

FEB 16, 2021 TESTIMONY
-BEFORE THE HOUSE FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION-

Members of the Committee, Ladies & Gentlemen, thank you for allowing me the time to testify today on behalf of the Arts & Entertainment Industry.

My name is Brian Thomas. I am the Business Agent for I.A.T.S.E. Local 12 here in Columbus, Ohio. I have been in our industry for more than 26 years. More than half of my life. I.A.T.S.E. stands for the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists & Allied Crafts, of the United States, its Territories and Canada, AFL-CIO, CLC. Or better known as the "Stagehand Union". Our International office is in New York City, home of Broadway. There are around 400 chapters throughout the United States and Canada. In the State of Ohio there are IA.T.S.E. chapters in Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, Akron, and Youngstown. The I.A.T.S.E. nationally represents over 155,000 Members and hundreds of thousands more future Members, and workers, in our industry. The I.A.T.S.E. has been here since 1893, 128 years.

Our logo might seem familiar to you. That is because you have probably seen it in the credits of almost all movie and television productions. This includes locally produced movies such as the Shawshank Redemption, Teachers, parts of Traffic, with Michael Douglas, and Air Force One, with Harrison Ford, just to name a few. Here in Columbus I.A.T.S.E. Local 12 also works in the theatres for Broadways, BalletMet, Columbus Symphony Orchestra, Opera of Columbus, CATCO and any other performance held in our theatres. We work in venues such as the Ohio, Palace, Southern, Lincoln and the Joann Davidson Theatres. The McCoy Center in New Albany. We also work at the Wexner Center for the Arts (Ohio State Univ campus), MAPFRE Stadium, the Schottenstein Center, Nationwide Arena, the AEG/Promowest venues (Express Live, etc.), the Columbus Commons, the Ohio State Fairgrounds, COSI, Ohio History Connection and the Columbus Museum of Art. We also work events such as the Ohio State Fair, the Memorial Tournament, the Arnold Expo, the Intl Auto Show, Red White & Boom, Jazz & Ribfest, Festival Latino and Music in the Air series. We work at the G.C.C.C. and in Battelle Hall for all the tradeshows, corporate events, cheerleading events to name a few. We also represent the G.C.C.C. Full Time Engineers. We work events as far north as Mansfield and Marysville. East at the Midland Theatre in Newark and the Seacrest Auditorium in Zanesville. We work the shows at the Memorial Auditorium at the Ohio University in Athens. We work events in Circleville, Chillicothe, and West Jefferson. As lengthy as my list is.... that is not everywhere and all we work. The arts and entertainment workers are everywhere.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic on March 13, 2020, to use a quote from former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, is a “day that will live in infamy” regarding the Arts & Entertainment industry. It is an industry that accounts for around 4% of the National GDP. Billions of dollars lost. Hundreds of thousands who lost their jobs and careers. Including stagehands, a/v technicians, actors, truck drivers, food/craft services, concessions, ushers, ticketing, security, and office personal. In Columbus, we are around 95% unemployment rate since April 2020. Local 12 normally does around \$5 million annually in gross wages. That’s all gone. That day...our industry was decimated.

The ancillary fallout of the impact on our industry was enormous. Including restaurants, catering and hotels who thrive on our industry. A great example of the fallout is downtown Columbus, the Short North, the Arena District, and all the hotels. All the workers in our industry are very anxious to get back to work doing what we love. What we love is entertaining you! Increased funding from the state through the Ohio Arts Council is critical to getting us back to work. We were the first industry affected and, unfortunately, seems like we will be the last to return. Our industry has been shut down now for almost a year.

The I.A.T.S.E. has been proactively working with all employers, across the nation and locally, to prepare for reopening. We have adopted OSHA, O.D.H. and C.D.C. guidelines for workplace safety protocols.

Our industry will return eventually but we need your ongoing help immediately! ODJFS support, for our industry and “gig” workers, is imperative! The ODJFS system has been very troublesome to our workers. Many have been penalized in a way for working any labor call. ODJFS has asked people to pay back thousands of dollars for trying to “do the right thing”. Workers are being evicted and foreclosed on at an alarming rate.

Efforts such as “Save Our Stages, the “Red Alert Campaign” and the “Backstage Benefit Fund” (held @ the Midland Thr) are commendable but not enough. Federal and/or State allocated funds and support are imperative. The Arts & Entertainment industry are viable and necessary. We need your immediate and continued help! Thank you for your time and consideration.