

CAST IRON

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Oregon House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
Re: HB 4153 – Creative Opportunity Fund

Chair Lively and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lana Veenker. I am the president and founder of Cast Iron Studios, a film, television, and commercial casting company based in Portland since 1999.

From 2015 to 2018, my company hosted the Talent Diversity Initiative (TDI), an actor training program for performers of color aimed at bridging the opportunity gap, improving access to gatekeepers, and increasing representation on the screen.

The program was offered free of charge to the performers, and provided jobs to acting coaches, many of whom were themselves people of color. It consisted of a six-week acting intensive, including guest speakers, and concluded with a day of mock on-camera auditions with our casting team, and Q&As with industry professionals.

About 100 actors completed the TDI, and for the vast majority, it was the first time they had found themselves in an acting class comprised of people who looked like them, where they could discuss the challenges unique to their experience. Each year, our office was flooded with thank-you cards and testimonials.

Not only did they report that their acting and auditioning skills had improved, but they had formed long-lasting friendships—invaluable in an industry that depends on relationships. Many went on to collaborate on projects together. Others began to reach impressive new heights in their careers by gaining acceptance into prestigious acting schools, landing lucrative national commercials, launching their own production companies, or achieving national exposure on film and television.

The early years of the initiative were primarily funded by TNT, the network that aired the Oregon-made TV series *Leverage*, with additional support from the Oregon Film Office and Portland Film Office. But when *Leverage* was not renewed, the funding also ended.

We were able to continue on for a few more years on a very restricted budget, thanks to modest contributions from Oregon Film and the Portland Film Office. But with their own budgets often in flux, it became difficult to continue, and the initiative was shelved.

We were recently exploring ways that we might bring the TDI back to life, when we heard about HB 4153. The Creative Opportunity Fund could provide our initiative with its much-needed funding, which would allow us to:

- Put new classes of performers through the program, at no cost to them
- Hire an administrator to oversee budgeting, recruitment, scheduling, and showcases
- Hire acting instructors, guest speakers, and other professionals to provide training and resources
- Engage—and pay—previous TDI graduates to help mentor the new trainees
- Rent classroom and showcase space from local companies
- Provide scholarships to encourage further training

Based on the demonstrated success of our program, we hope that, like us, you will support HB4153, so that we can continue to level the playing field for performers of color in our community, and help ensure that what we see on our screens reflects the broad palette that exists in our communities.

Yours sincerely,



Lana Veenker