

# PORTLAND OPERA

February 8, 2022

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

On behalf of Portland Opera, we respectfully request your support of House Bill 4040, which allocates additional pandemic relief for Oregon's cultural organizations.

Like many of our peers, the federal relief funding from the CARES Act, Shuttered Venues Operators Grant (SVOG) program, and Payroll Protection Program have made it possible for Portland Opera to remain open during the pandemic. These funds allowed us to mitigate impacts as one of the state's largest arts employers, and share adapted public programming with a focus on the community that we serve. We are humbled and grateful for this support, but the fact is that the losses we've realized continue to impact our future. Our sector, and our company, requires additional state investment in jobs and cultural programs that are essential to our community.

Portland Opera needs to rebuild its staff and ramp up programs that provide earned income, event-related spending, and additional jobs for artists and union employees, at proper staffing levels. After facing a 93.92% decline in earned revenue from 2019-2021, we returned to performances in a semi-staged outdoor form in summer 2021. Extreme heat and wildfires then forced cancellations of paid performances and free public programming. Since then, Portland Opera has been able to produce one mainstage production. Yet our revenue potential in reopening has been significantly limited by decreased capacities, distancing measures, public safety concerns, and scaled back production activity. Today, we remain under constant threat of immediate cancellation due to surges in variants and cases, and are faced with escalating costs to hire, meet union contracts, and produce public programming (including freight and material costs). While Portland Opera remains resilient, these challenges—combined with the increased costs for safety and testing in our unique artistic discipline during COVID—create additional strain on our ability to rehire and build back our reimagined future.

Portland Opera has shown imagination, prudence, and acumen during these extraordinarily challenging times, and remains a leader in our cultural sector. We've invested in technology and systems that allow us to reach digital audiences. We've worked with educational partners to deliver curricula to help keep arts learning in the distanced classroom. We've partnered to help activate the SE Portland Industrial corridor. We've held meaningful conversations with stakeholders and community organizers to imagine the Portland Opera and Portland of the future, and to transform our institution with cultural equity. We've minimized risk by scaling back seasons, budgets, and productions. Our amazing core staff and artists navigated work reductions while creating new workflows even with austerity measures. And, as we begin to ramp up, we still face a \$2.4MM budget deficit in the coming year.

We believe that additional state funds for the arts, culture and humanities are essential for our company, our sector, and the community. This investment will go beyond stabilization for the institutions and programs that anchor our non-profit arts ecosystem; but will be a catalyst for the revitalization of civic pride, spending, and tourism in our region. We urge the leaders of Oregon to act now, to ensure that Oregonians have continued access to the arts and humanities tomorrow.



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