

Testimony in support of SB 319
Senate Committee on Business and Transportation
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Good afternoon, my name is Kevin Lefohn. I am a violinist, a music educator and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Nation's oldest youth orchestra, the Portland Youth Philharmonic.

Having received \$29,000 in funding from the Oregon Cultural Trust since its inception, PYP serves 300 young musicians from over 100 different schools in the Portland metro region. We leverage the talent of these young musicians by serving over 30,000 people each season throughout the state through our performance and outreach activities.

We change lives... Not only those whose talents we nurture, but the everyday Oregonians whose hearts their talents touch.

I am here this afternoon to share a story with you. A story of how 100 children inspired an entire community into artistic self-sustainability and how a rural community forever changed the lives of 100 children.

PYP was the recipient of funding from the Oregon Cultural Trust in 2010 to fund a tour to Burns Oregon to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Sagebrush Symphony, a youth orchestra and the genesis of PYP.

The purpose of the 2010 tour was to return to our roots, creating an experience where, in the hands of young people, the arts could bridge the urban/rural divide and allow cultural and social exchanges to occur.

Harney County, with a population of 6888, not unlike many communities throughout the state, had experienced drastic budget cuts in funding for the arts. Burns had gone from having nine music teachers to one – no elementary or middle school music program had survived. A group of local citizens organized the Harney County Arts in Education Foundation with a mission to revitalize the community's support for music education. PYP's visit marked the Foundation's inauguration with a public concert raising funds to support their efforts.

Upon arrival, PYP musicians were treated to a welcome dinner at a community church with old-time fiddlers, presentations by local dignitaries and an official proclamation of October 30, 2010 as Portland Youth Philharmonic Day.

Mingling with local children at the fairgrounds the next day, volunteers from the community gave demonstrations on black powder ammunition, fire starting, hatchet throwing, Paiute singing and dancing and a rodeo. Lunch was provided by the local Basque community and the concert at the high school that evening was performed for a sellout crowd of 800 people.

Fast forward 2 and ½ years to when we recently learned of the Foundation's extraordinary success in restoring arts to their children's education. Since our visit, the Foundation has fully restored music and arts teaching at elementary, middle and high school levels.

While continuing to keep a watchful eye on the education sector, the Foundation's sights are now firmly set on building a 25,000 sq. foot performance complex that will serve as both a performance venue for local and touring groups and a community arts space for area artisans and students. If you build it, they will come...

So what was the return on investment for the Cultural Trust and the State of Oregon?

- 11% of Harney County's population attended PYP's concert.
- 100 children from an urban community had meaningful experiences in history and culture beyond the classroom and neighborhoods of urban city life
- Harney County is investing in its own future through a focus on the importance of art IN education
- The community self-funded the reinstatement of arts and music education in every level of public education in a period of two short years

These lives would not have been changed had it not been for the Oregon Cultural Trust's investment of only \$5,000. This funding and the opportunities it created would not have existed had the State of Oregon been less forward thinking in August of 2001 when the Cultural Trust was created.

I leave you with the words of Emma Simmons, a 12-year old PYP Violinist. "I really felt as though we became a part of the community during our stay in Burns. It was a very different culture than I was used to and I found the differences in the way of life charming and endearing. It was humbling to be treated so kindly and I was honored to return to Burns and be so warmly welcomed."