Student Assembly

Resolution 18: Addressing the Delays and Lack of Transparency Surrounding the Risley Shops and Theater Repair Timeline

Abstract: This resolution requests clarity from the Cornell administration (specifically Cornell Environmental Health and Safety (EHS), Student and Campus Life (SCL), and Housing and Residential Life (HRL)) regarding the repair timeline surrounding the Risley Shops and Theater.

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Type of Action: Investigation

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Current Status: Adopted by the Assembly, Unanimous Consent, 10/15/2026

Whereas, in late August 2025, Cornell Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) conducted a review of the Risley Art Shops and Theatre and immediately closed them.

Whereas, the administration (Student and Campus Life, SCL, and Housing and Residential Life, HRL) claimed to have found safety concerns in these spaces but did not provide details. They argued that EHS had been oblivious to the shop conditions and needed to limit access immediately.

Whereas, a full EHS report was published in 2023 in which the Risley Ministry for Arts and Shops Development (RMASD), the student governing body of the Shops, addressed all safety action items, and another EHS walkthrough in December 2024 found no concerns for either the Shops or the Theatre.

Whereas, in November of 2025, they provided a timeline stating that a final report would be finished by December 9, 2025. As of December 16, they claimed it would be another 60 to 90 days to complete the evaluation, and even longer to provide action items for reopening.

Whereas, there was a meeting on January 26 concerning the closure, but they refused to have student representation (or even Risley faculty) present.

Whereas, on February 23, 2026, the RMASD president emailed Christine Rodgers, the EHS Senior Director, asking about the reopening timeline and what students could do to help after EHS completed its evaluations. On the same day, only seven hours later, Christine said, "The shops remain closed, and we have no information to share...I don't have a timeline to provide…information will likely be communicated through SCL."

Whereas, on March 2, 2026, HRL emailed all Risley residents stating that the Shops would be closed until Fall '27, as the Shops and Theatre "are not expected to be available for use in the 2026-2027 academic year." They directed concerns to the Residence Hall Director at a non-NetID email (risley@cornell.edu). On July 9, 2026, RMASD President Hua Cui emailed Ryan Lombardi about the above issues. He did not respond until July 27, 2026, at which point he passed the torch to the VP of SCL, Dan Sweeney.

Whereas, RMASD and select Kommittee e-board met with SCL higher-ups Asa Schindler, Amy Gaulke, and Dan Sweeney on August 24, 2026. SCL Facilities staff met with Facilities Engineering for code analysis on September 15, 2026.

Whereas, until after the 2025-2026 academic year, only potential "safety violations and fire code concerns" were cited as reasons for this closure by Residence Hall Director (RHD) Faryal Yaquby, with no recourse for students. It took nine months for HRL/SCL to communicate that the Shops and Theater "are not expected to be available for use in the 2026-2027 academic year," according to a March 2 email from HRL.

Whereas, Risley has always been a tight-knit community where people of different cultures, backgrounds, and identities can live without judgment. Creatives can feel included here and feel free to express themselves (see the murals on the walls, weekly programs). Historically, Risley has been an entirely student-operated hall, which allows the RMASD and other community leaders to cater to residents' needs and desires. People use the resources and programs Risley offers as an outlet for mental well-being and a way to make friends. If these spaces were limited and programs were no longer funded, the bonding would be limited, as would the artistic potential and traditions that have been in place for decades.

Whereas, the purpose of Risley Residential College is "to promote the creative and performing arts in the Cornell and Ithaca communities."

Be it therefore resolved, the Student Assembly and RMASD request that the administration (EHS, SCL, HRL, etc.) provide a clear, written timeline outlining when and how the RMASD and student body can expect the Risley Shops and Theater to be repaired. Additionally, we request a written explanation of the safety concerns associated with the closure of the Risley Shops and Theater.

Be it further resolved, that the administration collaborate with the RMASD to access and relocate supplies in the Shops and Theater (such as jewelry-making supplies) so the RMASD can use them to maintain the creative, artistic nature of the Prudence Risley Residential College for the Creative and Performing Arts.

Be it finally resolved, we request that, in accordance with the Student Assembly Charter and the Assembly's role in Campus Life, the President provide a written response within 30 days to the Student Assembly, RMASD, and the broader student community.

Respectfully Submitted,

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