

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CONCERNED WATKINS ALUMNI DEMAND RIGHT TO FUNDRAISE AND CALL OUT
NEGLECTFUL BOARD**

An **“Open Letter to the Board of Directors at Watkins College of Art from Concerned Alumni”** was released today (Thursday, February 20, 2020, 9:00 CST). The letter expresses collective discontent with the complete lack of outreach and communication to Watkins alumni for financial support, the continued vacancy of a Director of Development role, and the suspicious hiring decision of President J. Kline’s fiancée (now wife). Critical excerpts of the letter are outlined below.

“We are disappointed by the news shared with faculty, students, and the public on Tuesday, January 28, 2020, by President J. Kline. **It is bewildering that those who have been entrusted to lead our alma mater would make such a drastic decision without transparency throughout the process.**” The letter further notes, “The disconnect between the Board of Trustees’ practices and the needs of the people they serve has been wide, but this decision underscores the governing board’s lack of understanding in the value of developing the artist’s voice.”

“If the board had a sincere interest in exploring all possible avenues of funding, one would expect a call for help to be sent out to one of the school’s greatest resources: Watkins alumni. We are members of communities all over the country and work in all types of sectors with connections to many different people and organizations. We have been trained by Watkins faculty to form innovative ideas, develop creative solutions, and apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills to any situation. To underutilize such a great resource is short-sighted and does not align with the president’s claim that everything has been done to keep Watkins independent. **The alumni have not been contacted in the past five years with information noting that our alma mater was in desperate need of financial help.** Had we been told, many of us would have offered our time, resources, and money to support Watkins. This raises the question: If one of the school’s greatest resources was not engaged in the conversation, what exactly has been done to secure the future of Nashville’s independent art school during the past five years?”

“Watkins is more than a name. Watkins is faculty. The faculty who create relevant, innovative curriculum and challenge the student artist in the development of their craft. Watkins is students. The students who gather, discuss, and turn thought-provoking ideas into form. Watkins is alumni. The alumni who apply creative strategies developed at Watkins to create, sustain, and improve their communities. Watkins is community. A community where authentic exploration exists, where experimentation is encouraged, and where creativity is embraced.

“Watkins cannot be given to a university and maintain the qualities that make it the unique and accessible school that it is today. We should not put the name of our school on a building at a university, reduce it to an existing program, and call it “Watkins”. We cannot abandon the essential core of Watkins and say that the legacy of Samuel Watkins will continue.



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Without the Watkins faculty, curriculum, and majors, we cannot claim it a deal made in the best interest of securing the mission and vision of the school. We cannot state that students will be able to attend Watkins for many years to come when the cost of tuition will be beyond the reach of prospective students (currently nearly double the cost). We especially cannot declare such decisions are the best outcome to this financial crisis when all possible resources were not sought or solutions explored.

“We request a restricted account be set up for the purpose of raising funds to save Watkins with an online donation option placed on the school’s website. These funds will be returned to donors should Watkins be taken over by Belmont.

“We also request the board place a temporary hold on the plans to give Watkins to Belmont and allow time for the voice of stakeholder representatives to be included in the process of exhausting all possible solutions before closing the doors of the school.

“We love Watkins. We believe in Watkins. We would not be where we are today if we had not had the opportunity to attend this school. Not only have our lives been impacted, but the world in which we live has benefited from the arts education we received. The skills we learned and the experiences we gained have rippled out into all areas of our lives and communities. **We believe if given the chance, if told the story, if made aware of the needs, there are many who will invest in and preserve the incredible work taking place inside the hallowed walls of Watkins.**

To view the full letter, visit savewatkins.com

Watkins College of Art is a public non-profit college, founded in 1885, pursuant to the will of Samuel Watkins. It is governed by a board composed of three Commissioners appointed by the Governor, and 16 Trustees. Watkins currently offers career-oriented bachelor of fine arts (BFA) degrees and graduate (MFA) degrees.

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 pursue their education. This may manifest as securing the funding to keep the Watkins College of Art open in its current form, working towards a partnership with a different institution, or changing existing policies at Belmont for the benefit of all current and future Watkins students.

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