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TESTIMONY FROM FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN, FOR NYS LEGISLATURE
HEARING ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

I am Fran Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera. For 52 years, Regina Opera has offered fully-staged operas with full orchestra and English supertitles, as well as many concerts. We provide affordable entertainment in accessible venues for audience members who may not otherwise attend live performances. The performances bring happiness and empathy to our audiences, and bring people together, especially Senior Citizens which make up about 65% of our audience.

We perform 3 full operas each season, each featuring 4 ticketed and one totally free performance, complete with supertitles, and many free concerts in parks, libraries, and festivals, and ticketed concerts in our theater in Sunset Park, an underserved and low income community. All bring foot traffic to local restaurants and shops, assisting them financially in this difficult time.

The need for this cultural enrichment is reflected in the fact that over 4000 people usually attend our performances each season.

Due to COVID-19 Regina Opera lost the ticket income and private sponsorships from 16 months of live productions, as we pivoted to posting archived operas and new recorded concerts on our YouTube page. Regina Opera, as well as the huge number of arts and cultural organizations, have relied upon public funding – paying for rent, insurance, phone and phone answering services to keep our companies "alive".

We at Regina Opera have reopened to the public and are now planning both free and ticketed events, for which will rely upon funding that NYSCA provides to other public agencies.

As a member of the public as well as an arts producer, I would like to stress the critical need for support of the Arts and Cultural organizations all of which were devastated by COVID-19.

We especially request increase in funding which will be used for organizations and neighborhoods that were the hardest hit by COVID and are under-supported in general.

Our NYC friends and neighbors, especially in low-income neighborhoods such as Sunset Park, Brooklyn, are still suffering greatly, and we owe it to these great folks to help them to return to “normal” life, in which the Arts and Culture plays a big part.

We ask that the legislature

- Fund the NY State Council on the Arts at a baseline of \$150M (including an increase in capital funding to \$30M) in order to fully support the thousands of arts organizations doing critical work across the state. In particular we ask that the increased funds be used to deliver support to BIPOC-led/serving organizations which have been historically underfunded and are at increased risk post-pandemic.
- Create a \$150 million, three-year post-COVID relief and stabilization fund, open to both for-profit and nonprofit live performing arts organizations and sole proprietors. This would provide urgently needed relief for large and small organizations and individual arts workers who continue to lose work due to the pandemic. This would be a relief fund delivered directly to the sector, on par with the program California is enacting.
- Open the existing Small Business Relief fund to nonprofit cultural organizations and sole proprietors. There are funds remaining in this program, which is currently open only to ‘for profit’ small businesses.

Thank you for this hearing and for all your work,



Francine Garber-Cohen