STATEMENT OF EDGAR BRONFMAN, JR.
CHAIRMAN AND CEO
WARNER MUSIC GROUP
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, TRADE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

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Chairman Rush, Ranking Member Stearns and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of Warner Music Group, I want to thank you for inviting me to testify here today.

We at Warner Music Group recognize that we have a responsibility for the content we distribute and present to the public.

Mr. Chairman, we welcome your convening this hearing and we hope it will allow us to engage in a thoughtful approach – a dialogue among artists, media companies, community leaders and public officials – that is best able to examine an issue of importance and civic interest.

How we grapple with issues of humanity, including race and gender, ultimately comes to define what we, as a nation, stand for and who, as a people, we are.

The history of our country is, in one sense, the unfolding story of how we've dealt with these issues.

Often, artists who deal with the topics of race and gender in their works are seen not only as casting a spotlight on those issues but sometimes as being part of the problem themselves.

Creative works in any medium – not just music – can be controversial. In fact, they are often intentionally controversial in order to shed light on a social problem and to try to bring about much-needed change. Protest art – whether music, literature or the visual media – has played a long and distinguished role in the history of the United States, dating back to our Revolution.

But we also recognize that some creative expression is capable of being more than controversial. Some creative expression can be offensive. At the same time, we recognize that sensibilities are individual by their very nature and what may be offensive or inappropriate to some is important and necessary to others.

As a result, when evaluating the content we release, the balance we have to strike requires us, on the one hand, to protect and defend an artist's freedom of expression.

That's an activity we see as supporting not only our business, but also our nation's principles. At the same time, we know that we must consider – very carefully consider – the impact on our society of the content that we are offering to the public.

Striking the appropriate balance among these often-conflicting values, interests and concerns is a complex and ongoing challenge. And it is also a moving target. In the fifties, many people were deeply offended by Elvis Presley and a decade later many more were scandalized by The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. At various points in time, even entire musical genres such as Rock and Roll, Rhythm & Blues and Jazz were branded as the work of the devil. Thankfully, as years have gone by, those perceptions have been altered.

Public tastes and distastes wax and wane, which is why it is impossible to apply a uniform standard to any form of creative expression. However, to try and maintain our obligation as a responsible corporate citizen while dealing with these very complex challenges, we've developed and continue to evolve a set of practices to guide us.

I'd like to give you a brief overview of our practices regarding our content.

They begin with the creative process itself. The executives at our record labels maintain an ongoing relationship with our artists and their music. Our aim is not to create art or to censor it, but rather to ensure that our artists are aware of the potential impact of what they've created.

We very carefully consider any potentially offensive content, including matters of race, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation or physical or mental disability.

We also evaluate the societal context, cultural value and artistic merit of the creative work, as well as the reputation, background, personal history and intent of the artist, as well as how the work relates to, and compares with, other works.

We label our content as "explicit" using RIAA guidelines to alert the public – especially, parents and guardians of children and young people – to the presence of explicit content.

Additionally, we offer edited versions of labeled product to our retail, broadcast and digital partners, so as to broaden the choices available to consumers.

But reviewing our content is not a simple job. For many reasons. Not the least of which is that there are no absolutes. Every day we grapple with finding the right balance.

Different people draw the line between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" in different places. What's "acceptable" when it comes to creative expression is often determined by our age or class, our education or religion, our cultural surroundings, perspective or profession to name but a few of the influences on our individual attitudes. And the line keeps shifting.

As I mentioned earlier, it is abundantly clear that what is deeply offensive to some people at a given moment in history can become, with the passage of time, not only acceptable but revered.

So the message I wish to convey to you today is this: we recognize our responsibility with respect to our content. It is one we do not take lightly. Meeting that responsibility requires a delicate balance of many complex and difficult issues, one that can only be achieved through a constructive dialogue among artists, the industry and the communities we live in and serve.

We are committed to being a strong and thoughtful voice in that dialogue.

Thank you.

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