

April 22, 2021

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

I am writing to ask you to fund HB 3376, directing the Oregon Business Development Department to develop and implement a program to award grants to operators of movie theaters that have been closed to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unlike most other businesses, movie theaters experienced a total shutdown for nearly a year. I live in Salem, which used to have two locally-owned theaters but now only has one – the other was forced to close for good due to being unable to sustain itself during that long of a closure.

The other, Salem Cinema, has barely been able to stay afloat and is still open, but may not be able to stay open if it cannot address the costs that were incurred while it was required to be closed. This is a locally-owned, small business, not a corporate-owned megaplex. Funding for theaters like Salem Cinema helps keep dollars in our community while supporting a local resident in maintaining their livelihood.

Losing Salem Cinema would be a huge blow to the Salem community. This theater is the only one in our city that solely offers documentaries, arthouse, and independent films. If we didn't have Salem Cinema, people who wanted to watch those types of films on a big screen would have to drive to Portland. Salem Cinema is important for keeping our city culturally vibrant, and having access to these films provides unparalleled diversity in the arts that would be difficult to replace if the theater closed.

Movie theaters were not included in the \$25 million that went to live performance venues last year, and movie theaters have been largely overlooked in the relief aid programs. Movie theaters also face a long road to recovery with capacity restrictions. Even with greater capacity allowances (50% and above), theaters will still be limited to roughly 25% capacity due to six-foot social distancing requirements. Movie theaters have also incurred costly capital expenses related to re-opening with the COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Please provide funding for this important bill that will help keep Oregon culturally vibrant, protect the livelihoods of small business owners, and provide much-needed arts and entertainment for our residents.

Sincerely,

Sarah Evans
Salem, Oregon resident