



Chairman Ben Barnes  
Vice Chairman Mark Chang  
Honorable Member of the House Appropriations Committee

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 961**

On behalf of Maryland Citizens for the Arts, I urge you to support HB 961, an important measure that upholds the rights of artists and ensures the preservation of public art commissioned by entities receiving state funding.

Public art plays a vital role in shaping Maryland’s cultural landscape, reflecting our communities’ diverse identities, histories, and aspirations. The investment made in these works—by artists, government agencies, and the public—is significant, and it is imperative that we protect both the artistic integrity of these works and the rights of the artists who create them.

HB 961 establishes clear protections by ensuring that artists are not forced to waive their rights under the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) or surrender their copyright protections as a condition of public commissions. Unfortunately, some commissioning entities have required artists to forfeit these fundamental rights, leading to instances where works are altered or removed in ways that distort their original intent and diminish their value. This is not only a disservice to the artists but also to the communities that rely on public art for cultural enrichment.

Maryland has long been a leader in supporting the arts. Since the passage of Baltimore City’s 1% for Art ordinance in 1964, public art programs across the state have flourished, contributing to our rich artistic heritage. As these programs expand, it is crucial that we also strengthen the legal framework that protects artists and their contributions.

By passing HB 961, the Maryland General Assembly will reaffirm its commitment to fostering a thriving public art ecosystem—one that respects the rights of artists and upholds the integrity of the artworks themselves. This bill ensures that public resources are used to commission art in a way that honors and preserves its intended meaning for generations to come.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of this legislation and thank you for your leadership in protecting Maryland’s vibrant arts community.

Sincerely,

Nicholas S Cohen,  
Executive Director, MCA

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