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Artistic Director

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 135
Admissions and Amusement Tax – Distribution to Maryland State Arts Council

Thank you for your consideration of HB135. Originally signed into law as Chapter 145 (April 2016), this legislation removes the sunset provision and continues the distribution of \$1 million to the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) through the Perseveration of Cultural Arts (POCA) monies. This \$1 million distribution has helped to bring continued investment towards MSAC over the past 5 years.

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts (OTC) has proudly served as a cultural landmark in Maryland for 82 years and as a “state designated theater” since 1978. Over the years, we have entertained, educated, and inspired millions of Americans on our 14-acre campus in Montgomery County. Further, our National Players touring arm, the longest-running educational touring company in the nation, engages tens of thousands of citizens across Maryland and the nation each year.

Thanks in no small part to the investments of MSAC and Chapter 145, we have broadened our programming over the past five years to meet the cultural needs of an increasingly diverse Montgomery County and Maryland. In addition to advancing OTC’s reputation as a home for extraordinary classical plays and musicals, we are inspiring a new generation of artists and audiences by producing world, national, and regional premieres of thrilling new plays and musicals that feature diverse perspectives. We are continually fostering new arts education partnerships, offered at no cost or at a discount, that enhance academic and creative learning for 5,000+ Maryland students each year. We are also empowering the community to connect more deeply to the issues that affect Maryland through new behind-the-scenes events, community discussions, and workshops led by artists and non-profit partners.

A 30% increase in our audience between 2015 and 2018 (resulting in approximately 100,000 patrons and visitors annually) speaks to the eagerness among Maryland citizens for extraordinary theatrical experiences. Furthermore, we are an economic driver in the Maryland arts community, with more than 50 full- and part-time staff members and up to 500 artist and technician contracts annually. Our ability to meet the cultural needs of our community, educate Maryland’s youth, and serve as a vibrant home for Maryland’s theater-makers is shaped by support from the Maryland State Arts Council and the continuation of the Preservation of Cultural Arts monies.

For these reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB135. Thank you for your consideration and support of a creative Maryland.

Debbie Ellinghaus, Managing Director
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