



The Minerals, Metals & Materials Society
www.tms.org

A Joint Statement by The Minerals, Metals & Materials Society's President and Executive Director on Conducting TMS Events in Orlando, Florida

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We are excited to be preparing TMS2024 for our first visit to Orlando since TMS2015. Our excitement is not without reservation, however. The reason? We are distressed to see the recent actions by the Florida state government that effectively unwinds decades of the state's progress in areas associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion. We do not inventory the acrimonious particulars of those decisions here. The affronts to Black, Hispanic and Latino/Latina, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups are well documented by U.S. news organizations. We know that many in the TMS community are concerned. We are, too.

"The World Comes Here" is the motto of the TMS Annual Meeting and Exhibition. It is not hyperbole as our meeting routinely attracts attendees from approximately 60 countries. Mindful that our premier event welcomes individuals having a diversity of experiences, expectations, and perspectives, TMS takes our annual event to cities that are internationally convenient to visit, that offer modern facilities and amenities, that are comparatively affordable, and that are safe and welcoming to the many unique communities comprising the full materials science and engineering constituency served by TMS.

For decades, the city of Orlando has been an exemplar of this site selection philosophy, and for reasons that we expand upon below, we believe that it still is. It is one of the world's most visited destinations, it is commonly featured at or near the top of city rankings as a conference destination, and it is a city that celebrates hospitality as its primary business. Over the decades, Orlando has provided an engaging backdrop to our conferences and has, by extension, effectively helped the Society advance its mission to "promote the global science and engineering professions concerned with minerals, metals, and materials."

We very much empathize with the many TMS members working in Florida who are directly impacted by the state's decisions and who must navigate the resulting uncertainties, complexities, and anxieties. We also empathize with some members of the broader TMS community members who ask, "How can TMS continue to hold its meeting in a state that is working in a manner contrary to the Society's well-publicized efforts to be a highly inclusive society where all materials students and professionals feel welcome and diversity is celebrated?"

As advocates within TMS to advance the Society's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we weigh this question carefully and ask it of ourselves. We conclude that the answer has a number of facets, all of which lead to confidence in the Society's continued engagement with Orlando as our host city.

First, we recognize that while Orlando is in Florida, Orlando is not necessarily aligned with the recent actions of Florida. Cities are often at odds with their home states, just as states are often at odds with the federal government. Indeed, the Orlando government has created an environment that scores 100 out of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index. The city is convincingly passionate about advancing DEI issues. The city's visitors bureau, *VisitOrlando*, with which TMS works to arrange certain aspects of the meeting, tells us that the city "strives to be the nation's most inclusive travel destination, welcoming people from all over the planet to enjoy everything we have to offer regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or life stage." We believe Orlando to be compatible with the aspirations of TMS to be highly inclusive and not aligned with detrimental state-level actions.

Two, we are aware that no matter how welcoming a venue or host city is, attendees want to know that they are safe on site. Although risk is ubiquitous, our science and engineering community knows that safety is the top priority, and it is the same within TMS. We know from the Human Rights Campaign that Orlando has their highest rating for law enforcement. Within our event space, which is this year under the one roof of the headquarters hotel (the Hyatt Regency Orlando), we strive to create a TMS bubble. We will employ “badge checkers” to assure that only registrants are allowed access to our event venues. We also will hire off-duty local police (in uniform) to provide a visual deterrent in our venue and to provide real protection to our attendees and event space. Additionally, the venue will provide professional staff serving in security roles as well.

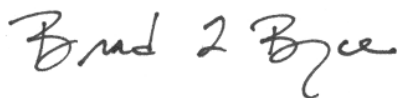
Third, the TMS Membership Diversity and Development Committee has among its subcommittees the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, which itself has several working groups. These volunteer bodies and others are aggregating resources and other materials to create a guide of LGBTQ+ supportive establishments and community resources. These will be posted to our conference web site. We are also working with our host facility to provide clearly marked gender neutral restrooms in our meeting venue. We remain committed to holding DEI events as part of TMS2024, such as the LGBTQ+ and Allies Networking Mixer and the Fresh Coffee, Fresh Ideas: Diversity and Inclusion Breakfast. Other initiatives are under discussion as well.

Fourth, we acknowledge the practical matter of contractual obligations. Since 2017, TMS has held a contract with our TMS2024 meeting venue. Withdrawing from these meeting contracts would incur roughly \$2 million in penalties. As facilities such as those required by TMS must be booked many years in advance of an event, it is unlikely that we would find an alternative venue for TMS2024 and would thus have no annual meeting next year. Without that revenue and with contractual penalties to pay, it is not an exaggeration to say that TMS would cease to exist by the end of next year.

Fifth and finally, while TMS does not have the influence of some megaphone organizations, we do have a voice. We use this voice to try to educate and persuade elected officials and not threaten retribution or denial of business against offending districts. We use this voice when engaging in visits with U.S. Congressional offices, where we explain our position that diversity and the lifting up of marginalized groups is essential to building our STEM workforce. We are taking steps to articulate our concerns about state legislation that creates new barriers, such as that in Florida. We recently used our voice as well to join with 15 other professional societies to advocate that state leaders not engage in legislative actions that are antithetical to DEI. An excerpt: “Particularly, we are concerned with legislative language that could be interpreted as eliminating access to funding resources for student organizations and engineering education programs due to the nature of their mission and which would disenfranchise underrepresented communities in STEM on college and university campuses.” TMS will continue to find ways to express its voice on these important matters.

In closing, we are convinced that TMS2024 will be a memorable event for all of the best reasons as hundreds of volunteers and every staff member make their best efforts to convene a conference that is safe, enriching, engaging, and meaningful. We remain confident that Orlando will continue to deliver on its promises to be a welcoming community for all of our attendees and will do so in future years.

We look forward to personally welcoming you to TMS2024 in Orlando and to discussing any of these or other issues while on site together.



Brad L. Boyce
2023 TMS President



James J. Robinson
TMS Executive Director