



INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF
THEATRICAL STAGE EMPLOYEES
LOCAL 868 *The Union Behind Entertainment*

June 22, 2021

Dear Strathmore Board Member:

We all know that the global pandemic has been an unprecedented and difficult period, not only for venues such as Strathmore but also for ticket sellers and others who earn their livelihoods in the performing arts. I'm writing to you today to make sure that you, as a Strathmore board member, also know that this last year has been made far more difficult due to the actions of Monica Jeffries Hazangeles, Strathmore's chief executive, and the managers and lawyers who report to her.

Not only has your management team reneged on an agreement reached last year with the people who are members of IATSE Local 868 at Strathmore, its leaders have indicated that they want to eliminate all full-time positions for ticket sellers and replace these individuals with machines. The kiosks being considered would be leased annually at a cost greater than what is currently budgeted for two full-time ticket office employees. This is a clear violation of the contract with IATSE and a cruel way to treat long-time, dedicated employees. It's also a poor business decision.

Strathmore's ticket sellers are routinely asked questions about the best views, acoustics, discounts, ticket exchanges and other matters that a machine is incapable of handling effectively. Many individuals, especially older patrons, are apprehensive about using these devices. If Strathmore pursues this strategy, you will be providing a level of service far beneath the level patrons deserve and expect.

Hazangeles has cited some data that might lead one to believe that most people want to use machines for transactions. While the data may have accurately reflected this trend during the peak of the pandemic, it is no longer relevant. After a prolonged shutdown due to COVID-19, Strathmore, like other arts organizations, needs to rebuild its relationship with its audience. Patrons deserve and expect a high level of customer service—not a recorded voice or an automated kiosk.

Backing out of a contract, the unfair elimination of loyal employees and other union-busting tactics by Strathmore's management have already been the subject of numerous news stories in [Bethesda Magazine](#), and other publications and broadcast news sites in the Washington region's media market. In the fall, [The Washington Post](#) prominently featured photos of IATSE members protesting during the outdoor performance of "Monuments Creative Forces."

Yet earlier this month, when we sat down with your management team to negotiate in good faith, they almost immediately declared an impasse, refused our repeated invitations to engage in further good faith negotiations, and threatened to unilaterally implement their last proposal. This proposal would (1) convert full-time employees into part-time employees, (2) replace previous part-time employees, who had been laid off due to the coronavirus pandemic, with electronic ticketing kiosks; (3) inject uncertainty into employees' scheduling; and (4) freeze wages and benefits for the life of the agreement. Thus, as Strathmore reopens, the new normal for its ticket office employees would be lower earnings and greater job insecurity. By contrast, IATSE has offered Strathmore temporary economic relief to help the institution regain its footing, while ensuring that the employees are not left behind after the recovery.

Perhaps the management team has not adequately informed you of the implications of its actions. I am writing to make sure you are aware that the protests that have greeted patrons will not only continue, but they will also escalate. We are not going away. The ticket sellers at Strathmore have the full backing of our national union, which represents stage, film and theatre workers all across the United States and Canada.

We all should be working together to fill seats and build support for the arts. When other area theaters and concert venues, such as The Kennedy Center, return, they will be relying on their ticket sellers to build audiences. Strathmore, in stark contrast, will be embroiled in a conflict with its workforce.

It doesn't have to be this way.

I encourage the board to urge your management team to reach a fair settlement with our members. If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss this matter in more detail, please call me directly at 202-320-0949 or contact our International Vice President Dan DiTolla at 845-216-6060, ditolla@iatse.net.

Let's make sure that Strathmore reflects the values of our community and that it is known in the months and years to come for music and the arts rather than hostility toward its workers.

Sincerely,



Anne Vantine
Business Agent
IATSE Local 868