[YOUR NAME & ADDRESS]

[DATE]

[YOUR COUNCILLOR/MP/MPP/MLA’s NAME] & TITLE

[ADDRESS]

Dear Mr/Ms. [THEIR NAME]:

I am a constituent in the riding you represent. I am a freelance artist in the live performing arts sector, which has been utterly devastated by the COVID-19. First, let me thank you, and all representatives, for the rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic. My hope is that we can soon see the light at the end of the tunnel.

It is impossible to create and perform live theatre ‘from home’, and it is impossible for the industry to exist without the gathering of people.  I respect and understand that the current health crisis requires extreme action in order to protect the broader public health, however it is imperative to recognize that an entire sector of the economy has been completely shut down to protect our community. As has already been reported by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, that region alone is already poised to lose more than $500 million in ticket revenue as a consequence of the crisis. For many designers, this is translating to as much as 50% of their annual income in immediate cancellations.

*“You can’t overstate it enough, that this is unprecedented. It is a very challenging time for our industry, for everybody. We need help. The only way the performing arts sector is going to recover from this is we need help from Ottawa and we need help quickly. We need a relief package, we need a stimulus package.”*

—Jacoba Knaapen, Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts

The cultural sector contributed an estimated $58.9 billion to the country’s GDP in 2017. However, members of the performing arts sectors – designers included – are among the most precariously employed members of our society. Even at the best of times, arts workers lives are precarious and paycheque-to-paycheque. Now with no paycheques, the hardship could devastate lives.

As with many of my colleagues, I live in Toronto because this is where most performing arts work is concentrated, and where I have the best opportunity to make a living. Of course, it is also a very expensive city, which creates its own particular stressors for artists. The average rent in Toronto is $2,300 – which exceeds the proposed Relief Benefit for self-employed individuals: even before we consider any other expenses.

We need help. I am calling on you to support and implement:

* Substantial disaster recovery funding for arts organizations, with the explicit mandate that funding be used to pay the artists affected by the COVID-19 crisis.
* Direct your arts councils to issue a mandate and clear guidance to all funding recipients that they must prioritize the financial support and obligations to their artists.
* That the relief benefit offered to self-employed and freelance workers must be increased to no less than 85% of a claimant’s gross regular earnings or $1000 per week.
* That, recognizing the exceptional crisis in the performing arts industry, additional disaster support be designated for affected arts workers, to ensure this sector can survive after the crisis.
* A provincial economic support benefit for self-employed and freelance artists who have seen their industry and income sacrificed in the fight against this pandemic.

We are all engaged in the best way we can to limit the damage of the COVID-19 pandemic, but I am fearful of the catastrophic effects of these efforts on the arts and culture sectors in this country.

Yours Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]