

Vote Yes to SB 824

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee:

The Baltimore Improv Group or BIG is Baltimore's only improv theater and school. A nonprofit arts organization, now in its 16th year, BIG works to advance the artistry and appreciation of improv comedy in the Baltimore region. We are a collective of just over a hundred performing artists, teachers, and students, offering an aggressive monthly calendar of free programming. Joining our organization costs nothing, a love of community and comedy is your ticket in.

BIG offers free nightly comedy shows, every night of every week of every month. That adds up to over 80 free shows a month, open to the public at our theater at 1727 North Charles Street, just next to the Charles Theater and down the block from the newer Parkway Cinema. We offer a free podcast studio that anyone can reserve at no cost. We make our space available for free or at under market rates to student film groups, community groups, and other worthwhile concerns. We teach free improv classes to public high schools. We sell classes that teach the curious how to become improvisers themselves and we aggressively award diversity-based scholarships to these classes. We awarded over \$32,000 worth of scholarships in 2019, almost a tenth of our entire budget, and we would have offered more if there was interest. We are a good organization.

We are led by the values inherent to improv comedy. We believe in saying yes to each other. Just before a show, performers whisper to each other "I've got your back" and mean it. We aspire to make each other look like geniuses instead of doing the same for ourselves. And we bend to each other, that is we meet the other where they are instead of where we want them to be. In fact, that principle drives the passion behind our membership. Ask a member of BIG what they love about the organization and you will hear, more often than not, something along the lines of, "I love meeting people from different walks of life and successfully collaborating with them."

We're dedicated in our study of improv comedy and yes, we like to put on a funny show. In that pursuit, we would find it useful to be able to sell beer and wine as allowed under a class C club liquor license. We have met with our local Community Association and they support our pursuit of this license. We have signed an MOU with our landlord which restricts the type of alcohol that can be offered by BIG and also the hours and manner it can be provided in.

At this time, I am happy to answer any questions you may have

Terry Withers
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