September 18, 2023

The Honorable Paul W. Mark, Senate Chair

The Honorable Mindy Domb, House Chair

Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts & Cultural Development

Submitted via email:

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***Re: H. 3241/S. 530 An Act to preserve space for the creative economy***

Dear Chair Mark and Chair Domb:

On behalf of the Mass Cultural Council, I am pleased to offer testimony on a critical matter pending before your Committee, the preservation of spaces to host the work of members of our creative and cultural sector.

Two proposals, H. 3241 and S. 530, each offer a crucial step to a potential solution to an unsettling trend we have witnessed across the Commonwealth: artists and creative individuals losing access to their creative and rehearsal spaces due to higher rents and/or developer acquisition.

The Creative Space Preservation Act, proposed by MASSCreative and filed by Rep. Dan Cahill and Sen. Liz Miranda, is inspired by the Commonwealth’s successful conservation land and affordable housing preservation laws. The legislation establishes a defined property restriction for creative maker space and performance or exhibition space and authorizes municipalities to establish trust funds to hold assets and property for the creation and preservation of creative spaces.

Mass Cultural Council has become increasingly alarmed over recent years as stories of lost creative spaces are portrayed in the media. As the state arts agency we know communities from the Berkshires to Boston will lose their downtown vibrancy, creativity, and economic gains if creative spaces continue to disappear and individuals are forced to relocate to continue their creative practices. And while our capital grant program, the Cultural Facilities Fund, which we administer jointly with MassDevelopment makes great strides annually to ensure cultural facilities remain in a state of good repair, more investment is needed overall to ensure facilities and spaces are available for creative uses.

We applaud the Committee for holding space for this important conversation to take place. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is known nationwide as a leader in providing its citizens with the right to a clean environment and access to public open spaces through Article 97 land and enacting landmark legislation to preserve existing privately-owned affordable housing. These models may provide a path forward to ensure Massachusetts’ stock of creative spaces is affordable and accessible for our creative workforce.

Mass Cultural Council is deeply interested in this topic and is available to the Committee as a thought partner, should the panel wish to engage further in this matter.

Please do not hesitate to reach out at any time.

Sincerely,

Bethann Steiner

Senior Director of Public Affairs