



# CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

**JAMES F. KENNEY**  
Mayor

Office of the Mayor  
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January 21, 2020

Rich Porco  
Comic Div. President

Tom Knight  
Fancy Brigade Div. President

John Pignotti  
String Band Div. President

Charles McKenna  
Wench Div. President

Jack Cohen  
Fancy Div. President

Dear Mummers Leadership:

The Mummers Parade is one of our city's most unique and recognizable traditions. However, the behavior of a few participants has once again cast a shadow over that tradition. Mummers groups have made commitments to avoid continued damage to the parade's reputation caused by racial insensitivity and nuisance behavior, but the future of the parade is in jeopardy if Mummers leadership does not make immediate changes to better control the parade and organize yourselves. To be specific: I will explore options such as hosting the City's own New Year's Day Parade or changing the City's policies regarding informal cost forgiveness applicable to cultural parades.

This parade has an infamous history of using racially and culturally insensitive themes, and the repeated inability of Mummers leadership to control the use of blackface by some participants threatens the City's continued support for the parade. Despite your progress in recent years, every time a parade participant mocks our Black community through the willful, ignorant use of blackface, it exacerbates the parade's association with racism and bigotry.

Our diversity is Philadelphia's greatest strength. In a proudly diverse city, you simply cannot alienate fellow Philadelphians who may see these hurtful images. You must understand the anger and frustration of those who feel strongly that taxpayer dollars and corporate funds should not be devoted to supporting this event.

It is therefore critical that you take decisive steps to end this behavior for good. If you fail to make these necessary changes, the parade will forever be known for hatred and bigotry, not the hard-work, dedication and celebration that I once enjoyed as a participant.

Since 2016, at the Mummers' request, the City has assisted clubs in screening their themes and providing input and education to groups on potential concerns like cultural appropriation or stereotypes. We have seen much

progress from this work. In recent years, through education and outreach, the parade has made strides to become more inclusive and has developed a code of conduct which addresses many concerns when properly enforced. We have also seen improvements in the organization and flow of the parade on Broad Street.

However, the lack of control and organization you assert on your own members has led to the problems encountered again this year. This lack of control is not limited to the blackface incident at this year's parade. Mummers have harassed City officials, including police officers, and the regularity of extreme intoxication has caused problems of its own.

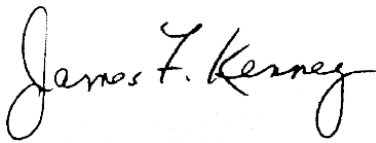
Emblematic of this lack of control and oversight is your continued inability to organize all divisions to receive appropriate permitting documents for the parade. For years, the City has had to apply for the permit itself because of this lack of central, accountable leadership. In 2016, we insisted that this situation had to change, and that you needed to follow the permitting procedures that every other parade follows. This must change.

We will be proposing significant recommendations to change how the Mummers' divisions organize themselves and how the City has worked with the Mummers in the past. The City is again willing to work with your leadership to ensure that the policies and procedures the Mummers put in place are appropriate for a tradition I—and many other Philadelphians—would like to see continue.

If you cannot commit to meaningful changes, the City will be forced to consider alternatives. Ultimately, the City may prefer to produce and control its own New Year's Day parade or celebration that is more inclusive, which will displace the Mummers Parade on Broad Street. We may also place conditions on the informal cost forgiveness we provide to this and other cultural heritage parades; those conditions would require recipients to commit to enforcing rules that govern their participants' behavior.

I have asked the City's Managing Director, Brian Abernathy, to organize a meeting with you to discuss these changes as soon as possible. I ask that you please comply with this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James F. Kenney". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

James F. Kenney  
Mayor

CC: Brian Abernathy, Managing Director  
Councilman Mark Squilla

