July 16, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate

RE: Supporting COVID-19 Relief for Arts and Cultural Institutions

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

Recently, The United States Conference of Mayors passed a resolution calling upon Congress to help support our cities' artists, arts workers, and the arts and culture nonprofit sector. Nearly two-thirds of the nation's artists and arts workers are now unemployed.

The country is at grave risk of permanently losing essential arts and cultural organizations that are critical to our national identity and will be essential to accelerate our regional recovery efforts. It is our arts and culture organizations that connect people to each other and ensure that creativity thrives among a wide breadth of our communities, from seniors to children, and members of our society who are under-resourced, hard to count, and more vulnerable now than they have ever been.

The arts and culture sector contributed more than $877.8 billion to the nation's economy in 2017 and directly employed more than 5 million workers nationwide. The current losses sustained by the arts and cultural sector throughout the country as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have reached a staggering $8.4 billion as of July 9, 2020.

Despite all of this, artists and arts workers are innovating right now to provide online arts experiences and distance learning opportunities for people of all ages, helping address social isolation and mental health issues, providing direct health benefits to our communities, but, in many cases, with very limited resources.

As Congress formulates the next relief package, greater relief is needed for the recovery of our arts and culture communities. This is about far more than the cancellation of performances and exhibitions; this is about individuals—artists and cultural workers alike—whose livelihoods are being threatened if not irrevocably impacted.

The United States Conference of Mayors urges Congress and the Administration to provide increased COVID-19 relief and recovery support to keep our iconic arts sector alive through this pandemic and help it thrive when this crisis ends. Specifically, we urge for legislative relief that:

- Extends the duration of unemployment insurance for artists, arts professionals, and self-employed workers whose income has been negatively impacted by COVID-19 through the calendar year 2022 understanding that many will continue to be out of work as the economy struggles to regain its foothold for the next three years;
• Adjusts the Economic Stabilization Fund or other mechanisms to implement programs that support all nonprofit employers, regardless of employee headcount, including loan forgiveness and other provisions; and provides clear guidance and maximum flexibility to private lenders to prioritize processing the applications of charitable nonprofits, including arts organizations;

• Extends SBA and Paycheck Protection Program assistance for artists and arts professionals; provides additional forgivable SBA loans to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, self-employed workers, sole proprietors, and small LLC’s, eliminates the 500-employee cap for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations; and provides further flexibility regarding the percentage of loan forgiveness for payroll versus rent;

• Provides additional funding to the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services;

• Helps to incentivize contributed support for the arts and culture sector through removing the cap on charitable deductions and maintain the removal of the Adjusted Gross Income limits for the current and future tax seasons;

• Supports the U.S. creative economy by enabling inclusion of the nonprofits arts and culture industry in federal workforce development opportunities for creative businesses and creative workers;

• Enacts policies that will ensure rapid processing of the artist visas and consular appointments that are essential to supporting international cultural activity;

• Enables equitable participation in artistic, educational and cultural online activity through ensuring our most vulnerable population have access to free or low-cost high-speed broadband program offerings;

• Ensures that dedicated funding is provided to the arts and culture industry to help build out its health and safety infrastructure, and that they are included in the legislative discussions related to business disruption insurance and liability.

It has become clear through this pandemic just how important it is for people to connect in shared experiences. More than ever, we must restore the power of the arts and culture using it to connect our residents to each other, to build social cohesion and belonging, and reinstate our shared sense of hope. As mayors, we are utilizing all policies in our toolkit to keep these communities thriving, and we will work with our federal partners to do the same, including various tax incentives, licensing, and other legislative needs.

Thank you again for all that you are doing and for your support surrounding the priorities of our communities.

Sincerely,

Tom Cochran
CEO and Executive Director

Attachment