

# Holland & Knight

1722 Routh Street, Suite 1500 | DALLAS, TX | T 214.969.1465 | F 214.969.1751  
Holland & Knight LLP | [www.hklaw.com](http://www.hklaw.com)

Stephen C. Rasch  
[Stephen.Rasch@hklaw.com](mailto:Stephen.Rasch@hklaw.com)

August 25, 2021

**Via U.S. Mail and Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested**

Commie Girl Industries, Inc. d/b/a Wonkette  
Attn: Rebecca Schoenkopf  
1001 S. Main St., Suite 500  
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Re: *Wonkette* Article Regarding Monty Bennett and Ashford Hospitality Trust, Inc.

Dear Ms. Schoenkopf:

This law firm represents Monty Bennett and Ashford Hospitality Trust, Inc. (“Ashford”). On April 28, 2020, *Wonkette* published an article, titled “Meet Monty, The Sad Rich Trump Donor who Only Got \$96 Million in ‘Small Business’ Loans,” regarding Mr. Bennett and Ashford. Mr. Bennett and Ashford only recently learned of the article’s publication. The article contains false and defamatory statements, as described further below, which my clients demand that *Wonkette* retract and/or correct.

The article states that Mr. Bennett “exploit[ed] the ‘small’ business loan program” and that his actions were “sleazy as fuck.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “sleazy” is defined to mean “sordid, corrupt, or immoral.” Mr. Bennett and Ashford neither “exploited” the Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”) nor acted in a sordid, corrupt, or immoral manner. The PPP loans obtained by hotel properties within Ashford’s portfolio were obtained lawfully and in a manner contemplated by provisions of the CARES Act. The article acknowledges the legality of the loan applications but falsely implies that there was some corruption in the loan application process. Further, Ashford subsequently returned all of the PPP loan funds and rehired many furloughed employees.

In addition, *Wonkette* falsely asserts that Ashford constitutes “a single business *pretending* it’s several smaller businesses.” That statement is factually and legally false. Ashford, Inc., Ashford Hospitality Trust, Inc., and Braemer Hotels and Resorts are separate and legally distinct entities. Additionally, the hotel properties within the Ashford portfolio are owned by entities separate from Ashford. The article falsely implies that there was some deception in the loan application process. We demand that *Wonkette* retract and/or correct its indisputably false statement.

Next, the article states that Mr. Bennett “had to console himself with some great big bonuses, plus huge dividends from his preferred stock” and that Mr. Bennett “apparently has no plans to hire back his family-like employees.” The implication of those statements is that Mr. Bennett enriched himself through the PPP loan program while laying off or furloughing

Ms. Rebecca Schoenkopf  
August 25, 2021  
Page 2

employees during the pandemic. COVID-19 dramatically negatively impacted both Mr. Bennett's 2020 earnings and Ashford's 2020 net income. And, as noted above, the Ashford portfolio hotel properties *returned the PPP funds*. Mr. Bennett's dividends from Ashford Inc. were *decreased* as a result of the pandemic. It is flatly untrue that Mr. Bennett had no plan to rehire hotel employees, many of whom have been rehired. My clients thus demand that *Wonkette* retract and/or correct these defamatory statements.

Pursuant to Chapter 73 of the Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code and Section 27-1-818 of the Montana Code, Mr. Bennett and Ashford demand that, within thirty (30) days of this letter, you retract or correct the false and defamatory statements. My clients further demand that *Wonkette* affirmatively state the truth about Mr. Bennett and Ashford, which is that they acted lawfully and ethically in obtaining PPP loans after having suffered enormous financial losses during the pandemic, that none of the PPP loan funds were retained by Ashford portfolio properties, and that Mr. Bennett's compensation *decreased* as a result of the pandemic. Failure to retract and correct these statements may subject you to punitive damages, in addition to other amounts for which you may be liable. We trust that you understand the seriousness of this matter and that you will promptly comply with our demand.

Very truly yours,



Stephen C. Rasch

SR:mm

CC: Meghan McCaig (***Via E-Mail***)