



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETH "BETSY" B. RITTER
THIRTY-EIGHTH DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 4002
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591
HOME: (860) 444-1700
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8585
TOLL FREE: 1-800-842-8267
FAX: (860) 240-0206
E-mail: Elizabeth.Ritter@cga.ct.gov

MEMBER
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Testimony

Commerce Committee

February 5, 2009

Proposed H.B. No. 6101 AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR
THE EXPANSION OF THE EUGENE O'NEILL THEATER CENTER IN
WATERFORD

Good afternoon Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger, and members of the Committee on Commerce. I am Elizabeth Ritter, I represent the 38th House district, and I am here today to first thank you for raising Proposed H.B. No. 6101 AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE EUGENE O'NEILL THEATER CENTER IN WATERFORD and then to urge you to support passage of the bill.

The O'Neill Theater is seeking a total of \$7 million from the State of Connecticut over three years to augment its capital campaign to expand its campus, permitting the launch of exciting new national educational initiatives.

The O'Neill Theater is an internationally renowned institution dedicated to discovering and nurturing new talent and writing for the stage, and has been at the forefront of American theater since its founding in 1964. In autumn of 2008, three O'Neill developed shows were playing Broadway simultaneously; an unprecedented achievement for any theater, bringing positive recognition and press for Connecticut. Scores of well-known writers, actors, and directors began their careers as students or emerging artists at the O'Neill, including August Wilson, John Patrick Shanley, Michael Douglas, Angela Bassett, Jennifer Garner, and more.

The O'Neill is now seeking to launch two new national educational initiatives which will bring significant national attention to the State of Connecticut and secure the O'Neill's financial future.

In order to accommodate these new programs, the O'Neill must expand its physical campus.

The Town of Waterford owns the O'Neill's property and land, and is supportive of the O'Neill's goals. The Town has offered adjacent land not currently part of the O'Neill's lease as a possible building site for most of the new construction. Additionally, the Town has agreed to pay to bring the sewer line to the O'Neill, a significant investment, and to extend the length of the O'Neill's lease.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$20 Million Campaign, and the theater is seeking funding from private, federal and state sources. This bill requests a total of \$7 Million over three years.

This is a good investment for the State of Connecticut. With it, the O'Neill will expand its programming, bringing it and the State of Connecticut to the forefront of arts education in America. Already a shining beacon in the theater world, the O'Neill would become a larger and more widely-known beacon with these new programs, O'Neill Stages and NTI-Musical Theater. With it, the O'Neill can secure its financial future through the tuitions that these programs will generate, self-sustaining the organization. Without the campus expansion that this funding will enable, the O'Neill cannot launch these programs, certainly losing the O'Neill Stages idea to another theater, in another state.

This investment represents good value for the State. While significant, the \$7 Million would quickly generate much more in direct and indirect business activity. Approximately 45 new full-time and seasonal full-time jobs would be created to support the new programming. The O'Neill's budget size would expand (to \$4.5 Million/year), creating more business in the State.

The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center is deeply grateful for the State's consistent support, especially in recent years. This request represents a large jump from past levels of support, but a one-time jump that is justified – the investment will pay for itself, as the O'Neill, a jewel in Connecticut's cultural crown, will be firmly financially stable and an even greater cultural icon for the State. The O'Neill is back on its feet and has demonstrated excellent financial stewardship, having finished its last two years in the black. However, this growth is precarious without the larger enrollments that an expanded campus would allow. The demand for the NTI program is strong among colleges, and clearly justifies the expansion. We hope that the State will join us on this important project, at a critical positive juncture for the O'Neill.

Thank you for your attention and your support. I will be available for questions at any time.