

Testimony before  
The Council of the District of Columbia,  
The Committee on Business, Consumer,  
and Regulatory Affairs

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B21-514, the "Made in DC Program  
Establishment Act of 2015"

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Good morning and thank you to the members of the Council of the District of Columbia, and the Committee on Business, Consumer, and Regulatory Affairs.

My name is Alex Zavistovich. I am the co-founder and Artistic Director of Molotov Theatre Group, a 501(c)(3) non-profit small theatre company incorporated in and performing in Washington, DC. Molotov focuses on education and the preservation of the historically significant French genre of The Theatre du Grand Guignol. We will be featured as a case study in a scholarly work to be released in 2017 by an international textbook publisher.

I support B21-514, the "Made in DC Program Establishment Act of 2015." A program to identify District-created products – and services – would raise the reputation of the District as a hub of artistic and creative excellence. Especially important is the proposed District-sponsored Innovation Studio Space and Marketplace, for low-cost access to studio space, gallery space and classrooms.

I would ask that theatre arts be included among the groups addressed by and benefiting from this proposed program.

### **An argument to include theatre arts for Innovation Studio Space**

There is not enough affordable performance space for DC's theatre community. That shortfall is detrimental to the growth of small theatre companies. Without some level access to facilities, small theatres cannot compete against their larger, more established counterparts. These same emerging enterprises then find themselves at a disadvantage for donations and grants.

Still, the District has a vibrant, growing theatre community. TheatreWashington tracks 97 professional companies in the DC metropolitan area. DC is the second largest theatre city in the United States on a per capita basis, following New York. With the exception of national tours, all of our theatre art is, undeniably, Made in DC.

### **Theatre contributes to employment, education and literacy**

The DC theatre community contributes substantively to employment, to education and to literacy. The District ranks above the national average for arts and heritage employment. *However*, employment opportunities are found most often with established arts organizations – precisely because smaller companies lack needed resources to grow.

DC deserves more opportunities for theatre graduates from our colleges and universities. Dwindling opportunities can be tied directly to insufficient venues where students – and faculty – can ply their trade. For example, Catholic

University of America has two separate theatre programs, but there are no off-campus professional theatre venues anywhere nearby.

The District is not alone in this capacity shortfall. For some cities, that has led to a flight of theatre entrepreneurs to other more hospitable locales. We risk that same fate; already many national theatre professionals recognize the District as a good place to be *from*.

Other cities have met the problem head-on, creating new venues and opportunities. In Baltimore, MD the Howard Street Incubator has emerged as a public-private partnership. In Philadelphia, PA, the Drake Hotel Ballroom is being converted to performance space in a collaborative leasing arrangement.

In our own back yard, Frederick, MD's East Street Arts Center has created 12,000 square feet of performance, rehearsal and classroom space, through the efforts of Landless Theatre Company, whose members all used to perform exclusively in Washington, DC.

### **Arts incubation is vital to metropolitan cultural development**

Molotov Theatre Group recognizes arts incubation's importance in cultural development. We have begun building awareness of the need for a theatre arts incubator in DC. This multiplex facility would house several companies, each producing shows in several theatres under one roof.

An incubator would take advantage of underutilized or vacant city property in a public-private partnership. Underutilized property returns nothing to the taxpayer, nor does it enhance the cultural landscape for its residents.

From a high-quality, affordable arts incubator, it's a very short arc to more urban revitalization. Food service, retail and tourism follow arts development, adding up to a thriving community.

As we work toward that goal, we applaud the "Made in DC Program Establishment Act of 2015" and the Innovation Studio Space and Marketplace provision.

When we look back on the benefits we will enjoy from this act in the coming years, I'll be proud to say that Molotov Theatre Group was "Made in DC" and, most importantly, "STAYED in DC."