



ACE Act Testimony Outline and Talking Points

Bill: H.151/S.113, An Act improving accessibility in the creative economy (the ACE Act)

Sponsors: Rep. Dan Donahue and Sen. Paul Mark

Committee: Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

ARTICLES AND STORIES ABOUT THE ISSUE:

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF ACCESS REPORT:

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/documents/FINAL-TOWARDS-A-CULTURE-OF-ACCES S.pdf>

TESTIMONY OUTLINE:

Below is an outline that you can use to create your own testimony for the ACE Act.

- I. Intro
 - A. Individual: Hello Chair Livingstone, Chair Kennedy, and members of the committee for the opportunity to share my support for the [add actual bill numbers and bill name]. My name is [name] and I live in [town]
 - B. Organization: Hello Chair Livingstone, Chair Kennedy, and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is [name] and I am testifying on behalf of [organization] in [city/town]. I am here to share our strong support for [add actual bill numbers and bill name].
- II. Why Now?
 - A. This summer, we celebrated 33 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. While this Act fundamentally changed how our society plans for the inclusion of people with disabilities in public life, it does not ensure that our cultural spaces are accessible.
 - B. In fact, according to the Towards a Culture of Access Report released by the Mass Cultural Council and Open Door Arts in 2022, people with disabilities continue to experience significant attitudinal, physical, and programmatic barriers to fully participate in the Massachusetts

creative sector. Two of the top five barriers that organizations reported as preventing them from making their spaces more accessible were funding and facilities limitations.

C. Share a personal / organizational story about how this is affecting you / your group.

1. Where has this issue prevented you from enjoying or participating in Massachusetts cultural assets?
2. What is a specific facility feature or program you would modify with additional resources?

III. Share why you believe this bill is part of the solution:

A. This bill would

1. Establish the Accessibility in the Creative Economy (ACE) Fund to provide grants to organizations focused on the arts, culture, humanities, and interpretive sciences to remove barriers encountered by people with disabilities.
2. Create an 11-person board consisting of a majority of individuals with disabilities and individuals with experience advocating on behalf of individuals with disabilities would make recommendations on the grant criteria to the Office on Disability.

IV. Remind the committee why this is urgent:

- A. 33 years have passed since the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law and our creative sector is behind in making our programs and venues accessible to everyone.
- B. I / We strongly encourage the committee to report the [bill number and name] favorably out of the committee and support its passage this session.

TALKING POINTS:

What is the ACE Act?

- H.151/S.113, sponsored by Sen. Paul Mark and Rep. Dan Donahue.
- The ACE Act would create a fund to provide grants to organizations focused on the arts, culture, humanities, and interpretive sciences to remove barriers encountered by people with disabilities.

What would it do?

- For-profit, nonprofit and public organizations throughout the Commonwealth that are part of the arts, humanities and interpretive sciences sector would be eligible to apply for Accessibility in the Creative Economy (ACE) grant funding.
- ACE would be administered by the Office on Disability to support capital improvements and projects to improve programmatic access and remove barriers encountered by persons with disabilities.
- An 11-person board consisting of a majority of individuals with disabilities and individuals with experience advocating on behalf of individuals with disabilities would make recommendations on the grant criteria to the Office on Disability.
- No less than half of 1% of funds allocated for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services would go to ACE. The Office on Disability could accept donations for the fund from individuals, organizations, associations, nonprofits, businesses, estates, foundations or other entities.

Different arguments to consider:

- **Arts and culture should be available to everyone.** The creative sector exists everywhere and impacts everyone in Massachusetts. Everyone should be able to produce and consume art without concerns of encountering barriers to access. It's a matter of civil rights.
- **Workforce Development.** Building more workforce development pipelines in MA must include accessible, creative workforce development. We want to train creative professionals with the promise that they can use their talents here.

- **Economy and Tourism.** The vibrancy of our downtowns relies on diverse and accessible arts and culture. People visit from within the state and outside of MA to enjoy shows, exhibits, and performances. It's in our economic interests to make it possible and easier for anyone to access the creative economy.

Has it worked in other places?

The ACE Act is based on the Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Grant already available in Massachusetts. We have passed legislation like this before and we can do it again.

How much would it cost?

The current funding formula reads that “no less than half of 1% of funds allocated for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services would go to ACE, and that the Office on Disability could accept donations for the fund from individuals, organizations, associations, nonprofits, businesses, estates, foundations or other entities.” This formula needs to be reevaluated by the Committee and advocates to arrive at a level of funding that would be appropriate for seeding the grant program, while making a meaningful impact on our cultural facilities.