

THE SENATE
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January 13, 2021

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: New York State Arts Revitalization

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I was thrilled and encouraged yesterday during your State of the State Address to hear the focus on the State's need to revitalize the arts, which is a cornerstone of the Hudson Valley's economy and culture. However, as we await details of your plan, I want to emphasize the need to equitably revitalize the arts across the State for venues large and small, and ensure the State is not simply picking winners and losers.

You stated in your address, "New York City is not New York without Broadway," and this is absolutely correct—but it also rings true for countless communities I represent as well. A venue does not need to have the same flash and crowds as Broadway to have a similar impact on its community as Broadway does on New York City. In fact, before ever going on to the larger stages and brighter lights, most performers get their start performing at the smaller, local venues, bars and restaurants. Unfortunately, many of these local venues are hanging on by a thread due to the economic shutdown. Although bars and restaurants have been able to operate at a limited capacity, many of them rely on the draw of performances to operate, and reopening after the State expressly banned ticket sales and advertising for these performances simply was not feasible.

The revitalization of the arts should not be limited to handpicked locations determined by the State. For this reason, it is critical that the State establishes clear and impartial guidelines that would allow any venue that can operate safely during the pandemic to do so. However, the State must also avoid a one-size-fits-all approach that may be practical for larger venues, but impossible for smaller venues. Flexibility, along with open dialogue with those who are responsible for operating and performing in these venues, is crucial for ensuring smaller venues are not left behind. The reality is, as these venues are the lifeblood of the cultural and economic resurgence of many upstate communities, to leave such venues behind would be to leave these communities behind as well.

Furthermore, I am concerned about the State potentially unilaterally selecting state property to host the "pop-up" performances and arts events you mentioned in your address, which would come at the expense of local venues. In the event that any such performances were to take place on state property, I would recommend the State uses proceeds from these events to go directly to a fund dedicated to providing relief for local venues that have been unable to host performances during the New York State on PAUSE order.

A recovery effort that only rewards the largest venues and the biggest names will fail to rebuild the communities and small businesses that contribute so much to our State. The COVID-19 pandemic hit every community and business, regardless of size, and so it is essential that our recovery efforts do so as well.

I thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to working with you on this critical effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Serino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Sue Serino

41st District