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Sen. Mike Rounds  
502 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Rounds,

Greetings from South Dakota. I hope you and your team are staying healthy and in good spirits. I know the last few months have been very trying for our country's leaders and I thank you for your service to our state and nation.

I am writing to support conversations happening in regards to a new Covid-19 relief package and specifically assistance to the creative sector. As a South Dakotan, a professional musician, and someone who works closely with the arts sector across the state, I want to share my concern for this vital sector's health and well-being. The national arts and cultural industry is an \$878 billion industry, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. In South Dakota, the same sector contributes \$1.2 billion to the state's economy and supports nearly 15,000 jobs.

At the heart of our arts sector are the many cultural and creative focused non-profit organizations. Think of the Washington Pavilion, Sculpture Walk, or South Dakota Symphony Orchestra in Sioux Falls. Or consider the Day County Arts Council in Webster, the National Music Museum in Vermillion, or Suzi Capp Arts Center in Rapid City. Non-profit arts organizations strengthen and support quality of life in so many South Dakota communities. And the non-profit sector drives much economic activity. The non-profit arts sector is a \$115 million/annual industry in the Black Hills and nearly the same amount in Sioux Falls. The arts strengthen South Dakota communities, provide a well-rounded education for our youth, and truly create jobs and impressive economic activity across our state.

Even in a state that has not totally closed down, our creative community has suffered on an outsized level due to the pandemic. Arts businesses were the first to close and will be the last to fully re-open. Nationally we're seeing a 50% job loss of the workforce associated with "fine and performing arts." In South Dakota, a survey of arts non-profits tells us 94% have had to cancel events. That equated to 879,259 lost program attendance with an over \$11 million negative financial impact to the sector. Over 500 South Dakotans have been laid off or furloughed in the arts sector during the pandemic. And this information comes only from reporting organizations. We know the numbers are higher.



South Dakota artists are suffering. Recently Arts South Dakota provided emergency relief grants to S.D. artists that made a significant part of their living in the arts. One hundred sixty-five artists applied in less than 2-weeks. Artists asking for help during the pandemic reached across the entire state, with over 62 communities represented (60% coming from rural communities). Artists ranged in age from 19 to 75 and represented dancers, musicians, traditional arts, regalia, quillwork, photography, all sorts of visual arts, and more. As a working musician myself, I can personally attest to the sudden and immediate shut down of performance opportunities when the pandemic started. Overnight I went from an average of 2-3 performances a week to literally nothing for months.

The creative sector has been decimated, and it will take continued Federal support to prevent widespread permanent and irreversible damage, even in our resilient state of South Dakota. We request your support and leadership to enact a second round of PPP support from the SBA, specifically designating funds for the cultural sector. Congress must also support new unemployment assistance to "gig" workers, many of which make up the 5.1 million American creative workers. In many situations, gig workers or contract employees have no safety net often found in more traditional employee relationships.

We will need community arts experiences more than ever as we come out of isolation. 72% of Americans believe "the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity." Keeping the arts healthy is an investment in keeping our communities strong and vibrant for post-pandemic rebuilding.

Please know I am at your service if I can provide any help in this matter. I do not doubt that you support a creative South Dakota and want the arts to flourish in our state. Please remember this virtual sector as you lead our country through the upcoming and hopefully final months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Best Regards,



Jim Speirs  
Executive Director

cc. Mark Johnston, Deputy Chief of Staff

