

Regarding the special appropriation for arts and humanities funding – hearing on 7/7/2020

From:

**Marci Shegogue
Board President and Music Director,
The Free Theatre
Germantown, MD 20874**

Dear Councilmembers,

I have been part of the arts community in Montgomery County for over 40 years. My work has ranged from teaching preschool music at BlackRock Center for the Arts, Music Directing for MCPS drama programs at Northwest and Quince Orchard High Schools and Kingsview Middle School, and Music Directing for community and professional theaters in the county and around the DMV. Music and theatre have been my passion and my career. My daughters, Camryn and Jamie have benefitted from all of the arts programs in this community, and are currently in college continuing their study and support of music and visual arts.

I currently serve as the Board President and Resident Music Director of The Free Theatre, a student-led tuition-free high school theater education program in Rockville, MD. We have existed completely on grants and individual donations, and most importantly, ticket sales for the past two years. COVID created a situation where we had to cancel our spring show, which meant that ticket sales went to \$0. We are now starting out our 3rd season with a lack of funding. We are in the process of likely cancelling our 2020 show since we aren't sure what the virus will do to our ability to put on a production. We are trying to find something to do that will be safe and flexible. But, another piece of our funding gone.

Our mission is to make theatre accessible to all, regardless of financial means. This is important to our students, and to our community. We are not the only group in limbo – we don't know what the future will bring to our company, to our arts community. Will we be able to afford to continue our life's work?

The arts have a proven effect on our students' mental health, their connection to their community, their quality of life. It is urgent to keep our arts groups funded

so that we may continue to provide this outlet and connection. If you think about all the things that helped keep people going during this time of lockdown – videos, television shows, “Hamilton,” Netflix, Disney Plus, online performances, TikTok videos, books, painting, online voice lessons, playing instruments, virtual choirs – all arts-related, all an incredible outlet for each of us, and connection to our community.

I am thrilled that Craig Rice and Evan Glass have brought this to the table, and that they believe in the importance and power of the arts. Please approve it so that we can keep up the work that we do.

Sincerely,

Marci Shegogue