

November 12, 2020 – 1:30 pm

Testimony on behalf of

**Montgomery County Hospitality, Culture, Recreation, and  
Entertainment Recovery Stabilization Program**

Good afternoon, Council President Katz and Council Members, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Monica Jeffries Hazangeles and I am the President and CEO of Strathmore, a multi-disciplinary arts organization based in North Bethesda. We are proud to join with our arts and humanities and hospitality and tourism colleagues in testifying before you this week in support of the \$5,050,000 special appropriation proposed for the Tourism Anchor Institution Grant Program and GBAC STAR program.

We are grateful for the Council's previous, strong support of the arts and humanities and tourism communities, however, the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and closures of our venues are unprecedented and threaten the viability of some of the County's most valued, signature institutions

Without the ability to operate any of its venues since mid-March, Strathmore's earned revenue and contributions have taken quite a hit. For the first time in more than a decade, Strathmore ended its fiscal year 2020 with a deficit. Ticket sales revenue was down more than 44% from FY19, and we are projecting a 98% loss in standard ticket revenue in Fiscal Year 2021. We have gone from welcoming more than 250,000 visitors annually from around the region and the country to fewer than 200 indoors since March.

With recovery for our industry still out of view, Strathmore and many of its arts and humanities and tourism colleagues have significantly reduced staff, made dramatic changes to operations, cut expenses, and sought emergency grants and funding. Yet, despite these challenges, we continue to fulfill our missions, increasingly being called upon to enhance educational and social services programs amid the pandemic.

For its part, Strathmore has successfully mounted virtual versions of its 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade Student Concerts, in cooperation with Montgomery County Public Schools, and recently provided artistic inspiration and reflection for nearly 10,000 residents and families, in accordance with all Montgomery County Public Safety directives, with its month-long outdoor *Monuments* installation!

There have been dramatic shifts in our sector, and many of the limitations from the pandemic will be with us for years to come. Some industry predictions anticipate it will be 2024 before we return to regular, full capacity operations. We are a creative industry that will adapt, but it is going to take time to create solutions that work in this dramatically changed environment.

The County's significant capital and operating investments in the vibrancy of its arts and tourism sectors deserve protection at this precarious time. The arts and humanities sector in the County employs more than 4,200 residents and generates more than \$76 million in local spending. It is vitally important that we receive funding support at this time so that we

may continue to serve our citizens and help fuel the recovery and resiliency of Montgomery County in the months and years to come.

I thank you for your leadership and hope you will support the recommended appropriation.