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Dear Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Diehl and Nguyen, and Committee Members:

As President & CEO of Britt Music and Arts Festival in Jacksonville, Oregon, I lead one of Southern Oregon's largest cultural organizations. In 2023, Britt was the grateful recipient of state-allocated recovery funding. This funding has supported Britt in returning to full-strength post-pandemic, and I am writing to support funding for Oregon's arts and cultural organizations that were excluded from the 2023 measure.

Britt is the primary economic driver of the town of Jacksonville. Our Chamber of Commerce estimates that Britt patrons provide approximately 80% of all restaurant business, and a substantial percentage of local transient lodging businesses. Britt generates around \$15 million in economic activity in Southern Oregon, and we are keenly aware of our responsibility for ensuring the vibrancy of our region. We serve approximately 75,000 people annually with in-person events, and another approximately 50,000 with access to the free public park that we manage 365 days per year.

The only larger cultural organization in our region is Oregon Shakespeare Festival. OSF is an even greater economic driver to both Ashland and the Rogue Valley, and our entire sector relies on OSF as the backbone of our industry. OSF draws patrons who support the greater cultural economy, staff talent that enables our sector to thrive, and tourists who bring enormous resources into the Rogue Valley each summer. While its past few years have been turbulent, OSF's new leadership is embracing its role in our community and shoring up its relationships to ensure the economic vitality of our region. Southern Oregon is an area that is underserved by cultural organizations, and OSF represents the foundation of our entire sector.

In 2023, Americans for the Arts released new impact numbers. Beyond ticket purchases, arts patrons spend an average of \$39.14 per person, per event. These funds are spent on restaurants, lodging, local transportation and parking, shopping, and more. In Oregon, the arts represent 3.4% of our gross domestic product, driving around \$687 million in economic activity and supporting over 23,000 jobs held by regular, hardworking Oregonians. Funding for arts recovery is not a frill; this is a meaningful investment in the economic health of our state.

During the pandemic, Oregon's arts and entertainment venues were shuttered longer than in any other state. Due to the ban on large gatherings, arts organizations were the first to close and the last to reopen. Restarting operations after 18 months of shutdown has incurred massive costs, and relief funding has allowed organizations like mine to make a full recovery. I urge you to fund those worthy cultural organizations that were omitted from the 2023 funding measure. Arts and entertainment is a crucial contributor to Oregonians' quality of life and economy.

I'm grateful for your consideration of this measure, and for the time you have taken to review my testimony.

Sincerely,

Abby McKee  
President & CEO  
Britt Music & Arts Festival