

Joint Response from CCC, CAC, CEOC, and The Dance Complex

Re: Representative Mike Connolly's Letter to City Council on the East End House Funding Proposal

As four longstanding nonprofit organizations serving thousands of Cambridge residents, we appreciate Representative Connolly's attention to this issue and his recognition of the essential role nonprofit organizations play in our community. However, we feel compelled to respond to several statements in his letter that mischaracterize our concerns, question our integrity, and attempt to undermine the intent of our collective advocacy.

Our goal has never been to attack any organization or individual, but to ensure that public benefit resources are distributed in a way that is equitable, transparent, and aligned with the values and systems that have guided our city's nonprofit sector for years. We are the ones turning down the money that was offered to us in favor of a process that benefits more families, not a few. It is precisely because of our deep commitment to the people we serve that we have raised our voices.

1. Claim: The opposition is "last-minute," "misinformed," and possibly worse.

Response:

Nonprofit leaders and community members began raising concerns publicly as soon as they became aware of the scale and structure of the proposed deal. Many were genuinely surprised to learn the full extent of the \$20 million allocation and the process through which it was reached. That this concern arose after the May 20th Ordinance Committee meeting reflects a lack of transparency around the deal's development rather than bad faith on the part of those now speaking out.

2. Claim: The opposition has made "crass, cynical, and false claims" about East End House.

Response:

We have taken care not to vilify East End House or its leadership. Our concerns have consistently focused on process and equity, not personalities. We recognize East End House as a valued part of the nonprofit ecosystem. What we object to is the precedent this deal sets, where a single organization can secure tens of millions of dollars outside of the transparent, community-informed system that was created to ensure fairness. Representative Connolly's accusations have unnecessarily personalized this issue, distracting from the real concerns we have raised by attempting to call into question our integrity and our commitment to the very families we serve.

3. Claim: This is pitting neighborhood against neighborhood and nonprofit against nonprofit.

Response:

To the contrary, this effort has been rooted in collaboration among nonprofits across the city who believe in shared opportunity and collective advocacy. We are not arguing that East End House should receive nothing. We are arguing that in a time of shrinking resources and rising need, this level of investment should be shared, particularly when many nonprofits also serve East

Cambridge residents and face urgent capital and service challenges. It is baffling that Representative Connolly would not see the value in advocating for equity and transparency across the board. Even more troubling is that he would choose to personalize this disagreement by attempting to undermine the leadership and integrity of those advocating for a more inclusive process.

4. Claim: The deal did not sidestep the Community Benefits Fund, which does not support capital projects.

Response:

The concern is not whether this specific funding should have gone through the Community Benefits Fund as currently structured, but that it violates the spirit and original purpose of creating a centralized, transparent, and equitable mechanism for distributing developer contributions. If the fund is not currently permitted to support capital projects, this highlights the need for reform, not for privately negotiated deals.

5. Claim: The process has been public “for years.”

Response:

If that is true, it raises serious questions about why most nonprofits only became aware of the full scope of this deal within the past month. The meetings where the details were finalized were not widely advertised, and the Community Benefits Advisory Committee was not involved in determining how the funds would be distributed. By all indications, the public and nonprofit community had little to no role in shaping this agreement.

6. Claim: Criticism of the East End House's relationship with BioMed is unfair.

Response:

We are not criticizing the relationship. We are raising questions about fair access to opportunity. Most nonprofits did not pursue direct relationships with developers because they believed the Community Benefits Fund would serve as the fair and inclusive vehicle for resource allocation. East End House was a vocal proponent of that system when it was created, which is why this deviation raises legitimate concerns about equity and trust.

7. Claim: The deal already supports multiple local nonprofits.

Response:

While it is true that four other nonprofits were eventually offered ~\$420,000 each, this decision appears to have been made after pushback began, not as part of the original agreement. That amount is less than 3 percent of the full \$20 million package and was not developed through a transparent or consultative process. It does not reflect the relative scale, need, or community impact of many of the included organizations. We are the ones saying no to these funds because we believe it is more important to advocate for a just process than to accept a token share of a deal that was not built with equity in mind.

8. Claim: Criticism has been “personal,” “racially charged,” and “misleading.”

Response:

This is a serious accusation. Our public statements have focused on the mechanics of the deal, not on individuals. We have also highlighted the ways that deals made through informal networks can reinforce existing racial and social hierarchies, something our own leadership has

acknowledged about themselves as well. Raising structural inequities is not the same as making personal or racially charged attacks. In fact, ignoring these dynamics is what allows inequity to persist. Representative Connolly's framing creates a false paradigm that pits process against impact, rather than recognizing that they are inseparable in any just system.

9. Claim: This situation risks reputational damage to East End House and the nonprofit sector.

Response:

What threatens trust in the nonprofit sector is not criticism, it is a lack of transparency and fairness in how massive sums of public-impact funding are allocated. Our goal is not to damage anyone's reputation. Our goal is to strengthen public trust in how community resources are distributed and to ensure all organizations have a fair opportunity to secure the support they need to serve the residents of Cambridge.

10. Claim: "Let us send a strong message that in Cambridge, we lift each other up."

Response:

We agree. Lifting each other up means listening to concerns, sharing resources equitably, and honoring the structures that were put in place to ensure all voices are heard. That is the message we hope City Council will send by delaying the vote and reopening the process in a way that reflects the values our city strives to uphold.

We remain committed to working in partnership with the City Council, the Community Benefits Advisory Committee, and our fellow nonprofits to ensure that resources like these serve the broadest possible public good. We hope you will stand with us in calling for a more inclusive and equitable process moving forward.

Sincerely,
Cambridge Community Center
Community Art Center
Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee
The Dance Complex