

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

March 19, 2021

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 Shawn Townsend, Deputy Mayor John Falcicchio, Director Andrew Trueblood, Director Angie Gates and Director Maryann Lombardi

**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 twice a week, every week for the past year 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, with representation from every ward and nearly every major musical community in the District.

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 year, the music community and entertainment sector — which are crucial economic drivers for cities like DC — have suffered devastating losses, with no clear path to recovery in sight. Many in our artist community are quietly suffering, now more than ever. Musicians have been deprived of a majority of their regular income for nearly a full year. Some are only receiving minimal unemployment benefits, provided they were able to collect in the first place. (Many musicians have fallen through the cracks of DC's overloaded unemployment system.) Others have been forced to abandon their profession entirely to take up jobs in other sectors to support themselves and their families. Many artists will be saddled with insurmountable debt when rent is finally due, and many have moved away from the city and may not return. Likewise, those that support the music community through sound engineering, event production, management, and recording are suffering the same losses.

Finally, the pandemic has devastated a central pillar of our music economy infrastructure: music venues. Over the course of 2020, Washington, DC lost eleven music venues, seven of which closed as a direct consequence of Covid. Those seven venues are primarily small, historic

venues catering to DC's vibrant Black music community by presenting jazz, soul, R&B and Funk, and their loss will be deeply felt by the community for years to come.

As the city begins to look towards reopening, we want to 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 over the next couple months and following year to ensure that DC's world renowned music community has the ability to return and thrive once this pandemic is over.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The DC Music Coalition has outlined four different funding priorities and nine policy priorities that we would urge the administration and council to consider in 2021 and for the 2022 budget cycle. The lingering effects of COVID will have a negative impact on all sectors of the music community well into 2022, yet with vaccinations increasing and residents eager to resume some sense of normalcy, there is an expectation that some forms of music and live entertainment will resume in the next couple months. In order to make that transition easier for our community, we have proposed the creation of two performance funds, one for musicians and one for festival producers, as well as an additional round of funding through our proposed Music Venue Relief Act, to help venues whose businesses may not return to normal until the spring of 2022. Our final funding priority asks the administration and council to fund the DC commission on the Arts and Humanities at or above its FY2020 levels.

The music community has had one year of weekly discussions about the policies that can help our ecosystem grow and thrive especially in a post COVID environment. Those policy priorities include: establishing **fair and equitable guidelines for the return of live music**; the introduction and passage of the **Harmonious Living Amendment Legislation of 2021**; adopt **Fair Trade Music principles for funding** around live entertainment; **incentivise the development of new music production, recording and practice space** along with industry **job training programs**; leverage relationships to **build more national music industry infrastructure**; **include musicians and artists in city planning discussions**, **ease permitting restrictions** for pop up art and music events; **ease restrictions on outdoor performance** in community spaces and public parks.

## **MUSIC COMMUNITY FUNDING PRIORITIES**

### **Fund Individual Creatives Through Outdoor Live Performances throughout the Summer and Fall of 2021.**

Music brings joy to communities, and after one year of intense social distancing and quarantining, newly vaccinated residents will want to get out in their community and enjoy live music. The safest way to do that in the immediate future is through live outdoor performances and experiences.

Cities across the US have announced their plans to fund outdoor music performances throughout the Summer and Fall of 2021, in order to bring people together and provide opportunities for local artists. We urge the city to utilize leftover CARES funding and/or unspent Bridge Fund resources to create a \$300,000-plus grant program supporting the presentation of outdoor performances.

This fund would create a safe way for artists to perform for communities, and since our venues are still shuttered there are very few traditional avenues to pay artists for their performances. Furthermore, the costs of outdoor performance are greater than traditional indoor shows; artists will need to secure power, sound systems, and sound engineers, on top of their labor preparing for the performance itself.

We ask that these funds be reallocated in an expedient manner, as opposed to the protracted timeline of a full budget proceeding so that artists can begin performing in a matter of months. These funds should also be separate from grants and funding artists might otherwise receive through the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (DCCAH), because the lengthy administrative process of distributing funds through the Commission will pose a significant challenge to artists who need those funds urgently.

Finally, 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.

**Additional funding is needed for presenters and festival producers who are anticipating reviving their events in 2021.**

Our coalition was pleased to see that promoters and producers were eligible for the Supporting Businesses Entertainment Bridge Fund. Those funds were critical to cover the immense financial losses many of these institutions have suffered over the past year. Sadly, many smaller entertainment presenters who focus on community-based and cultural events were left out of that funding due to the annual overhead fixed cost threshold.

