



## CONGRESS OF RUSSIAN AMERICANS, INC.

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September 22, 2020

To: Manhattan Mini Storage  
520 8th Avenue, 19th Floor,  
New York, NY 10018

As a board member of the Congress of Russian Americans ("CRA"), I write this letter on behalf of the board in regard to your recent display bearing a message "Vote because Russian lessons are expensive" movement. The CRA is a national non-profit organization established in 1973 that has thousands of members, primarily American citizens of Russian ancestry and heritage and is a recognized voice of Russian Americans. Our members have contributed to enriching this nation, and the CRA Hall of Fame includes a Nobel laureate alongside many Russian-American innovators, artists, and leaders in humanities, arts, and sciences. The CRA stands in support of the American ideals of democracy, civil rights, human dignity, and the rule of law.

The meaning of your message is unequivocal: your basic premise is that the Russians will undermine elections in this country and that Americans need to fight against that. The "Russian lessons" is a thinly veiled reference to the election of 2016, which led to an investigation of the Russian Government's purported collusion with the Trump campaign. The display you put up for the public to see is grossly offensive, inasmuch as it disparages all people of Russian origin and all people that speak the Russian language. We call on you to remove the banner and never to display such messages in the future.

The New York Tri-State area has a population of over 1.6 million Russian-Americans and some 600,000 of them live in New York City. Your misleading characterizations of "Russians" as the inimical force that undermines American democracy borders on incitement and ethnic hatred. Just as all other United States citizens, naturalized Russian-Americans have the right to vote. Your statement effectively makes its audience believe that all Russians – including those Russian Americans who call the United States their home – are necessarily pawns of the Russian Government in Moscow. The thrust of your message is that the influence the Russians exert on U.S. elections must be counteracted. Reduced to basics, your message casts aspersions against Russian-Americans exercising their Constitutional rights and calls people to action so as not to allow another "Russian lesson."

Imagine inserting any other nationality, ethnicity, or race into your message. How would the public feel if you wrote "Vote because Jewish lessons are expensive" or "because Black lessons are expensive?"

Your public statement, regardless of whether expressed on behalf of a third-party advertiser or on behalf of your commercial entity, has prompted outrage in the Russian-American community. Equally, it also calls into question your business' adherence to laws banning discrimination in day-to-day operations.

In addition to committing never again to display a sign bearing an ethnically-offensive message, we demand that you undertake these additional actions:

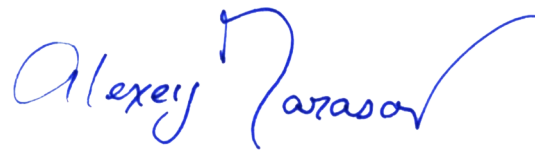
1. Within a reasonable timeframe, to institute written Anti-Discrimination/Implicit Bias policies and provide training to all of your staff on issues regarding diversity and anti-discrimination (to include national origin discrimination).
2. Within a reasonable timeframe, to provide to our office copies of your Anti-Discrimination/Implicit Bias policies.

With that, we will consider this matter closed. Should you be disinclined to follow through with the request outline above, we intend to pursue this matter further, up to and including the filing of a legal injunction request.

Alexey V. Tarasov,  
Attorney at Law

Admitted in Texas, New York, Oklahoma

Tel.: 832-623-6250

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexey Tarasov". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Attachment "A"

