



February 19, 2025

**Written Testimony of the Connecticut Association of Theatre Owners
in Opposition to:
SENATE BILL NO. 797:
AN ACT REQUIRING SCHEDULED START TIME DISCLOSURES
IN MOTION PICTURE ADVERTISEMENTS.
Before the Joint Committee on General Law**

On behalf of CATO (Connecticut Association of Theatre Owners), an association representing Movie Theatres throughout Connecticut, we respectfully submit these written comments in opposition to Connecticut SB 797. Our position is based on the following concerns:

A Mandate to Advertise Separate Start Times for both Pre-Show Programming and Feature Films would be Costly, Confusing, and Impractical

For over 100 years, moviegoers have come to expect coming attraction trailers to play before the movie. It is part of the overall experience of going to a cinema. Many guests look forward to seeing special film footage and specialty ads not available anywhere but in a movie theatre. Trailers build anticipation and are part of the movie going tradition.

They also play a vital role in giving latecomers a chance to get settled before the theatre lights are dimmed for the main feature. Much the same as going to see a concert or a comedian, the trailers are an “opening act” that add value to the audience experience. Other entertainment sectors and sporting events feature pre-event programming and ads—yet cinemas, one of the most affordable out-of-home experiences, are unfairly singled out.

Requiring movie theaters to advertise separate start times for advertisements and movie trailers and the featured film is costly, impractical, confusing, and detrimental to the moviegoing experience. Instead of helping consumers, SB 797 would negatively impact theater profitability, raise ticket prices, disrupt dine-in theatre operations, and increase legal and financial risks, ultimately harming both theatres and moviegoers. We strongly urge lawmakers to reconsider the negative impact of this bill and prioritize policies that support—not hinder—theatre operations and the moviegoing experience.

Operational Complexity & Disruption to Theaters and Moviegoers

- Theatres sell advance tickets weeks before they know what trailers will be available or played, making it impossible to advertise separate start times. Theatres may be forced to stop selling advance tickets, affecting moviegoers that prefer to plan ahead.
- Trailer durations vary depending on the film, time of day, and distributor agreements, making it impractical to advertise precise and consistent pre-show programming and feature start times. Mandating additional scheduling complexity will strain theater staff, increase labor costs, and create unnecessary logistical hurdles.
- Theaters operate with complex and fluid schedules that vary by location, day, and time, as well as the demand for films. A regulation requiring precise start times for pre-show programming and features would be nearly impossible to implement across different showtimes, genres, and promotional agreements.
- Dine-in theaters use the pre-show period to take and serve orders, ensuring minimal disruptions during the movie. If patrons arrive later due to separately advertised start times, it will delay service, increase interruptions, and disrupt the moviegoing experience.

- For safety reasons, theatres may dim lights incrementally during the preshow to assist patrons with finding their seats, but will lower the lights fully when the feature starts. Late comers confused by the later advertised times would inevitably disrupt other moviegoers as they try to find their seats and get settled in the dark.

Increased Costs and Financial Burden for Theaters

- The movie theatre industry continues to recover from the pandemic as well as the actors' and writers' strikes that have severely impacted the profitability of theatres.
- The financial impact on Connecticut theatres has been real with 2024 admissions down 26.4% compared to 2019. These financial losses have resulted in 19 Connecticut theatres permanently closing in the past five years. That is fully one third of all the 57 theatres open pre-pandemic. Just 38 indoor locations remain in the state.
- Implementing confusing and burdensome regulations will only exacerbate the negative impact on theatre operators and moviegoers.
- Pre-show advertisements generate essential incremental revenue that helps offset operational costs. The value of ads is based on expected viewers and advertisers may reduce payments to theatres based on the legislation affecting early attendance patterns, which further decreases theatre revenues.
- The added financial burden of modifying websites, ticketing platforms, and digital signage to reflect separate start times will impact all theater operators, with small and independent cinemas being hit the hardest.
- Beyond the cost of updating digital platforms, theaters would face increased labor expenses for ongoing website maintenance and monitoring. Each showtime update would require additional management to ensure accuracy and compliance with regulatory standards, adding both technological and financial burdens on theaters.
- These costs may ultimately be passed on to moviegoers through higher ticket and concessions prices, which could negatively impact attendance for theatres already strained financially.

Negative Impact on Audience Experience

- Scheduling and communicating two start times would create unnecessary confusion, leading to frustration and guest dissatisfaction.
- Moviegoers understand that the film start time is later than the posted start time due to pre-show programming and can choose to avoid such programming without burdening theatres with additional regulations.
- Because theatres pay the lion's share of their box office income to film distributors, theatres already operate on slim margins. Adding an unavoidable fine that exceeds the income from any one show time, for inadvertent errors on showtime listings created in this legislation may force more Connecticut theatres to close.

It is for these reasons that we urge you to consider the full impact this legislation would have on Connecticut's movie theatres and their patrons. Please vote "NO" on Senate Bill No. 797.

Respectfully Submitted,

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