

Chairman Perone, Chairman LeBeau, Members of the Commerce Committee, for the record my name is Brian Stevenson and I live in Griswold, CT. As a community member and father of three children that have been involved with the Eastern CT Performing Arts Association, I am here to testify in support of SB 141, AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR THE EASTERN CONNECTICUT PERFORMING ARTS ASSOCIATION. This bill would authorize up to \$500,000 for the Eastern Connecticut Performing Arts Association for the renovation and remodeling of a performing arts center to promote the performing arts, theater education, economic development and tourism. Good Morning and thank you for the invitation to speak in front of you today.

My wife and I have three daughters that have been fortunate enough to take part in the course offerings that ECPAA has already begun to provide in Eastern CT. Having three young children, the choice of what activities and classes we can allow them to participate in comes down to two main things: time commitment and expense. Many of the activities that are available to our children, whether it is dance, art, gymnastics, or other athletics, require a long-term commitment, and carry a hefty price tag. With young kids, it is hard to make a long-term commitment, not knowing whether they will develop a true interest. And in our community, most families cannot afford the high costs of such activities, especially with multiple children involved. This is why ECPAA is so vital to the community of Eastern CT. The short-term classes allow both children and adults to explore the arts, expand their talents, and find their interests and passion. My wife and I struggled for years with whether to enroll our girls in dance, not wanting to make the commitment because we were unsure of whether the girls would be truly invested. That is why we jumped at the opportunity to enroll them in the ECPAA Movin' Munchkins class. This five week class was just enough to gauge our girls interest, while keeping them engaged and excited about performing their five minute Nut Cracker on the last day of the class.

While my family is fortunate enough to be able to afford the classes that ECPAA offers, many families in our community are not so lucky. This is another reason that I feel so strongly about this organization. It is full of big-hearted people that are passionate about arts education, that want to see the arts accessible to everyone. Even though the courses are all kept at the minimum price possible, they still provide at least two full scholarships per class, based on financial need. The people that run ECPAA are truly out to reach every person in the communities of Eastern CT. Organizations like this simply don't exist, but they can, and these people are a testament to that fact.

As a resident of Griswold, I also fully support ECPAA in their pursuit of attaining a theater space downtown. I feel that the economic benefits of this project would be greatly felt by our town, particularly in the area surrounding the theater. Currently, Griswold is in the process of revitalizing the downtown area, and a theater that provides arts education classes would be the perfect catalyst for real change. Having a theater would draw people into the area, whether it be adults that are taking classes, parents of kids in the classes, or patrons of the productions that would be mounted in the theater. These people would then have the opportunity to frequent the local businesses, which would boost the need for new coffee shops, restaurants, and other small businesses. Looking at other areas that have gone through similar revitalizations, I believe strongly that Griswold needs this, is ready for it, and that the ECPAA theater is the proper centerpiece for a rejuvenated downtown area.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.