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CONTACT: Jas Chana, NCAC Communications Director
jas@ncac.org, 212-807-6222 ext.107

Free Speech, Artist Groups Condemn Decision to Remove Controversial Painting from Student Art Exhibition in U.S. Capitol

New York, NY, 1/19/2017- The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) and close to a dozen other organizations committed to defending free speech and the arts are condemning the decision of the Architect of the Capitol to remove a student painting displayed on Capitol Hill after it sparked controversy for its alleged anti-police message.

Last spring, David Pulphus, a St. Louis, MO high school student, was chosen as a winner in the annual Congressional Art Competition for an allegorical painting depicting a scene of protest against police violence. Together with the work of 400 other winners, Pulphus' painting was displayed in a public passageway leading to the U.S. Capitol building. The painting hung for six months before conservative media stirred controversy over its depiction of police. Republican lawmakers responded by removing the painting, without permission, from the passageway, which prompted Representative Lacy Clay (D-MO), whose district the student artist came from, to re-hang the painting each time it was removed. The Architect of the Capitol made the final decision, siding with Republican representatives who argued the painting broke the art competition's guidelines forbidding works that depict "subjects of contemporary political controversy..."

NCAC's statement strongly condemns the removal of Pulphus' painting, arguing that the art competition's vaguely worded guidelines are being abused by representatives whose goal is to silence a particular political viewpoint.

The statement, issued by NCAC, is co-signed by American Civil Liberties Union, American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia, American Society of Journalists and Authors, Authors Guild, College Art Association, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Free Speech Coalition, Index on Censorship, PEN America, Vera List Center for Art and Politics, Washington Area Lawyers for the Arts.

"At a time of nationwide concerns about the future of our free speech protections, this decision is deeply disturbing," said NCAC's Director of Programs Svetlana Mintcheva. "We urge the Architect of the Capitol to place the core national value of free speech over and above partisan strife."

[READ THE STATEMENT](#)

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The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is an alliance of 50 national non-profit organizations dedicated to defending freedom of thought, inquiry and expression.