



March 1, 2021

Testimony for SB 146: AN ACT AUTHORIZING SPORTS WAGERING, ONLINE CASINO GAMING, ONLINE
LOTTERY AND ONLINE KENO

Public Safety and Security Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Co-Chair Rep. Horn, Co-Chair Senator Bradley, Vice-Chair Senator Osten, Vice-Chair Rep. Dathan,
Vice-Chair Rep. Paolillo, and esteemed members of the Public Safety and Security Committee,

My name is Rufus de Rham, Executive Director of the Warner Theatre in Torrington, CT. According to the Arts and Economic Prosperity 5 study, the non-profit arts community in Northwest Connecticut generates \$34 million in direct expenditures, supports 812 FTE jobs, and generates \$3.4 million in government revenue. The Warner Theatre alone generates \$8.1 million dollars of economic activity and serves over 80,000 patrons a year. Our sector has disproportionately been impacted by COVID-19 and is a crucial partner for the state to rebuild our communities and economy in a healthy and equitable way.

The Warner Theatre, for example, has lost \$1.6 million dollars in revenue just between March and December of 2020, and we do not foresee our operations returning to pre-Covid levels until the end of 2021. Downtown Torrington cannot recover without us. Statewide our sector has lost \$2.4 billion in revenue, and is facing 60% unemployment. While we have received some support from private and public sources our crisis is far from over and we need critical support to avoid dire consequences that will further prolong our recovery efforts.

It is in this spirit that the Warner Theatre supports this bill with the modification that the Tourism Fund receives a portion of the gaming revenue. Right now, the bill states that 10% or \$20 million, whichever is less, is earmarked for the “state-wide tourism marketing account,” which was created in 2006 in section 10-395a of the general statutes to invest in the state’s tourism marketing campaigns. However, this statute was replaced with 10-395b in 2017 to create the Tourism Fund, which invests in the arts, culture, and tourism industries. It’s likely that this was the intention of the bill, but clarification is needed for our full support.

Expanding gambling in Connecticut has many risks that we are conscious of, but investing in the Tourism Fund would create widespread benefits in our communities, supporting not only the marketing of our lovely state, but the arts and culture that brings people and businesses to Connecticut to visit and stay. There is precedent for this, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

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Northwest Connecticut Association for the Arts, Inc.

shows six states allocate portions of gambling revenue to arts and culture. The Tourism Fund is a critical piece of our state infrastructure that funds not only state wide tourism efforts, but arts and culture as well through CT Office of the Arts, CT Office of Tourism, and CT Humanities. In combination with HB 6119, this investment would go a long way to supporting the very organizations and people that make this state so vibrant.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rufus de Rham", written in a cursive style.

Rufus de Rham (he/him/his) | Executive Director | Warner Theatre

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