

Testimony in Support of HB 4040
Robert Howard
Executive Director
Artichoke Music

Artichoke Music has been a part of the Portland community for almost 50 years. We offer an intimate performance space for all artists, particularly emerging artists, a performance space to develop their craft. We have a school and a shop music shop that support our mission to provide a creative space for people of all ages and background to gather, play and share traditional music from all cultures in a generous listening environment without commercial distractions. Many artists who first performed at Artichoke have gone on to establish a national following.

We are in the middle of our most difficult times ever. The Delta and Omicron variants have been a body blow. After a brief recovery following the waning of the Delta variant, the Omicron variant has reduced our audiences by 85 percent. Our funding is running out. The pandemic continues to have a severe effect on our business, especially as people and artists are fearful of further infection.

We survived so far with Federal and State funding, but after the fourth wave, our funding is running out and our revenues from shows at 20 percent of pre pandemic levels. We've tried to reopen several times, with audiences having to show proof of vaccination and always wearing masks, only to have the continued surges decimate our audiences...even with the precautions.

In better times, Artichoke Music was fully funded by donations and operating revenues from the venue, it's music school and small store. Grants and donations represented 15 percent of operating revenues. During 2021, over 50 percent of the operating revenues came from Federal and State grants. That money is spent to maintain staff and try to take advantage of the any improvement during the virus.

2022 is off to a very bad start. We need help. The Omicron variant has caused what little recovery in attendance we saw just before the holidays fade away in January. Our shows last week, with outstanding acts on the bill, played to audiences of 3 and 7 people. As soon as the Omicron variant appeared we were forced to cancel ½ our shows. We had two people out with COVID which forced us the shut down for a week. 2022 is off to a very bad start.

Since March of 2020, our venue has been able to open to live shows for 12 weeks out of out of 100 weeks so far since we closed the venue on March of 2020. I do not believe any industry has been closed longer or is experiencing such hardship. We depend on bringing audiences together in closed spaces, it has not allowed us to open when others could. Nor have audiences been willing to come out.

We are so grateful for the support we have received, but as I have said before the funding we have received is spent and it is as hard as ever. Our fixed costs are unforgiving and continue to eat up any small reserve we have retained. We are navigating a very difficult situation and we face a difficult and long recovery.

House Bill 4040 will provide critical help for us to keep trying to save live music performances in Oregon.

Thank you so much for your effort to save our vital arts venues.