

To: House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business

Re: House Bill 2459

From: The Liberty Theatre  
1203 Commercial Street  
Astoria, OR 97103

Honorable Chair Bynum,

I'm writing to you today regarding House Bill 2459. As you may know, I'm the Executive Director of the Liberty Theatre in Astoria, OR. I am also an appointed member of the Arts Council of Clatsop County and a clarinetist with the Oregon Symphony, Chamber Music NW, and various bands in Portland. Music is very much my passion and livelihood. Although I would like to report good news about our venue's recovery, I can only attest to our still dire situation.

Opening in 1924, The Liberty Theatre is a Venetian Vaudeville palace that sits in the center of Astoria's main street. Generations of Astorians have visited. The Liberty's economic impact on our rural town is just over \$1M annually. With more than 150 days of public shows, classes, rehearsals, and private events bringing people to our downtown core, our small businesses rely on the vitality of the Liberty Theatre for their continued success. **We boast a nearly 1:1 return on investment (*Americans for the Arts Surveys*) in the Liberty back out in our community. With 50% of our audience visiting from outside our county, our patrons stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants, and shop in local shops.** To further solidify this relationship, we offer our patrons ticket packages that include dinners and stays.

Since COVID-19 closed our doors, the loss to the Liberty in earned income is still down 47%. The previous funding packages did a good job of covering our most basic needs, but with a 42,000 square foot 100yr old facility that our nonprofit owns and operates, those funds disappeared quickly. And for us, the SVOG did not go far enough to provide what we needed.

Reopening costs for our rural venue are much higher than in previous years. Payroll is higher with rising housing and necessities costs - and we pride ourselves in paying our staff of 8.25FTE living wages. Booking agencies are either skipping Oregon completely or

sending their performers out for higher fees, with a lack of shared costs between venues. Worse, we have spent the last five years turning our Theatre out of an economic downturn in rural Astoria and have lost the momentum, basically starting over. The good news is that we have started to see ticket sales climb, but it has been much slower than anticipated.

In an effort to keep the arts in our area alive, The Liberty Theatre quickly adopted a temporary mission to position ourselves as a backbone agency to 17 performing arts organizations in our county. The arts are normally a \$15,000,000 industry in our county of 40,000 people. This funding package delivers “comeback” funds to FIVE venues in my small county alone. Each of these venues contributes to the economic impact, and even more, we all provide educational support and programs to fill gaps in our rural schools. Something we won’t be able to do if all of our remaining income is diverted to reopening.

Now, the Liberty Theatre has led Astoria through revitalization twice. Among the first to reopen after the 1922 fire and the first to renovate after the downtown of the 90s, we are again leading the charge, but we need help. **With a 1:1 return on investment in our economic impact, this funding package will help us make the strong comeback that our community needs.**

Thank you again for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Crockett  
Executive Director  
The Liberty Theatre of Astoria, Oregon