

Appropriations Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1551

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'S SPENDING ON ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Title: ACTIVITIES.

Vote Date: 4/24/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 4/3/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Appropriations Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

SB-1551 directs a fixed percentage – not less than 10% – of the revenue from the prepared meals and beverage tax to the "Culture and Tourism Account." This investment addresses the need for increased and predictable funding of statewide arts, culture, and tourism, as these industries are a vital component of CT's educational and mental health support systems, economic development, and civic engagement. The account will be used to provide grants to organizations to aid them in promoting the arts, creating leisure and business opportunities for tourism, and/or preserving and sharing CT's history and culture.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Jeffrey Beckham, Secretary, Office of Policy and Management, Opposes:](#)

OPM opposes "the creation and expansion of off-budget, non-appropriated accounts." The existing Tourism Fund fulfills the purpose of the culture and tourism account, and is subject to the spending cap. The proposed account is not subject to the legislative budget process, and "circumvent[ing] the constitutional and statutory spending cap" could result in spending that exceeds taxpayers' ability. The General Fund, which receives approximately \$100 million annually from the prepared meals tax, would suffer a loss of resources that either need to be replaced or appropriations would have to be reduced. This bill mandates grant recipients provide a report to CT Humanities rather than the state agency overseeing the funding.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Andres Verzosa, Executive Director & Curator, Stanley-Whitman House:](#)

SB-1551 is as a "sustainable funding mechanism" and asks the Committee to "allocate at least \$5 million to Connecticut Humanities (CTH), \$5 million to the Connecticut Office of the Arts, and \$12 million to the Connecticut Office of Tourism." Strategically investing in arts, culture, and the humanities "links cultural vibrancy to economic resilience," a profitable reinvestment in CT's creative economy. In CT, the nonprofit arts and culture sector is its own "ecosystem that supports jobs, tourism, education, and civic vitality," contributing over \$850 million annually and supporting almost 24,000 jobs. Small investments have a cascading effect through infrastructure, education, and research databases, to name a few. SB-1551 section 4 requires organizations "demonstrate public benefit and fiscal responsibility," promoting transparency and accountability.

[Steph Burr, Executive Director, Northwest CT Arts Council:](#)

Ms. Burr supports SB-1551 as "a critical step toward aligning state funding policy with the reality that the arts are not just a luxury, they are infrastructure." The arts and humanities are "vital drivers of both community and economic development," generating over \$30 million in the Northwest CT sector alone. This bill will promote a future where all CT residents have access to arts and culture by: (1) establishing a rationale and stable funding source that reinvests in itself; (2) emphasizing transparency by requiring organizations to report on spending; and (3) supporting communities in grassroots initiatives, especially in rural areas. Funding predictability permits strategic planning, allowing organizations to help more people, more equitably.

[Noah Bloom, Executive Director, Neighborhood Music School:](#)

Connecticut's investment in the arts, culture, and tourism sector promotes CT's most important priorities: workforce development, economic development, and civic engagement. Within workforce development, the arts foster skill-building, creativity, and innovation, critical skills as AI gains steam. The arts promote communication, collaboration, and confidence. As far as economic development, this sector invests in employment, internships, and apprenticeships, as well as, drawing people to local restaurants, businesses, and hotels. The arts encourage civic engagement, "as creative expression can inspire social change, foster community dialogue, and strengthen democratic participation." The arts "cultivate empathy in real-time" by exposing people to other perspectives, tapping into human emotions and experiences, and motivating people to celebrate their differences.

[Dr. Quan Tran, Co-Chair, Asian Pacific American Coalition of CT](#)

Dr. Tran is supporting SB-1551 "to ensur[e] not only the cultural vibrancy of our incredibly diverse and dynamic state population," but also to "ensure that historically marginalized and underrepresented communities also benefit from these efforts." CT's communities "come together, showcase [their] cultural traditions, celebrate [their] heritage, and transmit cultural knowledge." These events are fundamental to the culture of CT.

