

November 17th, 2021

The Honorable Bill Nelson
NASA Administrator
NASA Headquarters
300 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20546-0001

Dear Administrator Nelson,

I am writing on behalf of the American Astronomical Society concerning the recent decision regarding renaming the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). Our membership enthusiastically supports the facility and appreciates the monumental achievement it represents. However, many members of the astronomical community have expressed disappointment in NASA's investigation process and the subsequent public announcement.

The initial announcement to a limited press audience and subsequent briefing by Dr. Brian Odom at the Astrophysics Advisory Committee (APAC) provided little insight into an investigation astronomers care deeply about. The absence of a formal report—even one reporting null results—is highly unusual, fueling speculation and distrust concerning NASA's decision not to rename. Understanding the investigation scope and the criteria used to evaluate evidence would allow our membership to better understand how this decision was made. **We therefore request that a formal report on Webb's involvement in the Lavender Scare and the investigation process be assembled and made public. We ask that NASA commit to finishing the full investigation when COVID-19 restrictions on archive access end, and that this additional investigation be carried out by an independent historian with a background in LGBTQ+ history.** These actions would help reaffirm NASA's commitment to equity, inclusion, and transparency in the eyes of the astronomical community.

Beyond the issue of the Lavender Scare, I wish to state our membership's misgivings about the general naming process for this telescope. Both the original selection of the Webb name by Administrator O'Keefe, and this decision now, were top-down decisions that did not engage the wider scientific community. Astronomers are a vital community within and beyond NASA, driving the scientific discoveries that help make NASA recognizable around the world. They volunteer in advisory capacities such as the APAC in good faith, expecting that in return for their time and expertise they will be listened to and that appropriately democratic processes will be followed. It is troubling that the primary user group of this telescope did not get any true say in a name that some of them find objectionable.

I hope that you will consider this request so we can continue the hard work of making science transparent and welcoming to all.

Sincerely,



Paula Szkody
President, American Astronomical Society