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“Invest in Barnes where it is”, by Jim Gerlach

Gov. Rendell's proposal to spend \$25 million in taxpayer money to facilitate the move of the Barnes Foundation collection from its rightful home in Merion, Montgomery County, to the Ben Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia is a shortsighted and ill-advised decision.

This \$25 million would be enough to keep the Barnes Foundation solvent in Merion, making the move to Philadelphia unnecessary. This fact underscores the truth that the foundation board's decision to move the priceless collection of artwork was a poor one. The decision was based on false assumptions, questionable motives, and inaccurate financial projections. But using precious taxpayer dollars to facilitate this move is adding insult to injury. Using public money to purloin an invaluable treasure from Lower Merion would be a travesty of artistic, economic and legal justice.

Proponents of the move have employed substantial legal maneuvering to accomplish this task, but those efforts have not erased the most important and basic facts of the case.

Alfred Barnes, the man who assembled this wonderful collection of art at his marvelous home, was meticulously specific in detailing how he wanted his estate to be maintained after his death. Moving it to Philadelphia would literally destroy the trust Barnes put in place and make a mockery of his wishes and put an end to Pennsylvania's reputation as a place where estate and property rights are vigorously defended.

The argument that the Barnes Foundation will return to financial stability by moving to Philadelphia has not been satisfactorily proven. In fact, I believe such a move is more likely to bring about financial insolvency and a permanent demise of the Barnes Foundation collection, at least as intended by Dr. Barnes.

Many art critics decry the move as a blow to the aesthetics of the Barnes collection and its home. I am no art expert, but I am persuaded by these arguments. True, more people might experience the Barnes collection if it were to be moved to the Parkway, and Philadelphia's art-tourism industry may see a boost, at least temporarily. But to blatantly subvert the declared wishes of the man who built the collection for quick commercial gain is unjustifiable, particularly where the board failed to fully explore alternative approaches to financial stability at its current location. In short, what overriding public good is being served by moving this unique art and education institution a mere five miles east from Montgomery County to Philadelphia and spending \$25 million in public funding to do so?

The residents of Lower Merion want the Barnes to remain in its current home, Dr. Barnes' wishes were clear, and taxpayers want their money to be used for other public priorities closer to home, not for poaching an art collection and moving it to Philadelphia. The Barnes collection belongs in Merion, and \$25 million should be spent improving its home there.

U.S. Rep. **Jim Gerlach** represents the Sixth Congressional District, which includes parts of Berks, Lehigh, Chester and Montgomery Counties, including Lower Merion.