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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

F-38

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

F-38

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

COVID-19 study

**Comité permanent
des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Étude sur la COVID-19

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Monday 29 June 2020

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Lundi 29 juin 2020

Chair: Amarjot Sandhu
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Monday 29 June 2020

Lundi 29 juin 2020

The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.

COVID-19 STUDY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order now. We're meeting for hearings on the culture and heritage sector as part of the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020, and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

We have the following members in the room with us: MPP Cho and MPP Arthur. The following members are participating remotely: MPP Mamakwa, MPP Piccini, MPP Roberts, MPP Schreiner, MPP Skelly, MPP Smith, MPP Khanjin, MPP Lindo, MPP Rasheed, MPP Vanthof, MPP Karahalios, MPP Bourgouin, MPP French and MPP Simard.

MPP Simard, can you please confirm your attendance?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Yes. I'm here. I'm in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Our presenters today have been grouped in threes for each one-hour time slot. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation.

After we have heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. This time for questions will be broken down into two rotations of six minutes and 30 seconds for each of the government, the official opposition and the independent members as a group. Are there any questions?

CAPITOL THEATRE

MR. SPENCER JULIEN

ALTON MILL ARTS CENTRE AND
HEADWATERS ARTS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Seeing none, now I would like to call upon our first witness, Capitol Theatre. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Good morning. Thank you. My name is Olga Cwiek. I am president of the Capitol Theatre in

Port Hope. I appreciate very much the opportunity to speak with this distinguished committee, and may I extend a word of special thanks to David Piccini, who represents my home community, Port Hope, in the Legislature.

The Capitol Theatre is a designated national historic site and once a storied movie theatre—in fact, the first to exhibit a talking motion picture in Canadian cinema history. Today, we have two theatres—our main stage 385-seat theatre and a second 115-seat more intimate space—bringing professional, popular and specialized entertainment to people who come to us from the GTA and points west, and Ottawa and points east. The Capitol Theatre is, until now, a financially stable, non-profit organization which was projecting a surplus for 2020. Before COVID hit, we raised over \$1.3 million for an expansion—an expansion aimed specifically at generating new revenue streams and opening our doors even wider to the community—an expansion close to completion, but now, like other theatres in this province, the Capitol has seen its revenues vanish. We have had to unproduce a whole theatrical season, and the future remains unclear at best. To survive, we need help.

When one asks government for financial help, the first question is, “What are we asking you to invest in?” In the Capitol Theatre, Ontarians will be investing in a well-managed, popular, exceptionally well-attended, non-profit community theatre that showcases 300 events year-round and a professional summer season. Tickets sales represent 54% of our annual revenues, compared to 30% for many theatres in Ontario. We generate 93% of our revenue through ticket sales, concessions, rentals and fundraising. Only 7% comes from government grants—again, compared to 33% for many other theatres—making us remarkably self-sufficient.

We are deeply appreciative of the support we receive from our own local municipality and, of course, from the province in the form of Trillium grants last year and this, which we value most highly.

We brought over 87,000 people to Port Hope in 2019, up from 52,000 just a few years ago. Some 60% of our patrons come from outside our region, making us not only an entertainment but also a tourist attraction. The Capitol Theatre and local theatres across Ontario create and support jobs in retail, hospitality, restaurants and hotels, and even among professional services.

Investing in local theatre creates a powerful economic multiplier effect. The patrons we bring in spend money on

products and services in the community. The professional performers and artists that we bring in, many of whom reside in the community for two to three months, also spend money in the community. The theatre itself spends money in the community. Everything that goes into one of our productions is purchased locally, and throughout the year we use caterers, carpenters, printers, graphic artists, plumbers, electricians, accountants and insurance agents, just to name a few, and all local.

Local theatre is a direct channel into the local economy. The dollars that put arts and entertainment on our stage set the stage directly for economic benefits up and down our main streets. In Port Hope alone, the economic impact is \$3 million, not counting the money we spend in the community.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Still, right now we need major financial support and investment—a grant—just to survive. Like local theatres everywhere, our revenues have dried up, with sold-out concerts cancelled, marketing expenditures wasted and sponsorships and corporate gifts gone.

We face a lot of unknowns. Plans to reopen are in constant flux. The fundamental challenge unfolding for the Capitol Theatre and local theatres across Ontario is finding new revenue streams to offset revenue losses, with smaller audiences necessitated by social distancing.

My message today is to urge the government and Legislature of Ontario to invest in the Capitol Theatre in Port Hope and, more broadly, in the idea of community and theatre. One is part of the other.

The committee might visualize a special local theatre and community economic recovery fund to facilitate the recovery of local theatre, in turn to stimulate the recovery of local economies in Ontario. Because a plan without financial support is not of real help.

As I said on CBC Radio's morning show on Thursday, we need at least a \$300,000 investment by Ontario taxpayers in the Capitol Theatre, and \$500,000 would allow us to pay off our loans for the expansion. This would allow us to once again generate \$3 million in local economic benefits in Port Hope and our region. Here again we see a terrific return on investment in local theatre that puts money into the pockets of working families and small business owners.

Let me suggest another reason to invest in local theatre: Like a walk in the forest, an evening at the local theatre can remind us of what lives and breathes around us. The sights and sounds of ideas and laughter and music that can inspire us—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: —take our mind off the pressures outside and make us feel better. This is the stuff of life that we especially need today.

Theatre is an irreplaceable source of vital social energy and well-being from which the province as a whole will draw considerable strength in the post-COVID era, so when I say we need your help, these too are the things we need your help to do. Thank you so very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Moving along to our next presenter, Spencer Julien. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Spencer Julien: Good morning, standing committee members. I'd like to thank the Chair for recognizing me. My name is Spencer Julien. I'm a curator, an arts worker and an organizer located in Parkdale–High Park in Toronto. I'm currently studying critical practice at the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design at the University of Toronto. I'm also the co-founder of Hektor Projects, which is a small press that publishes work by young artists and creates opportunities for a community of artists to reach wider audiences while being paid for their work.

COVID-19 has undoubtedly impacted the arts and culture sector in far-reaching and yet-to-be-realized ways, and much of this has to do with the fact that the arts were unstable to begin with.

0910

I'd like to focus today on the way in which organizational funding affects job opportunities and stability for arts professionals like myself.

Artists have been relying on gig-based work for a long time, and creative professionals like curators, arts administrators and technicians have had little to no job security. As a result of year-to-year funding instability and project-oriented granting from various levels of government and charitable foundations, contract work has become the norm in culture. This especially affects those entering the arts professionally. I've met very few young people who work in the arts who have a permanent full-time position. Most are either balancing multiple part-time positions or moving from contract to contract, usually only lasting less than a year.

I spoke with Angel Callander, who is an art writer, curator and historian based in Toronto. She holds a BA from the University of Guelph and an MA from Humboldt University of Berlin. She has worked in collections, programming, curatorial and research roles in public institutions and artist-run centres since 2009 in both Canada and Germany, and has done her own curatorial projects in Guelph, Berlin and Stockholm.

Suffice to say, Angel has been very successful in her professional practice. However, after 10 years of working in the culture sector, Angel is relying on contract positions as her primary form of income. She's just finished an 11-week contract and is left with few job prospects in the face of COVID-19. Galleries are currently under-resourced to implement proper health and safety precautions to stay open during COVID-19, cutting off jobs which are essential to keep art professionals afloat.

This is the reality right now in arts and culture for many, and this has become a norm within arts institutions as well, who are unable to offer stability to their employees and workers because their own financial situations are themselves unstable and tough to predict. This leaves arts workers unprotected, as they are often considered independent contractors or don't work long enough continuously to qualify for EI or OW.

If we want to pursue a just recovery for cultural workers, we need to rethink our funding models for our cultural institutions, putting an emphasis on long-term predictability and fair wages for workers. We cannot continue to perpetuate that fallacy of the starving artist and expect culture workers to be impoverished, even in good times.

We need standards, as modelled by organizations like CARFAC, to compensate artists fairly, not just for the explicit hours worked but also the hours and hours of preparatory work which often goes uncompensated.

We must be mindful as well that the instability of jobs in the arts are a primary reason why marginalized communities are unable to gain access to arts spaces and government funding. Right now, the only way many people are able to pursue a career in the arts is knowing they have a safety net or have privileges and access to fall back onto. Most funding programs and opportunities require some level of experience, a luxury which is only afforded to those who can practise without compensation—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Spencer Julien: —for a considerable time.

Black, Indigenous and otherwise racialized communities are systemically disadvantaged from having these opportunities, and it is shown acutely in Toronto's art institutions and those across the province. Analysis done by Sean O'Neill for Canadian Art magazine shows that the directors of all four major Canadian art museums are white; the board presidents on all four major Canadian art museums are white; and 23 of 24 senior executives across those four museums are white. The Art Gallery of Ontario has no Indigenous representation on its board, and as O'Neill says, "White-dominated leadership is unethical and irresponsible. It's a standard that must change now if our public art museums have any hope of reckoning with the colonial violence of their histories to meet the plurality of their communities, the complexities of the present and the uncertainties of the future on a warming planet."

As we plan for a recovery from COVID-19 for the culture sector, this is going to look like multiple different things. We need to reverse the over \$10 million in cuts which were made to the Ontario Arts Council to ensure that funding is available for all artists across the province. We need to restore the Indigenous Culture Fund. We need to reverse cuts to the Ontario Music Fund and Celebrate Ontario for tourism, arts-based events. We need to make investments in commercial rental spaces that are regulated for culture use and rent-controlled accordingly. We need long-term protection of spaces like 401 Richmond in Toronto, and we need direct provincial support for arts organizations of all sizes. It must be easy to access, and eligibility criteria need to be expanded. We need expanded direct creative support, further eliminating the structural barriers which exist for marginalized creators when funding flows through organizations, and we need expanding of funding criteria for the culture sector to include new artists and student artists.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Spencer Julien: These patterns across our leading cultural institutions are inextricably linked with the financial security required to access the art world, and, in the wake of COVID-19, we have an opportunity to change the system and increase equitable access to arts funding, removing systemic barriers and hopefully paving the way towards a more equitable culture sector.

In opening up criteria for governmental funding for the arts through the Ontario Arts Council, BIPOC artists, curators and arts workers will be able to access much-needed supports while not being restricted by criteria of peer recognition, which too often gatekeep these opportunities. Economic justice for artists and culture workers will build a more equitable culture sector. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is Alton Mill Arts Centre and Headwaters Arts. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Jordan Grant: Good morning. My name is Jordan Grant. I'm co-founder of the Alton Mill Arts Centre, which is part of Peel region. Headwaters Arts, which I'll refer to today as HA, is a non-profit organization that promotes the arts in Caledon, Erin and Dufferin county.

I'd like to also introduce Margi Taylor who's with us and is both president of Headwaters Arts and has a studio at the Mill where she creates art herself and runs an art event management business. She's asked me to make the initial presentation, but Margi will be available during the question period.

The Alton Mill is a unique social enterprise. Originally a woollen mill built of stone in the 1880s, the property is privately owned. The vision of turning it into a regional arts centre was developed jointly with Headwaters Arts when the building was still derelict. Completed a decade ago with one-third federal and provincial funding and two thirds from the private sector, Headwaters Arts now has their permanent home and, in addition to its traditional fall arts festival, runs a year-round co-op gallery at the Mill, does other arts and educational programming and administers a youth scholarship program.

Not having the population locally to survive on local patronage alone, we must continuously promote the mill as a year-round destination. We work closely with Central Counties Tourism and other partners, and appreciate their invaluable efforts. Central Counties' surveys confirm that about half of our visitors come from within a 30-kilometre radius, and the rest are mostly from an arc running from Kitchener to Barrie to Bowmanville, with a smattering of international guests.

It has worked. The Alton Mill is a hub of creative activity and one of this rural area's top cultural attractions. The final piece of this picture is that a big part of what keeps the Mill afloat is the rental in the off-hours of our grounds and common spaces for private functions, particularly weddings.

COVID: Alton Mill shut to the public in mid-March, with a limited reopening beginning just this past weekend. We sanitized so that some studios could continue to have their artists working in them during the shutdown; some

tried online activities, such as teaching classes remotely. Headwaters Arts moved its gallery shows online and organized an online auction to benefit Headwaters Health Care Centre. But for most, all commercial activity ground to a complete halt.

Most problematic for us is that all our summer 2020 weddings have either been cancelled or deferred, and the fall is iffy. Deferred weddings become next year's revenue and cancelled weddings are an actual cash drain since our policy is to refund half the deposit. Private functions represent about two thirds of our revenue, most of which is irretrievably lost this year, so this is major.

Now, thanks largely to the government support programs, we lost only one monthly tenant directly due to COVID-19, at least so far. The Alton Mill has availed itself of all of the CECRA rent subsidy program, the 75% CEWS wage subsidy, the CEBA \$40,000 interest-free loan, deferral of realty taxes, HST and mortgage payments. Combined, these have kept us afloat during the shutdown. Kudos to the federal and provincial governments for arranging all that.

But now we still face extreme financial distress. Our underlying operating costs actually did not drop very much. This week, the deferred realty tax and HST tax payments come due, the CECRA rent support expires and we're still awaiting receipt of payments for both the rent and wage subsidies. The rent relief program was slow rolling out, and its criteria kept changing.

0920

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jordan Grant: With 23 individual tenants, some eligible, some not and some flipping back and forth, with each eligible tenant requiring an individual rent relief agreement and attestation form, frankly, it was a nightmare. Remember, I'm dealing with artists here, not accountants. Since all documentation had to be submitted all at once, our application has only now just been completed and we hope that payment will come quickly.

Also with CECRA, several of the artists found that they were ineligible for the rent subsidy even though they were completely shut down and unable to sell. Because they work for extended periods of time on single works of art, their sales are lumpy. If, last year, they happened to sell their works outside of the three-month reference period for computing a 70% drop, they were out of luck. Now, at this time, we decided to give the ineligible tenants a one-third rent break from our own pockets.

Other than its online initiatives, Headwaters Arts just basically shut down for the three months, keeping expenses to a minimum. For HA, COVID's impact is primarily forward-looking: How soon will gallery sales and cultural events resume, and how will the changed environment affect regular fundraising activities?

Finally, a general comment: Arts and cultural activities, even if not very profitable in their own right, do generate tremendous economic spinoffs, as well as bind the community together. Special attention is needed to support our creators and makers.

I have a few recommendations about the programs. Most arts businesses are either non-profit or marginally profitable, requiring public support, such as marketing support, even at the best of times. As we reopen, the higher costs and lower revenues may easily mean the difference between survival and shutdown, therefore a continuation and gradual phasing-down of the existing programs instead of a hard stop is warranted.

I've got a couple of recommendations regarding CEBA to address the problems that I mentioned, but I'll skip those and just mention that CECRA left out owner-operated event venues. They've been extremely hard-hit and some kind of support should be considered.

We'd like to make a pitch for municipalities. As a bricks-and-mortar destination, our third-largest expense, after wages and mortgage payments, is realty taxes. Deferral only pushes the cash-flow crunch into the future. Actual tax relief is needed. Since municipalities' costs didn't drop that much and they aren't allowed to run deficits, local governments need support from the senior levels in order to offer tax relief.

Finally, there is an opportunity to make up for lost business from afar, by focusing on the local market. We support a move to redirect tourism marketing dollars to local business promotion. I'll leave it at that. Thanks.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll go to questions now, and I'll start the first round of questions with the official opposition. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Olga, very nice to see you. Can you hear me okay?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Yes, I can.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I want to say that you're certainly right: The Capitol Theatre's reputation expands and extends far beyond Port Hope. The folks in Oshawa and across Durham region are well acquainted. So I'm not surprised that much of your revenue comes from the community from those ticket sales, which I know right now is not happening. We have a lot of local theatres here in the Durham region that we're hearing from that certainly are finding the same.

Just so that you know, I come to the Legislature through some local theatre channels. My colleagues at the Legislature may not be surprised to know that I have a dramatic background. Anyway, but I thank you for your presentation, and I am sure MPP Piccini and folks across our community would like to see you be able to continue and thrive.

You had asked for a specific number. You had a number that would cover your costs, and not the expansion, though. What would it mean for you to get some of that? What would it mean if you didn't get that?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: We would have to be fundraising non-stop, and fundraising non-stop in a community that, right now, relies on us, so it becomes a bit of a vicious circle. We have to fundraise. They don't have the money; they rely on us for the money. We rely on the support from the merchants for sponsorships. And it goes round. If we don't get the money, we're looking at a \$3-million impact on our town, plus the money that we spend ourselves.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate your answer because I think we all recognize in our own communities, but certainly in Port Hope, that when you go to the theatre there, it's an immersive experience. Like you said, it's a night out. It's not just going to the theatre; you're going to Port Hope, and as you said, it's supporting business, which right now we're hearing—everyone knows that businesses are in a pretty tough spot.

Have you had good engagement with the government? Is this your first opportunity to come forward and make your ask?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: It is, certainly, with the provincial government, and that is because the viability of the theatre is at risk right now. We have been very fortunate that we received a Trillium grant last year and a smaller Trillium grant this year, but so far, the coffers of the province of Ontario have not been open to us on a direct basis. We have received the money that is available from the federal government, but that is all debt. Those are loans. Except for the wage subsidy, everything else is debt, and we can't take on any more debt.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No. I can appreciate your numbers.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Sorry, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Chair, just for clarification—this is my first time on a Zoom committee. Is this time strictly for the Capitol theatre, or are we sharing with the others?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): It's up to you. You can share with others as well. You can ask questions to any of the three presenters.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. So, Olga, I thank you for your presentation. I'm going to make sure that I connect with some of the others.

Spencer, thank you very much for coming, and I know that MPP Karpoche would extend her best. I thank you for your presentation, especially your focus on colonial histories and imagining and envisioning a better future for youth, especially in the arts.

For many of the youth that you talked about that are having a hard time finding employment or when there isn't that employment, what will it look like for them if we can't support this industry, basically, or support this sector?

Mr. Spencer Julien: Thank you for that question. I think that's a super important point because this might be a turning point in many people's career in the arts where they might have to make the very hard decision to exit the industry, unfortunately. Funds are restricted, and as Olga was saying, there are very tough decisions to make within many arts organizations right now. That's naturally going to mean that the most senior folks within the organizations are able to stay on and the folks that were just hired, the interns and the folks that were hired on a project basis, are not going to be able to have a viable career, and that might look like turning to other forms of employment, unfortunately. It's a very real reality for a lot of young people in the province.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That would be very disappointing, I think, for the broader community because the broader community does so desperately depend on arts—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: —not just for, of course, recreation but also for that inspiration. We're in very challenging times, so we need you. Thank you very much for the work you do. I hope you're successful with the government hearing you.

Last, but not least—this is a rushed time, sorry. Jordan, I, for many years, lived in the Bolton-Palgrave area. The Mill and the Peel community is—as you said, folks all across the region are well acquainted.

I'd like you to just focus if you can a little bit more on that owner-operator event venues piece, because that's very specific. If there's anything else you wanted to get on the record—that's the first that I've had the chance to focus.

Mr. Jordan Grant: It's an area that's been a big gap. For us, two thirds of our revenue comes from that area. I can just imagine event venues that—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now for their time of questioning. Independent members, who wants to go first? Independent members?

0930

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Yes. I was muted. Sorry, Chair. I'm good for now, but I'm also new to this committee, so I want to know if I can share my time with any other member, or is it simply for independents, as MPP Schreiner had to step out?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): It's only for independent members.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Okay. Well, I'm good for this round. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We will move to the government side now. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to all the presenters. A special thank you to Olga, which I'm sure no one is surprised by, but I thank you, Olga, for that presentation. My first question is to you. Of course, I'll preface it by saying, Olga, how much we value the work that you and the team at the Capitol do, not only in Port Hope, where I'm also from, but across Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Minister MacLeod has talked about the double bottom line, on not only the important economic impact that the Capitol and other arts organizations have in our communities, but also the social bottom line, so I'm going to focus on that for my first question. We need and we must have theatres like the Capitol in rural Ontario so that we can continue to be a destination for people to come from outside the cities, but also so that we have our heart and our soul in rural Ontario intact, following COVID-19.

With that, I'm going to ask you: What advice would you have for government, specifically focusing in on rural Ontario, to support and aid the arts and culture sector in response to COVID-19? I know we've heard from the “big eight,” we've heard from big players in the GTA, and I'm really thankful we get to hear from you and others in rural

Ontario today. Any specific advice for rural Ontario and the important role you play in the backbone of our rural community?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: That's a great question, David. Well, for a start, we have 200 volunteers at the Capitol Theatre. That's community at work in the theatre. We play a very important role for them, as they do for us. But there is a very strong intimacy between the Capitol Theatre and the vital street-level commerce, which is stimulated by theatre activity. Main Street, Ontario, to me, to a great extent depends on the lifeblood, the heartbeat, that a theatre provides—and Main Street, Ontario is, I think, the heart of the province.

Mr. David Piccini: Agreed. And I'm wondering, just on those supports that we spoke about, the wage subsidy—have you applied for the loans, the \$40,000?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Yes. As I said, we're maxed out. We've applied for everything the federal government has got to offer. I'm just going to go back to your first question, just for a second, because one of the things that theatre provides that I think is so important is the social connections between people and each other, and people and things that lift their spirits.

But in terms of what we've applied for, David, we've applied for everything that's out there. As I was saying, our credit line is extended now. We've got the two \$40,000 loans. We're maxed out, in terms of debt load, right now.

Mr. David Piccini: When we last met, you and I spoke about a digital gap. I think it's especially paramount for rural Ontario theatres and the arts and culture community like yourself that we make an investment into digital.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. David Piccini: Can you just elaborate a little more on what sort of digital upgrades and supports that you'd like to see at, perhaps, the Capitol and others?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Yes, thank you. It's no surprise, again, that some of that revolves around money. It's a skill set that most people in the theatres don't have right now and that we have to bring in. But this past weekend, we just did a special fundraiser that was digital. Jake Epstein, who played Spider-Man on Broadway, did a special show for us, and we partnered with six restaurants in town for streaming at home. You bought a ticket, you saw the show at home, but you picked up a lunch or dinner from one of the local restaurants. We'd like to do more things like that. We haven't done that in the past. That can be an additional source of revenue for us. But, again, we need to plug into a fund and the knowledge of people who have got this expertise.

Mr. David Piccini: Wonderful. Finally, I just wanted to bring up, from my notes here, on the Equity piece with respect to the unions and paying actors according to a full house. Has that been resolved? Can you share with the committee some of the—

Ms. Olga Cwiek: I believe they are in mediation still, so I really can't go any further than that. We understand that there will be a 2% increase for performers.

Mr. David Piccini: Just specific to the full house: Can you share it for the others who might not have had the chance to hear about it?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Yes. The theatres have a category, and that category comes to us from Equity, the performers' union, which is the national across-the-country organization—not a union, but it represents the performers. The way that they get to the designation is always based on a full house: full, sold-out premises.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: So, in our case, with 385 seats, we know that won't be happening, yet our designation is still dependant on that number of a full house.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you for sharing that, Olga.

Thanks very much. No further questions, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start the second round now with the independent members, if you have any questions.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: MPP Amanda Simard from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

My question is for Olga. Maybe you already mentioned this, but you've mentioned help from the municipal government and the federal government—I know with the federal government it was loans. But what so far exactly have you received from the province? I think you said nothing, but I'm not sure, so I just want to make sure I know exactly. So far, what has been done and what types of—maybe not financial assistance yet, but any types of programs that you qualified for.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Just to be clear, we have received assistance from the province. We received a Trillium grant last year to help us with some of our technology, and this year we've received a seed grant to help us with youth programming, which we think is going to be extremely important going forward.

In terms of the federal government, we not only have received loans, but we have also received the wage subsidy. That adds up and that has been pretty significant.

From the Ontario government—again, because we have a very strong member of provincial Parliament—we have received a lot of guidance and support. But right now—I'm being pecuniary here—we need the grants.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: My other question was, I know you need help weathering the storm now, but looking forward post-COVID and the new normal and what it's going to look like—what do you think is going to change with the way that you operate, and what types of assistance would you need to adapt and conform to the new—sorry, I'm looking for my words; I'm French and I'm translating in my head. What types of mechanisms would you need to do the new way of doing theatre?

Ms. Olga Cwiek: So, for us, it's a couple of things. We have got the smaller theatre upstairs, which will be very helpful to us because we can do social distancing better upstairs. Downstairs, depending again on how the theatres are allowed to open, ticket sales are going to be impacted, and for us, because we're a not-for-profit and we try to balance the budget, a 15% drop in ticket sales will impact us; a 50% drop will really impact us.

We are looking at how we can use digital programming to parallel some of the other things that we're doing. What we don't know yet is to what extent are people perhaps now tuning out digital programming because it has been around so much. They come to theatre for the live experience. But we will be looking at that, and we will also be looking at doing a lot of small special events—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Olga Cwiek:—where the community can connect.
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M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Okay. Great. Thank you. No further questions, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I will go to the government side now, and I'll start with MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to all presenters for appearing this morning. I certainly hear the challenges. This is something that none of us saw coming. This was a pandemic that hit everybody hard. This is around the world, of course. Certainly, government has been no exception to how difficult this challenge has been. We're certainly very understanding of the anxiety and the difficulties in the financial sector out there.

Now that we have, it appears, turned the corner on the health aspect—which was priority number one, of course—we turn our attention to the economy. We were very clear in government on March 25 that health was the priority, and \$17 billion was put aside. That's not including a record in contingency funds, both for COVID and in a general contingency. But now that attention turns to fixing the economy—and a reminder that \$10 billion of that \$17 billion was put aside to help businesses and individuals with a series of deferrals—since the federal government announced measures such as the commercial rent relief program, both Ministries of Finance have been tied at the hip, with all levels of government, in fact, in trying to fill the gaps in every program that was introduced, and there were certainly gaps.

The commercial rent relief program, to remind everyone out there—when it was first introduced by the federal government, there was talk of separating the profit portion, and we knew that that was causing a lot of anxiety with small businesses out there, because small businesses simply pay a gross rent. It was very difficult to measure the profit. There was also talk from the CMHC about separating landlords who own the property versus having a mortgage on the property. We realize that that was difficult to actually enforce.

The reason I bring this all up is to have that understanding that we're all in this together, and that this was never the time for politics. We've put politics aside in our government. We've worked with Ottawa and our partners at the Ministry of Finance to make sure that we fill in those gaps by speaking to our municipalities, and the volume has been very big.

Now, of course, we understand that the feds do own the printing press, and that here in Ontario we are at our legislative maximum in terms of the capital that we were able to issue. That's why we're talking now, in consultation

with you and others in various sectors, about how we're going to formulate a very tough budget come the fall. I say "tough" because the sheer magnitude of how difficult our recovery will be. It's not impossible, of course, and being an optimist, we know that we will persevere and that Ontario's economy will be strong again, but there are going to be some stormy waters as we move forward.

So my comment and question and challenge to everybody is that we must continue to be vigilant, but we must also continue to be non-partisan as we move towards that recovery phase, so that those difficult decisions we're going to have to make are made together. Certainly we know that if we are able to do that, without pointing fingers across different governments or across party lines, we will be stronger for it as a people.

If there's any additional context you want to provide on how we feel we can do that in the best way, I certainly open that challenge to all of you, and that goes outside of this committee. Certainly we are available at the Ministry of Finance, and through the various committee members and your individual MPPs, to take those discussions. That's not a question; that is a challenge that goes outside of this committee.

With that, Chair, I will conclude my comments there.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini?

Mr. David Piccini: How much time do we have left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay. Thanks.

Just to add on the broadband and a few other pieces, just to echo what MPP Cho said: There is certainly not an equivalency with respect to the different levels of government. We all step in and do our part, as MPP Cho said, to support. When I think of some of our responsibilities like health care and social services—people here like Olga will know of massive investments we've made locally into health care and our local hospitals and social services, to support the most vulnerable in Northumberland.

I want to zoom in on broadband, because we recently made an announcement of leveraging up approximately half a billion—and this is for all the presenters. It's about a half a billion in a public/private equity that we can leverage for broadband. To date, we haven't had a commitment from the federal government to front-end that \$1.7-billion investment. So, my question to everybody is, how important will it be leveraging all levels of government to invest in broadband and Internet support going forward so that we can not only support all of you but expand our audience base into some of the more remote rural and northern areas of Ontario?

Mr. Jordan Grant: Obviously it is an issue. One of our artist tenants, for instance, who lives in the country—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Jordan Grant:—hasn't even been able to participate in Zoom meetings during this COVID time. So it's an important issue. It's not directly related to COVID, obviously.

There is a program called Digital Main Street that was helping various businesses become more Internet-savvy

and use the techniques. I believe there were grants available, but they expired at the end of the year. Perhaps a reviving of that program to help people with the actual transition would be helpful.

I know that Headwaters Arts was looking at trying to convert its fall festival on a two-track thing—we're trying to plan a festival, but we don't know whether we're actually going to be able to be open and whether people will be willing to attend in person, so we're also trying to plan a digital version of that, and it requires a lot of money and expertise and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the opposition again, and I'll start with MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I'd like to start with Jordan. I thank everybody for the presentations today.

One of the things that you said that we've actually been hearing consistently through the hearings was the need for a redirection of marketing dollars, sort of like a revamping of our actual strategy, to bring people out. Part of what we've been hearing alongside that is the need for the government to provide consistent messaging around it being safe to go outside so that people will start to spend locally; also, that we need to start paying more attention to marketing local businesses, local artist spaces, local cultural engagements and that kind of stuff.

I'm wondering if you could spend a little bit of time speaking to us about why that is so important right now and the way that it will stimulate our economy moving forward.

Mr. Jordan Grant: Sure. Luckily, I attended the Central Counties AGM last week and they had a polling firm that surveyed people's attitudes about going out and re-engaging in this COVID time. What they found was that people are willing to take some risk, but they really want to stay local. Of course, you can't travel far away anyway, so we know we're going to have a real drop-off in people coming from further away and people that are just simply risk-averse. In order to make that up, there are people within our own communities that may have been looking farther afield for their leisure time and so on that want to explore local. I think there's a real receptiveness to that, so the marketing dollars that may have been spent trying to bring people from wherever—from the US or whatever—could well be redeployed to try to help people connect with their local resources.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: That's fantastic. I'm actually going to use that as a bridge to ask Spencer a question. It kind of made me laugh; you did a little flashback for me when you talked about 401 Richmond. I used to be a musician. I used to rehearse there, so I understand that space and what it brings to the artist.

But what I also know is that a lot of the artists in spaces like that don't have a lot of money for the marketing. They rely on venues to do the marketing on their behalf. So if we bridge what Jordan was saying with the type of investment that the government could be doing right now to share the burden of marketing costs, I'm wondering if

that's an investment that you think would be helpful for local artists. As you said, it's time for us to rethink the funding model for the arts.

I'm just going to hand it over to you to speak a little bit to that.

Mr. Spencer Julien: Thank you very much for that question. I think it's absolutely crucial. As Jordan mentioned, the Digital Main Street program—opportunities like that, which artists are too often left out of, to build an online presence, to build an e-commerce presence right now.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Spencer Julien: Those are going to be crucial opportunities for artists to make it through this time and for early career artists, especially, to feel confident to enter the arts. That's ultimately what we need: to build that confidence in artists across the province that Ontario values artists and that it's a viable career to pursue here in Ontario.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so very much for that. I'm going to use that now as a bridge for Olga. Look how I did that. What? What? It's a good Monday morning, my friends.

One of the pieces that has kept coming up, as you've been answering questions, is the importance of investment in the form of grants versus loans. We've been hearing that consistently. I just want you to know you are not alone. I know that a lot of people have expressed that they are grateful for the loans, but now they're at the brink. So I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit more about why grants are so important right now, not just for your viability, but for us to be able to re-stimulate the economy because, really, this committee is here to think about economic recovery, and I think your point deserves to have the rest of the time that we have.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: I believe that grants are an investment right now, and I think that's the key take-away. You invest \$300,000 in us, and we're there generating \$3 million. That is an extraordinary return on investment.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Yes, I want to thank you for saying that, and I'm going to repeat it for the record. To be honest, I was listening to the government members before speaking about not being political, and I actually think this is the moment for us to be political, to make a choice that grants are an investment and then to do our job.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I just wanted to make sure that I repeated that. You had also mentioned that that investment into the arts has this economic multiplier effect. If you could spend time about that, that would be fantastic for them to hear.

Ms. Olga Cwiek: Yes. The money that you give us, or the money that we bring in, is all spent in the local community. As I said, as a theatre ourselves, we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in the local community. People who come in to see the theatre—60% of our audience comes in from outside of Port Hope. People come, they walk the main streets, they spend money in the

shops with the merchants and the retailers, and they have lunch. So that money is just recirculated. That money comes in and it stays in the community, and that is so—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes your time for a presentation. Thank you so much for coming. We appreciate your presentation.

TOURISM INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF
ONTARIO

MR. TROY JACKSON

MR. TAGHI ABDOLHOSSEINI

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next group of presenters, we will start with the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Beth Potter: Good morning. Thank you very much. My name is Beth Potter, and I'm the president and CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. I'm here today with my director of policy and research, Alex Rodgers, and we look forward to fielding questions from the committee.

I would like to thank the Chair and the committee for the opportunity to appear before you again. We recognize that COVID-19 is, first and foremost, a health crisis, and we recognize the work that every member of government has done to ensure the safety of all Ontarians as our first priority.

On June 4, I presented to you on TIAO's detailed policy response to the crisis and our recommendations on investment, infrastructure and labour that can ensure the tourism industry as a whole continues to be an integral part of the economic landscape in Ontario.

Despite the encouraging news we have received in the past few weeks about the temporary moratorium on commercial evictions, as our economy slowly reopens the perfect storm of negligible revenues, businesses taking on an increasing amount of debt and the difficulties many are encountering in accessing federal support means that many are on the brink of permanent closure.

At TIAO, we represent the broader tourism industry, which includes a myriad of sectors, businesses and workers across the province. Culture and heritage are key components of the broader tourism ecosystem.

