

Via Regular Mail and E-mail (nmaasbach@mocanyc.org)

Nancy Yao Maasbach
President
Museum of Chinese in America
215 Centre Street
New York, NY 10013

Via Regular Mail and E-mail (jchu@mocanyc.org)

Jonathan Chu
Co-Chair of Board of Directors
Museum of Chinese in America
215 Centre Street
New York, NY 10013

October 15, 2020

Dear Ms. Yao Maasbach and Mr. Chu:

I am deeply disappointed to learn of MOCA's immoral action of taking \$35 million in concession money through Council Member Margaret Chin's "yes" vote to allow the building of a new jail in the heart of Chinatown. I write to you because I understand the deep injustice in our criminal justice system and I do not support the further proliferation of jails anywhere in America.

Many community members have now learned of the Points of Agreement and the recordings of you, Ms. Yao Maasbach, speaking at public meetings and at a private closed door meeting with Chin and Mayor De Blasio. At no time did MOCA state that it opposes the jail plan. Instead, you, Ms. Yao Maasbach, specifically asked the Mayor for \$32 million for the purchase of MOCA's current location at 215 Center Street.

Community members, including many artists, requested a direct response from MOCA. You, Ms. Yao Maasbach, as the president of MOCA, consistently met their requests with an evading and condescending "I'm not even gonna answer that!"

I'm here to reiterate that this is not a personal attack on you, Ms. Yao Maasbach; or you, Mr. Chu. The community is looking to you Ms. Yao Maasbach, as no more and no less than the president of our museum and cultural institution, to give a response that we are entitled.

You must make a statement when you are capitalizing on the community's name to seek money to buy your current location. By taking concession money from the city to allow the city to build

a prison in your own front yard, you are allowing the profound health and financial sufferings of local residents and businesses during the 15 plus years of construction.

You must make a statement when, after MOCA's archives may be at risk after the 70 Mulberry fire, the community from all over NYC and the metropolitan area wholeheartedly came out en masse for the Chinatown Fire Relief Fundraiser on March 7, 2020. They came out even at the risk of their own lives during the height of the pandemic, to support the salvaging and recovery of MOCA's archives. Yet, you have been and are still sitting idle and gave the community the cold shoulder. In fact, anyone who asked you about MOCA's position on the jail, you called them haters. Looking back, I remember seeing you there at the fundraiser, Ms. Yao Maasbach, as president of this treasured institution, and I wondered if, aside from the fundraising efforts, you really saw the community there.

On October 6, 2019, about 1,000 people from organizations and small businesses within the community as well as all over the city came out to rally against the jail. Where were you Ms. Yao Maasbach, as the president of this cultural institution, on that day? Where were you Mr. Chu, as the Chair of the Board of MOCA and someone who has a significant real estate interest in Chinatown? I didn't see you there. By not showing up to this rally to join with the community to stand against the use of our tax dollars to build more prisons, you showed you don't represent Chinese in the Chinatown area and the greater NYC areas. By refusing to make a public statement on MOCA's position on this prison plan *after* it has been made clear in the Points of Agreement that MOCA will receive \$35 million as the Mayor's concession for Chin's "yes" vote, you showed your true colors.

The truth is MOCA took jail concession money. As leaders of MOCA, Ms. Yao Maasbach and Mr. Chu, you must not only answer, but you must also reject any money tied to the jail. You, as the leadership of MOCA, have absolutely betrayed the community of Chinatown, where your cultural institution is located. You also betrayed Chinese all across America by your complicity in promoting the prison-industrial complex.

You must also answer to other minority communities by rejecting any money tied to the building of jails that lock up primarily people of color. By taking the jail concession money, you have betrayed other minority communities. Your words, through holding "allyship" talks as support for Black Lives Matter, ring hollow and meaningless.

You must reject any money tied to the jail and make a public statement. Short of that, I support a call for you, Ms. Yao Maasbach, to resign; and you, Mr. Chu, to step down. I also call on the entire board to rethink what the Chinese American community is, and the founding purpose of the Museum of Chinese in America.

I am a Chinese American filmmaker and I highly disapprove of your desperate acts to seek money without a moral compass. If your mission is only to seek power from the rich and famous but not address what is happening in your own front yard with even a simple public dialog and rise up together with your surrounding communities, leave me out of it. Don't use the stories of the people in the Chinese American community to get funding while betraying the health and well being of the very community whose stories you claim to tell. I do not oppose that you fundraise to secure the building. But as long as the money that you are taking is tied to the jail, I will not exhibit any more of my films at MOCA.

Sincerely,



Alvin Tsang, Filmmaker

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