January 3, 2014

The Honorable Rahm Emanuel
Mayor, City of Chicago
121 N. LaSalle Street, 4th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60602

RE: Protecting Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Chicago

Dear Mayor Emanuel,

On behalf of Arts Alliance Illinois and the thousands of artists and cultural organizations we serve and represent, we are writing to request an exemption to any proposed changes to Chicago’s Clean Indoor Air ordinance that will allow actors and performers to continue to use e-cigarettes on stage if smoking is essential to the script.

Chicago has earned a global reputation as one of the finest theatre cities in the world. On stage and behind the curtain, our theatre community employs thousands of Chicagoans and attracts talent, tourists, and investment to the city. In an era too often defined by shallow and superficial experiences, our theatre and performing arts empower us to celebrate our individual identities, while reminding us of the core values that unite us as a city.

In order to build upon this great legacy and keep Chicago on the cutting edge of culture, we should do all that we can to promote the artistic freedom of playwrights, actors, directors, and all people who collaborate in the theatre-making process. Smoke that lingers on stage is often an essential element to setting a mood, establishing a time period, and developing a character. Recognizing that smoking on stage should be considered protected speech, many progressive cities and 12 states have established exemptions allowing actors and performers to smoke onstage during a theatrical performance.

In response to the Chicago Clean Indoor Air Ordinance of 2008, electronic cigarettes have become a last-resort measure to maintain the authenticity of onstage smoking without exposing our theatres to fines and fees. Electronic prop cigarettes, which produce water vapor, maintain a layer of realism to theatrical productions without exposure to actual smoke, nicotine, or smell.

As Chicago considers adding e-cigarettes to the indoor smoking ban, we urge you to find a commonsense solution that protects public health without impairing artistic freedom and integrity.

Thank you for your strong and progressive leadership on cultural issues and your consideration of this request. If we can be of further reference or assistance to you in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Ra Joy at joy@artsalliance.org or via phone at (312) 855-3105 ext. 14.

Sincerely,

Ra Joy, Executive Director
Arts Alliance Illinois

Chair, Board of Directors
Arts Alliance Illinois

cc: Commissioner Michelle Boone, Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events
David McDermott, Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events Chief of Staff