

02/26/2016

Dear Chairman Barnhart and members of the committee,

Re: SB 1507A

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I know your time is extremely valuable so I'll be as brief as possible. My name is Neil Kopp, and I'm a film producer based in Portland. I was born and raised in the Montavilla neighborhood of Portland, and after attending Vancouver Film School in B.C., I moved home for the summer to save money so I could make the big move to LA to pursue a career in film production. My story is about how that move never happened.

That first summer I worked for Will Vinton Studios as a production assistant, before being hired on staff as a production coordinator at Food Chain Films, a TV commercial production company which is a Portland institution. I managed 30 commercial shoots a year from start to finish between 2002 and 2005, something that I now look back at as a priceless opportunity - a boot camp for my future as a feature film producer.

Within a week of going freelance in 2005, I got a call from a NY based director named Kelly Reichardt who needed a producer in Portland for her film OLD JOY. I signed on before finishing the script, just so excited to have a movie opportunity. That film went on to premiere in Sundance 2006, and sparked both of our careers. To date I've produced 5 of her films, as well as 4 films for other directors including Gus Van Sant's PARANOID PARK, and Jeremy Saulnier's GREEN ROOM. 8 of my 9 films were produced top to bottom in Oregon, a point that I'll come back to.

In the most humble but also factual sense, I should tell you that our films are not small, local, "indies". They're midsized independents with budgets big enough to require celebrity lead actors, as well as worldwide distribution, to justify their budgets. With actors like Patrick Stewart, Michelle Williams, and Jesse Eisenberg, the films have all gone on to premiere at one of the major world film festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Sundance, and Toronto. They've all received theatrical distribution, and are all currently licensed by distributors in North America as well as 50 foreign countries, and have been translated into over 20 languages.

As the person who actually develops projects and then goes out and finds financing, I can tell you that nearly all of these films simply would not have happened without that support of the Oregon Film Incentive. In this competitive state incentive environment, the very first question I'm asked by financiers is "what kind of soft money are we looking at". Zero of the dollars I've raised have come from Oregon investors, but in total my projects have brought in over \$10.5 million dollars in invested cash expenditures to the state. My conservative estimate is that my films combined have provided tens of thousands of union work days for with pension and healthcare contributions for Oregon film workers.

I'd like to finish by talking about the film that got away; Kelly Reichardt's new feature CERTAIN WOMEN, which starred Kristen Stewart, Michelle Williams, and Laura Dern. The film was financed by Sony, and we premiered 4 weeks ago at Sundance Film Festival. This was my fifth film with Kelly Reichardt, who wanted badly to shoot the movie in Oregon. The state, along with Michelle Williams who has starred in 3 of our films, has become a recurring muse. We've lensed four previous features in Estacada, Medford, Burns, and St. Johns, respectively. Sadly, this time around, there simply wasn't any incentive money and we were forced by our financing partners to look elsewhere. With the support of the Big Sky Film Grant, we filmed in rural Montana.

As a native Oregonian and business owner I would have much rather spent that \$2 million dollars in state on goods, services, and organized labor. I believe I could have convinced Sony to let us shoot in Oregon for a mere 10% return on local spend (about 150k), but because of all of the great work already shooting here in the state, there simply weren't enough funds left in the OPIF program to make that happen.

It's a double-edged sword that can only be rounded by an increase in funding for this program. There are dozens of stories like this each year; films ready to spend in state who aren't afforded the opportunity due to the lack of funds.

However, there are moments of hope, like with our current film for Netflix, which starts shooting in four weeks with Elijah Wood. We were able to keep the film in Oregon thanks to Tim Williams and his staff's good communication and industriousness. We held out until the very last minute, and due to a few bigger projects that the state lost, they were able to allocate funds from the next fiscal year for us. Our particular project was in a fortunate position of being able to wait until the next fiscal year for the rebate, so it all worked out - but I think we'd all agree that this isn't a sustainable system, especially for producers who are purely bottom line minded and haven't built up a good trusting relationship with the Governors Office of Film and Television.

This story aside, I'm extremely fortunate to have a career here doing what I do. My wife, Amanda Needham, is also a native Oregonian, and she has a career as a Costume Designer, known mostly for her work on Portlandia, a position which has earned her two Emmy's. Amanda and I met in high school, and had our first child four weeks ago. There's been a lot of traffic through our living room these past few week (to see the baby), and when we have friends over from our childhood who have "normal" jobs, they just can't understand how a couple of kids from Clackamas have two Emmy's on their living room bookshelf. To be honest, neither do we.

But this should be a new reality for Oregon, as it is in other states. It's within our grasp, and my partners and I are poised to keep these projects coming, and growing in the years to come. We ask for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Kopp', with a stylized, cursive flourish extending to the right.

Neil Kopp