

DATE: Monday, December 14, 2020

TO: The United State Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation's
Subcommittee on Manufacturing, Trade and Consumer Protection

FROM: David Fay

RE: Written testimony of David Fay, President & CEO of The Bushnell Center for the
Performing Arts, Hartford, Connecticut to be presented before the Committee on
Tuesday, December 15, 2020.

Thank you, Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Blumenthal, for inviting me to testify today on behalf of the live performing arts and events industry. I am [David Fay] the President of The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts in Hartford, Connecticut. Our downtown, like so many, has become a literal ghost-town, not too dissimilar from those of the 60s and 70s that were decimated by the explosive growth of suburban communities. The arduous work to revitalize these abandoned city centers over the past forty years has been driven in part by private investment in restored and newly built performance venues, spurred by an array of federal, state, and local tax incentives and great civic pride. This, in turn, has spawned the development of restaurants, bars, clubs and other venues creating a vitality that has led to new residential and retail development, adding economic strength to entire regions who have successfully established their own unique cultural identities around these revitalized centers.

It has also led to the creation of an unprecedented touring circuit for regional and national performing artists, entertainers and shows. An industry that was once centered in a few major cities is now a systemic part of a uniquely American artistic mosaic that stretches literally from sea to shining sea. This vibrant national industry has provided an essential economic and cultural anchor for communities all across our country, but today this industry is facing an existential threat. A threat not only to the industry, but to the businesses and city centers, large and small, that have come to depend on it. The Cares Act was a critical step, but it was scaled to cover a much shorter period of closure than our industry continues to face. We cannot reopen our venues nor restart our industry until the virus is substantially subdued, and I do not expect that to occur until, at least, the fall of this coming year – hopefully!

Our industry is built on live performance venues from the smallest club where new talent is discovered and nurtured; to the playhouses and regional theatres where local directors, actors, designers, stagehands, musicians, writers and more, learn and develop their craft; to the Broadway theatres and producers who look to these venues for new talent, and to find half of all the new shows they open each year; and to the performing arts centers, like The Bushnell and those much larger, who are a part of this delicately balanced ecosystem and who depend on it to develop the extraordinary talent and shows that grace our stages, inspire our audiences, and uplift the spirit of our communities. Without your help, this ecosystem is in grave danger of collapsing and taking with it the pulse of our city centers.

It is also about the heart and soul of our country. Even after the virus is gone from our shores, we face a long road of healing and recovery. The Irish playwright, Sean O'Casey, said, "All the world's a stage and most of us are desperately unrehearsed." I submit to you that it is in our arts and culture that we find the greatest opportunity to explore what it means to be a human being. We live at a time when emotional intelligence is being outstripped by Artificial Intelligence. Increasingly we look to Alexa and Siri for information, and to social media for personal validation and guidance, rather than pausing a moment to look at ourselves and reflect on what it means to walk in someone else's shoes. The arts are a lens through which we examine ourselves, our society and our world. It is an avenue to explore the inspiration of the Declaration of Independence, the roots and repercussions of slavery, and the often-confusing evolution of our great American society.

It has been said the everyone dies twice. Once when we stop breathing, and a second time when our name is spoken for the last time. We need your help to ensure that the arts, our venues, and our industry will survive this pandemic so that the voices of our great American creative community will have the platform from which to speak to us, to challenge us and to inspire us to be our best self - so that when our names are spoken for the last time, it will be to honor the contribution we've made to our fellow man.