

Submitter: Charlotte Lin

On Behalf Of: OSF

Committee: House Committee On Economic Development and Small Business

Measure: HB2459

I'm writing to express my enthusiastic support for HB 2459 pandemic relief to cultural organizations in Oregon. Oregon suffered some of the nation's longest pandemic-related shutdowns, heavily impacting the arts/culture sector.

My husband and I first experienced the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) in 1982, when we resided in Tokyo. That OSF experience led us to buy a 2nd home in Ashland, where we've traveled to see 100s of live performances, enjoyed cooking for Senator Ron Wyden, and hosted houseguests from all over the U.S. - up to a dozen arts / wine / hiking visits per year.

I joined the OSF Board in 2021, very eye-opening in this crazy time!

In March 2020 when COVID-19 hit, OSF had just opened an 11-show season, after spending the normal ~50% of its \$44M budget prepping its world-famous stage productions. SIX days later OSF shut down: \$7M ticket refunds, cancelation of 829 performances and 2,300 community engagement and education events. Over the next few weeks, most of OSF's 500-person workforce got laid off; 10% remained, only thanks to the Payroll Protection Plan. Then in September 2020, the Almeda fire destroyed 2,500 homes and 600 businesses in the beleaguered Rogue Valley.

The community is in dire straits: Ashland Hospital recently cut its ICU, its ER may follow; Southern Oregon University has a \$14 million structural deficit, and will cut dozens of jobs; January 13, Jackson County's last remaining newspaper ceased publication; the Mayor of Ashland abruptly resigned last week, along with a member of the City Council.

And then there's OSF. Historically, OSF has generated \$250M annual economic activity in Jackson County, 20% of the Rogue Valley's overall economy. However, the theater sector projects 3-5 years for recovery from the pandemic.

Nataki Garrett had to focus more of her 1st year as OSF's Artistic Director on fundraising than art, bringing OSF \$19M in State and Federal emergency / relief funds essential for 2020 / 2021 survival. But it turns out OSF had operated with a structural deficit for years. Expenses had increased but revenue did not increase proportionally, in fact had decreased gradually due to smoke and wildfire with their impact on tourism, including audiences.

For 2023, OSF has reduced expenses by \$7M, with 30 more layoffs / furloughs, after last fall's announced repertory season reduction due to early indicators of the financial issues now hitting OSF. The OSF Board is working short-term financing that leverages restricted Endowment funds. Launch of a multi-year fundraising campaign has been initiated to ensure the future of OSF: A Bay Area family foundation supported this launch with \$2M in a 5-year campaign pledge totaling \$10M; my husband and I made a 5-year campaign pledge totaling \$1M (we're not a tech dynasty!)

I really hope the Oregon legislature can bring HB 2459's pandemic relief to Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the U.S. theater sector it leads, and the southern Oregon economy that benefits so much from it.