

October 6, 2020

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
The John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

Below you will find my responses to the questions included in your letter dated March 6, 2020. I appreciate the efforts made by you, your staff, and the rest of the Council in the scheduling of the public hearing on my nomination, and many other hearings and meetings over the summer.

1. A copy of the most recent Financial Disclosure Statement I filed with the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability is attached.
2. I have had no beneficial interests with business entities transacting with any business with the District Government.
3. Neither I nor immediate family members have received income for services rendered to businesses transacting business with the District Government.
4. Neither I nor my immediate family serves as an officer, director, partner, or agent with business entities transacting business with the District Government.
5. Neither I nor my immediate family members have borrowed any outstanding liability loans.
6. Not applicable.
7. I hold no professional or occupational licenses.
8. I am not a member of any professional organizations.
9. I am not and have not been a board member or commissioner of any District government agencies.
10. I am not a member of other boards.
11. I have no outstanding liability for taxes, fees, or other payments to the District, federal, or other state or local governments.
12. Neither I nor any member of my immediate family has any interest, financial or otherwise, that may pose any conflict of interest for my performance of duties.

13. I have not engaged in campaign contributions to local or political action committees.
14. I am not registered with any local, state, or federal government to lobby.
15. The agency's enabling legislation states that the Commission "shall evaluate and initiate action on matters relating to the arts and humanities and encourage programs and the development of programs that promote progress in the arts and humanities." In the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in, continuing to endure the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency's most immediate priority and focus must be on the survival of the District's arts and cultural sector. The hard reality is that the arts will be one of the very last industries to return to any kind of normal operations. This is especially true of the performing arts — theatre, live music, dance — because the nature of their business, a large room full of hundreds of people sitting next to each other watching a performance, is the very antithesis of social distancing. Furthermore, on the other side of the curtain are dozens of artists, stagehands, and technicians working offstage and backstage in often very close quarters. For our live performance venues, reopening at a limited capacity may not be possible, given the number of individuals needed offstage and onstage to make a performance successful, or it may prove to be more expensive than to remain closed.

Our individual artists of all disciplines have felt the financial crush in what is probably a worst-case scenario imaginable, as many artists are self-employed and often have a number of side jobs to supplement their incomes, such as teaching or working the restaurant or nightlife industries; side jobs that were also shuttered at the beginning of the lockdown, and which are now only back at limited operations.

If our individual artists cannot afford to live here and find themselves with no choice but to leave the District, we cannot assume that they will simply come back post-pandemic. With our arts and cultural organizations, particularly those that operate performance or exhibition spaces, if they should fall behind on rent or mortgage payments for those spaces and are evicted or worse, if the organization becomes financially insolvent and is forced to dissolve, we cannot assume that vacant theatres and music venues will be reactivated post-pandemic. They may instead be demolished in favor of a more lucrative development, a story that has been seen multiple times in the District in recent years, pre-pandemic.

16. In many ways, the role of Executive Director for the Commission represents the synthesis of multiple facets of my past professional and educational experiences, such as my work in grantmaking, in multidisciplinary and cross-cultural programs, and of course, in public service. The broad spectrum of my experience is, I believe, well-suited and necessary for this role, because the work of the agency itself encompasses such a broad spectrum. No artistic discipline or genre is privileged over any other, and our grantees range from the solo artist whose spare bedroom serves as her studio, to companies of international renown, and everything and everyone in between.

This holistic approach to the arts and culture, and the agency's ongoing commitment to improving equity in the field, is what drew me to work here initially as the Senior Grants Officer, and it is what compelled me to agree to serve as Director. These are concepts that resonate with me deeply, and I consider it a personal honor to be able to contribute in meaningful ways to their furtherance.

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson, for the consideration of my appointment to this position. I look forward appearing before the Committee of the Whole at the public hearing on my nomination on October 8, 2020. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heran Sereke-Brhan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a vertical line extending downwards from the start of the name.

Heran Sereke-Brhan, PhD
Acting Executive Director
Commission on the Arts and Humanities

FDS Filing Details for 2019

Name: Heran Sereke-Brhan

Date of Appointment or Employment: 10/1/2019

Final Date of Service: 12/31/2019

Position: Interim Executive Director

Agency: Commission on the Arts & Humanities

Position Held with the District Government During the Prior calendar year (If Not The Same As Above)

Position: Senior Grants Officer

Final Date in Position: 9/30/2019

Agency: CAH

Non District Employment/Business

1) Did you have any non-District employment or engage in any outside business or other activity during the previous calendar year for which you received compensation of \$200 or more?

No

2) Was your spouse, registered domestic partner, or dependent child(ren) employed by a private entity or did they engage in any business endeavors during the previous calendar year for which they received compensation of \$200 or more?

No

3) Did you serve in any unpaid position (without compensation) as an officer, director, partner, consultant, contractor, volunteer, member or in any other formal capacity of a non-government board or other outside entity during the previous calendar year?

