

Support Maine's Non-Profit Performing Arts

An open letter from industry leaders throughout the state of Maine

Non-Profit Performing Arts Organizations are the cornerstones of Maine's Arts and Cultural Tourism Economy in communities throughout the state but whether or not we will be here to support those communities after COVID-19 remains unknown.

The performing arts play a central role in the civic and cultural life of communities throughout Maine. But recent surveys show that more than 50% of our audiences will not return until a vaccine is available. Maine cultural organizations face dire realities with some of the state's most venerable performing arts organizations facing permanent closure.

Without immediate targeted action in the form of a Performing Arts Covid Grant Program, our companies will not be able to reopen in a sustainable way while assuring the safety of artists and audiences. We need operational support and help to make structural changes so our venues are safe.

Despite the current shutdown, the non-profit performing arts sector has not stood still. We continue to innovate, engage, and uplift our communities, primarily through free, online arts content developed and delivered with support from the PPP loan program. As PPP loan funds run out, and reopening our venues seems a distant hope, we join the many other businesses that have had to furlough or lay off employees further straining Maine's unemployment system and economy.

The arts build community. Recent studies show that Maine has more than 2,000 cultural organizations. While the urban centers of Portland, Lewiston-Auburn, and Bangor have major cultural facilities, cultural events and opportunities abound in all corners of the state highlighting the local history, heritage, and creative capital of local and professional artists who call Maine their artistic home.

The arts mean business. Arts and cultural organizations add a value of \$1.5 billion to Maine's gross state product and provide upward of 17,000 jobs. Non-profit performing arts help drive the economy and create a landscape that attracts job-seekers, young people, and retirees. We are an important part of what makes Maine a truly great place to live.

The arts bring us together. Performing arts organizations and venues are economic hubs, providing important financial injections into their local economies. The funds generated go directly back into the communities we serve through jobs, vendor contracts, and further driving area businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and retail. Every \$1 spent on cultural tourism results in \$46 spent in the local economy.

The arts inspire young minds. Our common mission is literally to promote the public good. Our stages and concert halls are spaces to build empathy, promote teamwork, engage creativity, and celebrate community; from elementary school students playing an instrument for the first time to high schoolers exploring classic plays on their feet with professional actors, our organizations bring diversity, vibrancy, education, and cultural literacy to Maine. We want to continue engaging young people in the arts but cannot continue to do so without significant economic relief from the state.

As the pandemic hit, performing arts venues and organizations were, collectively, the first to close and will likely be the last to reopen. Attending live performances such as concerts and plays may not be possible until a vaccine is readily available to the public, which could be many months away.

We, the leadership of Maine's non-profit performing arts organizations must be included in the state's economic relief and recovery efforts. The performing arts sector is in trouble. And we need your help.

Sincerely,

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Bangor Symphony Orchestra

Todd Benoit
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Bangor Symphony Orchestra

Bradford Kenney
Executive Artistic Director
Ogunquit Playhouse

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