Last year, a coalition of DC event organizers and producers sent a letter to the DC Council and the mayor's administration expressing the need for ongoing support for festival organizations as we all navigate the new world of public events post COVID. Beyond the challenge of recuperating losses from the past year, anyone planning to host an event in 2021 will have to deal with a significant number of additional costs to ensure the safety of attendees and artists. A non-comprehensive list of additional expenses include: the cost of PPE for artists, attendees and staff; the cost of added security to enforce social distancing; the loss of revenue due to capacity restrictions and the need to limit and space our vendors and activations in any given space; the cost of plexiglass installments for performers; the cost of additional handwashing and

hand-sanitizing stations; and additional infrastructure like added port-a-johns and queue management systems.

These additional costs add up very fast, and reduced capacity (as well as the potential lack of funding from community and regional businesses who were also hit by the pandemic) means that many of the traditional revenue streams our music community once depended upon will be disrupted, leaving most unable to recover from the additional expenses.

Similarly to our proposal for funding individual artist performances, we believe that this money should also come from leftover CARES and Bridge Fund money. These festivals are expecting to come back 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 \$3,000,000 should be allocated to help these producers have a successful 2021 season.

### **Include the Music Venue Relief Act in the Official 2022 DC Budget.**

Last fall, this Coalition shared a letter backed by over 1500 DMV music industry signatories that called for seven months of funding to help venues survive the winter months, with a proposed piece of relief legislation, called the Music Venue Relief Act (MVRA), attached. The letter was officially endorsed by seven DC councilmembers who urged the Mayor to adopt a version of the MVRA as emergency legislation. Many of the venues who signed the letter, as we know, did not survive the past twelve months — and still more might not survive another year of diminished or destroyed income. We have attached an updated version of our Music Venue Relief Act Legislation and the accompanying letter urging the council to reintroduce the legislation for FY 2022.

Despite the limited aid targeted towards venues nearly a year into the pandemic, the MVRA is still necessary. There is a great chance that indoor events at full capacity will not resume until Spring of 2022; that means the venues that survive will have gone nearly two years without meaningful, sustainable revenue. The Entertainment Bridge Fund provided much needed relief to those that have gone a full year without revenue, but it will not cover the costs of staying closed for another 8-12 months. Some venues will hopefully receive assistance from the Shuttered Venue Operators grant when that funding is released by the SBA. But we have seen that, due to numerous restrictions on who fits the definition of a traditional venue (and the legislation being open to museums, massive performance arts spaces and movie theaters), there is a real concern that there may be no funding left for the small- to medium-size venues who even qualify to apply. At this point, the SVOG cannot be a reason to hold back on local funding; we have no clue how many beloved local venues will fall through the cracks.

The funding through this legislation should be distributed in the same way that the Entertainment Bridge Fund was distributed, and should include a minimum of \$7,000,000 since some of the city's largest event and performance spaces will also be included in this funding.

The specifics of our legislation and the sliding scale of funding for venues is included in our proposed legislation, which is attached.

**Continue to Fund DCCAH at the same level it was funded in 2021.**

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. If interested we can share our 2020 Testimony from the DCCAH Oversight Hearing.

**OTHER POLICY PRIORITIES FOR 2021**

**Guidelines for Reopening** - The music community needs a strategic plan based on the data being collected through the REVS (Re-Open Every Venue Safely) Program, as well as local data that presents a safe yet reasonable plan for re-opening, distribution requirements for PPE, and a contact tracing methodologies. Our coalition is currently working on a set of community driven guidelines that we hope to present to the City in the next couple weeks to allow for outdoor music events to resume in the next couple months. If the city sees the value in resuming live performance, we believe that the City should also attempt to prioritize vaccines for live entertainment staff and performers.

**Introduction and Passage of the Harmonious Living Amendment Act of 2021** - Our community is asking The Council to reach out to Councilmember Nadeau's office and sign on to this legislation today before it's introduction next week. This unique piece of legislation could preserve our historic entertainment districts, prevent against the further gentrification of the arts and provide much needed resources for our vibrant and nationally recognized street performers. This legislation addresses the increasingly controversial narrative around "noise" in developing urban centers by fixing one of the major sources of this conflict which is insufficient sound proofing in new development.

**Adoption of a Citywide Fair Trade Music Framework** - We are in the process of drafting a Fair Trade Music resolution to present to the city for adoption. This Fair Trade Music resolution would establish a set of best practices that presenters, promoters, and venues would need to observe before receiving grants, abatements or rebates from the government. Some examples of best practices would include: use of standard contracts, payment of fair wages, sound and technical support, basic hospitality etc.

**Incentivize Music Production, Recording and Industry Job Training in the District** - The city has a severe shortage of recording and production infrastructure. There are entrepreneurs who have been trying to build and grow these resources for musicians, but they are not being acknowledged by the City and not given any form of incentive like commercial or real estate developers. Right now it is faster and cheaper for a DC artist to schedule a recording session in

New York City instead of here in DC. In addition to providing incentives for the creation of local recording infrastructure, the City should focus resources on training curriculum for students and young workers that include sound engineering and event production training.

**Build Relationships with the National Music Industry Companies to Grow Local**

**Resources** - Soundexchange, ASCAP, BMI all have headquarters in our backyard, and our community needs deeper relationships with these entities. According to preliminary data from the Music Census, only 20% of our artists have all of their copyrighted material registered with these agencies who pay artists their royalties. In addition, our city needs to focus on attracting the types of advertising, marketing, content production and media companies that are crucial to supporting a vibrant music community here in our city.

**City Planning and Zoning Coordinations with the Music Community** - Everything from working with planned commercial and residential development; doing away with community voluntary agreements that ban live music; new alcohol zones — should be done in coordination with music industry representatives. Such cooperation would provide a huge economic upside not just for the music community but for the city as a whole.

**Transportation, SideWalk, and Music Industry** - The City jumped to open up sidewalks and street parking for “Streeteries,” but when the music industry and venues complained for years about the lack of designated loading zones in front of venues (leading to musicians and tour busses getting ticketed), the city did nothing to address the problem. This is an issue that will need to be taken seriously when venues reopen; if the Streeteries are made permanent, there will be even less available loading space around our beloved venues.

**DCRA, Special Event Permitting and Temporary Spaces** - Post-pandemic, we are going to see a lot of empty retail spaces throughout the city. These spaces present countless opportunities for artists and musicians to create in pop up or even semi permanent spaces. The Administration and Council need to work with DCRA and property owners to make sure that access for creative placemaking is not overly burdensome and cost prohibitive.

**Increase Access to Outdoor Spaces for Presenting** - allow more designated outdoor spaces for presenters and performers to host live music, especially during the warmer months. This can be through the designation of public spaces for these purposes, or simply allowing venues with access to parking lots adjacent to public spaces to present in these outdoor spaces with minimal bureaucratic red tape. Finally, the city needs to permit the selling of merchandise in public outdoor performance spaces. These sales are critical to financially support performers who currently do not have access to traditional venues and indoor performance spaces.

Thank you all, again, for your time and support of 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,

Members of the DC Music Coalition Including:

Aaron Myers - Jazz Performer, Capitol Hill Jazz Foundation

Jamie Sandel, - CapitalBop

Christopher Naoum, Listen Local First DC + Down in the Reeds Festival

Sunny Sumter, DC Jazz Festival

Caroline Phillips - National Cannabis Festival

Dior Ashley Brown - Multifaceted Artist, DC Music Summit

Ariel Davis - The Kennedy Center

Douglas Yeuell - Atlas Performing Arts Center

Jessica Teachey, The MusicianShip Wammie Awards & DC Funk Parade

Karen Baker, Social Art and Culture

Kim Dreux Kelly, Think Local First DC

Jon Weiss - Union Stage, Pie Shop, Babe City Records

Evan Moses - Attorney and Band Leader of Rock Creek Kings

Rev. Dr. Sandra Butler-Truesdale - DC Legendary Musicians, Inc,

Bill Spieler - DC9 Nightclub

Andrew Grant - Director of Music / Radio Eaton DC

Graham Smith-White - The Infinite Goodness/The Sunrise Review

DC Youth Orchestra

Maija Rejman, musician and presenter

Davey S. Yarborough educator/performer

Will Suter - All Things Go

Layne Garrett - Rhizome DC

Matt Singer - DC Jazz Festival

Ben Kibour - Jojo restaurant and bar

Stacey Williams - Jazz Cat Herder, LLC

Sandra Basanti- Pie Shop

Jenny Langer- EastCoast Entertainment (ECE), Moonshine Society

Nicholas J. Fontana - Pearl Street Warehouse

Cam Poles, Black Alley Band / #HoodRockUniversity

Jamal Gray - Independent Curator / Producer

Molly Ruland - Heartcast Media & One Love Massive

Chris Grasso, musician and presenter

Amy K Bormet, musician and director of Washington Women in Jazz

Julianne Brienza, Capital Fringe

Tom Pipkin - Pipkin Creative Art & Music Productions

Nelson Jacobsen, Altavoz Volta Sound Lab.

Pedro Night, ADOBO DMV

Walter Alvarado, ADOBO DMV

Rob Coltun, Bossa Bistro / Musician

Michael Y. McFadden - DC Legendary Musicians, Inc.

Mary House-IndaHouseBand  
Oren Levine - performer and composer  
Ajoke Williams - Guided  
Adam Levin - Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center  
Herb Scott, Capitol Hill Jazz Foundation  
Kymone Freeman - We Act Radio