



Aug. 31, 2022

Dear Ms. Hughes, Mr. Escobar and the Philadelphia Inquirer leadership:

We're writing to you as the newly formed **J.A.W.N (Journalism Accountability Watchdog Network) Coalition** to further underscore our disappointment and displeasure at the ongoing failure of the *Inquirer's* DEI initiatives. These failures have led to the loss of multiple journalists of color within the newsroom over the last year, and as a result there are now zero Black male reporters at the paper outside of the sports desk. This means we are missing out on important perspectives to cover critical topics like public safety, housing, education, the LGBTQIA+ community, food insecurity, poverty and Black culture within Philadelphia.

We stand united in our individual and collective attempts to work with the *Inquirer* to address these failures and demand a meeting with you to determine our next steps in remedying this and to discuss other grievances our organizations and our communities have previously raised with you.

We recognize that journalists of color have had a variety of experiences at the *Inquirer*. While we celebrate the few journalists of color who have had "successful" experiences with the newsroom, they should not be weaponized a) to cast a rosy spin on longstanding failures in supporting and retaining journalists of color at the *Inquirer* and b) to pit reporters of color against one another. This statement is intended to address the broader trends of inequity experienced and practiced in your newsroom.

As PABJ President Ernest Owens stated, the association formed a partnership with the *Inquirer* last year to address the newsroom's failure to fully embrace DEI principles and practices. [The paper has not followed through on any of the agreed-on changes.](#)

Free Press has also demanded [transformative changes](#) within the *Inquirer*. The paper has neglected to communicate to Free Press or the public how it plans to become a true anti-racist institution — a shift allegedly mandated by its "[Inquirer For All](#)" initiative.

NAHJ Philly and AAJA Philly joined PABJ [in raising the glaring diversity issues within the Inquirer](#) following the publication of Temple University's landmark diversity report that noted several failures the newsroom has made in its DEI efforts around coverage, voice, content and representation within the newsroom. [All three affinity groups also sent a joint letter to the Inquirer leadership two years ago that was met with silence.](#)

Some of the most disheartening revelations from Temple's 118-page diversity report found that *Inquirer* stories cover Black people only 26.4% of the time (compared to 58.8% of the time for white people). Of those stories about Black people, 53% are about sports. The report at the time also revealed that only 13.6% of *Inquirer* staff is Black (compared to 77.3% white), with co-chairs of the audit stating that "the *Inquirer* tends to cover white people the most" and "white reporters tend to write about white people even more."

Now the *Inquirer* has zero (0%) Black male news reporters of a staff that is predominantly white covering a majority-BIPOC city. There are no Black male reporters outside of sports — none in features, none in breaking news, none in investigations, none in business, none in health, and none on the new communities desk.

The time for airing our grievances and waiting for the *Inquirer* to make glacial-moving DEI changes has now neared its end.

We demand that the powers that be at the *Inquirer* immediately initiate good-faith, consistent and transparent communications with J.A.W.N. We demand dedicated meetings with Lisa Hughes, Gabe Escobar, the paper's leadership and the board of directors. If the paper fails to fulfill this demand, J.A.W.N. will initiate a public campaign against the *Inquirer*. As part of this campaign, we will let the public know that the paper of record has continued to fail to live up to its anti-racist PR mantra, and that its coverage continues to harm, divide and build distrust among the communities of color it so clearly needs if it plans to survive in Philadelphia.

We are beyond just talking. We demand action, answers and accountability.

Signed,

Ernest Owens
President, *Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists*

Jingyao Yu
President, *Asian American Journalists Association, Philadelphia chapter*

Vanessa Maria Graber
President, *National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Philadelphia chapter*

Tauhid Chappell
News Voices Project Manager, *Free Press*