

Submitter: Jen Waters

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Economic Recovery and Prosperity

Measure: HB4040

Thank you Chairperson Lively and esteemed members of the Committee.

My name is Jen Waters and I am the Executive Director of the historic Whiteside Theatre in Corvallis, OR. I am a proud Mid-Willamette resident, a Mother to a native Oregonian, a Beaver Believer, and I am speaking to you today as a representative of the Independent Venue Coalition, which has been an essential support since the pandemic began nearly 2 years ago.

I have also come as a representative of venues in small towns and rural areas across this great state, to ask you today to help us find a path back to success.

Along with other venues, we were recipients of funding from the federal government as well as the state- that money is now gone. We have used it, as tasked to pay employees, continue programming, and to help with unexpected expenses required to keep patrons safe in our building.

The continued fear of new variants and questions of safety in large gatherings are continuing to leave venues operating at half the capacity of 2019 and due to the deficit, we are unable to offer competitive bids to acts that would usually tour through our state.

While the Whiteside has continued to operate, when state mandates have allowed, we have made money on only a handful of events, and that income is nowhere near enough to sustain costs for keeping the lights on, much less paying our staff through this uncertain time.

Our inability to fully operate has also greatly affected our local economy. As our mission states, the Whiteside is dedicated to, "enhancing the economic vitality and cultural diversity of downtown Corvallis for the benefit of the entire community?," which is a task we take very seriously. Our shows draw in patrons from all over Oregon and Washington, providing much needed patronage for local restaurants, businesses, and hotels.

Our event income also grants us the opportunity to give back to our community by providing a place for groups and individuals dedicated to diversity and equity, to gather for educational and fundraising events at minimal cost.

The Corvallis community has been beyond supportive and they are enthusiastic, if

not a bit tentative, about coming back into our theatre. We know that in the next 18 months, we will be able to get back on track providing quality entertainment and a place for people to assemble and learn and thrive. But we cannot sustain ourselves over the next few years of recovery without your help. Oregon venues need the support of House Bill 4040 in order to persevere through, what I'm sure we all hope, is the closing act on this pandemic.