

January 31, 2023

Chair Bynam and members of the House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business:

On behalf of the High Desert Museum (HDM), we're writing today to share why we support HB 2459, which would provide critical and significant funding, \$50 million, in the recovery and renewal for Oregon's arts and culture sector. I urge the committee members to support it, as well.

Arts and culture organizations are part of Oregon's 'second paycheck'. Coupled with the natural resources of this amazing state, cultural resources, like museums, performing arts centers, etc. provide incredible value. We live and work here because the quality of life is high. Economists note that the natural resources of Oregon offer a higher value for our families, our workers, our companies – and our arts and cultural assets and resources attract and keep great companies, which, in turn, provide a vibrant economy. The cultural sector often punches above its weight when it comes to economic impact. A 2019 ECONorthwest economic impact study demonstrated that the HDM contributes over \$20 million in Central Oregon. Our staff of 58 FTE at HDM work tirelessly to support our mission and bring vibrant educational opportunities to this region. Arts and culture opportunities are few and far between in the more rural parts of Oregon. Supporting an anchor like the High Desert Museum on the east side of the Cascades is critical to building community and bridging many of the divides, including the geographic ones, that challenge Oregon. Significantly, the Museum is the largest arts organization on the east side of the Cascades, serving as a resource to not only to burgeoning Bend but also the rural region beyond. Our 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.

It is important to note that many museums did not receive last year's ARPA recovery funding. The High Desert Museum and the Museum At Warm Springs – the two largest in Central Oregon – were deemed ineligible among many others in the state. HB 2459 will provide critical funding for these museums to recover. Our prolonged shutdowns and occupancy limits (the most restrictive in the nation for museums) significantly impacted our capacity to keep employees, rebuild and maintain momentum during the pandemic. It's important to note that Oregon lost several museums during the pandemic: the Portland Children's Museum, the longest running children's museum in the nation shuttered its doors and so did the innovative World of Speed museum. As we begin 2023, school field trips have not yet returned to 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 occurs 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, rare books



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and other items to the care of wildlife. Let's ensure our museums have the capacity to recover for the next generations of Oregonians.

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.

Please help maintain the vibrancy it and other arts institutions bring to Oregonians, every single day, by supporting HB 2459.

Sincerely,



Dana Whitelaw, PhD
Executive Director



Nelson Mathews
Board Chair