

A Statement from Washington National Opera:

The Washington National Opera (WNO), after extensive efforts to resolve without litigation, has reluctantly, given no other option, filed a lawsuit to recover more than \$17 million in donated funds that belong to WNO and are currently being withheld by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

For roughly 15 years, WNO and the Kennedy Center maintained a formal affiliation under which WNO produced its world-class operas at the Center, and the Center managed donations made for WNO's benefit. Throughout that relationship, WNO remained a separate nonprofit organization, and the funds raised for WNO always belonged to WNO.

That affiliation ended in January 2026, at the Kennedy Center's own suggestion. Since then, WNO has repeatedly and in good faith asked the Center to return the donor funds it holds on WNO's behalf and to provide a basic accounting. Five months later, the Center has not returned the funds, has refused to say whether it intends to return the money at all, and according to the Kennedy Center, it has put a significant portion of these funds at risk by using them to collateralize the Center's line of credit.

These funds represent years of gifts from loyal supporters who gave specifically to advance WNO's mission, its performances, its artists, and its education and community programs. WNO has a fiduciary responsibility to its donors to ensure their contributions are honored and used as intended to support the work of WNO's artists and its programs.

WNO spent months attempting to resolve this matter privately, including repeated meetings and a formal request for mediation. Having exhausted those efforts, WNO now turns to the courts to recover what belongs to it and to protect the donors and artists who depend on WNO to uphold its mission.