



ARTS & CULTURE OPEN LETTER

Hon. Premier Doug Ford
Premier's Office
Room 281
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Minister Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
438 University Avenue, 6th Floor
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May 15, 2020

Greetings Premier Doug Ford and Hon. Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries,

We hope this letter finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy as possible during this difficult time.

On May 11, 2020 the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture led by Hon. Minister MacLeod hosted a last minute technical briefing zoom meeting. There were over 70 people in attendance on the call including MPPs and staff. Of the 45 minutes scheduled, 7 minutes at the end were provided for us as MPPs to bring the voices of our communities to the forefront. This was insufficient.

Today we are writing you on behalf of the many artists, cultural workers, gig economy workers and arts administrators we represent in our Toronto ridings. We are writing on behalf of the countless grassroots, small and medium-sized community arts organizations, collectives, charities and non-profits representing invaluable diverse neighbourhood cultures, languages and identities we are each so honoured to represent. Artists tell the stories of our communities – they *are* the story. Our cultural institutions are vehicles for social and economic justice and they embody the power of representation. Creatives amplify local challenges, broaden community conversations and champion solutions through the arts. Through culture, voices that have historically been marginalized – especially Indigenous, Black and racialized, women-identified, Deaf, disabled and LGBTQ2S+ are not only seen but they are heard.

Our local artists and arts organizations have struggled long before COVID-19 for the respect, recognition and real, sustainable funding from your provincial government they deserve. Arts organizations big and small, artists, writers, musicians, thespians, filmmakers, television producers and production crews, collectives, fashion designers and local sewists have generously given of their talents during this difficult time through free online concerts, public readings, film screenings and festivals, theatre, sharing of visual arts and creative communities stepping up and creating non-medical home-made PPE. Our arts communities have shown us consistently who

they are and have been there helping comfort and connect Ontarians across our province throughout this difficult time. It's time your government had their backs too.

For example, the decision of your government last year to slash the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) budget by \$10 million with unforeseen cuts on the way was unimaginable and has left an indelible mark on arts communities across Ontario especially those represented by OAC-identified priority groups: artists of colour, Deaf artists and artists with disabilities, Francophone artists, Indigenous artists, new generation artists (16-30 years old) and artists living in regions outside of Toronto. Adding insult to injury, your government ended the Indigenous Culture Fund a direct response to the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action, slashed the Ontario Music Fund by over fifty percent, slashed millions from Celebrate Ontario which meant 71 fewer tourism and arts festivals received grants and you also ripped funding from Ontario Library Service-North and Southern Ontario Library Service programs. Needless to say a lot of damage was done last year, it impacted many lives and livelihoods and continues to.

We are now all trying to navigate through COVID-19 – a pandemic exposing the very inequities all too many of our community members experience routinely.

Our arts and culture communities have been suffering and they need DIRECT SUPPORT now more than ever from their Ontario provincial government. According to Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, there is an estimated \$500 million dollar estimated total loss of arts revenue by June alone and that number will continue to increase without your support. Artisans, cultural workers and arts organization – especially those serving predominantly racialized, lower-income, disabled and LGBTQ2S+ communities are especially hurting and in need of direct support from the government. Without support many more will shutter which is a loss for both arts communities and communities fighting for safer community spaces, equity and representation.

As Members of Provincial Government we have worked with and listened to community and they have identified areas where DIRECT SUPPORT is critical in order for our arts communities to not only 'respond' to COVID-19 but RECOVER from it. Artists, cultural workers and community-based arts organizations must be at the COVID-19 recovery table. Their voices must be heard.

Today, Premier Ford and Hon. Minister MacLeod may this Open Letter serve as your final notice. Our community members need your support today. They need a transparent and publicly accountable plan that demonstrates your commitment to them not as a 'frill' or an afterthought but as vital, contributing members, integral to what makes Ontario who we are and a formidable contributor to our economy. It is not enough for your government to engage large multi-million dollar cultural institutions in silos. Small and medium arts voices must also be heard.

On behalf of Toronto, home to more than twice as many artists and cultural workers as any other Canadian city, we write you with the DIRECT ASKS of our arts communities.

