

Senator LeBeau, Representative Perone and Distinguished Members of the Commerce Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of the Consortium of Connecticut Art Museums and the Lyman Allyn Art Museum of New London. I am here today to ask for the Committee's full support of **House Bill 5393, AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR THE LYMAN ALLYN ART MUSEUM IN NEW LONDON.**

My name is William Lieber, a long term trustee of New London's uniquely special museum, the Lyman Allyn Art Museum.

When the Lyman Allyn Art Museum opened on North Hill overlooking New London harbor 81 years ago, it was hailed by an over exuberant trustee as "the finest small museum in the nation". From day one admission has continued to be free to the citizens of New London. Immediately off I-95, it is the only shoreline museum devoted to the broader history of art between the New Haven and Providence. The Museum itself is a highly regarded monumental testimony to a previous era of a surprising local accumulation of whaling and merchant wealth, now long gone – as is the merchant class, whose supported the fine staff that built its very significant collection. But the very serious public responsibility of maintaining such a respected art collection of more than 10,000 objects in a beautiful, but ever more inefficient and costly treasure house remains to those of us who have volunteered to take on this task.

In these harsh times, the challenge of gaining sufficient support to provide the expected cultural programming and educational services has become ever more arduous, particularly for institutions in communities as distressed as ours. As the arts are the first to be sacrificed by stretched local school districts, museums do the very best to volunteer to fill in with age appropriate programming and hands-on creative activities. The Lyman Allyn Yellow Bus program sponsors free transportation to its door and returns of 5 to 7 thousand local school students a year to to participate in its interactive educational programs.

All of our efforts to stand by our deep commitment to our community, providing access to the public's collections, rotating exhibitions and education programming is dependent on our funding. At the moment because of draconian budgetary necessity, we are limping along with a heroic staff that is half the size of what is needed for a collection of our breadth and a museum of our size. As we must make up for unforeseen expenses, we far to often must turn to our last resort, our endowment – thus threatening the very survival of the Museum. Knowing that we are not alone is very small comfort. We need all the help that we can get.

For us to continue that mission, I ask on behalf of the Lyman Allyn and the community of New London, the cultural beacon of Southeastern Connecticut, that the Committee seriously address our request.

