

November 8, 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

Testimony of Listen Local First DC and DC Music Advocates regarding Bill B23-0317 - Go-Go Official Music of the District of Columbia Designation Act of 2019

Dear Mayor, Directors and the Committee on the Whole,

Listen Local First DC and a coalition of DC music industry advocates would like to commend Councilmember McDuffie and the Council as a whole for supporting the introduction of the “Go-Go Official Music of the District of Columbia Designation Act of 2019.” Acknowledging Go-Go as the city’s official music is a monumental step so critical to uplifting and preserving DC’s culture and musical traditions.

While this acknowledgement is a first step, it is imperative that this legislation go further than just acknowledging an official genre, this legislation must allocate appropriate funding to preserve and grow Go-Go music through a series of specific dedicated funding mechanisms.

We believe that a bill that does not identify actual funding mechanism is a bill that supports Go-Go in name but not in action. The type of funding this bill should include covers funding for artists themselves, historical preservation and education. A comprehensive bill could identify a number of potential sources for this funding and could establish a valuable precedent for which agency or office should take on the responsibility of implementing these support mechanisms.

There currently is no agency or office that exists within the District government that has the resources, capacity and focus to take on all initiatives that are fundamental to supporting Go-Go and the broader, growing music community. There has however been a proposal that will allow the creative community to have access to a more comprehensive set of resources than existed under a solely grant funding agency. Through this Bill the Council has the opportunity to potentially define the extremely valuable scope of work and resources needed to launch DC’s Office of Creative Affairs and identify one of its first objectives. Establishing that this office will be the administrative go-between and resource connecting tool to manage funding and

programs between agencies and offices is an extremely valuable tool for the Go-Go community and the music community as a whole.

While this Bill should create additional grants for Go-Go artists to record and perform throughout the city, funding for touring, workforce development, aging in place, curriculum development and historical preservation are not all responsibilities that fall under the DC Council on the Arts and Humanities or any one office. The new independent DCCAH will be able to take on new grant making initiatives while all other forms for support needed for the Go-Go community and musicians across the city should be strategically managed out of the new Mayor's Office of Creative Affairs.

In the section below we have listed a number of potential funding opportunities that should be included in the final version of this historical legislation. In most cases we have tried to suggest potential avenues for funding new initiatives. If the Council wishes to take this historic step we ask that instead of just voting on this current legislation, the Council should fully fund it, go all the way, hit that Grand Slam and #FinishtheFight like the Washington Nationals did.

FUNDS TO SUPPORT GO-GO ARTISTS & PERFORMANCE

Establish a Touring Fund for Bands: In 2019 professional bands and artists tour to make money off tickets to live shows and grow their fanbase in other markets. Go-Go music is rooted in the live performance and while popular in DC, this vibrant music could grow exponentially as it reaches new ears and audiences in cities around the country and the world. The issue is that touring regularly and travelling to festivals with 8 - 14 band members not including crew is extremely cost prohibitive. There are festivals all over the country that would welcome DC's Go-Go bands and help spread the Go-Go sound, but the booking fees alone will most likely not cover the cost of travel and accommodations for the artists. If this bill establishes a fund that these Go-Go bands could use to cover travel costs they could be reaching new fans and audiences around the country on a regular basis.

When music fans see Zydeco bands and funky brass bands they immediately connect the sound with New Orleans, Lafayette Louisiana and the surrounding area, when music fans hear Go-Go anywhere across the US, that sound should conjure up images of Washington DC. Music has an incredible power to connect to memory imagination and feeling. Hearing a familiar sound can take a person back to the exact location where they first heard that song or artist. That power is strong and that power is why Go-Go needs to be directly connected to our tourism economy.

This fund would essentially be promoting DC culture and tourism. Having these bands play around the country will expose a whole new world of music fans to DC Culture and give them a whole other reason to come and visit the city. This fund can be established through tourism dollars, through Destination DC, through hotel and Airbnb taxes. This fund should be available on a quarterly basis and should be awarded on a rolling basis as tours and shows are booked.

