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April 12, 2024

Metropolitan's Clerk Office
The Honorable Austin Kyle
1 Public Square, Suite 205
Nashville, TN 37201

To Clerk Austin and to the Ethics Board members:

We are resubmitting our ethics complaint against Arts Commissioner Carol McCoy. During the April 4th recorded meeting of the Ethics Board, there was a lengthy discussion on whether or not Carol McCoy's racism constituted misconduct. White board members argued that racism as harmful language is merely that. Black attorneys and Councilmember Zulfat Suara argued against the notion that racist language is merely unkind words, but rather an impression to discrimination.

We, the undersigned artists and allies, agree with the Attorney Young, Attorney Grimes, and Councilmember Suara on their interpretation of what racism is. This undersigned group did not attend eight months of Arts Commission meetings, multiple committee meetings, two special sessions led by Councilmember Joy Styles and Councilmember Terry Vo, to tell you that our feelings were hurt by Carol McCoy. Where there is smoke, there is fire.

For this resubmission, we are submitting the following:

1. The March 8th original complaint
2. The email sent to the Ethics Board from Lydia Yousief on March 29th, 2024
3. Materials Referenced
4. Complaint Re-Submission: Proof of Misconduct in the Case against Carol McCoy of the Metro Arts Commission



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I. The March 8th Original Complaint

I, Lydia Yousief, and the undersigned community members are submitting this complaint for review by the Ethics Board. Pursuant of the Metropolitan Code of Laws 2.112.030, I and the undersigned are reporting the following Metropolitan Arts Commissioner:

Carol McCoy, appointed by Mayor John Cooper and approved by Metropolitan Council.

The basis of this complaint revolves around the alleged breaches of the following standards of conduct:

1. Interrupted Metro Arts Commission meetings and spoke to topics not set in the agenda/not made public twice;
2. Humiliated a Black Metro Arts staff member publicly;
3. Made openly racist and classist remarks and general disregard for the arts community.

Breaching the above standard of conduct violates the promotion of the study of, the participation in, and the appreciation of the arts.

I. Interrupted Metro Arts Commission meetings and spoke to topics not set in the agenda/not made public twice:

On November 16, 2023, during a Metro Arts Commission meeting, Commissioner Carol McCoy derailed a public meeting, interrupting the Public Works presentation, to form the Finance and Oversight Committee. This was not on the agenda, so the public was not prepared to comment on the creation of another Metro Arts Committee. She was seconded by Will Cheek and Jim Schmidt. This meeting is not recorded, but Lydia Yousief and Sangeetha Ekambaram were witnesses and attended the meeting in full.

On February 15, 2024, Commissioner McCoy again de-railed the meeting to discuss another topic and to vote on a decision not on the agenda and not given proper public notice. [This meeting is recorded and available online.](#) At 43:40, Director Daniel Singh asks Metro Legal if it's legal to bring in discussion on the memo Metro Legal sent without public notice; Lora Fox (representing Metro Legal) allows that first interruption on the basis that the memo was part of the director's report, which would be later in the agenda, so it was simply moved up in the agenda. From this opening to discuss the Metro Legal Memo, McCoy goes off a tangent on financial oversight. She brings up consultants like Dana Parsons and Justin Laing who are doing anti-racist work in Metro Arts. She offends Thrive recipients by suggesting there is no oversight for the administration of those funds (though Director Daniel Singh corrects her multiple times during past Commission meetings in October and November 2023). The meeting runs for another 2 hours without reaching any of the important agenda items like Public Works; the Commission does not make any decisions they were scheduled to make. Instead, all decisions were delayed, and McCoy motions to fire Dana Parsons and break that contract.

II. Humiliated a Black Metro Arts staff member publicly;

During the November 16, 2023 Metro Arts Commission meeting, Director Daniel Singh introduced three new staff members. Because this meeting was not recorded by Vivian Fox, the Operations staff person, I will detail it here:



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After derailing the meeting, (after already arriving late), McCoy asks about new staff present. Director Daniel Singh had already introduced them, but complied with introducing them again. He introduces the two new white staff members first and then he introduces the new Director of Finance of Metro Arts, a Black woman named Christiana Afotey. She is seated behind McCoy. McCoy turns around and aggressively remarks (while very close to Afotey): “You’re the director of Finance? What qualifications do you have?” Afotey responds that she had run her own small business and has several years in accounting experience. McCoy turns around, unsatisfied, without a thank you. Afotey gets up, visibly upset. She exits the room in tears.

Daryn Jackson, one of the new Metro Arts staff members at that meeting, asks for that racist confrontation to be added to the minutes.

Multiple committee meetings go by and McCoy does not make a statement. Commissioner Diana Perez, during the January 25, 2024 Commission meeting, made a public statement about Commissioner McCoy’s racism. That comment is available online at 1:25:00 of the recording.

On February 15, 2024, McCoy issued a terrible apology for her racist remarks. She says, “I was overzealous; therefore, I was rude,” and then quickly transitions the meeting. This apology was merely performative because she failed to recognize the deep-seated racist perspective of challenging the qualifications of a Black woman and not two white women. McCoy also failed to address that Afotey cried and that this confrontation brought her great distress and humiliation. McCoy, even in apologizing, could not center the victim of her racism.

III. Made openly racist and classist remarks and general disregard for the arts community

During the February 15, 2024 meeting, Carol McCoy implied that she had just learned how Thrive was arts funding for individuals and organizations (48:00), even though she’s been on the Commission since March 2023. She rattles on with other inaccurate information about Thrive funding in terms of amount awarded and recipients without correction. Finally, she culminates in saying: “I have been a member of many nonprofits. I don’t think I’ve ever been on a micro agency that has a budget of \$25,000. That is not even enough to pay one staff person, so it occurred to me that if you give money to a micro agency or to an individual, how do you do it in such a way it can be accounted for and properly used.”

Not only did McCoy confuse Thrive with general operating funds (micro organizations are a category within general operating grant funds), revealing that she does not understand how money is dispersed through Metro Arts, but she also is implying, even after Director Daniel Singh mentions reporting measures for Thrive recipients, that local artists misuse art funds. This is a classist statement because it ignores that the Frist, Symphony, and TPAC do not have to report how funds were spent and most of their funding from Metro Arts will go towards staffing (not artists or art-making). McCoy even says that micro organizations can’t be real on the basis that they don’t have staff. She has no idea what artists in this city go through. \$25,000 could be rent for a gallery that a curator is running on the weekends in Wedgewood Houston; \$25,000 could be a small production’s budget for a yearly show in North Nashville; \$25,000 could run a magazine. Yes, it often does not go towards staffing or paying even the artist for their labor, but implying that art-making requires staff and million-dollar budgets means she’s a Commissioner who is not connected to Nashvillians.

Even worse, during McCoy’s interview with the Rules Committee, she stated (as noted in the MHRC report published March 4, 2024):



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“I read a news article, and I couldn’t quite figure out what was going on. I know that the Executive Director either retired or was replaced so there’s a new person on board, and I don’t know who that is...I don’t think the focus of the Commission.”

“People who come in who just want to start a new venture. Their application is woefully poor, you wouldn’t award anyone that money until you thought it would be handled properly...The one I remember was the Chinese New Year’s festival, it was a little group of people getting together and I think they asked for \$5,000 but the grant was just so poorly written, maybe if they’d gone to the center for nonprofits they might have gotten some help.”

We ask this board to sanction Carol McCoy. Racism is intolerable; while there is no exact mention of anti-racism in Metro Code, this Board has the opportunity to place into precedence that repeatedly-racist, unapologetic commissioners/board members can be sanctioned. This would be a major step against white supremacy in Nashville; holding space on a Commission to serve the corporate interest over community investment, health, and wealth.

Respectfully submitted,

Alayna Anderson
Christine Hall
Lydia Yousief
Sangeetha Ekambaram



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II. The email sent to the Ethics Board on March 29th, 2024 (no edits)

Dear Ethics Board members:

I am very grateful that you all have taken the time to read through this complaint and requested access to the hyperlinks to see what we, artists and allies, have been going through for months with the Arts Commission since the deliberate defunding of BIPOC and working class artists in August of 2023.

I have read Metro Legal's response, and I wanted, before the April 4th meeting, to offer my opinion on this response as one of the complainants and also as someone who has watched both Cheek and McCoy on this Arts Commission for months.

From my understanding, the role of this Board is to consider "complaints that allege a violation of the standards of conduct by the Metropolitan Government elected official or member of a Metropolitan board or commission." Metro Legal quotes the INTENT of this board as "the **integrity** of the processes of local government be secured and protected from **abuse**. The general assembly recognizes that holding public office and public employment is a **public trust** and that citizens of Tennessee are entitled to an ethical, **accountable** and **incorruptible** government" (emphases my own). Metro Legal and I agree on this intent—that those in charge of public funds and programming should be held accountable, and that abuse of power and privilege leads to a corrupt government.

Now, we ideologically differ at Metro Legal's the definition of ethical standards. Because Metro Legal is a racist body, having pushed for (or was complicit in silence on) LPRs, a 7-day work week for the Farmers' Market, funding FUSUS, the Titans Stadium, the halving of the democratically-elected Council, the firing of Dr. Stephanie Kang and collapsing of the Health Department's Bureau of Health Equity, the defunding of BIPOC artists and the racist push against race-conscious decision-making, we, the complainants, of course would differ on what is unethical and what is ethical.

Metro Legal offered, in their report, this definition of breaking ethical standards: "disclosure of interests, financial improprieties, improper influence of officials, and acceptance of benefits by officials," and said definition does not include, in Metro Legal's definition, "operational aspects of governmental entities."

I fail to see why Metro Legal rejected racism, in particular, as an issue that breeds these issues listed above, namely improper influence of officials and disclosure of interests. Our argument in the complaint is that racists in charge of public funds will inevitably corrupt the government because their decision-making about where these funds should go will inevitably favor white individuals, and particularly white people they are in community with (i.e. rich white people), and that racism influences how they structure distributing funds and maintain barriers for BIPOC, like through the grants process at Metro Arts which historically was designed so



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that 88% of arts funds went to white people (before 2023). Hence, the corruption of the Arts Commission has led to five decades of financial impropriety: \$62 million dollars in public funds with 70% of those funds going to only 10 organizations since the 1970s. This is a gross misallocation of public funds, and even when challenged by the community and an equitable new director, Daniel Singh, McCoy and Cheek continue to divert funds away from Nashvillians, harming tens of thousands of community members.

As the MHRC report shows, we know Commissioner Cheek referenced speaking to the Nashville Opera, and that the Nashville Opera, along with other art monopolies, were preparing to sue the city if BIPOC artists received our funds in August 2023. We have community members who were on the boards and who were working at the art monopolies and left subsequently because of discussions of defunding BIPOC artists in those rooms. We can connect Commissioner Cheek directly to improper influence and collusion with the art monopolies. While he has resigned since then, we are calling on his direct sanctioning to never serve on another board again, so that accountability is made.

In the case of Carol McCoy, she has been more insidious in reworking the grants process, so that BIPOC and working class artists cannot receive funds directly or equitably. She continues to deny community members and Council members agency in determining how public funds are spent. Currently, McCoy is rolling back Daniel Singh's equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians—particularly those who are artists and don't have a grantwriting background, like so many of my own people who are contributing to Nashville's arts fund, but not seeing a dime in return. In the last Grants Committee meeting, community member Alayna Renae asked her directly if she had read the grants application; McCoy did not answer and instead launched into "how many emails she gets as a Commissioner" and "she's only a volunteer," yet she is actively working with the new grants manager and Metro Legal to erase direct funding for BIPOC artists. As McCoy said during yesterday's Commission meeting, "it's just not possible to give funds, no matter your background," and she sides with Metro Legal and Finance's decision to halt all grants for FY25. Councilmember Styles and the Minority Caucus already have notified the Commission, Mayor, Legal, Finance and the public that there is political will to fund the artists fully.

In the same way Will Cheek halted artists from getting funding FY24, so Carol McCoy will do to artists for FY25. And because she is denying us conversation and input into the process, the promises made by that Commission in December 2022 to give more funds to the small organizations and less to the large institutions (as outlined in the MHRC report) will not be fulfilled to the community. McCoy will maintain the status quo for white-led institutions, denying BIPOC artists and BIPOC-led organizations access to our money. This is corruption and misuse of tax funds.

