

June 23rd 2021

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

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

Requesting Funding Support for Music Festival Organizers Post-COVID

Dear Mayor Bowser and DC Council,

On March 19th, 2021, members of the DC Music Stakeholder Coalition sent you a letter outlining top funding priorities and policy goals expressed by our city's musicians, venue owners, promoters and music advocates. Today we, as representatives of DC's largest cultural events and music festivals, are following up to address the specific and time-sensitive needs of our festival community as we emerge from a year of pandemic restrictions.

Our community is excited that live entertainment is returning, though we continue to encourage our concert-going communities to get vaccinated to ensure the safety of public gatherings. While we welcome the return to "normal," the devastation felt by the music community will take years to recover from. Festivals that plan to return this year and in 2022 have suffered enormous financial losses, and are in desperate need of support. Most losses are due to sunk costs of cancelled events, but we also project losses in future revenue due to supply chain disruptions, permanent loss of vendors and providers, higher-priced new partnerships due to fewer providers in the community and significant additional costs due to public safety compliance, including additional security, personal protective equipment, hand washing stations, more port-a-johns, and, if worst comes to worst, further capacity restrictions in the future.

Last week, we re-sent a survey to the undersigned festival organizers to collect data on their attendee count, accommodations, transportation, non-profit and charity support, number of local hires, and dollars spent by attendees in past years. We have also been collecting some rough data on losses incurred by these entities over the past year.

This survey confirms that the undersigned organizations host events that are attended by over 300,000 DC-area residents yearly, and regularly draw close to 70,000 yearly attendees from

outside the DMV. These festivals have donated or provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to DC based non-profits and local charities, and they've grossed over \$14 million annually for locally owned businesses, artists, craft and food vendors. Their guests have booked more than 20,000 overnight stays in hotels or Airbnbs per year, and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on metro and rideshare services to attend. As a cohort, these festivals pay a minimum \$130,000 a year to MPD, and nearly double that to private security contractors; \$1.4 million dollars to over 2,000 local employees, just for day-of operations; and a similarly high figure to artists and performers, many of whom are also locally based. These are rough numbers, but they clearly indicate that festivals provide a significant economic benefit for the city. (We are happy to share this data we collected privately with any official or agency who would like to review.)

The loss in revenue alone that these festivals have suffered during the last 16 months adds up to millions of dollars — millions of dollars that the city's economy is now missing. Immediate support from the city through American Rescue Plan funding, for ongoing support years into the future, is an investment that will provide economic and cultural returns for decades to come.

We propose that the city allocate resources to a dedicated music festival fund, totaling \$15,000,000 (\$3,000,000 per year) to be distributed over the course of the next 5 years. Chicago, New York, Austin and the state of Oregon recently just announced funding for their events and festivals through a set-aside from the American Rescue Plan; we hope that Washington, DC will follow their lead.

Many of the smaller festivals listed below have received absolutely nothing in relief funding: Some not eligible for funding from the most recent Bridge Fund, and others were not eligible for federal Shuttered Venue Operator grants. Festival season is upon us, and these festivals need resources immediately — within the next couple months. We encourage emergency action to get this done. Funds could be disseminated through DSLBD, DMPED, OCTFME or MONC. (DCCA is not a suitable funding resource for these purposes; their granting process is not nearly quick enough for the current need, and they are unable to fund any entity that does not have a 501(c)(3) designation.)

Cultural events like these are a vital part of the continued vibrance of DC's music and arts community, and can help keep our city on track towards becoming a nationally recognized Music City. The relatively modest funding we propose is more than worth the investment.

As a final note, we must take this opportunity to note the serious hindrance that DC's special event permitting processes pose to many festivals. The onerous process many events are required to go through to get approval from the city — often a very expensive and protracted one — is a huge hurdle to overcome after a year-plus of continued losses and zero event-related revenue. While we acknowledge that this topic needs its own discussion entirely, we ask today that the Mayor and the Council review the attached APPENDIX A, and consider taking immediate action to address many serious concerns with the bureaucratic deadlock of the current HSEMA special event permitting process.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to an ongoing discussion of this issue..

Broccoli City Festival
DC Jazz Festival
Funk Parade
National Cannabis Festival
All Things Go Fall Classic
Adams Morgan Day
PorchFest DC
Black LUV Festival
HillFest DC
Capital Fringe Festival
Snallygaster
Kingman Island Bluegrass & Folk Festival
Down in the Reeds Festival
The Black Love Experience
Honey Groove Festival
Washington Women in Jazz Festival
CapitalBop
Capital Pride Celebration
DC Turkish Festival
Fiesta DC
Made in the DMV

APPENDIX A

LIST OF PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SPECIAL EVENT PERMITTING PROCESS

- Develop a process to digitize the special event presentations so that presenters do not have to print out 30 physical copies for the HSEMA Taskforce.
- Digitize the approval process so that signatures from each agency can be done online.
- Remove the cumbersome physical signature requirements for events on public streets and property.
- The community events fund needs to be more transparent, open, and accessible.
- Create a standard that does not allow agencies to wait until a week before an event to impose additional requirements and fees that their approval is then conditional on. All fees and event related requirements need to be established months before the date of the event.
- There have been multiple documented complaints of sexual harassment and overt sexism over the past couple of years in dealing with different agencies. We ask if proper training and supervision is not available that the majority of the permitting be digitized ensuring interns and staffers no longer need to endure abuse.
- Allow for event related vending on public park property.