



Craig V. Hickman
Senator, District 14

THE MAINE SENATE
130th Legislature

3 State House Station
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Testimony of Senator Craig V. Hickman in Support of

LD 1566 Resolve, Directing the Department of Economic and Community Development To Create and Administer a Fund for Live Entertainment Venue, Performer and Worker and Public Art Recovery Grants

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

Good morning, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and distinguished colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. My name is Craig Hickman and I represent Senate District 14, 11 towns in Southern Kennebec County, in the Maine Senate. I ZOOM before you today as the lead cosponsor in support of **LD 1566, Resolve, Directing the Department of Economic and Community Development To Create and Administer a Fund for Live Entertainment Venue, Performer and Worker and Public Art Recovery Grants.**

For those that do not know, I am an actor, a playwright, singer and dancer, and literary performance artist and National Poetry Slam Champion, and I have served on a few non-profit art boards, including the Theater at Monmouth right her in my district. And so, today, with Chairs' and committee's indulgence, I'll perform a brief show don't tell:

Field Trip

Serenely sauntering into the Worcester Art Museum to expose a predominantly white, suburban audience to the intricacies of inner-city poetry, toting a big black bag, inconspicuously clad in everyday attire, I, nonetheless, was singled out by the security officer, rapidly approaching from behind the safety of his desk, as if to interrupt some impending disaster on his desperate journey toward me.

“Hey you! What’s the bag for?”

The air around me sputtered in search of retort, while my tongue lay hostage against a confused palette.

Labor and Housing Committee, Chair * Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

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As the approaching crowd began to smell the progression of fear, to caution, to his Robin-Hood rush to save a museum in distress, a thick, curious tension rushed in on a whirlwind, besieging the small crowd, now marveling at what might become an adventure Worcester hadn't seen in decades.

"I said, what's the bag for and what you got in it?"

Now, empowered by the women around me, I could stay silent no longer. "It's my purse. Just like hers, hers, and hers. And what's in it is none of your business!"

"Well, that's an awfully big purse!"

"And I'm an awfully big girl, now back off!"

Just what could his mind have conjured?

Perchance he thought I was going to swipe some art museum treasure, more priceless than a Van Gogh original, fold it up in, say, sixteen sections, secure it neatly in my bag, from which I'd just retrieved by compact Uzi, threatening to take out any man who dared stop me (subsequently raping his wife and children), and rush out past the front desk into a welcoming black night.

Or perchance he thought my bag was loaded with several pounds of coke, a hundred vials of crack, and all kinda dope I was eager to deal to a museum crowd desperate for a fix.

Or perchance he thought I was just some loose-cannon vandal, up to no good, armed with several cans of metallic mauve spray paint, or more likely, a big old watermelon, which I'd smash on the floor, scooping out large chunks to smear across the designs displayed on the walls of his big white castle on the hill, leaving behind my own art, my mark, a trail of little black seeds following me out the back door.

As I moved past this suspecting man, the strap of the bag biting into my shoulder, its contents pulling me down a bit closer to the earth I walk on, I realized the bag I carry around daily is weighted with memories, wishes, dreams and stories yet untold; is weighted with city streets, country roads, highways and rivers to places yet unseen; is weighted with groans, laughter, cries and screams yet unheard.

And deep down, somewhere near the bottom of that big black bag, my purse, there's a neighborhood, a small town, a city, a country, a world, where no person carries the fear to dare ask what's inside it.

I wrote that as part of the Boston poetry slam scene back in 1993.

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The spirit doesn't move through the ZOOM as it moves through a room, does it? Now, more than ever, we must invest in the arts, make whole those businesses, venues, and live performers, who bring us joy, who help us heal, who show and tell us who we are.

Let me close with a quote from novelist, poet, activist, James Baldwin. "Art has to be a kind of confession. . . . The effort, it seems to me, is: If you can examine and face your life, you can discover the terms with which you are connected to other lives, and they can discover, too, the terms with which they are connected to other people. This has happened to every one of us, I'm sure. You read something which you thought only happened to you, and you discovered it happened 100 years ago to Dostoevsky. This is a very great liberation for the suffering, struggling person, who always thinks he is alone. That's why art is important. Art would not be important if life were not important, and life is important."

And so as we go away this morning, let us go away with the knowledge that we came together to value Maine's creative economy, Maine's culture, and the spirits of our people through the live performing arts. I humbly encourage your unanimous vote on LD 1566 and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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