

# Commerce Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1456

AN ACT DEDICATING A PORTION OF THE MEALS TAX REVENUE TO ARTS,

**Title:** CULTURE AND TOURISM.

**Vote Date:**

**Vote Action:**

**PH Date:** 3/11/2025

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Commerce Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill establishes and clarifies tax rates for various goods and services to ensure fair and consistent taxation while setting specific exemptions. It aims to generate revenue for essential state and municipal programs, including transportation, tourism, and regional development, by allocating tax collections to targeted funds. The bill imposes taxes on goods such as lodging, meals, and high-value items while offering targeted relief, such as reduced rates for active-duty U.S. military personnel and incentives for maritime activities. By consolidating tax rates, it simplifies the system for businesses and consumers. Overall, the bill promotes economic growth, funds vital services, and supports key industries.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

None Submitted.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Connecticut Tourism Coalition, Mr. Frank Burns, Executive Director:** They are in **support** of this bill. This is an act dedicating a portion of the meal tax revenue to Arts, Culture, and Tourism and they acknowledge the Committee for recognizing the need to fund these sectors. They suggest that the line items cuts proposed by the governor be restored and that the line items and the three tourism districts be funded out of the 1% of the meal tax

for a total of \$10.7 million and that for the next three years that \$5 million be taken out of the 1% of the meal tax to fund Arts, Culture and Tourism Marketing for America 250. They see this an opportunity for the state to attract new visitors and possible new residents and businesses. They see the funding of these three sectors and America 250 as a way to enhance state revenue, create new jobs and improve upon the quality of life for Connecticut.

**CT Humanities, Ms. Helen Higgins, Board Member:** She offered her testimony in **support** of this proposal. As the distributor of the Culture funds, they anticipate this will mean a \$5 million state investment that they will in turn re-invest in their communities' cultural organizations.

**Connecticut Restaurant Association, Mr. Scott Dolch, President and CEO:** They **support** this legislation. It would allocate 10% of the state's meals and beverage tax to fund the growth and promotion of the state's tourism industry and as we know this plays a crucial role in the state's economy, supporting thousands of jobs across various sectors. This is a forward-thinking approach that allows us to build a sustainable, long-term model for the state's economy.

**Connecticut Economic Development Association, Mr. Kevin Bielmeier, President and Economic Development Director:** His testimony is in **support** of this bill. He points out that the creative sector drives nearly \$12 billion to the state's economy, employs 54,000 people, and represents 4% of our GDP and that this investment has a net positive effect for our communities.

**Rya Greene, Community Development Director, Pilobolus:** They endorse a proposal by CT Arts Alliance, CT Humanities, CT Tourism Coalition, and the CT Retail Association that would distribute the funds with half going to the municipalities where the tax is collected, 30% dedicated to arts, culture, and tourism—with at least \$5 million each for arts and cultural funding, and \$12 million for tourism marketing—and the remaining 20% allocated to workforce development. They believe this increased funding would position Connecticut as a leader in the creative and tourism sectors, while fostering vibrant communities, stimulating local economies, and supporting cultural growth. They highlight how such funding would greatly benefit Pilobolus by enabling more local programming, arts education, staff expansion, and tourism appeal, ultimately enriching the state's cultural and economic landscape.

**Frank Burns, Executive Director, Connecticut Tourism Coalition:** They urge restoring proposed line-item cuts and funding the Three Tourism Districts through the meals tax, freeing up \$13.4 million currently funded by the Hotel Occupancy Tax. They highlight strong returns on investment in tourism and culture, up to \$7.80 per dollar spent, and stress the need to fund America 250, suggesting \$5 million annually for three years to avoid missing out on economic and tourism opportunities. They conclude that these investments will boost revenue, create jobs, and enhance quality of life in Connecticut.

**Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, Ms. Sara Mendillo:** They are in **support** of this bill and urge the committee pass the bill forward as they believe it will deliver lasting benefits to all Connecticut communities.

**Hartford Symphony Orchestra,**  
**Mr. Stephen Collins, President and CEO,**  
**Mr. Robert Bausmith, Board Chair,**  
**Ms. Kirsten Phillips, Marketing Chair:**

They are in **support** of this proposal and suggest that with this tool they have the opportunity to provide sustainable and equitable funding to organizations that enrich our communities.

**The Maritime Aquarium, Ms. Emily Lavin, Communications Lead:** They are **supportive** of this legislation and feel increasing awareness of tourist attractions across the state makes Connecticut a more desirable location for working, living and playing.

**Art Club of Cromwell, Mr. Juan Agudelo:** His comments are in **support** of this bill.

**Bridgeport Downtown Special Services District, Ms. Lauren Coakley Vincent, President and CEO:** She offered her testimony in **support** of the bill saying that the increased level of funding will allow the Office of the Arts and Humanities to increase their support to the artists and organizations that keep their downtowns vibrant and interesting places to live, work and visit.

**Connecticut League of Museums, Ms. Amrys Williams, Executive Director:** They are **supportive** of this proposal. Greater investment in the cultural sector will ensure key components of the states' economy.

**Connecticut Convention and Sports Bureau, Mr. Robert Murdock, President:** Their comments are in **support** of this bill. They describe the upsides of adequate funding for the Arts and Culture in our state the downsides of what could happen if additional funding is not obtained.

**Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut, Ms. Lisa Scails, Executive Director:** She is offering her testimony in **support** of this bill. This is more than just a budget allocation; it is an opportunity to breathe new life into our communities. By supporting this funding, you are championing the organizations that bring people together through arts and culture, sparking economic activity and enriching our community's health and vibrancy.

**CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, Ms. Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy & Division Advisor:** She offers her comments in **support** of this proposal. The bill acknowledges the importance of the arts and culture industries and the creative economy in our state and provides desperately needed support as we continue to rebuild from the devastating impact of the Covid 19 pandemic.

**Greater Hartford Arts Council, Ms. Amanda Roy, Interim CEO:** She is **supportive** of this bill and urges the committee to restore funding and reaffirm our state's commitment to the creative sector.

**Cynthia Rider, CT Flagship Producing Theaters:** They are in **support** of this legislation. They say the arts are essential to our identity as a state and play a crucial role in enriching the lives of our residents.

[Cromwell Creative District, Ms. Ann Grasso, Chairperson](#): She offered her comments in **support** of this bill.

[Downtown Cabaret Theatre, Bridgeport, Mr. Hugh Hallinan, Executive Director](#): His comments were also in **support** of this proposal and the impact supporting the Arts have on many sectors of the state's economy.

[Fermata Arts Foundation, Mr. Tatyana Ishutkina, Executive Director](#): Their comments were in **support** of this bill.

[CT Arts Alliance, Mr. Rufus de Rham, Interim Executive Director](#): His comments were in **support** of this legislation. This increase level of funding will allow it to be increase in support of the artists and organizations that keep our downtowns vibrant and interesting places to live, work and visit and to encourage more people from out of state to visit our downtowns.

[Ms. Pamela Lucas](#)

[Ms. Margaret Kelly](#)

[Ms. Francys Jesson](#)

[Mr. John Cusano](#):

These folks all submitted testimony in **support** of this proposal. They believe that the bill represents a critical step in strengthening the states vibrant arts and cultural sector. In this time of great division and difficulties in our society this will help bring us together and offer healing and inspiration to forge ahead.

[Mr. Paul Kulikowski](#)

[Mr. Jonathan Jacobson](#)

Their comments were in **support** of the bill the following breakdown. 50% to the communities where the tax was incurred; 30% to Arts, Culture, and Tourism Funding and 20% to workforce development.

**Curtin Call, Stamford:**

[Mr. Granville Burgess](#)

**Ms. Minnie Liu**

**Mr. James Carroll**

**Mr. James Chiles**

**Ms. Sara DeFelice**

**Ms. Sara Gannon**

**Ms. Alexandra Hall**

**Ms. Angela Joachim**

**Ms. Dana Konikoff**

**Mr. Chris Nardi**

**Ms. Valerie Periman**

**Ms. Misha Polonsky**

**Mr. Shelby Reynolds**

**Ms. Rachel Rosado**

**Mr. Gregory Suss**

**Mr. Louis Ursone**

**Ms. Karyn Ward**

Mr. Ted Yudain  
Anonymous  
Ms. Susan Asselin  
Ms. Cristina Chainani  
Mr. Clint Clifford  
Ms. Cara Kramer  
Ms. Ashley Mareinek  
Ms. Hoshang Mulla  
Ms. Marie Muthersbaugh  
Ms. Renee Oliver  
Ms. Diane Reiter  
Mr. Larry Rosolowski  
Ms. Estelle Rumely  
Ms. Veronique Shaftel  
Ms. Marianne and Mr. Clifford Schorer  
Ms. Doran Welch  
Ms. Marialisa Valendra  
Anonymous  
Ms. Anna Zavorina  
Mr. Paul Thury  
Mr. Frank Sisson:

All these people identified themselves as ardent supporters of Curtin Call and all indicated their **support** for this bill and how it was to be allocated. They also said the increase in support is an important step toward making the state a leader in New England and across the country in the creative and tourism sectors.

They also mentioned that two organizations received larger grants than others and that these were "pork" that came through legislative action. They ask that all line-item funding to theatre be eliminated, pooling the funds to be distributed through competitive grant programs offered through the CT Office of the Arts.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Frank Burns, Executive Director, Connecticut Tourism Coalition](#): He suggests restoring the governor's proposed budget cuts and using 1% of the meal tax to fund the Three Tourism Districts, totaling \$10.7 million. The \$13.4 million currently collected from the Hotel Occupancy Tax, which funds Arts, Culture, Tourism, and the tourism districts, could be redirected back into the General Fund. A study by Longwood's International showed a return of \$3 for every dollar spent on tourism promotion, with updated figures expected to show a \$7 return per dollar. The state's Cultural Fund also showed a return of \$7.80 per dollar spent. The Governor and legislators have shown little interest in funding the America 250 initiative, which celebrates the U.S. 250th anniversary. The proposal suggests using \$5 million from the meal tax over three years to fund marketing for this event, noting that other states have made substantial investments in similar efforts. The goal is to boost state revenue, create jobs, and improve quality of life by enhancing tourism and cultural funding, ultimately attracting more visitors, residents, and businesses to Connecticut. He advocates for these ideas as a way to increase revenue and improve the state's tourism and cultural sectors.

**Reported by: Richard Ferrari and Austin Adil**

**Date: 3/24/25**