Last week, Minister MacLeod spoke to you about what we want Ontario to look like in 18 months. Like her, we believe that we must protect what not only makes Ontarians proud to live in our province but the sector that will lead our economic recovery.

For instance, let me briefly discuss francophone and Indigenous tourism. Francophone tourism highlights the unique culture of Franco-Ontarian communities and the added value of offering French-speaking visitors services in the language of their choice. It targets niche markets to attract new visitors from across Canada and other French-language countries to enhance high-yield spending and

shoulder season visitation, and it mitigates the risks and dependencies on more traditional markets.

We support the recent announcement of the Francophone Community Grants Program and recommend that funding continue to be transferred to support the critical work of the francophone tourism sector. We further recommend that all levels of educational institutions in Ontario provide bilingual instruction and program offerings so that we have a workforce that can continue to service guests in both official languages.

Ontario is home to the largest Indigenous tourism industry in Canada. Prior to COVID-19, it represented an estimated \$622-million contribution to GDP and more than 12,000 jobs across 550 Indigenous tourism businesses. Before the onset of COVID-19, Indigenous tourism was the fastest-growing sector in our industry, growing 23.2% between 2014 and 2017. If we compare to a 14.5% increase in overall tourism activity in Canada, this growth shows the recent and momentous acceleration of Indigenous tourism as a product offering.

Many of these businesses have lost 80% to 100% of their revenues. A higher-than-average proportion of Indigenous tourism businesses will not survive the pandemic, and despite the Ontario government's welcome decision to make available \$50,000 in loans, with a forgivable portion, to Indigenous-owned businesses, many will not be able to apply.

Sharing the authentic Indigenous story is important to the Indigenous people and is attracting a growing number of domestic and international visitors each year. At TIAO, we know that culture truly belongs to the community, and we must ensure that the existing businesses and infrastructure are not permanently lost as a result—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Beth Potter: —of the political, economic and social devastation from COVID-19.

Continued support must take into account the political and geographic needs of the Indigenous people, and therefore any financial support must be done through existing Aboriginal financial institutions.

Culture and heritage tourism will be key components of our economic recovery. Visitors who come here for these experiences spend more and stay longer. To welcome these international visitors, we need a globally recognized testing and contact-tracing system in place, and we are asking the province to work in collaboration with the federal government to get this in place by the end of 2020.

Many cultural and heritage sites across the province have survived the temporary closures and complete loss of revenues, but they now face the challenge of reopening and operating with costly new infrastructure and reduced capacity. Ongoing access to liquidity is key. Support in the form of non-repayable grants and tax credits will help to ensure that these businesses, many of which are small businesses, don't continue to add to their debt load.

Our vibrant arts and culture scene gives us another advantage: Data indicates that 65% of business leaders say that a thriving arts and culture scene drastically improves attracting and retaining top talent, and 65% of skilled

workers look for the same kinds of things when looking for a new community. The specific threat to our heritage culture experience could mean we lose a competitive advantage in attracting a skilled workforce.

To conclude my remarks, I would like to thank the MPPs for their interest and engagement on working to protect our tourism industry. By doing so, you are also working to protect the very communities that you represent. I know your committee is charged with the almost-impossible task of deciding economic and legislative priorities during a health and economic crisis. While you are making these important decisions, we ask that you remember to support the cultural and heritage fabric that represents our past—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Beth Potter:—and our future here in Ontario. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. I will go to our next presenter now, Troy Jackson. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

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Mr. Troy Jackson: Hello, everybody. My name is Troy Jackson. Thank you, Chair and committee, for approving me to speak today. I'm a performer, writer, clothing designer, husband and dad to a mostly lovely "threenager." I had the pleasure of creating and performing and writing for over 25 years. I am one of the co-owners of the Glad Day Bookshop, the oldest queer bookshop on the planet. I have served on the board of the 519 Church Street Community Centre and the board of Blockorama, the Black stage which participates at Pride Toronto. I'm currently the president of the LGBTQ-affirming and gender-equal mosque space, the El-Tawhid Juma Circle community mosque, founded in 2009.

I live downtown, in the Church and Wellesley area, and I am 50. I wear many hats, as you might see by the bio that I just gave you. I have been a member of the creative studio at the Fashion Zone at Ryerson University since February 2018. The membership has enabled me to move my idea of having a fashion—

Interruption.

Mr. Troy Jackson: Is everything okay? Can you hear me? You're fine?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Troy Jackson: Okay. I have been a member of the Fashion Zone at Ryerson University since February 2018. The membership has enabled me personally to move my idea of having a clothing design business to the actual reality of having one. Through mentorship, workshops and access to research and students, I have learned the necessary skills and been given the necessary research needed to comfortably state that my company was in good standing and we were just about to go to market before COVID-19 happened.

We had a really great showing in November at the Toronto Kids Fashion Week. I love to participate in local productions and local events that highlight the talent that Canada has and the talent that Ontario has. It was a

wonderful experience to be a part of Toronto Kids Fashion Week. We had thunderous applause for our first collection. I was really excited, as a 50-year-old, to finally be manifesting my dream of doing fashion.

As a Black designer, I wanted to make sure that I was working with other folks of colour, people that are gender-non-conforming etc. because I like to also support my community. Having said that, I participated at the Fashion Zone in a hiring blitz, basically, so I got to see a really broad overview of how much talent we have in Ontario and, frankly, how many great students Ryerson University is putting out. I interviewed, I think, 19 people for two positions. I was just in the process of hiring two of said people. They are two Black folks. I was working with the Magnet program at Ryerson University and also Youth Employment Services, the YES program, to hire these two individuals.

Needless to say, as many of us in the creative industry are doing, we wear many hats. We actually make our dollar stretch. My dollar is stretched from my full-time job as an executive assistant for a refugee and immigration law practice, which is in my home because that's what my husband does. That job has been lost because of the closing of the borders etc., so the money that I was using to fund my next jump to do a new job was taken away by COVID-19, basically. I'm not able to hire two racialized folks. One of them was a student just graduating, so she was really excited to be working for an upstart that was locally based.

My business is called Supreme Tamu, which means "supreme sweetie." It's dedicated to my son. We are really—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Troy Jackson:—pressed for, "What are we going to do?" We are located in the Gay Village, the Church-Wellesley area, and also, what are they going to do? There has been much talk in media and much talk amongst people who have businesses on that street of what they are going to do. Small business has been affected by this, because the parameters by which they can apply for funding—\$50,000, yes, that's great money, but to actually have to pay that back to you as well, as a starting small business, is going to be really difficult.

I would say folks from marginalized communities, i.e., myself, who was just starting a new business, have been greatly impacted by this. I am supposed to be in another fashion show for my second collection in December that was supposed to be in June. How I'm going to do that, I have no idea, but I'm going to pull on my Black boy magic and manifest something really fabulous and great.

I know your committee is tasked with the collection of a broad spectrum of data, but please, please, please, I would like to say to this committee to take into account the marginalized communities that have been affected greatly. We don't have investment money from parents, family etc. We have stories to tell that are vibrant, and they are needed so that we can get the full encompassment of what Ontario is, of what Canada is, and the talent that we have here to offer.

I really think that some stories and some really great products that were just about to go to market and really great ideas that were just about to go to market were really taken away from all of this with COVID-19—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Troy Jackson: I'd like to wrap it up by saying that I would really like to see a better investment in the arts from the get-go by establishing and reinvigorating the funding of the arts in schools, and also a combination of mental health funding and city—to actually make sure that the arts and artists have great, stable places to live and to create and to thrive. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

I will move to our next presenter, Taghi Abdolhosseini. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Taghi Abdolhosseini: Good morning. My name is Taghi Abdolhosseini. I started dance class last fall, when I found a discounted monthly membership—one that sells for regular price—in a street festival in Toronto.

Before, I was going to the gym. Since I found dance classes more beneficial than the gym, I decided to continue with dance classes. It was in this dance class that I learned how much these activities contribute to the livelihood of our society. One of the students was saying one of the benefits of this class is it improves our mental health, which is true. Over time, I found there was a hub of activities playing around this class, which improves the health and well-being of our society.

I noticed how more people were coming to classes, and the studio got busier. When the pandemic started, one of my friends was encouraging everyone to cancel social gatherings. Specifically, he was requesting Iranians to cancel new year celebrations and all related events. This was much earlier than the awareness about how this pandemic spreads among the population, and many, including myself, were not prepared to make such a decision. I, myself, argued with him that there was no such urgency to make these measures—specifically, that I was remembering that during the SARS outbreak, I was hearing that many of these social events were held and no one made any issue about it. However, gradually, as we learned about the pandemic through news media, more and more people agreed with him. This caused me to pay attention to the news and follow closely any new policies.

With this background, I was monitoring what would happen to our dance class. I remember a couple of days before the closure of the studio due to the pandemic how busy they were, while I knew that they had to close the studio very soon for an unforeseeable time, which even might last a year. It was with this insight that I talked to the front desk to talk to the manager of the studio to discuss the issue and let them know what to expect in the coming days. This caused me to get into conversation with the front desk about the pandemic and then she heard everything. I noticed that she became very upset, and at the end, she said that she cannot afford this.

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Then she shared her situation, which is typical of many artists: model, dancer, actor, film director, post-production, getting back into music. Grew up doing competitive modern dance, musical theatre, cheer dance—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Taghi Abdolhosseini: Pardon?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes left.

Mr. Taghi Abdolhosseini: Okay—and hip hop. Studied performance art and English literature at Glendon, York University. Involved in film and television as well as modelling. Continues to work intensively in hip hop, ballet and jazz from renowned choreographers and instructors throughout the city. Completed teaching workshops focused on the little ones, instructs at various studios, currently working toward her fitness certification.

I want to argue with all these—you can imagine how vulnerable these people are and how it is important that they get more attention, that we can have this livelihood of our society. That's it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start this round of questions with the government side, and I'll go to MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My first question is for Beth Potter. On the Digital Main Street program, the Ontario government invested \$57 million and helped out about 22,000—almost 23,000—different businesses to get online with it. But it appears that on the tourism side, there was a little bit of a shortfall with some of the Indigenous communities, so we put \$10 million into that. It's an interest-free loan, up to \$50,000 interest-free until the end of 2022. Where do you think the tourism industry with Indigenous communities can use that as they start to recover, coming out of COVID-19?

Ms. Beth Potter: One of the issues is actually whether or not those businesses will feel that they can apply for the loans. The simple reason is a lot of those Indigenous communities have basically closed their doors to outside visitors to their communities. The businesses are completely shut down right now and have taken on additional debt load in order to try and keep things afloat at this time. There are a lot of folks in the Indigenous community that just look at an additional loan, even with an incredibly amazing forgivable amount, as additional debt that they just don't want to take at this time. So it's a real challenge.

I know it's something that we are talking about through our partners at Indigenous Tourism Ontario, and how we support these businesses. We also engaged with our partners at the Ontario BIA Association as well, and as you know, they're the ones that are implementing Digital Main Street. So we're trying to bridge a relationship between the OBIAA and Indigenous Tourism Ontario in order to see if we can't assist some of those businesses in accessing some of that program funding. But there is a reluctance.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm the parliamentary assistant to northern development, mines and energy. We've got a northern Ontario jobs and recovery committee that we have formed, and one of the things that I've heard from

that group with respect to tourism is that better than 60% of the tourists who take advantage of northern Ontario and Indigenous communities, in particular, are US and international travellers. Ontario had about 200 infections—a little less than that, I think; actually, I think it was about 160 yesterday. The states that border on Ontario yesterday had 3,000 infections. A week ago, we were looking at around 1,000 infections in total in the province, and those same US states were at about 30,000 infections over a seven-day period.

How do we promote northern Ontario, Indigenous and remote tourism to local people in Ontario, and try and avoid the US market and the international market that we just cannot bring in right now?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Beth Potter: Well, there are a couple of things that we need to keep in mind. First of all, we've been keeping an eye on what consumer sentiment looks like, so we are working with our destinations across the province to promote a hyper-local or an all-Ontario vacation for this year, and probably into next year as well. Those northern fly-in fishing camps and those great resource-based operations that rely up to 100% on American visitors are going to have to shift, and TIAO is working with about 58 destination marketing organizations and northern Ontario right now to come up with a plan to make that Ontario bucket list. How do you get out and feel comfortable?

The other part of it has been that we've been working internationally with our colleagues around the world on protocols that line up so there's a continuity of procedure in health and safety in place to ensure that visitors feel safe when they make the decision to go to these places, whether it's an Ontarian travelling around the province or, when we do eventually open up the borders, welcoming back those international visitors.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that. Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute and 25 seconds.

Mr. Dave Smith: My next question is going to be for Troy. Troy, you talked about some of the challenges that you yourself are facing getting product to market, especially with COVID-19. We've had a number of other presenters; I'm going to refer to them as "non-mainstream," because there was a whole series of people who came in with the challenges that they face getting their art, culture and other industry, I guess, to the marketplace. Can you describe for me how you get your product to the marketplace? Is it significantly different, and is there an opportunity, then, for us to create a new marketplace specifically for those non-mainstream, to improve moving forward?

Mr. Troy Jackson: Yes, in January, when I first started to go to market, I was a part of the Flamingo Market at the 519 Church Street Community Centre. Now, that is for highlighting LGBTQ, queer, gender-nonconforming people who are doing creative things within our community. That went off really, really well. I had great feedback from that. I was also participating in that in June—online, though, because of course nobody was meeting at that point in

time. That has been a great tool. I think they posted a couple weeks ago that even just through that one hub that they sold \$14,000 worth of product.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll have to move to the opposition side, now, for their first round.

Before we do that, I'll just need to confirm the attendance of MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Hi. Yes, I'm here and present in my home in Toronto.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Andrew? Can you unmute yourself, please?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Why are you unmuting me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Andrew.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Jill Andrew; Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Morrison, we'll start with you.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Hi. Yes, I'd like to direct my questions to Troy Jackson. Welcome. It's good to see you. I haven't seen you in so long. Welcome to committee today. I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about how the 2SLGBTQ+ community has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. We see not just the loss of business, services and employment, but particularly folks who may be employed in different ways who were not eligible for CERB, and also the loss of the Pride Festival as a significant source of income in the community as well.

1020

Mr. Troy Jackson: I would say the talk on the street with some of the other people who have businesses on Church Street is that they've been devastated by this. They're holding on by a thread as far as not having Pride being available; people aren't on the streets, basically.

Also, I'd say a lot of performance people, public speakers and artists who had work planned into next year—basically, it has not been booked. A lot of them have been forced to go online—which is great, I think, for exposure, but then we're caught in a point now of how we monetize that and actually pay for our bills from being online. That's been a great challenge for that. I think one of the great places that has been really stepping up to the forefront for that is Glad Day Bookshop, frankly, with their programming that they've been doing. They've got a "GD TV" Zoom program that they've been doing, and that has been great.

I think that, for me, they've been challenged by that, but also because a lot of queer folks are marginalized from their family, and from society in general, sometimes, as well. For them to have access to nowhere to go to get a loan, to nowhere to go to get mentorship—I think those avenues need to be really shared in a broader sense, so we can actually get our ideas out there and activated quicker and faster. We have the talent; we just need to pool that talent, I think, to be easily accessible, because we're really going to have to dig deep for this one. People are going to be really pressed and marginalized and challenged for that.

A lot of people, also, have been socially isolated, and that's been, as we see, detrimental because of the mental

health issues that go along with this. Having said that, because we have more time to take in content, this is a great opportunity for content to be made, because people are watching that and people are supporting that.

So the challenge is, I would say, monetizing our talents right now in a new way. Also, the MPP beforehand asked a really good question about what's happening right now in the community. It's finding out what's happening in a queer community that is working, and then linking them up to more mainstream sources of revenue or advertising, because, as I said before, exposure is really great, but exposure that comes with financial opportunities. We are not looking for handouts; we're looking for investment. We're not looking for charity; we're looking for investment into our vibrant, amazing community that gives a lot of money and pulls a lot of money, through Pride and other things throughout the year, into this—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Troy Jackson: —beautiful, amazing diversity.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you very much. My next question: You mentioned the emergency survival fund at Glad Day, and I know that this has been a really important program in the community that has really caught a lot of folks who are artists, gig workers, tip workers, sex workers who may have fallen through the cracks in existing federal and provincial support programs—CERB or EI or whatever it may be. What advice would you like to give to the government on how to better design support programs to catch folks who are gig workers, tip workers and artists to make sure that they're better included in these types of programs moving forward?

Interruption.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'm so sorry. My dog is growling in the background.

Mr. Troy Jackson: That's okay. I would say this: We need to look at how we value art and how we look at things that way. Art and culture—like I said before, people are at home, bored, watching a lot of things right now. That's what's keeping people mentally sound and mentally entertained. I think we need to look at better ways of supporting people who are “not so mainstream,” so independent artists and independent art.

I think, as well, that yes, our government organizations are great, but I think that sometimes at the top you forget and miss a lot of people who are creating really beautiful things that are outside of the bounds of storytelling, because of the centrality of the way that we look at and structure our organizations that look at storytelling as blah, blah, blah, instead of from this way or that way, and that often, a lot of different cultures don't story-tell the same way.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Excellent. And one of the proposals that we put forward to help support small businesses, particularly in the Church and Wellesley Village, was for commercial rent subsidies—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Suze Morrison: —a ban on evictions. We've also put forward a proposal for rent subsidies for residential tenants as well, which I think would go a long way to helping, again, artists and folks who are vulnerable in the

community. Do you think that those are proposals that you would like to see this provincial government fully implement?

Mr. Troy Jackson: I would like them to fully implement all of that. People are vicarious right now. I think right now we are in a pause of the bubble of, “It's okay. Everybody is okay.” We're just starting to see people being evicted and stressed right now. I think that it's going to be a really big problem here in about three to four months when push comes to shove, when people start getting really stressed about what's going on right now. Right now, we're in a bubble.

All those things you listed are going to help people keep their spaces, keep kids off the street, keep queers off the street, keep mothers and their children off the street. I think that, having said that, as well as stuff that's happening too with regard to people living on the street right now, too, as well, so thank you—those things, yes.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much, Troy.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the independent members now. MPP Simard.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Amanda Simard, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell in eastern Ontario, a largely francophone riding, and I'm a francophone myself. I really appreciated all of the presenters' presentations—very valuable information.

I feel that the arts sector and the performing arts are often undervalued, the way that they contribute to society. I can really relate to—I think it was Taghi, with the dance studios. I used to dance ballet jazz for many years. I know how much it's important for people of all ages in their life, especially kids. It keeps them out of trouble. It's relationship-building. The whole aspect of the production—it's just really a valuable experience. In small communities, it's very, very important for empowerment. Being a minority as well, you build relationships with other people.

I think it's really valuable, and we need to get that up and running as soon as possible and try to make sure that nobody closes their doors for good as well, because they're small businesses, and they're facing all the challenges that everybody else is facing as a small business but especially in the arts sector, which is often—they're going to be the hardest hit, because people don't have the economic power anymore. It might be seen as an extra, but it isn't. It's really at the core of some people's lives—such as mine, when I was younger, and so I appreciate that.

But I had a question for Beth. I really appreciated you highlighted the francophone contribution in the tourism industry. I was a part of L'écho d'un peuple, which was a major outdoor show many years ago, but it attracted people from all over the country—not just Quebec. It truly was something. We have so much history. Francophones were here well over 400 years ago in Ontario—so, lots to say, lots of projects on the go. But now, that's all moot and not happening for quite some time.

I wanted to know, long term, if you have recommendations for government-specific programming or assistance

or any type of help for francophone tourism and recovery—not just in the immediate future but more for long-term recovery.

Ms. Beth Potter: Great. Thank you very much for the question.

We would like to see some ongoing support for the francophone community and specifically for francophone businesses. Recently, in the last two years, the funding for region 10, Regional Tourism Organization 10, was cut, and so that meant that Ottawa Tourism, who was the body that oversaw and received the funding also—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.
1030

Ms. Beth Potter:—supported Tourisme Prescott-Russell were no longer able to financially support Tourisme Prescott-Russell. So here you have an incredible francophone community with lots of great product that is not getting the same kind of financial support that other small communities in the province are. That's an example of how the provincial government could help support francophone tourism going forward.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Further questions? All right, so we'll move to the second round now. I'll start the second round with the opposition. MPP Andrew.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you. Hopefully there's a faster way to unmute me, because I was trying, you're trying, and I wasn't getting unmuted.

Thank you very much to all the presenters this morning. I had a question for Taghi and also Troy. Taghi, thank you very, very much for your work in dance, for advocating for dance. You have said it spot-on: Dance is not only about movement, but it is absolutely part of mental health. In our fabulous riding, which you know, we have dance studios that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19. I wanted to know, if you could tell the government right now one thing that we need to ensure dance remains steadfast in our communities, what would that be? Thank you, Taghi.

Mr. Taghi Abdolhosseini: I think more support of these dance classes, specifically the one that I am going to. I found them very nice people, a very good culture between the organization. Unfortunately—I sent them an email. I don't name them because they didn't respond to me—those kinds of things.

But I am very fascinated with how this, including all its side, let's say, activities—that's very important. I think it's very important that recover—as I said, perhaps the gym was something that I remember—I am in your riding. I remember at Piccininni that I was going before, when the killing of that girl happened downtown. They started focusing more on the gym, those kinds of things, and I remember someone told me that they are expanding these. Now, it's a very good gym, very nice people. But dance is completely different.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Right.

Mr. Taghi Abdolhosseini: More activities, more socializing—lots of things that I think government needs to pay attention to more. All of these people are only relying

on day to day, and they work. There is no benefit, there is no—I don't know, some kind of employment. They are all—

Ms. Jill Andrew: Right, thank you. Thank you, Taghi. I appreciate it. What I also know about our dance studios is that we need spaces, and we need spaces to have rent subsidies, and we need spaces to have utility freezes, because many artists are drowning in rent arrears. It doesn't matter if there are no evictions allowed; their rent is still drowning them, and it will come back to bite them in a few months under this provincial government.

To Troy, thank you very much for being such a leader in—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Pardon me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jill Andrew: How many minutes? Two minutes?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Three minutes, thank you. Troy, thank you for being such a leader in the Black queer community, the Afro-Métis community, the Indigenous community. Thank you for your work.

As you know, I have been advocating steadfastly for fashion to be included as part of our cultural sector, which it currently isn't in the province or in Canada. The official opposition has been behind this 100%. We want to see fashion included in the Ontario Arts Council. We want to see a doubling of the Ontario Arts Council budget. We're just wondering if these are things that you feel would be good things for the province to do to ensure that fashion is recognized, the industry, the sector and its contribution to all the other art forms, whether it's dance, whether it's music, whether it's television and film, whether it's museums and heritage—tourism, for goodness' sake. Fashion is often at its centre and often forgotten. Do you have any words on that?

Mr. Troy Jackson: I have some words on that. I would say that during MasterCard Fashion Week, I met a beautiful Black woman who was being mentored by Robin Kay. She's taking her own personal money, I found out, to do a study about how fashion, which is not funded exactly like you just said, contributes so much money to our province, to our country, through dance, through fashion—everybody wears clothing. It's everywhere; it needs to be supported as much as another industry that's pulling in that amount of money, that amount of talent that's coming here. I know MasterCard Fashion Week is not here any more, but there's no reason why Toronto can't host something like that in the future, when this lifts, to celebrate everything we have going on here.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much, Troy, and that also sort of segues to Beth as well. Thank you, Beth, for being here. It's good to hear from your organization again.

In terms of tourism in Ontario, tourism is not just about travel; it's about heritage, it's about identity, it's about social cohesion. It's part of our social contract to want to know where we live and have pride in where we live. The

impacts of COVID-19 to Black and Indigenous communities, for instance, ones that have not been financially supported by this government or previous governments, quite frankly, in any sustainable way: How important is it that we maintain our commitment to tourism, which is again a commitment to job creation, to hospitality, to education, to hotels, to transportation, to community infrastructure—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up now.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Right. Beth, I will be in touch with you.

Ms. Beth Potter: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the independent members now for the second round. MPP Simard?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Great. Thank you, and I think the questions from the opposition and the government are very good. Some of them I wanted to ask, so that's great.

I would like to know if there are any other provinces that have practices that we should be looking at that you think are good. I think the question goes to Beth because of the tourism industry in Ontario. What are you hearing from your counterparts in BC, in Alberta? Have the provinces been rolling out specific programs that you find may be helpful for us to look at? Maybe just share best practices, if there are any. Usually Ontario is the leader, and we're really proud of that, but maybe there are things to learn from other provinces right now.

Ms. Beth Potter: Thank you for the question. I meet weekly with my counterparts across the country to ensure that we do keep in touch and understand what's happening in other provinces. Ontario has helped to lead the way on developing some best practices going through this pandemic.

One of the things that we're looking at is, Alberta has actually started to allow indoor gatherings of 100 people. They have turned to their event and their business event leaders in the community to say, "How do we do this? How do we do it safely?" so that we can start to have performances again, so that we can start to have business meetings again, and remembering that for those performances, it's not just the people on stage or hosting the meeting whose livelihoods are at stake, but it's also all those people behind the scenes—the producers, the AV techs, the sound engineers. They are all out of work right now too, and until we can get larger gatherings allowed again in Ontario, there are so many people—artists, but also the people who support those artists in getting their stuff on stage and on film and on TV. All of those workers are without work as well right now. I think that that's one of the things if I could ask Ontario to really start working with us on—we've been working with our colleagues globally on this, as well, and looking at other countries as they are opening up their countries again to understand what are they doing, what are the lessons that they've learned. Let's be proactive so that we can get all these people back to work.

1040

Ms. Alexandra Rodgers: I'll just add one thing: On the best practice for Alberta, we have seen that they are doing direct grants for new infrastructure costs for PPE and engineering requirements for worker health and safety and for the visitor. Certainly, I'll just add that the Alberta best practice would be very welcomed in Ontario. Thanks for the question.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you. Because I know we've all been hit differently, so every province is unique, but oftentimes in terms of types of financing or the mechanisms that the government is using, the consultation process and also the advance notice before you are allowed to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes and 45 seconds.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you, Chair. Those are things we can look at. We can't always operate the same way because we are in a different position.

How has it been for the advance notice for the reopenings for the different groups? Did you get enough advance notice to be able to open certain things properly, or is it really last minute? How are you feeling that the process is going on right now?

Ms. Beth Potter: It has been a little bit challenging. In the beginning, businesses were getting a little bit more advance notice. For instance, marinas got three weeks' notice. But this last entry into stage 2 was a little bit shorter. So it's a challenge because businesses have to put precautions in place, they have to readjust in some places the layout of their stores or their restaurants, so that has absolutely been a challenge.

But we still are of the mind that all businesses should be allowed to open if they are ready to and they have the protocols in place to open, and not continue to restrict businesses. There are a lot of outdoor, and indoor for that matter, attractions as an example that could be open right now and they aren't because they're not on the list, but they're ready to be open.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I appreciate that. That's good information for us and for the government, especially with the advance notice we saw with the stage 2 reopening. Even some of them are the opposite: They are not ready but they're allowed to open—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: —just because they didn't have the time and they're losing the competition or the clients to others that have.

But it's hard to plan, and I think the most important thing right now is to communicate. We'll try to be more in communication with you and to make sure moving forward to have those advance notices. Thank you.

Ms. Beth Potter: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the government side now, and I'll start with MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, everyone. My question is for Troy. Troy, you're a man who wears many

hats, but I would like to focus this morning on your role as a fashion designer with children's fashion. First of all, I was just Googling your work and it's pretty amazing. You do some pretty remarkable stuff. But that doesn't surprise me. I think Ontario is very fortunate to have a plethora of talented fashion designers.

While COVID has certainly presented many problems for small business owners and those in the fashion world, I think there is an opportunity—I come from Hamilton, and one of the areas that has seen growth is e-commerce. In your opinion, what has to be done to provide even more opportunities for people in your industry to sell their goods?

Mr. Troy Jackson: I would say that, for me, it would be to have access to—for instance, I have an online website, and that is going to be refurbished and updated. For me, it would be for independent artists and independent designers to have access and money as well to actually be able to access that because it does cost some money to set up your website and do all those things to get to online.

I think also, too, as well a hub of some sort that's created. So if somebody's looking for particular fashion, for instance, kids' fashion in Ontario, is there is a hub where somebody can go to and look and find all the designers who have designed kids' fashion in Ontario, for instance? That would be great. For me, it's all about how people access information now in the digital age of social distancing and people not going out so much. How do they access that? Where do they look for that? There's not—

Ms. Donna Skelly: That is true. Just to try and find a more collaborative site—one site that could host and highlight fashion designers in the Toronto area—right across Ontario actually, because we really do have deep talent right across the region. That's important.

You also mentioned a woman you met at the last fashion show who is looking into an economic—

Mr. Troy Jackson: Okay. She is responsible for the MasterCard Fashion Week that used to happen here. Her name is Robin Kay. She's quite the personality, but she stands behind her words, and as far as I know, she was, at the time I was talking to the person she's mentoring, taking her own personal money to research, so I think that's somebody you should reach out to, actually, to research how much money fashion does bring in to Canada and Ontario as a whole. I think people really need to look into that because they would be surprised—like people I'm talking about as far as when you put on a show, it's not just people who are putting on the show, it's all the people behind the scenes who help you do that as well.

In fashion, it's the same thing. There's cutters, there's sewers; there's people who do the buttonholes; there's people who produce the buttons. There's all those people who are now not working as much or working at all because they don't have a venue from which to promote that, but also, as well, we're all still in a pausing period where people like, "Is this opening? Are people going to have any disposable income to buy fashion?"

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Troy Jackson: My fashion is more sustainable because it's locally sourced, and it's also upcycled, too, as well. So that's one thing—

Ms. Donna Skelly: I saw that, yes. And with the shift away from fast fashion, there is a huge opportunity not just for you but really for all artists in Ontario. I'm glad you raised that. Where do you manufacture your line?

Mr. Troy Jackson: I manufacture my line—it's a little studio run by a beautiful woman in Roncesvalles. It's like the Matrix. You go to the back of the laundromat and there's these glass doors with curtains. You tap, tap, tap, she opens it up and it's a huge production space that she actually—like she does most of the work herself. But I mean, there's eight machines there. She is great to go there as a first-time designer, going and saying, "Hi. I have really amazing ideas. Can you help me bring those to fruition?" It's fabulous work, fabulous and local work.

For me personally, too, as well, I'd like to see more investment into—I know it wasn't popular, but now that it's coming back and to keeping it local, we need to actually start looking to small production houses that can produce things here in Ontario.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Absolutely.

Mr. Troy Jackson: People will buy that—

Ms. Donna Skelly: And training—

Mr. Troy Jackson: Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: —training people to get in to be able to sew.

Mr. Troy Jackson: To be able to sew. Sewing is a whole different—

Interjection.

Mr. Troy Jackson: —is an art form. It's physical labour. People don't really look at how much it takes to make these beautiful clothing that we're all wearing right now. A lot of time and talent goes into that. So I would say yes, investment into that.

Also, too, as well, I think people need to look at how many small burgeoning businesses—i.e., single parents, single mothers who are actually sewing on the side. They're really amazingly talented and they don't even have that right now. So, that's an investment—

Ms. Donna Skelly: That skill set has been lost also in schools, and I think fashion houses clearly are always looking for talent. We're looking for talent right across every sector in Ontario, but this was one with a serious gap.

I'm so glad that you presented today because it is an area, it is one part of our economic sector that has not been represented so far at this committee. What you have raised is invaluable, and I look forward to hearing the results of the study. I wish you all the best, and I hope I get to see it online because I do have nieces and nephews I'd like to buy for.

Mr. Troy Jackson: Yes. Thank you.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and presentations.

Mr. Troy Jackson: Thank you.

WORKMAN ARTS

REGIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION 7

KITCHENER-WATERLOO SYMPHONY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. We'll move along to our next presenters. First, I will start with Workman Arts. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

1050

Can you unmute yourself.

Ms. Kelly Straughan: There. Hello. You can all hear me, yes?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can.

Ms. Kelly Straughan: Okay. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Kelly Straughan, and I am the executive artistic director of Workman Arts, an art and mental health organization located in Toronto.

Our organization serves over 450 artists with lived experience of mental health and/or addiction issues. Our mission is to reduce social isolation, one of the prime predictors of poor mental health, through engaging artists in weekly art classes, workshops and presentation opportunities. As you can imagine, it has been a unique challenge to achieve our mission in a time of social distancing, but we are figuring out how to deliver online art classes and even possibly an online festival. Every day feels like leaping into the unknown as we work to become digital experts.

In 2017, Workman Arts scaled their programming to three sites in Ontario—St. Catharines, North Bay and Thunder Bay—with the support of a three-year grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. In each location, we worked with local organizations to replicate our successful model of arts programming that is proven to improve the mental health of participants. To date, the sites have successfully offered arts programming to over 350 artists in Thunder Bay, 130 artists in North Bay and 450 artists in St. Catharines. All program participants identify as having mental health and/or addiction issues, and these programs help them maintain their recovery through positive social connections built around a shared passion.

We're in the final months of OTF funding for this initiative, a time when the plan was all three sites would be prepared for the funding to end and would be on the road to financial independence. Unfortunately, this plan came at a time when the Ontario Arts Council faced significant cuts of \$15 million to its programming. Since 2018, Workman Arts in Toronto has experienced an 8% cut to our operational funding, which impacts our ability to deliver our programs. Our three scaling sites across Ontario fared even worse when applying for OAC project funding. For example, inter-arts project grants were reduced by 33%. Visual art project grants were cut by 37%. The Indigenous Culture Fund was eliminated completely.

Receiving project grants is an important way that an arts collective moves towards financial stability. When our

sites were applying for much-needed project funding, the Ontario Arts Council was struggling to meet demand.

Then COVID-19 hit. Now what we are experiencing at all three sites is very concerning—the perfect storm, if you will. With minimal staff and resources, the focus has now shifted from seeking funding to reinventing programming for online delivery. That shift requires time to research options, resources to build appropriate online classes, and the expertise to deal with technical issues.

