

March 18, 2020

Oregon State Legislature
Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response

RE: Impact of COVID-19 on the High Desert Museum

Dear Senator Roblan, Representative Holvey and members of the committee,

First, we would like to thank you for your leadership in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. We are with you — closing our doors, canceling programs and implementing strategies designed to stem the spread of the virus. We appreciate our Legislature's swift efforts to help keep the most vulnerable Oregonians among us safe.

We are also grateful for the Legislature's longstanding enthusiasm for arts and culture organizations like the High Desert Museum. Now, in the face of this health crisis, we're asking once again for your support.

As the committee works to address the economic impacts of these times, we ask that you consider arts and culture institutions. We fill critical needs in our communities: The High Desert Museum, for instance, provides STEAM-based educational programs in Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson and Lake counties, and has recently conducted listening sessions in Harney and Wallowa counties to learn how we can best serve populations there. We welcomed nearly 200,000 visitors last year, with 10 percent of them entering on free and reduced-price admission programs designed to make the Museum accessible to all.

This work will vital work will suffer under continued financial pressure. With the potential ahead of extending our closure and more program cancelations, we estimate a loss ranging from \$300,000 for the present two-week time period to \$1 million if the pandemic's impacts spread into a four-month window. We also anticipate a decline in membership. We have the ability to continue paying our 50.5 FTE for the next several weeks but will be forced to reassess after that. We are tracking expenses and lost revenue attributable to the crisis and would be happy to share that with you at the appropriate time.

Thank you for considering the inclusion of the cultural sector as you address impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on Oregon businesses and citizens.

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Sincerely,

Dana Whitelaw

Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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