In essence, what I am asking this board to do is to decide whether or not anti-racism is an ethical standard in Nashville. To imply that anti-racism is an ethical standard we value in Nashville is to ensure public funds are distributed evenly and without barriers. Currently, McCoy is rolling back Daniel Singh's equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians—particularly those who are artists and don't have a grantwriting background, like so many of my



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own people who are contributing to Nashville's arts fund, but not seeing a dime in return. I am asking this board to intervene—to be the village, to stop the abuse.

I would call on this Board to make a firm commitment that abuse of public office to work against community members, particularly BIPOC, will not be tolerated and sanction McCoy and Cheek and move the decision to Council. **If that decision is not possible at this time**, I would ask that this Board consider holding a public hearing. But at least, I ask that you all do not do nothing and dismiss. ***A dismissal of this complaint would be complicit in harming BIPOC and working class artists.***

As Nashville continues to be an unsafe city for BIPOC with Nazis marching on the street, I am calling on this body to protect the people and send a signal to every Metro department that racism is not tolerated and racism is unethical. In order for Nazis to feel comfortable marching on the streets openly, they know that they are protected and affirmed by higher orders. Do not protect or affirm white supremacy in government.

I will see you all on April 4th.

Peace,

Lydia Yousief

615-861-0251 (personal)



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III. Materials Reference

A. MHRC Report Links:

The MHRC Title VI report: [link here](#) (pdf)

MHRC report PRESENTATION (3/4/2024): [link here](#) (YouTube)

2:58...Public Comments begin

34:16...Summary of Report Presentation by Ashley Bachelder

1:17:36...Summary of Legal Memo to the Title VI Complaint by Attorney Mel Green

1:35:00...Conclusions by Ashley Bachelder***

1:37:39...Probable Cause Statement by Director Davie Tucker followed by discussion by the Commission for a Public Hearing

MHRC Legal Memo by Attorney Mel Green: [link here](#) (pdf)

MHRC report presentation powerpoint: [link here](#) (pdf)

B. Metro Arts Commission Meeting Links

August 17, 2023: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

January 25, 2024: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

53:44...Daniel Singh's executive report

1:21:20...Diana Perez's statement on equity + call for accountability

February 15, 2024: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

March 13, 2024: Grants Committee Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

50:19...Alayna Renae's question to McCoy

****Please note that there is no public record of the July 2023 Commission meeting, only an audio with Metro Arts and Metro Human Relations. There is also no recording of the November 2023 meeting.. There is also no recording of the August 2023 2-hour-long public comments.**

C. February 15, 2024 Commission Meeting Timestamps

39:25...McCoy says she was "overzealous" in humiliating Christiana Afotey (and mispronounces her name)

40:33...McCoy, Cheek, and West de-rail meeting to discuss Metro Legal's memo (not on agenda)

47:44...McCoy accuses local artists of not reporting and denies the existence of "micro organizations," not pertinent to Metro Legal's memo on HR + December 2023 audit, in order to halt Thrive grants for FY25

50:25...McCoy rails against anti-racist consultants who were chosen from multiple bids and lies that Director Singh was not in contact with the DEI office in Metro

51:29...Cheek comes back to Thrive applicants and challenges oversight (despite multiple years on the Commission and also multiple public conversations on this racist herring)

54:35...McCoy implies staff are not competent enough to review reports submitted by Thrive artists

55:55...McCoy asks about the community editing process for grants which was reviewed and approved by the Commission in December 2022

57:39...Nefflen, a new commissioner, also attacks standards of local artists' reportings and weaponizes his incompetence on Director Daniel Singh

59:00...McCoy claims "objectivity" is needed

1:00:02...McCoy says, "I thought this was going to be fun. I thought we were going to give funds to the community," while having defunded local artists months before and about to motion to fire the person in charge of grants for FY25

1:02:00...Metro Arts staff interject Dana Parsons as the one who worked with community to develop the application questions + reporting process



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- 1:04:35...McCoy says, “We may have no money to disperse,” which is unclear as to whether it was a threat to local artists that they will not get funds for FY24 (because of the Legal memo) or a threat to applicants for FY25
- 1:05:29...West also attacks equity as unsustainable for FY25 because “changes need to be made”
- 1:15:32...McCoy says, “Change can come about through our new grants manager,” and urges, in the middle of a grants cycle, for a new grant application and reporting mechanism for a 10-year old grant process
- 1:21:50...McCoy asks a question about moving budget lines revealing that she doesn’t know how Thrive works; white directors have moved grants money to consulting to pay for Thrive (as explained in MHRC)
- 1:23:39...McCoy moves on to “the director having a work relationship with Parks and Library” and accused Singh of not communicating
- 1:28:07...McCoy interrupts to says that this is the “first time” the Commission has “discussed” topics
- 1:38:24...MA staff redirects to MHRC complaint on agenda
- 1:40:09...Cheek supersedes democratic procedure and requests Thrive “be approved” by the Committee of Commissioners, says delay is “no fault of our own,” despite voting to defund organizations
- 1:41:18...McCoy interrupts and motions to terminate the contract of Dana Parsons
- 1:52:30...Nefflen is considered about an HR issue; Syndie Davis says she is capable of doing the job and will use Dana Parsons’ labor
- 1:55:40...Cheek seconds McCoy’s motion to terminate Dana Parsons’ contract
- 1:58:35...Cheek says grants need to be redone without community members’ input
- 2:04:10...MHRC Update by Director Davie Tucker
- 2:16:26...McCoy suggests Justin Laing’s anti-racist is unnecessary because Metro has a DEI office
- 2:25:08...McCoy asks for Andrea Blackman (whose name she forgot), the DEI Director under Finance, to be at the next meeting
- 2:35:32...Martin introduces cultural planning

D. Other Links

2023 Metro Arts Disparity Study:	link here
Information from MA website on Thrive:	link here
Arts Equity Nashville website:	link here
Daniel Singh’s Packet (Commission 1/25/2024):	link here
Kevin Crumbo Letter #1 (March 2024):	link here
MHRC Response to Crumbo Letter #1:	link here
Kevin Crumbo Letter #2 (April 2024):	link here

While there is an understanding that Ethics Board members are volunteers, all evidence and material presented here are to contextualize the harm that has been committed, the fortitude of the volunteers who have labored for months to collect and capture what is happening, and the gravity of our intent and call for McCoy’s removal. In other words, this is not about “feeling upset about what a Commissioner said,” but rather the very real consequences of misconduct and harm.



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IV. Complaint Re-Submission: Proof of Misconduct in the Case against Carol McCoy of the Metro Arts Commission

On April 4th, 2024, Ethics board members discussed whether or not racist language constituted misconduct. We are alleging that it does. **Metro Arts, since 1978, has given 70% of their funds to only 10 white-led organizations with budgets over \$500,000.** The Fisk Jubilee Singers have not been funded; Jefferson Street Sound Museum has not been funded. Thousands of Latinx and Arab artists have never been funded; very few Black artists have been funded to the point that a disparity study conducted in 2023 concluded that the inequity was incalculable because of the massive disparity. BIPOC artists had been funded even less than 1% of the arts budget. For years, community members have fought for equity in distributing the little money Metro Arts has. To learn more about this history, you can watch Arts Equity Nashville's Teach-In (38 minutes).

After decades of pushing for equity, several BIPOC staff losing their jobs, a politically-aligned Metro Council ready to fund the arts, a new grants process for Thrive (created in 2014), and finally a new director with an equitable vision, we are alleging that Carol McCoy, as Arts Commissioner, discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023, **and** we are alleging that even with the same political will from Council, Metro Arts Director Daniel Singh, and the community of artists for equity, Carol McCoy still led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for FY25.

We are filing this with the Ethics Board because it is important to remove Carol McCoy as soon as possible because of the pattern of discrimination against BIPOC and working class artists.

We ask the Ethics Board to consider these specific Standards of Conduct when assessing the actions of Arts Commissioner Carol McCoy. The explanation that follows details how Commissioner McCoy is influenced by specific interests and parties (violating standards J and K) while serving as a voting member of the Arts Commission.

Standard J: Shall not participate in making or influencing any metropolitan government decision or action in which they know that they have any material financial interest distinguishable from that of the public generally or from that of other metropolitan officers or employees generally.

Standard K: Shall not give reasonable basis for their conduct for the impression that any person can improperly influence, or unduly enjoy their favor in, the performance of their official duties, or that they are unduly affected by the kinship, rank, position, or influence of any person.

- 1. Carol McCoy, as Arts Commissioner, discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023, despite the vocalized wishes of the community, Metro Council, and the Director**

The MHRC report breaks down the August 17, 2023 vote. The MHRC report and the legal memo allege intentional discrimination. It is important to note that before the August 17th vote, Councilmember Delishia Porterfield attended public comments and stated clearly the intent for the \$2 million was for BIPOC and



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working class artists; to vote to defund local artists would be against Metro Council's budget and the stated intent. During that August meeting also, after two hours of public comments from majority BIPOC artists, both Commission Chair Matia Powell and Director Daniel Singh clearly noted on the record that to vote against funding Thrive was inequitable and against the will of Metro Council.

Carol McCoy, in the same way a commissioner with a conflict of interest would, voted against equity and chose Scenario 4, which would add to the funding of white-led organizations with budgets larger than \$5 million. Moreover, McCoy is a board member at Humanities Tennessee. Humanities Tennessee receives funding from Metro Arts. The last General Operating grant they received in the FY24 grant cycle was \$124,600.

In her interview with MHR staff in December 2023, McCoy continued to suggest she was merely listening to discussions from the "public" to inform her "unbiased" decision. Specifically, in the interview, she says, "I was just listening to what the public people had to say. I didn't know what they were talking about," and she repeats, "In June there were different organizations during the public comment time. I did not engage with them. I didn't engage with the board members. I was listening, and I was still concerned about not understanding what was going on." But it's clear, from that same interview, that McCoy was not merely listening. She was speaking to multi-million dollar organizations: "I remember asking two of those people what organization are you with, and one said Nashville Opera and the other the TN Rep Theater. This was in May. They were having to plan their budgets, and they were told this is what would happen." She also only listened to white Commissioners (not the Black Commissioners who argued against former Commissioner Marianne Byrd's 4-page speech about "making promises [to white-led institutions] to guarantee them funding every year). As McCoy says in her interview: "And, she [Marianne Byrd] said, I think we gave our word, and we have to keep our word." Her deliberate racism to exclude Black artists and artists of color from dialogue—even suggesting she didn't know who they were in public comments for June and July as they advocated for equitable funding—and her deliberate erasure of Black Commissioners' commentary and a director of color prove that her racism is interlocked with her misconduct to defund BIPOC communities. Even when there was enough money for everyone to get something, the political will from Metro Council, an equitable director, dozens of BIPOC artists who approached the Commissioners during public comment to vote for Scenario 4, McCoy voted against the people, the democratically-elected body, and fellow Commissioners and director. Therefore, even in a perfect scenario with a large funding pot and multiple vetted artists' applications and high community engagement, Carol McCoy's actions show how racism reveals misconduct, and racists cannot and will not equitably distribute tax funds.

Moreover, Carol McCoy, unlike other white commissioners, cannot say that Metro Legal had intimidated them during the closed meeting in August 2023 before the Commission meeting (which was illegal because there was no threat of a lawsuit) because McCoy voted to abstain in July 2023 for the initial full-funding of Thrive vote. She did not fully "flip" her vote from AYE to NAY. She claims it was because she lacked information, but Director Daniel Singh, before the July and August vote, called each of the Commissioners individually to answer all their questions to prepare for public discussion.

2. Carol McCoy still led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for FY25



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This accusation is not illuminated in the MHRC report, which focuses exclusively on investigating the August 2023 vote.

Carol McCoy's racist and classist views create a bias to defund Thrive—the current most equitable grants process for BIPOC and working class artists—in order to fund white institutions. Thrive was created in 2014 to provide direct funds to artists, as is done in most cities. Direct funds do not require an artist to partner with an institution like the Frist or Opera, nor do they require the artist to have access to their own building. Thrive applications, before Daniel Singh's leadership, funded majority white artists, so from 2014-2023, none of the white Commissioners had an issue with Thrive—not in its reporting, nor its application, nor in who was receiving.