Our part-time coordinators are working longer hours to support instructors in adapting their content to online delivery, while struggling with the use of technology themselves. We worry that in-person programming may never be possible at these sites because they do not have the financial resources to purchase the appropriate personal protective equipment.

Workman Arts is asking the government, in light of COVID-19 impacts, to please return the Ontario Arts Council budget to its previous level so arts organizations, collectives and artists can make the shift required to survive in our new reality.

In addition, what we've noticed across the province is that online is not an accessible solution for our most vulnerable. One needs access to a device and access to reliable Internet to participate in a class—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Kelly Straughan: —or present online. Many of our program participants are on the Ontario Disability Support Program and ineligible for CERB. They do not have extra funds to make the online shift with us and cannot access something that is so critical to their well-being. I'm asking today that you please consider additional increases to ODSP recipients.

Minister MacLeod very rightly pointed out that culture and sport contribute \$35 billion to the provincial economy, and spoke, in part, to the wonderful world-class entertainment that we have right here in Ontario. I am very proud of the talent on display in our largest institutions, the ones that so beautifully marry the culture part of the portfolio with the tourism part. Our sector is understandably concerned about how we get back to business, and Minister MacLeod rightfully pointed out that we need to rebuild consumer confidence.

All of this is very important, but I'm here today to make sure that this is not the only way we quantify the value of art. I'm here to remind you of the people in our creative industries who are the most vulnerable. They may not be able to prove that their small independent production draws tourists, they may not meet the requirement to be considered a qualified donee to access federal funds to become COVID-19-ready, but they must not be forgotten.

What does my Ontario look like in 18 months? It's an Ontario that takes into account the most vulnerable in our sector and makes sure they are seen, heard, encouraged and, most importantly, supported. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

Before we move to our next presenter, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Karpoche, can you please confirm your attendance and if you are present in Ontario?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Present.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): And in Ontario?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Fife? Can you please confirm your attendance?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Hello. I'm in Waterloo, Ontario. Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Our next presenter is Regional Tourism Organization 7. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Bill Sullivan: Good morning. My name is Bill Sullivan. I'm the chief executive officer of Regional Tourism Organization 7. Our region encompasses the counties of Bruce, Grey and Simcoe.

The latest statistics available from the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries indicate that the annual visitor spend within region 7 in 2016 was in excess of \$1.3 billion, with over 11 million visitors, and it is the third most-visited region of the 13 regions in Ontario. Region 7 is a four-season destination and is often considered the indicator for rural tourism in Ontario. That means that our region often experiences the best and worst of the tourism conditions first.

I'm here to speak to the effects of COVID-19 in our rural Ontario arts, culture, heritage, sport and tourism sector. Those same statistics indicate that over two thirds of the visitors to Bruce-Grey-Simcoe that visit our cultural performances, museums, art galleries, and historic sites, attend a sporting event, or participate in an outdoor activity stay overnight. A successful destination relies on this interdependence to be successful. A successful destination also needs a balance of permanent offerings, as well as festivals and events that contribute to a sense of excitement by providing new offerings. Most of the time, these festivals and events are built on the very things that were listed previously.

Some 96% of the establishments that are in the arts, culture, heritage and sports sectors have less than 50 employees. A recent Destination Canada and McKinsey & Company study indicated that a best-case scenario for tourism recovery by the end of June would mean that 33% of the annual visitor spend would be lifted out of the tourism sector within Canada. If you extrapolate those percentages to region 7, that is \$429 million, or 5,577 full-time-equivalent jobs.

I think we can all agree that the tourism industry will not open fully by the beginning of July. The report went on to detail what would happen if the crisis continued up to September: 58% of the annual visitor spend would be lifted out of the tourism sector within Canada. For region 7, that is \$754 million, or 9,800 full-time-equivalent jobs. Those numbers are staggering. For rural Ontario, that is over \$6 billion and over 80,000 full-time-equivalent jobs that will be lost if recovery is delayed until September.

The tourism sector within region 7 is comprised of over 8,800 tourism-related businesses. Over 700 of these businesses are identified as being in the arts, culture, heritage and sports sectors. Those 700 businesses have an influence

on two thirds of the visitation to this region. Those 700 businesses have an effect on the quality of life of the permanent and seasonal residents. Those 700 businesses contribute to the overall tourism offering, with over 8,000 other tourism businesses to support the activities of these sectors, our destinations and our small towns.

The tourism industry in rural Ontario is critical to the survival of small towns' downtowns and service providers etc. that are located within those small towns. The loss or decline of the tourism industry will start a domino effect. In small towns, as tourism businesses close, there are no businesses left that employ more than a few people. These towns are no different than towns that built up around mining or other resource industries. When the mining industry leaves, there is very little economic reason to stay. The same is true when tourism leaves rural Ontario. Thus begins the migration of small business owners away from rural Ontario and the exodus of residents to other parts of Canada.

1100

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Bill Sullivan: Currently, the growth and viability of this industry is hampered by the lack of many infrastructure items that many residents in Ontario take for granted: reliable broadband, public transportation, social services and health care that matches the seasonal needs of the region.

What kind of help can be provided? Our current laws and regulations have made this largely a two-government response at best. The current Municipal Act does not allow for lower-tier governments to provide significant long-term assistance. The emergency act should be allowed to affect the Municipal Act so that lower-tier governments have the ability to assume debt, forgive property taxes, provide grants to businesses directly, act as guarantors, and other items that will help the businesses survive this situation and other future emergencies.

The provincial emergency order should provide blanket coverage that authorized protocols cannot be challenged by other governing authorities and an indemnity from lawsuits for operations for two years past the lifting of the emergency order.

The value of the industry is being removed exponentially every day. Investors are looking for more secure investments. The unknown, to an investor, is a flag to invest elsewhere. One of the largest unknowns is the possibility of future litigation. The indemnity referenced earlier will go a long way to help maintain value in the industry. Without this indemnity, the insurance industry will be hesitant in reinsuring these businesses, thus leading to higher costs or no insurance. Without this indemnity, investment in the industry will dry up until tourism becomes a better investment than other opportunities.

Stimulating the economy does not have to all come from grants and government handouts. We need to stimulate spending. We need to stimulate acceptance. Our current residents' sentiment is very negative towards tourists visiting rural Ontario. The lack of volume in health care and the lack of a secure supply chain of all supplies, whether it's PPE or food, need to be addressed.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Bill Sullivan: This stimulation comes from creating a sense of security and safety. The conversation needs to change from what we can't do to what we can do.

Tax credits and HST rebates should be considered as a way to stimulate spending. Rewarding residents of Ontario who travel at home and reinvest in the Ontario economy is a good thing.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to take any of your questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony. If you could please state your name for the record and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Good morning, everybody. My name is Andrew Bennett. I am executive director of Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, and I also wear another hat which I think I've explained to this committee before: I'm also the national chair of the advocacy committee of Orchestras Canada, the national body.

It's really great to have this opportunity to speak to the committee, not least because it shows that you care about a sector that is fundamental. It shows that you understand that the arts, heritage and culture sector is huge in Ontario. We've all heard the statistics, but it's worth saying again: It's larger than many of the other sectors that get a lot more attention. So thank you for taking the trouble.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony is the third-largest symphony in Ontario. It means we're a big organization—certainly, a flagship arts organization within the region of Waterloo, where we serve immediately 600,000 people and, of course, wider afield.

We've had an extraordinary experience in the last three months. We've gone from a very conventional pattern of performances, doing very well in that, to becoming an online presence. It has been a big success. What we do know is that it's not viable in the medium to long term, and we also know that we need support to get through the next stages.

The reason we're going to need special support is partly because the performing arts are bound to be at the back of the line for a return to something like normal after COVID. Those realities are based upon the nature of how we gather together in enclosed, large spaces. I don't need to explain to you why that's a problem. So we need to get a bridge to a post-COVID normal that works both for audiences and for institutions and, thus, for our artists.

I think it's also worth saying that in our expectation in terms of revenue, sadly, the worst is yet to come. We are, as an employing organization, benefiting from the federal wage subsidy. When that concludes, any orchestra whose musicians are employees will be in dire straits, but it is keeping us going for the moment. We've also benefited from the special support for culture from the federal arts and culture program. While we're appreciative of that, I would like to explain to those who are on this committee that that represents, once it's apportioned to us, approximately 2% of our annual income. So it's welcome, but it isn't a game-changer.

I want to talk mainly about how I think the province can support arts and culture, and particularly this organization, going forward. We need further investment in digital platforms across the sector, especially equipment for venues, and the expertise for smaller orchestras. We're lucky at Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony: We have expert staff, we do have facilities and we do have the experience. If you look at our YouTube or Facebook channels, you'll see that we have thousands of views weekly for the product we're able to export for the moment. It's great that we're getting that, but it isn't a replacement, because what audiences really crave most of all is live, new experiences, and that's what we're not able to deliver at the moment.

The second thing we need is special facilities for distanced audiences and distanced performers, both front-of-house and in the lobbies and so forth in venues and also backstage. Venues, I know, are crying out for help with that in terms of expertise and also the resources to make differences and upgrades.

You'll notice from my accent that I come from the UK. I've noticed in the last few weeks, frankly, what a mess my former compatriots have made of getting information about reopening of arts and culture—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Andrew Bennett:—as a road map without a scale, and there's conflicting information about what is and isn't possible. It really doesn't help. So as we move towards reopening, what's crucial, as far as I'm concerned, is that any eventual reopening should have clear and very careful messaging right away across the province. Yes, we may be working at different speeds; that information must be clear and careful. It also needs to be coupled with additional investment in high-profile programming for arts organizations and the special promotion of the reopening of the performing arts.

The other thing where I think the province can make a big difference at this stage is by considering a matching program for donations to annual operating costs, to restore the level of confidence of our donors. At Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, we have the benefit of incredibly committed donors to whom I'm very, very grateful indeed. They're people who care desperately about the organization and they're trying to make the difference in an ongoing fashion. What we can't do is cultivate new donors. We can't have that cup of coffee, that drink in the Conductor's Circle bar that leads to a new donation. That simply isn't possible at the moment, and people are naturally cautious about dipping into their pockets at a time of economic uncertainty. So if there could be any funding to match those contributions, it would make the biggest difference to how we can go forward.

We are very successful, as I said, in the online presence of the orchestra. We are now planning and there will be a major announcement from this organization tomorrow about how we're going to go forward for the 2021 season and, indeed, the 2021-22 season. I'm not going to divulge that today, as you'll naturally understand, because it's a big announcement tomorrow. But it means that we are looking to a reduced activity in some respects, serving our community and serving further afield.

But at the end of the day, online, you're in competition with Mumbai—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Andrew Bennett:—and you're in competition with Moscow. We have a very dedicated community, but we need to be very aware that live, real performances are what make a big difference.

I'm very grateful to those MPPs who've made a commitment to listen to us. I know not everybody could do it for all of the organizations, but I would single out MPP Mike Harris and MPP Laura Mae Lindo, who have convened special occasions and opportunities for us to make sure that MPPs know what's actually going on at the coal face.

Finally, I would like to make it clear that Orchestras Canada will be making a written submission on behalf of all the orchestras. Hence, there will be this follow-up, and any notes from the conversation and questions today, which I'm very happy to take in due course, will be incorporated in that submission to make sure that you have all the facts you need in order to make the best possible argument for arts and culture, and particularly the performing arts, at this time of very great need indeed. Thank you for your attention.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

Before we go to questions, I'd like to do an attendance check. MPP Crawford?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Hello, Chair, I'm here. It's Stephen Crawford. I'm in Oakville.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start the first round of questions with the independent members. MPP Simard?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the presenters. I wanted to make a comment just really appreciating how you're highlighting the challenges that the rural communities and many lower-income communities will be facing for this, because they're very different challenges. As Kelly pointed out, as we move to digital practices, it's going to be very difficult for the lower-income, yes, because of the access to those digital means, but also, even when we do have the economic power to have access to the digital platforms, in communities like my own—I'm in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—there are some spots that don't have even Internet. Even if we do have the funds, we can't get it. So it will be important to invest there, to make sure.

The government did announce some funding, so we are really, really looking forward to getting those means to access the new normal to which we're all transitioning. It's very important. As I think Bill highlighted, in small communities the artistic and touristic sector is very important to the local economy but also to the communities for the social aspect. We really need to have particular attention to those rural areas and lower-income communities for that.

Other than investing in the rural broadband and the Ontario Disability Support Program, as Kelly mentioned—which is very important in certain pockets of my

communities, I know—what else could the provincial government do right now, in the short term and in the long term, to help in those specific communities that we should really be looking at? How can we involve you in those processes as well? I know you might already be in communication with the minister's office and in consultation, but if you could just share with the committee maybe concrete measures that you're seeing in other provinces or things that you would recommend. To any of the—

Ms. Kelly Straughan: Certainly, I think that our organization, Workman Arts, and then our scaling projects across Ontario that—we are an arts organization. We get funded by the arts councils. But certainly the people that we serve even struggle to be identified as professional artists to be able to access certain grants that the Toronto Arts Council is offering, where professional artists can receive subsidies because of canceled productions or canceled exhibitions. I think it's really looking at organizations like Workman Arts that may by some standards be considered community arts, but ways that we can help access the most vulnerable. We could be an organization that is able to purchase devices, a number of iPads, and be able to distribute those to people who we know—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Kelly Straughan:—don't have any devices at home. I think it's really about remembering those community organizations that really are in direct touch with those who are the most vulnerable and are able to help them.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you for that. And what are the programs that you qualify for right now, provincially or federally, or that your artists qualify for?

Ms. Kelly Straughan: I think what's quite interesting is our situation at Workman Arts in Toronto, which has been around for 20 years, and then our provincial sites in Thunder Bay, North Bay and St. Catharines are very different.

For us, we are on stable operational funding, so while we did receive cuts to our operational funding from OAC, we still have that stable—it's multi-year commitments, whether it's three or four years. So we are in a much more stable position than, for example, our scaling sites that are looking for project funding. That is really tough to get right now. They actually don't qualify for some of these federal grants. The emergency support fund—I'm forgetting the exact name—that was through United Way and through the community foundations, because they're not considered a qualified donee, they can't access those funds. We're able to, but you can only do it once, so we can't help them. What we're seeing is those organizations that are vital—in Thunder Bay and North Bay, this is vital, vital programming for them, yet they can't access, I would say, the majority of the special funds that have come out, or even project funding from every level of government. So I see how vulnerable those organizations are, and they're so critical.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: And how has the consultation process been so far from your viewpoint, from where you're standing?

Ms. Kelly Straughan: Sorry, can you elaborate on that? The consultation—

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: The minister was doing several consultations—and we’ve heard really different things about it—through stakeholders and I’m just wondering if you were part of those and if you were able to express those concerns at the table?

Ms. Kelly Straughan: I was a part of them. What I do find is it’s such a big portfolio, and so the focus—it just kind of defaults to tourism. We end up talking a lot about getting people back into venues, getting people back into seeing live theatre. I think that’s really important. We also run a festival. Our Rendezvous with Madness Festival is going virtual, and we are feeling as vulnerable as everyone else trying to figure out the online world. I think, in the conversations I’ve been involved with, that I’m not hearing talking about the most vulnerable artists, the most vulnerable—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We’ll have to move to the government side now, and I’ll go to MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you all for your presentations. I wanted to ask Bill Sullivan a question, as I’m in Simcoe county. You mentioned 11 million visitors to the region when things were at best, and now things are a little bit different. Can you speak to some of the partnerships you’re working on right now, in terms of trying to help one another in the region, whether partnerships with hotels or different entertainment venues and recreation like Blue Mountain, in terms of what you’re working on and some of the best practices that you’ve learned that we could use in other regions?

Mr. Bill Sullivan: Thank you for the question. We have a number of different programs running. The very first has to do with the local musicians within the region. We’ve created a From Home Music Series. Musicians who either grew up in the region or reside in the region produce a video, tell a story of why it’s so important that they live where they live or why they grew up where they grew up and what’s special about it, then they perform a song, and we promote that. What we are trying to do there is to give a sense of community, bring the residents a sentiment that’s a little bit more positive. We’re also trying to give some exposure to the artists and also to the producer that we’re working with who resides in the area as well. That’s one program we’re working on.

We’re also supporting Blue Mountain Resort with their virtual performances and Meaford Hall with their virtual performances as well. Then we’ve developed a number of partnerships with, I think it’s closer to 55 different businesses right now, where we match their operating expenses with social media exposure. That social media exposure is sometimes brand new for some of these operators. Most of it is around the shop-local campaign to bring people into their restaurants or places of business, but it’s twofold. It’s to bring business in, which is very important, but it’s also to expose them to what has become the most important medium when it comes to advertising in the tourism world. So those are working quite well.

Then we have all of our other programs, which are still for the most part, moving ahead. The unfortunate aspect is

that we don’t have private sector coming to the table, because matching dollars are required to access those programs. Private sector doesn’t have matching dollars right now, so we’re working with municipalities and some DMOs to make some of the projects work, but a lot of them we can’t make work, and those dollars will, unfortunately—we will not be able to spend those. If we don’t have matching dollars, those much-needed tourism dollars will go back into the general coffers, and we need that changed.

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Ms. Andrea Khanjin: What would be your recommendations for promoting? You talked about staycations, and the minister talked about it quite a bit. But if you’re a resident of the area and you want to really promote your area, what can just general individuals do to help you with promotion and getting the word out?

Mr. Bill Sullivan: It’s probably the most difficult question that I am wrestling with right now. All the statistics and all the data will say that there’s very little residents’ support for visitors coming into the region. The approach that we are actually taking is, let’s improve residents’ sentiment first. Let’s give them a sense of safety and security. Let’s work with different ministries to make that happen. Let’s work with the municipalities to make that happen. If we don’t solve that problem first, we can spend all the money in the world and it won’t go very far.

Also, when you are spending money to advertise locally, you still need a population base. We have municipalities of 4,000 or 5,000 people who have been hit hard by this crisis, and they don’t necessarily have the dollars to spend that way. While it’s a great idea for some areas, and I absolutely support it 100%, it has limited value right now to go out and advertise in the way we would normally advertise. We need to get residents’ sentiment back onside first, and then we can move from there. It’s about responsible tourism and it’s about sustainable tourism, and both go together. That’s the approach we are taking.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: And then, would you say in terms of locally getting residents’ confidence back up, the patio policy of letting people enjoy the patios in the season, but maybe linking it to allowing artists to safely perform on those patios as a way to build up artist confidence and consumer confidence?

Mr. Bill Sullivan: Absolutely. When people see good things happen, they want to get on board, and as long as we practise the safe practices within those establishments, it’s the best way to do it. We all love that kind of thing. We love being able to be outdoors. We love to be able to see things happen. But we want to make sure we’re safe doing it. One of the best advertising units you can actually do is when people see it in person.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. I’m going to pass it on to my colleague MPP Rasheed.

Mr. Bill Sullivan: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Rasheed, and one minute.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Okay. Thank you so much, Chair. What I’m going to do is, then, I’ll ask the question

to Kelly, and then maybe in the next round, we'll continue. Kelly, I was actually just looking at some of the information through your presentation, and I know that especially during this whole COVID time, things have moved digitally or there has been a digital transformation that has taken place in many industries, and I'm sure arts and this sector have definitely stepped up and moved things in a very different direction from on-site to a digital space—just like yesterday, we had the digital Pride parade, too. Especially when we talk about mental health, your organization, the work that you are doing, especially you were planning to move on-site in the summer of 2020—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll come back to that in the second round. Now I'll have to go to the opposition side, and I'll start with MPP Karpoche.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you all for your presentations. My question first goes to Kelly. Kelly, thank you and your organization for the incredible work that you do. I serve as the critic for mental health and addictions for the official opposition NDP, so this is a file that is very close to my heart, and I'm so glad you raised basically the social determinants of health when it comes to mental health and addictions and how one of those determinants really is arts. Arts are a medium through which we cannot only promote but maintain health and well-being. So thank you for that.

I completely agree with everything you raised. At the end of the day, it has to serve those who are most vulnerable. Whatever we do, it has to serve the most vulnerable in our communities and that includes folks who are on ODSP, many of whom have different mental health and addictions issues. So going in that same line, I'm thinking that there are many who have mental health and addictions issues but may not qualify for ODSP because we know that ODSP eligibility comes with its own set of rules which can be quite restrictive, even in terms of understanding what disability might look like for different people.

So does your organization serve others who are vulnerable and who might not be on ODSP, and do you think that, for them, government supports like rent relief would play a big role in their health and well-being—specifically, mental health?

Ms. Kelly Straughan: Yes, absolutely. Many of our 425 members, many would be on ODSP. There are professional artists as well in our organization who present through our various platforms. We have an annual exhibition, and we have an annual festival, and so those artists who have really kind of solidified their place as a professional artist, there are more opportunities for them, absolutely.

I think the arts councils have thought of them first, have thought about the professional artists first, and they do, at this point in time, have access to CERB. It's helped to bridge the gap, but as we've all been talking about, this problem isn't going away any time soon, so exactly the kind of thing you're talking about, where there's support for their everyday lives to enable them to potentially purchase the devices they need to go online, get the

training they need to go online, because it looks like festivals will be presenting in this way for quite a while, and arts organizations—we're looking at a fairly large shift here.

I think, absolutely, in addition to increases to ODSP, to look at things like rent relief to support those artists—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you. And you touched on PPE, and I know that PPE, when we talk about things like hand sanitizers, masks and other supplies—it can sound like little things, but the costs add up. The costs can be huge for many organizations that are smaller. It becomes a huge percentage of their budget. In addition to not only returning arts council grants and funding up to previous levels—I mean, in the NDP we've called for doubling of the Ontario Arts Council funding. Do you think that all arts organizations need to have that dedicated funding to ensure PPE because, at the end of the day, safety is something that is top priority for everybody?

Ms. Kelly Straughan: Yes. I think it could be as simple as getting us together through potentially arts service organizations, like the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, that would help us have group purchasing power and potentially have less individual costs to those organizations. It could really, really help those small organizations because if you're in line with Stratford and they're purchasing probably a lot, that benefit would go down to the small community organizations, like ours or like our partner sites across Ontario.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you very much. I'm going to pass it to my colleague MPP Lindo.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Lindo?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Chair, how much time do we have?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute and 10 seconds.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Perfect. Thank you. I'm going to start with Andrew. It's so lovely to see you, and thank you for your kind words during the presentation. MPP Fife and I, a couple of years back, I think, now, or a year ago, had done a discussion around arts and the economy and the return on investment. Given that we're here talking about economic recovery and trying to be innovative, I was taken by the portion of your presentation around investing in the equipment that you might need to move into and invest in the digital side. Could you just spend a little bit of time speaking more about that?

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Yes. Something I think that particularly involves—for example, our main venue is Centre in the Square in Kitchener. It has actually quite a good technical setup for digital broadcasting, which is a real boon to us, but we lack possibly the three or four extra cameras that would be necessary in order to make the very best-quality video experience for all of our consumers going forward. We're hoping to start doing new work come September, and that would make a big difference.

1130

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Similarly, we—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. We'll come back to that in the second round.

Now I'll go to the government side, and we'll start with MPP Rasheed again.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Just to end my question with Kelly: In terms of the experience so far in this whole digital transformation, but also post-COVID, like the plans that you have in place—I would love to get your input on that. Thank you.

Ms. Kelly Straughan: Well, in terms of going digital, one of the prime things we do to reduce social isolation and improve people's mental health is that we offer about 25 art classes a week. Initially, I think we thought going online would be more accessible; you know, potentially some people have social phobias or there's physical disabilities, and this is really going to help.

But then, of course, what we realized very quickly is that so many of the people who take our classes really would be the most vulnerable. I think those are the ones who potentially are on ODSP or on fixed incomes. They're available to come to those art classes, where we do have some members who, as I said, are professional artists working as independent contractors. But the most vulnerable we see really had trouble accessing those online classes, because even our instructors, with the amount of data that Zoom uses, are only able to afford tiny little Internet packages, if anything at all. We noticed that some were trying to even go to subway stations and see if they could get Internet there to take part in the class, so that really quickly became something that we need to solve.

And then, as well, with the instructors, it was tough for us to just say, "Okay. Now just teach improv online." How the heck do you do that? How do you do a scene-study class online? So then we were asking people to reinvent everything they were doing. It feels like kind of pulling a thread on a sweater: The further you go, you just think, "Wow, this is a completely, completely different way of working, even from the class side."

And then, of course, I'm sure you've had many people come in to talk about the impacts on festivals or public presentations, the loss of revenue and the loss of box office. We found it to be something that we thought would improve accessibility, but actually does not for many, many people.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay. Just a comment before I pass on to MPP Roberts over here: What I've seen so far is—again, from experience—that organizations have been moving to a digital space because of this whole COVID situation.

Again, we don't know how long it will take for things to get "normal" in our province, because of these social distancing and physical distancing issues that we have to follow as provincial guidelines. I just feel like, yes, there may have been some issues in the very early stages, but what I'm hearing out there, especially in our sectors for tourism and everything—just yesterday or the day before yesterday, there was a huge concert that took place online, and I think \$6.3 million was raised, so—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed:—I think that, yes, things are going to be very different, but again, to me, these are very positive changes. Now people are not sitting at home; rather, they are doing something productive.

I'm going to pass on to MPP Roberts.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: My question is to Andrew. Hi, Andrew. Thanks for your presentation. I've been reflecting a lot about the fact that we need to figure out how to get folks to come back out, to overcome some of the fears and anxieties. I also wonder whether or not there is an opportunity here to use that marketing push or incentives to help draw a new generation of folks in to the orchestra.

I recall that when I was younger, my father signed up for packages at the NAC, where he would bring me to four concerts a year, and that fostered in me a lifelong commitment to going to the symphony, going to the orchestra, being a regular subscriber at the NAC. I'm wondering, do you have any thoughts on how the government could help, either on an incentive side, perhaps a tax incentive, or on a marketing side to help get families, for example, to come back out to the symphony and to the orchestra?

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Thank you for that question. Obviously, it will take time. That's the crucial thing, and we can't buy time, sadly. We are also already doing that. One of the things that's great about the current program is that it's free and you don't have to sign up for it. However, it means that we've not been able to capture data, and one of the changes we'll be making come the fall is capturing the data of the people who are interacting with us so we can do precisely what you've just described in terms of getting people to come to live performances later.

I also think that the biggest challenge is still the existing audience.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: I think that that's where we're going to have to be really careful, because the demographic skews to older—not necessarily overall, but there are older people who are quite rightly cautious, and we're going to need to invest, probably, in quite a lot of video work and communications work around explaining to them the measures that have been taken to convince them that the risk is absolutely minimal when the time comes.

That's why I said a joined-up provincial approach to looking at how we explain what venues and arts organizations are doing will make a huge difference to convincing people in general. It's one thing for Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony to do it, and we will do it well, but if we actually join together our forces and talk about what all venues are doing, what all institutions are doing, what Workman Arts are doing, what everybody is doing to make things safe and accessible eventually, I think we'll be much more successful in communicating. I think that's the biggest single factor in success when we get the chance to be successful.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. I'll go back to MPP Lindo from the opposition now.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I'm going to bring it back to Andrew. I'm going to switch courses a little bit, because

you gave a solid example of why we need to invest in the digital side of the arts, so that people are able to make this transition, and other people in prior hearings have also raised that. But you also said something that was extremely important, also something that we've heard consistently: the importance of clear, direct messaging from public health. To me, this actually brings your comments in line with and in support of what Bill was also saying about the need to encourage people to feel safe. I just want to give you a little bit of time to speak about that, because that is one of the ways that we will actually stimulate the economy, and sometimes people don't realize how important that connection is.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: As I said, there are two elements. One is alignment, particularly at the provincial and municipal level, with the venues concerned, the places where art is performed, that there is clarity around what is and is not going to be possible and when it's going to be possible. So that's the first step. Much as I would love to get back to doing live audience events as soon as possible, I'd much rather wait and do it well than rush it and make some of the mistakes that we're seeing elsewhere internationally.

The second thing is that I think that we need—if there could be investment, it would be investment in the information that's produced specially by organizations that explains about what measures have been taken and the basis on which people will be able to return.

I just think there's one thing that's worth saying in all of this. You're probably seeing horror photos of venues and orchestras or theatre companies with a distanced audience, and there are the six people in the front of the orchestra area, and it looks very sad. Yes, that might be okay for a publicity stunt. I'm not suggesting that there's no room for that at all, but it isn't viable for the organization in any respect. It's not really viable for the audience who are there. Can you imagine the trouble you'd have to go to to even get into the auditorium in the first place? And if you want to go to the washroom, well, you're just going to have to forget that, because that really isn't going to be possible. There are all sorts of hurdles that don't work. It doesn't work for the audience. Our orchestra will play for a small audience if they're really appreciated, but if you're a performer, you don't want to play week in, week out for an audience where there's just no reaction. It's all a bit sad.

Then finally, it doesn't work economically. I hardly need to explain this, but we are a not-for-profit; we barely get along when we have full audiences. A 20% audience really doesn't "butter any parsnips," as they would say. It really doesn't make any sense. You have to get a full audience to be successful. So if you're going to be opening early with a reduced audience, don't try. Wait until you can get a full audience and then do it really well, and invest in the messaging and get the alignment.

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Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much for that. Again, we've heard a lot of people talking about the importance of those safety protocols, just as you've outlined, and the importance of incorporating those ideas into the marketing strategy from the province.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I want to move over to Bill, because one of the things that you said, and I think it's rather ingenious, is to stimulate acceptance, because a lot of people are nervous. If they live in a tourist area, they're nervous about the push to welcome people in. But part of what could happen, and what we've been hearing, is strategic marketing that outlines the safety protocols being put out provincially, not just within your region, so that people do feel better about opening themselves up so that we can start to stimulate the economy. Have you heard people speaking about that or do you think that that would be something that would be viable to stimulate this acceptance, as you described?

Mr. Bill Sullivan: We're actually doing that. We're producing a series of close-to-home videos right now, which the intent is, you vacation close to home. But on each one of those videos, we have an icon of a person washing their hands, wearing a mask and social distancing. We put what we consider the three main icons on every one of our videos. It will be part of our social media platform going forward, talking about the measures that need to be taken. Hopefully, with enough repetition, that will start to get the message out of safety and security.

I do think the lack of clarity from the beginning, and it continues to this day, is causing us issues. In part of my presentation, you, as an operator, can put all the protocols in place but a different ministry or a different agency can come in and say, "You can't open." The operator doesn't have the confidence. We need this blanket indemnity for so many reasons. We need this indemnity from a lawsuit. Investment is just going to leave this province like you would not believe if we don't do this. It's going to go elsewhere. Why would you invest in a business that in a couple of years' time, you could be sued for something? The contact tracing isn't strong enough to really prove the fact that you have to defend yourselves against it. These are the issues that have to be taken care of now.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much for that, Bill.

In the small amount of time we have remaining, I just wanted to say thank you to Kelly for something that you had said in your presentation: the need to invest in people, by increasing ODSP amounts, for instance. That helps people with their mental health, and we've been talking about the impact of COVID on mental health. If you want to take a little bit of time to explain why that's important, go on.

Ms. Kelly Straughan: I'm sorry. Can you just repeat the end of that? My Internet connection cut out a little bit. Sorry about that.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: We may not have a lot of time, but it was just giving you a nod for saying the importance of increasing ODSP.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize for that.

We have to move to the independent members now. MPP Simard, do you have any questions?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I echo what my colleague MPP Lindo said. I wanted to give the chance to the presenters

to answer her question because it's a very important question about the ODSP support. I want to give my minutes to that question because I think it's an important one, to invest in people and the importance of supporting lower incomes and those who rely on ODSP.

Ms. Kelly Straughan: As I mentioned, a number of our members who are artists are on ODSP and have been for quite a while. Depending on their circumstance, it is quite a low amount per month. Enough to cover rent and food, and that's really it.

Even with our members, we started a food share program—we have a kitchen at our site—because we noticed people are having to make the choice between being able to afford coming to class or eating that day. So we offered a food share program.

Then, we were able to expand and offer a TTC token program, where they were able to get a token to at least get home from class. All of that made a huge difference. That's how on the edge they're living. So you throw one more thing at that; you throw "Can you buy an iPad? Can you access Internet?" There is no way that can happen.

We do have many of our members who become instructors, and that becomes hugely terrifying for them to make one step outside of ODSP because you do one thing wrong and then you can get clawed back. So it's hard for them to even start to develop their careers to potentially maybe one day be off of ODSP because the annual limits are so, so tight for them. If you increase it, if you give them a little bit more wiggle room to be able to afford being online, because online, when you think about it, there's an accessibility issue. It's not necessarily for the elite, but it is an accessibility issue to be able to access absolutely everything we're talking about today.

I like that Andrew also pointed that out for seniors. There's an accessibility issue and a comfort level that they need to also get online.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Yes, and I can appreciate that. I have one of my parents who lived most of his life on ODSP, so I know exactly the amount and the struggles. It's tough basically just to live, borderline, so I appreciate that.

I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank all the presenters today. It's a beautiful day, but you're sharing your time with us, which is very valuable information as we try to navigate this uncharted territory. There's just no manual on how to operate, and hearing the on-the-ground situations is very helpful. I'll make sure to take that back to my colleagues as well who are not on the committee today. I really appreciate it. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. All right. And thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations. That concludes our list of presenters before we go in recess. This committee now stands in recess until 1 p.m. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1147 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back. We are meeting for hearings on the culture and heritage sector as part of the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal

Update Act, 2020, and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

Before we move on to our next presenters, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Oosterhoff, if you could please confirm your attendance and presence in Ontario.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm here; West Niagara, Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right.

COMPUTER ANIMATION STUDIOS OF ONTARIO

MS. ELIZABETH JACKSON HALL
CANADA'S BALLET JÖRGEN

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would like to call upon our first witness now, Computer Animation Studios of Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: Thank you. Neishaw Ali.

