



Press Release

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Bonnet House Launches Fight to Protect its Future

Local control, revenue of beloved estate at risk

FORT LAUDERDALE BEACH — At a news conference today, Bonnet House officials announced the launch of the Preserve Bonnet House campaign and their plans to fight a takeover attempt by the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation in Tallahassee, which has declared its intention to take control of the estate and all of its revenue away from Bonnet House, Inc.

In 1983, owner Evelyn Fortune Bartlett gifted Bonnet House to the Florida Trust to preserve it for future generations. Her wish was to have the property managed locally and invest all of its revenue back into the estate to preserve, restore, and maintain it. However a few years into the relationship, the Florida Trust began regularly diverting a significant portion of Bonnet House's revenue to fund its own growing administrative costs and shore up its other operations around the state. The almost \$150,000 per year that the Florida Trust takes from Bonnet House revenue comprises 64% of the Trust's budget, and has totaled more than \$1.4 million since 1995.

"The Florida Trust has broken trust with Bonnet House and the people of South Florida," said Patrick Shavloske, CEO of Bonnet House. "It is exploiting this Fort Lauderdale treasure for its own financial gain and dishonoring its legacy."

The Florida Trust first made its intentions known in February 2019 when it put Bonnet House officials on notice that it was going to trigger a provision in the Bonnet House agreement to seize 100% control of the property's management and all of the revenue on

August 19, 2019. Just before their self-imposed deadline, the Florida Trust finally agreed to mediation — to come to the table and work out a fair and equitable solution.

The Bonnet House Board negotiated in good faith and believed a resolution was well within grasp. However on September 26, 2019, Tallahassee-based Florida Trust inexplicably broke off those talks and sent a letter notifying Bonnet House they had declared a mediation impasse. The letter gave Bonnet House, Inc. 48 hours to set a date to turn over keys to the property, have the local management team depart, and transition all of Bonnet House's revenue and control of its bank accounts to the Trust.

“The Florida Trust is determined to seize total control of this property and all of the revenue it generates,” said William O’Leary, Bonnet House, Inc.’s Board Chair. “Bonnet House is just as determined to prevent that from happening. We will fight to make sure this beautiful estate remains under the expert management and care of our local board.”

Bonnet House will celebrate its centennial in 2020 and 100% of its revenue is needed to maintain the property and secure its long-term sustainability. At nearly 100 years old, the property requires continuous and expensive restoration and maintenance to prevent it from deteriorating beyond repair. To learn more and help keep Bonnet House in local hands for the enjoyment of generations to come, please visit preservebonnethouse.org.

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About Bonnet House, Inc.

Bonnet House, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Funding for this organization is provided in part by the Broward County Board of County Commissioners as recommended by the Broward Cultural Council. Support for the educational programs is provided in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.