

To: Oregon Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Re: House Bill 2459

From: The Liberty Theatre
1203 Commercial Street
Astoria, OR 97103

Honorable Co-Chairs,

I'm writing to you regarding House Bill 2459. I'm the Executive Director of the Liberty Theatre in Astoria, OR. I am also an appointed member of the Arts Council of Clatsop County and a clarinetist with the Oregon Ballet Theatre, Oregon Symphony, and various bands in Portland. Music is very much my passion and livelihood. Although I would like to report good news about our venue's recovery, I can only attest to our still dire situation.

Opening in 1924, The Liberty Theatre is a Venetian Vaudeville palace in the center of Astoria's main street. Generations of Astorians have visited. The Liberty's economic impact on our rural town is just over \$1M annually. With more than 150 days of public shows, classes, rehearsals, and private events bringing people to our downtown core, our small businesses rely on the vitality of the Liberty Theatre for their continued success. **We boast a nearly 1:1 return on investment (*Americans for the Arts Surveys*) in the Liberty back out in our community. With 50% of our audience visiting from outside our county, our patrons stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants, and shop in local shops.** To further solidify this relationship, we offer our patrons ticket packages that include dinners and stays.

Every dollar invested in The Liberty supports our 9.25 FTE staff and nearly 500 contractors annually. We hire local stagehands, lighting and sound technicians, and touring performers. Liberty also provides our county's only year-round dedicated after-school theater program, teaching young people enriching stage and practical technical skills. We can't continue to offer these programs at an affordable cost to our community without support.

Since COVID-19 closed our doors, the loss to the Liberty in earned income is still down 47%. The previous funding packages did a good job covering our most basic needs, but

with a 42,000 square foot 100yr old facility that our nonprofit owns and operates, those funds disappeared quickly. And for us, the SVOG did not go far enough to provide what we needed.

Reopening costs for our rural venue is much higher than in previous years. Payroll is higher with rising housing and necessities costs - and we pride ourselves in paying our staff of 8.25FTE living wages. Booking agencies either skip Oregon entirely or send their performers out for higher fees, with a lack of shared costs between venues. Worse, we have spent the last five years turning our Theatre out of an economic downturn in rural Astoria and have lost the momentum, basically starting over. The good news is that we have begun to see ticket sales climb, but it has been much slower than anticipated.

To keep the arts in our area alive, The Liberty Theatre quickly adopted a temporary mission to position ourselves as a backbone agency to 17 performing arts organizations in our county. The arts are usually a \$15,000,000 industry in our county of 40,000 people. This funding package delivers “comeback” funds to FIVE venues in my small county alone. Each of these venues contributes to the economic impact, and even more, we all provide educational support and programs to fill gaps in our rural schools. Something we won’t be able to do if all of our remaining income is diverted to reopening.

Now, the Liberty Theatre has led Astoria through revitalization twice. Among the first to reopen after the 1922 fire and the first to renovate after the downtown of the 90s, we are again leading the charge, but we need help. **With a 1:1 return on investment in our economic impact, this funding package will help us make the strong comeback that our community needs.**

Thank you again for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Crockett
Executive Director
The Liberty Theatre of Astoria, Oregon