

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Executive Office of the Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC 20004

March 22, 2022

CC: The DC Council Committee on the Whole, Chairman Phil Mendelson, Councilmember Kenyon McDuffie, Councilmember Charles Allen, Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, Councilmember Christina Henderson, Councilmember Anita Bonds, Councilmember Janeese Lewis-George, Councilmember Robert White, Councilmember Mary Cheh, Councilmember Trayon White, Councilmember Elissa Silverman, Councilmember Vincent Gray, Director Solana Vander Nat, Deputy Mayor John Falcicchio, Director Andrew Trueblood, Director Angie Gates, Director Heran Sereke-Bhrak, Kennisha Davy

RE: DC Music Budget and Policy Priorities for DC Council and the Mayor

Dear Mayor Bowser and Members of the DC Council,

The DC Music Stakeholder Coalition is a group of advocates and DC music community leaders who have met weekly for the past two years to share resources, build community solidarity, and propose policies to help our vibrant communities survive and thrive throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Our advocacy coalition, which has grown to over 300 members, represents artists, managers, agencies, producers, art collectives, cultural non-profits, festivals, music educators, recording studios and venues. These individuals and entities represent every ward and nearly every major musical community in the District.

For the past two years, we have polled our community members to discern the issues that matter the most to them. Given that this week marks the beginning of the budget negotiation process we wanted to highlight some of the top concerns of our community in the hopes that the administration and council can find ways to support these needs in the coming fiscal year and beyond.

As you all are aware, the pandemic has sent shockwaves through the music community. Recent surveys and data indicate that while many sectors of the economy fared much better than expected over the past two years, the music community and entertainment sector — which are crucial economic drivers for cities like DC — have suffered devastating losses. Every sector of this community from artists to venues to producers and sound engineers faced an uphill financial battle in 2021 and a couple of months after live entertainment started to resume everyone was shut back down for an additional three months due to Omicron. We are hopeful that 2022 will see some sense of normalcy and stability for the community as a whole, but we are all incredibly wary that come fall and winter we may be forced to sustain another round of closures.

For these reasons, we urge the administration and the Council to prioritize support of the backbone of DC's cultural economy — live music — and to take the appropriate measures to ensure that DC's world-renowned music community can return and thrive as it did over two years ago.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The DC Music Stakeholder Coalition has outlined six funding and policy priorities that we would urge the administration and council to consider in 2022 and for the 2023 budget cycle.

- Increase funding and performance opportunities for musicians including grants for individual creatives to activate public spaces.
- Increase and continue relief funding for cultural event producers and music festivals, especially those that have not received any local or federal relief funding to date
- Continue relief funding for music venues, especially those that are on the verge of permanent closure due to their lack of ability to access any of the federal or local relief funding.
- Pass the Harmonious Living Legislation Act of 2021 to prevent the further displacement of entertainment venues and cultural performance spaces in our city.
- Create a minimum basic income pilot program to support our full-time creatives still recovering from the losses of the past two years
- Create a DC Music Office to address the unique needs of our internationally celebrated music industry.

Increase funding and performance opportunities for musicians for the summer and fall of 2022 and through the budget for the 2023 fiscal year

Music brings joy to communities, and after two years of intense social distancing, hesitancy to resume regular attendance of indoor shows and canceled opportunities we need to get our artists back to work.

The fastest way to do this is to create a fund utilizing leftover American Recovery Plan (ARP) funding and/or unspent Bridge Fund resources to establish an individual grant program of at least \$300,000 to support outdoor performances for the remainder of 2022. This approach supports artists, sound engineers and others involved in performances, and benefits the community arts institutions that may host them. We welcome the opportunity to work with any agency tasked with the administration of this grant to ensure the production community and outreach support.

Our coalition would be happy to suggest DC performance professionals with relevant experience to design and manage the application and grant-making process in collaboration with the DC government. It is essential that these funds are distributed to artists living and performing in all wards of the city and that grantees represent the diversity of musical styles that make this city unique.