Daniel Singh, in 2023, after multiple engagements with diverse community artists and organizations, reworked the application and reporting to streamline it for artists who are not grantwriters to ensure equitable access to funds. All this information is available [online](#).

Carol McCoy attacks Thrive artists as “not real artists” because “there is no objective reporting” beyond if the project was completed. She pushes for changing the grants process in the middle of the grants process, and her logic is that “increased funding won't be secured,” as it was in April 2023, so the status quo must come back in funding white institutions. In McCoy's one hour rant, the issue with Metro Arts is not decades of inequity; the issue is equitable distribution. To bolster her argument to defund local artists for a second year, she uses several white supremacist tactics:

1. Thrive is a very complicated budget process. It's not “good governance.”
2. BIPOC need to be policied if funded; “they don't know what to do with the money.”
3. The community should not be engaged; Commissioners should only listen to “the law” as interpreted and enforced by Metro Legal.

All of these arguments were used when integrating public schools in the 1960s. White people will always find a reason equity is inconvenient and why BIPOC cannot be equal citizens.

What's troubling in the case of McCoy is that she actively is fighting to defund BIPOC Nashvillians and is using racism—about our abilities to spend money, about our artistic abilities, about “how the law is set up”—to do so.

In firing Dana Parsons on February 15, 2024, Syndie Davis, the newly-hired grants manager, was left without any training on how the grants process works at Metro Arts. Davis reassured the Commission in February that she was capable of the job and had access to Dana Parsons' proprietary documents on equitable grantmaking. She goes so far as to tell the Commission that there is enough time to redevelop the grants process while undergoing the grants, and so Commissioners voted to terminate Parsons' contract. Davis attended a [Grants Committee meeting on March 13th, 2024](#) with Commissioners Jester, Wade, and McCoy, and Davis was unable to answer any of the community members' concerns about whether or not Thrive would be funded for FY25. McCoy, during that meeting, also told Alayna Renae that she has never read the Thrive application that the community made under Daniel Singh's leadership and approved by the Commission in December 2022. McCoy said it's because she gets a lot of emails. Despite being on the Grants Committee, McCoy admitted to never reading through the application with the most diverse and equitable



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application pool. This complete dismissal of BIPOC and working class artists, again, shows that she is not interested in engaging community members, but rather serves on this board to meet the interests of the few. Again, McCoy heard from three local artists—all three of whom also participated in the grants editing process in November 2022. Artists spoke about the importance of the community's edits and how impactful Thrive is. She ignored the artists, and during the March Commission meeting (starting around 52 minutes in the middle of Commissioner Watts' Oversight Committee updates), she rehashed the same racist lines to derail the meeting and push to get rid of the BIPOC director of color.

This chaos that McCoy created led Director of Finance Kevin Crumbo to recommend on March 22nd, 2024 that Metro Arts halt grantmaking for FY25 ([letter available here](#)).

There are concrete consequences to removing McCoy:

1. Ending the derailment of every commission meeting to attack Daniel Singh and scapegoat him for the intentional discrimination of defunding BIPOC artists in August 2023 instead of holding accountability for how this Commission voted;
2. Signaling to other boards and commissions that racism is intolerable and the law does not protect racists;
3. Making the Grants Committee functional and equity-centered; and
4. Reviving the FY25 grants process, so that artists are not discriminated against a second time, opening a second lawsuit on the city.

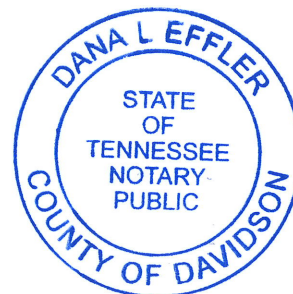
The community is unable to subpoena her bank account or do a thorough background search into her disclosed and undisclosed relationships. Please consider that we are not lawyers and, also, we are doing all this—attending monthly Commission meetings, multiple Committee meetings, gathering information and informing the public on the defunding—all for free and in our spare time. We are doing this because dozens and dozens of artists have been harmed for decades, and systemic change is necessary and overdue.

As this Board heard Metro Legal say, there is no entity within Metro government that handles accusations of racism and discrimination when it comes to Boards and Commissions. That is by design. And just as it is by design, it is also within our ability to redesign. We ask that this Board not legalize harm. It's not enough to personally call it out. There must be systemic mechanisms and consequences in order for the integrity of the government to remain intact.

Respectfully submitted,

Alayna Anderson
Christine Hall
Lydia Yousief
Sangeetha Ekambaram

Lydia Yousief



Dana Effler
exp. 10/04/2027



To view this digital complaint and to access the hyperlinks, use this QR code.



METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

FREDDIE O'CONNELL
MAYOR

WALLACE W. DIETZ
DIRECTOR OF LAW

DEPARTMENT OF LAW
METROPOLITAN COURTHOUSE, SUITE 108
P.O. BOX 196300
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37219-6300
(615) 862-6341 • (615) 862-6352 FAX

TO: MEMBERS, BOARD OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

FROM: TOM CROSS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF LAW
COURTNEY MOHAN, ASSOCIATE METROPOLITAN ATTORNEY

RE: DEPARTMENT OF LAW REPORT – AMENDED ETHICS
COMPLAINT OF LYDIA YOUSIEF AGAINST ARTS COMMISSION
MEMBER CAROL MCCOY

DATE: APRIL 23, 2024

I. BACKGROUND AND RECOMMENDATION

On March 8, 2024, Lydia Yousief (“Complainant”) filed an ethics complaint against Carol McCoy, a member of the Metropolitan Arts Commission. The complaint alleges that Ms. McCoy discussed and voted on matters not on the Arts Commission agendas, publicly humiliated a Black female Arts Commission employee by questioning her qualifications, and made racist and classist remarks concerning certain members of the arts community. At the Board of Ethical Conduct (“the Board”) meeting on April 4, 2024, the Board unanimously voted to dismiss with prejudice the allegations related to violations of the Open Meetings Act and to dismiss without prejudice the remaining allegations.

On April 12, 2024, Complainant¹ filed an amended ethics complaint against Ms. McCoy.² The amended complaint restates the allegations from the March 8th complaint

¹ The Amended Complaint states that it was submitted by Alayna Anderson, Christine Hall, Lydia Yousief, and Sangeetha Ekambaram. However, only Lydia Yousief signed the Amended Complaint. Because Metropolitan Code § 2.222.040(C)(1)(b) requires that a complaint “be signed by the complainant and notarized,” only Lydia Yousief is considered a complainant.

² The signed and notarized April 12, 2024 amended complaint of Lydia Yousief is attached as Exhibit A.

and lists two new allegations that are asserted to constitute violations of Metropolitan Code §§ 2.222.020(j) and (k).³

It is the opinion of the Department of Law that the amended complaint alleges sufficient facts that if true could support a finding that a violation of the Standard of Conduct set forth in Metropolitan Code § 2.222.020(k) occurred. The Department of Law recommends that a hearing be conducted on this claim only and that the remaining claims set forth in the amended complaint be dismissed.

II. DUTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LAW

The Department of Law is required to evaluate the complaint and issue a report evaluating whether the facts alleged in the complaint, if true, could support a finding that a violation of the Standards of Conduct has occurred and recommending either that specific claims be dismissed or that the Board conduct a hearing.⁴

III. ALLEGATIONS IN THE AMENDED COMPLAINT

The amended complaint asserts that Ms. McCoy violated the standards of conduct set forth in Metropolitan Code §§ 2.222.020(j) and 2.222.020(k). New allegations not included in the March 8th complaint include that Ms. McCoy “discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023” and “led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for [fiscal year 2025]”. In support of these allegations, the amended complaint states the following:

- Ms. McCoy “is rolling back Daniel Singh’s equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians;”
- Ms. McCoy has racist and classist biases that led her to defund Thrive in order to provide more funding for white-led institutions;
- Ms. McCoy referred to Thrive artists as “not real artists;”
- Ms. McCoy stated the lack of staff indicated that micro organizations are not “real;”

³ For purposes of accessing links embedded therein, the unsigned amended complaint of Lydia Yousief is attached as Exhibit B.

⁴ Metropolitan Code § 2.222.040(C)(1)(e).

- Ms. McCoy questioned “if you give money to a micro agency or to an individual, how do you do it in such a way it can be accounted for and properly used;”
- Larger organizations, such as the Frist Art Museum, the Nashville Symphony, or the Tennessee Performing Arts Center, do not have to report how their grant funds are expended;
- Ms. McCoy engaged more with individuals associated with larger organizations such as the Nashville Opera and the Nashville Repertory Theatre in May 2023 than BIPOC artists;
- Prior to the vote about funding at the August 17, 2023 Arts Commission meeting, Councilmember Delisha Porterfield addressed the commission and stated the intent for the \$2 million in funding was to fund BIPOC and working class artists;
- Ms. McCoy listened only to white commissioners during discussions surrounding the funding vote;
- Ms. McCoy voted for scenario 4 which increased funding “of white-led organizations with budgets larger than \$5 million;”
- Ms. McCoy motioned for and voted in favor of terminating the contract for Dana Parsons at the February 15, 2024 Arts Commission meeting; and
- Ms. McCoy had not reviewed the application for Thrive funding, which has the most diverse applicant pool of the Arts funding opportunities, as of the March committee meeting.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLAINT

The Metropolitan Standards of Conduct were enacted in response to state legislation mandating that local governmental entities adopt ethical standards for all officials and employees of such entities.⁵ The intent of the legislature is reflected in Tenn. Code. Ann. § 8-17-101 as follows:

It is the intent of the general assembly that the integrity of the processes of local government be secured and protected from abuse. The general assembly recognizes that holding public office and public employment is a public trust and that citizens of Tennessee are entitled to an ethical, accountable and incorruptible government.

⁵ See Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-17-103.

The term “ethical standards” is defined in the state enabling statute and expressly excludes procedures related to operational aspects of governmental entities:

“Ethical standards” includes rules and regulations regarding limits on, and/or reasonable and systematic disclosure of, gifts or other things of value received by officials and employees that impact or appear to impact their discretion, and shall include rules and regulations regarding reasonable and systematic disclosure by officials and employees of their personal interests that impact or appear to impact their discretion. The term “ethical standards” does not include personnel or employment policies or policies or procedures related to operational aspects of governmental entities;....⁶ (Emphasis added.)

The Standards of Conduct, when read in conjunction with the state law requiring the adoption of ethical standards, are intended to protect and secure the processes of local government from corruption. The state enabling legislation and the Standards of Conduct are aimed at disclosure of interests, financial improprieties, improper influence of officials, and acceptance of benefits by officials.

A. Violation of the Open Meetings Act

At the Board’s meeting on April 4, 2024, the Board dismissed with prejudice the allegation that Ms. McCoy violated the Open Meetings Act. While the amended complaint incorporates the original complaint, which includes the allegations related to the Open Meetings Act, those allegations have been dismissed and cannot be reasserted.

B. Public humiliation of a Black Metro Arts employee

The amended complaint did not include any additional facts related to the allegation that Ms. McCoy publicly humiliated a Black Metro Arts employee. The Department of Law refers to its report issued on March 27, 2024, addressing the original complaint. For the reasons listed in that report, the amended complaint fails to allege facts that if true could constitute a violation of the Standards of Conduct.

⁶ Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-17-102(a)(3).

C. Violation of Metropolitan Code Section 2.222.020(j)

Metropolitan Code Section 2.222.020(k) states that employees “[s]hall not participate in making or influencing any metropolitan governmental decision or action in which they know that they have any material financial interest distinguishable from that of the public generally or from that of other metropolitan officers or employees generally.” “Material” is defined as “something that a reasonable person would consider important in assessing or determining how to act in a matter.”⁷

The amended complaint does not allege facts that could support a conclusion that Ms. McCoy has “any material financial interest” in any decisions she participated in as a member of the Arts Commission. The amended complaint states that Ms. McCoy is a board member for Humanities Tennessee, a midsize organization that received funding from Metro Arts. No facts are alleged in the amended complaint, however, indicating that Ms. McCoy receives money or compensation in any form through her work with Humanities Tennessee.

