

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

Chair Grayber and members of the House Committee of Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans,

We urge you to support House Bill 2498, which creates a visionary Cultural Impact Program as part of the Oregon Cultural Trust. Importantly, it directs the sale of \$200 million of lottery bonds as a long-term investment that will allow for the sharing of interest and earnings from those funds to cultural organizations across Oregon.

Arts and culture organizations bring vibrancy, educational opportunities and economic benefits to our communities. I know this to be particularly true from firsthand experience with the organization I'm most deeply connected with, the High Desert Museum in Bend. The Museum is the largest arts organization on the east side of the Cascades, serving as a resource not only to burgeoning Bend but also the rural region beyond. Our cultural sector is often described as part of Oregon's second paycheck—our quality of life improves dramatically with the existence of a rich and vibrant cultural sector. Quantitatively, we punch above our weight. The High Desert Museum, for instance, welcomes almost 200,000 visitors annually, which is nearly double the population in Bend. Few organizations can say that. Moreover, we contribute over \$20 million per year to the Central Oregon economy.

When the Oregon Cultural Trust was created 20 years ago, the proposal included the sale of surplus public lands to create a fund of at least \$200 million, from which earnings would be used to support Oregon's cultural organizations. The surplus property sales never occurred. HB 2498 remedies this with the \$200 million in lottery funds. Oregon's future can be culturally vibrant and sustained with this infusion. There is \$506 million in lottery bonding capacity this time around—well above traditional levels. It's the right time to meet the original promise, taking advantage of the opportunity to do so without tapping general funds.



Currently, Oregonians have generously built the Cultural Trust to approximately \$30 million through a tax credit. With the \$30 million, 60% of interest earnings flow to the cultural sector—including five statewide partners, 45 county and tribal coalitions and 1,600 qualified cultural nonprofits—and 40% is reinvested back into the fund.

Oregon has always been unique in the nation and the Cultural Trust is just one of many examples of how we stand out. Sadly though, Oregon ranks 36<sup>th</sup> in the nation for legislative appropriation for arts and culture operating support. Oregon spends \$.48 per capita on arts, whereas Minnesota, the national leader, spends \$7.34 per capita on the arts. To move Oregon into the national top 20, we need to more than double our investment. Our time is now to take the initiative and the powerful move to fund Oregon's cultural sector for the future and meet our shared mission of making sure every Oregonian has access to arts and culture in their community.

House Bill 2498 provides a significant opportunity for Oregonians—I urge you to support this forward-thinking legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Nelson Mathews  
High Desert Museum Board Chair



Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D.  
High Desert Museum Executive Director