

January 25, 2023

TO:

Oregon House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business
Representative Janelle Bynam, Chair

I'm writing today to share why I support HB 2459, which would provide \$50 million in recovery and renewal dollars for Oregon's arts and culture sector. I urge the committee members to support it, as well.

Arts and culture organizations bring vibrancy, educational opportunities and economic benefits to our communities. I know this to be particularly true from firsthand experience with the organization I'm most deeply connected with, the High Desert Museum in Bend. The Museum is the largest arts organization on the east side of the Cascades, serving as a resource to not only burgeoning Bend but also the rural region beyond. Its contributions to educational programming and services were so significant upon the onset of the pandemic in 2020 that it was one of only three museums recognized in 2021 with the country's highest honor in the field, the National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

Yet Oregon arts and culture organizations like the High Desert Museum sustained prolonged shutdowns and continued reverberations throughout the pandemic. Recovery as of early 2023 is still underway. During 2022 at the High Desert Museum, school field trips had not yet returned, attendance remained below pre-pandemic levels, and the continued turbulence in the job market impacted hiring and retention, all while inflation pushed the cost of operations upward. This occurred against a backdrop of 24-7 care needs for all that is entrusted to the Museum, from our 29,000-object collection of priceless art, one of the most recognized collections of Native cultural objects and artwork from the Plateau region, rare books and our living collection of wildlife.

HB 2459 would allow for the continued recovery of a cultural anchor like the High Desert Museum, as well as for it to proactively serve communities in the future. At the Museum, this looks like renewed vigor for our Little Wonders program, which provides free annual family memberships to all Head Start families in the Central Oregon, and additional support for collaborations with tribal partners in creating educational resources for elementary school teachers.

A 2019 economic study showed that the High Desert Museum has a more than \$20 million impact annually on the region. Please help maintain the vibrancy it and other arts institutions bring to Oregonians, every single day, by supporting HB 2459.

Sincerely,

Maria Hall

