



The following letter was sent to Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden; Delaware Governor Jack Markell; and Wilmington Mayor Dennis P. Williams.

April 14, 2014

I am writing on behalf of the membership and Board of Trustees of the Association of Art Museum Directors in response to the announcement made on March 26 by the Delaware Art Museum that it had decided to sell works of art from its collection to provide funds to reduce its debt and support its operations. Since the AAMD first learned last November that the Museum was considering this course of action, we have been in close contact with the Delaware Art Museum's interim director, Mike Miller, and the Museum's Board of Trustees to offer our assistance in finding a resolution that would not involve deaccessioning works of art for this purpose. Treating works that are held in the public trust as financial assets represents a serious violation of the AAMD's Code of Ethics and professional standards that are widely accepted throughout the museum world. This step also represents in our opinion a limited understanding on the part of the Museum's Trustees of their role as fiduciaries and the responsibility they have for all of the resources—most significantly, the collection—that have been entrusted to their care.

The AAMD fully appreciates the serious financial challenges with which the Delaware Art Museum has been grappling during the past several years, but also believes that they are not insurmountable and can be solved without resorting to the sale of works of art. We also reaffirm our offer to help the Museum explore alternatives to this course of action. As we have noted consistently in our communications with the Museum, it is a long-standing policy of the AAMD (an organization of which, until very recently, the Delaware Art Museum has been a member) to prohibit the use of funds obtained through deaccessioning for any purpose other than the acquisition of other works of art. We will continue to urge Mr. Miller and the Museum's Trustees to reconsider the decision they have made, which will only serve to weaken the Museum's collection, diminish its standing in the field, and compromise its ability to serve as a vital cultural and educational resource for audiences in Wilmington and throughout the state.

Our policy prohibiting deaccessioning for operational purposes has long been, and must remain, a core principle of the museum profession and a basic standard of professional museum practice throughout the country to ensure the protection of our cultural heritage now and in the future. If art museums do not uphold this principle, we believe that they will violate the trust in which the works of art in their collections are held. The use of proceeds from the sale of a work (or works) of art from a museum's

collection to support operations—and, in this case, the retirement of debt—will irrevocably damage its mission and ability to serve its community. Furthermore, such actions can only serve to discourage those who would otherwise be inclined to support art museums and is therefore likely to have a significant negative impact on fundraising over time. Treating works of art from a museum's collection as financial assets not only weakens the institution taking such an action, it will also do substantial harm to the field as a whole.

As you can well understand, we are also deeply concerned that the Delaware Art Museum has refused to disclose publicly the works of art that it is considering selling. Given the importance of this decision and its potential impact, we believe that such information should be shared with the Museum's members and the community as a whole so that they can understand what is at stake and be reassured that the action taken by the Board of Trustees does not violate donor intent or other strictures.

If the Delaware Art Museum proceeds with its current deaccessioning plan, the AAMD's Board of Trustees might be forced—with regret—to respond in the strongest possible way to this action through either censure or sanction. It is, furthermore, my understanding that by taking such a step, the Museum also risks losing the professional accreditation granted by the American Alliance of Museums.

We would welcome a meeting with you and your staff to discuss the Delaware Art Museum's decision, as this is clearly a matter that involves a consideration of both the public interest and how the actions recently taken by the Museum's Board of Trustees represent a violation of long established and widely accepted professional practices within our field.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy Rub". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Timothy Rub
President, Association of Art Museum Directors
The George D. Widener Director and CEO, Philadelphia Museum of Art