February 5, 2020

Dear Southeastern CT Legislative Delegation:

On behalf of our board and the 500+ arts and cultural organizations, entities and individuals we represent, the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition wishes to express our support for An Act Concerning Jobs in and Revenue from the Gaming Industry with one modification that we believe will provide additional positive benefit to our region and Connecticut. The bill makes Connecticut competitive in the gaming-entertainment market, maintains the government to government relationship with our two Tribal Nations, and provides additional municipal support in our region, which we support wholeheartedly.

We strongly encourage the following change to the bill:

p. 13 line 390 - Ten per cent of the gross gaming revenue from the operation of authorized games, except video facsimile games, which shall be deposited in the state-wide tourism marketing account, established pursuant to section 10-395 of the general statutes;

be changed to:

Ten per cent of the gross gaming revenue from the operation of authorized games, except video facsimile games, which shall be deposited in the Tourism Fund, established pursuant to section 10-395b of the general statutes;

The entire Tourism Fund includes:

- funding for statewide tourism marketing (CT Office of Tourism)
- funding for arts and cultural anchor institutions that attract millions of tourists annually through individual line items and consortium line items that include local arts and cultural organizations - Florence Griswold Museum, Lyman Allyn Museum, Eugene O’Neill Theater Center, Garde Arts Center, Mystic Aquarium, Goodspeed Opera House, and more
- funding for the CT Office of the Arts, which receives a federal match of the state investment from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) upwards of $1M that is re-granted through a competitive grant process to over 400 arts and cultural organizations statewide and in nearly every municipality
- funding for arts education programs in local communities, youth-based arts programs, arts program addressing social issues like the environment, social justice, racism, the environment and criminal justice
- funding for CT Humanities, which also receives a federal match of the state investment from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) upwards of $1M
that is re-granted through a competitive grant process to over 40 organizations, including libraries, museums and historical societies, to provide community programming, events and projects

- funding for the three tourism districts (eastern, western, central)
- funding for nine arts and cultural Designated Regional Service Organizations, including the Cultural Coalition, through the Office of the Arts’ grants or individual line items

Legislators continue to have the ability to appropriate the Tourism Fund revenue during the biennial budget process.

To restrict funding to statewide tourism marketing does not lift all boats, and it is arts and cultural organizations that are creating products for tourism to market. The Tourism Fund, in its totality, invests in product development, community development, tourism marketing, and more to reach local neighborhoods and residents and audiences from far away. We support overall investment in the arts, culture and tourism ecosystem.

With this change, we also believe the bill would garner more support from a broader constituency as more organizations and residents would benefit. While statewide marketing tourism invests in advertising buys and media campaigns in other states, which is definitely needed to remain competitive nationally, the rest of the Tourism Fund goes directly into CT’s cities and towns benefitting the communities and residents.

Arts and cultural organizations are a cornerstone to tourism. Public funding spurs private investment at the local and regional level. We should concomitantly invest in the organizations that are creating the events, programs, and attractions that drive tourists here, as well as statewide tourism marketing. More important, beyond the tourism impact, arts and cultural organizations create vibrant communities, attract and retain employees/employers, and add to the quality of life for Southeastern CT residents.

I hope you will consider support of this recommended change to the bill.

Sincerely,

Wendy Bury
Executive Director

Cc: Chairman Rodney Butler, Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation
Chairman James Gessner, Jr., Mohegan Tribe
Chief of Staff, Chuck Bunnell, Mohegan Tribe