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July 6, 2020

Amarjot Sandhu, MPP, Chair
Julia Douglas, Clerk
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park, Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Re: Study of the recommendations relating to the *Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020* and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy

Dear Standing Committee Members:

On behalf of ACTRA Toronto, please accept the following comments regarding the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Culture and Heritage Sector, and more specifically on the film and television industry.

ACTRA Toronto represents 12,000 professional performers in Ontario. Our members work across the screen-based and recorded media industry including in film, television, digital media, videogames, animation, commercials and audiobooks. Diversity is our strength. Inclusion is our goal within the union and in the industry. We are proud founding members of FilmOntario and work closely with Ontario Creates and our industry partners to promote Ontario as a strong, stable and healthy environment for domestic and foreign productions.

In 2019, Ontario's film and television industry had a record-breaking year, generating \$2.16 billion in direct spending and creating almost 45,000 jobs. Before the pandemic hit, the industry was on its way to another record-breaking year. Unfortunately, since the economic shutdown, a large percentage of those 45,000 workers have been out of work, and industry estimates suggest that, as of June 30, at least \$713 million in direct spending will be lost for this year, with more losses to come if production is slow to get back to business.

Performers, the most precarious workers within the industry, were hard hit as the film and television industry shutdown. We welcomed the invitation to join Minister MacLeod's Advisory Committee and the opportunity to speak specifically to the challenges performers were facing and what would be required as the economy opened up again. We appreciated the support from the provincial government as we lobbied the federal government for expanded eligibility requirements for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the ability of workers to earn \$1000 in addition to CERB per month. This change allowed many artists to participate in on-line performances and provide welcome entertainment to people inside and outside of Canada who were isolated in their homes. The recent announcement by the federal government to extend CERB will be particularly helpful to performers. While we are confident that the industry will see a return to pre-COVID production volumes, we know this may take time. In the short-term, we expect to see smaller sets: fewer principal and background cast; fewer stunt and action scenes that traditionally would have required large numbers of performers.

As FilmOntario members, we would like to express support for their submission to this Committee. In particular, we would like the government to do the following:

1. Mitigate the risk of another economic shutdown by ensuring that all Ontario-based producers have access to a backstop for COVID-19 related insurance claims.
2. Provide support through the tax credits for the increased costs associated with mitigating the risk of COVID-19 on sets. Performers will be the most vulnerable on sets. We have worked closely with the Ministry of Labour's Section 21 Committee to develop return to work COVID-19 guidelines.

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The development of workplace policies, procedures and trained personnel to oversee and administer the protocols will help to reduce the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19. The support of the government through the tax credits will help ensure that productions can get back to work safely and communicate to domestic and service producers that the government is committed to promoting Ontario as not only a centre of stability but one of safety too.

3. Demonstrate Ontario's ongoing commitment to the economic strength of this sector by making sure the province has stable and effective tax credits, with expedited payment terms, less red tape, and certainty for companies who had to shut down productions in March.
4. Support domestic producers.
5. Provide access to training and other initiatives to lay the groundwork for a diverse and inclusive workforce that will ensure the industry returns on an even stronger footing.

In addition, ACTRA Toronto is working closely with Ontario Creates on the **Ready to Roll** campaign. This effort to promote Ontario and Ontario's workers is critical as we compete to attract business back to the province and ensure the confidence of the players across the industry. The government's support of this effort in the short term and consideration of enhanced incentives to engage local and diverse talent will further help to develop and support a performer base here in Ontario. Ontario can play anywhere in the world. It is possible to cast the world in Ontario too. Let's build and champion our own stars.

We would like to thank the government for the actions that have been taken to date to address the huge economic impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our industry and on the entire province. In particular, Minister MacLeod's dedication to reaching out to stakeholders, listening to our concerns, and holding regular Town Halls to keep the sector informed has been much appreciated.

The past few months have been challenging for the province as a whole as well as for the film and television industry. However, as a sector we are committed to getting back to work, safely, and creating jobs and investment for the province of Ontario.

Thank you very much for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,



Theresa Tova
President, ACTRA Toronto

cc: The Honourable Lisa MacLeod
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Minister.MacLeod@ontario.ca

The Honourable Rod Phillips
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