[David Fay, President & CEO, The Bushnell; Michael Moran Jr., President & CEO, The Palace Stamford; Frank Tavera, CEO, Palace Theater; Anthony McDonald, Executive Director, Shubert; Stephanie Fried & Patrick Langevin, Co-Executive Directors, Warner Theatre; Steve Sigel, Executive Director, Garde Arts Center:](#)

CT Performing Arts Center Coalition supports SB-1551's investment in CT's "essential economic and cultural anchors." The six centers above "welcome over 600,000 patrons each year" and "provid[e] educational opportunities to more than 45,000 Connecticut students annually." The Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 study demonstrated "that in 2022 alone,

nonprofit arts and culture organizations generated \$954.1 million in economic activity in Connecticut, supporting 16,667 jobs and generating \$275.6 million in tax revenue." The proposed culture and tourism fund will provide stability that allows organizations "to invest in long-term sustainability, infrastructure improvements, and expanded programming." This fund is a necessary compliment to existing state allocations, not a replacement.

[Lydia Blaisdell, Playwright & Cultural District Commissioner, City of New London:](#)

Ms. Blaisdell grew up in CT and returned with her husband "quite literally" for the "strong arts and culture scene." From a practical perspective, investing in the arts, culture, and tourism sector drives economic prosperity for local communities. As CT looks to bring more residents/taxpayers to the state, "thriving arts scenes and active cultural centers create towns and cities that young professionals want to live in, work in, and age comfortable [sic] in."

[Frank Burns, Executive Director, CT Tourism Coalition:](#)

SB-1551 is a significant economic opportunity, with the potential to bring more residents and taxpayers to the state. This bill could generate around \$10.7 million, helping CT compete with other New England and Mid-Atlantic states. The tourism industry contributes \$1.2 billion in tax revenue, and either directly or indirectly employs 120,000 people.

[Michael Barker, CEO & Principal, Pursued by a Bear, LLC:](#)

Mr. Barker notes the creative sector represents 4% of CT's GDP, adding \$12 billion to the economy and employing 54,000 people. SB-1551 will create \$7 in economic activity for every \$1 the state invests. CT falls behind its neighbors in arts, culture, and tourism investments. This sector brings our communities together, increases economic activity in our downtowns, and increases community health and vibrancy.

[Leah Glaser, Professor of History & Coordinator of Public History Program, CCSU:](#)

Investing in CT's arts and cultural sector is vital to revitalizing communities by "protecting the resources and promoting the stories that connect people to those same places." This sector provides historical knowledge, creating the "informed citizenry essential to a democracy." At this point in history, investing in the creative sector is necessary to preserve the future.

[Chris Senecal, Sr. Public Policy Officer, Hartford Foundation:](#)

The Hartford Foundation supports SB-1551 because the arts "serve as a unique resource in supporting community and resident well-being, including physical and emotional well-being, learning, economic growth and community cohesion and resilience." They educate on social justice issues and share lived experiences. They are a source of hope and healing.

[Amrys Williams, Executive Director, CT League of Museums](#)

CT Humanities' grants allow CT's museums to grow and thrive. Collections Assessment Grants help museums assess and care for their inventory. Museum Makeover Grants provide expert advice and implementation funds. Planning and Implementation Grants are the foundation of almost every major exhibition and program they fund. Capacity Grants permit strategic work and long-term planning. Partnerships Grants help organizations that serve cultural institutions.

[Dr. Jason Mancini, Executive Director, CT Humanities:](#)

The economic benefits of cultural investment in the arts and humanities are "real and demonstrable." With the federal cuts in funding, we stand to lose the building blocks of

"curiosity, knowledge, and understanding." People learn about each other, find ways to express themselves, and make connections. All emotions "are rooted in and expressed through arts and humanities." While the economic benefit is concrete, the arts and humanities are invaluable.

