_year=2019)) addresses the welcome centers and also creates a tourism council within DECD. It lays out requirements for the commission's 29 members; Kooris said he wants to take the upcoming special session as an opportunity to refine boards and commissions, because it's hard for DECD to staff all the ones on which it is supposed to sit.

Asked about the **blank "Attractions" signs** (<https://www.theday.com/local-columns/20190608/new-londonx2019s-embrace-of-electronic-billboards-is-another-bad-sign>) on I-95, Kooris said his understanding is the installation of the signs was one capital project but the information is another, which is now starting. He doesn't know why the Department of Transportation did it this way.

Overall, Kooris said DECD "has a very comprehensive, quantitative, measurement-based approach" for making its funding decisions, made easier by digital media.

"It gets into a little big brother territory, I'll admit, but I'd rather use those tools for good than for evil," he said, pointing to the ability to identify how much more likely people exposed to advertising are to visit the state and how much longer they stay.

He added that the process is underway of wrapping buses that go up and down the East Coast in tourism advertising, and that the Eastern Regional Tourism District in Connecticut is working with Foundry 66 in Norwich as a public-private partnership to cut down on administrative and overhead costs.

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Anis Alawi had been selling lottery tickets at the C Depot Citgo for about 10 days when a winning lottery ticket worth \$2 million was purchased there.

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Mayor Ron McDaniel recently announced he will seek a third term as the town executive.

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Norwich police charged a New York woman Monday with second-degree sexual assault and risk of injury to a minor.