

April 6, 2017

VIA EMAIL ONLY (hecdt.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)

Chair, Representative Ann Lininger
Vice-Chair, Representative Pam Marsh
Vice-Chair, Representative David Brock Smith
House Committee on Economic Development and Trade

Re: Written Testimony in Support of the -2 Amendments to HB 3139

Dear Chair Lininger, Vice-Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Brock Smith and Members of the Committee:

I am a member of the Board of Trustees of the High Desert Museum (“Museum”). I am writing in support of the -2 amendments to HB 3139. The Museum is one of the premier sources of arts education, performance, and access in Central Oregon. But more than that, because of the Museum’s unique mission focus on the high desert areas of Oregon, Idaho, and Nevada, our institution offers all Oregonians and visitors to our state an opportunity to experience the unique art and culture of our region. This includes a vast permanent collection of high-quality western American and Native American art as well as traveling exhibits such as the Ansel Adams original photography exhibit that recently wrapped up its run at the Museum. We cannot sustain and grow this Central Oregon artistic treasure without support from private donors, foundations, and importantly, the State of Oregon.

In 2016, the Oregon Arts Commission changed its eligibility criteria for its Operating Support Grant Program and its Arts Learning Grant Program (the “Arts Program”), determining that arts institutions like the Museum are no longer eligible for grant funding. This is a departure from years of past practice and from the intent of the legislature when it originally passed SB 145 in 1967. At that time, legislators articulated that the premise of the state supported Arts Program was to encourage the arts to flourish throughout the state and not to focus on the type of art but rather the quality of the art. The bill seeks to restore the status quo and return to the original legislative intent of promoting quality art, in whatever form, throughout the state.

First, the bill amends the statutory definition of “arts” to clarify that museum-related activities are included within the definition. The amendment is aligned with the definition of “arts” supported by the National Endowment for the Arts that recognizes and includes museum-related arts activities. Clarifying that Oregon’s statutory definition of art is aligned with the NEA is

good public policy and should facilitate efficient operation of the Arts Program by the Oregon Arts Commission, including the grant programs.

Second, the bill instructs the Director of the Oregon Business Development Department to adopt rules for the grant programs administered by the Arts Program. The objective of such rules would be to ensure that (a) the criteria used to determine the eligibility for grant awards take into account regional differences in public access to, or in opportunities for engagement in, arts and cultural development in the state and (b) promote investment in communities where opportunities for engagement in arts and cultural development is limited. That objective is particularly important because the Arts Program grant programs are largely funded by monies from the state's general fund. As a matter of fairness and equity, those monies should be distributed according to well-known, objective, and transparent criteria that serve the legislature's goal of truly promoting the arts throughout the state.

I appreciate your consideration of HB 3139 and the -2 amendments, and I hope that you will join me in support of this important piece of legislation.

Best regards,

Steve Shropshire
High Desert Museum Board of Trustees