



Testimony for Commerce Committee on Bill 726: To Allow Commissioner of Economic and Community Development to Establish Renaissance Districts To Enhance the Arts in Connecticut

February 18, 2015

My name is Diane Ploch. I am the Administrator of the Arts & Culture Collaborative for the Waterbury Region. We are a regional arts and cultural service agency under the auspices of the Greater Waterbury Chamber of Commerce Foundation. We serve artists, performers, arts and cultural organizations and their audiences in 16 towns. I am also on the board of the Connecticut Arts Alliance, a statewide organization for the arts.

I am writing to support Bill 726 introduced by Senator Robert Kane to allow the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development to Establish Renaissance Districts to enhance the arts in Connecticut. Since being moved into the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Office of the Arts has defined a new direction. It is called placemaking and positions the arts at the heart of an economic development strategy to create vibrant communities that will attract new talent and businesses, revitalize our cities and towns and give our economy a boost. To make this strategy even more of a reality, arts organizations and communities need support and possibly tax incentives like Bill 726 proposes. The payoff will be seen in economic impact.

We, as arts advocates, have understood the economic impact of the arts for a long time and applaud the State for recognizing the arts as an economic driver. According to a study by the Americans for the Arts with Connecticut Office of the Arts, published in 2012, “nonprofit arts and culture is a \$653 million industry in the state of Connecticut, one that supports 18,314 full-time equivalent jobs and generates \$59.1 million in local and state government revenue. Nonprofit arts and culture organizations, which spend \$455.5 million annually, leverage a remarkable \$197.5 million in additional spending by arts and culture audiences – spending that pumps vital revenue into local restaurants, hotels, retail stores, parking garages and other businesses.”

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The arts are an industry that spurs economic activity. It seems to me that supporting and creating “renaissance districts” as proposed in Bill 726 can only leverage arts activity into more positive economic impact for cities and towns as well as our state.

As the Arts & Culture Collaborative, our mission is to strengthen and support the arts as a key component of furthering economic development and enhancing quality of life. We see the arts stimulating economic revitalization. In Waterbury, the Palace Theater, located next to an arts magnet school and across the street from a UConn branch, draws people from the suburbs and surrounding states who then eat at area restaurants and buy highly taxed gasoline, driving money back into the economy and the state coffers. A couple blocks away are several arts organizations, great restaurants and market-rate housing. It’s all in close proximity to the Mattatuck Museum and the downtown area, with plans for redevelopment.

The Renaissance District bill can help this kind of momentum grow in other communities. I welcome the opportunity to help this type of initiative become reality. If I can answer questions or provide more information, please contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Diane J. Ploch](#)

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