

During the Winslow Way Halloween event, a Chase Bank employee handed out candy to Island children dressed in a racially offensive costume. The citizen protest that followed prompted the Council to write the following letter to Chase:



November 22, 2016

Ms. Phyllis J. Campbell
Chair, Pacific Northwest
JP Morgan Chase

Dear Ms. Campbell:

For over a week, a protester has stationed himself on the public sidewalk in front of your Chase Bank Winslow Way branch on Bainbridge Island. This gentleman is protesting a racially offensive costume worn by a Chase employee during the Island's annual downtown Halloween trick-or-treat event.

While the action giving rise to this protest was almost certainly not meant to be offensive, it clearly was. From conversations with several Chase management personnel, we understand that Chase is addressing this issue internally. We trust that internal action is not punitive, but rather is educational. The action giving rise to this protest was not widely condemned at the time by the many Bainbridge Islanders attending the event. That is a sad commentary on our collective lack of racial sensitivity. This situation therefore creates a teaching moment both for Chase and for all of us.

Chase has offended our community values of inclusiveness and mutual respect. Chase's refusal to acknowledge its error and engage in public dialogue on this subject is bad for our community and bad for Chase.

We urge Chase to reconsider, and to publicly acknowledge and address this incident. Business owners operating on Bainbridge Island go out of their way to be good corporate citizens. Good citizenship means consistently acting in a way that reflects the values of the community. Failing to acknowledge this breach of our civil contract is the antithesis of good corporate citizenship.

Most of us were taught from an early age that people will think better of us if we own up to our mistakes. We hope we will soon have cause to think better of Chase Bank.

Val Tollefson, Mayor, City of Bainbridge Island
Sarah Blossom, Councilmember
Wayne Roth, Councilmember
Roger Townsend, Councilmember
Michael Scott, Councilmember
Ron Peltier, Councilmember
Kol Medina, Councilmember

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Chase's Northwest Chairman replied as follows:



November 24th, 2016
City of Bainbridge Island

Dear Mayor Tollefson, Members of the City Council and concerned citizens:

On behalf of all of us at Chase, I write to apologize for what was perceived to be a racially insensitive costume worn by one of our employees during a community Halloween event.

As I explained in my phone call this past week to Mr. Trinidad, our employee meant no malice by his action. However, we know it was perceived as insensitive, and it was inconsistent with Chase's values. We send our deepest apologies to the citizens of your community.

We take pride as individuals and as a company that we embrace diversity and inclusion in all its aspects. We also are proud of the many ways we help make our communities better places to live and work. We do make mistakes, and this was obviously one of them. We will use it as a learning opportunity going forward.

Thank you for bringing this situation to our attention. We look forward to working together and continuing to make Bainbridge Island the great community it has always been.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phyllis J. Campbell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Phyllis J. Campbell
Chairman of the Pacific Northwest, JPMorgan Chase

I appreciate Chase's prompt and public apology.

This incident has generated a community discussion that needs to continue. Some saw the protest as an overreaction to a silly Halloween costume. Others observed that the "white perspective" on what may or may not be racially offensive is not particularly valuable. Reactions to the protester during the time he stationed himself in front of the Bank included comments that make clear that, regardless of your view on the underlying incident, we on Bainbridge Island have a long way to go to live up to our aspiration as an inclusive and tolerant community.

Val Tollefson, Mayor