

Testimony Submitted to the Committee on Finance, Revenue, and Bonding

***Testimony of Ilene Frank
Chief Curator/COO
Connecticut Historical Society:***

S.B. No. 1137: AN ACT CONCERNING DEPOSITS IN LIEU OF TAXES

The Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) was established in 1825 and is a private, nonprofit, educational organization. It is the state's official historical society and one of the oldest in the nation. The CHS houses a museum, library, and the Edgar F. Waterman Research Center that are open to the public. Our collection includes more than four million manuscripts, graphics, books, artifacts, and other historical materials accessible at our campus and on loan to other organizations. The Connecticut Historical Society's collection, programs and exhibits help Connecticut residents connect with each other, have conversations that shape our communities, and make informed decisions based on our past and present.

I write in opposition to this bill, due to the detrimental effect it will have on our ability to serve the people of Connecticut.

The CHS is fortunate to have an endowment that provides a substantial portion of our operating budget. This enables the CHS to serve over 18,000 students and teachers each year, many of whom receive discounted admission. The CHS also has the ability to offer free admission days throughout the year. Should we be taxed, the CHS would not be able to offer discounted and free admission. Should this bill be enacted it would force the CHS to raise fees, on school visits and for the general public, to ensure we have the discretionary monies needed to pay this levy.

As an almost 200 year old organization, our endowment has been established by hundreds of donors. It was first established in 1849. Many of these gifts came with donor restrictions related to our collection of Connecticut's history. The CHS can only access these funds when undertaking collection related activities such as active conservation of historic objects and acquiring new items for the collection. More than 65% of our endowment has been restricted for these purposes. These funds are not available for school programs, public programs, or exhibitions.

In closing, I reiterate our opposition to this bill and our concern for the damage it may do to our ability to collect, preserve, and share Connecticut's history with the people of our state.

Thank you,

Ilene Frank
Chief Curator/COO
Connecticut Historical Society