

February 8, 2022

Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Cate, Vice-Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival located in Jackson County, both Nataki Garrett, Artistic Director, and myself respectfully ask for your vote to pass HB 4040, which will provide \$50 million dollars in relief to Oregon's Arts and Culture sector.

OSF was founded in 1935 and is among the oldest and largest professional non-profit theatres in the nation. In recent (pre-Covid) years, our seasons consisted of around 850 performances in three theatres, and we sold an average of 380,000 tickets annually. In March of 2020, we, like most theatres around the country, were forced to cancel our entire season and lay off the majority of our staff and artists due to Covid-19. We did not have a full season in 2021 either, only offering an outdoor theatre summer show and a holiday production, both to limited capacity with limited runs. Further, just for our holiday show alone, we had to spend more than \$200,000 in COVID testing in order to keep the show open. All this has had a devastating effect on the fiscal health of our organization and our community.

Disaster recovery experts will tell you to expect that recovery will take two to three times as much resource in money and time to recover from a disaster as it did to get through the disaster. If we imagine that this COVID disaster will come to conclusion in 2022, we will have 4-6 years ahead of us to rebuild to pre-2020 levels. In 2022 alone we are seeing a significant mismatch between the resources needed to run our theatre and produce our world-renowned work, and the revenue we expect to bring in. Audiences are cautious about returning and cautious about returning in the volume they have in the past.

As you know, Ashland is a small, rural town in Southern Oregon, and the health of the local economy is intricately connected to the health of OSF. Our audience comes from across the country to enjoy a multitude of outdoor activities, culinary experiences, and visits to local wineries, to name a few, and then watch a play at OSF. The impact of us having to close our doors has significantly affected hotels, dining establishments and other tourist attractions, and while we have survived this far by working together and taking advantage of the generous funding that has been available, that funding was the emergency care that sustained us to this moment. We now are in desperate need of recovery funds to ensure we can continue to provide the jobs and the resources the community needs.

OSF has been incredibly grateful for having received support from the government through PPP 1, CARES Act and SVOG funding, along with funding from individual donors, foundations, and our community. Those funds allowed us to survive to today, but they have been used to fund the great need. In order to re-open and re-emerge as a stable beacon in our community, we need further financial assistance. OSF's economic impact on the region is close to \$250,000,000. Resources to ensure our success in 2022 is an investment in Southern Oregon, an investment in the thousands of people who are employed because of OSF, and an investment in Oregon's recovery. HB 4040 is a critical tool in supporting the recovery of the Arts Economy in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration and efforts on behalf of the Arts Economy in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Schmitz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Schmitz
Executive Director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival