

February 6, 2022

Representative John Lively, Chairman
House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
Salem, OR. 97301

RE: HB 4040

Dear Chairman Lively and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the High Desert Museum, the largest cultural organization east of the Cascades, we invite you to invest in the continued recovery of Oregon’s cultural sector and support the passage of HB 4040.

The High Desert Museum, like many of our peers, has benefited from the CARES and ARPA funding allocated from the federal and state government during the pandemic. Thank you does not go far enough to communicate how this funding has sustained us. For two years now with this critical support, the Museum has reopened, innovated and imagined to keep our vision and mission intact for those we serve—indeed, the Museum earned the 2021 National Medal for Museum and Library Service in recognition of our COVID-year service to community. Yet challenges continue for cultural organizations, and now is the time to shore up resources for the cultural sector and support a strong recovery.

Now celebrating our 40th year, the High Desert Museum is the largest cultural organization east of the Cascades and in a city of 100,000. We traditionally welcome 200,000 visitors a year. To continue to be an arts anchor for Oregon’s more rural region, we need a significant investment from the state. The cumulative loss of revenue-generating programs, events and lower admission numbers has forced the Museum to cut back on core functions and educational impact. Specifically, without further support from the State, the High Desert Museum could face a \$1M deficit in the coming year at a time when the organization needs to regrow, rebuild and revive. Indeed, to be the vibrant resource caring for over 27,000 objects, including one of the most significant Plateau Native American collections in the nation, now is the time to provide more support. Not only will this investment sustain the Museum’s operations, it will benefit our region. Significantly, an ECONorthwest study found that the Museum’s \$5M operating budget contributes over \$20M in economic activity in Central Oregon through jobs, vendors, visitation, overnight stays and the artists, scholars and curators that contribute to this creative economy.

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Oregon has had the bold vision to allocate additional funding to the cultural sector during the pandemic, and this has made a significant difference. The cultural sector, however, necessitates longer-term investment. We require significant resources, time, money and talent to create and build exhibitions, scholarship, plays, ballets and symphonies. On the east side of the Cascades, the Museum brings together resources and organizations to provide unique learning experiences that would otherwise not be available. We're asking for the support to rebuild our programs so we can be a vibrant part of Oregon's recovery.

Oregon's arts and culture landscape has been decades in the making and is a key part of the vibrancy that many move here to enjoy. It bolsters our economy in such a way that economists have called it the "second paycheck." We urge our leaders to act today to ensure the continued vitality of cultural institutions across the state.

With appreciation for your leadership and support of Oregon's cultural sector,

Dana Whitelaw

Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Nelson Mathews

Nelson Mathews
Board Chair

