

Good Afternoon,

My name is Chris O'Neill, and I am here as a Nova Scotian based in rural Kings County. I am the Executive Director of the Ross Creek Centre for the Arts, I am also an artist with Two Planks and a Passion Theatre, an arts educator, and involved in the Nova Scotia Arts Coalition, an ad hoc group of arts organisations, and representing many of the 14,000 cultural workers in this province.

There are so many things I would like to speak to, but five minutes doesn't give us a lot of time together. We can get the formalities out of the way - I am here in reference to clause 62, the loss of the deed transfer tax from the casinos, and the attendant loss of revenue to the province, which then we are supposed to believe is the rationale for decimating the culture of Nova Scotia.

I am choosing the casino clause because I have been thinking a lot about the gamble that this government is taking, with this financial measures act. A gamble that is already affecting people's livelihoods, our communal heritage, and our sense of our own possibilities.

While I am very proud to stand with and for so many colleagues across the province who all work in very different ways, and whose voices should all be heard, I am going to use our own organisation as an illustration of the larger issue. I have also asked the office to distribute some important data around the impact of Arts and Culture on Nova Scotia's economy and society. But rather than focussing my time on very well documented statistics, I am going to tell two stories.

The first is our origin story and what we do. The Ross Creek Centre for the Arts is in rural Kings County. We are three kilometres down a dirt road, where the nearest village of 900 people is 7 minutes away. We are a multidisciplinary, multicultural, and multigenerational centre which operates arts and environmental outreach, working with some

of the most marginalised people in our area, arts education at all levels and stages, including work with schools, professional development through international artist residencies, festivals, and live performance from our resident theatre, Two Planks and a Passion Theatre. We bring a minimum of 15,000 visitors a year to our community.

The **very** small investment that the government of Nova Scotia makes annually to our operating budget is then multiplied by 10 in revenue generation.

In other words, the investment of the province allows us to leverage ten times that money into our own organisation, which is then redistributed out in our community, and that doesn't include the economic impact that we have on our community and on the province as a whole. The jobs we create both at our own organisation and in the broader community - in the local Inn, the coffee shop, the gas station, the hardware store. We are an integral part of the economy of our rural community.

Beyond that, we also bring in other kinds of investment to our community. The facility where I am speaking to you from today, the Ross Creek Annex, was created at a cost of \$3M to a private donor, \$3M of local contractors, suppliers, tradespeople, all new money into our community because of the small investment of the provincial government in our programs and operations.

These are real economic impacts.

And that is good return on investment.

And those stories are repeated in varying scales across the province, with the impacts felt as keenly in rural communities as they are in urban ones.

And along with those go the social good impacts. The children who have learned to express themselves creatively and gained confidence, the artists given their first professional job, the audiences who feel connection and less isolation through gathering together at a production that could stand with any in the world. The belonging and identity that is created at our community suppers.

That is all the direct result of a small amount of provincial investment in one rural community, in one organization over the past decades.

Let me be very clear, the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage is not the problem with Nova Scotia's Finances. The \$14M of cuts that includes, not just 20% cuts to organisations but 100% cuts to vital programs and services will impact the lives of Nova Scotians now and into the future. If passed this province will be poorer.

These are real programs we offer to our communities, where we are rooted, and where we serve, and instead, the Financial Measures Act seeks to lighten a financial burden on a casino.

When I think about gambling, I think about the sure thing, vs. the long shot. Arts, Culture and Heritage are already here, we have a proven track record, and we are a miniscule part of the budget. Invest more and we will make it pay off for the people of Nova Scotia.

And it strikes me that this government has been acting like a problem gambler betting our communities, our livelihoods, our resources, our heritage, and our future against some mythical payday.

I want to leave you with one other story. When I was very young and going to Port Williams Elementary, Mermaid Theatre came to perform at my school. I still remember the magic and then the wonder that these were real people doing this as a real job. I decided as a result of seeing live theatre in my school that I could do that. And for the past

35 years, I have been doing my best to make that kind of magic for other Nova Scotians. We are workers, and we are lucky enough that when we get up and go to work, we create magic.

But we can't make something from nothing.

When you invest in arts, culture, and heritage, you invest in our economy and our people. You respect what the past has to teach us, and you give Nova Scotians an opportunity to become the next Rachel Reid, the next Anne Murray, to create the next Ross Creek Centre.

The impacts of this Financial Measures Act, the way it prioritizes private ownership and dismisses all the organisations that serve our communities will be devastating. It is not too late. I am calling on all MLAs to pause and rework the financial measures act.