



June 30, 2023

The Honorable Marco Rubio
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Rubio,

Established in 1912, the Florida Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Florida) is a non-profit professional association representing the interests of and providing services to more than 4,000 architects and affiliated design professionals in our great state. We are writing to you today on behalf of AIA Florida and our members to express our deep concerns about federal legislation you recently introduced, S.1943, the “Beautifying Federal Civil Architecture Act”.

As we are you are aware, S. 1943 closely tracks an Executive Order (EO) issued by the outgoing Trump Administration on December 21, 2021, entitled “Promoting Beautiful Civic Architecture.” This EO was vehemently opposed by our organization, the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), and others. In fact, over 11,000 architects contacted the White House to register their opposition to the EO and federal mandates on what is appropriate for communities by federal authorities. The former Executive Order was subsequently revoked by President Biden in February 2021.

Our specific concerns with S. 1943 relate to the proposed legislation’s establishment of a “preferred” classical architectural design style for federal buildings and courthouses across America, and a “preferred and default” classical architectural design style for those in the District of Columbia. We support the GSA’s Design Excellence Program, which S. 1943 would nullify.

We are also very concerned about the proposed “President’s Council on Improving Civic Architecture” as outlined in the bill (and drafted by those who will benefit from these appointments). This would create a new bureaucratic agency (appointing many who have little to no expertise in building construction, design, safety, health, or welfare). This self-appointed group would then be tasked with making recommendations to the General Services Administration (GSA) on how to carry out the bill’s objective of ensuring that all federal buildings and courthouses in America adhere to the same classical design style.

Currently, the process for selecting the design style for federal buildings and courthouses is established by the Design Excellence Program at the GSA, which has been the envy of the world for many decades. This program is based on the Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture as disseminated by President John F. Kennedy in 1962. To mandate in federal law a preferred or default architectural style, whether it be the classical style or any other style, would be a radical departure from the Design Excellence Program at GSA and was specifically addressed in the Guiding Principles:

“2. The development of an official style must be avoided. Design must flow from the architectural profession to the Government, and not vice versa. The Government should be willing to pay some additional cost to avoid excessive uniformity in design of Federal buildings. Competitions for the design of

Federal buildings may be held where appropriate. The advice of distinguished architects ought to, as a rule, be sought prior to the award of important design contract.”

AIA Florida members agree that the “excellence” strived for within the Design Excellence Program’s policies and procedures depends on continued adherence to the Guiding Principles, including a style-neutral approach that focuses on community-centered decision making, peer review, and architectural (and design) skill. We do not believe it would be appropriate to impose a particular architectural style preference from the federal government onto communities, who do not want that style of building (where citizens have no say). It has been the tradition of the Design Excellence Program to consider the culture, geography, climate, and input of the people living in the communities where the project is built. We are concerned that S. 1943 would effectively gut that process and replace it with a process focused on one specific design style based on recommendations from a new federal commission in Washington, DC, from several who would benefit from this mandate.

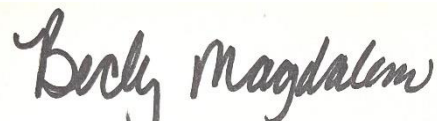
AIA Florida, as well as our national organization AIA, strongly supports S. 366, the Democracy in Design Act, bipartisan legislation supported by Sen. Van Hollen (D-MD), Sen. Braun (R-ID), and Sen. Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM). This legislation would require GSA to adhere to the Guiding Principles in the design selection process and to undertake rulemaking to establish in code that process. This would prohibit any federally mandated design style and protect the GSA’s Design Excellence Program in law.

We respectfully ask that you reconsider your position on this important policy issue and consider supporting the Democracy in Design Act and freedom of design and community input. We would be happy to meet with you and/or your staff during your next district work period to discuss our concerns and explore whether we can suggest alternative steps to address the concerns you have with the GSA’s current federal building selection process.

Sincerely,



Beverly Frank, AIA
President
AIA Florida



Becky Magdaleno, Hon. AIA, CAE
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AIA Florida