There are insufficient facts alleged in the amended complaint that, if true, would support a conclusion that Ms. McCoy has a material financial interest in any vote she participated in as a commissioner. The facts alleged therefore cannot support a finding that Ms. McCoy violated Metropolitan Code § 2.222.020(j).

D. Violation of Metropolitan Code Section 2.222.020(k)

Metropolitan Code Section 2.222.020(k) states that employees “[s]hall not give reasonable basis by their conduct for the impression that any person can improperly influence, or *unduly enjoy their favor in*, the performance of their official duties, or that they are unduly affected by the kinship, rank, position or influence of any person” (emphasis added). The amended complaint can be broadly read to allege that Ms. McCoy violated this Standard of Conduct by giving the impression through her conduct as a commissioner that large arts organizations were unduly entitled to favorable treatment and public support at the expense of smaller ones.

In support of this allegation, the amended complaint alleges that Ms. McCoy questioned the validity of Thrive artists and micro-organizations and their ability to manage funds while not questioning the fund-management practices of larger organizations. The amended complaint alleges that Ms. McCoy engaged more with individuals from larger

⁷ Metropolitan Code § 2.222.010(7).

organizations than individual artists in the time leading up to the August 2023 vote and that she otherwise demonstrated improper favoritism towards large organizations. If proven true, these alleged facts could minimally support a finding that Ms. McCoy's conduct gave the impression of undue favor benefitting larger organizations.

V. CONCLUSION

It is the opinion of the Department of Law that certain of the facts alleged in the amended Complaint filed by Lydia Yousief, if true, could support a finding of a violation of Metropolitan Code § 2.222.020(k). Therefore, the Department of Law recommends that the Board of Ethical Conduct hold a hearing as to this allegation only. Evaluation of the truth of the facts alleged in the Complaint and the determination whether a violation occurred are ultimately the responsibilities of the Board of Ethical Conduct during the hearing process. The Department of Law recommends that the remainder of the claims set forth in the Complaint be dismissed.

The Board is not bound by the Department of Law's recommendations.⁸

⁸ See Metropolitan Code § 2.222.040(C)(1).

**Exhibit A – Signed and Notarized Amended Complaint of
Lydia Yousief Against Carol McCoy**

Lydia Yousief
PO Box 17685
Nashville, TN 37217
615-861-0251
lydia.yousief@gmail.com

April 12, 2024

Metropolitan's Clerk Office
The Honorable Austin Kyle
1 Public Square, Suite 205
Nashville, TN 37201

To Clerk Austin and to the Ethics Board members:

We are resubmitting our ethics complaint against Arts Commissioner Carol McCoy. During the April 4th recorded meeting of the Ethics Board, there was a lengthy discussion on whether or not Carol McCoy's racism constituted misconduct. White board members argued that racism as harmful language is merely that. Black attorneys and Councilmember Zulfat Suara argued against the notion that racist language is merely unkind words, but rather an impression to discrimination.

We, the undersigned artists and allies, agree with the Attorney Young, Attorney Grimes, and Councilmember Suara on their interpretation of what racism is. This undersigned group did not attend eight months of Arts Commission meetings, multiple committee meetings, two special sessions led by Councilmember Joy Styles and Councilmember Terry Vo, to tell you that our feelings were hurt by Carol McCoy. Where there is smoke, there is fire.

For this resubmission, we are submitting the following:

1. The March 8th original complaint
2. The email sent to the Ethics Board from Lydia Yousief on March 29th, 2024
3. Materials Referenced
4. Complaint Re-Submission: Proof of Misconduct in the Case against Carol McCoy of the Metro Arts Commission



To view this digital complaint and to access the hyperlinks, use this QR code.

I. The March 8th Original Complaint

I, Lydia Yousief, and the undersigned community members are submitting this complaint for review by the Ethics Board. Pursuant of the Metropolitan Code of Laws 2.112.030, I and the undersigned are reporting the following Metropolitan Arts Commissioner:

Carol McCoy, appointed by Mayor John Cooper and approved by Metropolitan Council.

The basis of this complaint revolves around the alleged breaches of the following standards of conduct:

1. Interrupted Metro Arts Commission meetings and spoke to topics not set in the agenda/not made public twice;
2. Humiliated a Black Metro Arts staff member publicly;
3. Made openly racist and classist remarks and general disregard for the arts community.

Breaching the above standard of conduct violates the promotion of the study of, the participation in, and the appreciation of the arts.

I. Interrupted Metro Arts Commission meetings and spoke to topics not set in the agenda/not made public twice:

On November 16, 2023, during a Metro Arts Commission meeting, Commissioner Carol McCoy derailed a public meeting, interrupting the Public Works presentation, to form the Finance and Oversight Committee. This was not on the agenda, so the public was not prepared to comment on the creation of another Metro Arts Committee. She was seconded by Will Cheek and Jim Schmidt. This meeting is not recorded, but Lydia Yousief and Sangeetha Ekambaram were witnesses and attended the meeting in full.

On February 15, 2024, Commissioner McCoy again de-railed the meeting to discuss another topic and to vote on a decision not on the agenda and not given proper public notice. [This meeting is recorded and available online.](#) At 43:40, Director Daniel Singh asks Metro Legal if it's legal to bring in discussion on the memo Metro Legal sent without public notice; Lora Fox (representing Metro Legal) allows that first interruption on the basis that the memo was part of the director's report, which would be later in the agenda, so it was simply moved up in the agenda. From this opening to discuss the Metro Legal Memo, McCoy goes off a tangent on financial oversight. She brings up consultants like Dana Parsons and Justin Laing who are doing anti-racist work in Metro Arts. She offends Thrive recipients by suggesting there is no oversight for the administration of those funds (though Director Daniel Singh corrects her multiple times during past Commission meetings in October and November 2023). The meeting runs for another 2 hours without reaching any of the important agenda items like Public Works; the Commission does not make any decisions they were scheduled to make. Instead, all decisions were delayed, and McCoy motions to fire Dana Parsons and break that contract.

II. Humiliated a Black Metro Arts staff member publicly;

During the November 16, 2023 Metro Arts Commission meeting, Director Daniel Singh introduced three new staff members. Because this meeting was not recorded by Vivian Fox, the Operations staff person, I will detail it here:



To view this digital complaint and to access the hyperlinks, use this QR code.

After derailing the meeting, (after already arriving late), McCoy asks about new staff present. Director Daniel Singh had already introduced them, but complied with introducing them again. He introduces the two new white staff members first and then he introduces the new Director of Finance of Metro Arts, a Black woman named Christiana Afotey. She is seated behind McCoy. McCoy turns around and aggressively remarks (while very close to Afotey): “You’re the director of Finance? What qualifications do you have?” Afotey responds that she had run her own small business and has several years in accounting experience. McCoy turns around, unsatisfied, without a thank you. Afotey gets up, visibly upset. She exits the room in tears.

Daryn Jackson, one of the new Metro Arts staff members at that meeting, asks for that racist confrontation to be added to the minutes.

Multiple committee meetings go by and McCoy does not make a statement. Commissioner Diana Perez, during the January 25, 2024 Commission meeting, made a public statement about Commissioner McCoy’s racism. That comment is available online at 1:25:00 of the recording.

On February 15, 2024, McCoy issued a terrible apology for her racist remarks. She says, “I was overzealous; therefore, I was rude,” and then quickly transitions the meeting. This apology was merely performative because she failed to recognize the deep-seated racist perspective of challenging the qualifications of a Black woman and not two white women. McCoy also failed to address that Afotey cried and that this confrontation brought her great distress and humiliation. McCoy, even in apologizing, could not center the victim of her racism.

III. Made openly racist and classist remarks and general disregard for the arts community

During the February 15, 2024 meeting, Carol McCoy implied that she had just learned how Thrive was arts funding for individuals and organizations (48:00), even though she’s been on the Commission since March 2023. She rattles on with other inaccurate information about Thrive funding in terms of amount awarded and recipients without correction. Finally, she culminates in saying: “I have been a member of many nonprofits. I don’t think I’ve ever been on a micro agency that has a budget of \$25,000. That is not even enough to pay one staff person, so it occurred to me that if you give money to a micro agency or to an individual, how do you do it in such a way it can be accounted for and properly used.”

Not only did McCoy confuse Thrive with general operating funds (micro organizations are a category within general operating grant funds), revealing that she does not understand how money is dispersed through Metro Arts, but she also is implying, even after Director Daniel Singh mentions reporting measures for Thrive recipients, that local artists misuse art funds. This is a classist statement because it ignores that the Frist, Symphony, and TPAC do not have to report how funds were spent and most of their funding from Metro Arts will go towards staffing (not artists or art-making). McCoy even says that micro organizations can’t be real on the basis that they don’t have staff. She has no idea what artists in this city go through. \$25,000 could be rent for a gallery that a curator is running on the weekends in Wedgewood Houston; \$25,000 could be a small production’s budget for a yearly show in North Nashville; \$25,000 could run a magazine. Yes, it often does not go towards staffing or paying even the artist for their labor, but implying that art-making requires staff and million-dollar budgets means she’s a Commissioner who is not connected to Nashvillians.

Even worse, during McCoy’s interview with the Rules Committee, she stated (as noted in the MHRC report published March 4, 2024):



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“I read a news article, and I couldn’t quite figure out what was going on. I know that the Executive Director either retired or was replaced so there’s a new person on board, and I don’t know who that is...I don’t think the focus of the Commission.”

“People who come in who just want to start a new venture. Their application is woefully poor, you wouldn’t award anyone that money until you thought it would be handled properly...The one I remember was the Chinese New Year’s festival, it was a little group of people getting together and I think they asked for \$5,000 but the grant was just so poorly written, maybe if they’d gone to the center for nonprofits they might have gotten some help.”

We ask this board to sanction Carol McCoy. Racism is intolerable; while there is no exact mention of anti-racism in Metro Code, this Board has the opportunity to place into precedence that repeatedly-racist, unapologetic commissioners/board members can be sanctioned. This would be a major step against white supremacy in Nashville; holding space on a Commission to serve the corporate interest over community investment, health, and wealth.

Respectfully submitted,

Alayna Anderson
Christine Hall
Lydia Yousief
Sangeetha Ekambaram



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II. The email sent to the Ethics Board on March 29th, 2024 (no edits)

Dear Ethics Board members:

I am very grateful that you all have taken the time to read through this complaint and requested access to the hyperlinks to see what we, artists and allies, have been going through for months with the Arts Commission since the deliberate defunding of BIPOC and working class artists in August of 2023.

I have read Metro Legal's response, and I wanted, before the April 4th meeting, to offer my opinion on this response as one of the complainants and also as someone who has watched both Cheek and McCoy on this Arts Commission for months.

From my understanding, the role of this Board is to consider "complaints that allege a violation of the standards of conduct by the Metropolitan Government elected official or member of a Metropolitan board or commission." Metro Legal quotes the INTENT of this board as "the **integrity** of the processes of local government be secured and protected from **abuse**. The general assembly recognizes that holding public office and public employment is a **public trust** and that citizens of Tennessee are entitled to an ethical, **accountable** and **incorruptible** government" (emphases my own). Metro Legal and I agree on this intent—that those in charge of public funds and programming should be held accountable, and that abuse of power and privilege leads to a corrupt government.

Now, we ideologically differ at Metro Legal's the definition of ethical standards. Because Metro Legal is a racist body, having pushed for (or was complicit in silence on) LPRs, a 7-day work week for the Farmers' Market, funding FUSUS, the Titans Stadium, the halving of the democratically-elected Council, the firing of Dr. Stephanie Kang and collapsing of the Health Department's Bureau of Health Equity, the defunding of BIPOC artists and the racist push against race-conscious decision-making, we, the complainants, of course would differ on what is unethical and what is ethical.

Metro Legal offered, in their report, this definition of breaking ethical standards: "disclosure of interests, financial improprieties, improper influence of officials, and acceptance of benefits by officials," and said definition does not include, in Metro Legal's definition, "operational aspects of governmental entities."

