To The U.S. Copyright Office

I am writing to you today to express my thoughts and concerns about the proposed legislation regarding copyright protection for visual works. The proposed changes to the current copyright laws will affect my career and ability to earn a living from my art.

I've been an artist for as long as I can remember. As far back as early grade school, I wanted to be an artist and create picture books. I went to school for art, earning my BFA in painting with a minor in drawing, and am currently illustrating and writing for children. My first picture book came out in December of 2014. I've displayed my art in public in art shows in galleries, as a solo artist, and as a part of several groups. I've displayed my art online, in order to make my work known to art directors and companies to secure work using my artistic skills, and share what I'm working on with friends and family. I've contributed art to charitable causes many times as well. All of these things raise my profile as an artist and contribute to future projects, successes, and income.

If the proposed changes go through, there will be a possibility of the theft of my art for monetary gain for other people. This will not only make it harder for me to make a living and have a career as an artist, but it will also take the control away from me (the artist) of who does what with my art. This would always be a concern for me as an artist, but it's even more concerning as an artist who illustrates for children.

If the changes in the copyright law go through, an individual or company could decide to use my art for something that is not appropriate for children. This would likely mean that I could no longer create new artwork for children, thus ending my career and livelihood.

(The reason for this is that an artist's style, or visual language is recognizable. If that language is used for adult content, it is then associated with that and not appropriate for use in children's books and other materials. It is not realistic to think that an artist could just change their style if that happens. Learning to create art in a new style is similar to learning a new language. It would take years to become proficient in in this new style, while in the meantime you are unable to earn a living with your old style. And, there's no guarantee that publishers or companies would like your new style, meaning you might not be able get work with the new style or the old style.)

In my career as a children's book illustrator, I've seen that my art and the art of other illustrators gains value upon publication, whether in print or online. Work and visual style builds over the years. It's been my experience that the more times people see the art, see my name attached to it, and have a positive association with the art, the more likely they will be to hire me to illustrate a book, or purchase a book I illustrated (the same appears to be true for other artists as well, when you look at their career path). It took many years of building my art reputation and

showing my work to publishers before I got a contract to illustrate a picture book. This is not unusual. The more you can get your work in from of editors and art directors, the more likely they are to offer you a book contract. You'll never get a contract if they don't know you exist because your work is not out there. If the threat of copyright infringement grows greater, artists will have to weigh the threat of art theft vs. the possibility of new commissions and contracts.

Many artists, myself included, have already had one or more issues with art theft. It would be great if the laws would continue to protect artists, rather than sanction the use of our images without our consent or without compensation (consent must be paramount - compensation without consent is not fair to the artist, takes away their ability to choose who to sell the art to and for what price, and takes away their choice to not sell at all).

If my work becomes orphaned and/or used by others in ways that I would not choose (especially if it's not appropriate for children), it is likely people will no longer associate the work with my name, or could possibly have a negative association with it. This will affect my ability to find work and sell books.

Artwork gains value over time as an artist grows their career and has an inventory of art from which to draw on. Ideas build, including both visual and narrative ideas. I'm still getting inspiration from, and learning and improving on, art that I made decades ago. If these copyright changes go through, that visual language I've been building my whole life will be subject to the decisions and alterations of other people, and will limit my ability to grow as an artist and story teller. It will also cut off possibilities for revenue from those ideas and images.

The proposed changes to the copyright law will have a real and detrimental affect on artists. It will affect their careers, their ability to make a living, and their creativity. It will also affect our society because artists won't be free to create without the fear of someone stealing their ideas, and they won't feel free to share their ideas and creativity. This is especially important for artists who create for and share with children, as they are inspiring the next generation of artists.

Thank you for your consideration and for your help in keeping copyright laws that protect artists and their livelihood.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ruble
artist/illustrator/author
www.sruble.com