Go-Go Grant Fund: This fund would allow bands to apply for grants to cover the cost of studio time and professional recording as well as designated performances in public locations. This fund could support performance at DC Parks throughout the summer, performances at the Reeves Center, which used to host regular Go-Go shows, the Conventions Center other historic locations around the city. In order to educate the public about Go-Go there needs to be more Go-Go available to the public on a regular basis. These grants could be made available through specific set asides in the DCCAH budget or could also come from a tourism tax or funding vehicle since some of this funding will go to free public performances around the city that can bring residents and tourists together to witness the city's music.

Go-Go Workforce Fund: In any music genre only a small percentage of the musicians make the majority of their income from their recordings and live performance. Therefore this fund should be established as a creative workforce development effort and a way to help Go-Go artists age in place. By training and educating artists about alternative creative revenue streams and offering job training in related fields of production, sound engineering and event management, these creatives can leverage their musical skill sets into alternate income potential that will allow them to continue to make the music that they love.

This type of program can be funded in part by the Office of Aging, DSLBD or potentially Office of Cable Television Film Music and Entertainment. There are also many national foundations, nonprofits and government agencies that can help connect cities and municipalities to the resources they need to help expand these tools locally.

Go-Go Facilities Incentive Initiative: This initiative would provide a tax break to venues that regularly host Go-Go shows and those that provide space for bands to practice. The flip side to this incentive would be a series of fines for any venue that requires Go-Go bands to pay a security fee up front, or pay for additional artist insurance. Any venues that deploys these discriminatory tactics should be fined and those fines should go to support other Go-Go incentives. This initiative would be very easy to include in the legislation and implement because it does not require a specific allocation in the budget. This initiative will however need to be supervised and monitored and those costs and administration will need to rest within an office, preferably the Office of Creative Affairs or the Office of Nightlife and Culture.

Go-Go City Ambassadors: In order for government and the creative community to work together and have the greatest positive impact, creatives need to be better versed about the inner workings of local governments and the delineation between different agencies and government offices. Likewise workers and agency officials within the government need to better understand how their work impacts the creative community. Listen Local First has advocated for years to create a program where local creatives can seek part time paid fellowships in agencies throughout the DC government. Having creatives as part of city agencies can also breathe new life and inspiration into programs and operations. If the city funded part time employment opportunities/ fellowships for Go-Go creatives who care about government policy, that can help build stronger relationships to address the needs of their community. We would

love to see Go-Go ambassadors working with MPD, Fire & EMS, DC Parks & Rec, Office of Creative Affairs, DC Office of Planning and so many more. This type of funding would need to be allocated in the operating budgets of the different agencies. This funding can also start off as a pilot program or grant offered through employment services covering the cost for these first round of fellowships at various agencies.

Go-Go Music Festival: Festivals like Broccoli City Festival, All Things Go Fall Classic, National Cannabis Festival, Funk Parade, DC Reggae Festival and H Street Festival have become arts and culture staples of the city. They draw DC residents from all Wards as well as visitors and tourists from across the country. If the city were to fund a national Go-Go Festival that gave a platform for all of our talented DC artists to perform and grow new audiences, it could become a nationally recognizable destination music event like New Orleans Jazz Festival within a handful of years. An event like this would need to leverage serious funding from organizations like Events DC and the DC Economic Partnership bringing in new corporate partners who share in the vision of investing in DC's cultural traditions and history.

Go-Go Media Preservation Fund: Every thriving music scene has a thriving arts media community that supports it and helps spread the message. If the goal of this legislation is to uplift Go-Go the Council should consider taking action to uplift local media that covers Go-Go. This support could include stipends for local print and online media journalists who write about and cover Go-Go, support for photographers, podcasters, videographers, sound recorders who document and record live Go-Go performances and finally support for radio programs and stations online or on traditional formats that specialize in Go-Go. The DMV has its own 24 Hour Go-Go Radio station, Go-Go Radio Live has been operating for close to a decade covering Go-Go Music and Go-Go bands 24/7. This legislation should aim to help media outlets like Go-Go Radio move back into the district with some resources to become a premiere outlet to support DC's historic local artform.

The city currently spends a very large amount of money on our city run media outlets. A successful media landscape is one that is diversified and supports original programming and ideas in the spaces where they exist. If just a portion of the resources being used for city owned media outlets could be diverted to support independent programming that could have an enormous impact on the arts community as a whole.

