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Policy Memo

Having volunteered at The Olympia Film Society, The Seattle International Film Festival, and also having been an active patron of many other of Washington State's locally-owned nonprofit theaters for many years now, I have seen first-hand the difficulty they have faced in their daily operations in a post-pandemic world. These difficulties have forced theaters to rely more heavily on grants than ever before in an effort to have the funds they need to stay open. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, this was especially an issue, as many of them had to close to safeguard from the risk of the virus spreading. These closures created a financial crisis for these historic theaters, resulting in an average loss of \$240,000 in profits per theater over the time they were closed. With no incoming revenue during their closures, theater operators had to defer important maintenance projects, resulting in the endangerment of the preservation of their historic theaters.

Washington State's government has notably done some work in the wake of the pandemic's undeniable effects on historic theaters by creating the Historic Theater Grant Program in 2021 through the Washington State Archeology And Historic Preservation in an effort to aid with these unprecedented financial losses, as well as with the intention that the grant's funds be used directly towards historic theater's maintenance. However, it is critical that the state make more grants specifically aimed at these local theaters, so that these theaters can retain their status in their local economies as key institutions of community engagement and cultural tourism, as well as ensuring that they can maintain the important work of the preservation of their theaters.