



METRO ARTS

NASHVILLE OFFICE OF ARTS + CULTURE

PUBLIC COMMENT
Committee for Antiracism and Equity
Feb. 2, 2022 5:00p.m.

Dear CARE/Metro Arts Commission,

I am submitting a comment in light of the release of the Metro HR Fact Finding report that was recently released. In order for Metro Arts to live up to its mission of driving a more equitable community, a third-party group must come in and do an investigation. Within these investigations conducted by Metro HR, there are many named instances of BIPOC employees, both former and current, experiencing microaggressions and other racially oppressive systems/behavior in the workplace. For any reconciliation to happen, the harm must be named and accountability for the negative impact must take place. The only way this can happen is for a neutral outside group with experience in antiracism to come in and make recommendations.

As Commissioner Angelico stated to the Nashville Scene, “We may not have violated any rules, but that doesn’t mean we didn’t do something wrong. The rules are there to tell us what’s permissible and not permissible — not to tell us what’s right and wrong.” Metro Arts has made the efforts to go above and beyond by being the only Metro agency with an equity statement. In order to live up to this statement, it is imperative that these values are not only implemented in a superficial, front-facing way, but also internally. Specifically, the equity statement says that, “Metro Arts will commit to frequent and on-going, agency-wide honest conversations about race, class, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and income status.” Clearly, there is a severe lack of trust and honesty internally. Also, more importantly, Metro Arts “commits to exposing and unraveling [inequity] through our own leadership, practices and policies.” Now is the moment for Metro Arts to prove that they are truly an equitable and antiracist organization by putting the words they have released to the community to action.

It is absolutely imperative for there to be a third-party, neutral group to come in and do an investigation. I hope that CARE and the Commission decide to do so briskly to restore trust with Metro Arts employees as well as the Nashville community at large.

Thank you,
Isabel Tipton-Krispin
District 9

Dear CARE members,

I am grateful for your contributions to the arts in Nashville as individuals, for the greater impact your individual and committee work has and will continue to have on the Nashville arts community, and for this committee's work in "holding Metro Arts accountable in becoming fully antiracist," as is stated in your purpose.

In this vein, I am once again requesting a drastic change in Metro Arts leadership. The evidence continues to be clear that Director Vincent, Ian Myers, and possibly other white supervisors on staff at Metro Arts and in Metro HR racially discriminated against former staffers, and continue to do so against current staff. Furthermore, Metro Arts Commission Chair Jim Schmidt (and perhaps the entire commission) failed in his duty to employ an Executive Director that lived up to Metro Arts' Cultural Equity statement. Indeed he failed at the simple task of employing a Director that was a good leader.

Whether the discrimination (or even just poor leadership) was intentional or not is irrelevant due to the fact that it has continued for nearly three years.

I urge this committee to make the following recommendations to the full Metro Arts Commission:

- To accept the immediate resignation of Caroline Vincent as Executive Director
- To accept the immediate resignation of Ian Myers as Metro Arts HR liaison
- To accept the immediate resignation of Jim Schmidt as a Metro Arts Commissioner (and therefore as Chair)
- To require all Metro Arts Commissioners and MA Committee members to regularly participate in anti-racist and cultural equity training

I fully understand the optics of a man calling for the resignation of a woman. I would not do so if I did not truly believe it is the only way for this vital government department to move forward with equity and justice. Anything short of those four steps will just be a temporary measure that may hide the issue for a while. Anything short of those four steps will certainly prevent talented women of color from applying to work for Metro Arts or forcing out those already working there. Anything short of those four steps will continue to impede the work that Metro Arts is trying to do in our community.

I hope to be present for this meeting to talk with you in person, but covid-related childcare issues continue to be a problem. I look forward to working with you all soon.

Sincerely,
Alan Fey
1987 Gatlin Dr, 37210 (District 17)
Freelance Arts Administrator

ALIAS Chamber Ensemble, Managing Dir.
Nashville Philharmonic Orchestra, Operations Mgr.
Make Music Nashville, Executive Dir.



Metro Nashville Arts Commission
Metro Southeast Campus
1417 Murfreesboro Pike
Nashville, TN 37217

Metro Arts Commissioners:

We are writing to uphold and remind each other of our shared commitment to robust conversations and action around racial equity in the arts and beyond. In this regard, we support a substantive response to the grievances shared by former and current Metro Art employees of color. This action is important not only for Metro Arts, but also for the potential impact of these inequalities as they trickle down, in direct and indirect ways, to those the Nashville arts community serves.

Since Metro Arts has been awaiting the human resources report to take further action, we anticipate that solutions and remedies are forthcoming imminently. While we are not in a position to investigate and adjudicate this matter as an organization, we want to emphasize the following thoughts and recommendations as the response unfolds:

- With a new Chief Diversity Officer, a diverse Metro Arts Commission board, a Metro Human Relations Commission, and a Committee for Antiracism and Equity, Metro Arts and Metro government have equipped themselves with multiple safeguards, experts, and resources to address these matters. We would ask for Metro Arts to engage this expertise and hear what these experts recommend as a way forward.
- Human resource departments are not necessarily viewed by all as an unbiased broker in these conversations, especially, in this case, if a person of color has not been involved in the Fact Finding and HR report. This would warrant a third party outside resource to further investigate, craft, and ensure implementation of solutions as a response to the grievances.
- Contrition and acknowledgement from leadership for the impact this has had on the lives of those affected would be healthy for repairing harm and improving the range of possible solutions. This is the first step in necessary accountability for the situation. This is an opportunity to restore trust and build a more equitable institution, positively shaping Metro Arts as well the organizations and communities it serves.
- If there is truth to Ibram Kendi's statement that racism is about power and policy, not people; then examining the enforced or disparately enforced department and Metro policies that are a point of tension is necessary to create systems for future success. This includes exploring the administrative and reporting structures necessary to create a more supportive culture and equitable participation.



- We have worked with all parties and have found them to be highly capable and effective members of the arts commission and arts community. There should be room in an expanding Nashville for all to contribute their capabilities, especially as it relates to those who are not being included in the benefits of the changing Nashville landscape.

We look forward to hearing from Metro Arts commissioners and the Committee for Antiracism and Equity on their proposed solutions. While this is a clear setback on the road to a more equitable Nashville arts community, it is also an opportunity for Metro Arts to lead other Metro departments and Nashville organizations by envisioning more diverse, healthy, and equitable workplaces.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Janet Walsh".

Janet Walsh
Board Chair
Southern Word

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Smith".

Benjamin Smith
Executive Director
Southern Word