FUNDS TO SUPPORT GO-GO HISTORIC PRESERVATION

For years before the Don't Mute DC Movement we have been hearing from members of the Go-Go community about the need to create a real Go Go Archive to preserve the history through recordings, video, pictures, posters and more. While DC Public Library has already started the process of launching an official city archives there is still an incredible amount of funding needed to properly document decades of music history. The members of the Dont Mute DC Movement have already shared some of their thoughts on how archival funding should be

approached, we are just reiterating some of those points and would like to make sure that funding for preservation purposes is actually included in the language of the Bill itself.

A Go-Go Museum: This would be one of the largest endeavors and costs but possibly one of the most meaningful and important for the community. The overhead for this type of project would be immense and would involve partnerships with many private entities but there will be funding needs from tax abatements to funding for procurement, programming and general operations that can come from the city.

DC Public Library Go-Go Public Archives: Helping grow this already established public initiative will probably require less funding at the onset but it will be limited by the capacity and future funding of the DC Public Library system and staff. A public archive that is free and completely available to anyone who wants to access it is extremely useful for research education and historical retention. Depending on how much funding would be allocated to the Archive for on going programing, it could be a living learning center much like a private museum.

Fund for Preservation Procurement Digitization and Archiving: Whether the community sets up a Go-Go Museum or the city decides to properly fund a robust DC Public Library Archive there will need to be a fund for the procurement, digitization and archiving of sound recordings, video, photography, artwork, poster design and memorabilia. 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 available to the public through a free public archive, like the library 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.

Establishing the funding for these types of historic preservation should not be difficult, the majority of the funding will need to be allocated up front with other funding mechanisms that can kick in down the road. The city might start by reaching out to any number of national academic institutions based in the District to leverage some of their historic preservation and archiving resources. The archive itself once established as a museum or a public archive would be able to generate some income for continued preservation through events, donors and licensing archival material to other institutions and for commercial purposes.

Another possibility for funding the procurement and archivings 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.

FUNDS TO SUPPORT A GO-GO CURRICULUM AND LIVE MUSIC EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This final but most important funding initiative that should be included in this monumental legislation is the funding that should be allocated to Go-Go education. Again we defer to the letter that was sent to Councilmember McDuffie's Office on Nov 9th outlining the different initiatives the community has asked to have funded. We want to reiterate that unless this funding is committed in this legislation, the legislation does not go far enough in its support for the Go-Go community.

Funding for a Go-Go Curriculum in Schools: Develop a curriculum that teaches about the history of Go-Go in DC public private and charter schools. This curriculum should incorporate the music, the local musicians, but also the culture, the politics and the divisions that the city had to grow through.

Funding for Live Music Education in All Schools: Bringing live music education especially Go-Go, Jazz and West African Drumming back into the public schools is not only important for cultural preservation but is crucial to child development. This music education needs to begin in elementary school and be available to students as they grow. The commitment to this type of funding is probably the number one thing the city can do to really preserve and grow the culture of Go-Go. This type of funding would provide opportunities for older musicians to work in music education and work to mentor students in the schools, it would also establish a new generation that will carry their interpretation of Go-Go into the future.

The costs associated with music education could potentially be lowered by committing to partnering with local non profits who already provide after school music programming and do it well. These organizations are well connected to the local music community and investing in them could allow them to grow a model that works well and expand those models citywide. There are multiple organizations that exist in the city that have worked on Go-Go curriculum and have excellent music education and mentorship programs. The city needs to commit to supporting those in the community already putting in the work.

This type of programming and funding also needs to leverage potential creative alternate sources. Other cities around the country have come up with creative ways to leverage publicly available sources of funding to increase music education. One case study would be Denver and how they leveraged HUD federal funding to create an in school mentoring program to pay local musicians part time to work with public school students.

CONCLUSION

Go-Go is synonymous with DC Culture and Music and should be celebrated as such. Go-Go is the movement and the pulse that echoes throughout all streets and wards of this city. This is a genre that the entire world should know. The fact that the Council is willing to take the time to

honor this genre as the official music of DC is commendable, however, after decades of being disrespected and degraded by politicians, law enforcement, and larger local institutions, it is time to give this genre the true credit it deserves. That credit involved more than just an official recognition, it involves a well thought out inclusive piece of legislation that will fund the current movement, future success, and historic preservation of essential DC Culture. We urge the council to do the right thing, go back to the drawing board and make sure you all include as many different avenues for funding in this legislation as possible.

Thank you for your time,

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