This coalition also hopes that the administration and The Council will explore opportunities for artists and creatives to receive even more government grant assistance in FY 2023. It will take years to make up the losses they suffered over the past two years. More and more artists are seeking opportunities through grants from the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities as well as other agencies to help make up for lost income and in quite a number of cases loss of opportunity to perform considering so many venues have closed permanently during the pandemic.

We urge the Administration and Council to approve DCCAH funding at or above the FY2020 funding level. A caveat to this request is that we hope that DCCAH will increase funding for individual musicians, increase funding for DC's GoGo community, and increase funding for East of the River artists and projects. Individual music grants are the smallest category of Fellowship grants distributed by the Commission, yet music is one of the largest cultural economic drivers of the city.

Increase and continue relief funding for cultural event producers and music festivals, especially those that have been excluded from current relief funding opportunities.

We want to thank the administration for taking the very important steps of establishing and expanding the Special Events Fee Fund. We believe this action has been incredibly helpful for our event community partners who host events on city streets and property where significant expenditure on MPD security and city permits are needed.

This fund, while helpful to some, does not provide relief to a large number of our beloved event producers, many of whom were not even eligible for federal relief through the SBA's Shuttered Venue Operator Grant. A more detailed analysis of the specific needs of independent festival and cultural event producers was expressed in a separate letter to the council and administration on March 16th.

Similar to our proposal for funding individual artist performances, we believe funding for festival producers should also come from leftover Bridge Fund or ARP money. These festivals are returning this Summer and Fall, creating time pressure that warrants allocating these funds outside of the budget and DCCAH process, and through entities that can fund non-profit producers and for-profit producers alike. Given the size, scope and economic impact of the festivals in this city, an initial fund of at least \$3,000,000 should be allocated to help these producers have a successful 2022 season. We also urge the administration to consider up to \$15,000,000 to be budgeted to support festivals over the next five years.

Continue Relief Funding for Music Venues, especially those that may have survived the pandemic but are on the verge of closing their doors permanently.

The Music Venue community is grateful for the support the local government has provided over the past two years. Between the Bridge Fund, Arts and Venue Relief Act and other federal funding opportunities, the venues that were able to withstand the initial blow of the pandemic have been able to recoup a large part of their losses. There are however, several venues that fell on hard times at the very beginning of the pandemic and have not been able to qualify for any of the subsequent local or federal relief funding. The hurdles that prevented these venues in the direst straits from applying for relief funding a year ago, still remain in place as the requirement to access additional funding support aimed at helping those very businesses. Even losing one additional music venue at this point is a problem after so many spaces have closed permanently during the pandemic. Unlike other types of businesses, when a music venue closes it is rarely replaced with another music venue and the entire music community that depends on the space is permanently impacted.

Given the way the COVID-19 has come in waves over the past two years it is very plausible that the end of 2022 may bring another surge or perhaps a different variant causing temporary shutdowns once again. It is for this reason that we ask the council to prepare for this very real possibility and allocate additional relief funding to be dispensed to venues as needed. Venues like many other local hospitality-related businesses are struggling with finding new staff as well as specialized sound engineers, bookers and production managers. If these venues know that there is funding set aside for another future shutdown they can guarantee their staff payment and salaries and know that there is relief on the way to cover their loss of business during that period. Having this budgeted funding not only allows the venues to survive but helps support their families, staff and community.

Pass the Harmonious Living Amendment Act of 2021 to prevent the further displacement of entertainment venues and performance spaces in our city.

The Harmonious Living Amendment Act of 2021 was introduced to Council by Councilmembers Brianne Nadeau, Janeese Lewis-George, Christina Henderson and Brooke Pinto in the spring of 2021. This piece of legislation was a collaborative effort raised by music venues, artists and a coalition of creative advocates to preserve our historic music venues and performance spaces and prevent the displacement of these spaces amidst an ever-changing and developing vibrant city. The proposed legislation was never brought to a hearing and has since stalled in Council.

The proposed legislation addresses our city's ongoing debate about public noise by adopting the "Agent of Change" principle, which establishes that the business or person responsible for a change to the city's landscape must also be responsible for managing the impact of that change. As density, growth, and development surge in cities all around us, the Agent of Change principle places the burden of mitigating the acoustic impact of those shifts on the developers — NOT the street performers and entertainment performance venues toiling to provide for themselves and keep DC's streets culturally vibrant.

