

Testimony on Raised Bill #148
**AN ACT ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE PURCHASE OF
ARTWORK FOR STATE BUILDING PROJECTS**

The “1% for Art” program started 30+ years ago and was, at its inception, a make-work initiative designed primarily to benefit artists and the agencies and organizations that administer public funds on their behalf. The program has been controversial almost from the outset. Many people are uneasy with tax-payers being required to subsidize the production of art, believing this to be a private matter and that the spirit of unfettered creativity is compromised by government involvement. More importantly, much of the art produced in the 1% program is of an era and type that is unapologetically indifferent to public taste – being deliberately obscure and adding little or nothing to the environments it was plopped down on. Indeed, in one famous case, involving Richard Serra’s “Tilted Arc” – the employees of the Federal Court House in New York where it was installed, spent years petitioning for its removal.

Carl Andre’s “Stone Fields”, a conceptual art work (which the majority of passersby recognize only as a cluster of large boulders) adjacent to the Ancient Burying Ground in Hartford, exemplifies the broad public indifference, and occasional hostility, to much that has been produced under this tax-supported program.

While the public has never been polled to determine if people wish to be taxed to subsidize such work, evidence is overwhelming that the majority do not.

I write as a longtime curator and exhibition developer at Connecticut’s premiere art museum and as a former museum director who, in fact, enjoys much contemporary art and sculpture. I have visited the famous Storm King sculpture park near West Point, New York many times, rather like Carl Andres’ stone fields in Hartford, and maintain a paid membership at MassMoca.

But I understand and respect why some of this work invites ridicule and agree with critics who think this is not something hard working Americans should be taxed to support.

In the best of times this is a questionable use of public money. In these times it is an affront to calls for “shared sacrifice.” We need to restore balance to the notion of public good and must begin rolling back special privileges and entitlements everywhere we can without jeopardize public safety, compassion or our security. This is an excellent place to start.

I encourage you to adopt Sen. Doyle’s bill to terminate the 1% for Art program.

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