

Testimony for HB2459 Arts Recovery Funding Bill – Lakewood Theatre Company/Lakewood Center for the Arts

Reason to support continued funding In brief:

The arts are an investment that delivers both community well-being and economic vitality.

2020, with the start of the Covid Pandemic, was a universally challenging year that affected all aspects of our economy and society. For arts organizations and arts venues, it was particularly devastating. Unlike other businesses the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) closed our venue for 18 months, and then we began to open gradually in late September 2021. Concerns about large gatherings from many of our older patrons and young parents continue to affect us in providing programs, attracting audiences, and remaining economically stable. The loss of earned revenue has been significant, but thanks to Board leadership, financial management, and support from donors, Lakewood, although greatly reduced in its capacity to serve our audiences, has remained viable through the crisis. Lakewood Theatre Company received critical support from the Small Business Administration Shuttered Venue Operators Grants and from State of Oregon and City of Lake Oswego ARPA funds. But the road to Pre-Covid levels of audience revenue will be at least another year.

Our Organization/Venue History:

Lakewood, now celebrating its 70th anniversary year, is the longest continuously operating theatre and arts venue in the greater Portland area with over 130,000 people per year attending the theatre, classes, lectures, music events, art exhibitions, festivals. Our mission: We inspire and nurture a love of theatre and the arts.

Our demographic information shows we attract audiences from five western states for our large-scale summer arts Festival. Throughout the year we attract audiences from a 60-mile radius to our classes and performances.

Three main points to consider:

1. Lakewood as an arts venue and arts organization is an economic multiplier.

The national organization Americans for the Arts estimates that art venues return 2.5 their annual budget back into the community. Patrons attend an arts event, buy special clothing, may pay for parking, eat dinner at a restaurant, enjoy dessert after the show, and return home to pay the babysitter. The study found that the typical attendee spends \$31.47 per person, per event beyond the cost of admission. This is regionally adjusted by state and population. Pre-Covid, Lakewood's budget was \$2,200,000. Its economic multiplier is \$5.9 million with more than \$500,000 going to local and state government revenue.

The study also shows that one-third of attendees were not from the county in which the arts event took place. What brought those visitors to town? Two-thirds (69 percent) indicated that the primary purpose for their visit was to attend that arts event. The message is clear: a vibrant arts community not only keeps residents and their discretionary spending close to home, but it also attracts visitors who spend money and help local businesses thrive.

2. Services for Youth – Pre-and post-Covid: Education, Socialization, and Creativity needs to be addressed state-wide post pandemic.

Overview: In the last two and a half years social isolation has greatly impacted youth. Schools, psychologists, and parents tell us they have lost two years of skills. Students are struggling. Lakewood encourages self-expression, creativity, team building, socialization, and goal realization. The performing arts encourages children to explore their emotions, expand their imagination and helps them develop their own, unique voice. To reach students isolated by school closures and unable to attend events at our venue Lakewood provided both onsite and outreach programs.

Our onsite programs: Lakewood programs encourage students to explore self-expression and creativity. Before Covid we provided more than 3,500 students per year instruction in theatre, dance, art, TV production and stagecraft. During the 18-month shutdown we pivoted to gatherings outside under a large tent with small participant numbers allowed by the OHA. We moved back into the building in late September 2021 with masks and continued limitations on class sizes.

Covid impact on classes:

- 3,500 students in Pre-Covid 2019
- 450 in 2020
- 1,025 in 2021
- 1,642 in 2022

Our outreach programs: Lakewood partnered with ESDs throughout the state and provided art instruction via books, video and in person instruction to more than 28,000 bilingual students in grades 2-5. Its purpose was to cultivate a sense of belonging, offer social and emotional programming and academic support, and mentorship for underserved populations in public schools including families or youths of color, emerging bilinguals, and/or families or youths navigating poverty, homelessness, or foster care.

As Covid restrictions eased Lakewood provided instructors to go online and in person to schools to provide group art instruction in painting, sculpture, and movement. In addition, Lakewood provided:

- Video classes by zoom.
- Performances taped and provided for download via internet.
- Brought migrant families to our facility to introduce them to live theatre.
- Staged student art exhibits onsite to showcase work in a formal setting.
- Created a Young Playwrights Program and Jr. Theatre Productions to offer all kids a chance to be involved in theatre.

3. Community Well Being – Art Organizations and venues provide neutral gathering places.

Art venues provide a safe space free from recent social divisive forces for people to learn, participate, exhibit. With our concerts, shows, art exhibits, and community events we provide experiences at Lakewood for more than 130,000 people each year. National arts publications note that we rely on the arts to help us through difficult times. Art reminds us that we are not alone and that we share universal human experiences. Through art, we feel deep emotions together and can process experiences, find connections, and create impact.

However, the concern expressed by many regarding large gatherings of people, although lessening, is still a factor in our economic stability. Lakewood's successful economic model Pre-Covid was 65 percent audience and 35 percent gifts/grants/donations. Today, our audience participation has been growing back slowly since re-emergence in September 2021, but it is less

than 55%. We estimate that it will be another 12-18 months before a more balanced recovery is seen. Our budget history:

2019 (pre-Covid): \$2,200,000

2020: \$996,000

2021: \$1,217,000

2022: \$1,740,000

We have grown our revenue, but we are not back to our Pre-Covid budget of \$2.2 million.

Summation: Oregon's arts organizations/businesses were closed by Oregon State Mandate longer than any other state. Oregon Arts businesses lost 1.6 BILLION in revenue, according to Americans for the Arts. Oregon's art organizations and venues have not completely recovered. This Arts Recovery Funding Bill is extremely necessary as expenses due to inflation, labor shortages, and supply shortages have increased substantially in the last year. Oregon audiences are slow to come back because of an abundance of caution. But they are gradually increasing in size. As an industry and community resource, we will survive and thrive, but we need this investment to get through the final stages of COVID-19.

Arts and culture organizations play an important role in the community and are economic drivers. Studies have repeatedly shown that concerts, shows, theatrical events and arts events have a great multiplier effect on tourism, travel, hotels, restaurants, bars, retail shops, real estate value and tax base by adding to the vibrancy of a community.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Edwards

Executive Director

Lakewood Theatre Company/Lakewood Center for the Arts

368 S. State Street

Lake Oswego, OR 97034

503-635-6338

www.lakewood-center.org