

CITY OF AUSTIN BUDGET HEARING, AUGUST 18, 2016
RE. CITY FUNDING \$40,000 TO ZACH SCOTT THEATRE

Good evening, Mayor, Mayor Pro-Tem, and members of city Council. My name is Rachel Magee and I am the President of IATSE Local 205, the union that represents Austin's working stage professionals. I have been an Austin resident since 1998 and I have been working professionally in the theater industry since 1994. As a working professional, I have been fortunate enough to work almost exclusively, my entire career, for producing theaters and theater companies, like Zach Scott. For the last ten years, I have been privileged to work for Austin Opera as their Props Master, with whom we have a successful Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Although, my personal list of work experience does not include working at Zach Scott, through my engagement in Austin's theater community, I know many people in our industry who have worked at Zach, and more importantly, IATSE Local 205 represents many people who have previously worked at Zach, going back as far as 1984, right up to the last season. Therefore, I have heard first hand accounts of the wages and working conditions that theater professionals at Zach have experienced. Furthermore, I can advise this council that Zach is well known within Austin's theater community, and has been for a great many years, as a "revolving door". Meaning that for the most part, Zach attracts recent graduates and people who wish to move to Austin. These folks start work with promises of improvements to wages and conditions, and then after a year or two they leave. Typically, moving on to something better sometimes burnt out, but usually when they realize that the promises made are not going to be forthcoming and that their wages are not enough to sustain a family on.

For the first time, as far as I am aware, some of Zach's stage employees are starting to explore the options of organizing so that collectively they can speak up, together, to improve their situation. However, this has been met with strong opposition from Zach's management. In fact, I am seeing tactics being used that are straight out of a corporate anti-union play book. Literally, if you were to log onto You Tube and watch a big box store anti-union video, the rhetoric Zach management is currently using is almost identical.

As a labor leader and a member of the Austin community, you can see why I have to question the concept of awarding public money to a theater company creating such a hostile environment for the people that work there. However, as a life long theater worker, I am a firm believer that the arts enrich the fabric of any community and they need and have to be funded in order to survive. Indeed, the ability for Austin's artists to continue being able to afford to live in Austin is currently at the forefront of all of our minds, and to cut funding would only make this bad situation worse.

To conclude, IATSE Local 205 supports city funding for all arts organizations, but what we want to ensure is that public funding is not being used to undermine working people's ability to pursue a living wage and improvements in their working conditions.