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January 25, 2023

The Honorable Janelle Bynum
Chair, House Committee on Economic
Development and Small Business
Oregon Legislature
Salem, Oregon. 97301

RE: H.B. 2459

Dear Chair Bynum and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for scheduling HB 2459 for early consideration. Oregon's providers of arts, culture, heritage and the humanities have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic and continue to deeply need support in the form of relief dollars to survive and transform.

On behalf of over 350 nonprofit organizations and individual members of our Coalition who deeply value access to Oregon's cultural treasures for every resident, we encourage you to take action to move this issue forward in the discussion of state priorities.

Across Oregon, attendance levels for community arts and culture events have declined by 23% between 2019 and 2022, as reported in a recent CACO survey. Earned revenue has declined by 25% in that same time period. Simultaneously, expenses have increased. Our members are adapting but the reality is that our communities are losing access to arts and culture because of the pandemic. Inflation is hitting culture groups hard as wages rise, fewer out of town artists arrive, and reduced performances become the norm.

Even more concerning is the impact on youth, historically underserved communities and the elderly who have curtailed their participation. Because creativity connects people, transforms society, and is often a safe harbor in a community for dialogue and discourse, we are concerned that Oregon's fabric is fraying – we don't believe full recovery is possible without creativity.

It is no secret that the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is downsizing its staff and its offerings – in Ashland, attendance in 2022 was 46% less than it was in 2019. Most of our nonprofit members are reporting an unstable future and a lifeline is still necessary to retain our talent and reorganize our providers.

We urge your consideration for this support for a critical sector in Oregon's quality of life.

Sincerely,

J.S. May, Chair

