

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**ARTS
ADVOCACY
PROGRAM**

May 17, 2019

Mayor Walt Hollingsworth
City Hall
315 Bradley Street
Carrollton, Georgia 30117
Phone: (770) 830-2000
Email: whollingsworth@carrollton-ga.gov

Dear Mayor Hollingsworth,

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is an alliance of over 50 national nonprofit organizations, including literary, artistic, religious, educational, professional, labor, and civil liberties groups dedicated to promoting the right to free speech. The Dramatists Legal Defense Fund (DLDF) is a nonprofit arm of the Dramatists Guild of America that advocates on behalf of dramatists, theaters, audiences, and all who confront censorship on stages across America. NCAC and DLDF write to the City of Carrollton to express concern that it pulled its sponsorship from a theater production in response to the play's textual references to nudity, an action that raises serious First Amendment concerns. The play was scheduled to open in the fall at the Carrollton Center for the Arts, a city-owned venue. We demand that the City restore funding to the production.

The following is our understanding of the facts; please inform us if you believe we are in error.

Calendar Girls, a comedy by Tim Firth, is based on the true story of a group of middle-aged women who produce a calendar in which they pose nude. Their goal is to raise five thousand dollars to buy a couch for their local hospital in memory of one of their husbands who died of leukemia. The sale of the calendar exceeds their expectations; they raise over five million dollars and donate it to the hospital for leukemia research. The play, based on a 2003 movie, has toured nationally and internationally, and it recently generated a musical spinoff. While the movie includes brief glimpses of female breasts, the stage performance does not include any nudity whatsoever. The City of Carrollton had approved the play and the production rights have already been obtained. Reportedly, however, the City Manager and some members of the City Council do not want its name to be associated with a play that even references nudity. The City pulled its funding, leaving the future of the production in peril.

While the City Manager and City Council members may personally find the mere idea of nudity offensive and worry that potential ticket buyers may react similarly, city officials are barred by the First Amendment from suppressing speech because they consider the ideas expressed in it offensive. And that includes defunding the play:

**NCAC PARTICIPATING
ORGANIZATIONS**

Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
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 NewsGuild-CWA
PEN America
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

While the government may choose whether to fund art or not, it cannot wield the power of the purse strings to discriminate against viewpoints it doesn't like. As stated in *Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences v. City of New York* (E.D.N.Y. 1999): "the government cannot avoid the reach of the First Amendment by acting indirectly rather than directly." Therefore, the City may be found in violation of constitutional imperatives if it has withdrawn funding because of the subjective opinion of some city officials and their discomfort with references to nudity: "...where the denial of a benefit, subsidy or contract is motivated by a desire to suppress speech in violation of the First Amendment, that denial will be enjoined." (*Brooklyn Inst. of Arts and Sciences v. New York* (E.D.N.Y. 1999))

Art, which may sometimes be controversial, is crucial to the democratic conversation in any society. It helps us make sense of our changing environment and understand the strangers around us: it is a social necessity, not a luxury. An open democratic culture rich in art and ideas inevitably includes ideas with which some members of the public may disagree.

NCAC and DLDF demand that the City restore its sponsorship to *Calendar Girls* immediately and restore it to the fall schedule so that it can proceed as planned. Please respond to this letter as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Joy Garnett
Arts Advocacy Associate
National Coalition Against Censorship



Ralph Sevush, Esq.
Executive Director
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund

Cc:

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