

Submitter: Thomas Busse
On Behalf Of: Performing Artists Impacted by Lockdowns
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Measure: SB1582

By day, I am a bookkeeper, and by night and weekend I am a professional singer.

In 2020, I had lined up enough gigs I was ready to return to classical music as a full-time artist. Then lockdowns and mandates happened. I lost everything, and as an independent contractor, I did not qualify for UI. Later, as performing arts organizations re-opened, they limited their audiences and ticket revenue, fired employees who did not take an experimental injection that killed a family member of mine, violated my bodily autonomy by demanding tests with the diagnostic specificity of a magic eight ball, and continued irrational health measures far longer than any other part of the economic sector. Other countries such as Sweden did not lock down, mandate masks, or cancel performances, and they had superior outcomes.

Although I am a lifelong arts advocate and believer in government funding for cultural institutions, I cannot support rewarding these organizations for hurting their own ticket revenue by cancelling performances, limiting attendance, checking Orwellian vaccine passports, and engaging in hygiene theater far more than required under public health orders. I also cannot support rewarding them for not questioning the public policy, advocating against lockdowns, or standing up for the livelihoods of the independent artists they employ. During lockdowns, I saw arts administrators and fat-cat executive directors and overpaid charming development directors continue to get paid while I lost tens of thousands of dollars in cancelled gigs and lost opportunities - to the point I quit the field.

If the State of Oregon wants to fund arts - fine. Fund arts. But it is the State of Oregon that shut down arts, and now the taxpayer is being asked to pay for the damage of the state's own creation and these institution's willing complicity. None of these lockdowns or restrictions were necessary. We saw the OHA lie about the numbers and the necessity, and other states lifted restrictions far sooner than Oregon's. Meanwhile the arts organizations were not going to stand up for the artists who actually do the work and were unemployed - because they were government funded.

The way to fund arts is through hotel taxes and the lottery. Not the general fund.