April 9, 2023

Dear ,

My name is Kimberly Blaeser. I am a Past Wisconsin Poet Laureate, Professor Emerita at UW-Milwaukee, the Founding Director of the national organization Indigenous Nations Poets, an MFA Faculty member at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, Vice President of Letters for the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, a member of the Academy of American Poets’ Poetry Coalition, and the author of eight books. I have worked in the literary arts fields for more than thirty-five years.

I am writing to you today to express my dismay that the Wisconsin Center District Board would allow its CEO Marty Brooks to unilaterally decide to demolish the treasured literary arts installation in the Wisconsin Center Building. As a government entity, the Wisconsin Center District Board would seem to have an obligation to due process such as a public hearing. The citizens who supported the creation of this one-of-a-kind nationally recognized installation deserve a chance to express their opinion about its future. The stealthy way that Mr. Brooks has tried to accomplish this erasure of public art, this silencing of Wisconsin’s literary history, does not show the Wisconsin Center District in a good light. As I write this, I and a number of regional and national figures are working to bring the story to the press and arts organizations across this nation. Wisconsin already stands at the bottom of the fifty-two states in terms of arts funding. Does your board want to be a part of giving it the reputation of also censoring public art and running roughshod over the citizens whose tax dollars support the WCD?

In my capacity as Founding Director of Indigenous Nations Poets I am currently in the process of bringing our national gathering to Door County at the end of April. These artists from Hawaii to Alaska and everywhere in between will be shocked to learn of the destructive and dictatorial action allowed to move forward in Milwaukee. How ironic to bring Indigenous writers into a state that is systematically erasing their words.

There is still time to halt this action and Marty Brooks’ unethical actions, time to bring transparency to the process, and time to involve those trained in the arts into the conversation. I ask that you show your leadership and raise your voice to stop the wanton destruction. Wisconsin and the larger arts community will be watching what happens in Milwaukee. Please don’t make deaccessioning of art part of our history.

Please find attached a copy of the press release being circulated about this situation which includes additional context and commentary.

Sincerely,


Kimberly M. Blaeser

Professor Emerita University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Founding Director, Indigenous Nations Poets