



January 25, 2023

The Honorable Janelle Bynum
Chair, House Committee on Economic Development
and Small Business
900 Court St. NE, H-276
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: H.B. 2459

Dear Chairperson Bynum,

I am writing today on behalf of Oregon Children's Theatre (OCT) in strong support of H.B. 2459, which would provide relief for Oregon cultural organizations still recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

For more than three decades, OCT has served young people in Oregon, reaching more than 120,000 in a typical pre-pandemic year through our professional stage productions, educational residencies, theater skills classes, and other programs. Our audience surveys indicate that for approximately 75% of our young audience members an OCT production is their first introduction to the magic of live performing arts. The benefits of early exposure to the arts are significant for young people. It is associated with greater kindergarten readiness, improved academic results across all subjects, strong school engagement (a key predictor of persistence to graduation), as well as the development of socioemotional skills, positive self-concept, and behavior self-management.

OCT's stage productions and educational programs are the product of a vibrant creative community dedicated to ensuring equitable access for *all* children, regardless of their socioeconomic, cultural, or geographic background. In a typical year we employ well over 100 performers, directors, choreographers, technical artists, teaching artists, costume and set designers, and many other creative and allied workers in both full- and part-time capacities in addition to our full-time staff of 21.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an existential threat to our organization. During the pandemic, interruption of earned revenue from ticket sales, our primary source of income, led to an estimated \$2 million in lost revenue. And while OCT returned to the stage, studio, and classroom in late 2021, we are still anticipating revenue at least 20% below pre-pandemic levels for productions planned for our 2023-24 season. Relief provided through the federal CARES Act and other grant programs were critical to the survival of OCT during the hardest years of the pandemic. Additional funding through H.B. 2459 has an transformative potential for Oregon's cultural landscape as we continue to recover and build more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable creative organizations moving forward. We are grateful for this opportunity to include our voice among those of artists and arts organizations across the state in support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Hammerstrom".

Michael Hammerstrom
Director of Marketing & Development