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Ontario Hansard – May 10, 2006 ACTRA's Lobby Day at Queen's Park

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): Lately there has been considerable attention paid to the revitalization of existing cultural landmarks like the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the construction of new venues like the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. These projects are being credited by some for awakening a cultural renaissance here in Ontario. While it's undeniable that these institutions will enrich the province, they can't do it alone. These stages, performance halls and galleries all rely on artists to bring them to life. For this cultural renaissance to be fully realized, measures to improve the working lives of artists need to be introduced. Artists contribute significantly to Ontario. Their work helps to enliven our communities, stimulate our intellectual lives and attract investment to the province that helps build economic growth.

Despite the ways that Ontario benefits from the work of its artists, this is not a reciprocal arrangement. Artists rank amongst the lowest-paid workers in Ontario. They're not afforded the minimum standards that protect the rest of the workforce. Many live in poverty.

Many artists are here today in the Legislature to advocate for the introduction of status-of-the-artist legislation that would provide them and their peers with protection in the workplace and more income security. Arts and culture play a critical role in helping Ontario flourish in so many ways. My hope is that this Legislature will assist them.

Ontario Hansard - 10-May2006 ASSISTANCE TO ARTISTS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): A question to the Premier. Before the election, you promised to produce a report on the status of the artist in Ontario within the first two years of your government. Your government is now into its third year, and no such report has been released and no legislation has been tabled on the status of the artist in Ontario. When are we going to see the report and the legislation that were promised?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Culture.

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): First of all, I want to say that I'm proud of the fact that we had a stand-alone platform on culture in which status-of-the-artist legislation was a commitment we made.

Since that time, we have had the advisory committee to the minister, which has been speaking to and is being advised by a number of individuals -- 4,000 people have responded. We are now in the process of taking all of those perspectives and are planning to move forward.

Today, I'm pleased that I met with a number of people from ACTRA, who are supporting our direction. We will be moving to legislation as soon as we can.

Mr. Hampton: After three years, no report and no legislation, the McGuinty government says this is moving fast.

The McGuinty government talks a lot about valuing culture, but in fact you're letting down the very artists and actors, the very women and men, who work so hard to create culture in Ontario. Some examples: Child actors working in Ontario have virtually no legislated protection on the job. Often their education suffers or, worse, their safety is put at risk when they're forced to

perform stunts. Also, under Ontario law, most artists and actors are classified as independent contractors. According to the Employment Standards Act, they are not protected by the minimum labour standards that protect the rest of the workforce. Older artists have virtually no income security and are left to live in poverty because government refuses to average their incomes.

My question again: After three years, when are we going to see the promised report and the promised legislation on the status of artists?

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: Not only have we been working for a very long time, trying to get this right, but we have accomplished a great deal when it comes to our cultural industry in this province.

I want to remind the member of some of the things we have done in our cultural industries. We have just provided \$49 million to support capital projects. We have provided \$23 million, because we believe we need to support and develop our media and creative clusters. We also know that we need to support our actors and try to help their quality of life and standard of living. We have every intention of doing so. We've made that commitment and ---

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