

**Final Coalition Letter Text, May 20, 2020; Ran in Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Milwaukee Business Journal, Memorial Day Week, 2020; Signatories below current as of 7/8/20**

In times of great uncertainty, we have always turned to the arts for solace and sense-making. Yet, in the global COVID-19 pandemic, our artistic and cultural communities, including individual artists, creatives, and institutions, like many others, have been hit extremely hard, experiencing difficult challenges and ongoing uncertainty from multiple fronts.

First, the cancellation of live events, the closure of gathering places and the elimination of education programs as a necessary response to COVID-19 has left our city's artists and cultural organizations with unprecedented, unexpected earned revenue losses.

Second, the global economic shock and ensuing volatility is affecting our business partners and private donors which has serious and significant downstream effects on the contributed revenue streams of our non-profit organizations.

At the same time, public funding for the arts and culture sector in our state is low when compared to peer states and municipalities. In fact, Wisconsin ranks last in public funding for the arts and similarly, for cities of our size, we face equally poor rankings.

This leaves the non-profit arts and culture sector in Milwaukee County, one that generates over \$225 million in annual expenditures, employs tens of thousands of people, and reaches millions of people across the region and state, with no safety net.

Our region's non-profit arts and culture organizations and for-profit creative businesses – as well as those employed to create, perform, curate, design, and teach – cannot weather the sustained and severe impact of COVID-19 on their own without severely jeopardizing programs and services that inspire, engage and connect millions of our friends and neighbors each year.

While there have been encouraging recovery developments at the Federal level, the city, county, and state also have important roles to play to ensure that our arts and cultural heritage is not lost during this dire time. Therefore, we stand together, ready to partner with our elected officials as other municipalities and states have done.

For example, Seattle has announced a \$2.6 million effort with a mix of public grants to organizations, rent and utility relief, and direct assistance to artists. In Chicago, the Mayor and Governor have established a public-private partnership with foundations throughout Illinois to form The Arts for Illinois Relief Fund which will provide financial assistance to artists, creatives, and cultural organizations that have been impacted by the virus. This relief fund has been seeded with \$4 million in private and public funding so far.

One thing COVID-19 has made incredibly clear to us is that it is not a forgone conclusion that our city's dynamic and vibrant arts and culture scene will remain intact through this crisis. Nationally, 44% of arts and culture organizations do not think they will survive this pandemic. We know that we are not alone. Watching our friends and partners in hospitality and adjacent

entertainment industries deal with many of these same challenges, we know that our sector is not special. Rather, we are proud to be part of an interconnected web of businesses and organizations that are vital to our city because they shape our city and region's very spirit and unique character.

And, we believe that with swift action and strategic investments, together we can create a viable safety net that ensures our creative and cultural eco-system does not suffer catastrophic losses and is positioned to inspire, heal, reconnect, and play a key role in shaping our region's future in a post COVID-19 world.

Sincerely,

