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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan introducing

LD 1163, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Capital Improvements for Arts and Cultural Facilities

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. I am Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland. I am here to introduce **LD 1163, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Capital Improvements for Arts and Cultural Facilities.**

In my community, and in each of yours, there are many arts and cultural venues that are at the heart of our civic infrastructure. These are the performing arts centers, the playhouses and theaters, and other local venues where the town congregates. Drive through many of our communities and you will pass the worn out theaters and arts centers. What most of these structures have in common is a need for repair and rehabilitation, and a local community group that cannot afford to do it. In fact, many of them need upgrades to meet ADA requirements and ensure that everyone in the community is welcome without extra effort. Others need basic repairs such as roof replacements to ensure their viability. These organizations have been hit especially hard by COVID-19.

We all know what the need is in our own communities. A few years ago, the Cultural Emergency Resource Coalition provided a disaster planning and recovery session. Over 1,100 nonprofit organizations participated. Now, obviously, not all of them need critical structural repairs but it gives you a sense of the potential need.

There is currently no program available to meet this need. Many states, and most of the New England states, have annual appropriations to address this problem; we do not. The successful implementation of this bond proposal will hopefully pave the way to a modest ongoing program.

The only restriction I have included is to limit the program to nonprofits. I envision a program designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of organizations. Some may be able to provide matching funds; some may not. Some may need a small grant; some may need major construction.

I understand that some people do not support issuing bonds in the current economic environment and that state agencies will not provide testimony. That is a broader discussion that this committee and our leadership will undertake. However, if there is a bond package, this should be a priority.

The arts and cultural sector is an important economic factor in our state. These structures provide the underlying, basic infrastructure which knits our state together. I urge your support for this bond.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.