ALBUM 88 ALUMNI STATEMENT

June 2, 2014

Georgia State University
President Mark P. Becker
P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, GA 30302-3999

Dear President Becker,

Album 88 Alumni are writing to express our opposition to the deal reached between Georgia Public Broadcasting (“GPB”) and Georgia State University (“GSU”) over the daytime broadcasting rights for WRAS Atlanta 88.5 FM (“WRAS”) and request that you meet with our representatives this week. We write to explain why this deal has led us to announce today that we are withdrawing our support, financial and otherwise, from the university. While we recognize that the university administration feels that this deal represents the best interests of the students currently attending GSU and stands to create new opportunities for students in media, the alumni firmly believe this deal undermines the station’s legitimacy for the following reasons:

The impact Album 88 makes on students' careers: As WRAS alumni, many of us owe our careers to the lessons learned and the networks developed while volunteering at the station, and all of us learned important life lessons at the station that serve us to this day. The current model adds significantly more value for the tuition dollar than any opportunity that could be provided by GPB. WRAS in its current format represents a unique learning and training experience, and there is no way to replace hours on the board and the responsibility involved in managing airwaves 24/7. While a partnership with GPB may prove beneficial for communications students and for interns, it should not be achieved by re-organizing WRAS - a student-run station that is very beneficial for communication, music, business, and students of many other majors. Opportunities can be created for film and communications majors without having to change the makeup of Album 88’s student-run radio.

The impact Album 88 makes on industries: The station’s ability to influence the music industry and broadcasting industry - by educating students and shaping their career paths through hands-on experience - is directly tied to the station’s broadcasting power and reach. By restricting students’ airtime to nighttime only, you eliminate all these opportunities for future students. There is no real comparison between the experience gained during nightshift broadcasting and a secondary online channel suggested, and that provided by the power Album 88 has today as a terrestrial radio station (that reaches the entire state of Georgia as well as parts of South Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama).

The impact Album 88 makes on the local community: Album 88 has a positive influence on the health of the music industry in Atlanta. As an incubator of new music, it exposes new trends
and plays deep cuts from albums, providing listeners with a unique music experience they can't get elsewhere. Local clubs and music retailers have successfully operated for decades nurtured by this unique broadcasting experience. By contrast, the GPB talk radio format is geared toward older demographics in a market already saturated by talk radio stations. Moreover, the university has never before measured Album 88 by its listenership volume, nor has it attempted to influence student programming in a manner that can increase ratings – an idea that we believe the students may be open to exploring should this be a priority for the administration.

Objection to the details of the deal and the way in which it was reached: The administration left the primary stakeholders (GSU students and WRAS staff and management) in the dark during months of negotiations with GPB. The administration never outlined any concerns about formatting and never engaged the students in an attempt to address any concerns. The community, whom WRAS has a duty to serve, was also left out of the conversation.

Historically, these types of partnerships have not been in the long term interests of students or institutions, as seen in several other schools in recent years. One example is Sacramento State, whose students were promised great opportunities to work with NPR in creating and curating programming, and instead have seen their roles reduced to answering calls during pledge drives.

In addition, the contract as it stands does not represent the institutions' best interests. For example, as the FCC license holder of WRAS, GSU is left responsible for all damages incurred by an FCC complaint. There are many such complaints of obscenity against NPR and NPR affiliates. Any complaint against the station would be the responsibility of GSU regardless of the time of day or the group providing content. This shows that this deal was reached without ample consideration for the possible negative financial impacts to the university.

Our expectation from the GSU administration: We expect the GSU administration to prioritize and steward the students towards greater opportunities. We fail to see how limiting a student-run media outlet in favor of a third party media outlet meets the goals of the university. It is also a very worrisome strategy that communicates to the students that none of their media is actually free. To reach a decision without input from the students the way you did - and with the timing you chose - displays total disregard for the students, the university as a whole, and indeed the entire GSU Alumni which for decades has regarded WRAS as a beacon for the university's brand.

Uplifting students and rising to the occasion: The administration is faced with a golden opportunity: To empower GSU students to rise to the occasion and face the format's challenges on their own. By doing so, students will develop new skills and learn new lessons in a way that re-enforces WRAS's role in the community and reaffirms its four-decade-long legacy. For example, if the administration takes issue with the funding of the station, allow students to administer their own pledge drives and benefits and learn how to obtain sponsorships and fund a portion of the operation. If the administration takes issue with listenership levels, the alumni are
ready to form an advisory committee and work with student management to re-shape programming in a manner that will lift listenership significantly within a year, while also developing new careers for students in the process. If the administration seeks to establish new opportunities for film and communication majors, the university’s alumni can work with additional local partners (and there are several obvious candidates for this in Atlanta) to foster strategic relationships that will yield very strong value-add, all without having to compromise any student-run media. Let us work together towards solutions instead of fostering divisiveness.

**Conclusion:** For all of these reasons, we believe that there is merit in asking GPB to re-negotiate the details of the agreement, with student involvement in the process. We believe that while GPB may play an important role as a partner of GSU, its involvement at WRAS must be tempered with the need to prioritize the students’ control of the airwaves 24/7 and the students’ self-determination with respect to any hours of programming that may be allocated periodically to GPB as a partner.

Album 88 Alumni are cautiously optimistic, with the delay to June 29th, that the administration is taking the right steps to ensure the best interests of the students and keeping them on WRAS 88.5 FM 24/7. We request that you meet with us this week so that we might hear what steps the university is taking to right the wrongs that have been inflicted on the staff of the radio station and how you are working to regain their trust. We understand that your time is valuable so we only ask for an hour of your time. What is discussed in the meeting is off the record and will not be shared with the press. Our goal is to work with you to make sure that GPB finds another avenue of obtaining a signal in Atlanta.

Please contact Reid Laurens to set up our meeting at a88a.rlaurens@gmail.com or 470-222-5177.
Thank you for your attention-
Album 88 Alumni

Signed,
Zachary Lancaster

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