



January 25th, 2023
Letter of Support for HB 2459

To the House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business:

On behalf of Northwest Children's Theater and School, and the tens of thousands of children and families we serve, I am writing to offer our whole-hearted support for House Bill 2459. This bill would allocate \$50 million in funding desperately needed to support the recovery of Oregon's struggling creative and live events industry.

Across the nation, Oregon has faced some of the longest COVID-19-related shutdowns, resulting in a lagging recovery compared with our peers in other states. In the live theater industry (particularly children's theater) companies have begun to report a return to normal attendance figures over the past few months, while here in Oregon attendance is still less than 60% of pre-pandemic benchmarks. This has led many companies, NWCT included, to be extremely cautious with our re-openings. Show runs are reduced, and performances forced to close due to continued struggles with COVID. The net effect is fewer Oregonians accessing live, community-building events. In our case, that means fewer children introduced to live performance, and potentially an entire generation missing their entry point to this critical form of self-expression.

For NWCT specifically, the continued, lagging recovery has meant our staff is still on partial furlough through the Oregon Work Share program, live performances are smaller and serve fewer. In 2022 we were able to offer live performance for one-tenth of our per-pandemic audience. We are currently planning for a major company re-launch this spring, but funding is tight and all previous emergency support has been expended.

Please help Oregon's struggling arts, culture, and live events companies bridge the gap between this uncertain moment and a recovery that is almost within reach.

Thank you,

Nick Fenster
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to educate, entertain & enrich the lives of young audiences