Joining Mr. Mancini, multiple board members from CT Humanities offered testimony in support of SB-1551:

1. [Andrew Forsyth, Board of Directors](#)
2. [Helen Higgins, Board Member](#)
3. [Andy Horowitz, Board Member](#)
4. [Jacques Lamarre, Board Member](#)
5. [Rorie Litos Rueckert, Board Member](#)
6. [Andrea Rapacz, Board of Directors](#)
7. [Carlos Torre, Board of Directors](#)
8. [Ruth Garby Torres, Vice-Chair Board of Directors](#)
9. [David Westmoreland, Board of Directors](#)

The testimony in support of SB-1551 is extensive, with many people highlighting that CT is at a tipping point, especially with federal support reductions. A consistent, reliable funding source will allow these organizations to plan, expand, and grow. As compared to surrounding states, CT already underfunds its cultural sector. Arts, cultural, and tourism organizations support CT's important priorities; they create meaningful jobs and serve disadvantaged communities. These organizations helped our communities and children make it through the pandemic. They bring our communities together and stimulate local economic activity. Visitors eat at local restaurants and patronize local businesses, and the increased focus on tourism will only benefit CT by making it a tourism destination.

To understand the rippling economic benefits, visit the [Arts & Economic Prosperity calculator](#) for a quantitative demonstration. Each piece of testimony below highlights various personalized reasons and examples to support SB-1551:

1. [Brett Abbott, Executive Director & CEO, New Britain Museum of American Art](#)
2. [Pedro Bermudez, Educator & Filmmaker](#)
3. [Kevin Bishop, Executive Director, Cuatro Puntos](#)
4. [Logan Ray Bishop, Artist, Adjunct Professor, Prison Arts Assistant, Printmaker](#)
5. [Wendy Black-Nasta, Founder & Executive Director, Arts for World Peace](#)
6. [John Boccuzzi, President, Friends of Newtown Seniors](#)
7. [Shannon Duncan Bodwell, VP of Advancement, Everyday Democracy](#)
8. [Tony Braz, President, Simsbury Historical Society](#)
9. [G Brekke, Board Member, Long Wharf Theater](#)
10. [Dorothea Brennan](#)
11. [Robert Brock, Executive Director, CT Landmarks](#)
12. [Lois Bruinooge, Executive Director, The Last Green Valley, Inc.](#)
13. [Derek Caelin](#)
14. [Jessica Cerullo, Artist & Founder, Connect to Create](#)
15. [Diane Charney, Retired Professor, Yale University](#)
16. [Janice Chrzescijanek, Dir. of Economic Dev. & Chair of Bethel Arts, Town of Bethel](#)
17. [Kay Clarke, Treasurer & Trustee, Florence Griswold Museum](#)