I fail to see why Metro Legal rejected racism, in particular, as an issue that breeds these issues listed above, namely improper influence of officials and disclosure of interests. Our argument in the complaint is that racists in charge of public funds will inevitably corrupt the government because their decision-making about where these funds should go will inevitably favor white individuals, and particularly white people they are in community with (i.e. rich white people), and that racism influences how they structure distributing funds and maintain barriers for BIPOC, like through the grants process at Metro Arts which historically was designed so



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that 88% of arts funds went to white people (before 2023). Hence, the corruption of the Arts Commission has led to five decades of financial impropriety: \$62 million dollars in public funds with 70% of those funds going to only 10 organizations since the 1970s. This is a gross misallocation of public funds, and even when challenged by the community and an equitable new director, Daniel Singh, McCoy and Cheek continue to divert funds away from Nashvillians, harming tens of thousands of community members.

As the MHRC report shows, we know Commissioner Cheek referenced speaking to the Nashville Opera, and that the Nashville Opera, along with other art monopolies, were preparing to sue the city if BIPOC artists received our funds in August 2023. We have community members who were on the boards and who were working at the art monopolies and left subsequently because of discussions of defunding BIPOC artists in those rooms. We can connect Commissioner Cheek directly to improper influence and collusion with the art monopolies. While he has resigned since then, we are calling on his direct sanctioning to never serve on another board again, so that accountability is made.

In the case of Carol McCoy, she has been more insidious in reworking the grants process, so that BIPOC and working class artists cannot receive funds directly or equitably. She continues to deny community members and Council members agency in determining how public funds are spent. Currently, McCoy is rolling back Daniel Singh's equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians—particularly those who are artists and don't have a grantwriting background, like so many of my own people who are contributing to Nashville's arts fund, but not seeing a dime in return. In the last Grants Committee meeting, community member Alayna Renae asked her directly if she had read the grants application; McCoy did not answer and instead launched into "how many emails she gets as a Commissioner" and "she's only a volunteer," yet she is actively working with the new grants manager and Metro Legal to erase direct funding for BIPOC artists. As McCoy said during yesterday's Commission meeting, "it's just not possible to give funds, no matter your background," and she sides with Metro Legal and Finance's decision to halt all grants for FY25. Councilmember Styles and the Minority Caucus already have notified the Commission, Mayor, Legal, Finance and the public that there is political will to fund the artists fully.

In the same way Will Cheek halted artists from getting funding FY24, so Carol McCoy will do to artists for FY25. And because she is denying us conversation and input into the process, the promises made by that Commission in December 2022 to give more funds to the small organizations and less to the large institutions (as outlined in the MHRC report) will not be fulfilled to the community. McCoy will maintain the status quo for white-led institutions, denying BIPOC artists and BIPOC-led organizations access to our money. This is corruption and misuse of tax funds.

In essence, what I am asking this board to do is to decide whether or not anti-racism is an ethical standard in Nashville. To imply that anti-racism is an ethical standard we value in Nashville is to ensure public funds are distributed evenly and without barriers. Currently, McCoy is rolling back Daniel Singh's equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians—particularly those who are artists and don't have a grantwriting background, like so many of my



To view this digital complaint and to access the hyperlinks, use this QR code.

own people who are contributing to Nashville's arts fund, but not seeing a dime in return. I am asking this board to intervene—to be the village, to stop the abuse.

I would call on this Board to make a firm commitment that abuse of public office to work against community members, particularly BIPOC, will not be tolerated and sanction McCoy and Cheek and move the decision to Council. **If that decision is not possible at this time**, I would ask that this Board consider holding a public hearing. But at least, I ask that you all do not do nothing and dismiss. ***A dismissal of this complaint would be complicit in harming BIPOC and working class artists.***

As Nashville continues to be an unsafe city for BIPOC with Nazis marching on the street, I am calling on this body to protect the people and send a signal to every Metro department that racism is not tolerated and racism is unethical. In order for Nazis to feel comfortable marching on the streets openly, they know that they are protected and affirmed by higher orders. Do not protect or affirm white supremacy in government.

I will see you all on April 4th.

Peace,

Lydia Yousief

615-861-0251 (personal)



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III. Materials Reference

A. MHRC Report Links:

The MHRC Title VI report: [link here](#) (pdf)

MHRC report PRESENTATION (3/4/2024): [link here](#) (YouTube)

2:58...Public Comments begin

34:16...Summary of Report Presentation by Ashley Bachelder

1:17:36...Summary of Legal Memo to the Title VI Complaint by Attorney Mel Green

1:35:00...Conclusions by Ashley Bachelder***

1:37:39...Probable Cause Statement by Director Davie Tucker followed by discussion by the Commission for a Public Hearing

MHRC Legal Memo by Attorney Mel Green: [link here](#) (pdf)

MHRC report presentation powerpoint: [link here](#) (pdf)

B. Metro Arts Commission Meeting Links

August 17, 2023: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

January 25, 2024: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

53:44...Daniel Singh's executive report

1:21:20...Diana Perez's statement on equity + call for accountability

February 15, 2024: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

March 13, 2024: Grants Committee Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

50:19...Alayna Renae's question to McCoy

****Please note that there is no public record of the July 2023 Commission meeting, only an audio with Metro Arts and Metro Human Relations. There is also no recording of the November 2023 meeting.. There is also no recording of the August 2023 2-hour-long public comments.**

C. February 15, 2024 Commission Meeting Timestamps

39:25...McCoy says she was "overzealous" in humiliating Christiana Afotey (and mispronounces her name)

40:33...McCoy, Cheek, and West de-rail meeting to discuss Metro Legal's memo (not on agenda)

47:44...McCoy accuses local artists of not reporting and denies the existence of "micro organizations," not pertinent to Metro Legal's memo on HR + December 2023 audit, in order to halt Thrive grants for FY25

50:25...McCoy rails against anti-racist consultants who were chosen from multiple bids and lies that Director Singh was not in contact with the DEI office in Metro

51:29...Cheek comes back to Thrive applicants and challenges oversight (despite multiple years on the Commission and also multiple public conversations on this racist herring)

54:35...McCoy implies staff are not competent enough to review reports submitted by Thrive artists

55:55...McCoy asks about the community editing process for grants which was reviewed and approved by the Commission in December 2022

57:39...Nefflen, a new commissioner, also attacks standards of local artists' reportings and weaponizes his incompetence on Director Daniel Singh

59:00...McCoy claims "objectivity" is needed

1:00:02...McCoy says, "I thought this was going to be fun. I thought we were going to give funds to the community," while having defunded local artists months before and about to motion to fire the person in charge of grants for FY25

1:02:00...Metro Arts staff interject Dana Parsons as the one who worked with community to develop the application questions + reporting process



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- 1:04:35...McCoy says, “We may have no money to disperse,” which is unclear as to whether it was a threat to local artists that they will not get funds for FY24 (because of the Legal memo) or a threat to applicants for FY25
- 1:05:29...West also attacks equity as unsustainable for FY25 because “changes need to be made”
- 1:15:32...McCoy says, “Change can come about through our new grants manager,” and urges, in the middle of a grants cycle, for a new grant application and reporting mechanism for a 10-year old grant process
- 1:21:50...McCoy asks a question about moving budget lines revealing that she doesn’t know how Thrive works; white directors have moved grants money to consulting to pay for Thrive (as explained in MHRC)
- 1:23:39...McCoy moves on to “the director having a work relationship with Parks and Library” and accused Singh of not communicating
- 1:28:07...McCoy interrupts to says that this is the “first time” the Commission has “discussed” topics
- 1:38:24...MA staff redirects to MHRC complaint on agenda
- 1:40:09...Cheek supersedes democratic procedure and requests Thrive “be approved” by the Committee of Commissioners, says delay is “no fault of our own,” despite voting to defund organizations
- 1:41:18...McCoy interrupts and motions to terminate the contract of Dana Parsons
- 1:52:30...Nefflen is considered about an HR issue; Syndie Davis says she is capable of doing the job and will use Dana Parsons’ labor
- 1:55:40...Cheek seconds McCoy’s motion to terminate Dana Parsons’ contract
- 1:58:35...Cheek says grants need to be redone without community members’ input
- 2:04:10...MHRC Update by Director Davie Tucker
- 2:16:26...McCoy suggests Justin Laing’s anti-racist is unnecessary because Metro has a DEI office
- 2:25:08...McCoy asks for Andrea Blackman (whose name she forgot), the DEI Director under Finance, to be at the next meeting
- 2:35:32...Martin introduces cultural planning

D. Other Links

2023 Metro Arts Disparity Study:	link here
Information from MA website on Thrive:	link here
Arts Equity Nashville website:	link here
Daniel Singh’s Packet (Commission 1/25/2024):	link here
Kevin Crumbo Letter #1 (March 2024):	link here
MHRC Response to Crumbo Letter #1:	link here
Kevin Crumbo Letter #2 (April 2024):	link here

While there is an understanding that Ethics Board members are volunteers, all evidence and material presented here are to contextualize the harm that has been committed, the fortitude of the volunteers who have labored for months to collect and capture what is happening, and the gravity of our intent and call for McCoy’s removal. In other words, this is not about “feeling upset about what a Commissioner said,” but rather the very real consequences of misconduct and harm.



To view this digital complaint and to access the hyperlinks, use this QR code.

IV. Complaint Re-Submission: Proof of Misconduct in the Case against Carol McCoy of the Metro Arts Commission

On April 4th, 2024, Ethics board members discussed whether or not racist language constituted misconduct. We are alleging that it does. **Metro Arts, since 1978, has given 70% of their funds to only 10 white-led organizations with budgets over \$500,000.** The Fisk Jubilee Singers have not been funded; Jefferson Street Sound Museum has not been funded. Thousands of Latinx and Arab artists have never been funded; very few Black artists have been funded to the point that a disparity study conducted in 2023 concluded that the inequity was incalculable because of the massive disparity. BIPOC artists had been funded even less than 1% of the arts budget. For years, community members have fought for equity in distributing the little money Metro Arts has. To learn more about this history, you can watch Arts Equity Nashville's Teach-In (38 minutes).

After decades of pushing for equity, several BIPOC staff losing their jobs, a politically-aligned Metro Council ready to fund the arts, a new grants process for Thrive (created in 2014), and finally a new director with an equitable vision, we are alleging that Carol McCoy, as Arts Commissioner, discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023, **and** we are alleging that even with the same political will from Council, Metro Arts Director Daniel Singh, and the community of artists for equity, Carol McCoy still led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for FY25.

We are filing this with the Ethics Board because it is important to remove Carol McCoy as soon as possible because of the pattern of discrimination against BIPOC and working class artists.

We ask the Ethics Board to consider these specific Standards of Conduct when assessing the actions of Arts Commissioner Carol McCoy. The explanation that follows details how Commissioner McCoy is influenced by specific interests and parties (violating standards J and K) while serving as a voting member of the Arts Commission.

Standard J: Shall not participate in making or influencing any metropolitan government decision or action in which they know that they have any material financial interest distinguishable from that of the public generally or from that of other metropolitan officers or employees generally.

Standard K: Shall not give reasonable basis for their conduct for the impression that any person can improperly influence, or unduly enjoy their favor in, the performance of their official duties, or that they are unduly affected by the kinship, rank, position, or influence of any person.

- 1. Carol McCoy, as Arts Commissioner, discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023, despite the vocalized wishes of the community, Metro Council, and the Director**

The MHRC report breaks down the August 17, 2023 vote. The MHRC report and the legal memo allege intentional discrimination. It is important to note that before the August 17th vote, Councilmember Delishia Porterfield attended public comments and stated clearly the intent for the \$2 million was for BIPOC and



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working class artists; to vote to defund local artists would be against Metro Council's budget and the stated intent. During that August meeting also, after two hours of public comments from majority BIPOC artists, both Commission Chair Matia Powell and Director Daniel Singh clearly noted on the record that to vote against funding Thrive was inequitable and against the will of Metro Council.

Carol McCoy, in the same way a commissioner with a conflict of interest would, voted against equity and chose Scenario 4, which would add to the funding of white-led organizations with budgets larger than \$5 million. Moreover, McCoy is a board member at Humanities Tennessee. Humanities Tennessee receives funding from Metro Arts. The last General Operating grant they received in the FY24 grant cycle was \$124,600.

