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March 3, 2019

**Janis Burley Wilson, President & CEO
Ronald Lee Newman, Manager
August Wilson Center for African American Culture
980 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh PA 15222**

Dear Ms. Burley Wilson & Mr. Newman:

As one who brokered the original meeting with then Mayor Tom Murphy in my position as the President of the NAACP Pittsburgh Branch in 1996 to prepare for our local branch, and the City of Pittsburgh, to host the 1997 National NAACP Convention, I have a personal interest in what happens to what has been identified, up to now, as the August Wilson Center for African American Culture. It was at that meeting in 1996 that then Mayor Murphy responded to our request that part of the NAACP "Plans for Progress" would be the call for the creation of what we then referred to as a Black Museum. Within weeks of that meeting I received a call from then Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Director Mulugetta Birru to inform me that funds were being earmarked to begin research on the possibility of creating a Black museum in Pittsburgh. Soon after, a committee was appointed by Mayor Murphy to be chaired by then Councilman Sala Udin and then Councilwoman Valarie Roberts. I appointed at least two NAACP Executive Committee members to serve on this committee. I later became a member of the first official Board of the August Wilson Center for African American Culture and served for a few years in that capacity.

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African Americans VOTE in EACH and EVERY election!!"
Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.**

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Website: www.b-pep.net**

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When the possibility of the center closing was a real possibility, in my capacity as Chairman & CEO of the Black Political Empowerment Project I met with many community people including people like Renee Wilson and Maryellen Deckard, to discuss this very troubling situation. I later held a news conference in front of the Center with B-PEP Planning Council members and area citizens to support the idea of the Center being supported by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. There was much community excitement when a plan was put into place to help save the Center.

It is with this backdrop that I recently read with much dismay about the decision to change the name of the August Wilson Center for African American Culture to “The August Wilson Cultural Center”. It would seem that such a decision about an important cultural gem and a source of pride for the African American community of Metropolitan Pittsburgh would first be shared with the community at large before a final decision would be reached.

What seems confusing to me is that in the news release it states: “The center’s mission is to own and operate a home for the arts, storytelling, learning and exchange around the African American experience and the rich culture of the African diaspora”. If that is indeed the mission, then WHY would the center proceed to eliminate the words “African American” from the name of the institution that was established to focus on ‘the rich culture of the African diaspora’?!? I am reasonably certain that August Wilson would be proud to have his name listed alongside the words “African American Culture”. It is also important to note that we will never know the impact on Black children, and Black people of all ages, seeing the words “African American Culture” on the front of this beautiful building! Why should we hide that? These words should be a sense of pride to *every* African American throughout the Pittsburgh Region and beyond.

With a ‘star studded gala’ scheduled for the 10th Anniversary of the Center in April 2019, the last thing the center needs is a controversy around, of all things, the Center’s name. I think there is an

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immediate need to meet with people from the community who have expressed great concern around this name change decision. I also strongly urge that this bad decision be reversed.

I am still willing, as Chairman & CEO of the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP), to work with the two of you, and others, in urging Black-based organizations, agencies and churches to make annual donations to “The August Wilson Center for African American Culture” to demonstrate ongoing support from the African American community. Though our funds are limited, I have already authorized B-PEP’s annual commitment of \$250.00 for this year which you will be receiving shortly, along with my personal check.

Looking forward to hearing news of the reversal of this recent decision. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tim Stevens

Tim Stevens, Chairman & CEO
The Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)
412-758-7898

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