

January 30, 2023

To: House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business,  
Oregon State Legislature Re: HB 2459 - \$50 million to support recovery of  
arts and culture sector

Dear Members of the House Committee:

As a leader in the nonprofit arts and culture sector in Oregon we urge you to support HB 2459, which requests \$50 million in funds to support the ongoing recovery and new beginnings for the crucial and vibrant arts and culture sector in our state.

Oregon has experienced some of the longest pandemic-related shutdowns of any state in the country, which has heavily impacted the art and cultural field. Those of us working to revive this important part of the local and regional economy and way of life believe recovery will take three to five years.

Operating a venue continues to be challenging. We have had to cancel, postpone, or modify countless performances, exhibitions, fundraisers, special events, community groups' presentations, and so many other programs. We have been forced to reduce staff, scale back programming, cut our budget, and are unable to raise salaries to meet the rising costs of living. We have also struggled with the precarity of the field. We are vulnerable as the pandemic surges and wains and audience members are still not comfortable in crowds or live events. Although there is no capacity mandate currently in place, we have had to cut our venue capacity to one third of our normal capacity to accommodate this discomfort. Attendance for some organizations is well below 60% of pre-pandemic levels, PICA is no exception. Our TBA festival attendance in 2022 was down from prior years by 68% and many of the events were free or sliding scale. Ticket sales now represent about 15% - 20% of our pre pandemic revenue.

Without the crowds, we are also seeing a significant loss in concession revenue. Concession income also now represent just over 15% of pre pandemic numbers. PICA has seen and nearly \$500k loss in earned income when also considering lost event rentals and our own fundraising events in addition to tickets and concessions. In addition, the costs of producing – labor, equipment rental, travel – are rising. The increased cost of technical staff went up nearly 20% and there are fewer available for hire, so we are often working with overtime pay.

In spite of everything, we continue to produce art that matters and makes a difference, to support artists' livelihoods and the broad cross-section of communities that rely on artistic and cultural outlets and activities to thrive.

**PICA**

**As we rethink our non-profit business models while continuing to serve our communities, this support is critical.** The more resources we have to reset and recover, the more we will be able to build back our programming and our valuable contributions to the economy, workforce, and creative industry while being safe, responsive, and responsible.

Our pre pandemic economic impact was significant. For our TBA Festival alone we drew audiences of over 23,000 people. Of these audiences, 23.5% of them were from out of town. Using the economic impact calculator from Americans for the Arts, these cultural tourists spent \$684,717 in non-festival venues, hotels, restaurants, retail stores, car rentals and the like. Of PICA's pre pandemic investment in the festival (650k to 900k) nearly 80 % was spent locally and regionally.

The benefit to our community is evidenced in our audience demographics. Our audiences are nearly 40% Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and our artists almost 90%. We serve LGBTQ+, Disabled, Immigrant/Refugee, and Deaf-identified artists and communities. We present artists from Oregon, from across the nation, and from around the world. We also work intergenerationally, serving adults, youth, and elders.

If PICA and our sector at large were to receive additional recovery funds, we could make greater progress toward reestablishing and reinventing the arts and culture landscape that is so critical to what makes our state special and unique. We have some of the best art and artists in the world right here in our own communities, and some of the most dedicated and passionate audiences.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB 2459, and for your service to your constituents and our state. I sincerely hope we can count on you to support this bill and the tens of thousands of people it will benefit and serve.

With Respect,

Victoria Frey  
Executive Director  
Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA)

**PICA**