This one-of-a-kind legislation includes a series of proposals tailored to fit the specific needs of our thriving, diverse, creative city. Developers must be required to build to higher acoustic standards in entertainment districts; venues and existing property owners will be eligible for funding or tax incentives to retrofit their properties with acoustic upgrades; new renters and owners will be provided with disclosures stating the type of neighborhood they are moving into; a survey will be conducted to provide resources for street performers to access in order to avoid future conflict over noise complaints and ensure harmony with DC's older and newer residents alike.

We ask that the Council hold a hearing and mark-up of this very important legislation and not delay any further. This legislation is important and its value stands on its own and could provide immediate benefits for our ever changing city landscape.

Create a minimum basic income pilot program to support our full-time creatives still recovering from the losses of the past two years

The pandemic has highlighted some of the extreme difficulties of being a creative independent gig worker in a city that is becoming increasingly unaffordable for the creative community that fosters the urban center's development and growth. Full-time independent gig workers, especially musicians, make a majority of their income from regular gigs and performances. If it wasn't for the CARES Act that allowed gig workers to apply for unemployment, many of these creatives would have had no way to support themselves and their families while venues were closed. Now that restrictions have been lifted, we understand that attendance at many venues is only now starting to return to pre-pandemic levels. Two years have changed people's behaviors, so we expect a continued lull in attendance during the late fall and winter months and possibly the next year or two. This will mean fewer paying patrons and much less income for artists.

It is for these reasons that the DC Music Stakeholders Coalition has been reaching out to experts on minimum basic income and reaching out to officials in other cities across the country who have introduced Minimum Basic Income Pilot programs over the past two years. The Yerba Buena Center¹ who co-sponsored the Minimum Basic Income Pilot with the City of San Francisco has studied the impact of regular payments to these communities and has seen that adequate resources and support for the creatives, increases creative output, strengthens whole neighborhoods and communities and improves the health and well being of those communities as well.

We urge the administration to join the Mayors for Guaranteed Income Coalition² and communicate with cities across the country that have successfully launched creative minimum basic income pilots in order to launch a similar program for our city and our creatives. We

¹

<https://sfmayor.org/article/mayor-breed-announces-launch-guaranteed-income-pilot-program-san-francisco-artists>

² <https://www.mayorsforagi.org/>

understand that there is a lot of research and time that would need to go into this projects but there are many creatives within our Stakeholder group that would happily provide their time to work with city officials on how to structure such a program.

Create a DC Music Office to address the unique needs of our internationally celebrated music industry

This final point is one that we understand may be a longer term goal, but one that is crucial to the growth and development of our music economy. DC's Music industry is composed of many diverse stakeholders and related businesses that all function in a symbiotic ecosystem. The industry spans multiple sectors of the economy from youth education to nightlife, tourism, community development and placemaking and therefore there are at least five different administrative bodies and agencies that share in its oversight. This current framework makes it very difficult to address issues that may come up and impact a diverse group of stakeholders within the industry.

The music and performance communities are some of the only industries that have two competing parts that are also essential to each other. The music community consists of the venues, the presenters, promoters, bookers and festival organizers and their staff, but it also includes the musicians, managers, labels, distributors, recording studios and more. The unique interplay of all of these different types of businesses can only be addressed by an office whose true focus is to understand the music industry and its impact on our local economy.

An office of Music, Performance and Festivals that supports venues and music infrastructure partners, addresses the needs of artist livability in the city, handles noise complaints with a dedicated staff of professional sound engineers, and acts as the primary liaison for festival and public event permitting makes the most sense for our city. Other cities around the country have successfully established music offices and while we do not advocate for adopting a model that was designed for the specific needs of another city, we believe that these offices share some basic similarities that can help address DC's unique needs.

