



FRANCESCO LECCE-CHONG
Music Director & Conductor

SCOTT FRECK
Executive Director

Representative Virgle Osborne
900 Court St NE
H-375
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Rep. Osborne:

As you may know, Oregon has experienced some of the longest pandemic-related shutdowns of anywhere in the nation, and our arts and culture sector was heavily impacted. Recovery for this sector is seen by many as a five-year cycle. Patrons and attendees are still slow to return to in-person gatherings; many performances have been impacted as performers were sick with COVID-19. Attendance rates for some organizations are often less than 60% of what they were before the pandemic.

At Eugene Symphony, the pandemic forced a suspension of all performances and ticket sales for 2020/21, thus eliminating a major source of revenue. After a year and a half away from audiences, the Symphony welcomed patrons back in September 2021 to a full orchestra concert at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts. The number of subscriptions sold during that re-opening season was significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels (754 versus 1,106, or 68%).

In our current 2022/23 Season, we continue to see a graduate increase in sales numbers, but which are still lower than pre-pandemic levels. Although our doors may be open and masks no longer required, we see audience members hesitant to return to the performance hall. While we are grateful for previous rounds of federal and state relief, we are far from fully recovered, and we need additional funding to maintain our programs and grow back to financial health.

Recovery money from House Bill 2459 would provide support to vital programs offered by the Symphony and which do not generate significant earned revenue, but which provide foundational education for our area's young people who have experienced profound disruption and vulnerability in the past three years. These programs include:

- *Private Lesson Program*, which serves 44 students in Eugene. 20 of those students receive scholarships dedicated to BIPOC youth in thanks to our partnership with Eugene-Springfield NAACP Branch #1116;
- *Link Up program*, which is a partnership with 30 elementary schools throughout the region to provide music instruction through local after school programs. This program features a special partnership with schools in south Lane County to areas with geographically isolated students with little to no access to music education;
- *Encouraging Young Musicians to Achieve (EYMA)*, which sends musicians into under-resourced schools in local school districts for personalized instructions to those who likely do not have access otherwise.

Eugene Symphony is only one example out of the many organizations within the arts & cultural sector in Oregon that are continuing to face obstacles brought on by the pandemic. HB 2459 asks for \$50M in funds to support the continued recovery and reinvention of the arts and culture sector — half the funds will be distributed similar to how the CARES dollars were distributed earlier through the county coalitions. The other half are earmarked for larger anchor organizations and live venues. With this support, Oregon can further invest in the success and longevity of these organizations for future generations to enjoy.

I urge you to vote to approve HB 2459 in your coming committee meetings. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Freck
Executive Director

ENRICHING LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF MUSIC