Testimony for Senate Listening Session on State’s Reopening: 
Tourism, Arts, Culture & Small Businesses 
July 15, 2020 at 11:00am

For the record, I am Emily Ruddock, Executive Director of MASSCreative. On behalf of our membership, which includes over 400 arts and cultural member organizations as well as arts and cultural workers, creatives and supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

MASSCreative works to advance public policy, grassroots advocacy learning, and cross-sector alliances towards a Commonwealth where art, culture, and creativity are a valued part of everyday life. Today I want to share with you the economic and community value of the arts and culture sector to the Commonwealth.

As you have heard from the Mass Cultural Council, the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent economic crisis has had a chilling effect on the creative community. **This should be particularly concerning given the arts and cultural sector’s value to the Commonwealth as an economic anchor, job provider, and a hub for community connectivity.**

In almost every region of the Commonwealth, the creative community plays a role in the economic vibrancy of the area:

- In 2018, the [U.S Bureau of Economic Analysis](https://www.bea.gov) reported that arts and cultural production (both for profit and nonprofit businesses and firms accounts for $25 billion in total value added to the Commonwealth, representing 4.8% of Total Gross State Product in 2018.
• That same year, the MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development estimated the arts, entertainment and recreation sector employed over 63,000 people on average each month, totally $2.5 billion in compensation annually.

• In the Berkshires cultural tourism anchors including MASS MoCA, Tanglewood and Jacob’s Pillow represent the third largest sector of the economy.

• In Boston, Salem, Gloucester, and New Bedford arts, history and culture are the drivers of out-of-state tourism.

• ArtsBoston reported more than 21 million attendees at arts and cultural events in the Greater Boston area - more than 4 times all major Boston sporting events combined for 2018.

• Specifically, the nonprofit arts and cultural community contributes significantly, as reported by the Mass Cultural Council:
  ○ Of the $2.3 billion total impact, $1.5 billion of that is from goods and services bought by nonprofit arts and cultural organizations from vendors and businesses in the Commonwealth.
  ○ Audiences of nonprofit arts and cultural events generate $877 million in spending to restaurants, retail and other businesses in the Commonwealth.

• I want to be clear - this isn’t the result of a few cultural institutions or tourist attractions - we are a diverse ecosystem that includes smaller budget-sized organizations like Castle of our Skins in Boston and the Community Music School of Springfield as well as places like Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts and the Ecotarium in Worcester.

The Arts and Cultural sector is essential to the economic health of the Commonwealth because we are the core to the gathering economy intertwined with vendors, restaurants, retail and other businesses in every region of Massachusetts.
However, the outbreak of COVID-19 required a complete halt to our sector’s regular operations and work activating downtowns and main streets, and stimulating the economy.

Shutting our facilities and cancelling events does not mean we have stopped serving our patrons, neighborhoods and the Commonwealth. Like other nonprofit organizations and businesses in the Commonwealth, our services and programs are still needed and we must deliver. Almost immediately, the creative community pivoted and adapted to serve people in new ways:

- Many theatres, cultural spaces and museums created free online content to engage audiences and connect individuals who are at high risk of isolation due to social distancing requirements.
- The ICA in Boston converted its East Boston Watershed facility into a fresh food distribution center for residents in partnership with East Boston Neighborhood Health Center and five other businesses.
- Staff of Creative Youth Development organizations like Artists for Humanity in Fort Point or Elevated Thought in Lawrence continue to do daily outreach to the youth they work with to ensure they are supported during the crisis.
- The Brickyard in Lynn and Artisan's Asylum in Somerville coordinated artists, artisans and makers to create and donate personal protection equipment for frontline workers.
- The Worcester Cultural sector created virtual programming for the city’s Recreation Worcester serving children of all ages and employing artists in the region.

The work of arts and culture to care for communities and connect neighbors has not stopped because of COVID-19. But now the work is almost entirely subsidized by the individuals and organizations within the creative sector itself and that is not sustainable.
As we enter Phase 3 of the Governor’s reopening plan that allows for limited capacity re-openings of museums, cultural spaces and outdoor performance venues, we must face the reality: **our sector will not be able to reopen at full capacity for some time - in most cases not until there is a publicly available vaccine or treatment for COVID-19.** In addition, recent studies tell us that audiences will not be ready to return to public indoor cultural spaces for some time. As stewards of communities, we understand the real and perceived public health concerns of our audiences. In fact, many arts and cultural organizations voluntarily closed their facilities and artists cancelled events to protect their audiences, patrons and communities before Governor Baker’s mandated closures in March.

But this prolonged closure of our sector will endanger our ability to deliver the kind of economic recovery the Commonwealth needs. In-person event closures and the forecasted continued loss of contributed revenue from private funders and donors means our sector is especially vulnerable. The Mass Cultural Council’s data tells us the financial damage from COVID-19 to arts and culture nonprofits is estimated at $425 million. Without immediate action, organizations will shutter and the artists who are at the heart of our sector will leave Massachusetts. Our sector’s strength is our diversity and volume of activity. COVID-19 and the economic crisis threaten that diversity and our ability to play our role as a proven economic driver and community connector.

We know you and your colleagues in the legislature are hard at work addressing significant state revenue shortfalls, working to cover new costs related to the pandemic and keeping residents of the Commonwealth working. We also know that given the significant loss of tax revenue, currently estimated at $6 billion and counting, you face difficult choices on what to fund and how, especially as you await word from the Federal government regarding potential state and local aid.

**We urge you to prioritize the economic value and community necessity of**
the arts and culture sector as part of Massachusetts’ full recovery as you make these decisions.

Some ways to protect our sector include:

● As Federal aid is delivered to the Commonwealth ensure the creative sector receives a portion of these funds.
  ○ We applaud the Senate for including a $2 million relief fund for Cultural nonprofits with under 25 employees in the recent COVID-19 CARES supplemental budget. We encourage you to continue programs and aid packages like this that includes more nonprofit arts and cultural organizations as more aid arrives.

● Ensure Massachusetts Unemployment Assistance continues to include 1099 or “gig economy” workers with the additional $600 / week- especially for those in industries unable to reopen at full capacity for the next 12 - 18 months.

● Grant 100% forgiveness for nonprofit organizations that self-insure for unemployment. These nonprofits are currently liable for 50% of the unemployment assistance claimed by employees furloughed or laid off due to COVID-19.

● As workforce development and support programs are launched or expanded, ensure artists, cultural workers, arts administrators and creative professionals are eligible.

● Pass Senate Bill 2022 the Massachusetts Public Art Program that would create a fund for new public art on or in new state building projects. This program would put Massachusetts artists back to work.

MASSCreative, our members and supporters are happy to work with the Senate on any of these policies and relief funds to protect the arts and culture sector during the prolonged shutdown. Thank you for your time and consideration.