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ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS

Empowering Our Music Community

May 16, 2025

Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #5
1021 O Street, Suite 4210
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Christopher Cabaldon, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee #4
1021 O Street, Suite 7320
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Quirk-Silva and Senator Cabaldon,

As representatives of the state's orchestra management and musicians, we come together to **respectfully urge you to reject the Governor's May Revision proposal to revert \$11.5 million in General Fund dollars appropriated in 2023-24 for the Performing Arts Equitable Payroll Fund (PAEPF)**. These funds were allocated to implement *SB 1116 (Chapter 731, Statutes of 2022)* and support small nonprofit performing arts organizations—regional orchestras, theaters, operas, dance groups, and more with annual revenues under \$2 million—located in every legislative district across California.

This proposal comes on top of a troubling trend of deep, disproportionate cuts to arts and culture funding in California. Since 2023, the state has slashed over \$70 million in previously approved investments.

These reductions have already taken a significant toll on orchestras. If the PAEPF is also eliminated, the consequences for California's orchestra community will be devastating. The \$11.5 million at stake is a modest but high-impact investment for the performing arts—an industry that delivers strong returns. Performing arts organizations are estimated to provide over 250,000 jobs statewide and drive a powerful multiplier effect: for every 100 performing arts jobs, an additional 156 jobs are supported in adjacent sectors. These organizations enrich local economies, strengthen community identity, and create accessible pathways to arts education and participation.

In fact, the PAEPF was well underway in implementation before this announcement. The California Office of Small Business Advocate (CAL-OSBA) hired a program manager through a competitive process in November 2024. The program launched on March 10, 2025. Just ten days later, it was forced to close due to overwhelming demand and oversubscription. Funds were committed and applications were under active review for award when the proposed cut was announced. These funds were not "unspent"—many orchestras were expecting these critical dollars in just a few short months to keep their doors open.

These are direct quotes from orchestra leaders who had applied for the PAEPF program upon hearing about the prospect of losing funding:

- "Receiving this funding will make a huge impact on our capability to sustain our programs in the upcoming seasons." (Cindy Bandel, **Orchestra Santa Monica**)

- “The PAEPF was going to be a crucial reprieve after the loss of the NEA, and the *significant* atrophy of foundation/institutional support for the arts that has happened in the last few years.” (D. Riley Nicholson, **Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music**)
- “Without this funding, our options will be to hire fewer musicians, reduce staff, and/or deliver fewer services to our community.” (Kevin Eberle-Noel, **Redlands Symphony**)
- “Our situation is grim, like so many other orchestras throughout the state, and we were counting on the PAEPF. We had to take out loans, for the first time, just to get us through this season.” (Barry Silverman, **South Coast Symphony**)

As you can see, the urgency is real. The 160 orchestras and the 3,000+ individuals in their administrative workforce and the 5,000+ musicians we represent throughout the state continue to face intense post-COVID challenges, including:

- Ongoing financial stress from pandemic-era closures and capacity limits;
- Rising costs of labor and concert production;
- Expiration of federal NEA pandemic recovery grants;
- Reduced state arts support in the 2024-25 budget; and
- Loss of work that would qualify musicians for Unemployment Insurance, Workers’ Compensation, and other employee benefits.

The PAEPF will help fund jobs—the salaries of orchestra musicians and staff who perform the music and deliver the concerts and music education programs that enrich California communities. On behalf of the statewide orchestra community, we urge you to reject the proposed reversion of PAEPF funds.



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Cc: Speaker Robert Rivas
Senate President Pro Tempore Mike McGuire
Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, Senate District 28 (ACSO)
Assemblymember Mark Gonzalez, Assembly District 54 (ACSO)
Senator Tom Umberg, Senate District 34 (Local 7)
Assemblymember Avelino Valencia, Assembly District 68 (Local 7)