

November 20, 2015

Chief, Litigation III Section
Antitrust Division
U.S. Department of Justice
450 5th Street NW, Suite 4000
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Justice Department Review of the BMI and ASCAP Consent Decrees

To the Chief of the Litigation III Section:

My name is L. Russell Brown and I am a songwriter living in Nashville, TN. I have been an affiliate of BMI for 51 years and I truly value the service and support BMI has provided me throughout my career.

I write today in response to the Justice Department's request for public comments on the issue of whether BMI and ASCAP's consent decrees mandate music licensing on a 100% basis, rather than the long-established industry practice of fractionally licensing jointly-owned songs. It's vital that my voice is heard, because if 100% licensing were required it would severely impact my creative freedom, my ability to choose which PRO licenses my music, and ultimately, my livelihood as a songwriter. Beyond my career, these ramifications would profoundly affect songwriters across our nation.

My profession is writing songs, making me America's smallest small business. The late Vice President of BMI, Thea Zavin upon first meeting me suggested that I use L. Russell Brown as my professional name for logging my music. She had the vision to tell me I had a great future in this name. With BMI's financial assistance I went on to write one of America's most beloved songs ("Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree" along with a dozen other hit songs. I am loyal to BMI because of the trusted relationships I have there, and, essentially, I like the way they value my music and fight for all writers to get fees that reflect the fair value of our creative work.

Like most music creators today, I choose to collaborate with other writers. In fact, all of my hits, are the result of co-writes. What a 100% licensing model could mean for me is lower royalty payments if I collaborate with a songwriter represented by a PRO other than BMI. My co-written works could be licensed – and I could be paid – by a PRO that represents my co-writers' share in my songs. The licensing fee the other PRO charges might be lower than the one BMI has negotiated or fought for in rate court, and despite my chosen affiliation, I would have to accept the lower fee. My royalties could also be delayed since they would have to flow through two PROs.

As a result, rather than choosing the best artistic fit in a writing partner, I would be restricted to writing solely with fellow BMI writers to keep my royalties flowing from

BMI under the benefits of their specific valuation system. Otherwise, I would be forced to rely on a PRO I have no relationship with to accurately track my performances and pay me, including my fair share of bonuses, on their timetable under their distribution system. How could I be sure I would be paid fairly or at all? Where is the assurance of accountability under 100% licensing? With this uncertainty, it might no longer be financially or creatively viable for me to collaborate with a writer outside of BMI. Under 100% licensing, the core of my creative freedom and the primary source of revenue I depend on would be threatened.

Traditionally, music users from radio to streaming services to local television have all paid the PROs according to their respective shares of the music. Similarly, BMI has only ever paid me for my shares of co-written songs. 100% licensing would upend the well-established ways the PROs have been conducting business for decades, and consequently, have a drastic effect on the profession of songwriting.

If protection under copyright law was developed as an incentive for creativity, with its resulting works to be shared to benefit all of society, then requiring PROs to license music on a 100% basis – which would impede the way I work creatively – goes against the very premise of copyright policy. I urge you to carefully consider your decision and consider the impact it will have not only on all songwriters across our nation, but also on the continual creation of the music that forms the soundtrack to our lives and positions America on the forefront of the global creative marketplace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Keith", written over a diagonal line that crosses the signature from the top left to the bottom right.