

Submitter: Nick Fenster

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Economic Recovery and Prosperity

Measure: HB4040

To the House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity

I am writing today on behalf of Northwest Children's Theater & School (NWCT), a three-decade-old arts organization serving children, families, and schools across the Portland metro region. Like all performing arts organizations (and most businesses that rely on face-to-face interaction) we have confronted and survived enormous challenges over the past two years. We have only done so with the steadfast support of our community and our government. HB 4040 would extend a lifeline to organizations like ours across the state.

At this time, NWCT is still not able to offer live performances, though we hope to return in the early Spring of 2022. We have successfully returned to offering in-person theater classes (both at our own facility and in partnership with local schools). However, to keep our students and teachers safe, class sizes remain heavily restricted and every class requires additional support staff for COVID-19 screenings and mitigation efforts. So far, we have been extremely lucky and avoided any community spread of COVID-19 within our program - but maintaining these protocols is enormously expensive. We have effectively doubled our labor costs and reduced our tuition revenue by half at the same time. Add to this the cost of HEPA air filters, N-95 masks, and substitute teachers, and it becomes increasingly clear that tuition alone cannot keep us afloat.

Up until now we have met these challenges with support from the Federal and State Government, local foundations, and generous gifts from individual community members. However, these funds are projected to be fully spent by the middle of February. The funding provided by HB 4040 is absolutely essential if we are to maintain our COVID-19 mitigation efforts and bridge the gap between now and our planned full reopening this Spring.

Please support HB 4040 to provide \$50 million in new funding to help save organizations like ours around the state.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Nick Fenster
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