

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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15 July 2020

Honorable Ned Lamont, Governor
State of Connecticut
Office of the Governor, State Capitol
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Lamont:

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), at its regular meeting on July 15th recognized the importance of the Garde Arts Center, Southeastern Connecticut's nonprofit performing arts center, an important regional catalyst for economic, social, and cultural activity, which will be critical for this region's post-pandemic recovery. The SCCOG voted unanimously to endorse the efforts of New London Mayor Passero, and his colleague mayors from New Haven, Hartford, Waterbury, Stamford, and Torrington, to obtain emergency funding from the State to sustain the Garde and the other five urban performing arts centers, through July 2021.

As one of Connecticut's six major urban performing arts centers, the Garde has partnered with the five other performing arts centers to develop a state-wide, six-city urban recovery plan. The six mayors are leading the effort in seeking a \$10,000,000 loan or grant from the State that will provide the necessary liquidity to sustain minimal operations through July 2021 and prevent bankruptcy or dissolution, so that these critical cultural institutions will be around when it's time to reopen.

The Garde serves 90,000 people annually, and this past year presented and hosted 226 days of performances, film, civic events, meetings, and rehearsals. Many regional arts and educational institutions, including the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, rely on the Garde to showcase their work in front of large and diverse audiences from primarily 63 towns in greater New London County. The Garde hosts visitors from 42 states, with 89% of the audience coming from throughout Connecticut. The largest community-owned arts employer in the City and the region, last year the Garde provided 115 jobs and internships. Based on multipliers from the CT Arts and Economic Report IV, the Garde's annual economic impact exceeded \$5,000,000 including audience spending, household income impact, and state and local revenues, and created 93 FTE jobs in the region.

The Garde has been shut down since March 13 and has had no theater-related revenue, which accounts for 77% of all annual revenue and contributions. The Garde is down from 115 employees to a skeletal part-time core staff of five. The operating costs of maintaining the facility and

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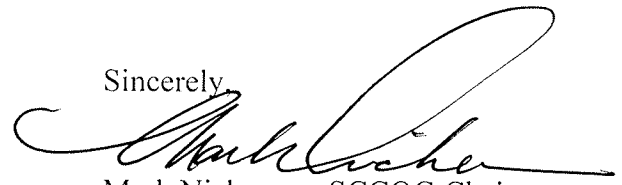
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planning for reopening has depleted most cash resources and has put into question the theater's ability to survive this pandemic. All theater events have been cancelled through 2020 and it is likely that unrestricted occupancy will not be possible until fall of 2021.

Theaters the size of the Garde were the first to close and will be last to reopen. The loss of the Garde would have incalculable negative impacts on SECT's recovery, because the Garde has proven to be such a critical activity generator and economic catalyst.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



Mark Nickerson, SCCOG Chairman
East Lyme First Selectman

Cc: Mayor Michael Passero, New London
Philip Michalowski, President, Garde Arts Center
Steve Sigel, Executive Director, Garde Arts Center

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