

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

June 28, 2023

Tolly Graves, Director
Linsi Crain, Public and Government Affairs Manager
Richmond Refinery
Chevron Products Company
Chevron U.S.A. Inc.
841 Chevron Way
Richmond, CA 94801

Sent via email to RichmondRefineryInfo@chevron.com, linsicrain@chevron.com

Dear Mr. Graves and Ms. Crain,

As a nonpartisan organization dedicated to freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry, the National Coalition Against Censorship is deeply concerned by Chevron's unilateral decision to remove and confiscate the entirety of a temporary public art installation titled *Fencelines* that had been approved by the city of Richmond, California. We urge you to return the artwork to the project's organizers, and support their right to artistic expression in the city's public spaces.

We understand that *Fencelines* is the product of at least ten widely-advertised community workshops held in the Richmond area over the past year, led by local artists, activists, and community organizers. The workshops convened hundreds of local residents who painted messages on colorful slats of salvaged wood that were designed to be attached onto a chain-link fence. The messages reflect residents' desires and visions for their community, their thoughts about living in close proximity to multiple oil refineries, and their concerns about the ways in which this negatively affects their health and quality of life. The project culminated in both an exhibition at the Richmond Art Center opening in early April, and the April 22 unveiling of the installation at a relatively small section of fence that separates the neighborhood of North Richmond from the recreational and publicly accessible Bay Trail, eight lanes of the Bay Highway, and further off, Chevron's Richmond refinery.

The organizers leading the project had obtained approval from the City of Richmond to install the artwork on a section of fence that they were informed

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 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
Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Association of Art Critics United States (AICA-USA)
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 Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The News Guild-CWA
PEN America
People for the American Way
PFLAG National
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Poets & Writers
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
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Office of Communication
United Methodist Church, United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

was city property from April 22 through mid-June. Between May 15 and 16, however, the work disappeared. Chevron has since admitted to removing and confiscating the work, alleging that it was installed without permission on the company's property, and amounted to a "safety or security" concern.

The *Fencelines* organizers had contacted Chevron's community engagement manager about the project when it was in its initial stages, and in the weeks leading up to its unveiling, the project's intended location had been well-publicized. It was widely documented that this was a city-sanctioned public artwork, and Chevron should have addressed any concerns about property trespass or security directly to the city. Additionally, it is our understanding that the project was expressly designed and installed so that it would not cause any structural or functional damage to the chain link fence. Allegations that the artwork posed a safety or security threat, especially considering that it was installed along a fence bordering a publicly accessible recreational trail adjacent to vacant land, seems exaggerated and unlikely.

The secretive theft of the artwork raises serious questions about Chevron's claim that it supports freedom of expression and that it endeavors to be a good neighbor in the communities where it is located. We encourage you to return the *Fencelines* artwork to the project organizers, and work to clarify any property disputes with the city directly, rather than deliberately erase the work of artists who are trying to empower and engage members of their community.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Larison
Director, Arts & Culture Advocacy Program
National Coalition Against Censorship

cc: Lily Naaz Rahnema, Community Engagement Manager, Chevron
Ross Allen, External Affairs Advisor, Chevron