



JEFF FRANK
Executive Artistic Director

Dear Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of First Stage, I extend my deepest gratitude for your continued support of the Marcus Performing Arts Center (MPAC) and the resident companies who call it home. As Executive Artistic Director of First Stage, I write to underscore the vital importance of our residency at MPAC and the profound impact it has on our ability to serve the youth and families of Milwaukee County and ensure the magic of live performance is accessible to all children in our community.

Founded at MPAC nearly 40 years ago, First Stage has grown to become one of the nation's most acclaimed theaters for young audiences and families. Our mission—to touch hearts, engage minds, and transform lives through professional theater productions, unparalleled Theater Academy training, and dynamic Theater in Education programs—is deeply rooted in accessibility, inclusion, and community engagement. The support and infrastructure provided by MPAC are essential to our success and sustainability.

Our residency at MPAC enables us to present professional productions that honor the young person's point of view, elevate diverse and underrepresented voices, and spark meaningful conversations. With over 70 world premiere productions to date, First Stage continues to be a national leader in creating innovative plays for family audiences. The unique nature of the Todd Wehr Theater offering nearly 500 seats while still providing an intimate experience for each audience member has been critical to our ability to provide deeply connected, transformational experiences for first time audience members and their families that keeps them coming back.

Through our Access for All initiative we are removing barriers for historically marginalized and underserved youth and families. In the 2024–2025 season alone, we served 9,641 individuals through Access for All, providing discounted tickets, sensory-friendly performances, and partnerships with local nonprofits. Nearly 300 families currently benefit from our Access for All Passport, which offers \$10 tickets to our entire season.

Additionally, we provide nearly 40,000 discounted tickets annually to students and teachers, with fees prorated based on the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. These efforts ensure that every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to experience the transformative power of live theater.

Our continued presence at MPAC is not merely a matter of logistics—it is a cornerstone of our identity and impact. Being a resident company allows us to maintain the high quality and accessibility of our programming, deepen our community partnerships, and fulfill our mission with integrity and purpose. We respectfully urge the Milwaukee County Board to continue its support of MPAC. MPAC truly is a community gathering space for all and we recognize the indispensable role it plays in the cultural and

MILWAUKEE YOUTH
ARTS CENTER



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educational fabric of our community. Your investment in MPAC is an investment in the dreams, voices, and futures of Milwaukee's youth.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the arts.

Warm regards,

MILWAUKEE YOUTH
ARTS CENTER



Timothy J. Matttke
Chief Executive Officer

September 2, 2025

Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Courthouse, Room 201
901 North 9th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Re: Support for Marcus Performing Arts Center's Proposed Five-Year Operating Agreement

Dear Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors,

As a longtime partner with and neighbor to both Milwaukee County and the Marcus Performing Arts Center (MPAC), MGIC is writing in support of the proposed five-year operating agreement between the County and MPAC.

MGIC has long been committed to supporting initiatives that strengthen downtown Milwaukee. Our corporate headquarters is based in the neighborhood, and we demonstrate our commitment to a thriving, vibrant, and well-maintained neighborhood through our financial and in-kind support of the activities and maintenance of Red Arrow Park and MPAC.

We see firsthand the tremendous value MPAC brings to our community and to the region. MPAC is not only a cultural jewel, but an important economic driver for the region. Its programming draws audiences from across Wisconsin and Northern Illinois, generating significant tax revenue for the County. For over 30 years, it has been the home of Broadway in Milwaukee—a major draw for those seeking cultural opportunities within the County.

We recognize the County's desire to reduce support for cultural institutions. We would highlight that MPAC has shown real progress toward long-term self-sufficiency, successfully growing both earned and contributed revenue, while it has received less County funding each year. In that spirit, we respectfully urge you to approve the proposed five-year operating agreement, which will allow MPAC to complete its transition to sustainability while continuing to deliver extraordinary economic, cultural, and community benefits for Milwaukee County and beyond.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim", is located below the "Sincerely," text.

September 2, 2025

Peggy Williams-Smith
President & CEO
VISIT Milwaukee
648 N Plankinton Ave
Ste 220
Milwaukee, WI 53203

Dear Supervisors,

As president and CEO of Visit Milwaukee, I am writing to express my strong support for the Marcus Performing Arts Center (MPAC) and to urge you to approve the proposed five-year operating agreement that will allow MPAC to transition successfully to self-sufficiency and assume ownership of its historic building and grounds.

For more than 50 years, Milwaukee County and MPAC have demonstrated the power of a successful public-private partnership. Thanks to joint investment from both partners, including more than \$13 million from the County in the past decade and more than \$16 million from MPAC, this institution is one of the few cultural facilities in our region without deferred maintenance. That stewardship has preserved Uihlein Hall, improved infrastructure, and enhanced the outdoor public grounds that are home to free community programming for residents and visitors alike.

