

## OPEN LETTER to Governor Ron DeSantis

Embargoed until 6:00 a.m., July 11, 2024 (World Fringe Day)

Dear Governor DeSantis,

Like you, we the Orlando and Tampa Fringe festivals care greatly about the citizens of Florida. Given that common ground, we hope that you read this letter with an open mind and fully consider the proposal below.

We assume you did not veto the funding of science centers, aquariums, operas, zoos, children's programs, and other arts and culture programming lightly, and that much of what has transpired since the June 27th press conference is a misunderstanding. One of the goals of this letter, then, is to clear up some of those misunderstandings.

First, it is important to note that Fringe Festivals are performing arts festivals. We absolutely are not sexual festivals. The genres of performance range widely, but typically include storytelling, theatre, improvisation, circus, dance, comedy, etc. We diligently watch for age appropriateness and ensure that a show with adult content is age-rated accordingly. Through content indicators such as age, we empower our guests to make informed decisions and self-curate their experiences. No one is ever forced or coerced to see a show against their will.

Equally important is the distinction between uncensored and unlawful. Our festivals are uncensored, not unlawful. While a fraction of the work at our festivals *could* be adults only, we and the artists operate within the law, including decency requirements. We say *could* because Fringe artists are selected through a lottery-type drawing, thus it is literally the luck of the draw as to whether adult content is a part of these festivals. We as festival producers do not put our thumb on the selection scale though we proudly provide a platform for any and all artists to share their work.

Second, it is important that Florida taxpayers understand that their tax dollars do not pay Fringe artists. Artists *earn* their income directly through ticket sales. In fact, 100% of an artist's advertised ticket price is paid to that artist. Instead, taxpayer dollars help with office expenses, ADA accommodations, and staff salaries (i.e., tax paying Floridians).

More to that point, Florida's arts & culture sector generates around \$176M in State Tax Revenue; a 550% return on a \$26M investment. It could be said, then, that the vetoed \$32M is but a small reinvestment into the organizations that help generate significant earned income for the state. (Source: Americans for the Arts' Arts & Economic Prosperity ([AEP6, 2022.](#)))

Defunding Florida's entire arts & culture sector because of Fringe Festivals, which account for just .002% of the vetoed \$32M, is akin to canceling Florida's entire sports industry based on an objection with one player on one team.

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Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the many worthy organizations that have been negatively impacted by the veto are critical parts of the social, educational, and financial landscape of their respective communities. Their loss or diminishment will have serious ripple effects. As programs get reduced or cut, so too may salaries, which impact grocers, restaurants, auto shops, tithing and other charitable giving.

With all this in mind, we implore you, sir, to consider the following proposal:

*Governor DeSantis, we the undersigned Fringe Festivals, which remain committed to providing inclusive spaces for artists and audiences, agree on a non-precedent setting basis, to forego the 2025 state grants that were approved for us in order to facilitate the restoration of the remaining legislature-approved arts & culture funding, provided you champion a successful reversal or override of the veto. In addition, we will welcome and host you, your family, and some of your aides when you attend our festivals in 2025, and we ask that you reciprocate by welcoming and hosting us in October or November 2024 so that we can build bridges of understanding and deepen your familiarity with the benefits of arts & culture investments, thus empowering you to be an impassioned advocate.*

In that the fiscal year of many arts & culture organizations began July 1, time is of the essence. We look forward to working with you for the betterment of all Florida citizens.

Respectfully,

Scott Galbraith  
Interim Executive Director  
The Orlando Fringe

Trish Parry  
Festival Producer  
Tampa Fringe

Tempestt Halstead  
Festival Producer  
The Orlando Fringe