Mr. Matthew Bishop: Matthew Bishop.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: Hi. I'm Neishaw Ali, president and founding partner of Spin VFX. We are 30 years strong and still going. Together with Matt Bishop, co-owner and executive producer of Sinking Ship—18 years and still going strong—we co-chair Computer Animation Studios of Ontario, which represents companies in developing and producing creative content for broadcasters and VOD streaming platforms globally.

The majority of our work is labour-based; therefore, we rely heavily on the creative and technical talent of our workforce. We also use a wide range of software and hardware to create high quality content and cinematic visual effects. In 2019, visual effects and animation studios contributed \$308 million in direct provincial GDP, and we were expecting to increase our contribution in 2020 by approximately 30%. However, the economic impact of COVID-19 has created a huge gap in our production that is detrimental to our workforce.

At the beginning of March 2020, the animation, VFX and post-production studios employed an equivalent of over 7,000 full-time workers. While everyone was unable to work, we had a backlog that carried us through to July, so we managed to keep most, if not all, of our staff working. However, we now estimate that in July, 80% of all studios collectively will be out of work. That means 93% of visual effects studios and 100% of post will be out of work. We will have no work until production resumes after four months.

Let's assume for a moment that physical production will not resume at 100% unless there is a vaccine. Assume that 60% of productions start shooting in July 2020. They will have to prep, shoot, edit and have a director's cut before our work can begin. Therefore, the earliest that we would actually see a turnover of work would be in January 2021. That will be at a 60% level.

This situation is further intensified because of the worldwide competition that we have to deal with every

day. They're all vying for this 60% body of work, and producers will decide who to give the work to based on strong client relationships, the quality of the work, the stability of pricing, and of course, the amazing stability of our tax credit. Those are the studios that will be successful.

When production resumes, due to health and safety measures, which are absolutely necessary, the way we produce our shows will change and there will be a heavy reliance on visual effects to fill the gap. We have to look at innovative ways of creating intimate and crowd scenes, have dynamic discussion on screen. All of that, coupled with all of the shows starting and posting at the same time, will create a scarcity of labour that we will be unable to fill and, therefore, we'll have to turn work away. Should work resume 100% in January 2021, there will be a glut of work in the marketplace and VFX and post studios will be busy and not have enough artists to service the increased demand, especially if—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Ms. Neishaw Ali:—their workforce has to look elsewhere to subsidize their income. We will either have to turn work away or be forced to outsource work, and that is not what we want to do.

It is important to reinforce that prior to COVID-19, there was a 30% shortage of artists in the workforce in roles like animation and creature compositing, and now, with the uncertainty of the studios not able to cover the gap in our artists' wages from September to December, we are facing potential layoffs, and our artists will have to look elsewhere to feed their families.

Our industry has always faced severe challenges in acquiring and retaining employees in the post-production process. A lack of technical and creative abilities does limit the candidates available to work with. Talented professionals with the necessary qualifications, experience and skill set are in high demand, for high salaries. We need to maintain our workforce, so we can rebuild our sector and be ready to say yes to all the work. We've already spent over \$6.5 million in COVID-related costs in an effort to keep our employees working, and our ongoing monthly costs are projected to be \$1.4 million.

I will now pass you over to Matt, who will conclude.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself, please?

Mr. Matt Bishop: Sorry about that. While we share many of the same physical challenges voiced by other film and television industries, there are specific and unique pain points for VFX, animation and post-production studios. We have outlined seven recommendations to survive COVID-19 and to thrive moving forward:

(1) To push for the continuation of the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy and CECRA to December 2021;

(2) To include remote work from home as permanent—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Matt Bishop:—designated workspaces for OCASE purposes;

(3) The payment of outstanding OCASE tax credits as currently sought;

(4) To allow COVID-19-related costs to qualify for tax credits;

(5) To allow salaries paid to workers in Ontario to be eligible for OCASE in the first year residency, not the second;

(6) To untether OCASE from OPSTC, to allow VFX, animation and post-production studios to file OCASE independently and to reduce the backlog; and

(7) The stability of all the tax credits.

OCASE and its members would like to thank all of you for everything this government has done to help during this pandemic. Our industry in VFX and animation has grown over 85% in the last three years, with commendations at the Oscars and the Emmys, and continues to be an excellent use of tax credit expenditure, with every dollar generating \$10 in Ontario's GDP. I'm confident that the continued investment in COVID support of our industry we will continue to grow and deliver jobs that will make Ontario proud—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up now.

I'll now call upon our next witness, Elizabeth Jackson Hall. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: There we are. Can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Okay. My name is Elizabeth Jackson Hall. I am a fine artist here in Toronto, Ontario, with three school-aged children. I guess I'm here to present the microcosm of the self-employed fine artist and the effect of COVID, particularly the social distancing, on my particular industry, so to speak.

First, I'd very much like to thank the Standing Committee on Financial and Economic Affairs for allowing me to speak. It's my first time I've ever done anything like this, and I appreciate the ability to participate in the democratic process. I'm also very grateful for the provincial, federal and municipal efforts to combat COVID. I think we've done well. It has been difficult, though, as a self-employed artist.

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Just for the record, I'm not one who qualified for CERB, because my income last year did not reach it. I've got three children at home, and I've been rebuilding my career. It takes 10 years for a fine artist to build a career. I got to year nine before I had kids. I'm just grateful my security guard husband is still employed. Otherwise, it winds up being the child tax benefit that has allowed us to float our boat. I'm grateful for those things, but I had so many projects going forward in 2020 that were eliminated—completely eliminated—by the necessary crack-down. I'm not even sure that I can say, "Oh, can you throw more money our way?" It's not that. It's more a pressure to try to either open up the economy, allow for the kinds of openings that we have that allow you to sell art or to perhaps, I don't know, provide financial support for completely other ways of showing three-dimensional, tactile visual art—because the virtual world doesn't work very well for paintings.

At the beginning of 2020, I had the opening of my gallery, which it took me two years to actually build.

Let me see if I can do this “share screen” business. Aha, have I got this? Oh, my gosh. It’s been so long since I’ve done this. I’m sorry about this; I’m little bit of a newbie, even with Zoom.

Can you see this picture of my gallery?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Great. This was the artist Anne Smythe, whose work I was meant to open on March 26, as you can see. We had been planning it for seven months, with all of our effort—workshops and everything—to promote her work, and it was all for naught. I even printed the cards and I’d hired the musician. I had a reporter.

Sorry, I’ve got to pull up Zoom again. Damn it.

There we are. Sorry about this. As I say, I’m a bit of a newbie.

Ah, now I’ve gotten it. Sorry, I’ve got to unshare the screen and I’ve got to make it big again. Eek! There we are, almost. Now, how can I unshare the screen?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Ah, there we are. Can I unshare? No. Really, I do apologize. What can I say? One tries to go with the times.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): It’s already unshared.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Is it already—thank you. Thank you for your help.

I also run a drawing group with a friend of mine at a local coffee shop and we support him. It’s a place that is open with clothed models, so it allows for teenagers, or anyone who feels uncomfortable, to come and draw. Of course, that was nixed.

I had lined up a number of students to come and take private drawing lessons in my space out of that drawing group. If any of you have ever had to set up private drawing lessons, you know how much work that is. It has also been cancelled. The studio tour in our neighbourhood: cancelled. I had two commissions, also cancelled, worth at least \$1,200 each.

The one thing that did go forward, in fact, is a mural that I’m actually starting next week with a number of students. I do a lot of community stuff at this point in my life, because I have kids and they are 12, almost 14 and eight. I am going ahead, fortunately, because it’s an exterior project. It’s looking like I’m going to have at least eight teenagers helping me who are in the 12-to-14 range, for community service hours. I will be able to teach them how to do murals so that they also may go forward in this area that is being supported very nicely by the city of Toronto. It’s not a big mural; it’s like a \$5,000 mural, but I am grateful.

Yes, I think it is more a question of—and if there’s any way you are able to put pressure on the provincial government in particular—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: —to open up, so it can have an opening, so I can show my artist, and she can also

make a living, and the artist who I hope to show on top of that; continue the drawing group and—yes.

Thank you so very kindly for the opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Our next presenter is Canada’s Ballet Jörgen. If you could please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Bengt Jörgen: Thank you very much, Chair. My name is Bengt Jörgen, artistic director and CEO of Canada’s Ballet Jörgen. I’m also the artistic director of the dance program at George Brown College.

Members of the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to present today. Canada’s Ballet Jörgen is number one in delivering dance programming to communities across Canada. With a focus on making high-quality dance available to everyone, we reach every part of our great province. Last year we connected with over 48,000 people in some 51 Ontario communities. Together with George Brown College, we also train professional dancers drawn from every part of Ontario.

There are a few key messages I wish to deliver today: the vital importance of allowing our artists to return to work; the need for a reopening plan for arts venues across the province; and the need for recovery support to ensure the arts remain a vibrant component of our communities moving forward.

The performing arts have been completely shut down since mid-March, with dramatic consequences for our artists, organizations and our many stakeholders. Canada’s Ballet Jörgen alone has cancelled over 300 performances, community presentations and education events across Ontario, the United States and other Canadian provinces. Today our artists are working from home, trying to maintain top-notch physical conditioning while also delivering world-class artistic experiences online.

Dancers and professional-level dance students must pursue daily regimented physical training to maintain their abilities as artists. This cannot be done long-term from home. Dance artists across Ontario desperately need access to dance studios to ensure they can train and work safely. It can take up to 10 years to train a professional dancer. The commitment, stamina and physical performance required is the same as for any elite athlete. After three months without access to proper training, we are reaching a critical breaking point. Dancers are struggling to maintain their physical and mental well-being, and some, unfortunately, are starting to leave our profession.

Health must, of course, come first. Everyone in our sector understands the need to remain vigilant. We believe that allowing dancers and other artists back into their facilities can be done meeting provincial guidelines outlined for other businesses under the stage 2 reopening. Olympic and professional as well as provincially recognized amateur athletes are already allowed to get back to training within their training facilities. I urge you to allow Ontario artists to do the same.

Performing arts centres and theatre facilities are a critical part of community infrastructure across the province. They’re also the backbone of Ontario’s performing arts

sector. They ensure that a variety of artistic experiences are available in every part of the province. Many artists require these facilities to practise and prepare their productions. Students in arts training programs are dependent on accessing performing arts facilities to complete their training. In the face of COVID-19, venues are trying to determine how to manage thousands of events impacting every facet of the performing arts industry.

Performing arts facilities in Ontario need a clear path to reopening. They will have to prepare social distancing in their venues. They must undertake changes to their signage and routines. This will take time and money—money they do not have.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Bengt Jörgen: Arts and culture contributes \$25 billion annually to Ontario's economy. Today, much of this sector is shut down with no revenue. Canada's Ballet Jörgen saw a 90% drop in revenue in April, with continued steep losses for every month since. I want to acknowledge the critical support from all levels of government to stabilize the sector in the immediate aftermath of the shutdowns. Our sector is now facing a very long, slow recovery, with significant new investments needed to keep our staff and audiences safe.

With incomes decimated across the sector, additional measures to support the cultural industries as we move through the reopening process will be critical to ensure the vibrancy of the arts in Ontario. You have earlier heard from colleagues presenting the very largest Toronto arts organizations about the need for additional funding support. As a company serving all of Ontario, I would like to also stress the following needs for our community:

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- allow us to get into our dance studios;
- allow theatres across Ontario to start the process of opening and preparing themselves for operating with social distancing;
- ensure that there is support to get arts into smaller communities across the province.

Thank you for your time today and for the support of the province of Ontario for our cultural sector.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We will go to questions now. For the first round of questions, we'll start with the opposition. MPP Glover? He's not there? All right. MPP Karpoche? Oh, MPP Andrew.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Yes. It's actually going to be me first, for MPP Glover. Thank you to all of those who have presented. I really appreciate it. Thank you very much for sharing your wisdom with us today.

My first question is to Ballet Jörgen. Thank you very much for your work. I know that you all are trying very hard to use online. I see that through CBJ Interactive. I wanted to know how that is going.

I also wanted to commend you all for the work you did with Kids Help Phone and the Never Dance Alone-a-Thon. I think that was very important because it underscores the importance of art, especially community-based art, to our mental health. That's been a thread that we've been discussing all the way through.

I also wanted to say that I completely agree with you on the two pieces that you've asked for: allowing us to get back into dance studios, and also giving supports where necessary to potentially cover some of those PPE costs, which I have heard from some art institutions can go up to \$20,000, \$30,000—\$15,000 at least—to retrofit sets, to retrofit organizations, this sort of thing. I'm just wondering if you can expand on how the artists are doing. How have you all been keeping in touch with your dancers? What's your enrolment like? I'm wondering what some of the social conditions have been that you all are weathering right now.

Mr. Bengt Jörgen: Thank you, MPP Andrew, for that question. Canada's Ballet Jörgen is not just the largest producer of dance across Canada; we are one of the largest arts institutions in Ontario. We have over 100 artists working for the company in various facets. Obviously, as I said earlier, most of our revenue has collapsed due to COVID-19, but we have continued to work online and we have continued to create and we're continuing to develop an online presence. Most of our dance programs are now delivered online, with some success.

We are struggling because we have many professional-level dancers who are about to transition into the professional dance world. They are being transitioned through our partnership with George Brown College, and they cannot graduate. It is causing a lot of stress because we cannot give them an end date for when they can get back and complete their studies. They're in the middle of their programs.

All intakes currently have been suspended until January. That is a little easier to manage than those students who have been training for several years and are currently on hold and cannot graduate. We are seeing a beginning of people dropping out of the profession, as I mentioned in my comments. We have had some professional dancers who said simply they cannot face the journey back after sitting still for three months because, even though they can work at home, we need our facilities to physically work properly. We're seeing the same thing with students. So we will have a gap with regard to dancers in this province due to COVID.

Other provinces are facing the same issues, but we are reopening later. In Quebec, today—today—they're reopening their dance studios, and BC has done so. So there's a challenge for us to maintain competitiveness as well across the country.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very, very much. We are certainly honoured to have Ballet Jörgen in St. Paul's and I have seen the performances. We will continue to support and amplify that we need to have our studios open. Return to school is already going to be so difficult for students, so we need them to have access to as many community infrastructure pieces as we can, and this is absolutely one of our landmarks near Casa Loma as well.

The next question I have is on behalf of MPP Glover. This question is going to Neishaw Ali. Neishaw, MPP Glover would like to know the impact that COVID-19 has

had, particularly on your workers, and if you all have any semblance of a plan for return to work—if you've received guidelines, if the guidelines made sense to you all, if you have been able to implement any of those guidelines.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: Thank you for the question. We have been working non-stop. The guidelines have been amazing, and it's being readily adopted by not only our sector but by everyone in the film and television industry. With that, our hope—we cannot keep our artists employed unless physical production resumes, and not at 50%, but, really, full production. Should that happen, and when that does—and I'm hoping it's happening—then the gap that we see, while everyone was not able to work from March to now—we have been working, because we had the backlog of work. But now, we've got to wait until production starts to shoot—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: —there is an editor available, and we know that it takes weeks for that to happen.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

And Elizabeth, I know we won't have much time together, but I wanted to say thank you for your exquisite art. As a person who has many friends and colleagues who are visual artists, I have heard the plea for additional funding to the Ontario Arts Council, for instance, which is so seminal to the creation and preservation of art. I wanted to get your opinion on that.

Oh, you're muted.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Oh, dear.

It's a funny thing. From my own experience, I have found that for individual artists, it can be difficult to access grants. As a professional, I've been at it since I was—25 years, at least, and I've done church restorations.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the independent members for their time of questioning now. MPP Simard.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you. It's all me today, because MPP Schreiner is in another committee.

Thank you to all the presenters—very interesting presentations, and I appreciated the questions from my colleague MPP Andrew.

I wanted to ask the Ballet Jörgen—I'm a big fan, because I was a dancer for many years but ballet jazz; it's a bit different. But I've had my subscription for the ballet series at the National Arts Centre. I'm biased, and I think that it's the most beautiful form of art there is.

You answered many of the questions through your presentation about the training. I think that is very concerning. I was wondering about that: how they train in their houses. There is no barre; there's no full-wall mirror. And they are not considered in those categories that are allowed to train, which I understood from your presentation. So that's a concern, because you can't lose it. You really have to train consistently, because then you have to start all over, and this is a sport. It's a professional sector and career for many, and so that's very important. I know you deliver programming across Canada but also, I think, in the US, so I'm sure that now, you can't do that either. There's no access, and we don't know when you'll be able to go.

So I'm wondering—you must be in communication with other companies of ballet as well, but what is your experience with the different provinces? You mentioned Quebec—and acknowledging that we're not all in the same health situation in every province. Every province has had a unique experience with the pandemic. But how has it been with the different places where you perform, with the subscriptions and just dealing with the provincial guidelines? How has it been, the consultation process? What do you suggest we do short-term and long-term moving forward, and what are some of the best practices that you're seeing across the country?

Mr. Bengt Jörgen: Thank you, MPP Simard. We operate in every single province in Canada. We have staff in many different jurisdictions, and we talk to all of our colleagues across Canada. Ontario currently is the last province to open up for dance. As I mentioned earlier today, Quebec is allowing their professional institutions to get back to work. Alberta is moving in that direction, BC has already done so, and Nova Scotia as of mid-July. Those are, together with Ontario, the hardest-hit provinces. We are the last one to even look at that, since that is not here. So that's obviously an issue for us.

1330

In every region, we are very concerned, because we are dealing with physical work all the time. We have health committees, just on a regular basis, for the safety of our artists and for the safety of our staff, not really anticipating COVID, but other matters that pertain to this.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Bengt Jörgen: Basically, we believe that the same practices and social distancing that are applied to every other business is really what's taking place. Dancers are going in, they are keeping their distances. We think it can be done. The government set the rules. We don't have a problem with that. We will follow them. But we do believe we can follow them, and I think it's important that we get started on that process.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Great, and that's what I was going to ask as well, is that even planning for a second wave, maybe, or if we have to do this in the future, if we should include you with the professional athletes that can train right now. What is the difference going into your facility and doing the rotations, right? Only three dancers can go train, but at least you have that access, while maintaining and respecting the guidelines. Because we're all in this together, we're all following the same rules, but there's a way to do it. I was going to ask: Should you be included, should this happen again, at the stage 2 level?

Mr. Bengt Jörgen: We believe we should be included with the elite athletes. We believe we can meet all of the same requirements, and we're prepared to do so.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good afternoon, Chair, and everyone on the committee. My question I'd like to start out with is to Computer Animation Studios of Ontario, so it's either one of the presenters; you choose. By the way, I

enjoyed all of the presentations and I want to thank you all for coming in.

I know our government, and I think the people of Ontario, feel the film industry is very critical, not only to the culture and arts of our society but also to the economy, so there's a lot of importance to your industry here. I'm certainly proud of the great work that comes out of Sheridan College in my riding, which has a lot of computer animation and probably what I think are some of the best in the entire world. I'm sure you know better than I do, but I know there are some great programs there.

We as a government have felt very strongly about this. I know you mentioned the continuation of the Ontario film tax credit. I think that's something you want to see. I think stability in the tax credit—previously, there were some changes, and I think your industry does not want to see changes in this so you have the ability to forecast into the future, in terms of what you can do. I got that message loud and clear.

I wanted to hear a little bit more about what you're talking about with a couple of other points you raised, which I'd like to hear little more detail on. The first was, you mentioned something about working from home—I didn't quite understand that—if there's some tax credit or something? And also, if you could talk a little bit more about some COVID costs being tax-deductible. If you could shed some more light on that, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

Mr. Matt Bishop: I'll jump in on the COVID costs, and I think Neishaw can speak greater to the non-standard workplaces.

The tricky thing with the COVID costs was that in the visual effects in animation industry they cater to a lot of very strict NDAs, so it was very tricky for individuals to take the work and work from home. When the pandemic broke, we had to move very quickly and really create an environment where we could safely get our individual employees to work from home. There was a lot of increased costs in networking and connections.

We actually did a survey amongst our members, which right now is roughly about 40 different studios in Ontario, and the average cost that they suddenly had to face was between \$80,000 to \$400,000, out of the blue. That was for the networking infrastructure and all the security to have the workers work from home, in addition to the fact that all of the software licensing would have to be increased. Now that that's been incurred, the big thing now is the ongoing monthly cost. A lot of the industry is based on software subscriptions, and all of the members work on fixed bids, so, "This is the work for that." There is not a clause where we can go back and say, "We now are experiencing \$200,000 in new overages due to a pandemic." These are all things that our individual members have had to absorb. Both Neishaw, running Spin, and myself, running Sinking Ship Entertainment, both incurred massive immediate costs and a much higher new monthly cost, while also paying all of our full costs.

I'll pass it to Neishaw for the second part of the question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: I think one of the issues is how to maintain our artists working from home. We had to onboard them and get them all set up. There was labour, equipment. Software had to be purchased. They were able to be at home through connectivity, log-in to our servers at our studio and work efficiently. As Matt mentioned about the cost, we had additional costs because of the decrease in productivity. The first week of set-up, we only had 60% efficiency; second week, 70%; and now I think we balance anywhere from 80% to 90%.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, thanks. You touched on some of the financial issues that your industry is facing, and I know you mentioned the wage subsidy, which is the federal government. But we've found with a lot of different industries, including in the arts and culture industries, that sometimes there has been some red tape or regulatory barriers that have been a disincentive to hire people or create content. We have a lot of regulations in this province, so is there anything that you see that we can make a note of, that we can pass on to the minister to let them know that it would help your business?

Ms. Neishaw Ali: Absolutely. One of them, without a doubt, would be untethering OCASE from OPSTC, because right now, we are tied with producers filing for their credit before we can apply for our OCASE, which is our labour tax credit. We have different time periods in which we file. If there's a way of allowing for independent filing of the OCASE tax credit—it was not there before. It was brought in—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: —a couple of years ago. That is really, really important.

There is that, and then there is the residency: allowing, for any workers in Ontario who are working, their remuneration to be eligible for OCASE in the first year that they start working with us, because they're taxpayers.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: So it is based, right now, on citizenship?

Ms. Neishaw Ali: The year after. They've got to be here working for a year in order to qualify, then the following, so we waste a whole year of tax credit.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, thanks.

That's it for my questions. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We have only 15 seconds, so we'll move to our independent members now, again. Any questions from independent members?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Okay, I'm unmuted now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. MPP Simard?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Yes. I didn't think it was this quick.

I wanted to ask for the animation studios—which would be interesting to know, since you're a small business and you face the same challenges. Could you tell us what concrete recovery measures could help you now and in the next few years as you adapt, and what you see that the changes will be long-term that you will have to do to adapt, basically? Because you're a software and tech group, so

it's a bit different than what we've seen so far, and I think it would be interesting. We all assume that you're already pretty digital, but there must be other practices that you'll have to adjust moving forward and planning for the future. So are there things that will be long-term? What kind of support now and long-term?

Ms. Neishaw Ali: So the support now would be to keep our workforce. We need our workforce. We're a labour-driven industry. Sheridan, Seneca, all the colleges: It's very, very important. We currently have to keep our labour force working. We cannot have a gap where we're not able to support them. So that's where the wage subsidy is extremely critical, because there's a scarcity of resources.

1340

Physical production resuming is absolutely essential to our success, because come January 2021, there will be so much work that we will not be able to service that work.

Technology is an amazing thing, and with regard to the implementation of 5G, that happening will allow us much more flexibility and to do work on the bigger jobs and to have leverage across the world in order to work with anyone anywhere within the world. We do that now, but we still have limitations in terms of data management, rendering and storage. It's not as cost-effective for studios.

But immediately, to get out of COVID, we do need the wage subsidy. We do need OCASE to be untethered. We do need our artists to be eligible for a tax credit in the first year. That will help the studio owners to keep their employees employed and to work on safeguarding and creating a pipeline for the future.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chair, I have how much time?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes and 30 seconds.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Okay. I just wanted to add, because I believe this is my last round, for the dancers—just going back to the comment, I think there was an oversight there with the dancers and the training, being able to train in stage 2. I do think that we should work with the local médecins hygiénistes—I don't know how to say it in English—chief medical officers of the areas to maybe allow the dancers to go back to the training right now, even before stage 3, if that's possible. Because we don't know when we're going to stage 3 and when you'll be able to train.

I know in my area, that's how it works. We work with the local medical officers—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: —and they can make a few exceptions for certain groups. So maybe that's something to discuss, not only with the government but with the local health officers, so that they would be able to train, because that's absolutely crucial. I can't believe they're not considered with the pro athletes and the other athletes who are allowed to train. I just wanted to add that.

I am good, Mr. Chair, with my questions. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll go back to the government side for their second round. We'll start with MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for Matt. Matt, thank you for your presentation. You mentioned that you've had to incur tremendous costs to establish, I'm assuming, edit suites etc. in home offices. Is there any advantage, moving forward, to being able to work from home? Is it an incentive to attract, for example, talent? And can you then look, perhaps, at savings in the bricks and mortar where you have your suites currently established?

Mr. Matt Bishop: Thank you very much for your question. You're absolutely correct. I think what's really exciting about this is this it actually takes an industry that is very Toronto-specific and opens up the entire province. To me, that gets very exciting because, as a content creator, we get a chance to draw upon talented individuals who might not necessarily live in the Toronto core. I also think this is going to attract a lot of people who want to move to Ontario, because there still may be players—there's something for everyone here, and they can be just as competitive. They can work downtown or they can work in a beautiful small town and still have the same connectivity.

It's absolutely something that came out of left field with regard to increased cost, but I think as we move forward, we're now starting to put that into, how can we rebound and thrive in a COVID-19 world? Once we get over this hurdle, a lot of what we're really pushing for—and Neishaw spoke to you with regard to how there will be a lot of new work coming. Our industry is global. For us, we compete very heavily against BC and Quebec, but we also compete against China and India with regard to visual effects and animation. We're excited that we can now start to gather talented individuals all across the province and hopefully attract more people to this great place.

Ms. Donna Skelly: That's interesting. I'm from Hamilton. Of course, there is a tax incentive the minute you leave the GTA and go right into that H, the Hamilton area. I know that there are also tax incentives in northern Ontario. We recently visited a set just outside of North Bay where they have a number of productions being filmed on location.

Are there examples of tax credits that we could perhaps pursue for your industry to allow you to maybe cover the cost of setting up these home studios? Because what it will do, as well—we drive into Toronto all the time, and if we can start pulling cars off the highways and addressing congestion, there are hidden economic benefits in other areas, in other ministries, in other sectors, simply as a result of people working from home. Are there other advantages that you're seeing in parts of Ontario that we should perhaps look at, that could help your industry as we move out of COVID—other tax incentives?

Mr. Matt Bishop: Absolutely. I think it's a great point. We can also look to what BC is doing with some of the regional bonuses on animation. I think it has proven very successful on film and television, and with regard to live-action production, we've utilized it filming in Hamilton and filming in other parts of the province.

I think that what's exciting about that openness is that we're going to create new talent sectors in other parts of the province, because right now—the great thing about

what you're discussing is that if there was a regional bonus in visual effects and animation, then there would be more of an incentive for those individuals to establish a place of residence there. A lot of the jobs we're discussing are also very high-paying jobs, so they can become a great part of that community as well.

The idea of a regional bonus, very similar to what happens in live-action production, but in animation—I think CASO and its members would be very supportive, and I'd love to chat more about that.

Ms. Donna Skelly: And if you have any other ideas about tax breaks, because the tax credit in the Ontario film industry is critical to growing that sector—if there is a tax break that you could propose, we would be very interested in hearing about this, as well.

Mr. Matt Bishop: That's wonderful. We'd love to regroup with our members and put forth a plan. I feel like we've done a great job utilizing OCASE, but I think you've put forth a lot of great suggestions that could really expand this to a province-wide industry.

Ms. Donna Skelly: And, of course, help people in northern Ontario, which is an area that's often overlooked.

Mr. Matt Bishop: Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Those are my questions, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. MPP Smith?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is for the animation studio as well. When people were working from home, was your challenge horsepower in the processor or was it a bandwidth challenge?

Ms. Neishaw Ali: It was actually a bandwidth challenge initially, and then it became an adjustment challenge, because you're blending personal lives with work lives. For them to create a work-life balance was something, but it was a bandwidth challenge initially.

Some of our artists do not have what we would call professional bandwidth at home, because they didn't need it, but now the link—the speed of the uploads or downloads is only as strong as the weakest upload and download linking hub, so—

Mr. Dave Smith: And when you're putting a VPN in, then you're eating up some of that bandwidth on top of that, because everything has to be encrypted as it's being sent across.

Ms. Neishaw Ali: Yes, and families are—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Dave Smith: Matt, you wanted to weigh in on that?

Mr. Matt Bishop: Yes. You hit a great point, and I would also like to expand that to the regional areas. We have some amazingly talented artists who live in an area just outside of Guelph, and they couldn't get high-speed Internet access. The rural communities, I think, are really suffering with access to high-speed Internet. For the industry to thrive, people need to be connected to the Internet with a—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the opposition side for their time of questioning.

MPP Karpoche? Can you unmute yourself, please?

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: Yes. Okay. Am I unmuted? Yes.

Thank you, all of you, for your presentations. I have a couple of comments, and then I will get to the questions. First, for the computer animation studios, I just want to say that I completely agree that wage subsidies have to continue for workers, especially because not only did you—your company and your industry—face a no-work period, but that support has to be there, not just during COVID, but in the recovery time as well. So, on that front, I agree. I hope that the government is working on a plan to support that transition into recovery and make it successful in a way that can help get the industry and your company back on its feet as soon as possible.

1350

On the ballet front: Interestingly, I have actually heard from constituents who have dance studios who have raised pretty much what you have raised when it comes to the reopening. Because we have dance studios that are currently not allowed to open but other similar-type activities are being allowed, those who are in the dance studios feel that not only did they have all these months where they were not able to working but now they're lagging way behind other groups in getting started back up. We know that the longer it takes to get back, the more difficult it is to get back to where you were. Obviously, the hope is not just to get back to where you were but stronger than before, right? So I think that the case—especially from what I understand from my constituent, who is an artistic director of a dance studio as well, there are ways to practise physical distancing and still be able to offer the services. I think that, on that front, I too would support dance studios being able to reopen, following the guidelines. I hope that the government will take action on that sooner rather than later.

The bulk of my question really is focused for Elizabeth. Elizabeth, thank you so much for your presentation. I had an opportunity to check out your website before today's committee, and I'm really impressed with the work. It's really beautiful. Thank you. I noticed on the website and you shared on the screen that you have a studio. I'm very curious, first, to know how you are managing the studio and what it was like for you as a studio owner to deal with commercial rent.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Ah, I am one of the lucky dogs who owns my studio; it's at home. I have been in the same place. I actually rented the space from my parents when I was in university. They have both passed, so I inherited the building. It is a big difference, and having my father's—what was his shop—it took me two years; I had to do the wiring myself and all the plastering. I put the cove up—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: I have a background in theatre. I have something that a lot of artists don't have and I really want to share it with people as a teaching space, maybe as a co-working space, but definitely as show space for individuals, particularly, frankly, in the graphic arts, like in the independent comic book area—like, if you ever have gone to TCAF to exhibit; those

artists, like Nina Bunjevack and Chip Zdarsky and all these great Toronto artists—to help sell their books through the Beguiling and such.

So, yes, it's more that I'm so used to having to put my own front-up costs. Wunderkabinette is a collective I'm in with my friend Steve Loretta. There is funding, for example—it's at Harbourfront, and we usually do sugar skull workshops with kids. We build these sugar skulls and we do it all in my kitchen. We front the costs, and then they give us a stipend. So that's there. They want us to do it. But it's sort of like we are getting to the point where we have to produce something people can take home, and we have to invent that.

So we are having to have a—I built another skull; here's one over here. Steve says, "Let's do chocolate." So I sculpted a skull—and I would have to go get a professional mould made. We tried to do it in my kitchen. It didn't work. I don't have the equipment. It's going to cost a few hundred dollars for one, and then we have to hand-cast them all. So the part of it is, trying to make fine art at all economically viable—especially, I've got three kids and my husband's a security guard; it's all like, "What penny can I pinch today?"—it's hard. I don't know—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you. And quickly, I just want to say it's very lucky for you to be able to own your own studio, but lots of artists are—

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: So glad.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: —and having to close up shop.

Very quickly: For somebody like yourself, would a remote work set-up fund that would help you get set up with online software and things like that, help?

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: Yes, it would.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I can imagine that it would. Taking your work to the online world is really a challenge in itself, and then the cost associated with it would be quite significant as well.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself, please?

Ms. Elizabeth Jackson Hall: I would love to hire somebody 20 or 30 years younger than I am, who understood social media better and who had the time to do it, because my problem is that, yes, I've got Instagram, and I also mod Skyrim, and I had a whole thing going with a lady in Seattle, and we do all of this, but I don't have the time with the kids and trying to make art, so—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you to all presenters for your time and for your presentation. Thank you so much.

TOURISM MISSISSAUGA

CITY OF KITCHENER

YORK REGION ARTS COUNCIL

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenters: First I would like to call upon Tourism Mississauga. If you could please state your name for the

record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Toni Frankfurter. I am the general manager of the Waterside Inn hotel in Port Credit, Mississauga, and as of exactly two weeks ago, I am the chair of Tourism Mississauga—a brand-new entity; very excited. It's an unbelievable time to start this entity, actually, because I'm here today to talk about the impact of the pandemic on our industry.

Our industry ties in so closely with the cultural and heritage sectors. We have had to cancel a variety of events and festivals. Our art gallery was shut down. We have had to lay off across the board approximately—I mean, for example, the Art Gallery of Mississauga laid everybody off. They are 100% laid off. At my hotel, we've laid off 95% of our employees. I'm working at a 70% level at this point in time.

The hospitality industry drives everything. We have got people coming to hotels and, right from there, they are attending all of the festivals and the locations within Mississauga; all of a sudden, that's at zero. Like I said, all of the festivals have been cancelled throughout Mississauga since April. One festival that comes to mind, for example, is the Southside Shuffle. The Southside Shuffle alone is a three-day music festival event and it produces approximately \$9 million across the board, both directly and indirectly through hotel stays, through food and beverage, through retail, and they go and they visit places like the art gallery.