MPAC is now charting an inspiring path forward. Since 2022, it has grown its base of donors more than twenty-fold, dramatically expanded Broadway programming, and welcomed more than 145,000 audience members in the 2024-25 season with a near sell-out of available tickets. These successes have reduced its operating deficit from nearly \$3 million in 2022 to a projected break-even by Fiscal Year 2026. This is a clear sign of financial resilience and operational discipline.

Equally important, MPAC generates nearly \$60 million in annual economic impact, including more than \$1.3 million in sales tax revenue, much of it from audiences outside Milwaukee County. In 2024, more than half of ticket buyers came from neighboring counties or even out of state. This reinforces MPAC's regional and statewide significance. The economic activity directly supports our hotels, restaurants, parking operations, and small businesses while helping to define Milwaukee's reputation as a premier arts and culture destination.

MPAC's mission also aligns with Milwaukee County's strategic priorities in racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring that its cultural and economic contributions strengthen the entire community.

Now is the time to secure this momentum. A five-year operating agreement will provide the stability required to complete MPAC's transition to self-sufficiency while continuing to deliver cultural, educational, and economic benefits for Milwaukee County residents.

On behalf of Visit Milwaukee and the hospitality and tourism community we represent, I urge you to approve this agreement. Doing so will ensure that the Marcus Performing Arts Center remains a critical cultural institution for our community for the next generation.

Thank you for your consideration and all you do each day for Milwaukee County and its future.

Sincerely,

Peggy Williams-Smith
President & CEO
Visit Milwaukee



International Alliance of
Theatrical Stage Employees
Local 18

1110 N. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, Suite 650
Milwaukee, WI 53203-1117
414.272.3540 P / 414.272.3592 F



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Members of the County Board of Supervisors,
Since opening in 1969, the Marcus Performing Arts Center has served as a centerpiece for arts and culture in the Milwaukee area. Through essentially the entire time it has been operating, there has been an active relationship with an organization that enables many of the activities which take place there to happen. That organization is the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, a trade union that is frequently referred to as IATSE. The Milwaukee Local of this union has supported the work at the Marcus Center, as well as many other venues in and around our area, for nearly 125 years. We provide hundreds of workers who deliver thousands of hours of skilled labor in support of the work and programming that takes place at the Marcus Center. We are part of this community, and recognize the importance of this facility and the value of the programming that we work to deliver.

With millions of patrons attending thousands of performances, the Center has proven itself to be a strong driver of enormous economic activity. Aside from the direct revenue to the facility, the performers and our workers, the activities here draw patrons from surrounding areas. This brings thousands of visitors that come here to enjoy not only the shows, but our hotels, restaurants and other amenities as well, all of which generate tax revenue, while creating and supporting jobs. This ecosystem requires support, and in the aftermath of some recent challenges, that support is currently uncertain.

Over the decades, the Marcus Center has evolved many times and adapted to changes large and small. Recently, there were a few significant challenges which have had impacts on the operations and finances of the spaces. The unforgettable pandemic we all endured demolished schedules, plans and revenue models for over a year. Around the same



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time, a long-time resident of the Center, namely the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, opened and moved to their own dedicated space. Both of these events had significant consequences, including enormous losses of projected revenue. Recovery has been challenging, but there are strong indications that the current models are bringing the Center into a place of self-sufficiency in the very near future.

Looking at the reach of the Marcus Center into the communities that it serves, the success of their programming has brought so many to participate in arts and other cultural programming in ways that the facility is uniquely equipped and qualified to do. Aside from the marquis performances such as Broadway shows, Florentine Opera and Milwaukee Ballet productions, the work there goes much deeper into serving the needs of youth through various access programs, and of course, the always innovative and important resident of the Todd Wehr Theater, Milwaukee's First Stage. Without these crucial pieces, the likelihood of many, if not most, of our area's youth having meaningful access to high quality arts performances becomes very low. We all can agree that these experiences are important components of a complete education, and to the extent we are able to, those experiences are worth supporting.

In addition to the value the Center delivers to our County with programming that serves our youth, there are also numerous activities that occur there which demonstrate our communities commitments to our shared values, and our diversity. These events hold special places in our communities, and include the annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Day, the incredible free concert series in the Peck Pavilion known as Rainbow Summer and numerous activities in support of our area's Veterans and other underserved communities and constituents. All of these activities belong here and deserve support while the Center establishes a viable path to financial independence. Without County support for a few more years, some of these programs stand to be discontinued, and the patrons of these events will stand to be excluded from important opportunities.

That journey along that path to independence is not complete and at this time, it seems plain that the Marcus Performing Arts Center deserves and



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requires a few more years of support from the long-running partnership with Milwaukee County that it has been operating under for all these years. It is our sincere wish to see that commitment solidified in the upcoming budget, and to support the work and mission of the Marcus Center in every way possible. The modest requirements of the facility presently call for a modest investment on the part of the County and its leadership to see this through to the next steps.

Thank you for your consideration of this ask, and for your willingness to consider supporting the crucial role the Marcus Performing Arts Center fills in our County and our communities.

Respectfully,

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 18