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S.202

Introduced by Senators Clarkson, Benning, Cummings and Ram Hinsdale

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Commerce and trade; economic development

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to provide grants and other incentives to support creative sector businesses and cultural organizations that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

An act relating to supporting creative sector businesses and cultural organizations

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS; PURPOSE

(a) Findings. The General Assembly finds:

(1) The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly jeopardized the economic viability of creative sector businesses, museums, theaters, galleries, studios, performing arts venues, and other cultural organizations.

(2) Creative sector businesses and nonprofits are important to Vermont's economic growth and community vitality, attracting tourists, boosting local sales, and generating more than nine percent of Vermont's jobs.

1 (3) These businesses and organizations were among the first to close to
2 protect public health and are also among the last to fully reopen.

3 (4) Even as performances and cultural activities slowly return to
4 operation, they are often not able to operate at pre-pandemic capacity, and the
5 public remains trepidatious to gather in close proximity with others, even if
6 masked.

7 (5) Past financial support for creative sector businesses, performing arts
8 venues, and other cultural organizations has provided a bridge to this point, but
9 these entities continue to have significant need until vaccinations and other
10 public health measures allow them to return to economic health.

11 (b) Purpose. The purpose of this act is to provide \$17.5 million in
12 additional financial assistance to creative sector businesses and cultural
13 organizations as follows:

14 (1) to provide direct financial assistance for COVID-19-safe equipment,
15 marketing and re-engaging audiences, and covering operating costs;

16 (2) to support statewide promotion and marketing of Vermont's creative
17 economy;

18 (3) to provide funding for the Vermont Arts Council to implement the
19 CreateVT Action Plan; and

20 (4) to support both creative sector businesses and downtown growth and
21 revitalization by providing affordable studio, housing, performance, and

1 exhibition space and opportunities for artists and other creative sector
2 businesses.

3 Sec. 2. CREATIVE ECONOMY RECOVERY PROGRAM

4 In fiscal year 2022, of the amounts available to the State from federal
5 coronavirus relief funds, the amount of \$17,500,000.00 is appropriated to the
6 Agency of Commerce and Community Development, which the Agency shall
7 subgrant to the Vermont Arts Council to administer consistent with the
8 provisions of this section.

9 (1) Creative economy grants. The Council shall allocate funding for
10 creative economy grants to theaters, community arts centers, galleries,
11 museums, dance studios, and similarly situated entities, as follows:

12 (A) \$10,000,000.00 to cover a portion of monthly operating costs for
13 businesses and organizations that have sustained substantial losses due to the
14 pandemic, including rent, mortgage, utilities, and insurance;

15 (B) \$2,000,000.00 for public health-related business and
16 programming adaptations, including to purchase and implement touchless
17 ticketing, online sales platforms, and COVID-19-related health and safety
18 protocols; and

19 (C) \$4,000,000.00 for public health-related facility adaptations,
20 including the purchase of air purification systems, hand-sanitizer dispensers,
21 expanded outdoor seating, and HVAC assessments and upgrades.

1 (2) Statewide promotion and marketing of Vermont’s creative sector.
2 The Council shall allocate \$500,000.00 to support statewide and regional
3 marketing of arts and cultural events, venues, and creative sector businesses
4 that are essential to revive consumer confidence and spending.

5 (3) Vermont Creative Network Coordinator and network support. The
6 Council shall allocate \$250,000.00 to hire the Vermont Creative Network
7 Coordinator and Zone Leader positions for two years to implement the
8 CreateVT Action Plan.

9 (4) Art space and housing in vacant downtown storefronts. The Council
10 shall allocate \$750,000.00 for creative spaces grants to restore vitality to
11 vacant downtown buildings and other retail spaces and provide affordable
12 housing, studio, exhibition, and performance space to Vermont artists.

13 (A) A creative sector business may apply for a three-year grant to
14 lease vacant downtown retail space.

15 (B) A grantee may also use funds to lease residential space in the
16 same building and to enable a landlord to make necessary improvements to the
17 building to enable residential use.

18 (C) The Council shall pay grant funds directly to a landlord after the
19 execution of a lease agreement.

20 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

21 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2022.