The San Francisco Entertainment Commission was created to serve the needs of the entertainment community and they recognize music and performance as one of the largest parts of their entertainment community. This office is designed to serve venues and performers as well as handle permitting for outdoor music festivals and events. This office is also tasked with handling noise complaints and enforcing their Agent of Change legislation. Seattle has a vibrant music scene as well as their own Music Commission dedicated to growing the scene through advocacy and partnerships with businesses as well as film and other industries. Austin is another great example of a city with a Music Commission whose mission is to meet the needs of the growing music industry. The Austin Music Commission has a critical advisory role in studying the impact of development and growth on the music economy and providing resources to meet the needs of a growing music industry.

The DC Music Stakeholders would gladly meet with the council and the administration to implement a workgroup that can begin to explore the idea of a DC Music Office and the responsibilities thereof.

CONCLUSION

The six priorities above are directly tied to the livelihood of the music community and warrant more immediate consideration. We look forward to the administration and council helping us address these issues through the budget negotiation and/or in council sessions over the next year. There are however other issues that are shared with the Stakeholder Committee in our weekly meetings and in fairness to all of our members we wanted to also provide an Appendix with a more comprehensive list of issues that regularly come up in our weekly meetings. Appendix A outlines an extensive but by no means comprehensive list of other issues the music community feels strongly about.

The DC Music Stakeholder Committee would like to thank the administration and the council for taking the time to read our letter and we appreciate your continued support for the music community. If you have any questions or would like to further discuss any of the proposed funding and policy priorities outlined in this letter we would be more than happy to set up a time to follow up in the next couple of weeks.

Sincerely,
Organizers of the DC Music Stakeholder Coalition

Caroline Phillips, National Cannabis Festival
Aaron Myers, Chair- Capitol Hill Jazz Foundation
Will Suter, All Things Go
Sunny Sumter, DC Jazz Festival
Rev. Dr. Sandra Butler-Truesdale, DC Legendary Musicians, Inc. (501c3)
Simona Wright-James, Porchfest DC
Nia Mobley, Porchfest DC
Christopher Naoum, Listen Local First DC/ Down in the Reeds Festival
Dior Ashley Brown, DC Music Summit
Jackson Sinnenberg, CapitalBop and the Home Rule Music and Film Preservation Foundation
Sandra Basanti, Pie Shop DC
Nicholas Fontana, Pearl Street Warehouse
Travis Gardner, The Experience Band & Show, LLC
Charlie Gardner, The Experience Band & Show, LLC
Layne Garrett, Rhizome DC
Tom Pipkin, Pipkin Creative
Michael J. West, independent music journalist
Julianne Brienza, Capital Fringe

Jeremy Castillo, Levine Music
Robert Coltun, Bossa Bistro
Diana Ezerins, Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts
Graham Smith-White, The Infinite Goodness
Jen Saavedra, Down In The Reeds Festival
Jenny Langer, ECE, Moonshine Society, The Ron Holloway Band
Jamal Gray, CulturalDC, Black Fire Culture
Hassan El-Tayyab, American Nomad
Evan Sheres, Rock Creek Kings
Daniel Buchner, Kingman Island Festival
Oren Levine, independent musician and songwriter
Herb Scott, Capitol Hill Jazz Foundation

APPENDIX A

A More Comprehensive List of Additional Funding and Policy Issues the Music Community Cares About

- Adopt a Citywide Fair Trade Music Framework Instituting Best Practices for Live Performance
- Fund a program to provide financial support for independent local music and media coverage
- Incentivize Music Production and Recording Space in the City
- Create a Job Training Program for Sound Engineer and Stage Production Tech
- Build Relationships with National Music Industry Companies to Grow Local Resources
- Establish City Agency Paid Internships and Fellowships for DC Based Creatives
- Limit the Ability of Neighborhood Voluntary Agreement to restrict live music space.
- Create designated musician loading zones outside established music venues
- Ease Permitting Restrictions to allow creatives to activate unused former business spaces downtown
- Allocate Recurring Funding for a Music Census that can take place every 5 years.
- Create a Touring Fund for Go Go Bands and large musical ensembles
- Ask DCCAH to grant Project Event and Festival Grants on a rolling basis
- Work with Destination DC to provide more funding to highlight our DC based musicians, historic venues and independent cultural festivals