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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 21 – Abandoned Property in Possession of a Museum

Economic Matters - February 12, 2020

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 21 (HB21) would establish guidelines for when a museum may take ownership over property that has been abandoned within its collections. An item that has been on loan in a museum's collection for at least seven years without a predetermined date of expiration on the loan, would be considered abandoned. The museum would then be able to permanently take ownership of this property. Before taking ownership of the property that has been considered to be abandoned, the museum must first attempt to provide notice to the original owner.

Written Comments: Lack of statewide legislation on this matter leaves Maryland museums without a clear path to deal with old loans, anonymous and unsolicited donations, abandoned property, and the like. Although professional standards and guidelines exist, without the force of law, this process can be time-consuming and expensive, while still leaving some questions of ownership unresolved. Unclaimed loans, in particular, place a burden on a museum, as financial and physical resources are dedicated to caring for materials that the museum has no express rights to use or display. Even when no active conservation work is performed, such materials must still receive professional handling, storage, and research while in custody of the museum.

As the legislative arm of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, we represent the Jewish Museum of Maryland. Currently the Museum has a collection of over 12,000 objects which includes items that have been loaned to the museum. This proposed legislation lays out a clear, straightforward process should any of those loaned items become abandoned. This would free up more resources to carry out the museum's mission of sharing the story of the American Jewish experience in the city of Baltimore and throughout Maryland with the museums over 15,000 annual visitors, of which more than 3,500 are students.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report on HB21.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.