

November 8, 2017

The Committee on Government Operations  
Committee Chair Councilmember Brandon Todd  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 105  
Washington DC 20004

CC: Councilmembers: Trayon White Sr., Brianne K Nadeau, Jack Evans, Elissa Silverman

**Re: Testimony of Listen Local First DC on B22-508 Office and Commission of Nightlife Establishment Act**

Dear Members of the Council,

Listen Local First (LLF) supports the general idea of creating legislation to establish an Office of Nightlife to coordinate government agencies, businesses and community groups as they navigate the after-hour economy. However, LLF strongly believes there are a number of structures that need to be established, research that needs to be done, and coordination between already existing agencies that needs to happen before such an important position is created. At a time when DC is losing culturally important music venues to rising rent costs and rampant development, regulations restricting live music are becoming more common, and the festival/event permitting process is stuck in a bureaucratic mire, the need for a position to focus on these very specific issues is more important than ever, just not without the proper coordination prior to its establishment.

Listen Local First (LLF) was established a little over 6 years ago for the purpose of creating alternate avenues for local music exploration and to raise the profile of working musicians living within the District. The initiative aimed at creating connections between locally owned businesses, local artists, cultural institutions and government officials to better navigate our own music economy and create greater opportunities for musicians to have a say in their own success in this city. In the past 6 years LLF has, hosted two local music policy conferences in coordination with the Music Policy Forum and Georgetown University, created connections between hundreds of local businesses and musicians, released quarterly playlist showcasing rising talent in all genres across the district, facilitated dozens of meetings between musicians and local government officials, produced over 50 smaller local events and panel discussions, co-produced the Kingman Island Bluegrass and Folk Festival and co-founded DC's largest all local music festival, Funk Parade, four years ago.

To begin, LLF believes that the definition of "after hours economy" meaning economic activity occurring primarily between the hours of 5pm and 5am, is too narrow. A large section of DC's entertainment economy happens in the form of festivals, many of which begin outside of those hours. Festivals would require a significant amount of attention from this office. The complicated nature of the permitting process and the multiple agencies that require coordination are exactly the type of responsibilities this office should be designed to handle. These issues do not just happen from 5pm to 5am so there is no need for this part of the definition in the legislation.

Second, there are experts that live in this city that work on national music policy issues and know exponentially more researchers, officials, and consultants in cities around the country who would be an excellent resource in helping guide the roles and responsibilities of the position. **Appendix A** has a list of some of those contacts.

Third, the DC Cultural Plan is about to be released. The Office of Planning, Office of Cable, Television, Film, Music and Entertainment and the Commission on Arts and Humanities spent 6 months meeting

with creatives in all wards of the city to come up with a comprehensive Cultural Plan for the city. LLF hosted two working meetings with over 50 local musicians and a full day conference to gather data on the specific needs and issues facing the local music community. We urge the member of this committee to review the Cultural Plan and all of its recommendation and resources before moving ahead with this legislation as it stands.

LLF is not advocating that the Cultural Plan will actually have a complete set of recommendation for the framework of a similar position, in fact, a large criticism of the process for the creation of the DC Cultural Plan is a similar criticism and concern for this proposed legislation. The criticism is that neither of these processes were founded with the backing of hard data.

The ongoing recommendation from LLF and multiple members of the music community, is that real change to benefit the music community can only be achieved after the government has conducted a comprehensive census and survey of all of the resources, musicians, venues, associations, and general assets that make up the local music economy. This type of study conducted in cities like Austin, Denver, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, has been the backbone for real economic impact analyses that have led to the adoption of meaningful policy reform. DC needs to collect this real data to fully understand the creative economy and make proper policy recommendations.

Finally, in order to create a successful Office of Nightlife the city will need to establish a structure that represent the make-up of the Nightlife Economy. There is no way this need for representation can be met by having one member of a five-person board represent the “creatives” as a whole. It is for this reason that LLF has advocated for the establishment of a Local Music Taskforce to be created under the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development.

This proposal was highlighted in LLF’s recommendations to the DC Cultural Plan committee. The body of the Taskforce would be made up of members representing various music communities in DC, managers, record labels, local music media outlets, and locally owned venues. Major responsibilities of this Taskforce would be to: liaison with members of the various government agencies on issues specific to the local music economy, be a sounding board to resolve issues of concern among DC musicians, and be the champion of DC musicians when seeking partnerships with local and national brands and businesses. Additional responsibilities will almost certainly involve: advocacy for historic and cultural designation around areas housing historic music venues, the negotiation of sound abatement costs to be carried solely by new real estate developers in this area, and navigating the unnecessarily convoluted DCRA and HSEMA permitting requirements around special events and festivals.

If a support structure such as the Local Music Taskforce is not established prior the creation of an Office of Nightlife, the office will be overwhelmed with the multitude of extremely specific and very important issues of concern to DC musicians. The structure of the office as proposed will not be able to sufficiently address the incredibly diverse needs of the music economy as well as the needs of, festivals, nightclubs, restaurants etc.

It is important to reiterate that the establishment of this Commission and Office is incredibly important and will be valuable for the DC creative economy. However, LLF believes this legislation needs to 1) incorporate recommendations from experts around the country 2) be based on real data collected through a formal creative census 3) include coordinated recommendations from multiple DC agencies and the Cultural Plan and 4) be built upon a support structure to address the specific needs of each creative sub economy.

Thank You,

Christopher Naoum

Founder – Listen Local First DC

Co-Founder – Funk Parade

Co-Producer – Kingman Island Bluegrass & Folk Festival

## **APPENDIX A: MUSIC POLICY EXPERTS TO CONNECT WITH**

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