

November 28, 2023

Dear Mayor Wamp and Hamilton Board of Commissioners:

Sankofa Civic Engagement Organization (Sankofa) and the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga (ULGC) are writing to express our shared concern and disappointment with the recent actions of the Mayor and the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners relative to the passage of Hamilton County Resolution No. 1123-42 approved by your body on the 15th day of November 2023. This resolution prompted the reallocation of funds totaling close to \$1million from the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga and Sankofa, abruptly diverting them to the Hamilton County Fund for Excellence. The funds were originally awarded through the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF), part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) signed into law on March 11, 2021. The unwarranted, unfair and discriminatory action singled out both our organizations in a second attempt to defund us. As your body may recall, the first attempt to remove ULGC and Sankofa ARPA funds was on September 21, 2022 when Commissioner Beck presented County Resolution No. 922-21: a resolution to amend the previous resolutions awarding the ARPA funding to our respective organizations and reallocating \$900,000 in funds from the SANKOFA FUND AND THE URBAN LEAGUE to the United Community Action Alliance for operating funds. It was recorded in the meeting minutes that Commissioner Helton, the sponsor of this most recent resolution, stated, ***“This Resolution was presented very suddenly and could set a bad precedent to remove money a previous commission allocated.”*** He noted he would like time to look into this and have the parties affected to have a say in this matter. On motion of Commissioner Helton, seconded by Commissioner Sharpe, Resolution No. 922-21 was tabled.

The County’s abrupt decision to reallocate funds was done with a lack of transparency and in contravention to both Tennessee Code Ann. 8-44-103 and 8-44-105. Furthermore, the actions taken by the board of commissioners failed to align with the County’s own rules of procedure and practice. In the end, there was no public notice about the resolution and no opportunity to provide public comment at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. While we are aware that conversations were held with Hamilton County Schools personnel weeks before this resolution was passed regarding utilization of ULGC and Sankofa Org funding, no similar notice was provided to either of our respective organizations. Moreover, we are also aware that the County has nearly one hundred and fifty million in surplus funds that could have been used to both fulfill its previous commitment to fund our organizations and to support the schools. What’s even more troubling is that to our knowledge no other organizations receiving ARPA funds have been defunded to support school improvement efforts and strategically pitted against one another by elected officials. The schools are a great cause, but the manner in which this has transpired is

unfair, underhanded and reflects a blatant disregard for the communities we all serve, primarily communities of color and other disadvantaged persons.

**Given your failure to follow Tennessee law and proper procedure, we are demanding that County Resolution No. 1123-42 be rescinded immediately – no later than Friday, December 1st – and that full funding be restored to ULGC and Sankofa.**

For Sankofa, the mission of providing support, advocacy, and education to nonprofit organizations actively addressing the disparities affecting Hamilton county's most vulnerable communities was abruptly disrupted as a result of these actions. The Sankofa Fund for Civic Engagement has worked to raise more than a million dollars and distribute it to Chattanooga's African American communities (including Brainerd and Howard High Schools) in the form of grants and services since our inception in 2017. Sankofa recently announced to stakeholders that their second grant cycle would open the last week of November and the remaining \$400,000 would be disbursed through two 2024 grant cycles, but now we are left wondering how we will deliver on this commitment.

For over 40 years, our local Urban League affiliate has worked to enable African Americans, other ethnic minorities, and disadvantaged persons **to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power, and civil rights to live a better quality of life.** We have a great reputation for doing good work in the community and there has been no question on the impact of our efforts. Serving between 12,000 - 14,000 people annually, our primary constituents come from high poverty, urban and rural areas where youth, young adults, seniors and families struggle with economic hardships, building assets, and low educational attainment coupled with other underlying issues. Our new Urban League location, acquired in July 2022, is the first Urban League headquarters that we have owned since our inception in 1982. The headquarters are designed to serve not only as a pillar of hope, but also a central hub to support families holistically through programs and initiatives that improve living conditions, access, opportunity and economic prosperity for all that we serve. ARPA funding will position us to expand our program offerings, ensuring safe and adequate facilities, necessary technology and longer term sustainability to better serve our program participants and team.

We look forward to the Mayor and County's response as to how previously allocated ARPA funds will be fully restored to ULGC and Sankofa.

Respectfully,

The Leadership of the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga and Sankofa