



Legislative Testimony

Senate Bill 97
State Funding of Art

March 5, 2020

Chairman Revak, and members of the Senate State Affairs Committee,

Alaska currently faces a very stark fiscal situation. With a \$1.5 billion deficit, it is crucial that legislators scrutinize budgets carefully to ensure that state funds are spent only on those items which are absolutely necessary for governance. Generally, those items fall within the categories of public safety, roads and K-12 education.

Alaska is a beautiful place, with inspiration for all manner of art surrounding us continually. I'm sure none of you on the committee contends that art is not good. Art is a wonderful form of communication, and reflects on our culture.

But in these difficult budgetary times, legislators must make fundamental choices about spending limited state funds. Art is not necessary for governance. Just like families have to eliminate non-essential spending during times of limited income, so must the state.

According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, only 26 states currently have "Percent for Art" programs; 24 states do not. As other things to consider, some of those state "Percent for Art" programs require less than Alaska's 1%, and in some of those states, the program is fully optional. One state enacted a temporary three-year moratorium on its program.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies also tracks state-by-state legislative arts appropriations. For fiscal year 2020, it ranks Alaska as 24th in the nation in per capita arts appropriations from the legislature.

In that same year, Alaska's state arts agency had the 4th highest per capita revenue in the country. Looking at total state arts agency revenue, if Alaska had eliminated its "Percent for Art" program in fiscal year 2020, our state arts agency would have still

been funded at #20 in the country, with total funding of more than half of the other states.

An Alaskan curator of public art told the media in 2018 that one of the benefits of the “Percent for Art” program is that it employs artists. Legislators should ask themselves if that is an appropriate role for state government funds.

Charitable giving by the private sector can fill the void left by eliminating the “Percent for Art” program. There is evidence of this: when the National Endowment for the Arts federal subsidy was cut by 40%, it saw its private support increase by 54%.

Per the report you have from Alaska’s Legislative Research Services, most expenditures from the “Percent for Art” program go to DEED for art in schools. That is funding which could instead hire K-12 art teachers and pay for the related supplies.

In this challenging budgetary environment, I encourage the legislature to direct state funds only for essential services. As much as we might all love art, it’s just not something we can afford to fund with public dollars right now.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

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