In her interview with MHR staff in December 2023, McCoy continued to suggest she was merely listening to discussions from the "public" to inform her "unbiased" decision. Specifically, in the interview, she says, "I was just listening to what the public people had to say. I didn't know what they were talking about," and she repeats, "In June there were different organizations during the public comment time. I did not engage with them. I didn't engage with the board members. I was listening, and I was still concerned about not understanding what was going on." But it's clear, from that same interview, that McCoy was not merely listening. She was speaking to multi-million dollar organizations: "I remember asking two of those people what organization are you with, and one said Nashville Opera and the other the TN Rep Theater. This was in May. They were having to plan their budgets, and they were told this is what would happen." She also only listened to white Commissioners (not the Black Commissioners who argued against former Commissioner Marianne Byrd's 4-page speech about "making promises [to white-led institutions] to guarantee them funding every year). As McCoy says in her interview: "And, she [Marianne Byrd] said, I think we gave our word, and we have to keep our word." Her deliberate racism to exclude Black artists and artists of color from dialogue—even suggesting she didn't know who they were in public comments for June and July as they advocated for equitable funding—and her deliberate erasure of Black Commissioners' commentary and a director of color prove that her racism is interlocked with her misconduct to defund BIPOC communities. Even when there was enough money for everyone to get something, the political will from Metro Council, an equitable director, dozens of BIPOC artists who approached the Commissioners during public comment to vote for Scenario 4, McCoy voted against the people, the democratically-elected body, and fellow Commissioners and director. Therefore, even in a perfect scenario with a large funding pot and multiple vetted artists' applications and high community engagement, Carol McCoy's actions show how racism reveals misconduct, and racists cannot and will not equitably distribute tax funds.

Moreover, Carol McCoy, unlike other white commissioners, cannot say that Metro Legal had intimidated them during the closed meeting in August 2023 before the Commission meeting (which was illegal because there was no threat of a lawsuit) because McCoy voted to abstain in July 2023 for the initial full-funding of Thrive vote. She did not fully "flip" her vote from AYE to NAY. She claims it was because she lacked information, but Director Daniel Singh, before the July and August vote, called each of the Commissioners individually to answer all their questions to prepare for public discussion.

2. Carol McCoy still led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for FY25



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This accusation is not illuminated in the MHRC report, which focuses exclusively on investigating the August 2023 vote.

Carol McCoy's racist and classist views create a bias to defund Thrive—the current most equitable grants process for BIPOC and working class artists—in order to fund white institutions. Thrive was created in 2014 to provide direct funds to artists, as is done in most cities. Direct funds do not require an artist to partner with an institution like the Frist or Opera, nor do they require the artist to have access to their own building. Thrive applications, before Daniel Singh's leadership, funded majority white artists, so from 2014-2023, none of the white Commissioners had an issue with Thrive—not in its reporting, nor its application, nor in who was receiving.

Daniel Singh, in 2023, after multiple engagements with diverse community artists and organizations, reworked the application and reporting to streamline it for artists who are not grantwriters to ensure equitable access to funds. All this information is available [online](#).

Carol McCoy attacks Thrive artists as “not real artists” because “there is no objective reporting” beyond if the project was completed. She pushes for changing the grants process in the middle of the grants process, and her logic is that “increased funding won't be secured,” as it was in April 2023, so the status quo must come back in funding white institutions. In McCoy's one hour rant, the issue with Metro Arts is not decades of inequity; the issue is equitable distribution. To bolster her argument to defund local artists for a second year, she uses several white supremacist tactics:

1. Thrive is a very complicated budget process. It's not “good governance.”
2. BIPOC need to be policied if funded; “they don't know what to do with the money.”
3. The community should not be engaged; Commissioners should only listen to “the law” as interpreted and enforced by Metro Legal.

All of these arguments were used when integrating public schools in the 1960s. White people will always find a reason equity is inconvenient and why BIPOC cannot be equal citizens.

What's troubling in the case of McCoy is that she actively is fighting to defund BIPOC Nashvillians and is using racism—about our abilities to spend money, about our artistic abilities, about “how the law is set up”—to do so.

In firing Dana Parsons on February 15, 2024, Syndie Davis, the newly-hired grants manager, was left without any training on how the grants process works at Metro Arts. Davis reassured the Commission in February that she was capable of the job and had access to Dana Parsons' proprietary documents on equitable grantmaking. She goes so far as to tell the Commission that there is enough time to redevelop the grants process while undergoing the grants, and so Commissioners voted to terminate Parsons' contract. Davis attended a [Grants Committee meeting on March 13th, 2024](#) with Commissioners Jester, Wade, and McCoy, and Davis was unable to answer any of the community members' concerns about whether or not Thrive would be funded for FY25. McCoy, during that meeting, also told Alayna Renae that she has never read the Thrive application that the community made under Daniel Singh's leadership and approved by the Commission in December 2022. McCoy said it's because she gets a lot of emails. Despite being on the Grants Committee, McCoy admitted to never reading through the application with the most diverse and equitable



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application pool. This complete dismissal of BIPOC and working class artists, again, shows that she is not interested in engaging community members, but rather serves on this board to meet the interests of the few. Again, McCoy heard from three local artists—all three of whom also participated in the grants editing process in November 2022. Artists spoke about the importance of the community's edits and how impactful Thrive is. She ignored the artists, and during the March Commission meeting (starting around 52 minutes in the middle of Commissioner Watts' Oversight Committee updates), she rehashed the same racist lines to derail the meeting and push to get rid of the BIPOC director of color.

This chaos that McCoy created led Director of Finance Kevin Crumbo to recommend on March 22nd, 2024 that Metro Arts halt grantmaking for FY25 ([letter available here](#)).

There are concrete consequences to removing McCoy:

1. Ending the derailment of every commission meeting to attack Daniel Singh and scapegoat him for the intentional discrimination of defunding BIPOC artists in August 2023 instead of holding accountability for how this Commission voted;
2. Signaling to other boards and commissions that racism is intolerable and the law does not protect racists;
3. Making the Grants Committee functional and equity-centered; and
4. Reviving the FY25 grants process, so that artists are not discriminated against a second time, opening a second lawsuit on the city.

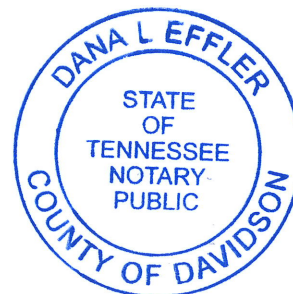
The community is unable to subpoena her bank account or do a thorough background search into her disclosed and undisclosed relationships. Please consider that we are not lawyers and, also, we are doing all this—attending monthly Commission meetings, multiple Committee meetings, gathering information and informing the public on the defunding—all for free and in our spare time. We are doing this because dozens and dozens of artists have been harmed for decades, and systemic change is necessary and overdue.

As this Board heard Metro Legal say, there is no entity within Metro government that handles accusations of racism and discrimination when it comes to Boards and Commissions. That is by design. And just as it is by design, it is also within our ability to redesign. We ask that this Board not legalize harm. It's not enough to personally call it out. There must be systemic mechanisms and consequences in order for the integrity of the government to remain intact.

Respectfully submitted,

Alayna Anderson
Christine Hall
Lydia Yousief
Sangeetha Ekambaram

Lydia Yousief



Dana Effler
exp. 10/04/2027



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**Exhibit B – Unsigned Amended Complaint of Lydia Yousief
Against Carol McCoy**

Lydia Yousief
PO Box 17685
Nashville, TN 37217
615-861-0251
lydia.yousief@gmail.com

April 12, 2024

Metropolitan's Clerk Office
The Honorable Austin Kyle
1 Public Square, Suite 205
Nashville, TN 37201

To Clerk Austin and to the Ethics Board members:

We are resubmitting our ethics complaint against Arts Commissioner Carol McCoy. During the April 4th recorded meeting of the Ethics Board, there was a lengthy discussion on whether or not Carol McCoy's racism constituted misconduct. White board members argued that racism as harmful language is merely that. Black attorneys and Councilmember Zulfat Suara argued against the notion that racist language is merely unkind words, but rather an impression to discrimination.

We, the undersigned artists and allies, agree with the Attorney Young, Attorney Grimes, and Councilmember Suara on their interpretation of what racism is. This undersigned group did not attend eight months of Arts Commission meetings, multiple committee meetings, two special sessions led by Councilmember Joy Styles and Councilmember Terry Vo, to tell you that our feelings were hurt by Carol McCoy. Where there is smoke, there is fire.

For this resubmission, we are submitting the following:

1. The March 8th original complaint
2. The email sent to the Ethics Board from Lydia Yousief on March 29th, 2024
3. Materials Referenced
4. Complaint Re-Submission: Proof of Misconduct in the Case against Carol McCoy of the Metro Arts Commission



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I. The March 8th Original Complaint

I, Lydia Yousief, and the undersigned community members are submitting this complaint for review by the Ethics Board. Pursuant of the Metropolitan Code of Laws 2.112.030, I and the undersigned are reporting the following Metropolitan Arts Commissioner:

Carol McCoy, appointed by Mayor John Cooper and approved by Metropolitan Council.

The basis of this complaint revolves around the alleged breaches of the following standards of conduct:

1. Interrupted Metro Arts Commission meetings and spoke to topics not set in the agenda/not made public twice;
2. Humiliated a Black Metro Arts staff member publicly;
3. Made openly racist and classist remarks and general disregard for the arts community.

Breaching the above standard of conduct violates the promotion of the study of, the participation in, and the appreciation of the arts.

I. Interrupted Metro Arts Commission meetings and spoke to topics not set in the agenda/not made public twice:

On November 16, 2023, during a Metro Arts Commission meeting, Commissioner Carol McCoy derailed a public meeting, interrupting the Public Works presentation, to form the Finance and Oversight Committee. This was not on the agenda, so the public was not prepared to comment on the creation of another Metro Arts Committee. She was seconded by Will Cheek and Jim Schmidt. This meeting is not recorded, but Lydia Yousief and Sangeetha Ekambaram were witnesses and attended the meeting in full.

On February 15, 2024, Commissioner McCoy again de-railed the meeting to discuss another topic and to vote on a decision not on the agenda and not given proper public notice. [This meeting is recorded and available online](#). At 43:40, Director Daniel Singh asks Metro Legal if it's legal to bring in discussion on the memo Metro Legal sent without public notice; Lora Fox (representing Metro Legal) allows that first interruption on the basis that the memo was part of the director's report, which would be later in the agenda, so it was simply moved up in the agenda. From this opening to discuss the Metro Legal Memo, McCoy goes off a tangent on financial oversight. She brings up consultants like Dana Parsons and Justin Laing who are doing anti-racist work in Metro Arts. She offends Thrive recipients by suggesting there is no oversight for the administration of those funds (though Director Daniel Singh corrects her multiple times during past Commission meetings in October and November 2023). The meeting runs for another 2 hours without reaching any of the important agenda items like Public Works; the Commission does not make any decisions they were scheduled to make. Instead, all decisions were delayed, and McCoy motions to fire Dana Parsons and break that contract.

II. Humiliated a Black Metro Arts staff member publicly;

During the November 16, 2023 Metro Arts Commission meeting, Director Daniel Singh introduced three new staff members. Because this meeting was not recorded by Vivian Fox, the Operations staff person, I will detail it here:



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After derailing the meeting, (after already arriving late), McCoy asks about new staff present. Director Daniel Singh had already introduced them, but complied with introducing them again. He introduces the two new white staff members first and then he introduces the new Director of Finance of Metro Arts, a Black woman named Christiana Afotey. She is seated behind McCoy. McCoy turns around and aggressively remarks (while very close to Afotey): “You’re the director of Finance? What qualifications do you have?” Afotey responds that she had run her own small business and has several years in accounting experience. McCoy turns around, unsatisfied, without a thank you. Afotey gets up, visibly upset. She exits the room in tears.

Daryn Jackson, one of the new Metro Arts staff members at that meeting, asks for that racist confrontation to be added to the minutes.

