



**HIPPODROME
THEATRE** *at the*
FRANCE-MERRICK
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

February 16, 2024

The Honorable Delegate Wilson

Economic Matters Committee

House of Delegates Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill SB539 - Commercial Law - Consumer Protection – Sale and Resale of Tickets

Dear Delegate Wilson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ron Legler, President of the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center/Hippodrome Theatre in Baltimore, Maryland. The Hippodrome, the sole National Touring Broadway Series venue in our state, proudly serves as a member of the Maryland Sports & Entertainment Industry Coalition. Today, I offer testimony regarding Senate Bill 539 addressing specific concerns and potential adjustments for your consideration.

The Hippodrome Theatre expresses gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the public hearing on Senate Bill SB539. While we oppose Senate Bill SB539 as currently written, we greatly appreciate the significant progress made in SB539 and express support for many of the terms set forth in this legislation.

We applaud and support the bill's aim to enhance transparency in ticket purchasing. Initiatives like mandatory disclosure of total price breakdowns and speculative ticketing practices in the secondary market align with our values. In fact, the Hippodrome has proactively implemented all-inclusive pricing since 2016, demonstrating our commitment to fair and upfront costs for patrons. In addition, all too often, we encounter honest people who come to our venue expecting to see a show, only to find that the ticket they purchased was fake and they were duped by a predatory broker. In these situations, it is heartbreaking to see the customers' disappointment and embarrassment when they learn that they do not have a valid ticket and they did not buy from the venue's official sites. As a venue operator, we do our best never to turn away someone who has come to see our shows. Our box office scrambles to try to find the patron tickets to buy a second time and helps them navigate doing a credit card charge back on their original purchase, all while servicing the needs of thousands of patrons entering our doors for the same show. To put it mildly, it is a hassle for all involved. As a venue, we are in the business of providing experiences and memories to last a lifetime. When a visit to our theatre is ruined by fraudulent sales, it casts a negative shadow on our relationship with the consumer because trust is lost – even though we were not the bad actor. We are therefore appreciative of your action to further protect consumers of live entertainment and the arts in Maryland.



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However, the Hippodrome believes that some proposed modifications to SB539 are necessary to ensure that Maryland remains a competitive and attractive marketplace for Broadway, concerts, comedy, dance, sports and other entertainment attractions.

We express concern regarding the data sharing requirements outlined in Section C. Mandating venues to store and manage customer data from various secondary market platforms creates an undue burden on already busy box offices, potentially hindering operational efficiency and raising data security concerns.

We respectfully request the removal of Sections D, E, and F. While supporting the Fan-to-Fan resale concept, imposing restrictions on secondary market pricing and service fees risks infringing upon consumers' resale rights and disrupting the delicate balance within the ticketing ecosystem. Additionally, we believe artists and presenters, as rights holders, should retain the ability to determine ticket transferability, a factor often influencing their decision to perform in specific locations.

It is crucial to remember that major touring productions, concerts, and sporting events have venue selection options. Without key amendments, this legislation could incentivize prominent promoters and artists to bypass Maryland in favor of other states, including neighboring Washington D.C., potentially impacting our local economy and cultural landscape.

We urge you to consider our concerns and explore amendments that address data sharing, remove price controls and fee caps to maintain market flexibility, and respect the choices and preferences of rights holders. By collaborating, we can achieve the shared goal of protecting consumers while safeguarding the vitality of Maryland's vibrant entertainment industry.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ron Legler

Ron Legler
President, France-Merrick Performing Arts Center/Hippodrome