

**N**ational  
**C**oalition  
**A**gainst  
**C**ensorship

Mayor Steve Schewel  
The City of Durham  
101 City Hall Plaza  
Durham, NC 27701

[Steve.Schewel@durhamnc.gov](mailto:Steve.Schewel@durhamnc.gov); [council@durhamnc.gov](mailto:council@durhamnc.gov)

July 11, 2018

Dear Mayor Schewel, Mayor Pro Tempore Johnson and members of the Durham City Council,

As an organization that has been defending free expression for over 40 years, the National Coalition Against Censorship is concerned by your decision to issue a statement that some people with controversial views should be denied an opportunity to speak in any place where they are likely to attract an audience, presumably including the Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC), a public space.

Your July 6 statement was issued in response to news that Jordan Peterson will speak at DPAC in September. It recognizes Mr. Peterson's "right to hold his opinions and to freely state his opinions without government interference" and acknowledges that the management companies that administer DPAC are "entirely responsible" for the choice of performers and speakers.

However, your statement goes on to say that "a person's right to free speech does not include the right to a platform or an audience." This assertion, followed by a reference to "Mr. Peterson's racist, misogynist and transphobic views," will inevitably have a chilling effect on the theater's ability to choose speakers representing a diversity of perspectives.

We have recently seen growing support for the idea of denying people with extreme views access to an audience. Its advocates suggest that venues should allot access based on the merit of a speaker's ideas and whether they benefit the community. But how do we determine which ideas have value? Who should make those decisions?

Clearly, Mr. Peterson's views anger you and may upset many of your constituents. But as public officials you have a duty to protect the rights of citizens who want to hear him, including those who disagree with him but want to hear him anyway. In a democracy we let the people decide which ideas have value.

We agree that no one has a right to an audience, but everyone is entitled to seek one, especially on a public stage.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan, Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship

19 Fulton Street, Suite 407  
New York, NY 10038  
tel: (212) 807-6222  
fax: (212) 807-6245  
e-mail: [ncac@ncac.org](mailto:ncac@ncac.org)  
web: [www.ncac.org](http://www.ncac.org)

Christopher Finan  
*Executive Director*

**NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS**

Actors' Equity Association  
American Association of School Administrators  
American Association of University Professors  
American Association of University Women  
American Booksellers for Free Expression  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Ethical Union  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Jewish Committee  
American Library Association  
American Literary Translators Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Society of Journalists & Authors  
Americans United for Separation of Church & State  
Association of American Publishers Authors Guild  
Catholics for Choice  
Children's Literature Association  
College Art Association  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund  
The Creative Coalition  
Directors Guild of America  
The Dramatists Guild of America  
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund  
Educational Book & Media Association  
First Amendment Lawyers Association  
Free Speech Coalition  
International Literacy Association  
Lambda Legal  
Modern Language Association  
National Center for Science Education  
National Communication Association  
National Council for the Social Studies  
National Council of the Churches  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Education Association  
National Youth Rights Association  
The Newspaper Guild/CWA  
PEN American Center  
People For the American Way  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Project Censored  
SAG-AFTRA  
Sexuality Information & Education Council of the U.S.  
Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators  
Student Press Law Center  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Democratic Intellectuals  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Church of Christ  
Office of Communication  
United Methodist Church,  
United Methodist Communications  
Women's American ORT  
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance  
Writers Guild of America, East  
Writers Guild of America, West

Cc:

Vernetta Alston Ward 3 Council Member <a href="mailto:vernetta.alston@durhamnc.gov">vernetta.alston@durhamnc.gov</a>	Mark-Anthony Middleton Ward 2 Council Member <a href="mailto:Mark-Anthony.Middleton@durhamnc.gov">Mark-Anthony.Middleton@durhamnc.gov</a>
Javiera Caballero At-Large Council Member <a href="mailto:Javiera.Caballero@durhamnc.gov">Javiera.Caballero@durhamnc.gov</a>	Jillian Johnson Mayor Pro Tempore <a href="mailto:Jillian.Johnson@durhamnc.gov">Jillian.Johnson@durhamnc.gov</a>
DeDreana Freeman Ward 1 Council Member <a href="mailto:dedreana.freeman@durhamnc.gov">dedreana.freeman@durhamnc.gov</a>	Charlie Reece At Large Council Member <a href="mailto:charlie.reece@durhamnc.gov">charlie.reece@durhamnc.gov</a>