

From: Peter

Sent: Wednesday, January 24, 2024 7:17 PM

To: Budget Committee <BudgetCommittee@london.ca>

Cc: Ferreira, David <dferreira@london.ca>; Pelozo, Elizabeth <epeloz@london.ca>;

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Increase in Grand Theatre Funding

Dear Councillor Pelozo,

I am writing to you today in your capacity as Chairperson of the City of London Budget Committee. As I understand it, there is a request from the Theatre to increase their annual funding from \$500,000 to \$750,000.

I am writing to you as a constituent that has spent my entire life living in London – and someone whose life has been directly impacted by the services the Grand Theatre provides this community.

The Grand is one of London's treasures; it is an anchor for performing arts, it is a driver of the downtown economy, and most importantly it is an institution which delivers the message of inclusivity, diversity and decolonization.

As a queer, Indigenous person, with a physical disability, the Grand Theatre provided me with space where I could be myself without fear of harassment or judgment. This was vital for me in my formative years as a member of their High School Project (2002-2004). I went from being a student that was going to drop out of high school- to attending the Richard Ivey School of Business on their only "full-ride" merit-based scholarship (\$70,000).

The confidence the Theatre gave me changed the course of my life. As I obtained my first Masters degree, the foundations of acceptance and inclusion that were laid by the Grand, led me to work in public policy- both for Dianne Cunningham, and Deb Matthews.

The arts, The Grand, is a space where we can have the difficult conversations surrounding social issues. Where we can, through the beauty of storytelling, bring people to see the world from different vantages. The Grand brings to us the heroic stories of refugees, it tells the agonizing stories of Residential School survivors. It explores the nuances of addiction and mental health through the characters it brings to its stage. It is a vital part of the tapestry of London, and in a world that is becoming less, and less accepting- never have we needed the arts to lead more than we do now.

I am asking the city to grant The Grand with this funding increase. It has proven itself as a well-run organization- and it has proven itself as the long-standing artistic heart of this city. One that we cannot let fail.

I believe it was Winston Churchill that stated in a response to cutting arts funding... "then what are we fighting for?"

Please grant this iconic institution the funding it needs to survive.

Respectfully,

Peter