



February 23, 2022

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Topeka Civic Theatre & Academy, Inc. (TCTA) is a not-for-profit (501c3) organization that was founded in 1936. TCTA is the oldest continuously running community dinner theatre in the country. In July of 1999, TCTA completed construction on our home in the former Gage Elementary School. This was possible because of a \$6 million fundraising campaign and investment in our community.

TCTA strives to engage, inspire, and transform volunteers, audiences and our community through theatre with high artistic standards while keeping it affordable and accessible to everyone. We are committed to embodying the mission of Topeka Civic Theatre: ...to bring our diverse community together to learn about, experience, and celebrate the joys of live theatre.

TCTA operates three stages. Our Mainstage is our dinner theatre that seats 282 patrons and is home to entertainment including five plays, three musicals, and a dozen comedy improv performances. Our smaller theatre is home to all of our six youth productions - four youth performing for youth and two adults performing for youth. This theatre is also home of our youth and senior improv troupes and old-time radio players.

Since 2013 TCTA has kept theatre alive in beautiful Gage Park by managing Helen Hocker Theater for Shawnee County Parks + Recreation. Productions at HHT include youth and adult plays and musicals.

Passing the sales tax exemption for not-for-profit corporations operating a community theatre would benefit our community and Kansas. Our Academy operations teaches youth leadership, communication skills, and problem-solving skills to help prepare tomorrow's work force. In 1999 we officially added "Academy" to our name and launched a robust theatre education program. Theatre teaches youth leadership and communication skills, appreciation for the performing arts, independence and resilience. Theatre develops artistic expression, a willingness to step out of one's comfort zone and real-world problem-solving ability. Theatre promotes collaboration, community and commitment. TCTA offers year-round after school classes for youth from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. Our spring break week-long camp is for youth 6-18. Our summer camps at both TCTA and HHT are for ages 4-18; we offer three 3-week sessions at both locations. By passing this bill, TCTA would be able to put the money saved back into programming and help prepare more youth for tomorrow's work force.

TCTA strives to cover our operating costs with ticket sales and Academy tuition. Patrons and businesses assist with donations and sponsorships. Even though expenses continue to increase annually we have held our ticket prices flat since 2012, in an effort to make live theatre affordable to everyone in our community. Our staff and volunteers are constantly striving to do more with less. Maintaining high artistic standards and education offerings is a continual challenge.

Funds saved by not paying sales tax on tangible personal property purchased to produce productions, such as materials to build sets and costumes, stage lighting fixtures, microphones, etc. would be invested directly back in our programming and mission. These savings could be used for camp/class supplies, outreach programs to local schools, facility safety and improvement costs, staff and volunteer training and many more mission focused expenses.

Keeping those funds focused on our programming has a significant impact on our community for business development and attraction and retention of individuals and families. We regularly partner with our business community as a highlight for activities for individuals and families to do when they recruit. To have our community and state grow we need community theatres. We also support new business development. When Mars decided to build a new plant in Topeka, a tour of our theatre was part of the decision that led them to choose Topeka. Keeping money focused on programming will help attract people and businesses to our community and state.

As we explore our new post-Covid world, we know for the first time we are competing with new entertainment options. Our patrons can stay home and watch Broadway productions on platforms like Paramount Plus and others. To keep live theatre thriving we need to enhance the experiences we offer patrons and families. We are in the process of developing a new strategic plan and will need funds available to implement changes in our patron experiences and business model.

We respectfully request your serious consideration of this bill to provide sales tax exemption for not-for-profit corporations operating a community theatre.

Respectfully submitted,

Vickie Brokke  
President & CEO