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...
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