

# SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CULTURAL COALITION

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March 1, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriation Committee,

On behalf of the board of directors of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition and our more than 300 partners, I am pleased to submit this testimony in response to the Governor's HB 6824, An Act Concerning the State Budget.

The Coalition is newest of the nine Designated Regional Service Organizations (DRSOs) of the Connecticut Office of the Arts to support the Department of Community and Economic Development (DECD). We represent a diverse cross section of Southeastern Connecticut economic sectors including cultural attractions, museums, libraries, historic site organizations, galleries, graphic artists, creative businesses and artistic entrepreneurs.

We strongly encourage the restoration of funds proposed to be cut from the DECD and deeply impacting the arts, cultural, heritage and tourism sectors.

The mission of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition is to foster region-wide economic growth in New London County by optimizing existing and new arts, cultural and heritage activities to assure that cultural sector and creative business assets are central to the vitality of the region. As a Coalition, we understand that all of our partners – those in arts, cultural, heritage *and* tourism- are connected to and affected by each other, in good times and in bad. We operate under the notion that a rising tide lifts all boats. Likewise an ebbing tide beaches all boats.

The proposed budget cuts would eliminate funding of arts, culture and tourism by some 32% from the previous year, and while the total DECD budget is proposed to decrease by 20%, 88% of that decrease is on the backs of arts, cultural and tourism agencies and institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Coalition's inception, we have supported development policies and guiding principles endorsed by the State, but we cannot support such cuts.

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Arts Alliance, CAA Governor's 2016-2017 Budget Recommendations

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We still believe in the update to the State’s Plan of Conservation and Development, *The Conservation & Development Policies Plan 2013-2018: The Plan for Connecticut*, adopted by the Connecticut General Assembly in June 2013, and outlining culture and tourism as “important contributors to the state economy and to the communities in which they are based.”<sup>2</sup>

We also have confidence in the 2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) prepared by the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer) and approved by the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG). The CEDs identified six industry groups or clusters that contribute most significantly to the economic base of the region. Two of the six clusters are Tourism and the Creative/Technology Clusters.

Our partners in Southeastern Connecticut arts, cultural, heritage and tourism can easily quantify their economic value to the State.

In fact, in supporting the enhancement of that value, an action item in the CEDs was to “establish a regional arts council.” The ultimate result, through State, regional, and local support, was and remains the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition formed in 2012.

The Coalition currently works in collaboration with seCTer, and many other partners, to continue implementing the remaining action items and programs suggested for the Creative and Tourism Clusters included in the CEDs. We are also actively developing new initiatives to support regional economic development priorities.

The economic impact of these clusters and the arts, cultural, heritage and tourism sectors are unquestionable.

“Tourism in the Mystic Country region is a \$3.8 billion industry, generating more than 58,000 jobs in eastern CT.”<sup>3</sup> As the CEDs states: “The purely artistic organizations in this [Creative/Technology] cluster contribute immeasurably to the quality of life and to the educational enrichment of the population....Harnessing the creative energy in this cluster and providing assistance to new businesses that arise from it is a major challenge to the region and will involve educational

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<sup>2</sup> P. 18, Conservation & Development Policies Plan 2013-2018, Office of Policy and Management

<sup>3</sup> Eastern Regional Tourism District

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institutions as well as the business support services offered by seCTer, the Chambers of Commerce and the CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD).”<sup>4</sup>

The proposed cuts to DECD will deeply impact ongoing economic and community development strides made through the arts, cultural and tourism sectors. Moreover, the cuts would eliminate funding to the State’s partners who are charged with providing boots on the ground programs and services, which benefit the State’s economy.

Certainly, we recognize current fiscal challenges facing the State and the need to make difficult decisions.

As such decisions are being formulated, we urge you to think of the sustained and lasting effects on Connecticut. Connecticut’s employment trend has persistently lagged behind the nation’s recovery, and Southeastern Connecticut has lagged behind the rest of the state in its own recovery. We have not yet fully recovered from the economic downturn, and while unemployment is going down, jobs have not returned to our region.

Southeastern Connecticut is the leading driver in the State’s tourism industry, and the core of Southeastern Connecticut’s tourism industry is driven by its arts, cultural and heritage assets.

The cuts to DECD currently outlined in the proposed budget significantly impact and injure the arts, cultural, heritage and tourism sectors and disproportionately hurt Southeastern Connecticut.

The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition prevails on you to restore this crucial funding.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendy Bury  
Executive Director

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<sup>4</sup> p.viii, Comprehensive Economic and Development Strategy 2011 Southeastern CT, Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region