Multiple committee meetings go by and McCoy does not make a statement. Commissioner Diana Perez, during the January 25, 2024 Commission meeting, made a public statement about Commissioner McCoy’s racism. [That comment is available online at 1:25:00 of the recording.](#)

On February 15, 2024, McCoy issued a terrible apology for her racist remarks. She says, “I was overzealous; therefore, I was rude,” and then quickly transitions the meeting. This apology was merely performative because she failed to recognize the deep-seated racist perspective of challenging the qualifications of a Black woman and not two white women. McCoy also failed to address that Afotey cried and that this confrontation brought her great distress and humiliation. McCoy, even in apologizing, could not center the victim of her racism.

III. Made openly racist and classist remarks and general disregard for the arts community

During [the February 15, 2024 meeting](#), Carol McCoy implied that she had just learned how Thrive was arts funding for individuals and organizations (48:00), even though she’s been on the Commission since March 2023. She rattles on with other inaccurate information about Thrive funding in terms of amount awarded and recipients without correction. Finally, she culminates in saying: “I have been a member of many nonprofits. I don’t think I’ve ever been on a micro agency that has a budget of \$25,000. That is not even enough to pay one staff person, so it occurred to me that if you give money to a micro agency or to an individual, how do you do it in such a way it can be accounted for and properly used.”

Not only did McCoy confuse Thrive with general operating funds (micro organizations are a category within general operating grant funds), revealing that she does not understand how money is dispersed through Metro Arts, but she also is implying, even after Director Daniel Singh mentions reporting measures for Thrive recipients, that local artists misuse art funds. This is a classist statement because it ignores that the Frist, Symphony, and TPAC do not have to report how funds were spent and most of their funding from Metro Arts will go towards staffing (not artists or art-making). McCoy even says that micro organizations can’t be real on the basis that they don’t have staff. She has no idea what artists in this city go through. \$25,000 could be rent for a gallery that a curator is running on the weekends in Wedgewood Houston; \$25,000 could be a small production’s budget for a yearly show in North Nashville; \$25,000 could run a magazine. Yes, it often does not go towards staffing or paying even the artist for their labor, but implying that art-making requires staff and million-dollar budgets means she’s a Commissioner who is not connected to Nashvillians.

Even worse, during McCoy’s interview with the Rules Committee, she stated ([as noted in the MHRC report published March 4, 2024](#)):



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“I read a news article, and I couldn’t quite figure out what was going on. I know that the Executive Director either retired or was replaced so there’s a new person on board, and I don’t know who that is...I don’t think the focus of the Commission.”

“People who come in who just want to start a new venture. Their application is woefully poor, you wouldn’t award anyone that money until you thought it would be handled properly...The one I remember was the Chinese New Year’s festival, it was a little group of people getting together and I think they asked for \$5,000 but the grant was just so poorly written, maybe if they’d gone to the center for nonprofits they might have gotten some help.”

We ask this board to sanction Carol McCoy. Racism is intolerable; while there is no exact mention of anti-racism in Metro Code, this Board has the opportunity to place into precedence that repeatedly-racist, unapologetic commissioners/board members can be sanctioned. This would be a major step against white supremacy in Nashville; holding space on a Commission to serve the corporate interest over community investment, health, and wealth.

Respectfully submitted,

Alayna Anderson
Christine Hall
Lydia Yousief
Sangeetha Ekambaram



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II. The email sent to the Ethics Board on March 29th, 2024 (no edits)

Dear Ethics Board members:

I am very grateful that you all have taken the time to read through this complaint and requested access to the hyperlinks to see what we, artists and allies, have been going through for months with the Arts Commission since the deliberate defunding of BIPOC and working class artists in August of 2023.

I have read Metro Legal's response, and I wanted, before the April 4th meeting, to offer my opinion on this response as one of the complainants and also as someone who has watched both Cheek and McCoy on this Arts Commission for months.

From my understanding, the role of this Board is to consider "complaints that allege a violation of the standards of conduct by the Metropolitan Government elected official or member of a Metropolitan board or commission." Metro Legal quotes the INTENT of this board as "the **integrity** of the processes of local government be secured and protected from **abuse**. The general assembly recognizes that holding public office and public employment is a **public trust** and that citizens of Tennessee are entitled to an ethical, **accountable** and **incorruptible** government" (emphases my own). Metro Legal and I agree on this intent—that those in charge of public funds and programming should be held accountable, and that abuse of power and privilege leads to a corrupt government.

Now, we ideologically differ at Metro Legal's the definition of ethical standards. Because Metro Legal is a racist body, having pushed for (or was complicit in silence on) LPRs, a 7-day work week for the Farmers' Market, funding FUSUS, the Titans Stadium, the halving of the democratically-elected Council, the firing of Dr. Stephanie Kang and collapsing of the Health Department's Bureau of Health Equity, the defunding of BIPOC artists and the racist push against race-conscious decision-making, we, the complainants, of course would differ on what is unethical and what is ethical.

Metro Legal offered, in their report, this definition of breaking ethical standards: "disclosure of interests, financial improprieties, improper influence of officials, and acceptance of benefits by officials," and said definition does not include, in Metro Legal's definition, "operational aspects of governmental entities."

I fail to see why Metro Legal rejected racism, in particular, as an issue that breeds these issues listed above, namely improper influence of officials and disclosure of interests. Our argument in the complaint is that racists in charge of public funds will inevitably corrupt the government because their decision-making about where these funds should go will inevitably favor white individuals, and particularly white people they are in community with (i.e. rich white people), and that racism influences how they structure distributing funds and maintain barriers for BIPOC, like through the grants process at Metro Arts which historically was designed so



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that 88% of arts funds went to white people (before 2023). Hence, the corruption of the Arts Commission has led to five decades of financial impropriety: \$62 million dollars in public funds with 70% of those funds going to only 10 organizations since the 1970s. This is a gross misallocation of public funds, and even when challenged by the community and an equitable new director, Daniel Singh, McCoy and Cheek continue to divert funds away from Nashvillians, harming tens of thousands of community members.

As the MHRC report shows, we know Commissioner Cheek referenced speaking to the Nashville Opera, and that the Nashville Opera, along with other art monopolies, were preparing to sue the city if BIPOC artists received our funds in August 2023. We have community members who were on the boards and who were working at the art monopolies and left subsequently because of discussions of defunding BIPOC artists in those rooms. We can connect Commissioner Cheek directly to improper influence and collusion with the art monopolies. While he has resigned since then, we are calling on his direct sanctioning to never serve on another board again, so that accountability is made.

In the case of Carol McCoy, she has been more insidious in reworking the grants process, so that BIPOC and working class artists cannot receive funds directly or equitably. She continues to deny community members and Council members agency in determining how public funds are spent. Currently, McCoy is rolling back Daniel Singh's equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians—particularly those who are artists and don't have a grantwriting background, like so many of my own people who are contributing to Nashville's arts fund, but not seeing a dime in return. In the last Grants Committee meeting, community member Alayna Renae asked her directly if she had read the grants application; McCoy did not answer and instead launched into "how many emails she gets as a Commissioner" and "she's only a volunteer," yet she is actively working with the new grants manager and Metro Legal to erase direct funding for BIPOC artists. As McCoy said during yesterday's Commission meeting, "it's just not possible to give funds, no matter your background," and she sides with Metro Legal and Finance's decision to halt all grants for FY25. Councilmember Styles and the Minority Caucus already have notified the Commission, Mayor, Legal, Finance and the public that there is political will to fund the artists fully.

In the same way Will Cheek halted artists from getting funding FY24, so Carol McCoy will do to artists for FY25. And because she is denying us conversation and input into the process, the promises made by that Commission in December 2022 to give more funds to the small organizations and less to the large institutions (as outlined in the MHRC report) will not be fulfilled to the community. McCoy will maintain the status quo for white-led institutions, denying BIPOC artists and BIPOC-led organizations access to our money. This is corruption and misuse of tax funds.

In essence, what I am asking this board to do is to decide whether or not anti-racism is an ethical standard in Nashville. To imply that anti-racism is an ethical standard we value in Nashville is to ensure public funds are distributed evenly and without barriers. Currently, McCoy is rolling back Daniel Singh's equitable measures to rewrite the grants process at Metro Arts to make it accessible to all Nashvillians—particularly those who are artists and don't have a grantwriting background, like so many of my own people



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who are contributing to Nashville's arts fund, but not seeing a dime in return. I am asking this board to intervene—to be the village, to stop the abuse.

I would call on this Board to make a firm commitment that abuse of public office to work against community members, particularly BIPOC, will not be tolerated and sanction McCoy and Cheek and move the decision to Council. **If that decision is not possible at this time**, I would ask that this Board consider holding a public hearing. But at least, I ask that you all do not do nothing and dismiss. ***A dismissal of this complaint would be complicit in harming BIPOC and working class artists.***

As Nashville continues to be an unsafe city for BIPOC with Nazis marching on the street, I am calling on this body to protect the people and send a signal to every Metro department that racism is not tolerated and racism is unethical. In order for Nazis to feel comfortable marching on the streets openly, they know that they are protected and affirmed by higher orders. Do not protect or affirm white supremacy in government.

I will see you all on April 4th.

Peace,

Lydia Yousief

615-861-0251 (personal)



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III. Materials Reference

A. MHRC Report Links:

The MHRC Title VI report: [link here](#) (pdf)

MHRC report PRESENTATION (3/4/2024): [link here](#) (YouTube)

2:58...Public Comments begin

34:16...Summary of Report Presentation by Ashley Bachelder

1:17:36...Summary of Legal Memo to the Title VI Complaint by Attorney Mel Green

1:35:00...Conclusions by Ashley Bachelder***

1:37:39...Probable Cause Statement by Director Davie Tucker followed by discussion by the Commission for a Public Hearing

MHRC Legal Memo by Attorney Mel Green: [link here](#) (pdf)

MHRC report presentation powerpoint: [link here](#) (pdf)

B. Metro Arts Commission Meeting Links

August 17, 2023: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

January 25, 2024: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

53:44...Daniel Singh's executive report

1:21:20...Diana Perez's statement on equity + call for accountability

February 15, 2024: Commission Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

March 13, 2024: Grants Committee Meeting [link here](#) (YouTube)

50:19...Alayna Renae's question to McCoy

****Please note that there is no public record of the July 2023 Commission meeting, only an audio with Metro Arts and Metro Human Relations. There is also no recording of the November 2023 meeting.. There is also no recording of the August 2023 2-hour-long public comments.**

C. February 15, 2024 Commission Meeting Timestamps

39:25...McCoy says she was "overzealous" in humiliating Christiana Afotey (and mispronounces her name)

40:33...McCoy, Cheek, and West de-rail meeting to discuss Metro Legal's memo (not on agenda)

47:44...McCoy accuses local artists of not reporting and denies the existence of "micro organizations," not pertinent to Metro Legal's memo on HR + December 2023 audit, in order to halt Thrive grants for FY25

50:25...McCoy rails against anti-racist consultants who were chosen from multiple bids and lies that Director Singh was not in contact with the DEI office in Metro

51:29...Cheek comes back to Thrive applicants and challenges oversight (despite multiple years on the Commission and also multiple public conversations on this racist herring)

54:35...McCoy implies staff are not competent enough to review reports submitted by Thrive artists

55:55...McCoy asks about the community editing process for grants which was reviewed and approved by the Commission in December 2022

57:39...Nefflen, a new commissioner, also attacks standards of local artists' reportings and weaponizes his incompetence on Director Daniel Singh

59:00...McCoy claims "objectivity" is needed

1:00:02...McCoy says, "I thought this was going to be fun. I thought we were going to give funds to the community," while having defunded local artists months before and about to motion to fire the person in charge of grants for FY25

1:02:00...Metro Arts staff interject Dana Parsons as the one who worked with community to develop the application questions + reporting process



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1:04:35...McCoy says, “We may have no money to disperse,” which is unclear as to whether it was a threat to local artists that they will not get funds for FY24 (because of the Legal memo) or a threat to applicants for FY25

1:05:29...West also attacks equity as unsustainable for FY25 because “changes need to be made”

1:15:32...McCoy says, “Change can come about through our new grants manager,” and urges, in the middle of a grants cycle, for a new grant application and reporting mechanism for a 10-year old grant process

