May 6, 2020

Dear Senator Baldwin, Senator Johnson and Congressman Kind:

We are writing to you today on behalf of the independent music venues in the Eau Claire region, who not only have felt the effects of the current health and economic crisis like the rest of us, but by their nature are experiencing greater distress because they were among the first to close and will likely be the last to open.

The Eau Claire area has in recent years undergone a dramatic economic resurgence, in no small part due to its growing reputation for culture and the performing arts. Several of our local venues and festivals are members of the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA), which represents this unique segment of the industry. They include The Pablo Center at the Confluence, The Grand (Chippewa Valley Theatre Guild), The Metro, The Plus, The Mabel Tainter, The Blue Ox Festival, Country Jam, Eaux Claires and the Sounds Like Summer Concert Series. The economic survival and recovery of these organizations will have a direct impact on our local economy.

Studies show that every $1.00 spent on a ticket within these venues is equal to $12.00 additional economic impact on surrounding businesses. The Pablo Center in Eau Claire is a prime example of the indirect economic benefits of these centers. The Pablo Center spends $3.2 MM on direct services each year and its patrons provide an additional $38 million of purchasing. It has also been a catalyst for $122 million of surrounding downtown development, along with providing work for 165 employees of the Pablo Center and surrounding hospitality industries.

Unfortunately, current federal programs to address the survival of businesses and non-profits in these challenging times are not a very good fit for these organizations, who are unlikely to be able to return to business as usual for another 12 to 18 months. For example, the current requirements and rules associated with the Payroll Protection Program under the CARES Act do not meet their needs for longer-term solutions. NIVA has proposed to Congress a number of specific measures that would help, including flexibility in the uses and timing of PPP loans, tax relief and deferrals, unemployment assistance, business recovery and reopening assistance, and more. We urge Congress to give serious consideration to these proposals as it drafts the next phase of economic relief.

Taking action soon will help to ensure that these vital parts of our communities’ economic and cultural fabric survive as cities across the nation emerge from the crisis.

Sincerely,

David W. Minor
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