I am writing this letter out of concern for both those that I know who are working hard to make ends meet by producing visual art and myself. Many of my friends and artistic colleagues have spent years honing their techniques and perfecting their style in order to become marketable and profitable artists.

I am not yet making money on my art, but that only makes me more concerned for the state of copyright. I look at my artwork – at bettering my art and working towards becoming dependent upon it for my income – as an investment in an ongoing career, but I am practical and I understand that being a self-employed artist places the burden of protecting my future well-being in my hands.

Self-employed artists live in a world that exists outside of 401ks, IRAs, company provided health care, and end of year bonuses. Starting out, many of them will not make enough to breach the poverty line. The living that a comic book artist makes is an immediate thing, and it takes years to develop a style and then a volume of work that becomes profitable.

The ability to leverage the full profitability of copyright is essential to the well-being of artists. In a long-term fashion, copyright is the 401k of an artist, and any change to the way in which they interact with it and any infringement upon their ability to continue monetizing their own work should be seen as the same as tampering with the principal investment or limiting the dividends earned.

The job visual artists have set themselves is to make art. Part of this is to act as a business person and to seek clients to pay for their work. They labor to make a living in the complicated environment of print sales, the internet, conventions, and any other interface that provides their work to their clients and the public. While good faith use of art exists, there is an obvious issue with lack of proper compensation, especially in terms of group licensing of work. In attempting to rectify the ability to properly match artist to artwork, care must be taken not to penalize the artists with a burden of paperwork that would prevent the doing of their job – making art – or an ease of loss of the ownership of their creation.

Loss of rights in regard to copyright of work would equate to loss of income, and, as I work towards making a career in visual art, that is a serious consideration. I recognize that I have time and work to put into my craft, but that is a commitment that I have to choose over the relative security of my far more mainstream office job. The Notice of Inquiry regards visual arts as “having a broad impact on U.S. culture,” but without security of income and protection of my creations, this important work will become financially unfeasible.

- A. M. Bell