1:21:50...McCoy asks a question about moving budget lines revealing that she doesn’t know how Thrive works; white directors have moved grants money to consulting to pay for Thrive (as explained in MHRC)

1:23:39...McCoy moves on to “the director having a work relationship with Parks and Library” and accused Singh of not communicating

1:28:07...McCoy interrupts to says that this is the “first time” the Commission has “discussed” topics

1:38:24...MA staff redirects to MHRC complaint on agenda

1:40:09...Cheek supersedes democratic procedure and requests Thrive “be approved” by the Committee of Commissioners, says delay is “no fault of our own,” despite voting to defund organizations

1:41:18...McCoy interrupts and motions to terminate the contract of Dana Parsons

1:52:30...Nefflen is considered about an HR issue; Syndie Davis says she is capable of doing the job and will use Dana Parsons’ labor

1:55:40...Cheek seconds McCoy’s motion to terminate Dana Parsons’ contract

1:58:35...Cheek says grants need to be redone without community members’ input

2:04:10...MHRC Update by Director Davie Tucker

2:16:26...McCoy suggests Justin Laing’s anti-racist is unnecessary because Metro has a DEI office

2:25:08...McCoy asks for Andrea Blackman (whose name she forgot), the DEI Director under Finance, to be at the next meeting

2:35:32...Martin introduces cultural planning

D. Other Links

2023 Metro Arts Disparity Study:	link here
Information from MA website on Thrive:	link here
Arts Equity Nashville website:	link here
Daniel Singh’s Packet (Commission 1/25/2024):	link here
Kevin Crumbo Letter #1 (March 2024):	link here
MHRC Response to Crumbo Letter #1:	link here
Kevin Crumbo Letter #2 (April 2024):	link here

While there is an understanding that Ethics Board members are volunteers, all evidence and material presented here are to contextualize the harm that has been committed, the fortitude of the volunteers who have labored for months to collect and capture what is happening, and the gravity of our intent and call for McCoy’s removal. In other words, this is not about “feeling upset about what a Commissioner said,” but rather the very real consequences of misconduct and harm.



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IV. Complaint Re-Submission: Proof of Misconduct in the Case against Carol McCoy of the Metro Arts Commission

On April 4th, 2024, Ethics board members discussed whether or not racist language constituted misconduct. We are alleging that it does. **Metro Arts, since 1978, has given 70% of their funds to only 10 white-led organizations with budgets over \$500,000.** The Fisk Jubilee Singers have not been funded; Jefferson Street Sound Museum has not been funded. Thousands of Latinx and Arab artists have never been funded; very few Black artists have been funded to the point that [a disparity study conducted in 2023 concluded that the inequity was incalculable because of the massive disparity](#). BIPOC artists had been funded even less than 1% of the arts budget. For years, community members have fought for equity in distributing the little money Metro Arts has. [To learn more about this history, you can watch Arts Equity Nashville's Teach-In \(38 minutes\)](#).

After decades of pushing for equity, several BIPOC staff losing their jobs, a politically-aligned Metro Council ready to fund the arts, a new grants process for Thrive (created in 2014), and finally a new director with an equitable vision, we are alleging that Carol McCoy, as Arts Commissioner, discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023, **and** we are alleging that even with the same political will from Council, Metro Arts Director Daniel Singh, and the community of artists for equity, Carol McCoy still led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for FY25.

We are filing this with the Ethics Board because it is important to remove Carol McCoy as soon as possible because of the pattern of discrimination against BIPOC and working class artists.

We ask the Ethics Board to consider these specific Standards of Conduct when assessing the actions of Arts Commissioner Carol McCoy. The explanation that follows details how Commissioner McCoy is influenced by specific interests and parties (violating standards J and K) while serving as a voting member of the Arts Commission.

Standard J: Shall not participate in making or influencing any metropolitan government decision or action in which they know that they have any material financial interest distinguishable from that of the public generally or from that of other metropolitan officers or employees generally.

Standard K: Shall not give reasonable basis for their conduct for the impression that any person can improperly influence, or unduly enjoy their favor in, the performance of their official duties, or that they are unduly affected by the kinship, rank, position, or influence of any person.

- 1. Carol McCoy, as Arts Commissioner, discriminated against BIPOC and working class artists and voted to defund us on August 17, 2023, despite the vocalized wishes of the community, Metro Council, and the Director**

The MHRC report breaks down the August 17, 2023 vote. The MHRC report and the legal memo allege intentional discrimination. It is important to note that before the August 17th vote, Councilmember Delishia Porterfield attended public comments and stated clearly the intent for the \$2 million was for BIPOC and



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working class artists; to vote to defund local artists would be against Metro Council's budget and the stated intent. During that August meeting also, after two hours of public comments from majority BIPOC artists, both Commission Chair Matia Powell and Director Daniel Singh clearly noted on the record that to vote against funding Thrive was inequitable and against the will of Metro Council.

Carol McCoy, in the same way a commissioner with a conflict of interest would, voted against equity and chose Scenario 4, which would add to the funding of white-led organizations with budgets larger than \$5 million. Moreover, McCoy is a board member at Humanities Tennessee. Humanities Tennessee receives funding from Metro Arts. The last General Operating grant they received in the FY24 grant cycle was \$124,600.

[In her interview with MHR staff in December 2023](#), McCoy continued to suggest she was merely listening to discussions from the “public” to inform her “unbiased” decision. Specifically, in the interview, she says, “I was just listening to what the public people had to say. I didn’t know what they were talking about,” and she repeats, “In June there were different organizations during the public comment time. I did not engage with them. I didn’t engage with the board members. I was listening, and I was still concerned about not understanding what was going on.” But it’s clear, from that same interview, that McCoy was not merely listening. She was speaking to multi-million dollar organizations: “I remember asking two of those people what organization are you with, and one said Nashville Opera and the other the TN Rep Theater. This was in May. They were having to plan their budgets, and they were told this is what would happen.” She also only listened to white Commissioners (not the Black Commissioners who argued against former Commissioner Marianne Byrd’s 4-page speech about “making promises [to white-led institutions] to guarantee them funding every year). As McCoy says in her interview: “And, she [Marianne Byrd] said, I think we gave our word, and we have to keep our word.” Her deliberate racism to exclude Black artists and artists of color from dialogue—even suggesting she didn’t know who they were in public comments for June and July as they advocated for equitable funding—and her deliberate erasure of Black Commissioners’ commentary and a director of color prove that her racism is interlocked with her misconduct to defund BIPOC communities. Even when there was enough money for everyone to get something, the political will from Metro Council, an equitable director, dozens of BIPOC artists who approached the Commissioners during public comment to vote for Scenario 4, McCoy voted against the people, the democratically-elected body, and fellow Commissioners and director. Therefore, even in a perfect scenario with a large funding pot and multiple vetted artists’ applications and high community engagement, Carol McCoy’s actions show how racism reveals misconduct, and racists cannot and will not equitably distribute tax funds.

Moreover, Carol McCoy, unlike other white commissioners, cannot say that Metro Legal had intimidated them during the closed meeting in August 2023 before the Commission meeting (which was illegal because there was no threat of a lawsuit) because McCoy voted to abstain in July 2023 for the initial full-funding of Thrive vote. She did not fully “flip” her vote from AYE to NAY. She claims it was because she lacked information, but Director Daniel Singh, before the July and August vote, called each of the Commissioners individually to answer all their questions to prepare for public discussion.

2. Carol McCoy still led Commissioners to fire Dana Parsons in February 15, 2024 leading to the full halting of all grants management for FY25



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This accusation is not illuminated in the MHRC report, which focuses exclusively on investigating the August 2023 vote.

Carol McCoy's racist and classist views create a bias to defund Thrive—the current most equitable grants process for BIPOC and working class artists—in order to fund white institutions. Thrive was created in 2014 to provide direct funds to artists, as is done in most cities. Direct funds do not require an artist to partner with an institution like the Frist or Opera, nor do they require the artist to have access to their own building. Thrive applications, before Daniel Singh's leadership, funded majority white artists, so from 2014-2023, none of the white Commissioners had an issue with Thrive—not in its reporting, nor its application, nor in who was receiving.

Daniel Singh, in 2023, after multiple engagements with diverse community artists and organizations, reworked the application and reporting to streamline it for artists who are not grantwriters to ensure equitable access to funds. All this information is available [online](#).

Carol McCoy attacks Thrive artists as “not real artists” because “there is no objective reporting” beyond if the project was completed. She pushes for changing the grants process in the middle of the grants process, and her logic is that “increased funding won't be secured,” as it was in April 2023, so the status quo must come back in funding white institutions. In McCoy's one hour rant, the issue with Metro Arts is not decades of inequity; the issue is equitable distribution. To bolster her argument to defund local artists for a second year, she uses several white supremacist tactics:

1. Thrive is a very complicated budget process. It's not “good governance.”
2. BIPOC need to be policed if funded; “they don't know what to do with the money.”
3. The community should not be engaged; Commissioners should only listen to “the law” as interpreted and enforced by Metro Legal.

All of these arguments were used when integrating public schools in the 1960s. White people will always find a reason equity is inconvenient and why BIPOC cannot be equal citizens.

What's troubling in the case of McCoy is that she actively is fighting to defund BIPOC Nashvillians and is using racism—about our abilities to spend money, about our artistic abilities, about “how the law is set up”—to do so.

In firing Dana Parsons on February 15, 2024, Syndie Davis, the newly-hired grants manager, was left without any training on how the grants process works at Metro Arts. Davis reassured the Commission in February that she was capable of the job and had access to Dana Parsons' proprietary documents on equitable grantmaking. She goes so far as to tell the Commission that there is enough time to redevelop the grants process while undergoing the grants, and so Commissioners voted to terminate Parsons' contract. Davis attended a [Grants Committee meeting on March 13th, 2024](#) with Commissioners Jester, Wade, and McCoy, and Davis was unable to answer any of the community members' concerns about whether or not Thrive would be funded for FY25. McCoy, during that meeting, also told Alayna Renae that she has never read the Thrive application that the community made under Daniel Singh's leadership and approved by the Commission in December 2022. McCoy said it's because she gets a lot of emails. Despite being on the Grants Committee, McCoy admitted to never reading through the application with the most diverse and equitable



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application pool. This complete dismissal of BIPOC and working class artists, again, shows that she is not interested in engaging community members, but rather serves on this board to meet the interests of the few. Again, McCoy heard from three local artists—all three of whom also participated in the grants editing process in November 2022. Artists spoke about the importance of the community's edits and how impactful Thrive is. She ignored the artists, and during the [March Commission meeting](#) (starting around 52 minutes in the middle of Commissioner Watts' Oversight Committee updates), she rehashed the same racist lines to derail the meeting and push to get rid of the BIPOC director of color.

This chaos that McCoy created led Director of Finance Kevin Crumbo to recommend on March 22nd, 2024 that Metro Arts halt grantmaking for FY25 ([letter available here](#)).

There are concrete consequences to removing McCoy:

1. Ending the derailment of every commission meeting to attack Daniel Singh and scapegoat him for the intentional discrimination of defunding BIPOC artists in August 2023 instead of holding accountability for how this Commission voted;
2. Signaling to other boards and commissions that racism is intolerable and the law does not protect racists;
3. Making the Grants Committee functional and equity-centered; and
4. Reviving the FY25 grants process, so that artists are not discriminated against a second time, opening a second lawsuit on the city.

The community is unable to subpoena her bank account or do a thorough background search into her disclosed and undisclosed relationships. Please consider that we are not lawyers and, also, we are doing all this—attending monthly Commission meetings, multiple Committee meetings, gathering information and informing the public on the defunding—all for free and in our spare time. We are doing this because dozens and dozens of artists have been harmed for decades, and systemic change is necessary and overdue.

As this Board heard Metro Legal say, there is no entity within Metro government that handles accusations of racism and discrimination when it comes to Boards and Commissions. That is by design. And just as it is by design, it is also within our ability to redesign. We ask that this Board not legalize harm. It's not enough to personally call it out. There must be systemic mechanisms and consequences in order for the integrity of the government to remain intact.

Respectfully submitted,

Alayna Anderson
Christine Hall
Lydia Yousief
Sangeetha Ekambaram



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