



May 7, 2016

On behalf of the more than 1,100 members of Actors' Equity Association who live and work in the District of Columbia I am writing to express strong support for the Commission on the Arts and Humanities Dedicated Funding Amendment Act of 2018.

Actors' Equity is the labor union representing professional actors and stage managers who work in live theatre. I write to you not only as Equity's President, but also as an Equity member who recently spent several weeks working at the National Theatre during the 2016-2017 tour of "Fun Home." While many of you may think of our members when you see a production at larger venues like the Kennedy Center or Ford's Theatre, the reality is that Equity members are going to work day in and day out at other theaters throughout the District, such as Theatre J, a 238-seat theater on 16th Street.

Make no mistake, this proposal is not just good for those of us who work in the arts. It's good for the entire economy. Equity released our first-ever study of regional theatre and found that the District of Columbia produced the second-most weeks of professional theatre of any city listed in the rankings. That strong cultural economy helps create a stronger economy for everyone.

Equity members are the heart and soul of productions that generate millions of dollars in economic activity, working in middle-class jobs that cannot be offshored. Theaters don't just create jobs onstage and backstage (actors, stage managers, crew, musicians) and in the front of the house (box office personnel, ushers, concessions and merchandise sales). They also create administrative jobs for those who find the plays, develop the plays, fundraise and manage the facilities.

Beyond that, though, theatre is an economic stimulus to the surrounding community. The performing arts attract tourists. They encourage the establishment of ancillary businesses (restaurants, parking garages, hotels) and encourage both entrepreneurship and real estate development within their geographic spheres of influence. It's easy to forget how Studio Theatre, which has been employing Equity members for years, helped lead the revitalization of 14th Street when it opened in 1978.

[A 2017 study by the nonprofit organization Americans for the Arts](#) estimated the economic value generated by the audiences attending performing arts events in the District of Columbia exceeded \$1.2 billion. Local arts organizations generated another \$1.6 billion in economic activity, for a combined impact of nearly \$3 billion.

For all the reasons I've outlined, it's clear that the arts are a huge economic driver in the District of Columbia. But despite all this, the funding for theatre remains incredibly tenuous, even in today's economy. While the National Endowment for the Arts has now withstood two attempts by the Trump Administration to zero out funding completely, the reality is that NEA funding has been slashed by \$20 million annually since 2010. Even more troubling, state and local arts funding has failed to make up the difference. This year's State Arts funding [is down \\$9 million](#) across the country according to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA). State funding remains below all-time high funding levels in 2001, and when accounting for inflation, state funding for the arts is 42.5 percent below 2001 levels.

I should note that in most cases, dedicated arts funds represent important seed funding that allows many Equity theaters to do the fundraising they need to bring a full season of theatre to the stage. For example, many theaters around the country that receive NEA funds can use that as a credential to secure additional

funding from private philanthropies. Without strong seed funding, local arts organizations would find it much harder to raise funds from the private sector.

On behalf of all the members of the Equity community who live and work in the District of Columbia, I want to thank you all for engaging in this debate, and strongly encourage you to support the Commission on the Arts and Humanities Dedicated Funding Amendment Act.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Shindle', written in a cursive style.

Kate Shindle
President, Actors' Equity Association