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# Arts and culture industry needs economic relief for good of all

Published July 12, 2020 12:01AM

**Wendy Bury**

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Governor Lamont announced the delay of Phase 3 reopening due to concerns about COVID-19's resurgence. While the decision is in keeping with Connecticut's cautious reopening, this delay is another painful blow to the already crippled arts and culture industry.

It is imperative that our elected officials, local legislators and municipal leaders dedicate relief for the arts and cultural industry. As of last week, \$160 billion was left unallocated in the Paycheck Protection Program. It is likely that there will still be billions left when the PPP application process closes. We urge our representatives to help sustain and protect our arts and cultural institutions and artists.

According to Americans for the Arts' "COVID-19's Impact on the Arts" report (June 29):

- \$8.4 billion in losses to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations. 96 percent have cancelled events as far out as 2021, resulting in \$10.3 billion in lost event-related spending by arts audiences at restaurants, lodging, retail
- Artists are among the most severely affected workers by the COVID-19 crisis, with 62 percent fully unemployed.

In New London County, the nonprofit arts and cultural industry generates \$168 million annually, supports 5,000 jobs, and attracts 3.2 million visitors.

The vibrancy in our downtowns is diminished by the shuttering of our arts venues. Rural areas are devoid of festivals that celebrate arts, culture and heritage. While virtual arts experiences have grown, the loss of live performances with shoulder-to-shoulder shared experiences is so profoundly felt.

Meanwhile, a tsunami of artwork is being created in response to the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd. New and powerful public art, songs, plays, paintings and poems are pouring out of artists. Artists are taking pen to paper to capture feelings of loneliness and disruption from the pandemic's required isolation and distancing. And they are using paint brushes and music to express their

emotions — anger, fear, weariness, solidarity, and hope — about racism and injustice. The artwork being created right now will help future generations understand the enormous strain our communities are under at this moment, and convey a year like no other. That's what the arts and artists do — they help capture, process and react to the world around us. And, in times of crisis, the arts help us heal.

Other countries moved quickly to protect their arts industry, not just for the economic value but for the intangible value to residents and communities. Germany announced a \$54 billion aid package for the country's creative and cultural sectors noting that "artists are not only indispensable, but also vital, especially now." The UK announced a \$2 billion rescue package to protect the country's renowned arts and cultural institutions through April. The U.S. did include \$150 million in the CARES Act that is currently being re-granted to arts and cultural organizations via the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Helpful, but not enough to protect the industry.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors recently passed a resolution to increase relief and recovery support, noting "the crippling impact on artists and arts and cultural organizations, who are integral to enabling our communities to survive and thrive economically and emotionally." They understand the risk of permanently losing essential organizations.

We need to see action through dedicated aid that will allow our arts and cultural organizations and artists to not just survive economically, but thrive once again.

Community members and arts patrons can help:

- Contact legislators and let them know dedicated federal aid is needed
- Donate to the **CultureSECT Economic Recovery Fund** (<http://culturesect.org/economic-recovery-fund/>) at culturesect.org.
- Boost local artists by buying art, local creative businesses by buying their products/services, and local arts organizations by making a donation or becoming a member.

**Wendy Bury is the executive director of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition.**

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