



The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Canadian Heritage
House of Commons
Ottawa

October 26, 2021

Dear Minister Rodriguez:

As a coalition of Canada's entertainment unions, representing performers, musicians, designers, and behind-the-scenes artisans and technicians, we would like to extend our congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Canadian Heritage. We write today to express our gratitude for the Government of Canada's efforts to support our industry and the people who work within it. Our coalition is comprised of the IATSE, Canadian Actors' Equity Association, the Canadian Federation of Musicians, and the Associated Designers of Canada. We represent over 50,000 workers across the entertainment industry.

Given that our industry is still struggling we were disappointed to hear the October 21 announcement with regard to worker supports following the CRB's termination. In addition to assistance for the thousands of live entertainment workers across Canada who are still unemployed due to COVID, we are also seeking clarification.

1. Further to the Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit, what constitutes a "lockdown"? Does a partial lockdown (i.e., restrictions that bar full operation) qualify?

Some provinces have lifted capacity limits on audiences (or soon will) so that venues can begin to welcome full crowds once again. Other provinces still have capacity limits in place. If venues are barred from operating at full capacity, is there recognition that there is still a lockdown of sorts in effect? Partial capacity means little profit for the venues, which means smaller, scaled back shows and reduced employment opportunities for live performance workers.

2. There will be a lag time between the lifting of lockdown/restrictions and the opening of shows - which is when most workers are employed (think lighting, dressers, ticket takers, ushers, chorus, orchestra, etc.). How are these workers meant to pay rent and put food on the table during that lag time, so that they are still there for employers once doors open?

It typically takes months of preparation to mount a production. Designs must be conceived (costumes, lighting, sets), and then constructed/painted or sourced (scenery, wigs, costumes, props), roles must be cast, dancing or fighting choreographed, scripts learned and rehearsed, the show promoted, tickets sold, equipment tested and repaired. Each step is critical, but not all cast and crew are required for every step along the way. Most front-of-house staff are not required until the show has opened, so to ensure a steadier flow of work, they'll often work at multiple venues. This is not possible right now, as virtually all theatres are dark and are looking to reopen all around the same time.

While Government has been generous with its support to organizations, those supports – including the wage subsidy – do NOT trickle down to the vast majority of arts workers, who are largely freelancers. If venues are not mounting shows, it is only their fulltime staffs who are eligible for the wage subsidy – which is not the majority of people who are employed by the venue in a regular, pre-/post-COVID world.

- 3. The Liberal Party of Canada Platform, “Supporting our Businesses and Hardest Hit Sectors,” included the launch of the Arts and Culture Recovery Program to partially subsidize ticket sales. The performing arts has been considered one of the of the hardest hit sectors throughout the pandemic. Would you please confirm whether or not the performing arts (and specifically, its workers) are going to be eligible for any of the programs including the “Hardest Hit Business Recovery Program.”**

With the announcement of the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program, those two sectors have been carved out for a specific benefit, using wage and rent subsidies to provide the best support. Live performance is still behind these sectors in terms of recovery, and the workers are struggling.


We have surveyed our employers across the country and we are told that, aside from a few shows, scaled back in size and frequency, they are not looking to return to full, pre-pandemic seasons until Spring 2022 at the earliest. Support for live performance workers will be necessary until venues are fully operational and allowed to host full audiences – who are confident enough in their safety to return. There are still restrictions on large crowds in many jurisdictions, and our members are therefore largely prohibited by government from returning to work. The work that currently exists is not enough to piece together a living, nor will it be for some time.

- 4. Could the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program wage/rent subsidy be expanded to include Arts & Culture? If so, would there be any distinction between for-profit and not-for-profit venues and live performance employers?**

Wage subsidies have allowed organizations, regardless of their tax status, to keep their doors open and pay their fulltime staff. We believe that wage subsidies have played a valuable role in keeping our economy strong. We also acknowledge that organizations in our coalition benefitted from the CEWS in order to keep functioning and continue to support and advocate for our members. While our priority as a coalition is to advocate for the thousands of live performance workers across the country who are still struggling, we must also ensure that their employers are supported and that there are jobs to go back to.

Since the pandemic began, the Government of Canada has been responsive and supportive of our industry and its workers. We appreciate and are grateful for that. Might you be able to tell us when specific details on these new programs will be made public? Now that we can finally see the finish line, we respectfully suggest that this is not the time to stumble.

Sincerely,



John M. Lewis
IATSE

jlewis@iatse.net



Arden Ryshpan
CAEA

arden@caea.com



Alan Willaert
CFM

awillaert@afm.org



Ken MacKenzie
ADC

president@designers.ca