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January 25, 2022

To: Sen. Michael Sirotkin, Chair, Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs

Sen. Alison Clarkson, Vice Chair

Sen. Becca Balint

Sen. Randy Brock

Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale

Dear Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs,

The Vermont Council on Rural Development first wants to thank you all for your hard work during this challenging time. As a facilitator and convener in Vermont communities, we are writing in support of the creative sector recovery allocation in S.202. We are excited to support this initiative to help to spur and sustain long-term economic and community vibrancy in cities and towns around the State.

Over the past several years, VCRD has had the opportunity, through our community facilitation and convening across the state, and through gathering input from thousands of Vermonters through the Vermont Proposition Initiative, to hear firsthand what communities are experiencing. We see communities grappling with how to attract newcomers and youth, how to increase community unity and connection, and how to boost economic vitality for the future. Many strategies can help to answer these challenges, but one way that we see communities capture interest, engagement, and investment time and again is through engaging local artists, performers, musicians, and entrepreneurs to bring music, events, and commerce to their downtown and village centers. Where communities have a strong creative economy we see revitalization, rehabilitation, community unity and participation, and public and private investment in the long term.

However, over the past couple of years, creative businesses and artists have faced unprecedented challenges. Cultural organizations that typically serve as anchor institutions and economic draws in our downtowns were often shuttered, and still in many cases are operating at limited capacity. Events that would typically draw crowds of hundreds or thousands to shop, dine, and stay in our downtowns and village centers have been postponed or severely limited. The artists, institutions, and organizations that serve as the critical backbone to these events and programs are struggling to bounce back, and we see the effect of that on other business sectors and our downtowns.

We see this creative sector recovery allocation as an innovative opportunity. An opportunity to help get these businesses and artists back on their feet today, but also an opportunity to advance and leverage this critical sector for the future vitality and strength of our communities. This Act is not just a recovery tool, but an economic and community development tool – to invest in

the individuals, businesses, and infrastructure needed for communities to realize a vision for a strong creative economy for their future.

We deeply appreciate the Committee's leadership on so much work to advance the vitality of our towns and cities. We encourage you to support the Vermont Creative Futures Act to ensure the ongoing recovery and strength of Vermont's creative sector as a critical tool for the future of our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Lowe", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian Lowe
Executive Director
Vermont Council on Rural Development