

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Save Watkins Press Contact: Quinn Dukes, quinndukes@gmail.com, 646.704.4761

The full statement from Save Watkins:

Belmont President Bob Fisher has awarded J. Kline a paid vacation and a promise of future employment while insulting the entire Watkins community with his patronizing statement that brushes off valid, long-standing concerns over Kline's failed leadership as mere emotional outburst. The fact is, as the faculty's no-confidence letter makes crystal-clear, Kline's leadership failures are multiple and long-standing, and many in the Watkins community have been sounding the alarm for a considerable time.

Belmont has chosen to defend Kline and insulate him from accountability for the crisis he helped to create. Meanwhile, Watkins faculty and staff have been given no job offers nor severance from Belmont, and Watkins students are left to scramble at the last minute to rethink their educational futures. Watkins alumni are left to wonder why they were never informed of the urgency of Watkins' situation, nor solicited for their help.

Dr. Fisher's callous statement demonstrates yet again why the Watkins community is deeply skeptical of the appropriateness of the deal with Belmont. From the moment that the giveaway of Watkins was announced, our numerous concerns, including the lopsided terms of the deal and the deep cultural differences between the institutions, have been met with empty lip service, or carefully-worded non-promises. Mostly, they were ignored completely. It appears increasingly clear that Belmont's prime motivation is to protect the \$15-20 million dollar real estate windfall they stand to gain.

We join the faculty, staff, and students' call to the Watkins Board to fire J. Kline as President, and we call on Belmont's administration to cease employing him in any capacity related to Watkins College of Art.

We call on the Watkins Board of Trustees to immediately place a hold on the Belmont deal, and start a full, inclusive, transparent public engagement process. The Trustees should do a "full reset", meaning they should start with a clean slate of options for the future of the school, and work with all stakeholders to craft a significantly better, more equitable outcome for Watkins' current and future students, staff, and faculty, as well as the Nashville community at large.

Finally, because current Watkins students have already been greatly harmed by this botched acquisition process, we call on Belmont to honor, at minimum, all of the currently-announced admission and financial aid promises for any Watkins student wishing to attend Belmont, regardless of the outcome of the full reset. Watkins students should not be penalized for the mistakes and bad judgements of others, that put them in this uncertain position.

An online [Change.org](#) petition, "An Open Letter to the President of Watkins College of Art and Board of Directors", has over 4,800 signatures. It makes several demands for transparency, and for accountable, enforceable guarantees for Watkins students who would be transferring under the Belmont deal, and severance pay for any Watkins faculty that are not hired by Belmont.



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The Save Watkins initiative continues pressing the Watkins Board for transparency. Save Watkins is a collective of Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni of the Watkins College of Art. Our mission is to secure a safe and open environment for Watkins Students to express themselves without fear of being censored. This may manifest as securing the funding to keep the Watkins College of Art open in its current form, changing existing policies at Belmont, or working towards a partnership with a different institution.

Watkins College of Art was founded as a public non-profit college in 1885, pursuant to the will of Samuel Watkins. Mr. Watkins envisioned his school as a place of education for all, especially those without means for expensive traditional colleges. Watkins currently offers career-oriented bachelor of fine arts (BFA) degrees and graduate (MFA) degrees.

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