18. [Lauren Coakley, President & CEO, Bridgeport Downtown Special Services District](#)
19. [Heather Coleman](#)
20. [Steve Collins, President & CEO, Hartford Symphony Orchestra](#)
21. [Davnet Conway](#)
22. [Kathleen Craughwell-Varda, Director, Conservation ConneCTion](#)
23. [Jennifer Crookes, Arts Administration & Development Consultant](#)
24. [John Cuk, Music Director, Danbury Concert Chorus](#)
25. [Lauren DiMartino, Business Manager, Edmond Town Hall, Newtown](#)
26. [Jennifer Eifrig, Dev. & Comms Dir., Justice Dance Performance Project](#)
27. [Janet Evelyn, Founder & Executive Director, NICE, Inc.](#)
28. [Samantha Fargione, Executive Director, Weston History & Culture Center](#)
29. [Jose Feliciano, Lead Consultant & Business Owner, Be Intensive LLC](#)
30. [Mike Finley, Senior Director of Government Affairs, Mystic Aquarium](#)
31. [Michael Fitzgerald](#)
32. [Matt Fleury, President & CEO, Connecticut Science Center](#)
33. [Dr. Julia Giblin, Prof. & Anthropology Program Director, Quinnipiac University](#)
34. [Susan Gilgore, Executive Director, Lockwood-Mathews Manion Museum](#)
35. [Aaron Goode, Ethnic Heritage Center](#)
36. [Rebecca Goodheart, Producing Artistic Director, Elm Shakespeare Company](#)
37. [Joellyn Gray](#)
38. [Rya Greene, Community Development Director, Pilobolus](#)
39. [Koray Gurz, COO & CFO, Mystic Aquarium](#)
40. [Barbara Harms, Vice Chair, Florence Griswold Museum](#)
41. [Dwayne Harris, Executive Director, The Little Theatre of Manchester](#)
42. [Henry Haskell](#)
43. [Daniel Hayden, Exec. Director, New England Civil War Museum & Research Center](#)
44. [Linda Hocking, Archivist & State Historical Records Advisory Board \(SHRAB\)](#)
45. [Susan Huizenga, Executive Director, WPAA](#)
46. [David Iscoe](#)
47. [Michael Jehle, Executive Director, Fairfield Museum and History Center](#)
48. [John Johnson, Proprietor, Thames River Gallery](#)
49. [Tracy Kay, CEO, Bartlett Arboretum Association, Inc.](#)
50. [Jonathan Kozak](#)
51. [Ginny Kozlowski, Executive Director, CT Lodging Association](#)
52. [Robert Kret, Exec. Dir. & CEO, CT Museum of Culture](#)
53. [Scott Kuykendall, Owner, Oxygen Design, LLC](#)
54. [Linda Lindroth, MFA](#)
55. [Heather Lodge](#)
56. [Kathleen Maher, Executive Director, Barnum Museum](#)
57. [Aaron Marcavitch, Dir., Economic & Community Development, Enfield](#)
58. [Winter Marshall](#)
59. [Marybeth Marx, Trustee, Florence Griswold Museum](#)
60. [Donald Masso, Vice President, Boothe Memorial Railway Society](#)
61. [Emily Mattina, Artistic Director, Shakesperience Productions, Inc.](#)
62. [Mark McEachern, Executive Director, Torrington Historical Society](#)
63. [Sarah McKay, Board of Directors, CT Arts Alliance](#)
64. [Lynn Mervosh, Site Administrator, North Central Region, CT Landmarks](#)
65. [Sandra Miklave, Executive Director, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra](#)
66. [Regan Miner](#)