At the end of the day, we look at local tourism to support the cultural events, the heritage events; we look at national tourism, so that's within Ontario and then within Canada; and we are also looking at international. The industry overall has just been devastated by the pandemic.

I've been driving tourism in Mississauga for over 10 years, because before becoming chair, I sat on the tourism advisory board for Mississauga. I was asked to be part of that. I have been in the hospitality industry for 35 years—and yes, I did start when I was four. We are looking for funding. At the end of the day, we need help to rebuild these specific sectors in Mississauga. The hotels are struggling. Those of us that have been able to stay open, we're struggling to have four or five employees in the hotel while we're trying to attract groups. In order to get groups back in the hotels, we need to be able to bring more employees back on simply to clean the rooms and to maintain the high level of cleanliness that we have risen to, in order to wipe the door handles down every half an hour.

1400

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: We're struggling to bring our chefs back in because food and beverage was off the table for the last four months, and in order to have groups in, we need to be able to provide banquets. The owners are digging into their pockets trying to keep whatever business

we can afloat, and there's just not enough to go around. We're struggling. We're having a really, really hard time.

That's basically my presentation and my deputation. I would like to also let you know that we are prepared to submit a further report to support my deputation.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Our next presenter is the city of Kitchener. If you could please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Thank you very much. My name is Berry Vrbanovic, and I'm the mayor of the city of Kitchener. Chair and members of the committee, let me begin by thanking you for inviting us to participate in the culture and heritage consultation process. COVID-19 has impacted our city, our region and the province as a whole, and that includes our culture and heritage sector.

Like many other cities and towns, Kitchener normally has hundreds of live performances, events and exhibitions every year. From the Kultrún World Music Festival to original productions from MT Space theatre company to the Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener and Area public art biennial and many more, the diversity and quality of these arts, culture and heritage productions in Kitchener fuel our innovative economy and are a big part of creating a strong sense of place for our residents.

However, the arts, culture, heritage and creative industries rely on gatherings for the purposes of creating and consuming culture, and this pandemic has halted artists and organizations in their tracks. This has resulted in significant losses on the income side: no gigs, ticket sales, workshops, camps, fundraising events or sponsorships. As an example, some local musicians would normally perform at restaurants to earn an income. We are hearing that is no longer happening, as restaurants have limited seating capacity due to distancing and other measures, including the current emergency orders. The space that restaurants may have used for musicians will be used as seating for dining customers once restaurants reopen. For the city of Kitchener, we have lost revenue from venue rentals, workshops and other programming. On the expense side, there will be additional costs due to PPE, distancing and monitoring measures.

In response to this adversity, many organizations and artists have pivoted to developing and delivering digital programming and performances, while managing significant resource constraints. In Kitchener's case and as a way of fostering community connections and supporting artists and many organizations, we've responded in a number of ways.

The city initiated a program called #KitchenerSaysThanks, which livestreams musical performances and children's programming twice a week. This programming has cost us several thousands of dollars and is an unbudgeted cost, but we felt it was the right thing to do at this time for our community.

We've also started the Active at Home program, which is a virtual programming series to empower residents of all ages and abilities to participate in online classes and activities like virtual cooking tutorials and home and garden programs while physical distancing from home.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony musicians have offered livestreams of performances from their homes. The Kitchener Public Library has quickly translated their many in-person programs into digital offerings.

As a city, we're partnering with area municipalities and CTV and doing a virtual Canada Day television program, which will include various performances.

All of you know that Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, has been cancelled for 2020, but our very own Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest, which showcases our area's rich German culture and heritage, has decided to try and move forward, but under a significantly different set-up. They're considering things like a virtual keg-tapping and opening ceremony.

While we're all trying to be innovative, all these measures are temporary solutions to try to bridge the gap to a new normal. By no means do they cover significant financial losses. They just try to minimize losses to make sure there is something there still next year and to try to lift the spirits of residents, like we know arts, culture and heritage do. In these uncertain times, our local arts, culture and heritage sectors need to see their stories reflected to the communities so we can create opportunities for connection, belonging and well-being. With all this in mind, we're asking the following from this committee and the provincial government:

We recommend that additional provincial funding is needed to support municipalities—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: —arts, artists, culture and heritage organizations and facilities, so all can develop and execute alternate operating models. Municipalities don't have this financial capacity, and the financial benefits of these events and festivals are largely derived by the provincial and federal governments through progressive taxes like income and sales taxes. These additional resources are even more important now as these organizations operate with constrained financial resources during the best of times. Their challenge now is to deliver their mandates in new, different and sustainable ways going forward.

Further, we recommend making additional grant funding available to artists, arts, culture and heritage organizations and municipalities so they can find creative ways to safely and cost-effectively bring back some of these events and festivals, whether live or online. This grant stream would prioritize initiatives that offer programming and infrastructure that support alternative ways of creating and sharing cultural and heritage productions; for example, providing funds for the equipment required to mount live performances in an outdoor venue, or initiatives that offer highly experiential digital programming.

We recommend additional funding to subsidize the use of cultural facilities and performance venues. These funds would be used to cover the expenses related to facility rental in order to mitigate lost revenues related to lower attendance due to distancing and other measures.

Finally, we recommend the provincial government find creative ways to get revenues into organizations to reduce their costs. Right now, it likely isn't worthwhile and safe

to have performances in half full, or less, venues, but if costs can be reduced, potentially by way of making the HST fully refundable or exempt on these events—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: —it may help make these events more cost-effective for the venues, performers and organizations in the future.

As the economic recovery begins, we cannot forget the value we place on the performers, organizations and their creations, the connections they create in our community, and how they support our community. It's our duty to nurture our culture and heritage organizations back to health as possible.

We hope you'll take these ideas and recommendations into consideration. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is York Region Arts Council. If you could please state your name for the record and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Sergei Petrov: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, committee members. My name is Sergei Petrov, and I'm the executive director at the York Region Arts Council.

I'm both excited and grateful to be here and to take a few moments of your time to share some of our insights from the regional arts, culture and tourism sectors. Even though the focus of our meeting today is to discuss the creative state of the province, we're also the destination marketing office for the regional municipality of York through Experience York Region, and we have an opportunity to share some of our ideas from both sectors. They're closely linked together. After all, a strong and thriving tourism sector is the best side effect of a successful and creative cultural industry.

It's been a bit of challenge to find words that you haven't heard before about the importance of investing and supporting the arts and cultural sector. Much of what I want and need to say about the benefits of the arts and tourism sector on the provincial economy has been shared with you already, if not in the past few years, for sure in the past few weeks and months.

As we connect today through this digital forum, there are a few points and questions for me to present: How important is the arts and culture sector to the development and sustainability of healthy and thriving communities in the province? What more can we do in order to alleviate the pains and challenges that the art sector at large is currently experiencing due to COVID-19? What role do we see the creative arts and culture sector play in our lives? These are just some of the questions that, on behalf of the regional arts sector, I bring to the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

If now is the time to be creative, how can we do it in a way that is supportive of the bright minds that reside within the province? And now is the time to be creative. There hasn't been a better time for this. Not because there is an abundance of investment available at this time, but rather, because of the abundance of need and desire: from parents thinking of different ways to learn with their children, through artists using new avenues to present their

projects, to teachers who are finding best ways to engage with students, to businesses finding the most practical and safest ways to operate, to governments looking for the most creative ways to get information across, to building platforms for diverse voices, to bringing our disconnected communities back together, even if safely apart for now.

1410

Based on our Creative State of York Region report that we released earlier this year, we know that the artists in the region seek to enhance their skills in business and management learning, creation and artistic practices, and marketing skills. Artists and cultural workers comprise 5% of the overall regional workforce; that's 10% of the overall cultural workforce in the province of Ontario.

There's no doubt that much has been done by the provincial Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries in the past few months, elevating some of the most immediate pressures as the industry copes with the state of emergency. Thank you to Minister Lisa MacLeod and the entire national cultural sector and the provincial sector for finding ways to assist and support emerging and established artists and arts organizations through these times. So thank you to all of you for sure. We've seen the impact, and having this conversation here today is the right next step.

What we have done from our side at the York Region Arts Council is to focus on building a regional collaboration framework, by strengthening York region as a hub for arts and culture, launching a seed-funding program for emerging artists in the region, working on animating all corners of the region with arts and culture through creative space use, even at this time, and developing a regional approach to skills building, mentorship and professional development.

But what more can we do? If we, as a regional arts council that's over one million people in population receive annual operational provincial funding of \$18,000, and if the annual earnings by the regional artists range from \$16,000 to just over \$40,000 a year, is this what we mean when we say that arts and culture is important?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Sergei Petrov: Is this how we show that creativity has room to thrive? Isn't investment in our cultural projects and ideas the best way to build a sustainable and successful economic prosperity? We're looking for ways to address this from our side, and I'm here to ask you to continue exploring the best ways to invest and support the arts now and into the future.

Thank you for your time, all your work and your continued passion for the wonderful and diverse province we all call home. Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. The first round of questions will start with the government side. MPP Kaleed Rasheed.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to all the presenters this afternoon. My question is for Toni from Mississauga. As a forever resident of Mississauga and representing the great riding of Mississauga East-Cooksville, I know

Mississauga is a very proud city to host many different ethnic or cultural events. Definitely, this is something that I'm personally missing this year, especially the waterfront events and Celebration Square.

Toni, during your presentation, you talked about your request about some support from the province, and we all know that the waterfront is going to start developing different condominiums. There's going to be huge construction that's going to go through. Did you have a chance to speak with the mayor of Mississauga, Bonnie Crombie, about her support for this sector right now, especially during this COVID-19? If yes, what was her response to your request?

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: Mayor Crombie is very supportive of, believe it or not, all sectors. She really wants to push the tourism sector forward. I believe that's what you are asking me. Or are you talking specifically about heritage and cultural?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I'm actually asking in general about her response to your requests towards funding and—

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: I have not spoken to Bonnie personally yet about the funding. As I said, we really only created Tourism Mississauga two weeks ago. Up until now, we've not been able to make any kinds of requests. This opportunity came up—for which we are extremely grateful, and thank you so much for your time—but we have not had an opportunity yet to sit down with the mayor. We've basically just been getting all of our little ducks in a row. This came up, and we thought, "This is a good place to start."

I do have the privilege of asking Bonnie for her time, though, and will definitely be speaking to her more about this overall. But from previous conversations before Tourism Mississauga was created and we actually had the advisory board—she frequented many meetings and was very supportive of tourism, so I would imagine that providing funding in some way, shape or form—she knows that's probably coming. Maybe that's why I haven't seen her in a while.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Or she may be trying her best not to have that meeting right now.

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: Right. It's tough for everybody, and I'm not only speaking for the hotels; I'm speaking for the restaurants, retail—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: And the reason I'm asking—sorry, Chair. I heard you say three minutes, right?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes, yes.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay.

The only reason is because, based on the development that I'm hearing, or what I see, there is a huge potential of Tourism Mississauga collaborating with the city in trying to find ways to get funding for Tourism Mississauga—which, by the way, is an excellent initiative. I know, with this whole development that's going to be happening, there's going to be a huge influx of people coming to Mississauga, and everything.

But I just wanted to get an idea as to how much support you have received from the mayor of Mississauga, so thank you for that.

Chair, I'm good. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: My comment/question is for Mayor Vrbanovic. Thank you for being with us this afternoon, Your Worship. I really appreciated some of the comments that you made. In particular, you spoke to innovation. I want to thank you for bringing that up as well as thank you for the hard work on the front lines. I know these are very challenging times, and certainly, we appreciate all the work our municipalities are doing out there.

We might not be able to get to this question in time for this round, so please consider it over the other questions, and feel free to comment in the second round when we come back.

We appreciate you have some challenges, especially when it comes to revenue, and you mentioned that. At the Ministry of Finance, we are looking for new ways to empower municipalities with new revenue tools. I will say, on behalf of Minister Phillips and Minister Clark, that, as they've said it, everything is on the table. So maybe the question to you is, have you thought of some ways that you can raise additional revenue, maybe some additional tools that the province can provide our municipal partners—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Stan Cho: —to allow them to raise that revenue moving forward and as we move out of this?

The final comment that I'll add to that question is, we know, based on other jurisdictions, that we will see another rise in numbers. That is inevitable. That is the thing we've seen across Asia, across Europe and other jurisdictions who are a little bit ahead of us. In the second round, maybe you can also comment on how you feel municipalities can be better equipped to handle that second wave.

So those two questions for the next round, if we don't have time, and I don't think we will: additional revenue tools and how we're going to handle that second wave on the front lines. Thank you very much, Your Worship.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: The long and the short of it is, let's invest in cities and communities across Canada with investments from provinces and territories and investments from the federal government. That's the ask that cities are making through FCM, nationally and provincially. We need the two sides to figure something out, because there will be no recovery, quite frankly, without cities and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll come back to that in the second round. Now, we'll move to the opposition side: MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you to all of the presenters. I'm going to start with Berry. It is lovely to be speaking to you from Kitchener, in Kitchener—hey.

I'm going to continue with my colleague's question. One of the things that we keep hearing consistently through all of the hearings is that there is a need for us to invest in the arts, that that is going to be something that's going to continue to stimulate the economy, drive our economy,

especially while we're here talking about economic recovery. But I'm also hearing a thread of the need to rethink how the arts has been invested in in the past.

1420

In your presentation, you brought up, I would argue, some of the best live music performances that we have in the city. We have Kultrún, the Multicultural Festival, and we've got things like MT Space. A lot of those artists, because they are Black, Brown, Indigenous, don't usually access or have access to the same types of investments. For a variety of reasons, they fall through the gaps.

I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about the importance from the province to actually make innovative investments in artists that provide alternative stories, alternative histories, alternative art-making to community.

You've got to unmute though.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Unmute yourself, please.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Thanks, MPP Lindo, and thanks to you and the previous questioner for your questions. What I will say to you is if one looks at the pandemic and some of the best research that's out there in terms of how cities and communities are going to get out of the other side of all this in the coming months and likely years—one of the things, for example, that Richard Florida talks about is that one of the top 10 things that we need to focus on is arts and culture. And yet, it's the most vulnerable area and the only way it's actually going to survive is if governments come together collaboratively to make these investments, but also bring together the other partners like the private sector, the not-for-profit sector and others to help in terms of making these investments going forward.

I think the other thing that you're speaking of, and I think it is so important, is the pandemic has really identified for us that we have a lot of work to do as communities to address challenges such as anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, systemic discrimination in our communities; and if you look, one of the best ways to do these kinds of things is actually through the tool of arts and culture, through music and other aspects to actually not only help educate, to tell stories, to bring people together and to build understanding and connection between people. That is really what culture does. But it also stimulates us to ask those hard questions. It challenges us at times, and that's what we need to do: As people, we need to challenge ourselves going forward.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: I think, really, the fundamental important issue here is we know from the last economic recession that cities need to be at the forefront of this. And so it's so critical for both the federal and provincial governments to work out an arrangement. There's a very reasonable proposal on the table from cities that builds both on cities of different sizes, as well as cities with transit systems, and we need to see that come forward. Arts and culture can be part of that, I think, as we look at the various components, and that's how we are going to make sure we have communities that are going to thrive and come out healthier, stronger and even better on the other side of this.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much for that. I also think along the same lines, a lot of the people, artists on the ground, are turning to municipalities for immediate help because they aren't necessarily certain of where that help is going to come from, which is something else that we have been hearing: that there is real worry that they will not be able to remain in the arts. They have to start thinking about what else they can be doing. I'm extremely worried about that because, especially from the space of the municipalities, losing that is actually losing a lot of our local economies starting if we don't have that happening. So I don't know if you want to take a little bit of time to speak about that.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Just very quickly: The reality is the city of Kitchener alone is losing \$2 million a month. Throughout the region, we're losing about \$10 million a month. So these are challenging times, yet we still continue to recognize these as important investments and why we've made these investments in terms of things like our #KitchenerSaysThanks concert series, like our Canada Day show and others that we're doing, because we want to support local artists so they can continue to thrive.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: One of the things we need to look at with the emergency orders is how we actually allow music to happen again at them. That would help some of those artists right now. I understand the concerns, but I think we can have music at outdoor patios and so on while still physically distancing and keeping everybody safe. That's something that certainly we're urging the government to consider making an amendment in that space.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much for that.

Chair, how much time do we have left in this round?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thirty seconds? Well, I'm just going to say thank you, and I'll come back to you, Toni. So, just prepare yourself. It'll be a great question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. So we'll move to the independent members now. MPP Simard.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Yes, hi. Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the presenters for the great presentations. It's very interesting to hear each and every one of you, the practical of how it's happening in your areas and sectors.

I guess my question is to Mr. Mayor. I actually sat on local council, on municipal council as a councillor from 2014 to 2018, so I know first-hand the challenge of wanting to help all these local groups and that sector, but having only one source of revenue that you can control, and it's going to be less now that some businesses may be closing, there's less revenue coming in. It has a ripple effect. It's really concerning, and so it's important to have you involved in the process.

You're also very dependent on the province for most of the funding. So what type of support, concrete, have you received so far from the province? I know you mentioned additional funding in your presentation—and also from the federal government. I know Minister Joly announced funding, but I want to know if there is anything concrete we can see so far. And from the provincial government—

how involved are the municipalities in that process right now? As my colleague MPP Cho mentioned, we may be bracing for a second wave and we need to plan and maybe change the way we do the consultations, the emergency orders, the communication with the local health officers—because they're very important, being front and centre during this whole pandemic—and also acknowledge that municipalities are the closest level of government to our residents, and residents feel that's the level of government they are more comfortable with.

So, that's where we go. That's where we think we can get the help, and municipalities are in the best position to know what is needed in their communities because you're the closest ones, right?

I have to say that when I became an MPP, I see those asks from the municipalities a bit differently because I've been in that position. So I'd like to hear a bit how you were involved in that process and how we can improve that, and again, what type of funding you've received so far from the province—just maybe share that with us.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Sure. Thank you very much for your question, MPP Simard. Let me really begin by saying thank you to all of you, as well as to our federal counterparts, because this is a challenging and unprecedented time. Quite frankly, you know, both orders of government have worked well and carefully with us as municipalities in terms of this initial response to ensure that we meet the needs of the citizens in our communities during these challenging times.

What I would say in terms of funding, as you know, from a federal perspective, much of the funding thus far has really been focused on two groups—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: —individuals and then on businesses. Quite frankly, those are the correct two groups in my opinion in terms of where those investments needed to be made, and many of my big-city mayor colleagues across the country and across Ontario would say the exact same thing.

Having said that, though, we're now at a point where the order of government, as you've identified, that's closest to the people that delivers those day-to-day critical services but also delivers those quality-of-life investments together with our community partners and really is going to be a key part of where an economic recovery is going to be generated from, needs to be whole. We cannot have cities across Ontario or across the country going potentially bankrupt because of the financial challenges they're dealing with, at a time when citizens need all of these services the most, when we need to bring our communities together the most.

1430

And so what I would say to you is that as we go forward, yes, we need to get into longer-term conversations around fiscal models. One thing I will say is that some have suggested there may be an opportunity where cities are going to be allowed to go into deficit. That is the wrong answer for cities, quite frankly. An order of government that relies largely on property taxes for the most part

should not be going into deficit when they don't have revenues that grow and decrease with the economy as a method of balancing their books. That's only creating a huge challenge for the future that I think would be irreparable. That is something that pretty much every mayor I know of feels very strongly about.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: I hope that answers your question.

Oh, and just specifically with respect to funding: The majority of the funds that have come up until now to municipalities have really been around things like the shelter system and so on. That's why the FCM ask—as you know, we're seeing across the country about \$10 billion to \$15 billion in losses—is a \$10-billion ask, of which \$7.6 billion would be delivered based on population and \$2.4 billion would be delivered based on ridership. That's the proposal.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: That's great. And I think you got the key word there: quality of life. That is very important, especially as we go through this—very important. So I think that will be the key word that we need to be mindful of moving forward, dealing with the municipalities delivering that. That's why we choose to go into those municipalities—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Your time has come up.

I have to move to the independent members now—sorry, where were we? Oh, sorry, the opposition. MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much, Chair. Toni, I hope you've been sitting there with bated breath, wondering what I'm going to ask. I know. I know.

Here's the deal: Very, very early on—I think it was the first session we had when we first started to meet—Minister MacLeod said something that still sticks in my head. She said that she had been advised that it's time for us to plan, not to panic, so I kind of try to carry that idea through as we're asking these questions. But it makes me want to say, “Congratulations for coming, two-week-old Tourism Mississauga.” That is part of what the plan looks like, right?

I'm wondering if, prior to this, you've had people speaking to you about their concerns around loans versus grants, for instance. I know we keep hearing that for a lot of businesses, a lot of hotels etc., the loan program was okay when we thought this would be short-term, but now that it's sort of extending and it's going to take awhile for some of these places to open, they're now asking for grants. So that's one question.

The other is around another thread that we keep hearing. If you're trying to attract folks through the tourism industry and you're trying to get them to feel okay about coming out to festivals etc., they're asking for the government to provide very clear details of health and safety, what those requirements are provincially as opposed to just regionally. I'm wondering if you've heard about that and if you could just speak a little bit to that for us.

Interjection.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Oh, and you've just got to unmute.

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: Sorry. Sure, and thank you for your questions.

I'll start with loans versus grants. It's an amazing thing. When this first came out—I mean, I went through SARS. I was working at the Radisson Admiral on Queen's Quay in Toronto. Even back then, we cumulatively decided in the executive office that we would all take one day off a week, just to give the hotel a break, because even then we saw—I mean, it was the largest city-wide convention ever. It was the city-wide cancer convention in 2003, and they cancelled—unprecedented—with SARS. But nobody else, except for that convention, really took notice of SARS. It sort of came in, we saw a few people downtown wearing masks, but it didn't affect anything, so this was really unprecedented.

We started hearing about it at the end of December, and then January. By the end of January, I was talking to my ownership and my executive committee here at the hotel saying, "Guys, I need you to have a heads-up. We're going to have to start cutting back on labour, because I have a feeling this is going to get terrible." That was just intuition, watching how it was escalating as opposed to SARS.

But we still didn't know. We still had no idea how devastating this was going to be. I mean, nobody thought that the entire world was going to shut down—unprecedented. At the beginning, everyone thought about loans and everyone thought that putting off taxes was a great idea, up until nothing was coming back and things were continuing to get shut down.

So, yes, grants are definitely where everyone is going right now. It's a big ask. I think that the grants are the only way that we're going to be able to take off again, and I'm talking across the board: arts, festivals, culture, hotels, restaurants, small businesses and local businesses. I think everyone is going to be asking. Honestly, there are some people in some places in some businesses that are done. We will not see them get back up, which is terribly sad.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Definitely. This is part of what we're actually hearing as well, is that there is an ask for grants, but there is an understanding on the ground that the reason you're asking for grants is because that is the investment to rebuild the economy.

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: Absolutely. That's what we're asking for, to rebuild.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: That's right, so I think that that's the flip that needs to happen in terms of how we start to plan moving forward.

Ms. Toni Frankfurter: Right.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Which brings me to you, Sergei. You're not off the hook; I've got a question for you. You had spoken about the need for innovation, a platform for diverse voices, and then you brought up creative space use, which for me—I was hoping that you could speak a little bit more about the importance, again, of having really solid, clear public health directives that are province-wide, so that the creative use of space and the way that we start to slowly but surely open up artistic spaces, artistic performances etc. can happen in a meaningful way.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Over to you.

Mr. Sergei Petrov: Thank you very much. It's about rebuilding at this time, of course. Being a tourism office and a cultural office for the region, we're able to carry both conversations through a diverse representation of stakeholders.

One of the key initiatives that we're working on right now with all municipalities and a lot of partners is, I would say, a creative place-making campaign that would allow for an increase in consumer confidence in approaching businesses: hospitality businesses, tourism business and cultural businesses, but businesses, down the road, on front-facing streets.

It's been a successful conversation for the last month, I would say. One of the ideas is to empower—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the independent members for their second round. Any questions from the independent members?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Hi. I'm good for this round, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go back to the government side now. MPP Smith?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My first question, actually, is for Sergei. You made some interesting points in your presentation. One of the things that you said was that the arts community, in particular, had an opportunity to improve their business management learning and their marketing skills through this. We fully expect that there's going to be a second wave of COVID-19, so we're looking at ways that we could do things that not only are going to help individuals come through this right now, but put them in a much better place to succeed if and when we have a second wave of that.

1440

Do you mind expanding a little bit on what you were talking about with the business management learning and some of those marketing skills? The reason I'm asking is, we've had a number of arts groups come and present and, if I can use this term, it's non-mainstream, what most of them have been talking about, in terms of having challenges in getting their stuff to market. So your comment has really intrigued me, just because I think we could really expand and do something better and different with it.

Mr. Sergei Petrov: Okay. So the information that I brought up in my presentation comes through, again, a creative state report that we undertook research for back in 2019. We consulted with over 300 stakeholders and individual artists in the region to let us know what they are seeking for us as an organization to do, and what they are seeking from the cultural sector in the region and on the local level and municipalities. And that's what they told us: They are looking for business, leadership and management skills to enhance their careers, as well as the creative artistic skills. That gave us an opportunity of sorts to hear that and to at least make sure that we are on the right path as an organization.

For the last few years, we've been running, quite successfully across the region, a program called Artrepreneur

that allowed independent artists or creative ideas to thrive in a business setting, empowering them with learnings and tools and outcomes and business plans that they can take out into the world and actually build a business around a flower shop or around a mural artist that can present his art as a business. That's what we've done for the last few years. Again, hearing it through our research kind of confirmed that we're on the right path.

What we've done as we shifted gears since February and March is we've shifted the program, Artrepreneur, from just a creative sort of idea that would see it grow as a business to a creative practice. So if you're an artist—as an example, a dancer or a performer—how can you build a career out of that? What can you do to better present your art, to be seen in the world and to build a platform around yourself, not thinking just strictly as a business plan, but for portfolio building or submission building or collaboration? We're hoping to launch it in the spring, but we're launching in mid-fall with Artrepreneur a performance stream that will allow dancers and actors and performers to sort of build a portfolio around their practice. We're taking that further with media arts and with digital arts as well.

That's how we've been—I could go on, because we are passionate about our projects, but what we've done and will continue to do is empower the artists to run and build a business around their ideas and their practice.

Mr. Dave Smith: It's an exciting thing to listen to you talk about it, because it's one of those cases where this is going to be something that could very well help during COVID-19 but also create sustainability long-term for anyone involved in that program whatsoever. That's the type of thing that any government, regardless of its political stripes, can get behind because it provides that long-term sustainability for a sector that, quite frankly, has had some challenges with sustainability. We've heard a number of people talk about the gig economy. We've heard a number of people talk about how they're in short-term contracts, and that's really the only type of work that they are able to find. If you can build your brand around yourself, and market yourself as the brand that way, from what you're talking about, those are all excellent things that I think will be long-term sustainable, not just for COVID, but as we come out of it.

My next question actually is for Berry, if you don't mind. Again, it's with respect to looking forward at the possibility of a second wave. Government can come up with plans right now for grants for different things, for loans for different things, for initiatives for different things. One of the points that you made was that government needs to find creative ways to get revenue to events. You talked primarily about grants. You talked primarily about tax relief. Your example was a break from paying the GST. Those aren't really creative, because it's the same thing; it's a tax break or a grant. Are there other creative ways that we can do something that can help get revenue to these events now and if there is a second wave?

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Let me be clear, because I do think some of the traditional ways need to be part of the

solution going forward, but I think the focus on the investments associated with some of those traditional ways may need to be and probably should be different as we go forward. Looking at things that will allow arts organizations and artists, for example, from Ontario to use technology to share their product not only amongst Ontarians, but amongst Canadians and around the world, is certainly, I think, part of the way of doing that. I think—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time for the presentation. Thank you so much for coming, and thank you for your presentation.

REGENT PARK FILM FESTIVAL
 ATOMIC CARTOONS INC.
 ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVANCY
 ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right, so we'll move to our next presenter, the Regent Park Film Festival. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Angela Britto: Hi, I'm Angela Britto, and I'm the executive director of the Regent Park Film Festival. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear here today. The Regent Park Film Festival is a non-profit media arts organization and a registered charity. We are a small organization, but we have managed to sustain ourselves and make it to our 18th year. We are Toronto's longest-running free community film festival, located in Ontario's largest and oldest public housing neighbourhood.

As a community film festival, we are a vital part of Ontario's powerhouse of a film sector. We and other film festivals all over the province bring locally produced films to new audiences. We support emerging and established filmmakers, and we provide education and employment opportunities through our work.

Our main activities are an outdoor summer screening series in July and August, which we have moved online and reduced the number of screenings for this year due to COVID. We have an annual festival in November, which we will be moving online as well, and year-round programming that includes a school tour of films and an accompanying classroom curriculum for students in the neighbourhood in grades 1 to 8 to develop media literacy skills.

We also have a paid internship program for Black youth to work as production assistants on the sets of TV shows like Murdoch Mysteries and Kim's Convenience, which cannot proceed this year until sets reopen for production. That endangers this really impactful job creation program. We also offer year-round panel discussions, exhibitions and workshops for training and professional development. We have cancelled those that cannot feasibly be moved online.

The main communities that we serve are Black, Indigenous and people-of-colour communities, people who are low-income, people in community housing and residents of Regent Park. These are particularly vulnerable

communities experiencing isolation and precarity due to COVID, and Black communities in Regent Park and beyond are experiencing a lot of grief and pain at this time.

In 2019, we reached approximately 11,000 people across all of our programs. This year we're projecting to reach half that number due to cancelled events and the move of our remaining programming online.

All of our activities are free to attend, so we don't have revenue from ticket sales. Our main sources of revenue are grants from arts councils, so operating funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Toronto Arts Council and project funding from the Ontario Arts Council. We've also applied for annual operating funding from the Ontario Arts Council for 2021, which we are anxiously waiting to hear the results on.

Operating and project grants from arts councils are our lifeline right now. We've recently qualified for Canada Summer Jobs and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, which we will begin receiving. Public funds made up 70% of our revenue in 2019, and we are going to see that increased to 80% of our revenue this year. This kind of public support has allowed us to retain core staff while we have had to cut other contract positions and greatly reduce the scope of our programming in order to have stability.

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It is imperative for the Ontario Arts Council and other provincial funding bodies that support the arts and culture to receive increased budgets for the next fiscal year so that we can build stability into 2021 and recover. Without this kind of sustained support from all levels of government, the Regent Park Film Festival would not be able to survive.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Angela Britto: But many of our peers are not so lucky. Many small and newer film and media arts organizations and festivals are vulnerable. They don't have the core funding from arts councils, and they don't have charitable status to qualify for other programs.

It's also not lost on me that these smaller organizations are those that primarily serve Black, Indigenous and people-of-colour communities, people with disabilities and rural and remote populations. We and other organizations that serve vulnerable communities through the arts often don't have the established stable donor bases that larger organizations do, and many of our private donations come from our communities who have faced historic barriers to accessing capital and institutional financing, who are themselves experiencing wide job losses and financial insecurity.

I'm worried that those peer festivals may not make it into 2021, and with them will go jobs, audiences and diverse vital voices that contribute to the vibrant film sector in Ontario. We need a provincial program managed by the Ontario Arts Council, for example, to support smaller organizations and collectives who don't qualify for support from other agencies.

In addition, there are the increased costs of organizations trying to survive COVID. Pivoting large-scale events online is expensive, and there are steep technological

learning curves for small organizations whose bread and butter is in-person events. Though we may survive 2020, it is unclear what fundraising will be like in 2021 and what reopening means for us.

Our sector needs funds for recovery; for digital initiatives, if we're going to be programming virtually longer than this year; for buying laptops and software and paying for Internet for staff who are working remotely indefinitely; for acquiring large amounts of PPE and training on to how to run physically distanced public events; and we need funds for marketing and outreach initiatives to bring audiences in again.

Going digital isn't always better.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Angela Britto: There are concerns around accessibility; namely, having Internet and computer access for low-income households and remote areas to access events solely in an online format.

Our decision to move our annual summer outdoor screening series online was a painful one for our organization, and our community has expressed sadness at this move. This event brings together families from all walks of life together for community cohesion, food, family-friendly activities, and a weekly movie under the stars. It supports local businesses, brings in visitors from all over the city, helps to reduce social isolation and improves community health, and it's a space for joy and celebration. Making this magic happen is something we and other community film festivals excel at, and Ontario is better for it. We want to keep doing it but we need increased, sustained and targeted government support to recover and continue to do so.

That's it, and I'm happy to elaborate further and engage in the questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is Atomic Cartoons. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Chris Wightman: Hello, my name is Chris Wightman. I'm the Ottawa studio manager for Atomic Cartoons. Thank you for allowing me to participate and allowing me to present to you today.

First, I'd like to provide a bit of background on Atomic Cartoons. Atomic Cartoons is relatively new to Ontario, but we are not new at making award-winning animated programming. Atomic Cartoons was started 21 years ago in Vancouver, and our studio in Vancouver has grown to about 600 employees.

In January 2019, just a year and a half ago, we opened the Ottawa studio and have since then created 75 new jobs so far, and we plan to double to about 150 in another year.

We also opened a studio in Los Angeles in the fall of 2019, just a few months ago, and they handle much of our development work. They also have about 75 people working there. In all, we typically have over 800 people working on anywhere from 10 to 15 animated productions and many, many more in development.

Our clients include all of the major streamers like Netflix, Disney+, Apple TV etc., and the broadcasters and

specialty channels like NBCUniversal, CBC, WGBH, Discovery Channel, just to name a few. One of our shows, called Molly of Denali, has just won the prestigious Peabody Award for children's animation. For those of you not familiar with the Peabody, it is often considered the equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize for television, radio and online storytelling.

Our animators in the new Ottawa studio have also been nominated for an Emmy Award for special class animation for The Last Kids on Earth, a show that's the currently on Netflix.

