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February 18, 2013

To: House Committee on Rules  
Fr: Diana Scoggins, Executive Director

Re: HB 2470 Testimony in support

Chairman Garrett, Members of the Committee,

Good afternoon. My name is Diana Scoggins and I am the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Youth Symphony, MYS. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you about funding that we have received from the Oregon Cultural Trust and how that has impacted our organization.

Founded by Lajos Balogh 39 years ago, the mission of MYS is to educate, develop and promote young musicians. Access is one of our core principles – we have a strong tuition assistance program, and, in an effort to reach as many students as possible, provide programs for all ages and levels of musical ability in orchestra, jazz, and band. New music director, Andres Lopera, a gifted conductor born in Columbia and most recently from the New England Conservatory, is passionate about bringing the best artistic experience possible to young people, making programming relevant to the broader community, and engaging students across all demographics.

This year we have 440 students, just under half are from Multnomah County; the rest are from 9 other counties as far away as Tillamook. Our 13 ensembles are directed by a conducting team of 11 educators from local universities and K-12 schools. Each of our ensembles perform in three concerts per year, and the majority of our students participate in concert tours to schools that have limited music programs and/or high rates of students on free and reduced lunch or ESL programs. We have performed at schools across a broad geographic spectrum, including schools in Madras, Warm Springs, The Dalles, Woodburn, Hillsboro, Beaverton, and Portland. Last year alone MYS students performed 17 outreach concerts reaching nearly 7,000 students.

MYS has received \$9,500 in grant funds over the past two years from the Oregon Cultural Trust for our Jazz program. Cultural Trust grants are immensely helpful to the work we do. As schools continue to cut instrumental music programs, we are gratified that we can provide students access to a strong jazz program. And the Trust's support frees operational dollars for other parts of the program such as tuition assistance and school outreach concerts.

The MYS Jazz program began 10 years ago under conductor Thara Memory, who recently received a Grammy award in collaboration with Portland star Esperanza Spalding, an MYS alumnus. Since then the program has grown to 3 Jazz ensembles, including a beginning jazz group that OCT funding enabled us to begin this season - Jazz Band Basics. Our jazz conductors are excellent and committed; they have created a solid program that helps our students to attend some of the best colleges and universities in

the country - funding from the Trust is critical to ensuring that we can properly compensate our conductors.

In addition, OCT funding has enabled us to perform original works with Oregon composer Gordon Lee, who worked with our students during the rehearsal process, begin a jazz improvisation and theory class – which inspired us to offer a beginning jazz ensemble this season, and hold workshops with jazz great Ron Carter.

And so important to us, this funding enabled us to send our jazz students out to perform outreach concerts for the first time at Roosevelt High School in NE Portland, at Lincoln Elementary in Woodburn, and this year to the Barnes, McKinley, and William Walker in the Beaverton School District to reach over 1,500 students with performances by their peers. These schools all have high populations of students on free and reduced lunch, ESL learners, and very diverse student bodies.

We received many fun letters and drawings from the Lincoln Elementary students: “When I saw them using the instruments I felt like using one of them.” “I hope you go to other places and be so proud of your selfs.” “I learned how to be a good audience. I also learned how the boy plays the drums. I hope you come back.” And my personal favorite, “Now I know all you do to be a director is count ‘And one, and two, and three, and four’.”

We desire that our students participate in their communities, and that they become leaders and advocates for their art. In a very real sense, OCT funding of our programs reaches into the schools as our musicians take what they have learned back to their schools and contribute to the music programs there.

And as relatively small as MYS is, we hire music educators and employ administrative staff, purchase advertising across multiple mediums, pay rent to the Portland Public School District for rehearsal space ten months of the year, contract with the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, rent school auditoriums outside of Portland for our community concerts, work with local printers, etc. We are just one of the hundreds of arts organizations that provide economic benefits that echo to reach restaurants, hotels and retail businesses which serve the audiences who attend art events

It is timely that I have this opportunity to speak to you as I spent the weekend attending the Northwest Music Educator’s Conference at the Oregon Convention Center. There, 2,000 school educators from 6 northwestern states met to network, learn, and work with the 2,000 student musicians who came to perform together in large orchestras, bands and choirs. I spoke with multiple educators from Oregon who universally expressed their passion for and concern about the future of music education in our state. The tax credit is such an important and innovative mechanism to ensure that we continue to build a climate that provides access to the arts, and the rich benefits they provide, for citizens of all ages and backgrounds in Oregon.

Thank you for your time.