67. [Kenneth Minkema, President, Hamden Historical Society](#)
68. [Jane Montanaro, Executive Director, Preservation CT](#)
69. [Barbara Nagy](#)
70. [Mary Noonan](#)
71. [Susan Origlia](#)
72. [Sean Parke, Archivist, University of Hartford](#)
73. [Jason Patlis, President & CEO, The Maritime Aquarium](#)
74. [Lizette Pelletier](#)
75. [Michelle Peralta, State Historic Records Advisory Board & Librarian](#)
76. [Kristen Phillips, Marketing Chair & Marketing Co-Chair, Hartford Symphony Orchestra & Board of Directors Theaterworks Hartford](#)
77. [Elizabeth Pite](#)
78. [Lauren Pittman, Poet Author Teaching Artist](#)
79. [Amanda Prose](#)
80. [John Proto, Executive Director, The Shore Line Trolley Museum](#)
81. [Maureen Quintin, VP & Dir. Communications, Essex Steam Train & Riverboat](#)
82. [Amanda Roy, Interim CEO, Greater Hartford Arts Council](#)
83. [Dayne Rugh](#)
84. [Sylvester Salcedo, LCDR, USNR-R](#)
85. [Lisa Scails, Executive Director, Cultural Alliance of Western CT](#)
86. [Linalynn Schmelzer, Dance Educator, River Valley Dance Project](#)
87. [Kate Schramm, Director, Cultural Sustainability, CT Museum of Culture and History](#)
88. [Jane Shaw, CT Landmarks](#)
89. [Cooper Sheldon, Curator, Sharon Historical Society and Museum](#)
90. [Elinor Slomba](#)
91. [Ilona Somogyi, Executive Director, Ball & Socket Arts](#)
92. [Susette Tibus, President & CEO, Mystic Aquarium](#)
93. [Maisa Tisdale, Pres. & CEO, Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History & Community](#)
94. [Margaret Anne Tockarshewsky, Executive Director, New Haven Museum](#)
95. [Joshua Campbell Torrance, Executive Director, Florence Griswold Museum](#)
96. [Cynthia Trenholm, President & Board of Directors, The Vernon Chorale, Inc.](#)
97. [Margaret Vaughan](#)
98. [Fiona Vernal, History Professor, UCONN](#)
99. [Mila Volpe, Yale student & Board Member, The Arts Council for Greater New Haven](#)
100. [Patricia Voorhees, Board Secretary, Bethel Arts](#)
101. [Kristen Wands, Curator, Windsor Historical Society](#)
102. [Dr. James Wharton, CEO, Beardsley Zoo](#)
103. [Richard Wies, AIA, Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects LLC](#)
104. [Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy & Division Advisor, CT Community Nonprofit Alliance](#)
105. [Jonathan Winn, Co-Artistic Director, Thrown Stone Theatre Company](#)
106. [Amy Wynn, Executive Director, American Mural Project](#)
107. [Charles & Susan Alyson Young](#)
108. [Cynthia Zuniga, Community History Project Assistant, CT Museum of Culture & History](#)
109. [Anonymous, Anonymous](#)

[Hartford Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, O'Neill Theater Center, Westport Country Playhouse, Goodspeed Musicals, and Yale Repertory Theatre:](#)

CT's Flagship Producing Theaters support SB-1551 as theater is crucial to education, economic development, and cultural exploration. The Flagship Theaters generate \$42 million

of economic activity while entertaining 328,000 patrons. Reducing ticket prices and providing summer programs are two important community activities that allow young children and adolescents to interact with the arts; these are only possible with continued funding. This exposure nurtures creativity in our young people.

[Bob Svensk, CEO, Pequot Library and Others:](#)

The humanities provide a deeper understanding and "appreciation of history, civics, literature and the arts" through "thoughtful study and reflection." Our young people's futures rely on supporting the humanities. As a panel of three MIT graduates affirmed, young children will succeed in the world of high tech only with a deep appreciation of the humanities.

[Tim Brunner, Retired:](#)

Musical training is correlated with engineering and science talent. Funding the arts and humanities will "enhanc[e] work-force capability," in addition to the vast community benefits.

A large volume of testimony focused on the educational benefits of the creative sector. The arts and humanities help children explore the world and inspire a sense of wonder. Not only do people learn new skills and gain an invaluable understanding of the past, but people also find an outlet and resource to promote mental health. Our youth learn empathy and how to celebrate our differences. These organizations also reach otherwise underserved communities, offering people safe and healthy outlets to which they would lack access. Youth are exposed to possibilities for economic livelihood. These outlets improve communication skills, an understanding of diversity, work ethic, personal responsibility, and group accountability. Each piece of testimony below highlights various personalized reasons and examples to support SB-1551:

