



RON OZER CONSULTING LLC MUSIC PRODUCTION IN MARYLAND AND DELAWARE

IN SUPPORT OF SB 539
February 13, 2024

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, Senators Gile, Hayes, Kramer, Lam, Ready, Washington, Ellis, Hershey, and Mautz:

First let me introduce the newest music venue in Maryland, Elkton Music Hall, which opened in July 2023 at a time when some thought it crazy to open a concert space! Since March I have been working as a contractor for Elkton negotiating deals for artists to perform ticketed events at the new 300 capacity concert hall. This new small business has taken a derelict old building and completely renovated it into a beautiful new gathering place in a small town that is struggling to overcome a long history of economic challenges. Located in the old Elkton downtown in an economic empowerment zone, we know first-hand how hard it is to make a small live music venue work for the owners, the staff and the patrons.

I strongly support SB 539, the Maryland event ticketing legislation, as its goal is for Maryland to offer significant defence of concert fans in an increasingly predatory marketplace. I personally am part a coalition of live event professionals across the spectrum of entertainment, with representation from the performing arts, artists groups, recorded music, independent ticketing companies, independent concert venues, and promoters and producers. This coalition represents stakeholders who take on all the risk to create once-in-a-lifetime experiences and bring joy, employment, and economic impact to communities such as Elkton, Maryland. We advocate for fans to protect them from deceptive and predatory ticketing practices and from price-gouging that has run rampant through the secondary markets, harming fans, artists, and venues alike. My work depends on venues succeeding, and being able to sell tickets at face value is key to our work.

SB 539 will codify consumer protections by 1) bringing transparency to ticket prices, 2) making it illegal for ticket resellers to gouge Maryland consumers, 3) banning the sale of "speculative" tickets, which are fake and 4) ensuring that fans who can't make an event are able to sell their tickets to other fans. SB 539, when properly enforced, will end toxic, predatory practices that fleece music fans.

From the moment a show is announced real fans must struggle to secure real tickets at the hands of these predatory resellers; initial Google searches often yield purposefully deceptive results with websites posing as the artist or venue, while still other resellers and sites claim to have tickets available for purchase before the event has even gone on sale. If Maryland removes the profit motive from those using illegal BOTS to vacuum up tickets and then posting them for exorbitant prices, more tickets will be available for true fans.

While fans suffer because of this broken system, so do artists. Fans who fall victim to price-gouging are then limited in the number of events they can afford to attend, harming the careers of established and emerging artists. As a talent booker, I work for the success of both the artist and the venue. Resellers add no value to this equation and often reap more profits than anyone involved in the real work.

Predatory resellers view tickets as nothing more than commodities to be traded for outrageous sums, throwing away the cultural and communal value they provide for our society. They exist to undermine the hard work, talent, and livelihoods of artists, inserting themselves as unnecessary and unwanted middlemen who make their money off the backs of the artists and venues who partner to make these events happen. As a result, resale ticket prices on just one platform (Stubhub) have increased by more than 100 percent since 2019 according to Bloomberg, while the face value of tickets has only increased by 10 percent.

Legislation such as SB 539 is vital to protecting fans, preserving equitable access to entertainment, and restoring balance to the currently broken ticketing ecosystem. It is my profound hope that this bill's strength and potential effectiveness is enacted by the state of Maryland and that it will stand as a beacon for fans and an example to other states seeking to pass true consumer protections into law.

Ron Ozer, CEO, Ron Ozer Consulting LLC, Programming for Elkton Music Hall, Elkton Maryland