



January 31, 2023

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislature,

As the federal government plans to let the coronavirus public health emergency expire in May, we are here to tell you that the coronavirus business emergency continues for live arts and entertainment venues.

After being completely closed for 18 months beginning in March of 2019, our reopenings were stunted by wave after wave of false starts as each new variant of the virus frightened our audiences, shut down our optimism, and re-closed our doors. The public, who were excited to see the end of their time in isolation and come together to enjoy music in community, were advised to stay home so often that it appears that many have decided that it is not advisable to go out even now, when the risk of severe disease has waned.

On average our current ticket sales are now 42% of our capacity, compared to average sales of 73% of our capacity at this same time in 2019. Of those who now buy tickets, up to 25% of them choose to forfeit the cost of their tickets to stay home. When 25% of that ticketed population stays home, that is 25% less potential business for all of our ancillary businesses who are also struggling to recover, just like us.

Live music venues bring people outside of their homes. On their way to our concerts, they use services that employ people in industries other than our own. They eat at restaurants, stay at hotels, shop, ride transit and use ride-share services. They walk and drive to our doors along streets that the news media continually tells them are unsafe. On the way, they see others walking too, and that perception is proven a lie. Bit by bit, our urban core wakes up.

The profit margin of for-profit live music venues is 5 to 10%. As a non-profit, our profit margin runs closer to 0 to 1% because we hold a public trust to fulfill our mission by offering live music that truly represents the marginalized along with the dominant cultures of the city of Portland. This means intentionally choosing who takes our stage from a perspective of public good rather than profitability.

To hold to that integrity of mission, we rely on a balance of earned and contributed income, and that balance has been upended by a combination of lingering audience hesitancy caused by covid, drastic inflation, and contributed income levels that have not adjusted for either obstacle.

The actual dollar figure of contributed income is on par with 2019, but our operating costs are projected to be 23% higher in 2023.

On the hopeful side, the people who are coming back tell us how happy they are to be in our building again. They speak with a commitment of support for what we do. They believe in us. They want us and need us, and it sometimes feels like experiencing live music in an audience community together symbolizes their own survival.

We feel a momentum. We feel hope. Our house at 42% capacity holds 42% more people coming together after complete isolation and closure. We can see that number slowly growing when we look at ticket sales for upcoming shows, but with a 0% increase in contributed income, today we are navigating 23% overall higher operating costs with 31% fewer ticket sales and 25% of that ticketed audience staying home. With fewer people in our house, we can't count on concession sales to currently compensate in any meaningful way. We need your help to help us back to prosperity for all.

Thank you.

Constance Bracewell

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