

James Caldwell, Chief Executive Officer
Michael Deitemeyer, President
Robert Rowling, TRT Holdings, Owner
Omni Hotels & Resorts
4001 Maple Avenue
Dallas, TX 75219

August 29, 2016

Dear Messrs. Caldwell, Deitemeyer, and Rowling:

The Southeastern Association of Law Schools, Inc. (SEALS) has hosted two successful annual meetings (in 2014 and 2016) and a Board of Trustees meeting at the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort.

We have been tremendously impressed with the Amelia Island property. Its location in northern Florida is perfect for our annual meeting as many of our members and guests travel to the meeting from various locations along the Atlantic seaboard. Your sales staff, event planners, and local staff have been excellent. There is, however, an obstacle to our future contracting with the Omni—the word “plantation” in the hotel’s name.

SEALS is an organization with more than one hundred institutional and affiliate members, comprised of law schools located throughout the United States—almost half of all of the law schools in the country—and Canada. Our annual conferences attract attendees from all over the world. Thus, our members employ all of the individual law professors at about half of the nation’s law schools. Among our organization’s values are inclusiveness and non-discrimination. A substantial number of faculty from member schools expressed deep concern about our honoring our contract this year and holding the annual meeting at a hotel with “plantation” in its name. Numerous conference attendees chose to stay at other hotels; many faculty members chose not to attend at all this year.

We wrote to you in February of this year to inform you that the SEALS Board of Trustees voted unanimously not to return to your resort (after honoring our contract to host the summer 2016 meeting there) as long as the word “plantation” remains in the hotel’s name. In our prior letter, we stressed that, while words can have multiple meanings, many of our members viewed the term “plantation” as synonymous with slavery:

We realize that the word “plantation” can have many different meanings, and that some of these meanings do not reference slavery and are not offensive. However, place and context are everything. The fact that you are a Florida resort, and that we are a Southeastern organization, suggests that we need to be particularly sensitive regarding the use of words that may evoke images of slavery. In its most common usage in the southern states of the United States, “plantation” is frequently regarded as a slave-centered symbol. Many historical discussions situate plantations—especially large and prestigious plantations—in the antebellum South. Therefore, inclusion of “plantation” in your hotel name runs the risk of valorizing an economic

structure that supported the institution of slavery. Since your resort is geographically located in the southern United States, you have a special obligation to demonstrate sensitivity to the complexity of issues that may be associated with the word "plantation."

We did not hear back from you regarding our February letter.

During our annual meeting this August, SEALS Board members had an in-person meeting with one of the facility's managers and a sales representative. The sales representative, with whom our Executive Director has worked for years, seemed to understand the importance of this issue. The manager, though, suggested that we "educate [our] people" on the meaning of the word "plantation." This was a wholly unsatisfactory response. Rather than helping us understand whatever advantage could be gained by the resort continuing to use the name "plantation" in light of the sensitivity we conveyed in our February letter, we were left with the feeling that our concerns may not have been heard or even considered.

We again respectfully request that the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort consider removing the word "plantation" from its name. As you know, our Board has clearly decided that it will not contract to return to the Omni's Amelia Island Resort as long as "plantation" is in the name. Because we received no response to our February letter and our August meeting suggested that the concerns we have raised may not have been heard or considered, we decided to make this final communication. Even if you have decided that you will continue to use "plantation" in the resort's name, we wanted to make sure that our concerns, raised on behalf of our membership, had been thoroughly conveyed to you. We look forward to a response from you before our next Board meeting in mid-December 2016. After this meeting, we will report any response we have received from you to our member schools, since this matter has been pending since our first letter to you about it sent in February 2016.

Our hope is that the Omni will demonstrate sensitivity to the racial issues involved and remove "plantation" from the resort's name, so that we can book future conferences at your resort. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Nancy Levit

Nancy Levit, President, Southeastern Association of Law Schools, Inc. (SEALS), on behalf of the Board of Trustees, Southeastern Association of Law Schools, Inc. (SEALS)

cc: Mary O'Donnell, General Manager, Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort