

February 27, 2019

Committee on the Whole  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 410  
Washington DC 20004

CC: Mayor Muriel Bowser, Director Angie Gates, Chairman Phil Mendelson, Councilmember Kenyon McDuffie, Councilmember Charles Allen, Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, Councilmember David Grosso, Councilmember Anita Bonds, Councilmember Brandon Todd, 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 Heran Sereke-Brhan, Director Maryann Lombardi

**DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities Testimony in the February 2020 Committee on the Whole Performance Oversight Hearing**

Dear Committee on the Whole,

My name is Christopher Naoum I am the co founder of Listen Local First DC. Additionally I am the co-programmer and former co-producer of the Kingman Island Bluegrass & Folk Festival, Co-Founder for the Funk Parade and the Down in the Reeds Festival and co-organizer of a yearly music policy conference now called The Music Policy Forum Summit. In the past couple of years I have applied for a number of Project Events and Festival grants from the Commission on the Arts & Humanities (DCCAH) and have also served as a panelist for the DCCAH Music Fellowship Grants for the past four years.

I am honored to have the opportunity to share my support for the Commission and the valuable work they do in support of creatives in the district but also put forward some suggestions and feedback on behalf of the music community.

**The Projects Events & Festivals grants should be offered on a rolling basis or at least twice a year.**

The current timing for this specific grant prevents the funding of smaller unique and diverse events and festivals run by smaller nonprofits and event organizers. Currently the one round of PEF funding due midsummer that then takes five months to be reviewed and an additional three months for the funds to be dispensed is a barrier to entry for many new and diverse festivals and events.

At the very least DCCAH should have a grant that is due in the early spring and one that is due in the fall. The review process for festival grants does not require applicants to come in and

present or perform, so the the process and time commitments for reviewing the grants should be much less demanding on the panelists. Ideally funding for these projects should be made available on a rolling timeline with perhaps a cap on the number of events that can be funded in any given month in order to make sure the majority of the budget is not spent in the first half of the year.

Additionally the panelists reviewing these grants need to have experience producing large scale festivals and events. While this may be difficult given that many of the folks organizing events will probably apply for these grants, there are plenty of for profit orgs, festivals and event organizers who have a real perspective on what it takes to organize large scale public events and can lend their expertise to the review process.

### **DCCAH needs to spend some additional resources on outreach to the music community.**

I have reviewed DCCAH Music Fellowship grants for the past 4 years and almost every year I see the same handful of musicians applying for these grants. This does not mean that the artists who continue to apply are not deserving of these grants, it means that the current system of outreach to the music community is flawed. The reason the same artists apply year after year is because DCCAH only sends out email notifications about upcoming grants to creatives who have previously applied for grants or have visited the website to sign up for emails.

The Commission should allocate additional resources to public outreach and advertisements in locally owned media outlets. This not only would support the local media outlets who in turn support local arts but it would really help spread the word about the grant opportunities. Additional specific grant funding for social media advertising will also be valuable for reaching a broader creative community.

Currently there is also a significant cultural barrier at play when it comes to the Music Fellowship grants. In my four years as a panelist I have maybe seen a total of two Go Go artists apply for grant funding. I do not think this is because Go Go artists do not need grant funding, instead it is clear that the opportunities for this funding is not reaching a broad section of the music community. The same disparity seems to apply to the pop, indie, punk and hip hop communities as well.

### **DCCAH should offer a much larger number of Music Fellowship Grants.**

This past summer the Mayor's Office, OCTFME and Georgetown University released the first ever DC Music Census. The purpose behind the music census was to collect information that can help provide a much more accurate picture of the size scope and economic impact of the music community. Listen Local First DC is so glad to see the launch of the DC Music Census partially because we have advocated for this type of data collection for the past five years.

Prior to this music census the data used to measure the music community only accounted for full time musicians whose federal income tax returns showed that a majority of their reported income came from music activities. By using this metric the old data showed that there were only 300 musicians living in Washington DC.

Anyone who works in the music industry or works with musicians knows that the majority of professional musicians earn their income through multiple different revenue streams and many of them are not considered music related for federal income tax purposes. Listen Local First DC has been aware that there are thousands of musicians living and working in the district that are not being accounted for when the administration measures the size of the music community. Therefore when the city plans to allocate funding in support of the music community, that funding should be based on the actual population of the music community.

Some members of the council and the government have probably received a brief overview of the DC Music Census Survey which is supposed to be released this spring. Listen Local First DC has been involved in the music census process from the beginning and we are aware that there were over 2600 unique census surveys filled out. This simple data point convincingly shows that there are way more than 300 musicians living in the district.

If the Commission is making determinations on the amount of grant money to be allocated to specific creative disciplines based on the population of those creatives living in the district then this new data is VERY significant and should lead to increased funding for the music community

Listen Local First DC hopes that DCCAH would consider doubling if not tripling the number of music fellowship grants made available in this next fiscal year and into the future.

### **DCCAH should adopt Fair Trade Music principles for every single grant awardee who plans to present live music**

Fair Trade Music principles have been adopted in cities around the country including Music Commissions from Seattle to Boston<sup>1</sup>. These live music performance principles determined by the music community through data collected on a very localized level would establish a series of best practice guidelines that should be met in order to host live music programming. The groundwork has been set for assessing opportunities and desires for principles within the local community. Preliminary surveys organized by Listen Local First DC highlight unmet professional needs including standard venue contracts with pre determined verifiable compensation models, minimum wage requirements, ease of load in requirements, established sound system and sound tech support, hospitality minimums, and shared promotional expectations.

There is no one size fits all model for these Fair Trade Music principles and they vary depending on publicly accepted community standards within the creative community in which they apply.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.imc-cim.org/news-imc/member-news/1074-fair-trade-music.html>

Fair Trade Music standards in Washington DC would therefore not necessarily be identical to Fair Trade music principles in Portland Oregon.

Fair Trade Music principles would allow artists to know that the accepted community standards are being observed at certain venues and city funded events. Likewise these principles would allow the public to know that they are supporting fair practices when they go out to their favorite clubs or festivals. We ask that the Commission take the time to adopt Fair Trade Music Principles for all grantees that aim to use city funding to host live music performances.

### **Re-allocation of DCCAH Funds to Address Certain Timely New Projects**

Last week the Mayor signed the Go-Go Official Music of the District of Columbia Designation Act . The legislation gives the Mayor a designated amount of time to come up with a plan to fully fund the legislation and all of the different programs and plans associated with it. Listen Local First DC submitted our own testimony in the hearing phase of the legislation that you all can view as part of the official record. <sup>2</sup>

Following the bill signing the Mayor was quoted in the Washington Post article as saying that the Arts Commission will be responsible for granting “a lot of dollars” to support the Go Go Legislation.<sup>3</sup> While we believe that the Commission has a role to play, the type of funding needed to support and grow the Go Go community and culture will have to come from many other sources including the Commission.

LLF believes that there is at least one funding source that can easily be reallocated to support a significant part of the Go Go legislation.

Individuals and organizations throughout the DMV like Donald Campbell and the Globe Poster Printing Co have spent years collecting and cataloging recordings and prints from concerts. If the community wants these archives to be preserved and available to the public through a free public archive, there will need to be funds allocated for the procurement of these collections as well as funds for the proper digitization and archiving of these historical records.

One possibility for funding the procurement and archiving of Go-Go recordings/ memorabilia etc would be the funds used for the DC Public Art Bank. In the last two fiscal years the city has spent between \$250,000 to \$400,000 per year on procurement of new art. Spending some of that money on securing these historic Go-Go collections may be a noteworthy way to really invest in the community and show real support for Go-Go as a true art form.

### **The creative community needs dedicated funding.**

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://iims.dccouncil.us/Download/42710/B23-0317-CommitteeReport1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/its-official-go-go-music-signed-into-law-as-the-designate-d-music-of-dc/2020/02/19/42a4ef62-52a1-11ea-b119-4faabac6674f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/its-official-go-go-music-signed-into-law-as-the-designate-d-music-of-dc/2020/02/19/42a4ef62-52a1-11ea-b119-4faabac6674f_story.html)

We do not mean to beat a dead horse when it comes to the importance of overall arts funding but LLF believes that the Commission must demand that its yearly budget comes from a dedicated funding stream and is not subject to appropriations. We hope the Commission will also restore the recommendation of the DC Cultural Plan to create two additional FTEs that are positions jointly funded by Office of Planning, DCCAH, OCTFME and DMPED.

There are so many matters that affect individual artists and musicians that cannot be addressed through grant funding allocation. The Arts Community needs a position they can rely on that is designed to support individual artists and help them with the processes of navigating issues in local government. This was really the underlying message of the Cultural Plan that got lost in the confusion around the loan proposal. While we are ending with this ask, we understand that this is the part of the testimony that the Commission itself probably has the least control over.

## **Conclusion**

We believe that some of the suggestions we have laid out in this testimony are easy lifts for the Commission and can go a long way in creating more equity for DC's vibrant talented and historically significant music scene. We understand and agree that the Commission on the Arts and Humanities is governed by a strict framework that limits its ability to build infrastructure and support mechanisms for the creative community outside of the standard and very important grant making directive. We ask however that the Commission take the time to communicate these necessary restrictions to the other agencies and elected officials. Let them know that a majority of the funding allocated to the Commission goes to support the world famous national institutions that call this city home and by virtue of their work actually do end up serving the broader arts community. Let them also know that support for independent creatives, artists, collectives and musicians are even more important and make up the real creative backbone of the arts community. As a city Washington DC does not have the music industry infrastructure that can sustain the livelihood of an ever expanding music population, but we do have incredibly intelligent musicians and activists that are willing to advise elected officials and agency representatives on how we can all work together to create more resources, new infrastructure and partnerships that can benefit the generations of musicians that will come.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Respectfully,  
Christopher Naoum - Co-Founder, Listen Local First DC