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I am writing in support of an Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Capital Improvements for Arts and Cultural Facilities.

Portland is home to a range of professional and amateur performing arts organizations that, despite several existing large and small performance venues, are severely limited because they lack space that is mid-sized, available, and affordable. St. Lawrence Arts (soon to be presented as The Hill Arts) will meet this need with a 400-seat community performance venue, abutting the current, historic St. Lawrence Church. This new space will continue to uplift the neighborhood, support the growth and viability of artistic partners vital to Portland's creative economy, the Portland Public School systems, and our civic groups, all while supporting, in perpetuity, the historic building that survives.

Since 2001, St. Lawrence Arts (soon to be presented as The Hill Arts) has brought culture and vitality in the form of music, theater, dance, and other performing arts to Portland's East End. Currently, the organization offers a state-of-the-art, 106-seat professional theater and is home to Portland's community of performance artists, provides a welcoming venue to those from away, and is a popular community gathering space for a variety of community events.

This adaptive reuse of The St. Lawrence Church as an arts center and its successful 23 years in business has had a profound impact on the revitalization of Munjoy Hill, driving development, economic growth and boosting Portland's creative economy.

The building has been recognized as a National Landmark in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and as a local landmark by the City of Portland in 1990. The formation, vision and success of St. Lawrence Arts gave new energy to the structure, preventing its complete deterioration and further depreciation to the neighborhood. However, years of tireless restoration efforts were not enough to prevent the catastrophic collapse and subsequent dismantling of the Sanctuary in 2008.

St. Lawrence Arts long-term sustainability, the survival of the Parish Hall, and the overall health of the neighborhood is contingent on expansion and the creation of a 400-seat performance space where the Sanctuary once stood. This performance hall will be a community space that presents established and emerging artists from a multitude of genres and continues the building's legacy as a welcoming space for neighbors.

When integrated with the successful Parish Hall Theater, the new space will create a dynamic performing arts center able to serve thousands of organizations, performers, and school children. This upgrade will provide state-of-the-art space at an affordable rate and expand opportunities for additional organizations for their programming, fundraising and community events. The performance hall will generate a revenue stream that will support the restoration of the Parish Hall, increase the variety of exciting arts programming in Greater Portland all while remaining rooted in its original 19th-century purpose of creating community space through collaboration. It will expand the organization's current programming, focusing on artistic performances and civic activities that require the mid-sized venue the city lacks, while putting Portland on the map for artists and events forced to bypass the city due the inadequate venue options.

The Hill Arts will bring an eclectic blend of individual artists, musicians and production companies. From the unorganized amateur or school recital to full-scale equity theater and musical shows, it will be home to the creatives that will keep Portland a unique destination for the arts. The space will be suitable for a wide variety of performances including music, film, theater, dance, and multi-media events and will be a multifaceted location where visual artists, musicians and actors all come together in one large celebration. The building will be marketed to non-profits, schools, and community members in desperate need of space to bring our community together.

The Hill Arts will provide a home for two new initiatives including a performing arts

incubator to help facilitate best-practice start up for non-profit creative organizations and a new multi-dimensional creative place for kids that provides a safe, fun and enriching environment with every-day activities focused on making, performing and creating as a way to inspire, sooth and support young people as they navigate the rocky road of modern life.

This new infrastructure will do more than seat 400-arts patrons. It will provide an engine for Portland's creative economy by establishing a diversified facility that can generate revenue and provide critical mass to serve both the arts economy and the community in a strong and sustainable fashion.