Premier Ford and Hon. Minister MacLeod these are some of the ASKS for DIRECT SUPPORT coming from arts communities:

- Provide direct provincial support to our arts community. According to many in our arts communities funding programs announced so far by the federal government though welcomed have either been insufficient or applicants are not eligible. Many in our community are still awaiting transparent, detailed and direct information with regards to how the federal \$500 million COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage and Sports Organizations will aid Ontario specifically.
- Invest in stimulus funding for digital transition plans to assist festivals currently in season so they can proceed online. They also need stabilization funding for the creation and execution of strategic marketing plans to reengage our culture sector audiences post COVID-19. Additionally, an ethnic media stabilization fund will assist our ethnic, community, and multilingual media producers which our culture sector depends on to reach our diverse audiences
- Raise your voices to your federal counterparts. Our arts communities need government to allow donations made in the 2020 tax year to apply to the 2019 tax season enabling organizations to enhance their donations during this critical period
- Reverse funding cuts to the Ontario Arts Council and increase funding to meet the exacerbated needs of arts communities. Maintain necessary resources to Celebrate Ontario and Ontario Summer Experience Program (with timely updates on OSEP based on ongoing COVID-19 physical distancing protocols)
- Restore and fund the Indigenous Culture Fund
- Reverse funding cuts to the Ontario Music Fund
- Invest in the creation of an Ontario Digital Public Library
- Increase Ontario minimum wage to benefit artists, gig-economy workers and to enhance consumer support of culture.
- Ensure strong film and television production companies by ensuring that those who created jobs and investment in Ontario by shooting here, will receive their tax credits in a timely manner, whether or not they are able to complete their productions. This will require waivers to some of the eligibility requirements for the tax credits and direction from Ontario to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) that costs associated with production shut-downs and longer-than-normal carrying costs are eligible for the tax credit.
- Arts community is asking your government to recognize the significance of grant applications already in the pipeline (Ontario Arts Council, Celebrate Ontario, Ontario Summer Experience Program, Ontario Creates, OTF, etc.). These grants were already vital to arts organizations' budgets before COVID-19 hit, and they've only become more crucial for survival this year.

- Artists and arts organizations need to receive grant application results as soon as possible. Community must be made aware of new granting opportunities as soon as possible. There are TOO MANY outstanding grant applications and applicants need to receive decisions immediately
- Arts communities need your government to recognize the significant impact that the current state of the private sector market is having on our usual revenue sources. Additional emergency grants should be considered for arts organizations and non-profits to help make up for the lack of funding available in the private sector (sponsorship and donations) this year.
- Legislate residential and commercial rent and mortgage relief. Legislate rent control, rent/mortgage freezes and the banning of evictions and rent increases both during this pandemic and the uncertain times ahead as Ontario recovers
- Many Live Entertainment Industry workers (technicians, artisans and crafts persons in the entertainment industry including live theatre, motion picture, television production and trade shows) are cobbling several jobs together to make a livable wage. This is not sustainable and requires immediate provincial government support. While they wait to be seen by this government they like many others in our culture sector are struggling to cover basic expenses such as rent, medical prescriptions and food.
- Acknowledge fashion communities ongoing call to government to recognize our fashion and textile industries as part of the culture sector and fund it as such. Our significant lack of local, provincial, national manufacturers has resulted in our governments relying heavily on PPE manufacturing offshore.
- Arts organizations need more clarity around 'Ontario Live' and how/if this program will benefit them
- Fund seniors' arts programs. Previous programs such as the Engaging Seniors through the Arts Program recognized the immense value of the arts to senior health, wellness and connectivity. Our seniors are some of the hardest hit by COVID-19
- Re-launch the Ontario Arts Endowment Program which matched private sector donations with government funding. Some stakeholders have reported more than a 50% loss in private sector funding over this time last year. They are asking for fast-flowing emergency grants to help them get by
- The Community Museum Operating Grant (CMOG) has not been increased in over 10 years resulting in under-funded cultural institutions unable to compete with modern technologies and accessibility needs of diverse visitors. Funding must mirror inflation and the costs of current operational needs. Our museum communities report significant difficulties engaging with the Grants Ontario Portal.

We know these asks are significant, but the challenges this sector faces are enormous. We urge you again to listen to the voices of artists and the creative sector, and take urgent action.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jill Andrew, PhD
MPP Toronto-St. Paul's
Ontario NDP Culture Critic
Women's Issues Critic

Signed By:



MPP Jessica Bell, University-Rosedale



MPP Marit Stiles, Davenport



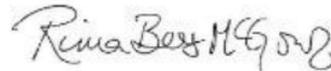
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