



To Whom it May Concern:

1/30/2023

My name is Jen Waters. I am the Executive Director of the Whiteside Theatre in Corvallis, OR. The Whiteside is a 100 year old nonprofit theatre that has been serving Benton and Linn counties for 100 years as a vaudeville theatre, movie theatre, and in the last 10 years, a live entertainment and community space.

I am writing to you all to encourage you to vote 'yes' on House Bill 2459, to continue to support live events venues, as we all continue to recover from the pandemic.

In March of 2020, I was a new Executive Director for this beautiful theatre that was already in bad need of repairs, ADA upgrades, and new Board leadership. I had been with the theatre for only a few years, but things were really starting to turn around for us. We were expanding our reach throughout the Willamette Valley and out to the coast, we had nearly doubled our membership, and our patronage was thriving.

Then the pandemic hit. We lost a substantial amount of money in the first several months due to cancelled shows, with no contract clauses that addressed a pandemic, and desperate agents who were unwilling to accept that this was an actual pandemic.

Through the next 2 years, we tried to keep the doors open for movies and small live events, when it was possible, but we had a massive loss in revenue from ticket sales. We additionally lost a great deal of memberships and donors, due to lack of "product" to entice people to our cause, as well as donation focuses being directed towards more immediate issues of human services.

We have had not only loss of staff, but a great deal of shifting as people's priorities changed and we were, and still are, unable to provide enough hours to staff to pay for their basic needs.

In 2022, we have seen some triumphs. Our staff has finally evened out, and we have had enough events to hire some new staff as well. We had a very busy October- December 2022 we were able to celebrate our 100th birthday- something that seemed unimaginable in early 2022.

But we have also had to shift our programming drastically to account for our greatly reduced budget. Bands are asking for more, as pricing on travel has increased, and we are not able to keep up competitively with neighboring venues who have larger staffs, budgets, and capacity.



WHITESIDE THEATRE
100 YEARS 🌸 1922-2022

Additionally, we have had to continue to update our historic building and costs of construction materials have also gone up.

2023 is going to be a huge turning point for us. Much of the new programming we are producing is bringing in younger and enthusiastic audiences. The theatre has plans this summer to FINALLY put in a much needed ADA bathroom on our ground floor. Additionally, we are seeking funding to support a youth arts program that will serve the expansive rural population that exists in Benton, Linn, and other surrounding counties.

Although we are seeing a resurgence in audiences, we are also operating very close to the bone, and without additional state funding will need to make some very difficult choices about priorities over this year. If the state can provide one more year of funding to venues, I truly believe that we can find our way out of this post-COVID slump and continue to grow as an organization that serves our community.

Thank you for your time and your work.

Jen Waters
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