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Joint Committee on Capital Construction

Oregon State Legislature

900 Court St. NE

Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for Western Oregon University Performing Arts Renewal Capital Construction Project

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Committee on Capital Construction,

I am writing to you today as a faculty member in the Creative Arts Division at Western Oregon University. I am also a member of the Creative Arts Facilities Needs Committee and a board member for the Smith Fine Arts Series, which presents world-class dance and music events that are transformative for the entire Mid-Willamette Valley. I wholeheartedly support the proposed Capital Construction Project of the Performing Arts Renewal on our campus, and I sincerely hope that you will also recognize this as a project worth supporting.

Rice Auditorium and Smith Hall are essential instructional spaces for the University, but they are more than that; they also serve as cultural landmarks and rallying points for enrichment within our community. They host concerts, theatrical and dance productions, community events, visiting artists, and student showcases that attract thousands of people to Monmouth annually.

The Monmouth Arts and Culture Commission conducted a survey in 2022 indicating that when people attend a cultural event in Monmouth, they make an evening of it by dining at local restaurants, using public transportation, enjoying dessert after the performance, and paying for childcare or pet care. The report stated that attendees at cultural events spend an average of \$18.63 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission, while visitors coming from outside Monmouth to attend these events spent an average of \$23.79 per person, per event. The impact is substantial. This report demonstrates that investing in arts and culture is an investment in the economic development of the surrounding area, supporting jobs and enriching the quality of life.

Monmouth, with its live performing arts, attracts thousands who live south of Portland and north of Eugene. Rice Auditorium serves as a vital hub for creativity, education, and connection. As one of the few large performance venues in Polk County, it acts as an anchor for cultural enrichment and tourism.

Smith Hall, which hosts music instruction, rehearsals, and performances, plays a vital role in music education and training in Oregon. It is home to several musical ensembles that engage with the community through performances both in and around the area. It serves as a training ground for musical instructors, conductors, and talented musicians who then share their skills with the community.

However, Rice Auditorium and Smith Hall are tired, worn-out, and outdated facilities that are in critical need of renewal. Their aging infrastructure has become a barrier to instructional delivery, accessibility, and safety. The Performing Arts Renewal project will ensure that WOU continues to meet the needs of our students, faculty, and surrounding communities. Modernizing these spaces will enhance our academic programs, improve accessibility for patrons of all abilities, and enable us to grow our partnerships with regional schools and arts organizations.

As a faculty member who witnesses the transformative power of the arts in students' lives daily, I urge you to support this project. Investing in these facilities is an investment in education, economic development, and the cultural life of the Mid-Willamette Valley in Oregon.

Thank you for your service to the state and for considering this vitally important project.

Sincerely,



Timothy Cowart
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