

Cultural Daily

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ALoud Update: Ad Hoc Committee Statement

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The Ad Hoc Committee in Support of ALOUD, consisting of Donna Frazier, Lynell George, Rubén Martínez, Hector Tobar, David Ulin, and Terry Wolverton, issued the following statement on December 6, 2018.

Esteemed friends, literary colleagues and passionate readers,

We cannot begin to tell you how grateful we are for your participation in the Petition in Support of ALOUD, created to protest the unjust firings of ALOUD founder Louise Steinman and associate director Maureen Moore by the Library Foundation. Many of you also followed up with your own letters to the Foundation and others.

The petition, delivered to the Foundation on September 12, asked two things: transparency regarding the firings and that the literary community be given a voice in the future of ALOUD. Surely, we thought, a program that fostered civic dialogue, presented in the city-owned Central Library, would be open to hearing what the public had to say.

But this petition, signed by more than 1,000 of us, was met with silence—from the Foundation, from the City Librarian, from the offices of the Mayor and City Council. The Foundation issued public statements that did not address the petition and seemed designed to obfuscate. They claimed it was a personnel matter and they were not obligated to discuss it publicly.

So we used the media as a way of making ourselves heard (a list of media coverage appears at the end of this message.) CicLAvia founder Aaron Paley wrote an Op-Ed for the LA Times.

Three people testified before the Library Commission on November 8, but were told the Commission could do nothing about the Foundation's personnel decisions. At that time, we were informed that the Foundation had hired a PR firm specializing in crisis management. The week before Thanksgiving, we began to see the results of their campaign. The Foundation issued a statement saying that they had asked for and gotten a temporary restraining order against one of the group of people who had been protesting at ALOUD events. The statement claimed Foundation President Ken Brecher had been "attacked" by this protestor; the statement then quoted Board Chair Gwen Miller as saying that we petitioners had also been attacking and intimidating the Foundation by sending emails to members of their board and to their supporters. This attempt to portray the Foundation as the victim and those protesting their decisions as out-of-bounds illustrates the mindset of those in charge.

The statement was followed by an interview with Ken Brecher in Cultural Weekly and his own Op-Ed in the LA Times. In these statements, he painted Steinman and Moore as out-of-touch with the changing demographics of the city. He claimed ALOUD had grown stale and lost relevance. Anyone who attended ALOUD knows these statements are ridiculous. What they do show us is that the Library Foundation is not an institution that is interested in public dialogue or public accountability.

We do not know what will happen from here. There has been some interaction with a deputy mayor that may yield more results. There is another meeting of the Library Commission on December 13. Since Brecher has revealed that the ALOUD firings did not arise from a personnel matter but were a programming decision, perhaps the Commission will more likely to get involved if public pressure continues.

We intend to continue our personal boycotts of the Foundation and ALOUD, and to support literary outlets that are more humane to their staffs and responsive to the public. We will update you with significant developments, and let you know about any future curating ventures by Louise Steinman and Maureen Moore. Maureen's baby is due in the next week.

Thank you for your support. We appreciate the public conversation it has created around ALOUD and the thinking it has stimulated about what we expect from private foundations that support our arts communities. We hope you will help that discussion continue.

Recent press on the ALOUD situation:

* See all of Cultural Weekly's ALOUD coverage, including a Nov. 21 interview with Ken Brecher, a Nov. 21 commentary piece titled "Why ALOUD Did Not Go Gentle Into That Goodnight," and reports on Nov. 8 testimony at the Library Commission and the Foundation's statement on the "intimidation tactics" of our protests: <https://www.culturalweekly.com/?s=aloud>

* Ken Brecher's Nov. 23 LA Times Op-Ed: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-brecher-library-foundation-aloud-controversy-20181123-story.html>

* Louise Steinman and Maureen Moore's Nov. 27 letter to the editor of the Times in response to Brecher: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/readersreact/la-ol-le-steinman-moore-aloud-library-20181127-story.html>

* Los Angeles Downtown News Nov. 5 commentary by editor Jon Regardie: "Why I'm Done with ALOUD": http://www.ladowntownnews.com/news/why-i-m-done-with-aloud/article_5aed89ee-dee9-11e8-9cde-ffd4e739fd70.html

* Plus a reminder of why we care, a 2014 Sandy Banks column on summer at ALOUD: <https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-0722-banks-summer-library-20140722-column.html>

Sincerely,

Donna Frazier, Lynell George, Rubén Martínez, Hector Tobar, David Ulin and Terry Wolverton
Ad Hoc Committee in Support of ALOUD

Photo: Audience at an ALOUD event, earlier in 2018. Photo by Gary Leonard

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