October 29, 2020

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We strongly urge you to identify and reallocate $4.5 million to provide no-interest, forgivable loans to assist small music venues in the District that are in danger of closing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. When our city re-opens, these venues will be able to resume operations quickly and will be an important part of our economic recovery. If they do not survive their long closure period, it would be a tragic loss to the culture of our city and to our economy.

Music venues across our city have been devastated by the pandemic, and most live music performances are not expected to resume until the final phase of reopening. While we hope that the Phase Two Live Entertainment Pilot Program will stabilize our larger entertainment venues, it will not help the smaller venues that have been the lifeblood of our musical arts tradition for decades. These smaller venues simply do not have enough space to meet social distancing requirements and would lose more money by re-opening than they would by remaining closed.

Many of our music venues already have closed due to the financial strain from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Eighteenth Street Lounge, Sotto, Marvin, Twins Jazz, and U Street Music Hall. There is no question that more small venues will close soon if the city does not provide financial support to help them stay afloat. During these uncertain times, it is critical that we support our local music venues, which are an integral part of the cultural vibrancy and economy of our city. Many of these establishments have existed for decades and have supported a large portion of the District’s music industry while providing tax revenue for the city and jobs for waitstaff, bartenders, and kitchen and janitorial staff.

Federal stimulus funds are not available to provide financial relief and support for music venues right now. That is why cities like Austin, Texas and Nashville, Tennessee have prioritized providing support for music venues. The District must do the same.

It would be tragic for the District if the few small music venues we have left closed. Our deep
musical tradition has been threatened for years as redevelopment and steep rents have already taken too many of our music venues, like Bohemian Caverns, HR-57, and The Islander. We have the opportunity to preserve this important cultural tradition and economic stimulant.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Robert C. White, Jr.
Councilmember, At-Large

Elissa Silverman
Councilmember, At-Large

Charles Allen
Councilmember, Ward 6

Brooke Pinto
Councilmember, Ward 2

David Grosso
Councilmember, At-Large

Brianne K. Nadeau
Councilmember, Ward 1

Trayon White, Sr.
Councilmember, Ward 8

Cc: Kevin Donahue, Interim City Administrator
John Falciocchio, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
Shawn Townsend, Director, Mayor’s Office of Nightlife and Culture