

A Letter to the Boston Public Improvement Commission from Supporters of the Yawkey Foundations

March 15, 2018

Dear Commissioners,

We are writing to ask you to keep the name Yawkey Way at Fenway Park.

This may seem like an odd request from such a wide range of Boston institutions and organizations – none of us has ever taken a public position concerning the actions of the Red Sox, other than, of course, to cheer loudly for our beloved baseball team. But we all share something in common: Each of us has benefitted enormously from the generosity of the Yawkey Foundations, which, through their charitable work, carry on the legacy of Tom and Jean Yawkey.

As you know, Red Sox and Boston Globe owner John Henry is seeking to rename Yawkey Way because the team under Tom Yawkey was the last Major League club to integrate. At a time when many organizations, including ours, are seeking to promote diversity and inclusion, he is apparently convinced that expunging the Yawkey name will underscore the team's commitment to these values.

We do not question his motives, but we respectfully disagree with renaming Yawkey Way. While there will always be questions about why the Red Sox could not integrate sooner, we believe it is unfair to paint Tom Yawkey as racially divisive and take the drastic action of striking his name from the street that has borne his name for more than 40 years.

During a recent broadcast interview, a Red Sox representative took pains to praise the Yawkey Foundations and said their good works should be considered apart from the issue of removing the Yawkey name from Fenway Park. But this is asking the impossible. The name on the street that honors Tom Yawkey's long and successful ownership – not to mention his philanthropy – is synonymous with the name of the Foundations. They are inseparable.

The Yawkey Foundations have donated hundreds of million to charities, many of which support the underserved. To date, some \$300 million has been given to hundreds of non-profits of all sizes in Boston alone. The origins of this giving began over eight decades ago, when Tom and Jean took thoughtful and deliberate steps to ensure that their mission to serve the forgotten and disadvantaged would live on through the work of their foundations. Although Tom never sought recognition, he is well known for his giving during his lifetime, particularly his rescue of the Jimmy Fund, which resulted in saving a generation of children and helped the fund become one of Boston's most enduring and cherished charities.

As direct beneficiaries of the Yawkey legacy, we are proud to include his name on the buildings, facilities and programs made possible by generous grants from the Yawkey Foundations. We believe it is not overstating things to say that removing his name from Fenway Park will forever taint his legacy, both as the historic owner of the Red Sox and throughout the city of Boston. It will force people to take sides over how to treat the Yawkey name and, we fear, create conflict rather than consensus over what we all need to do to make sure Boston is welcoming to people of color.

We applaud Henry's record as Red Sox owner, as well as his commitment to diversity and inclusion, but we hope you will reject his efforts to rename Yawkey Way as we find other ways to promote the values that all of us agree are important and necessary.

Sincerely,

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Archbishop of Boston

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