

**Ontario Presents' Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance
and Economic Affairs**

Re: The study of the recommendations relating to the *Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020* and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

Sector: Culture and Heritage

July 6, 2020

Dear Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs,

I am writing to you today from Ontario Presents, a non-profit network of performing arts presenters, artists, and sector professionals dedicated to supporting touring performing arts in Ontario. Our members include: performing arts centres; volunteer community based presenters; touring artists/arts organizations; artists' agents; and industry service consultants, all of whom work together to facilitate the distribution of live, performing arts shows into communities across Ontario.

Ontario Presents represents 74 performing arts organizations and an additional 70 individual professionals. We work closely with these members, as well as with fellow arts service organizations, networks, and colleagues across the country to support the arts ecology in Ontario and across Canada.

During my 20 + years at Ontario Presents, I have observed first-hand the incredible impact that the arts have on individuals and communities in our province. In all of this time, no crisis has devastated the arts to the extent that the COVID-19 pandemic has. I would like to thank the Government of Ontario for their continued attention to the needs of our sector. We have followed Minister MacLeod's Tele-Townhalls and have worked closely with other arts service organizations to advocate for our sector at all levels of government. We are grateful for Minister MacLeod's continued work and for the opportunity to report to the Standing Committee today. We thank you for consulting with the sector and hope that you will continue to do so as we all work to ensure that the cultural sector emerges from this crisis not only intact, but more equitable, resilient, and essential than ever.

The impact of this pandemic on the arts and cultural sector has been sudden and drastic. As Minister MacLeod has continually stressed, the live performing arts sector has been among the hardest-hit by the economic fallout of this pandemic, and will be among the last to reopen. According to the June 25 [report](#) from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, direct employment in the culture and heritage sector in our province has decreased significantly since February, falling from 120,000 to 96,000

by May, a decline of 20%. According to ilostmygig.ca, the average income loss (nationally) per gig worker is \$25,000. One in four culture jobs in Canada have been lost since the crisis began, and more will no doubt be lost the longer the ban on large gatherings continues.

These statistics are in line with the experiences of our members. Our member presenting organizations have laid off large numbers of staff, especially part-time and casual workers, and our artists and agents/managers are suddenly and drastically without income. Most live performing arts events have been cancelled through the rest of 2020, and likely into the spring of 2021. This has resulted in a near total lack of revenue for presenters, agents, managers, and artists, with little sense of when that revenue will return.

Even when in-person gatherings are once again permitted, the performing arts sector must contend with the threat of last-minute cancellations, little support from insurance companies, increased costs for sanitization and PPE, and audience reluctance to return to live events. Numerous audience surveys, including those conducted by our own members, and WolfBrown's global [Audience Outlook Monitor](#), all suggest that large portions of audience members will require 3-6 months after reopening to feel comfortable returning, and some will not return until the virus is no longer a threat. In a recent survey by the Canadian Arts Coalition, 61% of arts service organizations diagnosed that their members were still in the Emergency stage, defined as "needing help for an indefinite period of time," citing the impact of the pandemic on their operations and the uncertainty of re-opening dates.

This is not a short-term crisis for the live performance industry. Despite remarkable innovation and resilience among our arts sector colleagues, we will need sustained government attention, consultation, and support in order to weather this crisis and continue to provide employment, economic generation, and artistic experiences for our communities. Ontario Presents supports the three principles for Ontario's approach to our sector proposed by the Canadian Arts Coalition in their oral deputation to this committee on June 26th:

1. **Equity** must be fundamental to the province's approach. Due consideration of Indigenous, racialized, deaf, disabled, rural, Francophone and otherwise marginalized artists and their organizations is fundamental.
2. **Collaboration** with federal and municipal programs is vital, to ensure that gaps in policy and investment are bridged.
3. **Time** is of the essence. If arts and culture are going to play a role in Ontario's recovery, they need help NOW.

Furthermore, we recommend:

1. **Increased support through existing provincial funding bodies**, such as the Ontario Arts Council, and increased flexibility within existing programs to allow for support directly to operations and staffing.
2. The **establishment of a provincial stabilization fund** for arts and culture, to complement federal support and existing programs. This fund is particularly needed to ensure that freelance workers, laid-off cultural workers, and equity-seeking groups are supported. Many of these groups are not supported by existing structures and attention must be paid to ensure that they receive necessary support.
3. The investment of \$5 million towards the reinstatement of the **Indigenous Culture Fund**, a much-needed fund to support Indigenous cultural production and economic stimulation in Indigenous communities.
4. The establishment of an **integrated policy and funding program** for the re-opening of arts and culture that would include:
 1. **Infrastructure and operating support** for venues. Venue-based organizations have fixed costs that have not lessened despite their lack of revenue, and need support to keep their buildings and operations running, as well as for necessary retro-fitting and renovation to meet public health protocols.
 2. Detailed **public health protocols**, developed in consultation with the live performing arts sector. Clear, sector-specific guidance is needed for our sector to confidently reopen when the time is right.

3. Continued attention to the need for **marketing support** to encourage a return to arts and culture by both local audiences and tourists.
4. Reimbursement and assistance in procuring and purchasing **PPE and necessary safety and sanitization equipment**.
5. Support for **digital infrastructure** so that Ontario artists and arts organizations can develop, capture and share their work while traditional venues are closed or have only limited capacity.

According to the Ontario Arts Council's [Impact of the Arts in Ontario](#) report, 79% of Ontarians believe that the government should invest public dollars in the arts. This investment is needed now more than ever if the arts and cultural sector is to survive this crisis and continue to contribute jobs, economic stimulation, creative innovation, social cohesion, and physical and mental well-being to our Ontario communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions. We hope to continue to work closely with the Government of Ontario and our sector colleagues to rebuild a stronger, more resilient, and more equitable sector.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Warren Garrett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Warren" being more prominent than the last name "Garrett".

Warren Garrett

Executive Director, Ontario Presents

t: 416-703-6709 x5 | e: warren@ontariopresents.ca

a: 192 Spadina Ave, Unit 305, Toronto, ON M5T 2C2