Atomic Cartoons is part of a bigger family. Our sister company, Great Pacific Television, produces award-winning factual and unscripted programs like Highway Thru Hell, Heavy Rescue: 401 and High Arctic Haulers. Our parent company, Thunderbird Entertainment, produces scripted productions and is probably best known for the award-winning Kim's Convenience.

Our decision to expand our operations into Ontario only a year and a half ago has been very successful. It was a decision that was not taken lightly. When we decided to open a new animation studio in Ottawa, it was because of a few very important factors: to be part of the increasingly talented Ottawa animation talent hub and part of an exceptional animation and growing television production community in Ottawa; to be closer and more involved with the exceptional post-secondary animation programs at Algonquin College, Sheridan College down the road and La Cité collégiale, also here in Ottawa, to help develop talent and provide new jobs for new kids exiting the college system; and to promote it in the industry as a solid, viable career for young Ontarians, as well as attracting world-class talent to Ontario.

Probably more important to this hearing is the Ontario tax credit program that has helped this whole ecosystem of animation in Ottawa and Ontario flourish. The tax credit program is vital to not only Atomic being here and growing in Ontario but to continue to grow the film and TV industry in Ottawa and across Ontario.

The economic impact from COVID is mostly a positive one for Atomic. We've kept 100% of our employees working, without missing a single day or pay, and are in the process of hiring more for our new shows. Our success in just over a year in Ottawa has allowed us to expand our studio footprint three times, and we are now a very sizable and dependable tenant for our landlord. We use all kinds of local services, from printing to cleaning to data centres to security companies, again, without missing a single payment or invoice.

As I mentioned, it also has helped us create 75 new jobs in less than a year, and our plan is to double to 150 in another year. We have brought talent and new taxpayers to Ontario from other provinces and even more recently, a director from Los Angeles.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Chris Wightman: Pardon?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes left.

Mr. Chris Wightman: Oh.

However, it has created some unplanned costs and unscheduled investments. The work-from-home situation has required us to invest fairly substantially in a new remote technology so we could and can keep as many of our people still working from home safely at this time.

Even with our industry being allowed to return to work, with the social-distancing protocols needed we can only use about one third of our studio seating capacity. For our team to continue work at home efficiently in delivering on time and on budget, we felt it was needed to invest in a long-term remote work solution so we could be efficient in the studio or working from home. We need to invest to maintain our reputation as a trusted production partner that can deliver no matter what the situation is, keep people employed no matter what the situation is, and deliver on time and on budget.

The technology we use relies on very good Internet speeds, and we are fortunate to have what we need in Ottawa, but it is access to that kind of infrastructure that needs to proliferate across Ontario and open up the industry to other regions of Ontario.

The only other part of COVID that has affected us from an economic perspective is the recruiting events. Every spring, we typically visit all of the colleges, and this year, we were unable to, and so seeing the new talent coming out of the schools and building a reputation and relationship with those schools has been very difficult at this time and could impact our recruiting abilities coming up.

Also, the Ottawa International Animation Festival is another big recruiting and promotion event for us, and that has been forced to go online this year as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Chris Wightman: However, we are participating with them as a sponsor online, with their online efforts this year, and continue to help promote the industry and the community in Ottawa in that way.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Before I move on to our next presenter, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Harden?

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Mr. Joel Harden: Hi, Chair. I'm broadcasting to you from Algonquin territory here in our constituency office in Ottawa. Nice to see you, Chris. Thanks for joining us.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Our next presenter is Architectural Conservancy Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Okay. My name is Kae Elgie, and I'm from Architectural Conservancy Ontario. I would like to share my screen with you. I hope it's working now. Is that working? Are you able to see my slides?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we are able to see it.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Perfect. Okay. Because last time, it didn't work.

We at Architectural Conservancy Ontario see a solution ahead of us, a solution that will strengthen the heritage

sector for years to come, while also bringing three huge benefits to Ontario generally. Our proposed solution will create jobs, it will fight climate change and it will improve individual and community well-being—something that everyone agrees is important, especially the longer the pandemic continues. We not only have a solution; we have an easy way to make all this happen. Our solution is to invest in heritage infrastructure. I'll be giving you some specific examples later on, but for now you can think of this as rehabilitating, adaptably reusing and sympathetically retrofitting heritage buildings.

The first reason to do this is jobs. With Ontario unemployment the highest it has been since 1976, jobs, jobs and more jobs have to be everyone's top concern. Studies have shown that for every dollar spent, renovation and rehabilitation projects create twice as many jobs as new construction, and this is because with new construction, the costs split out to about 50% labour and 50% materials, whereas rehabilitation projects are 75% labour.

Secondly, rehabilitating heritage buildings fights climate change. First and most obviously, they do this by avoiding all of the energy and emission costs of demolishing perfectly sound buildings and hauling tonnes of good, solid building materials to the landfill. Secondly, they do this by using already manufactured building materials.

An exhaustive study done by the Preservation Green Lab found that even if a new building is 30% more energy-efficient than a similarly sized and situated heritage building, it can take between 10 and 80 years for the new energy-efficient building to compensate for all the greenhouse gas emissions and all the air and water pollution created during the construction process. This is because the study took the life-cycle analysis approach to looking at these environmental impacts. It didn't just look at the energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions of the new building compared to the old building, but it also looked at all the emissions and water pollution and so on created during the mining, processing, manufacturing and transportation of the new building's materials. If we took a life-cycle analysis approach to all our building decisions, our cities would look very different and our air would be a lot cleaner.

A third benefit of investing in heritage buildings is the way they boost individual and community well-being. These effects have been well studied by a team of British researchers, who found 12 studies showing that simply visiting historic places and heritage sites made people feel happier and more satisfied with their life. Seven different studies looked at the impact of living in a historic place, such as Amsterdam's historic Canal District. The greater the number of heritage assets, the higher was people's sense of place and sense of pride and the better the community functioned—and there were also local economic benefits generated in part by heritage tourism.

So by now, I hope you're saying, "Well, this sounds great, but it would take so long to pull it off. You would have to put out a call for possible projects, you would have to figure out a new funding program, you would have to train staff and so on, and we need COVID-19 relief right

now." Well, good news: Heritage organizations have been working on this since April, coordinated by the National Trust for Canada.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Kae Elgie: We put together a list of over 200 shovel-ready heritage projects that would create over 3,000 jobs. They're all ready to go. In Ontario alone, we have 50 projects that would create 500 jobs and require a \$35-million investment. Our colleagues at the National Trust have also determined by speaking to federal staff that there's a fairly easy way to pull this off, and that's to use the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. There's at least \$16.5 billion remaining in this program to be spent by 2028. All we're asking is that a modest amount of this, \$200 million, could be targeted to green heritage projects.

I'll give you a few examples of what this could accomplish. Here's one example from Whitechurch-Stouffville of a privately owned building. The owner wishes to create his 1850s Georgian building into a wheelchair-accessible medical office building. It's a \$700,000 project. It would create 10 to 12 renovation jobs and 20 to 25 permanent medical office jobs.

Then we have the Kineto Theatre in Forest, Ontario. They've been showing movies continuously for 103 years, up until now. The Kiwanis Club, which owns the building, has raised \$625,000 to put in accessible washrooms and seating. They need \$500,000 more to complete the project.

A third example is the Oddfellows Hall in historic Streetsville. It's a landmark building there that's already got a conservation plan outlining extensive masonry repairs and restoration of the original wood windows. It's been already approved.

That last point brings me to an important thing to remember: It's important to do retrofitting the right way.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Hire someone who understands heritage buildings the way they were, someone who has experience with them. This is what we've been trying to do with various governments when they do energy conservation programs—realize that wooden windows are just as effective. We've done a study to prove it.

Another one of our projects: I think a lot of heritage organizations have realized that digital infrastructure is important. Here's another example of one of those from the Ontario Black History Society.

So we just ask you to please use your influence to get Infrastructure Canada money targeted to shovel-ready heritage projects. Unemployed Ontarians and our planet will thank you for it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start with the questions now and start the first round with the independent members. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Chair. I want to thank the presenters. I'll have to apologize. I came in late because I was on another committee—I'm doing double duty today—so I only caught just the last presentation from Architectural Conservancy Ontario. But it's a presentation near and dear to my heart, so I'll ask you questions, Kae.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Great. Sure.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: There's usually a high multiplier effect on job creation through energy retrofits. So I'm just wondering if you—I know you posted some jobs numbers in your presentation.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Yes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Have you looked at doing any multipliers, like “every dollar invested creates X number of jobs,” as you've looked at some of these restorations?

Ms. Kae Elgie: Well, we have found that, dollar for dollar, you get twice as many jobs if you do the restoration as opposed to a new build. That, as I explained, is because in a new construction, the budget kind of splits 50% jobs, 50% materials, whereas in renovation, you've got the materials there, so you can invest in the labour: 75% labour costs that way, yes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Related to that, I know a lot of the heritage properties that people are looking at doing restorations on in a number of communities, including my riding, are not only looking at how do we preserve heritage and make the buildings more energy-efficient, but also making them more accessible—especially as we look at meeting our AODA goals by 2025, which is not very far away.

Ms. Kae Elgie: I know.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I feel like it's a particularly challenging issue for heritage buildings. Could you maybe just speak a little bit on how important it is to make these buildings accessible for everyone, and some of the challenges with heritage buildings in particular?

Ms. Kae Elgie: Right. Yes, there are challenges, but fortunately, there are a number of architects who have specialized in just this sort of project. I've seen many presentations about that. In fact, a number of the projects on this list that we put together are just for that accessibility. I mentioned the Kineto Theatre as one of those, but there are a number of other ones. I believe the Glengarry Bishop's House is another one. But, yes, it is really important because all those benefits that I was talking about, particularly the community well-being, just the sense of pride people get and the positive feelings people get just by simply being in a historic building—those are really important, and it's important for everyone in the society, not just able-bodied people, to be able to do that.

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It's the climate change and the environmental benefit that really motivates me the most. If we can save and reuse these buildings, we just save having to reproduce those materials and all that demolition and waste and so on. It just makes so much sense in so many ways.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Actually, that leads to my next question around embodied energy in buildings. Sometimes people say, “Oh, it's just easier to tear down and start over again.” But could you speak to the embodied energy and materials, and also maybe a little bit of ICI waste as it relates to demolition and new build?

Ms. Kae Elgie: I'm not sure what you mean by ICI.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Industrial commercial waste. We recycle very little industrial commercial—

Ms. Kae Elgie: That's right, yes. The one slide I had with the life-cycle analysis, in that particular study by the Preservation Green Lab, they costed out every little detail of it and they didn't let the heritage building off easily. They admitted that its operating efficiency, even when it's retrofitted, may not be as good. But if you look at the impact over the lifetime of the buildings, over both buildings, the life cycle, there's 10 to 80 years' difference if you're trying to recoup those gains in just operating efficiency.

In terms of the waste, I think I've read figures that construction waste is 25% to 30%, but don't quote me on that. I can get you the number; you might know it, too. But it's a huge proportion of our waste. The thing is that it can be done, and there have been two projects in Kitchener-Waterloo, where I live, which prove that renovating the buildings saved money. The Kitchener Public Library came in at 75%. The renovation came in at 75% of what a new build would have been. It was about 73% for the Laurier seminary building. But you need an architect who can see the potential and realize that these materials that we have in these buildings are such good quality. You just don't make that kind of stuff anymore.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No, we don't; absolutely.

And just a little bit on operating costs: For a lot of heritage societies, budgets are obviously going to be tight.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Yes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: They're always tight, but especially tight right now, and just having energy-efficient buildings, what it means to their utility bills and operating costs.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Yes, that definitely has to be looked into, because you do want to do that. In the Greenest Building study, they definitely said that's important to do. But the point I was making earlier was you need to do it the right way. You don't need to strip everything out. It's a horrible example we just saw up in Walkerton where they stripped the inside of this beautiful church. Partly, that's because building inspectors don't realize they have latitude and partly because people don't understand heritage buildings. So you need to get people that understand it and then they know how they breathe, they know they're different from insulated concrete form.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the government side now for their time of questioning. I'll start with MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: My question is for Chris. Chris, thanks so much for appearing today. It's really great to have Ottawa's animation sector represented today. For those of my colleagues who aren't from Ottawa, Joel and I are very happy to be able to trumpet our wonderful animation studios in Ottawa. Not a lot of people know this, but Mickey Mouse has been animated in Ottawa for the past couple of years. So we're proud to have you here today.

I appreciated your shout-out, also, to Algonquin College in your presentation. I've had the chance to tour some of their animation studios at Algonquin College in my riding

and a lot of great innovation is happening there and, certainly, I'm pleased to hear that that's one of the reasons why you set up shop in Ottawa.

I recall last year when the mayor delivered his State of the City address, he highlighted Atomic's move and decision to set up shop in Ottawa. I think at the time you guys had 15 animators set up shop in Ottawa and the mayor made a point to comment that you guys planned to grow exponentially in Ottawa if the right circumstances happened.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how COVID-19 has perhaps hindered that, and what sort of things government can do to help make sure we get back on track to bring those jobs and create those jobs here in our city.

Mr. Chris Wightman: Thank you. A good place to start is probably with Algonquin. Our biggest challenge in the animation industry is finding talent. There's enough work for us to do. There's tons of work; we're missing the people.

I'm worried a little bit about how the program at Algonquin is going to put out the same quality. They've adapted, they've pivoted and they're doing it online. They do a great job in the class studio, but the online piece is a new one. I think there's a little bit of a question mark on, if this is a prolonged environment, what kind of effect might that have on the graduating students—especially as a father with post-secondary kids, the importance of being together and working together in that whole environment is so crucial, especially in your later years of your post-secondary education.

That's something that if there's any assistance that can be given to the schools to get those kids as fast-tracked as they can from a little bit of—the last two or three months for them this year were rough. It sounds like the first two or three—next term, next year is going to be rough too, and who knows if that will continue? That's certainly one big part.

The recruiting piece is always something that all the studios—we're fighting over anyone who comes out of those programs—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Chris Wightman:—so the more we can get—and a way to increase that cohort as well would be another thing that I know Algonquin is already thinking about. There's plans to increase the size capacity. Definitely, those are some things that I know Minister MacLeod—she had a town hall at Algonquin. I believe you were there as well, a familiar face, I thought. So we're discussing that with—the Minister of Colleges I believe was there at that open house as well; I can't remember his name right now. But we had some good discussion around that round table.

I think that's certainly something, increasing the size of those classes and helping to increase the size for our recruiting numbers across—it's not only in Ontario. A lot of these kids end up down in Hollywood, too. Ontario's a known place. The colleges are well-renowned, world-class programs, and anything we can do to increase that, to support them through these times would be of tremendous

benefit, not only to them, to help evolve their curriculum, but also to the industry at large.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: For sure. I really appreciate that. Perhaps we can set up a time to chat off-line and connect with Algonquin College and maybe pull in my colleague David Piccini, who's on this committee as well. David is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities, so perhaps we can have a conversation and see how we can tackle any regulatory burdens or anything on that side that could make sure that we can get more kids into that program, particularly given the fact that there's jobs waiting for them on the other side, which is obviously something we all want to see happen.

Thanks again for your presentation, and I look forward to connecting again soon.

Mr. Chris Wightman: Me as well, yes. Thank you.

Just another thing to remember about the animation industry is that it is, at this point, a technology industry and technology is something that is expensive, especially for colleges. I know Algonquin struggles with getting the amount of technology they'd like to have for their students, so that the kids get as much time as they can using it. So any way to help with that type of infrastructure investment would go a long way.

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Mr. Jeremy Roberts: For sure. Great. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

There are 20 seconds. MPP Piccini, you have 20 seconds.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. We'll come back to you in the second round. Before we go to the opposition for their time of questioning, I'd like to do an attendance check on MPP Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, hi. I'm Chris Glover and I'm in Toronto.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right, so we'll go to MPP Morrison for her first question.

Interruption.

Ms. Suze Morrison: There we go. Excellent. I'd like to put my first question to Angela Britto from the Regent Park Film Festival. Thank you for being here today. I'm wondering if you could take a minute and just explain the really vital role that you play here in Regent Park. For those who don't know, Regent Park is the largest social housing development anywhere in the country right now, and I think you play a really important role around social cohesion as the neighbourhood goes through a substantial amount of change, particularly for the young people who are going through displacement from their homes, watching their neighbourhoods get torn down, and coming back in. Can you speak a little bit about the role that you play in community-building and social cohesion here in regent park?

Ms. Angela Britto: Absolutely. Thank you for that question. The Regent Park Film Festival sees its role in supporting community through supporting community

stories and storytelling. The kinds of events that we program, the films that we bring in to the community through our outdoor film screening series, Under the Stars, or through our annual festival in November really are high-lighting narratives that resonate with the key communities in Regent Park. Those are Black, Indigenous and people-of-colour communities, people who are low-income, people who live in social housing.

Our events have really been well received by the community as events that bring people together. They bring together, as you mentioned, lots of different groups that have undergone a lot of change in Regent Park over the last 10 to 15 years. For youth in particular, we have found an effective way to engage them is as volunteers in all of our events.

We offer a lot of professional development and training programs for emerging filmmakers, many of them who are from Regent Park. Whether that's in learning how to screenwrite, learning skills in short-film writing and editing, or whether it's through the paid internship program that we provide specifically for Black youth to work as production assistant interns on TV sets, it's a way of creating job opportunities and providing training.

Those are all ways that we support storytelling and storytellers in Regent Park. This is our 18th year. We're hoping to make it to our 20th anniversary in 2022. Though many things have changed in the community, I think the festival's role in bringing people together remains true.

Ms. Suze Morrison: We know that Black and Indigenous and low-income communities across the city have been harder-hit by COVID than wealthy neighbourhoods, than white neighbourhoods. How have you seen the impacts of COVID further amplified in Regent Park, as an example, which is predominantly racialized and lower-income?

Ms. Angela Britto: Well, I think there's definitely a greater need for things like free programming. The Regent Park Film Festival has always been free. We don't charge any admission for our events, and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Angela Britto: —we want to keep doing that for the community.

I think there has also been an increase in people feeling a lot of social isolation, particularly in vulnerable communities, people who are experiencing job loss, economic and financial precarity in communities that have historically faced barriers to accessing traditional forms of capital and financing, and so this is a moment when people are feeling very vulnerable. They need events and programming and moments of joy and celebration to bring people together again.

People also benefit from seeing themselves reflected onscreen, seeing their own stories in the films and media that they consume and that they have access to. We want to keep doing that for people through the Regent Park Film Festival. It's affirming. It validates people's experiences. We hope to program films about marginalized communities' experiences of COVID, but that's all dependent on

people being supported to make those films and tell those stories, which we can then bring to the community soon.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Could you quickly speak about or elaborate on the piece you were mentioning around technology not necessarily being the solution? I know we've had issues in the past with folks in the community not having access to technology to participate equally, and I know this has come up, for example, with young kids in the neighbourhood not being able to register for swimming lessons at the aquatics centre because it's all done through online registration, and getting pushed out of the programs that were really designed for those kids. Can you speak about that a little bit more?

Ms. Angela Britto: Sure. Making things available online doesn't necessarily mean making it accessible to everyone. More people may be able to access it; however, there are people experiencing barriers to Internet access, to bandwidth and to having computers and mobile devices to participate in our programming.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Angela Britto: The spaces where people could go to for free WiFi aren't available anymore—or not in the same way for large groups of people to be at.

We are hearing from people that it's great that you're moving these things online, but if a family of six is at home and everyone is online to go to school and work and to check in on other family members, then it makes it very difficult to ask someone to be able to watch a two-hour film that we broadcast online. So I think that having increased bandwidth, not just in rural or remote communities but also within the city, is a definite access issue if we're going to be programming digitally for a very long time.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Fifteen seconds.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Okay. With that, I'd just like to thank you again for being here today and for all the work you do in Regent Park. I'm so grateful for the film festival and everything you do. Thank you. Meegwetch.

Ms. Angela Britto: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I'll start the second round for the government side. I'll go to MPP Piccini.

MPP Piccini?

Mr. David Piccini: Hello?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Chair. Sorry. I was just waiting to be unmuted.

I appreciate the presentation from all the presenters. My question is to Kae. Just to build up to our previous discussion, Kae—and thank you for following up with an email to me; I appreciate it—I loved your comment on the ICIP. It's been phenomenal for communities like mine. As you know, we proudly have a number of natural heritage communities, like in Port Hope, to Colborne, up to Keene, where we've even done a number of filmings. We film Murdoch Mysteries etc. as a result. I love the idea. I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little more to me on that and how we would prioritize it. Again, this sort of

stems back to my old conversation, because I agree with you in principle and agree vis-à-vis environmental impacts and the important role that preserving these buildings can play. The practical ramifications are that in the absence of clearly prioritizing some over others, what ends up happening—and we've seen it in many local examples—is we've been marred in disputes at the municipal level and actually, nothing gets done. I think of the Walton hotel in Port Hope as a prime example, and others.

Can you elaborate a little more on how we would prioritize this? You had a couple of phenomenal projects that you pitched here in the slide deck.

Ms. Kae Elgie: And believe me, there's lots more. I am happy to send you the list of the ones that we have.

My understanding of it is basically, based on the investigations that the National Trust people did with federal staff in I think three different departments federally, trying to see what would be an easy way to do this—and they came up with the ICIP thing, and there is money in it. I see there has been a green stream, but there hasn't been one like a green heritage, if you like.

The advice we got was that if Ontario wanted to see this happen, Ontario could pitch for this to happen and maybe, within the Ontario money, put a priority for that. I haven't done investigations with the staff extensively, but that was the information we got: that if the Ontario infrastructure minister really wanted this to happen, probably it could happen. If you can help put this idea ahead, you've seen the benefits in your own community. So that would be fantastic.

1530

Mr. David Piccini: Do you have commitment from the feds on that? Just because I'm saying there are a lot of things we'd like. Broadband has been named ad nauseam at this committee. We've heard it from virtually every presenter. We asked for expanded broadband, and we were met with a no from the feds. I'm just curious: Do you have a commitment that they would be willing to have a carve-out if asked? Because it's always nice to have a yes when you know you're asking for something.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Well, we talked with staff. As you know, if staff think it's possible, that's a good starting point. They did think it was possible. They thought that was the easiest way. The different departments we went to pointed to other programs, but this seemed to be a fairly easy way to get it done. Politically, there's always that question, but that's kind of the experience we've had so far: that the staff feel it's a possible thing we could do.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. David Piccini: Yes, thank you. I'd like to connect with you off-line—I won't take up any more of the committee's time here—on a suite of wrap-around supports in addition to something like that vis-à-vis the tax credits at the municipal level for vacant buildings, because I'd love to see—

Ms. Kae Elgie: That would be terrific.

Mr. David Piccini: I would love to support you wholeheartedly in a big thrust to better utilize our historical spaces. We've got a litany of them here in rural Ontario that we could use for filming, for all sorts of things, and it

would be nice to have a suite of tools that governments at all levels could deploy to really get this going. So thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions?

Mr. David Piccini: No further questions, Chair. Thanks to all the presenters.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. So we'll go to the opposition side now for their second round. MPP Glover?

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is for Kae from the ACO. I'm really intrigued by your project. It seems that historically in Ontario, because most of the existing historical buildings that are still around are between 100 and 130 years old, they're at the point where they're either going to be rebuilt or renovated and saved or not. Is that a fair assessment?

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: Oh, you're muted.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Now I'm fine.

The definition of "heritage" is pretty broad, for one thing. I know typically people think it's really old buildings, but I think we are broadening that definition of heritage, and recent events are pushing us to broaden that definition of heritage too. But just because a building is 180 years old or whatever—I mean, that Georgian building that I showed in my slides still has good bones. ACO has a program, PreservationWorks!, where we can do an assessment at a very low cost for people looking at this, so you can see if it's worth it, because not all are, but a lot of them are.

Mr. Chris Glover: I like what you're saying, because the fund that you're talking about tapping into allows us to achieve this goal of preserving our provincial architectural heritage and, at the same time, putting people to work. I don't think we've begun to see the economic fallout from this pandemic yet.

Can you just talk a little bit more about the project and how the funding would work or what that—and I apologize; like MPP Schreiner, I was in another committee so I didn't get to hear the whole presentation. When I came in, you were talking about a fund that's available that we could tap into to both employ people and preserve heritage.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Well, it's a notional fund. The Infrastructure Canada investment program does exist, and when the National Trust for Canada, who have been spearheading this, talked to the staff there, they felt that this was a possible delivery method for it. So it hasn't been confirmed yet, but their suggestion was that if there was the political will from Ontario and other provinces, this could come to be.

In preparation for this, heritage organizations put together a list. We crowdsourced a list. In Ontario, we came up with 50 projects, and I'm sure there are more, if people knew there was really a program. But this is what we could come up with just on the idea—yes, there are so many benefits.

Mr. Chris Glover: Do you know what? I appreciate that, and I think it's wonderful. I'd like to see that slide deck, if you could have it emailed to my office.

Ms. Kae Elgie: I will.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. I want to pass it to MPP Andrew, because we're limited in our time. Go ahead.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Andrew.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you. I believe that MPP Harden is also on the call, so I'm going to try to be really quick.

Regent Park Film Festival: Angela, I just wanted to say thank you for your outstanding work. I know you all engage thousands of students per year in gaining interest in film, which then leads to job creation several years later for filmmakers.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I would also like to say to Architectural Conservancy Ontario—Kae, I wanted to get your input on how important it is for us to support our municipalities and to ensure that those who are making decisions around heritage have a background in heritage to ensure that we can preserve our community heritage sites. Can you say a few words? Just a few words, I'm sorry, so I can pass it on to MPP Harden. Thank you.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Yes, it is really important. The province has the responsibility for doing this and has delegated it to the municipalities, but there certainly could be a lot more done to help municipalities make good decisions on this. The ministries used to be a lot more active; the staff used to be a lot more active. That would really help. There is a lot that could be done. We see the potential, but it's getting that message out. I think the provincial government could really help us a lot to do that.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much, Kae. I've been in touch with ACO before, I've been to events, and I will be in touch again. I'm going to share my time with MPP Harden. Thank you.

Ms. Kae Elgie: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Chris, just to you, thank you for all you're doing, keeping people 100% employed in this moment. I mean, that is a remarkable thing. And what I've just offered—because I think I really only have, what, about 30 seconds, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute and 20 seconds.

Mr. Joel Harden: Oh, goodness. Thank you, MPP Andrew, for that.

What do you think we could do, Chris, to help students get the tech they need? It seems like we're going into even more of a tech-heavy moment as people try to be creative and collaborative online. I'm wondering if the people you're working with or who you want to recruit have the kind of tools they need, and if in fact that requires a little bit more investment from the province to make sure those labs that can be done online can happen as well as they can?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Chris Wightman: Yes, and I think if you look at the current situation and go back to the students from Algonquin, we're in a fortunate position at a studio where we

were able to send our artists home with their equipment from the studio. They all have their own personal set-up and they were allowed to take whatever they needed home to continue working.

Obviously at the colleges, the schools, they're sharing equipment, and they're lacking the numbers even at the best of times, just because of the costs involved. One of the ideas is perhaps having students start with their own equipment, albeit expensive, and that's something that I think the government could probably find a way to help with in some mechanism that's there, so that they start with the equipment and they're able to use it all the time. As we know, the more you use something, the better and more proficient you become. You enter the workforce that much further ahead, and we're not—typically, we sort of spend—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Chair. I was in the same committee meeting as MPP Glover, so we both have our excuse.

Chris, even though I missed your presentation—I apologize for that—I want to follow up on the conversation you were having with MPP Harden. When you talk about equipment in the labs, is there remote-access capability to that or not?

Mr. Chris Wightman: Yes, absolutely. Part of my presentation was that the unplanned cost that we've experienced from COVID was setting up that remote equipment, and we've invested quite substantially in it. Part of that reason is, who knows how long this will go on? Who knows what's going to happen next? We can use that same technology when big snowstorms hit and all kinds of things, even when things come back to normal. So to us it makes a lot of sense so we can continue delivering on time and on budget no matter what the situation is.

For the students, it's something that—there are all kinds of systems out there, the remote technologies. When we're in a situation like we're in, there's obviously a lot of confidentiality; it's got to be completely encrypted remote technology. But for the students working on classwork and lab work, a less robust system is probably needed.

I would say the biggest problem, though, is all of those students are now at home, and they don't have the technology they'd have in their labs at school to use. If this continues six months down the road—it's a three-year program to begin with, so you've already lost a year of using that technology, and even when they come out of the schools, we're still training them up, because they just don't have the touch time on the technology to get completely up to speed. So having that technology with them from day one as they enter through these programs would be ideal. That alleviates all of the problems that the schools have got of trying to have something for everyone, and then in cases like this, in their remote needs, they can continue on. They can work at it in their spare time and not be subject to it for the few hours of week that they're in the labs.

1540

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Okay. Just so I'm clear on this: The support the students would need is to be able to either have the equipment or the bandwidth to remote-access some of the equipment that you could provide them the opportunities to work on?

Mr. Chris Wightman: Yes. The big piece of equipment is really the tablet. The remoting-in piece is easy; I mean, even an old laptop can do that. But it's a \$3,000-to-\$4,000 oversized tablet, about a two to a two-and-a-half-foot-wide tablet, that is the expensive piece. There are some off-market brands that are starting to come out that are proving their worth, as well, but that's the real piece that's tough to get enough of them into their hands.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Okay. Great. I just want to switch over to Kae, and then I'm hoping I have time for one question for Angela as well.

Kae, I'm wondering if you've looked at heritage buildings for racialized communities? I'm thinking in particular in my riding of Heritage Hall, which the Guelph Black Heritage Society is working to make accessible. In this moment, when we're having conversations about systemic racism and how we tell the history of Black, Indigenous, people-of-colour communities, I'm just wondering if you've thought about any funding to restore heritage buildings that reflect those communities?

Ms. Kae Elgie: Yes, very much so. In fact, the next presentation round has one of the projects that I was going to show. The Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association will be telling you about a very interesting example. There are others on our list, too, that we've put together. I did mention the Ontario Black History Society. It was a digital list. But that's really important. ACO is really cognizant of the fact that that's an important priority for all heritage organizations these days.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Okay. Thanks for that.

Angela, I'm hoping to ask you a quick question. You talked about the importance of the community connections for students through the film festival and how challenging digitalization could be for a lot of people in terms of access. Have you thought about what types of guidelines you need from the province in order to maybe bring some of those community connections together that are not completely online, but still meet physical distancing and public health measures?

Ms. Angela Britto: Absolutely. I think some of those guidelines would be a big help for us and other community film festivals, or community festivals in general, because if we were to start opening up to public events and putting physical distancing measures in place, we would need some guidelines from public health authorities on how to do that safely.

We'd need some training. We rely on so many volunteers in order to run a large-scale event, so—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Angela Britto: —we would have to train our volunteers on how to do that safely while keeping them safe. As well as accessing large events, there's PPE; that's something we want to make available to all our volunteers or any attendees to the events.

Those are some considerations around reopening and support from government that would be very helpful, in addition to funding for things like marketing and advertising initiatives to start bringing people out to things, and investing in technology and digital solutions in the long term so we can maybe offer hybrid events moving forward.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, that makes sense. I'm probably almost out of time, but on the guidelines: There are the generalized guidelines, but that some sort of sector-specific guidelines would be helpful is what I hear you saying.

Ms. Angela Britto: Absolutely, yes. Film festivals are in the business of bringing together large groups of people into an enclosed space for an experience, so it would go a long—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time for the presentations. Thank you to all three presenters. We appreciate your presentations. Thank you so much.

As we're running ahead of time and we don't have any presenters from the next round, this committee stands in recess for 10 minutes. We'll come back at 3:55. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1545 to 1556.

INDIGENOUS SPORT AND WELLNESS ONTARIO

MOOSE RIVER HERITAGE AND HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION

BUDDIES IN BAD TIMES THEATRE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon and welcome back. We'll move along to our next group of presenters for 4 p.m. First, I would like to start with Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Good day. Taanishi kiya? Boozhoo. Marc Laliberté is my name. I'm the president of Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario.

I'd like to first acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in this province from time immemorial. I'd like to thank the Chair and the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for the invitation and opportunity to present on behalf of Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario and the Indigenous peoples we serve. We are honoured to be part of the dialogue as we work to develop solutions together.

For background, ISWO is the designated provincial-territorial Indigenous sport body for Ontario and serves all Indigenous people across the province, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis on- and off-reserve, in rural and urban settings. Our organization develops broad opportunities for participation in sport and cultural activities that promote wellness and positive lifestyles for Indigenous peoples in Ontario. Over the last five years, ISWO's annual funding received from the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries has grown from

\$200,000 to over \$1.9 million. This illustrates the ongoing dedication of this ministry and the government of Ontario to supporting Indigenous youth and communities, and we would like to acknowledge this tremendous and continuing support.

ISWO has progressed from an organization focused primarily on youth sport to an organization which programs in sport, leadership and wellness for all ages. At the core of all of our programming is a recognition and celebration of culture, of who we are as Indigenous peoples.

ISWO has successfully delivered on the minister's mandate, created substantial new partnerships, and over the past three years has generated an economic impact of over \$50 million for the province of Ontario. We successfully delivered the 2017 North American Indigenous Games in Toronto, attended by more than 5,000 Indigenous youth from across Turtle Island. The event created a national dialogue on reconciliation, boosted by our media partnership with the CBC and Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, and resulted in an economic impact of \$43 million for the province. Most importantly, these games provided Indigenous youth from across Turtle Island with an opportunity to share and celebrate their cultural traditions.

ISWO has also successfully hosted the 2016 National Aboriginal Hockey Championships, the 2016 Ontario Indigenous Summer Games and the 2018 Masters Indigenous Games. These major events directly and significantly contributed to Ontario's economy while also advancing the opportunities for Indigenous peoples to participate in sport and cultural events. High-profile events also allowed the organization to raise the awareness of issues facing Indigenous communities and create space for dialogue on reconciliation.

