

Anita Stewart  
Portland Stage  
LD 1163

I'm Anita Stewart, the Artistic Director of Portland Stage. Thank you for allowing me to speak in support of "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Capital Improvements for Arts and Cultural Facilities" (HP0735) presented by Representative BRENNAN, of Portland and co sponsored Senator ROTUNDO, and Representative GATTINE, MEYER, DOUDERA, DODGE, BRIDGEO, and PERRY.

As a public facing organization, Portland Stage places the community we serve at the forefront. In the course of a season, we typically serve around 50,000 individuals from across the state. Some of our subscribers travel 125 miles each way to attend productions in our space.

With robust Education Programs in schools across Maine serving up to 10,000 students each year, we work with schools in 9 counties, from Kennebunk to Mars Hill, Harpswell to Fryberg and Topsham to Lewiston. We are an active part of the arts education programs in the state and we use theater as a way to promote literacy, creativity and collaboration. Our partnerships with schools in this arena helps positively impact Maine students and the state's future workforce.

Now more than ever, our society needs places that invite us to view the world from another's perspective, building empathy and a sense of belonging. That is what we do. We are a vital part of our community and a part of what makes Maine a great place to live.

As a not for profit, we reinvest our resources to support our mission. Approximately 70% of our yearly income goes directly to the artists, crafts people, technicians, educators, and staff (nearly 250 individuals) who do this work in our community. The remaining 30% pays utilities, building maintenance, insurance, taxes and marketing. We make the most of every dollar we earn. So accessing resources for major capital improvements is a challenge.

We are deeply committed to ensuring that everyone in our community can access our productions and programs regardless of ability to pay. With three pay what you can performances for every production, we partner with multiple social service agencies and the public libraries to provide regular free or low cost access to all our productions and programs. Our limitation with providing access primarily lies with the physical structure of our facility and the need to make changes that will better serve our community takes resources above and beyond our yearly budgets.

Currently, Portland Stage is in the midst of a capital campaign focused on accessibility and visibility. In addition to a marquee that will provide a gateway into Portland's Arts district, we are installing a large, accessible elevator that will run from the basement where we store props and costumes to the fourth floor where staff works. It will allow a more diverse group of patrons to access our theater spaces and greatly increase Portland Stage's ability to hire individuals with mobility challenges.

In support of this campaign, we have been reaching out to individuals in our community. But having the ability to make a case for support to the state would be an extraordinary opportunity for an organization such as mine.

The arts in Portland generate over \$50 million in household income to local residents, and deliver \$8.6 million in local and state government revenue (AFTA 2017). In a pre-pandemic world, arts organizations across the state of Maine added over \$1.5 billion to the economy each year. Performing arts venues such as Portland Stage are known to generate spending by patrons who park, dine, and shop, in addition to seeing a show, and we expect that this project will not only lead to growth in Portland Stage's audience base, it will also positively impact the economic viability of other local businesses.

Helping us improve our facilities is helping Maine improve the quality of life for its

citizens. I ask that this committee strongly support this act that would allow governments funds to be used to improve the arts and cultural sector infrastructure.