No

4) Did your spouse, registered domestic partner, or dependent child(ren) serve in any unpaid position (without compensation) as an officer, director, partner, consultant, contractor, volunteer, member or any other formal capacity of a non-government board or other outside entity during the previous calendar year?

No

5) During the previous calendar year, did you have any agreements with a former or current employer, other than with the District of Columbia, for future payments or benefits (such as separation pay, partnership buyouts, or pension or retirement pay) or for future employment or for a leave of absence?

No

6) During the previous calendar year, did your spouse, registered domestic partner, or dependent child(ren) have any agreements with a former or current employer, other than with the District of Columbia, for future payments or benefits (such as separation pay, partnership buyouts, or pension or retirement pay) or for future employment or for a leave of absence?

No

Securities, Holdings and Investments

7) Did you have a beneficial interest in or hold any security ("security" means stocks (any class), bonds (including savings bonds and

tax exempt bonds), stock options, warrants, debentures, obligations, notes (not mortgage notes), mortgages (not on one's home), investment interests in limited partnerships, REITs, and such other evidences of indebtedness and certificates of interest or participation in any profit-sharing agreement as are usually referred to as securities) at the close of the previous calendar year that exceeded in the aggregate \$1,000 or that produced income of \$200 or more?

No

8) Did your spouse, registered domestic partner, or dependent child(ren) have a beneficial interest or hold any security ("security" means stocks (any class), bonds (including savings bonds and tax exempt bonds), stock options, warrants, debentures, obligations, notes (not mortgage notes), mortgages (not on one's home), investment interests in limited partnerships, REITs, and such other evidences of indebtedness and certificates of interest or participation in any profit-sharing agreement as are usually referred to as securities) at the close of the previous calendar year that exceeded in the aggregate \$1,000 or that produced income of \$200 or more?

No

9) Did you owe any entity or person (other than a member of your immediate family) \$1,000 or more, (excluding: mortgages on your personal residence, student loans, automobile loans, credit card accounts or other revolving credit, and other loans from a federal or state insured or regulated financial institution), during the previous calendar year?

No

10) Did your spouse, domestic partner or dependent child(ren) owe any entity or person (other than a member of their immediate family) \$1,000 or more, (excluding: mortgages on personal residences, student loans, automobile loans, credit card accounts or other revolving credit, and other loans from a federal or state insured or regulated financial institution), during the previous calendar year?

No

11) Did you have an interest in any real property located in the District of Columbia during the previous calendar year, aside from primary personal residence, occupied by you, your spouse or your domestic partner, where your interest had a fair market value of more than \$1,000, or where the property produced income of \$200 or more?

No

12) Did your spouse, domestic partner, or dependent child(ren) have an interest in any real property located in the District of Columbia during the previous calendar year, aside from their primary personal residence, where their interest had a fair market value of \$1,000 or more or where the property produced income of \$200 or more?

No

Regulated Professions

13) Do you hold any professional or occupational licenses issued by the District of Columbia government (i.e., are you licensed to practice law in the District of Columbia, or are you licensed by the District's Department of Health, the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the District's Department of Mental Health, the District's Department of Insurance Securities and Banking, the Metropolitan Police Department, the District's Occupational and Professional Licensing Administration, etc.)?

No

14) Does your spouse, domestic partner, or dependent child(ren) hold any professional or occupational licenses issued by the District of Columbia government (i.e., are they licensed to practice law in the District of Columbia, or are they licensed by the District's Department of Health, the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the District's Department of Mental Health, the District's Department of Insurance Securities and Banking, the Metropolitan Police Department, or the District's Occupational and Professional Licensing Administration, etc.)?

No

Gifts

15) Did you receive any gift(s) (A gift is defined as a payment, subscription, advance, forbearance, rendering, or deposit of money, services, or anything of value, unless consideration of equal or greater value is received) from any person that has or is seeking to do business with the District, conducts operations or activities that are regulated by the District, or has an interest that may be favorably affected by the performance or nonperformance of your duties in the total amount or with a total value of \$100 or more during the previous calendar year?

No

Additional Comments

No additional comments.

Supporting Documents

I certify that I have:

- Not caused title to property to be placed in another person or entity for the purpose of avoiding the disclosure requirements on the preceding form;
- Filed and paid my income and property taxes;
- Diligently safeguarded the assets of the taxpayers and the District;
- Reported known illegal activity, including attempted bribes, to the appropriate authorities;
- Not been offered or accepted any bribes;
- Not directly or indirectly received government funds through illegal or improper means;
- Not raised or received funds in violation of federal or District law; and
- Not received or been given anything of value, including a gift, favor, service, loan gratuity, discount, hospitality, political contribution, or promise of future employment, based on any understanding that my official actions or judgment or vote would be influenced.
- I certify that I have:
- Not caused title to property to be placed in another person or entity for the purpose of avoiding the disclosure requirements on the preceding form;
- Filed and paid my income and property taxes;
- Diligently safeguarded the assets of the taxpayers and the District;
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Additional Comments

No additional comments.