One of our most important platforms is to support the continued acknowledgement, learning and celebration of Indigenous cultures through the Standing Bear Youth Leadership Program. This innovative youth leadership program was developed in consultation with more than 500 Indigenous youth from across Ontario. The program is unique in Canada and is based entirely on an Indigenous framework of knowing, learning and doing. Youth can obtain certification in six distinct areas and access the program in their community through programs and events that are entirely online.

As one youth explained it, the impacts of intergenerational racism—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: —from the residential school system are like a tsunami, wiping out entire cultures and ways of being, with waves continuing to affect our youth of today. The Standing Bear program is a way to recoup their cultural identity, encouraging youth to connect back to their culture, their community, and to learn about their identity and strengths as Indigenous peoples.

ISWO's landmark sport pathway initiative increases access and opportunity for participation in sport, recreation and leadership through the hosting of dozens of sport

and cultural camps across Ontario, attended by thousands of Indigenous children on an annual basis. These camps celebrate Indigenous cultural traditions and engage youth in a safe space to embrace their culture, fostering stronger self-identity and connection to land, culture, community and self. This strength in self-identity leads to resiliency and self-determination, essential for life promotion and youth engagement.

The Masters Indigenous Games are another platform through which ISWO supports the recognition and celebration of Indigenous cultures. The event is for Indigenous adults over the age of 20 and is open to Indigenous peoples from around the world. The event consists of a cultural festival showcasing global Indigenous artists, performances, foods, traditional sports and teachings. This multi-day event is a significant economic generator for the province. The next Masters Indigenous Games will take place in Ottawa in August 2021. ISWO has signed a five-year funding agreement with the city of Ottawa and Ottawa Tourism to host the 2021 and 2023 Masters Indigenous Games and the 2022 Ontario Indigenous Summer Games.

One of the most important pieces in revitalizing culture for Indigenous people is storytelling. To encourage greater sharing of stories of Indigenous peoples, their culture and their achievements, ISWO secured a five-year media partnership with the CBC to help promote public awareness of Indigenous sport and culture across Ontario, to foster dialogue on the journey of reconciliation through sport.

With every camp event or program that ISWO develops, culture is at the forefront of what we do. Connection with the land and the community is paramount.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: COVID has had a tremendous effect on the entire nation, and especially our sport tourism and cultural industries here in Ontario. For ISWO, that has meant a delay in the delivery of some of our major events and an outright cancellation of others. In terms of dollars and cents, we have had more than half a million dollars lost as a direct result of COVID-19.

More significantly, our youth and communities are suffering, as many youth look to sport and our programs as positive outlets. Many of our communities do not have the resources to stay healthy and safe—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up.

We'll move to our next presenter now, the Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Could we start with Mr. Stan Kapashesit? He will begin our presentation. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sure.

Mr. Stan Kapashesit: Wâciye, everyone. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can.

Mr. Stan Kapashesit: Okay. Thank you, Cecil, for that. Wâciye and meegwetch for inviting us to present to you today.

I want to start by acknowledging the women, the elders and any youth at heart as well who we're meeting with today, as well as acknowledging the traditional and ancestral lands on which we are meeting virtually, from the homelands of Moose Cree First Nation, Ililiw, to that of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and all the lands in between.

I come from Moose Factory, the site of Canada's oldest surviving English-speaking community. Established in 1673 by the Hudson's Bay Company, Moose Factory survived and grew because of the hospitality and reciprocity of my people, who have called this region home since time beyond memory. In the post-war years, Moose Factory transitioned from a fur trade settlement to a permanent Cree settlement, and the fur trade was replaced by other resource development and tourism.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Moose Factory and Moosonee drew thousands of tourists a year from across Canada, North America and around the world. The influx of visitors declined in the 1990s because of changes in ONTC's budget, rail schedule and involvement in local tourism. This exposed pre-existing jurisdictional coordination and funding gaps. The deterioration of heritage sites, the lack of integration of local history, culture and local education, and larger educational, health, reconciliation and community development issues were also key factors. Nevertheless, the tremendous heritage and cultural tourism potential was immediately obvious to senior federal and provincial deputy ministers who visited our region in 2008 and invited the three local jurisdictions to submit a joint proposal to develop a coordinated tourism plan.

Tourism, however, is not the only reason why reinvestment in our heritage and culture is important for local and regional economic development. Heritage and culture also have a significant indirect impact on our youth and our communities' capacity to be participants and contributors not only to our communities and region, but to the province and country as a whole. I know this very well because I'm also director of economic development for Moose Cree First Nation, as well as chair of the Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association board.

In 2009, MRHHA was established in order to respond to the intersection of challenges and opportunities I have just described. Our association brings together three jurisdictional members: Moose Cree First Nation, the MoCreebec Eeyoud Council of the Cree Nation, and the town of Moosonee, as well as other private, public and non-profit organizational and individual members. Our holistic and multi-dimensional mission was encompassed with our motto, "Building a future with our shared past."

Just before COVID-19 hit, we were preparing to launch a major initiative aimed at building a future with our shared past. We have gone ahead with this initiative, but we are concerned that COVID-19 will negatively impact our efforts.

Dr. Cecil Chabot will elaborate more. He has also served as a co-founding MRHHA volunteer board member for more than 10 years, before recently becoming our part-time executive director. Originally from Moose Factory—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stan Kapashesit:—he also has a PhD in history, with a focus on Cree history and relations, European newcomers and reconciliation.

So I'll hand it over to Cecil.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Thanks, Stan, and thank you to the committee.

I want to underline two things about our holistic vision and mission. We know that heritage and culture are critical for tourism, but we also know that their importance for economic and community development alike extends far beyond this. Culture and heritage thrive when they're community-centred and driven. If they're reduced to an economic development tool used for attracting tourists, they will fail even to do this.

A community-centred-and-driven approach means placing primary emphasis on Cree heritage and culture, without losing sight of a defining feature of this heritage and culture: the Cree tradition of hospitality and the 350-year-old history of Cree/European transatlantic relations. Moose Factory, in fact, is the oldest continuous site of Indigenous/European relations and socio-economic, cultural and religious reciprocity, and intermarriage.

Now, more than ever, this heritage is needed. Canada faces significant reconciliation challenges. Although our local and regional communities have not escaped these challenges, we also have a history that is not defined only by them, and this history can help envision a new way forward. So our mission of building a future with our shared past is relevant not just on a local and regional level, but also on a provincial and national level.

In 2023, we will commemorate the 350th anniversary of the establishment of Cree/European relations and the founding of Moose Factory, and its legacy as Ontario's oldest permanent European settlement, along with Kingston; Canada's oldest surviving English-speaking community; and its oldest continuous Indigenous/European community defined by reciprocity. Our objective is to leverage this anniversary to achieve community and economic development goals that integrate and impact education, heritage, reconciliation, culture, arts, hospitality, traditional skills etc., and we have a wealth of tourism, heritage and historical reports and recommendations to draw from in serving this purpose.

1610

We're going to begin in 2021 with smaller events leading up to 2023, to build community engagement—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Okay; thank you.

We're working with many local organizations, and I can certainly elaborate on many of the various goals that we have. The key thing is that we are aiming to leverage this anniversary to achieve many goals that will have an impact not only in our region, but beyond, especially in terms of reconciliation.

We have a number of committees that are set up for this purpose, and I want to pass the word on now to Norm Wesley, who is the co-chair of the St. Thomas restoration committee.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself, please?

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Norm?

Canon Norm Wesley: Yes. I know I only have a few seconds, but this is a very, very big project for us, and we're very hopeful that this committee will take light to what we want to do here. We'll be happy to respond to any questions you might have. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

All right, so we'll move to our next presenter, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Thank you for this opportunity to present today. My name is Evalyn Parry. I'm the artistic director of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Founded in 1979, Buddies is the largest and longest-running queer theatre company in the world. We make our home in a city-owned building at 12 Alexander Street in the heart of Toronto's Gay Village.

I want to acknowledge that while we have been in the building for the last 27 years, the land that our theatre is located on has been the site of human activity, creativity and storytelling for many thousands of years before the arrival of settlers. Toronto's centre is covered by Treaty 13, an agreement between the crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit River, and it's also the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat, Petun First Nation, the Seneca and the Haudenosaunee. We acknowledge these nations, and as a queer theatre company, we want to express our solidarity with Indigenous and two-spirit people across Turtle Island.

I want to begin by giving you a little general context for our theatre and the work that we do, and then get to the economic effects of COVID-19 on our operations and on our future. Buddies creates vital Canadian theatre by developing and presenting voices that question cultural and sexual norms. Built on the political and social principles of queer liberation, Buddies supports artists and works that reflect and advance these values. As the world's longest-running and largest queer theatre, Buddies is uniquely positioned to develop, promote, preserve and present stories and perspectives that are challenging and alternative.

Buddies has firmly established ourselves as a premier cultural centre for Toronto's 2SLGBTQ community, as a top destination for audiences seeking cutting-edge theatre in Toronto, and as a leading centre for creation and presentation of alternative theatre in Canada. Buddies achieves artistic excellence through our Mainstage Season, our festival programming, our artist residency program, and our youth and intergenerational community-based initiatives.

The theatre that we create at Buddies and the process by which we create it are mechanisms through which we question dominant narratives and propose alternatives in the way in which we interrogate and transform our identities. The success of our company lies in our ability to dig into areas of discomfort and address, make room for and support the increasingly intersectional identities of queer artists and culture-makers who are the future of our community.

As the only theatre in our Church-Wellesley neighbourhood and an important physically accessible gathering space for the community, we play a vital economic and cultural role locally, and we're also recognized nationally as an important cultural leader and innovator in our field. Over the last decade, Buddies productions have toured nationally across Canada, and over the last year we've also toured internationally with the prestigious Edinburgh International Festival and the Cervantino festival in Mexico, bringing our unique queer work and the important global conversations that are happening here in Toronto to other communities around the country and around the world.

We are a not-for-profit theatre and a charitable organization. Our activity is funded through a mix of public, private and earned revenue. I'll take this opportunity to thank the Ontario Arts Council, an arm's-length body receiving funding from the Ontario government. We employ 14 queer and trans-identified full-time administrative, managerial and technical staff; four part-time program directors; and more than 15 part-time hourly staff. This is in addition to our important role employing freelance artists.

As some of you are likely aware, in this country, the vast majority of theatre artists work as freelancers in a gig economy. Buddies is proud to employ upward of 300 artists every year through our live programming: actors, designers, directors, playwrights, technicians, educators and others who make their living through contracts. In this way, we're one small part of a larger ecology in an industry which has been hard hit by COVID.

Our physically accessible venue has two professionally equipped performance spaces, one which holds up to 250 patrons and one a smaller cabaret space, which holds 120 seated—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Two minutes?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Thank you.

In short, Buddies is much more than a theatre; we're a local arts and culture leader for over four decades, an important community hub, a tourist destination, a preferred employer in our industry and an ambassador for Canadian culture on the international stage.

We shut our doors to the public March 16. Our season usually extends till Pride weekend, with Pride being a very important time for us—not only for the artists and community but also for income generation.

The closure started with the cancellation of our main stage show, a revenue loss of upward of \$20,000; the cancellation of Buddies's tour to Montreal, another \$20,000; the cancellation of three rental productions, who rent our venue, with a loss of upward of \$30,000; the cancellation of our month-long studio time, with cancelling 30 artists and their income; and finally, the complete re-visioning of a queer Pride festival, with a loss of over \$100,000 to our organization.

Through the federal CEWS program over the last three months, we've been grateful to be able to retain our full-

time staff and honour contracts for artists whose shows were cancelled in the first few weeks. But we've had to lay off all our part-time employees and, of course, the freelancers who were going to be employed by all of the productions and work at Buddies have been left high and dry.

I want to say that when we look to the future right now, it's very precarious in our industry. At this time, the earliest we anticipate being able to open is early 2021, and in this best-case scenario, seeing a very vastly reduced audience capacity. There's a potential loss of up to 100% of our ticket and bar revenues in the event that we're not able to open to the public next year, and being able to employ only a small percentage of all the freelancers who rely on this ecology that we are an important part of.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Thank you.

I'll just end with a couple of statistics from the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, to say that the impact survey results reveal that 168 professional theatre, dance and opera companies in Toronto anticipate experiencing a collective financial loss of \$500 million, and that assuming public events are cancelled up to the end of 2020, the cumulative impact and loss is over 25,000 public performances and exhibits cancelled and postponed, depriving 20 million audience members.

Thank you for your time today and for hearing my comments.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start with the questions now, and we'll start this round of questions with the opposition. MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much, and I'll share my time with MPP Andrew as well.

I'd like to direct my first question to Evalyn from Buddies. Welcome, and thank you for being here. I can't tell you how much I miss being at the theatre right now. I miss you all so much.

I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little bit on how the impact of COVID, coupled with the loss of revenue from Pride, has disproportionately affected the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Yes, indeed. I think the significant thing is all the people in our community who are employed through a space like Buddies and through events like Pride. In this gig economy, 2SLGBTQ people are some of the more precarious folks in terms of their social location and their ability to have stable employment to begin with. The kind of work and revenue that's generated by platforms like Pride, Pride Toronto and other locations in the Gay Village as well as Buddies are very significant platforms that pay people for their performances and their work.

It's hard to calculate the loss, actually. It's so widespread, and I don't think it's accurately represented. Because folks are not employees of a company, it's hard to put together that collective loss, but it's very significant.

Ms. Suze Morrison: What supports would you like to see put in place from the provincial government to help Buddies weather this storm and come out on the other side?

1620

Ms. Evalyn Parry: I want to draw attention to the letter that MPP Jill Andrew wrote in April of this year, to really actively support the recommendations that she made in that letter. Certainly, those include responsive funding—the Ontario Arts Council is a lifeline not only for organizations like ours, but also for artists who are freelancers, who do projects that feed into our ecology. So restoring funding from the massive cuts that happened last year would be a very important initiative.

One of the recommendations I noted in her letter was about supporting seniors' funding. I'll just draw attention to an important initiative that we've done at Buddies: the Youth/Elders Project, which engages young LGBTQ2S folks and elders in our community, putting them together, using theatre and storytelling to build relationships and to end isolation, and to address cross-generational relationship supports and community-building. Putting money into seniors is going to be a very important part of the COVID-19 recovery, and I think the arts can play such an important piece in helping us get through this difficult transition.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'll pass it over to MPP Andrew.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Andrew.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you. What's my time check?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Oh, that's a lot of time.

Thank you, MPP Morrison.

First of all, I want to say thank you to all of the presenters. I was able to hear all of your presentations.

I just want to echo what has been said throughout the days of these committees, along with today: that we definitely need to invest in a robust Ontario Arts Council.

We know the significant impact of having the Indigenous Culture Fund cut—a fund that was directly connected to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. That was reprehensible. And yet, here we are with COVID-19, at a time when anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism are rearing their ugly heads. I, for sure, along with MPP Morrison, all of us on this call, the official opposition—we are dead set on ensuring that the COVID-19 recovery plan looks pointedly at how we can recover while dismantling racism, how we can recover while building up our arts and culture sector.

So I just want to say thank you, because arts, as you know, for goodness' sake, contributes \$28 billion or so to our GDP, and certainly more than—I'm going to get this right—agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting combined. So arts is not only about what we create in terms of art, but it's also about job creation and tourism and hospitality and everything that Pride brings in.

My specific question is to Evalyn at Buddies. I love Buddies. Buddies was part of my coming-out journey. Can you speak particularly to the emphasis or to the power Buddies has had with young people—the safe space, mental health, Pride Prom etc. Why is Buddies so vital?

Ms. Evalyn Parry: One of the things that Buddies has been, for the many years that we've occupied our building in the Gay Village—we run dance club nights that are a

safe space for so many people, a part of so many people's coming-out journey. Those club nights that happen on the weekend have been an ongoing thing for almost 30 years. Generations of people have found their people at Buddies, made a safe home for themselves, and continue to be involved in other ways—sometimes as theatre patrons, sometimes becoming artists, sometimes as audience members or community project members. Our space is used by so many community groups. Pride Prom is a great example of an amazing event that brings together—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up.

We have to move to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three groups for coming in today. Your contributions are very helpful and insightful. I have a number of questions, but Norm, I'm going to go to you, because you've barely had an opportunity to even give your presentation, so I wanted to just give you a little bit of time to talk about the St. Thomas restoration.

Canon Norm Wesley: Thank you. You're so kind. St. Thomas church is—well, let's put it this way. When Cecil spoke to me about the restoration of the church, I said to him that this church is iconic, and it's as iconic as the Eiffel Tower. If you google Paris, images of the Eiffel Tower will show up. If you google India, images of the Taj Mahal will show up. If you google Moose Factory, the St. Thomas church will show up. It's iconic, from 1885, and it has had its positive and negative effects. There are mixed feelings over the church, but one thing is for sure: It has impacted us considerably in terms of its mission, in terms of our people. My mother and my father, the previous generation, were so close to the church.

But at the same time, there was a lot of stuff that went on, as we all know, within the church, and it's a building that we want to see maintained. In a time when we are tearing down statues and monuments, this community has chosen to uphold this building, this historic church, because of what it stands for. It's in remembrance of our heritage, our past, the good things and the bad things and things that we say we will never, ever forget.

Two things that we did at that church: Outside the church, we resurrected the Bishop Horden bell, which rang over the course of 40 years in the residential school. We restored that bell in the cemetery, and every year on a long weekend, we have 400 people come and we have a service there and that bell is rung. We have a monument that memorializes nine young people who drowned in residential school. The church said it was an accident; it was not an accident. It was an incident which was basically negligence on the part of the church, and we memorialize those. This is so, so important to us. We want to be able to maintain that, and it's something that many, many people have come from far and wide to see in the course of visiting here. It's important to us and I think it's important to this area. It's important to the history of this country.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks. While we're talking to the Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association,

Cecil, I just wanted to direct a quick question to you. You had talked about some of the commemorative events that you're planning, and I'm just wondering what impact COVID and the economic fallout has had on your ability to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes—

Mr. Mike Schreiner:—pull these events off and what kind of support you would need to ensure that they happen.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Well, we're still three years off from 2023, so we've got time. It really depends on what comes up, but there's so much critical work that needs to be done now to get the planning under way. A lot of sources of funding that would normally be available have been cut, and our capacity to pull things together has been limited. We were already working on a major project that required a lot of investment of time, energy and funding, and certainly COVID-19 and its impacts create a lot of uncertainty in terms of what we can do.

This is so important for the community going forward. We have a very holistic vision that brings together so many different elements around economic and community development. Really, what we would be looking for is a long-term vision and setting aside funding, making sure that there's funding to make sure that the culture and heritage sector is supported through the uncertain times that we're in, especially where the economic and social impacts are great, where it intersects with other priorities such as education, health, cultural renewal and reconciliation, especially in the North and in Indigenous communities.

Also, one thing would be if the committee could support requests of ours to meet with the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries to discuss securing capital and non-capital funding through her ministry for our initiative, that would be wonderful.

1630

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that.

I just want to quickly go to Marc. It's good to see you back at committee, Marc. I just wondered: You had talked about the youth leadership program, so I don't know if you or if Hillary is the best to answer this.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Could you expand a bit on that program and how we can support it? Because I would think, getting through COVID, that especially for young Indigenous youth, it will be very important.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Thank you. I'll defer to Hillary for that.

Mr. Hillary McGregor: Hi. Just quickly, for the youth leadership program: It's centred on Indigenous values related to land-based activities in particular. Since we are a health and wellness organization and a support organization, we focus on getting out and doing land-based activities, whether that be canoe, kayak, hiking or those kinds of things. Connection to the land is very important. Then, based on some of those core Indigenous values and that base that centres the program, it's finding an area of interest for youth. That's why there are sort of six elective

streams, we call them, where youth can participate in a wide variety of activities to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side now for their time of questioning. I'll start with MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to start with the Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario group. Marc, thank you very much for being involved on the amateur sport tables for us. Your input was fantastic. I'm going to try and avoid some duplication; I know that you presented to us in the first round, as well. What I would like to touch on though—I'm going to move away a little bit from the sports side of it, because you did do a presentation on that already. I'd like to focus, if I could, on the need for high-speed Internet, broadband in particular, and the challenges that your organization is facing in getting that programming out, now that you can't meet with a lot of the people that you help serve face to face.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Okay. Yes, connectivity is a big problem, particularly in the north, as MPP Mamakwa will attest to. I will defer this question to Abi, please.

Ms. Abidah Shirazi: Hi. Thank you, Marc, and thank you for that question. It's really important, as you just mentioned about connectivity. Our Standing Bear program is completely online. We have, obviously, in-person camps and activities, and we do it for this program as well, but it's available completely online, which right now is a huge benefit for those kids who are able to have connectivity and access to programs; but—exactly right—you pointed out that many kids, many youth, many families, do not have access.

So we're actually working with several northern schools and communities for those kids to be able to access the materials. If there was more support and more availability for those kids, especially right now, when in-person activities are limited due to COVID-19, I think it would greatly, exponentially allow opportunity for those youth to be engaged, and for them to create that community that they're so missing right now during this very hard time.

Mr. Dave Smith: [*inaudible*] and thank you—sorry about that; the Chair had me muted, as well. I very much appreciate that. Again, because you guys have already presented to the committee, a lot of the things I would have asked you, we have already talked about previously. I don't want to sound like I'm being disrespectful, but I'm going to move to a couple of other presenters. There are some things I will talk to you about off-line as well, though.

If I could, I would like to go to the Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association. Just so I completely understand what you're asking for here: In the next two or three years, there's a large celebration that is coming and, if I understand correctly, what you're looking for is support leading up to it. Because of COVID-19, you're not able to do some of the things that you would have been doing this year that would have generated some of the revenue for you leading up to it, but you're also looking

for additional supports to make that happen. Am I correct in that assumption?

Mr. Stan Kapashesit: Correct. Can you hear me? I'm actually going to ask Cecil Chabot to answer the question.

Cecil, you're muted I think.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Okay. There we go. All right. Thanks for the question. The challenge right now is we need to get funding in place to begin working on projects so that we are ready by 2023 to undertake all these initiatives that we want to do. We have a lot of initiatives, such as developing an online archive and resource centre. We want to provide funding for local and regional organizations to give a 350th flavour to the events that they already organize and the activism they already do from a year-to-year basis.

We also have other events and activities that we want to bring together. We want to amplify the events that exist, and we want to add other things: international conferences, begin planning, things like this. And then there are the major heritage restoration projects. St. Thomas Church is at the heart of that. That's a \$2.25-million project that we've got under way. We need to be able to secure funding in the next year to begin that project and have it ready to open by 2023.

These are some of the impacts. We were really hitting the ground running and we had a great momentum, and then COVID-19 hit and it's had a big impact on what we can do and what funding we can access.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. Out of curiosity, have you been looking at ICIP funding or NOHFC funding?

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Yes, we're looking at NOHFC funding. We've looked at the Trillium Foundation. But they're still rethinking how they're going to respond to COVID-19. So we're still sorting out what funding options are currently available, what funding options have changed, and getting a lay of the land.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. Because I'm down to a minute, I'm going to jump one last time over to Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, if you don't mind.

We've had a number of theatrical companies come in and do some presentations with us. I'm expecting that a lot of the challenges that you're facing are very similar to challenges that they have been facing as well. Getting the experience of a live theatre digitally is very, very difficult, if not impossible. Are you aware of the ontario.live website and what it can do?

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Yes, I've recently become aware of that website. We are certainly, all of us in the theatre and the live performing arts sector, exploring digital platforms and see them as a necessary lifeline at this time, but in no way are they a replacement for the art form that so many have spent their lives training and learning and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members for the second round now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm going to direct my next round of questions—I'm going to start with Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Thanks for coming today. I just wanted to

ask you—you had talked about the important role that the Ontario Arts Council funding plays, and we've had so many arts groups talk about that. I'm just wondering if you could maybe elaborate a bit more on how vital that funding is to the work that you do.

Ms. Evalyn Parry: Yes, I'll speak about it in two ways. One is the direct operational support that the OAC gives to organizations like ours that have a venue, that have an operational year-round cost. Of course, I'm advocating for organizations like Buddies, like my own, but I'm also here to advocate for our sector at large. Ontario Arts Council also supports so many independent artists and projects.

I think something that I fully support is MPP Andrew's advocating for returning the Indigenous fund to the OAC. I think a strength of the OAC in the last few years has been that they have prioritized equity-seeking groups and have made clear priorities around folks who haven't had the kind of access, training or support through the institutions, through these highly colonial institutions, over time. So in this way, I think the OAC is well positioned to redress and give access to many equity-seeking folks—racialized folks, LGBTQ2S folks, Black folks, POC. The way that the arts and that element of anti-racist policy work can go together is vitally important, and I think the OAC is in a position to be able to increase funding to places that are increasing equity in our society.

1640

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks for your response.

I'm going to go to Hillary since our conversation was cut off before. Could you talk a little bit more about how the youth leadership program works and what we can do to support that program? I'm imagining that a land-based program during the time of COVID-19 is a bit of a challenge. How do we help work through that challenge and maintain the quality of the program for Indigenous youth?

Mr. Hillary McGregor: As I was getting into, the youth will work through an Indigenous core that focuses on community, connection to the land, connection to their own identity and connection to different interest areas. Once they work through that, it's all about giving back to the community.

As Abidah mentioned, youth can do a lot of this work online if they have the proper bandwidth. There is an issue of equity even within our own communities in terms of who can access the program to the same levels. But a lot of the programming can be done individually; it can be done outside, if you have access to our Standing Bear portal online.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes and 45 seconds.

Mr. Hillary McGregor: The other challenge now is, if the youth have worked through a lot of these things, how do we give back to the communities in the time of COVID-19?

I think continued support for our organization and the development of online resources will be helpful, moving forward, so that youth can continue to work through these programs as independently as possible until we're able get back and do some group programming and get them engaged in their communities, as communities open up.

That's another challenge: A lot of our communities are currently in lockdown. So we'd like to see more support for online resources moving forward and finding some equity with that.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's so clear—and this comes up over and over again—that we need more investment to roll out rural and remote broadband faster.

I have one more follow-up question for you related to the online resources. In addition to bandwidth, are there any other online resources that would help with the program?

Mr. Hillary McGregor: I think one challenge is funding to hire our own Indigenous consultants who create specific online resources related to culture. We are an organization that is responsible for Indigenous people all over Ontario, and it's a challenge to create enough resources to meet the needs of such a variety of communities. I'm Anishinabek, so a lot of the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Hillary McGregor: —resources that I'm able to work on are based on one world view that won't represent everybody. We need funding to hire people from a variety of different communities and backgrounds to help create specific resources related to our program that tie in culture, that will resonate with youth from all over the province, as well.

So not only is it a connectivity issue, but it's also an issue of seeing yourself within the program, because there are so many different communities across Ontario with different cultures that need to be represented. We need funding to support the really great people who are available as community resources to help us build a lot of that resource.

So hiring the right people is a bit of a challenge, as well.

I hope that starts to answer your question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: That definitely answers my question.

Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You're out of time—five seconds.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks. Take care, everyone.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now for their second round, and I'll go to MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to all the presenters today. If I have enough time, I'll get to all three of you, but I'm not sure I'll have enough time.

I'll start out first with the Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association. It's a place—I would certainly love to get up there myself. It's on my list to go there. With this COVID situation that we've encountered over the last number of months, I think a lot of Canadians are being introspective, and they want to see more of their own culture, their history. You've got an incredible history, for example, in your community that I think you need to share with the rest of Canadians. What we need to do is work collaboratively to figure out how we can expand upon that.

One initiative our government took earlier in the year, if you recall, was to eliminate the northern aviation fuel tax. We want to make transportation more affordable for

people to get up to the north. Now there's a lot more that we need to do, but I think that's a start.

I wanted to get a sense from you on what else we can do to help your community thrive, because a strong community up north is great for the province.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: I'm thinking that perhaps Stan might take the lead on this question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Cho?

Mr. Stan Cho: No, it's okay. We'll leave it with Crawford.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Oh, sorry. MPP Crawford?

Mr. Stan Cho: My bad. I was confused. I heard my name.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Stan Kapashesit might take the lead on answering this question. If you could unmute him.

Mr. Stan Cho: You caught me daydreaming, and I heard my name.

Mr. Stan Kapashesit: All right.

Thank you, MPP Crawford. I appreciate the question. Certainly, our neck of the woods is quite far north. If you know where Moose Factory is, it's situated on the southern tip of James Bay. To get here, obviously, takes a bit of an adventure, a bit of time. But, certainly, if assistance can be provided, like you mentioned—the tax break on the gas for the aviation. So that's one step. But to really to get up here and experience life in the north and visit our area, because although it's celebrating 350 years in a couple of years, really, it's quite pristine—a lot of beautiful lakes, beautiful waterways to visit. I would certainly encourage anybody to come up and visit us. I welcome that.

In terms of economic impacts: In years past, the Polar Bear Express operated daily. Obviously, that will be impacted now because of COVID-19. So the duration of trains and stuff like that in and out will have to be monitored and closely evaluated as time goes on. But that will impact visitors for sure. We also have in place a pandemic team, if you will, that monitors travel and visitors who come in.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stan Kapashesit: So things like that will certainly have a play going forward. I encourage you to come up if you have the time and visit us. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, I would love to. That's for sure on my list. I think a lot of people in Ontario should get up there. I think, post-COVID, your community will come out of this stronger. I really do believe that.

We live in a modern world, so people want to remain connected as well. They're on vacation, but they want to remain connected. What's the status of communication and broadband in your community?

Mr. Stan Kapashesit: Right now, we're fairly connected to the network. We have cell service here. In our communities further north of us, I'm sure they're limited in their cell service. But broadband, high-speed Internet connection is pretty good here. There are sometimes where it's kind of choppy, but I guess it's probably because of where we're situated. But, yes, being connected for sure is

always important. Upgrading the network line is always a consideration that people should have. Yes, to stay connected is a good thing.

1650

Dr. Cecil Chabot: We have a heritage tour app available on various platforms that people are using, so we have fairly good connectivity in the community. I do want to pick up on your earlier question, as well, on the importance of the community and our history. I think that, provincially and nationally, it can't be underestimated, the importance of the history of not just Moose Factory but the region as a whole for envisioning reconciliation, because in spite of the problems that have affected the community in the 20th century—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Cecil Chabot:—that have been outlined by RCAP and the TRC, there is a much longer and deeper history of European/Indigenous reciprocity. It's the longest continuous European/Indigenous relationship defined by reciprocity, really, in Canada, so it is a very important history to look at, and it's going to be a big part of what we're putting forward. It's important to give people hope that it's possible to have good relations. I think that that history is significant in that regard.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, that's tremendously important, so thank you very much. I'll pass it on to MPP Khanjin.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Thank you for your question.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Khanjin, 25 seconds.

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: That's all right. I was waiting to be unmuted, but I just want to thank you all for your presentations. Just from Norm, if you don't mind maybe sending an email to the committee or something—just the importance of staycations and learning about one's heritage and local community aspects, how that could really tie into a tourism strategy. Something I remember talking about with Minister Tibollo when he had that file was that a lot of Indigenous tourism is popular here.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right, so we'll move to the opposition side now for their second round. MPP Mamakwa?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Hello. Good afternoon. Mee-gwetch, everyone, for the presentations. Listening to the conversations about reconciliation and also looking through an equity lens—it's good to hear.

I know one of the things—maybe I'll direct my question to Marc. I know we spoke about the summer games, the North American hockey championships and how you're involved in that. I know you spoke about the tsunami of racism and also the systemic racism our kids face as First Nations people, as Indigenous people. I know that for me I always look at things from an equity lens, and I'm just wondering, with COVID happening, with what's happening with COVID, what are the impacts of the organization that you're working with right now? Just maybe if you can share that.

But also, as you know, in the Far North, in my riding, I know that we do have a lot of social issues, and not only that, but mental health tragedies, and not only that, but there's a suicide crisis, as well. Can you tell a story on how sports can save lives, especially with our youth?

Marc, can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself?

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Okay, yes, I'm unmuted now. Meegwetch, Sol. Nice to see you. My condolences to you and your family for your loss.

We feel, rightfully, that sport can save lives. It gives hope to our youth, and we've witnessed it. We are very concerned about what we are hearing anecdotally about the situation in our communities and that some of our youth may indeed be losing that hope.

For the remainder of this question, I'm going to defer to Christina, one of our board members, and she can add some of her comments, please. Christina?

Ms. Christina Ruddy: Hi. Thank you, Marc. My name is Christina Ruddy. I'm from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. I'm sitting an hour and a half west of Ottawa. Before I start, I'm going to let you know that I'm on my cellphone signal right now, because we don't have reliable Internet. It's not just a northern problem.

I think what Marc said is vital to this conversation: The purpose of what we do and what drew me in to even become a member of this board is that sport saves lives, and so we treat that in a holistic manner. We don't just look at sports; we look at culture; we look at the need for cultural revitalization, reconciliation and giving our kids a better future and hope. A big problem that COVID has caused is the lack of ability for us to gather with them and be on the land with them, or host tryouts or host games.

Imagine spending your whole year practising and trying out to participate in the North American Indigenous Games, which you've been looking forward to for three years, and now they're being put off for another year. That feeling of hopelessness is not describable. It's so important to our kids. I consider the work that ISWO does very much saves lives, especially for kids who are isolated or in the north. If they can participate in sport and also reach out to their culture—I know that culture is one of the favourite highlights of all the kids who come to the NAIG.

I did a survey about NAIG when we did our bid in 2018. It was those nighttime sittings out with the drum in the middle of a parking lot or a field or wherever—that was the best part of the games for some of those kids. It was that connection to other First Nations, Métis and Inuit kids that was their best memory. Can you imagine? You know, you spend all that time travelling just to visit with people you only get to see every two or three years. It's kind of amazing.

