May 13, 2020

Dear U.S. Senators and Representatives and State Legislators:

I am contacting you today in support of the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA) and its members located in the Buncombe County area, including The Orange Peel, the Grey Eagle, L.E.A.F arts festival, ISIS Music Hall, Asheville Music Hall, White Horse Black Mountain, Connect Beyond Festival, and dozens more.

Our area proudly draws visitors and locals with its vibrant, unique entertainment and cultural offerings. Our local music industry helps define us as a city and as an arts community, as many national publications, such as Rolling Stone, have noticed (Why Asheville, NC Is the New Must-Visit Music City, March 2019).

Many venues, festivals and organizations among our local NIVA members see nearly 50% of their annual customer base travel from more than 100 miles away, which is a significant contributor to our vital lodging and tourism industry. Venues such as the Orange Peel draw over 125,000 concert attendees to our area each year.

This segment will be significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis for the long term. Given the immediate bans on mass gatherings and indefinite social distancing requirements, they were the first to close and will be among the last to return to "business as usual".

Their industry projects at least 12 to 18 months before normal business activities can resume. The current requirements for the Payroll Protection Program under the CARES Act do not meet their needs as shuttered or vastly reduced businesses, with little to no work for their largely public-facing employees.

We at the BCTDA support the request from NIVA to extend and amend the PPP program to address the unique needs of these businesses. Most importantly:

1) The period of validity must be extended well beyond eight weeks, given their expected timeline for reopening.
2) They must be allowed to use forgivable loans for all business expenses, not primarily payroll.

We urge you to support the Cleaver-Williams letter in the US House and the Cornyn-Carper letter in the US Senate.

Explore Asheville is extremely proud of our area’s vibrant music and entertainment history and exciting future as a music tourism destination city. We appreciate your support in ensuring that this important draw to Asheville survives, so they can again attract visitors to share the unique, authentic Asheville experience.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Pace Brown
Explore Asheville President and CEO