



Letter of support for HB1395

Legislative Council

As the Executive Director of the Minot Symphony Orchestra for the past 6 years, I am writing in support of the North Dakota Council on the Arts receiving an additional reallocation of unspent Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) money.

What did you do when the COVID-19 pandemic nearly shut down the world 1 year ago? Did you listen to music or podcasts? Watch movies? Read a book? Cut out hearts and place them in the window? Imagine the time you were forced to stay at home due to COVID-19 without any of the above mentioned activities. The arts impact our lives daily and you may not even realize it.

On March 7, 2020, the Minot Symphony Orchestra filled the stage with 74 local musicians plus 80 members of the Minot High School choir to perform for a live audience of 650 people. The hall was filled with live music from video games including Lara Croft, Assassin's Creed Syndicate and Sid Meier's Civilization VI. The performance featured the winner of the annual MSU honors competition, wowing the crowd on the piano part of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. Everyone left with a smile on their face and an extra bounce in their step. Little did we know, this would be the last time the nearly 1,000 people would gather together to make and enjoy live music in MSU's Ann Nicole Nelson Hall.

After the musicians were paid, there was \$1,830 left from the March performance to pay staff and prepare for the next concert. The season finale scheduled for April 25th was canceled. Events to connect with patrons, donors and supporters were canceled. Summer fundraising events were canceled. Without the valuable support of The North Dakota Council on the Arts, the Minot Symphony Association would not be able to provide these opportunities for musicians and patrons in NWND. The arts make people happy, and we all need some happy especially during challenging times.

Instead of my days being filled with planning fundraisers, committee meetings, meeting with donors and sponsors, and planning for the celebration of the 95th season, the days turned into countless hours of Zoom meetings, dreaming and hoping to have live music in Minot again. Would we have a 95th season? I was in fear of losing my job. What would I do?

As an recipient of an annual Institutional Support Grant from North Dakota Council on the Arts, the Minot Symphony Association was awarded 2 rounds of additional support over the past 12 months. These funds were greatly appreciated and helped fill in some of the gap in funding from lost revenue from ticket sales and contributions. However Q4 of 2019 compared to Q4 of 2020 shows a 38% decrease in revenue.

In order to help the Minot Symphony and arts organizations throughout North Dakota survive these most uncertain times, PLEASE allocate unspent Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) moneys to the North Dakota Council on the Arts to support arts organizations throughout ND. Demetri Martin said it best, "*Earth without ART is just 'Eh'.*"

Ellen Fenner

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