



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Benjamin

## State Senator Calls for Restoration of Iconic Harlem Mural and Immediate Removal of the Wall Obscuring It

BRIAN BENJAMIN

| ISSUE: **ARTS AND CULTURE**

(New York, New York) In response to Foot Locker's decision to wall off an iconic piece of public art celebrating Harlem's history and culture, New York State Senator Brian A. Benjamin is calling for the immediate removal of the wall and restoration of the mural.

The mosaic mural, titled "The Spirit of Harlem," was designed by artist Louis Delsarte in 2005, and, though tenants in the building that it adorns have come and gone in the meantime, it has survived the last 12 years on the corner of 125th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard. The mural features artists and musicians from Harlem's history, and its bright colors, bold and busy composition, and abstract background reflect the vitality of the Village of Harlem. That vitality is current obscured by a massive, blank wall of grey brick.

"I have been in touch with Foot Locker and I have made it clear to them that our community will not tolerate this disrespect. Their action has done more than cover up a piece of art that the community has appreciated for more than a decade, it has shown a lack of judgement on their part," said Senator Benjamin. "Everyone is welcome in Harlem, and I am glad that Foot Locker choose 125th Street as the location for their store, but you cannot simply move in and expect to share in Harlem's success if you ignore the decades of work, struggle, and commitment that have made the Village of Harlem what it is today."

“We need to make sure that we are preserving priceless works of art like Mr. Delsarte’s mural, and I will be exploring ways that the state can do so in the coming weeks. It is in the interest of the state to broaden public access to art, and to encourage a vibrant arts community,” said Benjamin. “In the meantime, to make sure that nothing stands in the way of the removal of this wall and restoration of the important artwork beneath it, I have reached out to the Department of Buildings to ensure that all the necessary permits can be granted as quickly as is possible.”

Earlier this year, Senator Benjamin was on the front lines of the fight to remove the disrespectful branding of South Harlem as “SoHa,” a similar situation where outside interests sought to benefit from Harlem’s success without respecting its history. Among his first bills in the New York State Senate were bills to block the re-branding of neighborhoods by business interests, and a bill to help devote state resources to preserving and land marking historic Harlem. The latter was signed by the Governor and is now law.

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## BACKGROUND

- S. 6616 - Neighborhood Integrity Act

*Establishes a formal process for renaming or re-designating a traditionally recognized neighborhood in the city of New York; provides penalties for real estate brokers and agents who advertise a property as part of, or located in, a designated neighborhood that is not traditionally recognized as such.*

- S. 6678 - Heights Heritage Act

*Helps devote state resources to protect and preserve Historic Harlem. Signed by the Governor on July 25, 2017.*

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## RELATED LEGISLATION

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## 2017-S6616

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
- - Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
- 

Relates to enacting the Neighborhood Integrity Act

June 07, 2017

In Senate Committee [Cities](#)

Sponsored by [Brian Benjamin](#)

Do you support this bill?

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## 2017-S6678

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- Introduced
  - - In Committee Assembly
    - In Committee Senate
  - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
    - On Floor Calendar Senate
  - - Passed Assembly
    - Passed Senate
  - Delivered to Governor
  - Signed By Governor
  -

Authorizes the formation of the Heights heritage area; repealer

June 12, 2017

Senate Floor Calendar

Sponsored by **Brian Benjamin**

Do you support this bill?