

**Testimony in Support of SB 319 and HB 2470**

**Joint Committee on Tax Credits**

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Good afternoon, my name is Bob Speltz. I live in Portland where I am the Director of Public Affairs at The Standard. I am also very pleased to be the Chair of the Oregon Cultural Trust board. I'm here today speaking in support of Senate Bill 319 and HB 2470 and I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective about Oregon's Cultural Tax Credit and the Oregon Cultural Trust.

The Oregon Cultural Trust first grew out of conversations in the business and cultural community around the need for an innovative new strategy to increase funds for arts and culture.

The business community knows that the arts, heritage and humanities create the kind of environment where people want to live and work and where business wants to invest and grow.

As Oregon's third largest publicly traded company, The Standard and our employees invest close to \$500,000 in arts and culture organizations in Oregon each year.

We appreciate that the Legislature – through the Oregon Cultural Trust and Oregon's cultural tax credit – has created a powerful incentive for individuals and businesses to increase giving to culture.

Why is this important? Oregon's cultural tax credit has attracted voluntary contributions from Oregonians in all parts of the state that, in turn, generate the resources that enable the Cultural Trust to make investments to support the arts, heritage and humanities in every corner of Oregon.

The cultural tax credit has created unique value in Oregon. It requires Oregonians to first make a personal financial investment in Oregon culture, with a contribution to one or more of the 1,300 cultural organizations that offer arts, heritage or humanities programs across the state.

Then it encourages Oregonians to contribute to the shared fund that is the Oregon Cultural Trust. We know anecdotally that cultural groups like Bag & Baggage

Productions in Hillsboro, Neskowin Chamber Music, the Oregon Coast Council on the Arts, Oregon Humanities and Literary Arts are among the many cultural groups that have used the incentive of the tax credit to increase contributions from their donors.

Structurally, the Cultural Trust is organized to make investments that benefit every region of Oregon. It has supported major cultural events and institutions ranging from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland to the Fishtrap literary gathering at Wallowa Lake – and many things in between. The Trust’s competitive grants – available to arts, heritage and humanities groups for significant projects help address some of Oregon’s most pressing issues – education, safe communities and lifelong learning.

But its investments in rural Oregon are having a powerful impact. The Cultural Trust facilitated the creation of cultural coalitions – one in each of Oregon’s 36 counties and the potential for one in each of the nine federally recognized tribes. These volunteer-led groups have inventoried local cultural assets – many for the first time – and developed local cultural plans to address issues like a lack of arts education in schools, access to cultural programs for youth and families, the preservation of historic buildings and festivals that celebrate Oregon’s agriculture, multiculturalism and changing seasons.

In rural Grant County, with a population of just over 7,000 residents, the Cultural Trust, through the Grant County Cultural Coalition, supported a wide variety of grassroots cultural activity including:

A 3-year Writer in Residence project which brought a professional writer to the county for a nine week period. In partnership with Fishtrap, the literary group in Wallowa County, that writer supplemented what the local schools were teaching by working with both middle and high school students as well as adults in the evening.

- The purchase of fire-rated files for the Grant County Historical Museum
- Fees for a live musical performance in John Day and
- Support to the Grant County Genealogical Society to digitize the County archives, so they could be preserved and better shared with the public.

In Malheur County, contributions to the Cultural Trust enabled more than \$16,000 to be invested this biennium on projects including:

- Repairs to the Historic Drexel Hotel
- Improvements to the Four Rivers Cultural Center & Museum:
- Transportation for middle schoolers to attend concerts produced by the Treasure Valley Community Concert organization at the Meyer-McLean Theater.

- An after school art program at Ontario Middle School and
- The Jordan Valley 100 yrs Roots Festival: a celebration of 150 years in the Jordan Valley community.

This support went to major gathering places in Ontario and elsewhere that serve a wide range of participants.

The Cultural Trust was established to be a longtime, permanent structure to support Oregon arts, heritage and humanities.

Today, ten years since its inception, the Cultural Trust is seen as a national model for investing in culture. It's reflective of some of Oregon's other unique public policies:

- It's ranked with the Bottle Bill, Beach Bill and Vote By Mail among our most innovative policies
- It's practices are open, fair and transparent, welcoming all types of groups
- Involvement is encouraged in every county and tribe
- It creates value throughout the state and connects Oregonians to our history, creativity, and the pulse of our communities.

The Standard is one of many businesses who support passage of SB 319 and HB 2470, and extension of Oregon's innovative cultural tax credit. I ask for the committee's support.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.