



CONTENT CREATORS COALITION

LOS ANGELES: 101 S. HARPER AVE., LA, CA 90048 • NEW YORK: 425 W. 23 STREET, SUITE 1BB, NEW YORK, NY 10011

April 24, 2017

Dear Congressional Black Caucus Member:

On behalf of the Content Creators Coalition, we write in support of H.R. 1695, the Register of Copyrights Selection and Accountability Act, which would modernize and provide greater transparency to the process of selecting the Register of the Copyright Office.

This is vital legislation that will strengthen the Copyright Office. We believe this selection process should be granted a similar import, rigor, and transparency as the processes of selecting other organizations, such as the U.S. Patent and Trademark office, that oversee large industries: Presidential nomination and Senate confirmation. In light of the specialized knowledge required to lead this office, we also support the appointment of an advisory group to suggest candidates for consideration.

This legislation would place the Copyright Office on equal footing as other economically and culturally vital agencies. It has wide bipartisan support and was passed out of the typically polarized House Judiciary Committee on a vote of 27-1.

As artists of color, we find it deeply offensive that opponents of this bill have attempted to recast their anti-creators' rights goals into a smear campaign against its sponsors and supporters, insinuating that the legislation is about the race and gender of the current Librarian of Congress. The Register of Copyrights Selection and Accountability Act is co-authored by the Dean of the House and the Congressional Black Caucus, Judiciary Ranking Member John Conyers, and supported by Congressman John Lewis. Their lifelong and unshakeable commitment to civil rights is a historical fact and should be honored and respected, not opportunistically and baselessly questioned just to score a few empty political points.

We would be the first to speak out against prejudice or bias anywhere – in business, culture, the arts, or politics. But here, we know these charges are false. The bill has nothing to do with the current Librarian at all – in fact, these reform proposals pre-date her appointment.

Nor does this bill have anything to do with the former Register of Copyrights. We are grateful for her tireless efforts and advocacy on behalf of working musicians and find it appalling that some have engaged in efforts to drag her record through the mud to defeat these reforms.

And certainly the bill has nothing to do with the current President – once again, these proposals to modernize the Copyright Office long pre-date his election. It is the height of cynicism for bill opponents to attempt to ride on the powerful coattails of the “RESIST” movement by falsely wrapping this bipartisan pro-artist, pro-creator legislation in the controversies surrounding the President, especially in light of his proposal for massive cuts to funding for the arts. In our view, misleading the President’s critics by leveraging fear into opposition for a non-controversial proposal like this ultimately undermines and disrespects our movement.

The need for this legislation is plain. The current system in which the Librarian of Congress selects the Register is the result of a unique moment in history and outdated concerns: in 1870, the Librarian of Congress asked Congress to give him the authority to appoint the Register in order to deal with a massive influx of new works and the need to quickly grow the Library’s collection.

Nearly 150 years later, the functions of the Copyright Office have changed. It is no mere registry of creative works, but has become the most trusted advisor on Copyright law and its interpretation for the United States Congress. The process of selecting a leader to this office should reflect the importance of copyright to the U.S. economy.

Congress is reviewing and revising copyright laws to ensure they continue to protect all music creators in a time of rapid transition online. It deserves the best advice it can get, and reform of the Register selection process is long overdue.

Thank you for consideration of our views,

Melvin Gibbs
Nona Hendryx
Ernie Isley
Ramsey Jones
Darrell McNeill
V Jeffery Smith

Biographies of Signatories

Melvin Gibbs is the President of the Content Creators Coalition. He is an American bassist, composer, and producer who has appeared on close to 200 albums. He has worked with numerous iconic acts across genres, including Cassandra Wilson, DJ Logic, the Power Tools trio with Bill Frisell and Ronald Shannon Jackson, Defunkt, Sonny Sharrock, Arto Lindsay, Dougie Bowne, the Rollins Band, Eye and I, Harriet Tubman, and more. Time Out New York magazine called him "the best bassist in the world."

Nona Hendryx was one-third of Labelle, the Grammy nominated trio best known for their hit song "Lady Marmalade." She performed on the Artists Against Apartheid project Sun City, recorded along with Bruce Springsteen, Bono and Lou Reed. She sang backup and toured with the Talking Heads and opened for The Who and The Rolling Stones.

Ernie Isley is a songwriter, guitarist, and member of the Isley Brothers, considered one of the most influential groups of the last half-century. Their music has spanned doo-wop, rock n' roll, R&B, soul, funk, disco and hip-hop, with hits like "Shout," "It's Your Thing," and "That Lady," and 50 singles on the R&B charts between 1969 and 1988. The Isley Brothers were inducted into the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame in 1992, and received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014.

Ramsay Jones is part of the Wu-Tang Clan family and has appeared on many of their releases. He is a drummer whose playing has been called the heartbeat of the Funkface sound. He has also played with likes of Vernon Reid (Living Color), Falu, Martin Luther, and Apollo Heights.

Darrell McNeill is Director of Operations of the Black Rock Coalition, a nonprofit dedicated to expanding and advancing opportunities for Black musicians. The organization is a united front of musically and politically progressive Black artists and supporters, with collaborators including Meshell Ndegeocello, 24-7 Spyz, the members of Living Colour, Fishbone, and Sean "P Diddy" Combs. He is a renowned bassist.

V Jeffrey Smith is a multi-instrumentalist. He is the writer/producer of Paula Abdul's #1 album *Spellbound*. He has also produced artists like Daryl Hall (Hall and Oates) Corey Glover (Living Color) Heather Headley, Tamia, and many more. He is the co-founder and member of the group, The Family Stand.