1. [Michael Bertolini, M Presents](#)
2. [Tonya Brock, President, Theatre of Northeastern CT, Inc.](#)
3. [Patrick Carr, Chair, CT Open Educational Resources Coordinating Council](#)
4. [Elaine Carroll, Executive Director, New Haven Symphony Orchestra](#)
5. [Lou Chen, CEO, INTEMPO](#)
6. [Dr. Clarissa Ceglie, Associate Professor](#)
7. [Stephanie Coakley, Executive Director, Pequot Library](#)
8. [Tina Couch, Chief Advancement Officer, Mystic Aquarium](#)
9. [Denise Davies, Graduate Student, CCSU](#)
10. [Catherine Del Buono, Founder & Executive Director, Our House Meriden](#)
11. [Joel Dodson, Prof. SCSU & Board Member, Arts Council of Greater New Haven](#)
12. [Eileen Donovan, Director of Learning & Engagement, Lyman Allyn Art Museum](#)
13. [Pamela Hovland, Acting Executive Director, Museum of Contemporary Art CT](#)
14. [Nathan Jedziniak, M.A. Public History student, CCSU](#)
15. [Lori Karp](#)
16. [Andrea Levy, Docent, New Britain Museum of Art](#)
17. [Mary Beth Maluccio](#)
18. [Ginger Morgan](#)
19. [Sarah Parke](#)
20. [Katherine Reed](#)
21. [Paul Skaff, President & CEO, CT Democracy Center](#)
22. [Judith Stoughton, Retired Children's Librarian](#)
23. [Raymond Sullivan](#)

24. [Carrie Taylor, Executive Director, Windsor Historical Society](#)
25. [Dic Wheeler, Executive Artistic Director, Oddfellows Playhouse Youth Theater](#)
26. [Elizabeth Wood, Executive Director, Historic Stonington](#)

[Scott Dolch, President & CEO, CT Restaurant Association, Supports with Recommendations:](#)

Investing in the hospitality industry directly will put resources back into our towns, and therefore, Mr. Dolch recommends creating a "Connecticut Hospitality Fund." In FY24, the increased meals and beverage tax generated over \$107 million. CT should reinvest this money back into the hospitality industry: (1) 50% back to municipalities based on revenue generated from the specific city or town; (2) 30% allocated directly to the CT Office of Tourism; and (3) 20% to hospitality-specific workforce development.

[Niantic Bay Playhouse:](#)

[Alexa J. Bracht, Board Member, Niantic Bay Playhouse](#)

Niantic Bay Playhouse is a non-profit, 186-seat theater, which currently receives no state funding. The Playhouse utilizes a movie theater space that closed during the pandemic, relying on community resources to build, open, and run shows. As a local community theater and educational resource for the arts, the Playhouse hopes to be included in funding similar to other playhouses and theaters "through the Flagship Producing Theaters, Performing Arts Centers, or Performing Theater Grant budget lines." The Playhouse is asking for a \$25,000 allocation per year (FYs 26-27).

[Sally Cini, Board Vice President, Niantic Bay Playhouse](#)

The playhouse is positioned to grow and continue to contribute to the local economy once it has a reliable revenue stream. Audiences visit from multiple states for well-produced shows. The leased facility has a good location but needs work. Four restaurants – two old and two new – are thriving within two blocks of the playhouse.

Multiple people submitted testimony on behalf of Niantic Bay Playhouse, highlighting its focus on educating its participants, economic development of downtown Niantic, partnership with local schools and businesses, and potential for growth and larger community engagement.

1. [Christopher Currier](#)
2. [Faith Currier](#)
3. [Stacie Fowler](#)
4. [Carla Frisbie](#)
5. [Emma Frisbie, student](#)
6. [Liz Hall, Board of Directors, East Lyme Regional Theater Guild](#)
7. [Matthew Hebbard](#)
8. [Joshua Kelly](#)
9. [Justine Lavoie](#)
10. [Kerry Leff](#)
11. [Julia Reid](#)
12. [Susanna Sciancalepore](#)
13. [Melanie Sisson](#)
14. [Cheryl Whipple](#)
15. [Amy White](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Jonathan Aidukonis, Opposes:](#)

Arts and humanities are critical and deserve support, but this bill automatically reserves a fixed percentage of meal and beverage taxes rather than transparent and strategic funding based in measurable outcomes. Revenue should be reinvested in the local restaurants, small businesses, and workers supporting the state's culture and tourism. This bill prioritizes a campaign over community building.

Reported by: Rebecca Hyland

Date: May 6, 2025