Take Marc for example. I was speaking with an elder who I had just met from the Windsor area not too long ago who is a big champion, and she told me about watching Marc play when he was young. Here we have Marc here now, representing our leadership and being this wonderful role model for kids, and it's people like Marc who remind

me all the time that we've got to keep doing this, no matter what, so I hope that answers your question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Guy, you wanted to ask a question?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you. First of all, thanks to all the presenters. For my question, I'm going to give the last word to Cecil. You spoke about the economic recovery and how important it is to reconciliation. If you could elaborate on your organization to finish it off, I'll give you the words. Again, thanks to everybody who presented.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Who was the question for? Was it for me?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Oh, it was for Cecil.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: Ah, there we go. I'll just give a bit of time, as well, to Norm, if you can unmute him.

But yes, thanks for the question. I addressed this, I guess, just previously, as well: economic development, reconciliation, community development, education, mental health, cultural renewal—all these things are fully—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Dr. Cecil Chabot: We have to have a holistic and integrated approach to them—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize. That concludes our time.

Thank you to all three presenters for your time. We appreciate your presentations. Thank you so much for coming.

LANGUAGES CANADA

CANADIAN AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

DANCE UMBRELLA OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next group of presenters: First, we'll start with Languages Canada. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

1700

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Ah, there we go. Thank you very much, Chair. My name is Gonzalo Peralta. I am the executive director of Languages Canada, and I am grateful to the committee today for hearing ourselves and our situation in terms of language educators. Ça me fait plaisir de représenter le secteur des langues ici au Canada puis en Ontario.

Ontario is a very important player in terms of the culture of language. Every year in Canada, we receive 150,000 international students who choose Canada, and 45,000 of those—a third, really—choose Ontario as a destination to come and immerse themselves, to learn about Ontario, to learn about our languages and our culture. It was wonderful to hear the end of the presentations from the last presenters, because so many of those who come here are attracted here—they're really attracted because of who we are. When we approach these students overseas, they come here for our culture. They come here not just as another place to learn English or to learn French; there's something about Canada, there's something about Ontario that speaks to all of these students.

One of the things that has happened, of course, since COVID hit is that from one day to the next, the tap was turned off. In Ontario, financially, that has meant going from \$800 million or \$900 million a year of export revenue to under \$100 million, so you can imagine the impact on all the language teachers and administrators across the province. And it goes out from there, because these students, when they arrive, are immersed in our culture. They stay with Canadian families. They attend all kinds of events for Canadian culture. They're here to learn who we are and to contribute. Many of them—over a third—decide to stay. They go on to Algonquin College or Lakehead University, and they love being in Ontario for their experience.

What can we do now? We live in a new era. This is not the time to say, "We have to wait until everything is okay." This is the time to be innovative and to create. Languages Canada has developed what we call the Study Safe Corridor, and I am here to ask you to support this concept. It is a concept in which we go abroad, we find the right students, and then we bring them in in a way that is safe to Ontario. We charter planes, we bring them in—we have had the conversations with Air Canada; Pearson airport is waiting for us—and then into the hotels to quarantine until everything is safe to continue on to our Ontario communities.

Our future is not dependent on the eradication of COVID. Our future is dependent on how we live with it. How can we assure Ontarians that they are safe? How can we assure the international students who sign on that they're safe? We have a proposal that's going in front of the federal government. I am here today to ask you to support that proposal, and also to begin engaging with you, with the government of Ontario, on how we—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: I am here to answer any questions that you have. What I can tell you is that financially what it means is going from \$850 million to under \$100 million. We want to bring 30,000 students to Ontario from here until March 31. That's \$350 million of export revenue that goes not only to the young teachers in our classes, but also to the hotels and to the tourism sector throughout Ontario. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Our next presenter is the Canadian Automotive Museum. If you could please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Alexander Gates: Hello. Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present today, and thank you all for your hard work. My name is Alexander Gates, and I'm the executive director and curator here at the Canadian Automotive Museum in Oshawa, Ontario. I've had the pleasure of holding this post since 2014.

My institution opened to the public back in 1963, and today we are home to the world's foremost collection of Canadian-built and Canadian-owned automobiles. It's our mission to share the story of the Canadian automobile with the world, and we do this through programs, exhibits and partnerships throughout the province and the country.

Last year, we were expecting to have more than 15,000 visitors come through our doors this year. Unfortunately, that's not going to be happening. Those visitors that we were expecting, about 60% of those on average, were going to be tourists who were going to travel more than 40 kilometres to visit our site, and when they come here, they want to enjoy our local restaurants and hotels as well.

We're a small institution with just one full-time staff member, myself, but we have a large tourism impact here in Ontario. Last summer, our galleries were packed with visitors, and I happened to strike up a conversation with a lovely family from Sault Ste. Marie. They told me they come down every year, once a year, to visit Toronto. When they're in Toronto, they come out here to the Canadian Automotive Museum, because it's their son's absolute favourite place in the entire world, and I'm pretty sure this 10-year-old now knows more about the cars in our museum than I do. This is a family, among others, that I think about when I'm coming up with my reopening plan. I'm thinking about what we're going to do to recover from this catastrophe three months from now and three years down the road from now because, after all, what is Ontario without our favourite places?

The challenges facing the Canadian Automotive Museum aren't unique. My colleagues at both the Ontario Museum Association and Central Counties Tourism have already provided this committee with data in terms of the economic impact that's being faced by our sector, so I won't repeat all those details today for you, but I can tell that all of Ontario's 700 museums got closed in mid-March, and just now we're slowly trying to reopen.

We're doing this cautiously, and we need the province's help to do this. Last year, there were over 20 million visitors who came through Ontario's museum doors, so that means there are approximately two million people a month we're going to have to convince collectively to return to our heritage and culture sites. It's no small task, and we're going to need the help of the province and the provincial government in order to make this happen. When these visitors do come back, they're not only going to help our institutions, but they're going to help our restaurants, our hotels and our coffee shops that they're going to visit along the line.

This afternoon, I have three recommendations I want to put forward to this committee to pass along to the provincial government that will help the heritage and tourism sector really rebound, survive and thrive over the next several years. The first is a relief fund to provide immediate relief related to COVID-19 reopening efforts. I want to make sure that our friends from the Soo have a safe and a fun time when they visit our museum next time that they're here, and the next time they come after that and years down the road.

We want to make sure that our museum is a safe place for visiting, but we still want them to have a quality visitor experience and not feel that they're wrapped in bubble wrap while they're going through our museum to interact properly with our exhibits. In order to do this, it would be a huge help if there was a short-term fund created to assist

not-for-profits, particularly with things like Plexiglas, touchless faucets, new exhibits that are not hands-on but still interactive, and great signage. I've seen this at the Toronto Zoo; it makes it fun and still exciting when visitors are coming through.

Charities haven't had any revenue in over three months, so we simply don't have the resources to keep up with the for-profit sector in terms of these innovations. On top of this, this innovation fund could be coordinated for collective bulk purchasing. It could also prioritize made-in-Ontario as well, so those tax dollars will go right back into our communities here. These types of programs could be administered by the provincial government through the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, the provincial heritage organizations or even municipal governments.

1710

My second recommendation is to extend property tax exemptions for Ontario museums and heritage sites. In the United States—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Alexander Gates: —exemptions for museums have been very successful—and also for libraries and Legions here in Ontario. Adding museums as an exempt class would eliminate our second-largest operating budget item, getting rid of that financial burden and allowing us to thrive.

My final suggestion is long-term investment in digital strategies. As a full-time staff of one, I just don't have the time to create constant online relevant content. Through a program with the province, I can imagine having digital advisers who could help make YouTube videos, record podcasts and set up online experiences. Not having this on each individual organization, but as a shared cost, could really allow museums to use what they've already created in terms of exhibits and programs and launch them online so that we have all this content available for families, for schools, for seniors' centres across the province and across the world.

By this time next year, I expect that the Canadian Automotive Museum will be more popular than ever as all these visitors are excited—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Alexander Gates: —through our online content and will return to our museum. With your help, we hope to make that happen.

I'm happy to take any questions. Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is Dance Umbrella of Ontario. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Robert Sauvey: My name is Robert Sauvey. I am the executive director of Dance Umbrella of Ontario, or DUO. DUO has supported dance artists and dance enterprises for over 30 years by providing business and management services to Ontario's dance sector.

I want to thank the committee for providing this opportunity to meet and to discuss the impacts of COVID-19.

The culture, heritage and entertainment sectors are grateful for the support provided by the federal government thus far. These measures have helped a sector that has been severely impacted by the pandemic to survive during this unprecedented time.

We know from health officials in Ontario and around the globe that this pandemic may not end—because we reopen—and that the effects on the public may be long-lasting. For the performing arts, this is particularly true, as our road to recovery will be substantially longer than other sectors.

The Canadian Association for the Performing Arts, or CAPACOA, has documented the effects on the performing arts sector through its online series, *Chronicle of a Pandemic and the Performing Arts*. In the series, CAPACOA has published insightful information and statistics, including the following: In March and April of this year, the information, culture, and recreation industries had seen the largest job loss, after the accommodation and food industries. In May, whereas accommodation and food rebounded 6.8%, culture shed another 1.1%.

The live performance sector was among the first to be closed and will be among the last to reopen. It's also a sector in which the recovery will be particularly long.

Some cultural consumers are reporting that they might wait up to five months or longer before returning to indoor events after they are allowed to reopen. This is an extraordinary amount of time for an organization that relies on ticket sales and revenues from events to survive without these revenue streams. These are not-for-profits. These not-for-profits will struggle, and some may not survive.

Reopening for these organizations is not just about their work or the artists they support; it's very critically about the comfort levels of audiences, old and young, feeling safe enough to gather indoors for performances or events. Social distancing, reduced audience sizes, free hand sanitizer and other methods are not enough to reassure safety-focused audiences and communities. Reduced ticket sales revenues for upcoming months or years will continue to have a financial impact on these not-for-profit organizations.

The pandemic has resulted in unprecedented financial stress for all of the workers in the culture, recreation and heritage sectors. According to a survey conducted by CAPACOA, more than half, 53%, of income of performing arts organizations—including theatre, dance, opera and music—comes from admissions, rentals, bars, parking and other fees. Many are now out of pocket as upfront expenses are now shuttered. Performances will not be offset by ticket sales and sponsorship revenues.

The culture and heritage sector needs long-term stabilization funding to help them serve their audiences and remain open as they pivot and adapt to the changing realities of gathering audiences for live events. The sector has shown great resilience in delivering online programming, offering these for free or for a donation. These initiatives have seen incredible artists sharing work with their Ontario national and international audiences.

However, these offerings have some drawbacks. Not everyone has access to stable Wi-Fi or Internet service at

home, which affects the reach of these efforts and leaves many unable to participate. Age demographics are also a factor in the success of these online offerings. For smaller organizations that serve immigrant communities of artists and performers, lack of technology is a contributing factor.

In the performing arts, sports and culture sectors in particular, the experience of an audience gathering together to share a live event is central—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Robert Sauvey: —to their mission and mandate. Stabilizing the cultural sector is not only good for self-employed artists and not-for-profit organizations, but for the communities they serve, be they immigrant, BIPOC, suburban, rural or urban. People who live and work in Ontario's communities require entertainment, a cultural life and a connection felt when gathering with members of their community. Live events, be they cultural entertainment, sport or heritage, are an essential part of creating a sense of community and shared understanding.

In the midst of protests for equality and human rights, understanding diverse perspectives is more important than ever. Communities across Ontario need not-for-profits and charities to survive and contribute to their well-being.

I want to thank the committee very much for the time today, and I'm happy to take any questions you may have. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

We'll start the first round of questions with the government. MPP Smith?

Mr. Dave Smith: My first one is actually for Gonzalo. Right at the end of your presentation, you talked about 350,000 students. What I wasn't clear on was, are these students from Ontario or are these foreign students coming into Ontario?

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Smith: Sorry, you're still muted.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Thanks. It's 160,000. A third of those are in Ontario. There are 83 Ontario members for Languages Canada, university language programs, college language programs and the private sector. Some 75% of them will be closed permanently within the next six months if we don't do something—permanently, and we're talking in all three: universities, colleges and private sector programs.

Mr. Dave Smith: So there's a real challenge for us, because if you take a look at the United States right now, the states that border on Canada over a seven-week period just a couple of days ago had close to 30,000 infections. We've got just over 30,000 in total since COVID-19 has come out. What can we do, then, to promote this from a more domestic standpoint? I don't see us, in the very near future, being able to open the borders to the US without significant risk.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: That's a great question, and I think it illuminates a lot. You know, 25,000 of those students come from Brazil, and 20,000 from Japan. From the States, it's a very small amount, actually. Canadians are some of the best language students, let me tell you, and we love the learning that happens there. However, what we

can do is to say, "How do we make it safe for Ontarians and how do we make it safe for the international students?"

That's why the proposal that we're putting forward to create a Study Safe Corridor is, for us, the way of the future. It's not necessarily from where but how safe can we make it and what control measures do we have in place? So our ask to you is to support us as we lobby the federal government to introduce the appropriate immigration policy to deal with this next context that we have.

1720

Also, we're asking them for \$80 million to help us bring in 40,000 students, out of which half of those would be coming into Ontario, and that's to partly pay for charter flights. We make sure the students are safe before they board the plane. We select the right students and for the quarantine process that they would go through, and then the schools themselves, the programs themselves, how do they welcome them properly—the safe distancing. Our members are incredibly creative. They're already saying, "We can't fit 20 in a classroom. We can only fit seven with the new health measures"—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: —"so we can rotate. We'll have the 8 to 12 session, the 12 to 4 session and the 4 to 8 session." Language programs are nothing if not creative.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much. My next one is for Alex. Alex, forgive me. My colleagues and I have been trying to figure out the two vehicles that are behind you. I know it's not part of what we're researching—

Mr. Alexander Gates: Sure it is.

Mr. Dave Smith: —but do you mind letting me know what cars are behind you?

Mr. Alexander Gates: I spent all day choosing the cars. So behind me, the big beast is Ladybird. It's a 1912 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost. It was owned by Lady Eaton in Toronto. So all of these cars are now owned by all of us here in Ontario. But it's in fact the store she opened, the Eaton's College Street store back in 1932, I believe, if you've ever been to the College Street station there.

The sports car is a 1975 Bricklin made out in New Brunswick, and that we just welcomed.

Mr. Dave Smith: With the gull-wing doors?

Mr. Alexander Gates: With the gull-wing doors and the hydraulics.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay.

Mr. Alexander Gates: We just got it back in March, and even Jennifer French has not seen it yet because we've been closed to the public, unfortunately. It was our big March break surprise, though. So, here we are.

Mr. Dave Smith: A good friend of mine has a Bricklin. He says he gets a lot of R and R from it, ride and repair. Yes, they were made in Atlantic Canada, but they seemed to have some challenges with them, and that's possibly why they're not with us now as a manufacturer. Completely off-topic, and I apologize for that.

Mr. Alexander Gates: Sure. It happens.

Mr. Dave Smith: But for interest's sake, I know there will be people watching this online and they'll have that same question: "What vehicles are behind you?"

With your museum, it's in that town that MPP French and I have had a number of conversations about that I can't say because I'm from Peterborough.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Smith: She has mouthed it, but I can't say it. It just can't come out of my lips.

I would suspect that you have a large number of US-based tourists who would come into that museum. Just with the McLaughlin-Buick name, it would be drawing a lot of people who are GM enthusiasts. Is that the case?

Mr. Alexander Gates: Yes. Yes, generally about 15% of our visitors every year are international visitors, from not only the US, but we get a lot of European visitors as well. I always say Germans are quite passionate for car museums, so they will drive any distance when they get to North America to see all their car museums.

Mr. Dave Smith: If we're not able to open up the borders to foreign travellers any time soon, are there enough Canadian visitors that we could incentivize them to come to the museum to keep you open?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll come to that in the second round.

I'll go to opposition side now for their time of questioning. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And I'll say it for you, MPP Smith: It's Oshawa, and we're very proud to represent here today at committee.

Alex, nice to see you and very nice to see the cars behind you. While I am, of course, interested in the cars behind you, I am most interested in the support behind you and behind other museums like yourself. I had appreciated the way that you worded, "What is Ontario without our favourite places?" I will tell everyone on the committee, and those watching at home, that the car museum is a favourite place in Oshawa and across the province. Anything that we can do to support our community spaces that tell not just our story—and of course, it's a local Oshawa story, but broadly it's Canada's story in terms of automotive history and hopefully future. So, Alex, thank you for coming.

When we talk about funding, a lot of organizations that have spoken at committee or speak generally are looking for help post-COVID, but they're also looking for help not just one time—that idea of a sustainable funding model because we don't know what transition will look like and we don't know what recovery will look like. Perhaps you could speak to sustainable and hopefully predictable museum funding. Is that something you're concerned about?

Mr. Alexander Gates: That is definitely something we're concerned about, and I think Robert mentioned this as well, working in the arts. It's something that across the sector—heritage, arts, culture, music—we're all concerned about.

Right now, there aren't actually any programs through the ministry of heritage that we're eligible for. Last year, less than a quarter of Ontario's museums—there are about 700 museums in the province, and 166 of them actually received operating funding from the province. Those numbers have been going down year after year. With

COVID hitting, it exacerbates the problems that there were in terms of the funding structures. One of the problems is that you have these old funding structures and they don't allow new organizations to grow and develop in the 2020s here. So the museums that were, for example, receiving funding back in the early 1990s are the ones that still receive that funding.

These programs have been under review for many years. I can tell you personally, that I've been here for six different ministers, and every one of them has promised a review of the funding structure for arts, museums and heritage organizations. Now with COVID, it's just one more step behind in terms of priorities. The programs I've mentioned are great for helping boost us out of this current situation, but moving forward we all need to have some stability when we're making our 2021-22 plans, how we're going to finance, especially making up for deficits from this lack of international visitors that we're going to lose here in Ontario in the short term.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Alex, I know that on that operating grant, the Community Museum Operating Grant, we've been having these conversations for years because it hasn't been open to new folks or even established folks since 2016.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That's a problem, I think, and we've heard it from other people, that idea of encouraging people back to our spaces and what that will look like. As you had mentioned, if each place or facility or museum or festival venue is having to market it themselves when there could be shared tools, I see that as an unfair battle. Perhaps you could briefly speak to that. If there's time, I would very much like Robert Sauvey to answer that same question: What would it look like for a shared marketing strategy? Alex?

Mr. Alexander Gates: Sure. I think that involves what's currently in place. For example, we're in RTO 6 Central Counties. We have a great team. Allowing our marketing teams to shift—and we're losing a lot of festivals this year. In terms of event guides, in terms of advertising, we usually have a brochure rack out front. With everything going on, it's totally empty this year. There are no brochure guides, there's nothing to give to visitors and everything is online. We need to quickly shift, we need to share resources and we need to help get out the word of what is open and how open it is and how great these things are.

One of the main things I want to emphasize is that we don't just want to reopen; we want to reopen with a great experience still. We want people still to have a great time. I went to the drive-through at the zoo. It's not quite as awesome, being 100 metres away in your car.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: But it's still innovative.

Mr. Alexander Gates: It was innovative. I had a great time, but you really want people to have the best possible experience. That's what we want to do and that's what I think all of our heritage institutions want to do. We want people to still have that quality experience and we want the word to get out.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Alex. Do I have a bit of time to ask that same question of Robert? What would a shared strategy look like if the province was involved in that?

Mr. Robert Sauvey: Thank you very much for your question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Robert Sauvey: I think that would be a really tremendous effort and something that could make a lot of sense. My organization in particular, the way we work is as a shared platform, so we already do marketing for about 40 dance organizations across the province. I think for the organizations to be able to receive the funding and the organizations themselves to be able to figure out how best to put that together would make an awful lot of sense.

1730

Any time there's an opportunity in the cultural sector to share resources, that always works very well for us.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Are we out of time?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You have 15 seconds.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Anything else, Robert—a quick plug?

Mr. Robert Sauvey: A quick plug: We'd love to partner on an effort like that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I think with your expertise with already working with 40, you would be a perfect person to be at that table, and I hope the government writes your name down—and others, of course.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three presenters for coming in and providing such valuable information today. I'm going to direct my first question to Alex.

Alex, one thing I appreciated about your presentation was that you were very clear and direct in telling us what you're asking for, so thank you for that. One of them—and we've heard this from other museums and heritage sites—was property tax exemption and how that could help you, probably, short-term and long-term with cash flow. I'm just wondering how much conversation you've had with municipal governments around that. Obviously, they're in a very challenging situation, as well, and I think we're going to need a program to support municipalities. But I would also think that municipalities recognize that you bring visitors to the community. So I'm curious about what kind of conversations you've had with municipalities on the property tax proposal.

Mr. Alexander Gates: We've definitely had that conversation. Here in Oshawa, it's—I won't get into the politics of it all, but there is a discussion between both the city and the region of Durham in terms of who would make that ultimate call in terms of waiving the property taxes.

The general feeling we've had from politicians is that they don't want to get into doing something special for one organization in their community, and so the general feedback we've received over the years is that it's best done at the provincial level, because the province of Ontario sets the legislation for property taxes.

One of the interesting things about the legislation is that museums are legally, here in the province, not educational institutions—which I was quite shocked by, receiving that news from the provincial lawyers. Libraries are tax-exempt. Educational institutions are tax-exempt. But here, at a museum—we have a lot of books, but we're not technically a library, so it goes back up to the province.

Ultimately, the really fair thing to do is to pass something at a provincial level. That way, institutions aren't bound to the particular municipality that they happen to be located in and the particular council they may have at the time, as well.

Property taxes, I understand, affect about a third of Ontario museums right now. Quite a few museums are provincially owned and operated, on municipal property—that sort of thing. Particularly for the small historic societies that have historic houses and so forth, it would really be quite a savings if this could be across the board for properties.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I could see not wanting to have municipalities competing off of each other and museums not wanting to be in the middle of that, for sure.

Do you have a sense—and maybe you can just speak to Oshawa, which would be fine—of how much revenue you generate from the visitors coming and then supporting all the other local businesses, which obviously, then, generates revenues for both the provincial and municipal governments? Do you have a sense of what that multiplier effect is for you?

Mr. Alexander Gates: I don't have a specific multiplier for our museum in front of me right now, but I do know Durham Tourism has great information in terms of that.

Just approximating: 15,000 visitors having lunch, getting hotel rooms—one of the things that is really popular in terms of our site is car clubs coming through, particularly on Sundays. They all spend the day out. They come here to Oshawa, they all get lunch together, and they go off to other areas around here—to Port Perry, Cobourg, those types of municipalities—and really share the wealth. We really serve as a destination for those types of groups.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thank you for that.

I'm going to just shift quickly to Languages Canada. You had mentioned that you have a federal proposal, I believe it's \$80 million to bring 40,000 students in, and you're looking for provincial support. I'm just curious how confident you are that we can bring those students in. I know one of my other colleagues talked about the US, but Brazil has a high caseload, and other places. I'm just curious. Maybe you can address that through your Study Safe Corridor plan, but how would you manage that?

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: That's actually the key to everything at this point. What we're doing is we're targeting specific locations. We're making sure that students are healthy when they come and then that they go through this process. Canada is number one in terms of a desired destination around the world—

Interjection.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Yes, there's no other place where international students want to come more, and Ontario is

the leading destination. There is a wait-list already of people wanting to come here and of people who are saying, “We want to be there, and we want to be there now,” so we’re extremely confident that the numbers are there.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: You were saying that 75% of the programs face closure, whether it’s private or part of a university, college or school. How dependent are you on international students versus domestic students to prevent that 75% closure challenge?

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Some 95% of all the students in our member programs come from abroad. It means that everybody, from Trent University—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. That concludes the time for our independent members.

We’ll start the second round with the opposition party. MPP Harden?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank all the presenters for offering us your thoughts this afternoon. Gonzalo, you were in the middle of a thought there, so I want to offer you the opportunity to finish that particular thought that MPP Schreiner was helping you articulate, as to the gravity of the situation. I’m wondering if we can also add Sheila’s voice into this conversation. It’s nice to see another person from Ottawa adding their voice into this. If that’s all right with you, Gonzalo, and if that’s all right with you, Sheila, go ahead: Finish your thought, and Sheila, if you could also help us understand this perspective, too.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Yes, I was saying 95% of those coming to study at our member institutions come from abroad. Only 5% come from inside Canada. It’s a huge impact; 95% is almost 100%. We are really, really feeling the impact. Schools’ programs are closing right now. If we don’t open those doors in a way that is responsible, we’re going to see a huge, huge impact not only now, but for many years to come.

Sheila, do you want to add something, please?

Ms. Sheila O’Gorman: Just getting back to the Study Safe Corridor: It is essential for Languages Canada and all of their members across the country to make certain that Canadians are safe. As Gonzalo mentioned earlier, we’re working with Air Canada, the Hotel Association of Canada and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada to make certain that everything is in place when students arrive, as Gonzalo said. If they come from Mexico or Brazil or anywhere in the world, before they get on the plane, their temperature will be taken when they arrive. They will be transported to the hotel, where they will quarantine for two weeks prior to going to class, because it is essential to us that Canadians are safe, and we certainly understand that this is a very important issue.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you for that, Sheila. What I’ll also offer both of you the opportunity to elaborate on a little bit is that it is Canada’s story; we are a story of people who have come here to seek a better life, but they’ve come here with their culture, with their heritage, with all they have to offer. It’s one of the things so many of us love

about our country. I’m thinking of some of the demographic information we have. Many of our provinces are shrinking. Many of our provinces are not growing, particularly—I’ve had the occasion to talk to colleagues in Atlantic provinces where the problem is quite acute.

1740

But here, we’re talking about Ontario, so I’m wondering if you could sensitize us to the value that people who come here to learn a language or come here to learn a trade or some kind of skill, what the multiplier effect that is in economic terms but in cultural terms. If you could just elaborate upon that, because sometimes I feel this is missed when we think about where to triage funding for various programs and we miss the opportunity that is given to us through language training. Could you elaborate?

Gonzalo or Sheila, either one of you.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: What I can say to this is that—first of all, I came to here, I came to Toronto as a refugee when I was 10 years old. We came here because we felt safe and welcome. International students can go anywhere they want: They can go to the UK, they can go to the US, they can go to Australia. They want to come here first and actually their first choice of destination is Ontario.

I want to say that I love the fact that Mr. Gates and Mr. Sauvey are here because this is why these international students come. Some of them are really turned on by cars, others by dance. They’re here for this. So the multiplier effect—well, you’re looking at it right now, and also I hope there are many others who come and contribute. Thanks.

Mr. Joel Harden: Sheila? Are you still on mute? Sorry.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself?

Ms. Sheila O’Gorman: Thank you. Yes, it’s very important. When international students come, they don’t only experience the tourism that Ontario offers and the very many exhibits and programs, but also they stay with Canadian families. There’s a homestay program, so that is very valuable to the students to be hosted by Canadian families and really understand our cultural experience.

Mr. Joel Harden: Fair, fair. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. Joel Harden: All right. Mr. Sauvey, over to you. I wonder if you could also help us understand from the perspective of dance what value not only to the richness of various cultural aspects and the amazing talent that we have in this province, but sometimes I feel the economic dimension of the amazing work creators do is lost. Could you edify us?

Mr. Robert Sauvey: Certainly. I can certainly try. I think what’s lost in a lot of this is that most of the artists we rely on for this source of, be it entertainment or arts and culture heritage etc., are all self-employed. So the short-term work that’s been done by the federal government has been wonderful and has saved people up to this

point, but as I'd mentioned, and it's not unique to the performing arts, we will be one of the last sectors to open and long-term stabilization will be very, very important for these artists and creators to want to remain in Ontario, to still find it affordable and to be able to want to create here—and they do. But like any other person, they have economic concerns as well, and they have to go where they feel they can make a living. So I think this could have great impact on not just my sector but on my colleagues' sectors as well.

Mr. Joel Harden: Good to end on a note of solidarity. Well done. I agree.

Thank you, Chair. No more questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. I'll go back to independent members. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Robert, I just want to direct a couple of questions to you as well. It's my understanding you work almost like a non-profit management company for individual artists as well as studios and performing arts places, or is it—

Mr. Robert Sauvey: Yes. There are only three umbrella organizations in Canada that work within the dance sector. There's one in Montreal, one in Vancouver and we're it in the province of Ontario. We provide business management, marketing, communications, governance and that sort of support to help artists grow and build capacity in their buildings. A lot of artists need to remain focused on what it is they do. They have the talent. I don't dance, so I can't do that. But a lot of these artists need that sort of background support, and that is what DUO does. We provide that sort of support. I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, it does, because I was assuming you have some insight into the economic impact, and obviously you would, given the role you play. I would assume that a lot of our dance theatres, studios etc. must be in a complete crisis situation right now, unable to open and it doesn't look like opening is going to happen some time soon. So how do we bridge the liquidity crisis they're facing so we don't permanently lose them?

Mr. Robert Sauvey: It's a very good question, and thank you for that. The other thing I would add is, particularly in dance, though it's true in theatre, opera and other forms as well, you can't even rehearse at this point in time. So it's not just about the shows; it's also about people have to be able to create a show. You've got to be able to rehearse no matter what genre or form you're in.

I know that the Ontario Nonprofit Network has put forward a proposal for a long-term stabilization fund. I would fall behind that as well. I think that's a very solid proposal. I didn't go into that in my presentation because it has already been covered.

But the short-term support, as I've said, that's been provided has been wonderful. The long-term support now is what's needed, and particularly for sectors like museums, like dance, like music, that are going to have a long time until people feel comfortable sitting in enclosed spaces, in theatres and in venues. That long-term stabilization is really what's required so that people can to

continue to create—while they're not earning necessarily ticket revenue, but they do need to create and then you do need to rehearse and then eventually that needs to lead to performance. I think that's incredibly important. We don't want to lose the creative sector in our province.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I agree. I'm very familiar with the Ontario Nonprofit Network proposal and I'm very supportive of it. I was actually thinking of other non-profits it would support, but now you've made me realize how much it would support the performing arts as well. Do you think it's broad enough and encompassing enough that it could provide the support the performing arts needs?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Robert Sauvey: I don't know the proposal intricately. I've read the executive summary. My hope would be that that proposal—and I believe in ONN's mission—is broad enough to support not-for-profits across the board no matter what it is that they do.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Okay; great. I appreciate that. I'm assuming that most of the dancers themselves are probably receiving CERB funding at this point, so my guess is that it would be very helpful if we could continue to advocate that the federal government continue to extend that program and we essentially have a basic income for artists who can't earn income out of no fault of their own right now.

Mr. Robert Sauvey: Absolutely. I think CERB has been an effective tool. I would love to see it continued for several more months, and if there was a lobbying effort to make that happen, if I could lend my voice, I'd be happy to.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thanks for that. I have no further questions and I think I'm probably out of time anyway.

Mr. Robert Sauvey: Thank you

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the government side. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to all the presenters for your presentation today. I just wanted to follow up a bit more with Gonzalo and Sheila regarding students. Can you reiterate the number of language students you're talking about, again?

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: We're talking, for Ontario, 80,000 students.

Mr. David Piccini: Have you spoken with the federal government? I know the ministry has announced a project effective July for what we're calling academically stranded domestic students, to give us a chance to walk as we run to get students back on a campus setting. I know, obviously, so many of our universities and colleges rely on international students, not only as a result of our world-class education system, language courses etc., who then go on to pursue work permits and to becoming Canadians and filling labour market needs and becoming part of our rich and vibrant multicultural country. My question to you is, what have your conversations with the federal government been like to date?

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: They've been positive. I think, as was mentioned before, some of their programs have

actually been helpful, the wage subsidy program and CERB and so on. They've been helpful to some extent. But that's a survival phase. That was the first phase of the pandemic, just to survive to get past it. What we're looking at now is to relaunch. So our conversation now is to say, "Don't give us money just as a handout to survive at this point. We need to get going again."

We're proposing this Study Safe Corridor, but it needs policy from the federal government for it to work; in particular, from immigration. We're looking to bring in, as I said, 40,000 students; 20,000 of those would be to Ontario. For that, we're looking for a stimulus package.

Yes, we are in conversations with them. We are in touch with the Prime Minister's office; we're in touch with Minister Joly, of course, in economic development, and Minister Ng for international trade. Definitely we've had conversations with Canadian Heritage as well, because language touches on culture, on who we are, but it's also education and international trade. So we've had conversations.

Where we think it's very important to act, in terms of the provincial level, is, obviously, to keep you informed, but also to seek your support in telling government, "We have to move on now. We need to find a safe way to live with this pandemic, and this proposal that Languages Canada is bringing forward is valid."

Mr. David Piccini: Have you looked at any other international jurisdictions? I know at the Councils of Ministers of Education, at the CMEC table, we talked with other provinces about this, and certainly I'm looking forward to taking a look at your proposal in greater depth. But I'm just wondering if you could point to any best practices in other jurisdictions?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Yes. Australia is launching a program like the one that we're proposing—their own version of it, of course. France has opened its borders to

international students, and New Zealand is looking at safe ways to bring in students. So others are moving. I think, for the US, of course, it's a lost cause at this point, and every indication that we have is that Ontario and Canada are poised to benefit greatly from the policies currently in place in the US. So yes, we are very connected worldwide to best practices.

Mr. David Piccini: I just wanted to say, I echo the sentiment. I've long felt—this was the sort of line I worked in prior to joining politics—that we're a step behind. Even advocating to the federal government for the extension of the work permits for our international students so that they can start their courses online, it seems like we're always a step behind, and we can't be when it comes to competing against Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Germany—some of these big players. I support and understand the need and the benefit of international students. We'll definitely look forward to following up off-line, and perhaps we could talk with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities in Ontario.

Mr. Gonzalo Peralta: Wonderful. Thank you so much. I'll forward the proposals so you have all the documentation there.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much. I would appreciate that.

No further questions, Chair, and thank you, both.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our business for today. Thank you to all the presenters who presented today and all the committee members and the committee staff for their assistance.

As a reminder, the deadline to send in a written submission will be 6 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on July 6.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, when we'll meet to continue hearings on the culture and heritage sector. Thank you so much.

The committee adjourned at 1754.

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