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January 26, 2023

Dear Chair Bynum, and esteemed members of the House Committee on Economic Development Small Business for Oregon:

I am writing to share my support for House Bill 2459, and to ask you to please pass this legislation, releasing \$50MM in funds to support the continued recovery and reinvention of the arts and culture sector. Our anchor organizations are in crisis, and our county and tribal coalitions need these funds to support the cultural fabric of their local communities.

Nationally, Oregon has experienced some of the longest pandemic-related shutdowns, and the arts, culture, and heritage sector was the first to close and the last to reopen. Based on research led by the Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon, we believe that recovery for this sector will be a five-year cycle. As you know, Portland is behind its peers nationally in reopening, and patrons are still slow to return to in-person gatherings - let alone ongoing disruptions as cases of COVID-19 and influenza impact company members and performers.

Portland Opera is facing steep deficits and finding a path forward has been extremely challenging. We have severely cut our mainstage offerings by 50%, which limits overall revenue potential. Our attendance levels continue at 60% less than pre-pandemic as our audiences are grappling with the safety issues that plague downtown Portland. This reduction in services impacts the amount of work we have for union musicians, chorus members, stagehands, and technical crews. It limits parking fees, small businesses, cafes, and concessions—all are impacted by our scale of community gathering. If we do not receive relief funds, we will need to significantly shrink our organization even further—creating a ripple effect in the community, and with the musicians, artists, stagehands and staff that we employ.

We are grateful for the emergency funding that we received when our doors were forced closed. We are honored to be a recipient of public funds, and we are grateful that with those funds we were able to adapt and keep as many artists, singers, and staff members employed at reduced capacities, while partnering with our arts ecosystem to produce community performances and arts education initiatives. Now, we need to recover, and we ask you to partner with our board and leadership by making this investment in our arts and cultural sector in Oregon.

Please vote yes in support of House Bill 2459.



Carole Morse
President, Portland Opera Board of Directors
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