

The Go-Go Collective franksiriusmail@gmail.com
Don't Mute DC info@dontmutedc.com
Make Go-Go Forever Task Force simplybpresent@gmail.com

May 6, 2020

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE GO-GO COMMUNITY: LET OUR MUSIC LIVE

To: The Honorable Mayor Muriel Bowser

Chairman Phil Mendelson
Councilmember Charles Allen
Councilmember Anita Bonds
Councilmember Mary M. Cheh
Councilmember David Grasso
Councilmember Vince C. Gray
Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie
Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau
Councilmember Elissa Silverman
Councilmember Brandon T. Todd
Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.
Councilmember Trayon White, Sr.

Dear Mayor Bowser and Council of DC,

Just a few short months ago in February, we were all celebrating the new law Making Go-Go the Official Music of DC. Then COVID-19 dropped a bomb on our industry.

This letter is a request that you include in the FY2021 budget the resources to make this new law a reality and ensure our music survives the coronavirus. A report released on April 10th by Don't Mute DC's Charles C. Stephenson Jr. and Dr. Suzanne Goodnea Lea makes two recommendations:

- Create a **\$40 million endowment for the Go-Go Performing Arts** that would generate annual grants to preserve and protect our music and support education initiatives such as Teach the Beat for future generations of Washingtonians.
- Create a **“Go-Go Cohort” within the DC Arts and Humanities Commission (DCAHC)** that would receive 15 percent of all arts and humanities grants annually.

These recommendations are crucial to saving our music. They are also a matter of basic fairness and equity. In the past year, you unanimously passed two major pieces of cultural legislation: 1) Bill 23-0317 made Go-Go the Official Music of Washington, D.C. This law came with no budget or resources. 2) In May 2019, you passed another law that sets aside 28 percent of all public arts grant funding to a group called the National Capital Arts Cohort (NCAC). In this year's FY2020 budget alone, this entitlement was \$8 million.

The NCAC cohort is comprised of 20 D.C. organizations spanning the genres of ballet, visual art, architecture, dance, choral music, theatre and two Shakespeare organizations. To be a member of NCAC, the DC arts organization must have budgets of over \$1 million, and this

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group also successfully lobbied for federal funding in addition to their guaranteed money from DC taxpayers. This law means that NCAC arts organizations don't have to compete for public grants as we Go-Go artists and every other DC arts organizations must.

We understand that COVID-19 has made it challenging to honor your commitment to the arts in these two pieces of legislation. You must find the money to pay \$8 million for this new NCAC entitlement in this FY2020 year alone, and forever moving forward. We are simply asking: where is the equity for Go-Go?

Because Go-Go has never been part of DC arts funding, investing in a Go-Go endowment would allow our industry to catch up. If you make an investment now in establishing an endowment, the go-go community can live off the interest forever. In addition, establishing a 15-percent set-aside from the DCAHC, similar to the NCAC deal, will bring equity to go-go.

Despite these funding inequities, and with nearly zero public investments in the past four decades, we take pride in creating what no other city has: its very own music genre. Shakespeare was a genius, but he wasn't from here. Chuck Brown was both, and the new law making Go-Go the Official Music honors his legacy. But without making the same financial investments the city has made to other art forms, this honor is an empty symbolic exercise.

We deserve more than a celebration. We deserve equitable investment.

Let the music live in the hearts and souls of our DC natives, newcomers and visitors. We seek to engrave the sound of the city into every aspect of Washington D.C., reflecting this honored new status. Being the "Official Music of DC" means supporting policies that ensure that music is heard both in DC and around the world. These investments will provide a much-needed economic stimulus to our communities, as [recommended by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute COVID-19 budget recommendations to save Black businesses](#), and will pay the city back in future tourism revenues similar to other music cities such as Nashville, Austin and New Orleans.

The decisions you make in this budget and legislative cycle will determine whether all of our celebrations that happened on Feb. 19 were bitter or sweet. Please make them sweet. Support the recommendations of the Stephenson/Lea report.

Signed,

Anwan "Big G" Glover, **BACKYARD BAND**
Cherie Mitchell-Augur **BE'LA DONA**
Cam Poles **BLACK ALLEY**
Tom Goldfogle, manager **CHUCK BROWN BAND**
Gregory "Sugar Bear" Elliot **E.U.**
Maurice Shorter, **JUNKYARD BAND**
Stephon Raeford DeSales Woodland Sr., **PURE ELEGANCE**
Michelle Blackwell, **WHAT? Band**
Jody Poe, **NEW IMPRESSIONZ**
Jas. Funk, **RARE ESSENCE**
Christopher "Little Chris" Proctor **TOB BAND AND SHOW**
Elgin "Black Bo" Miller **TCB BAND**
"Big Tony" Fisher **TROUBLE FUNK**
Michael Bailey, **UCB**
Derrick Holmes, **VYBE BAND**