



**TREASURERS & TICKET SELLERS UNION
LOCAL 751, INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF THEATRICAL STAGE EMPLOYEES**

**TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INVESTIGATIONS AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
AND THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND SMALL BUSINESS
APRIL 22, 2021**

Senate Chairs Skoufis and Kaplan, and distinguished members of the Senate Committees, I am Lawrence Paone, President of the Treasurers and Ticket Sellers Union, Local 751 International Alliance Theatrical Stage Employees (I.A.T.S.E.). I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the 500 Box Office workers in venues throughout New York City.

Local 751, chartered in 1941, represents workers in over 60 venues, including The Metropolitan Opera, Broadway Theatres, and arenas such as Madison Square Garden and Barclays. Our industry has been devastated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the majority of our members unable to work due to closure of theaters and other venues, large and small. Thus, many of our members have suffered financially during the pandemic, struggling to make ends meet, and for the support of Albany we are grateful. In particular, we would like to applaud your work on the COBRA subsidy funding, facilitating many of the federal assistance programs rapidly through state agencies, as well as rent assistance and moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures, and the grants and incentives the recently passed budget establishes for struggling venues.

I am here today to testify in regards to the current state of the secondary market for tickets. In an average year, millions of dollars in tickets are sold for live events through the secondary market. Local 751 is not opposed to the existence of this secondary market. The goal of every Local 751 represented employee is to provide world class customer service to theatregoers while maximizing sales for our employers. Part of the job responsibilities of our members -- and what we pride ourselves on -- is to provide personalized customer service, to solve ticketing problems, and to

ensure that everyone has a good experience and enjoys the show regardless of where a customer purchased their tickets. Based on Local 751's experiences, we see both the positive and negative aspects of the secondary market at the Box Office window.

Many customers have a good experience with the secondary market and are happy when they can get to see a hit show, even when they know they paid an above-market price to secure a ticket. On the other hand, other customers are extremely upset to discover at the venue that they overpaid for their tickets (for example, if they paid \$300 in the secondary market for a \$150 ticket). To that end it is important that there is full transparency in the secondary market so that all customers understand beforehand both the base cost of a ticket and the additional costs added by the reseller and can thus make an informed purchase decision.

In addition, customers sometimes unwittingly purchase fraudulent tickets from bad sources, because it is difficult to tell which online sources are legitimate versus illegitimate -- and there are so many. Illegitimate resellers sometimes resell the same ticket over and over again, making it very difficult for the Box Office to determine ownership so that customers may enter the theatre. These issues are often exacerbated by other circumstances, such as: 1) when they occur at a sold-out performance; 2) when they occur on a special day for the customer (a birthday, anniversary, etc.); 3) or when the customer bought a specific seat for a specific reason (e.g., to have their right leg out, to see the show from the left side of the theatre, etc.).

The Box Office staff does everything in its power to assist the customers in these situations, such as attempting to verify ownership through a search of accounts, seat history, and other methods in our ticketing systems, selling the customer new seats that accommodate their wishes (when possible), and in the cases of fraud, pointing the customer in the direction of law enforcement and informing theatre management of the issue. However, our workers can only mitigate the fallout; we alone cannot prevent the fraud from occurring. When reforming the secondary market statutes, we recommend you strengthen protections against deceptive and fraudulent practices to push these bad actors out of the secondary market.

It has been, and remains, Local 751's policy to work with Employers to determine the Union's role in the latest technological advancements in ticketing and to guarantee their success. I am certain that Local 751's open mindedness, flexibility, and interest in innovation with regards to the

secondary market and other issues will help our industry emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger than ever.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear on behalf of the members of the Treasurers and Ticket Sellers Union, Local 751 I.A.T.S.E. We hope to be a resource as you delve into reforming the secondary market, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.