



Ms Ann Sarnoff  
Chairman and CEO  
WarnerMedia Studios and Networks Group  
By email: [ann.sarnoff@warnerbros.com](mailto:ann.sarnoff@warnerbros.com)

5 November 2020

Dear Ms Sarnoff

On behalf of the board and the wider membership of Reach Charity Limited, I am writing to express deep concern at the way in which Warner Bros recent re-make of Roald Dahl's classic story, *The Witches* has chosen to stigmatise people with hand differences and to portray them as sinister or evil. Ableism has no place in the twenty-first century, and I hope you will find a constructive way of making amends for the damage that has already been done. Charities like ours invest time and resource trying to raise awareness of limb difference (because we recognise that much prejudice is born of ignorance) and to help individual children build their own self-esteem and confidence, which is often at rock bottom. Without support, many of them struggle with serious mental health issues from early childhood, through the rest of their lives.

One in two thousand children is born with some form of disability affecting the formation of their hands, many of them having several missing fingers. Living life independently, with an upper limb difference presents logistical and intellectual challenges. These children, and the adults they grow into, constantly demonstrate their ability to rise to this challenge. In fact, their ability to excel is inspirational. But the stigma of being different, of being stared at in public, of being bullied at school or shunned socially, is much harder to deal with because it involves addressing the ingrained public prejudice.

By using an identifiably beautiful actress with assumed 'sinister qualities' based on hand differences that are so recognisably identical to those of many of the children we support, you are sending a message to our children that their own hands are seen as ugly and can

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*Helping children with upper limb differences live life without limits*

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be conceived as a defining characteristic of an evil character. You are also providing an opportunity for public misconception and resultant bullying, hurt and negativity around our limb different community and their families. Your choice – and it was a choice, because this is not how the witches were described in the book – to depict the witches as all having a hand difference (and one that they must hide), fuels the prejudice and stigma already faced by the children our charity represents.

Of course, we recognise that this is ‘just a film’ and I am sure that you did not design the film in a way that deliberately sought to mock disabled children and adults. But, just as there would have been uproar if you had chosen to portray all the witches as different and ‘evil’ based on skin colour, or religion, your decision to use limb difference as the sign of evil has generated considerable concern and upset within our community, however inadvertent your actions were. We welcome your statement that you regret any offence caused by the depiction of the witches’ hands. But the fact remains that the distinctive, identifying characteristics of the witches in the film match almost identically the hands of many limb-different children and adults. Whether intentional or not, the risk of harm is still there.

I encourage you to spend just a moment contemplating what message the film sends to these children that their own hands are seen as ugly and needing to be hidden; what additional ammunition it might provide to the bullies who already mock them for their difference; how it will help our children to feel confident about their self-worth and value to humanity when their distinctive and recognisable hands are seen as the symbols of evil; or how it feels to be the parent watching their child crest fallen as they watch the film and shuffle their own hands further up their sleeves because they feel ashamed of their own body, and dreading going back to school. These are the realities for many children, not the supposed empowering and love-filled theme that you speak of.

Many of our members would like to see the film withdrawn immediately. We recognise that this is not a viable option. However, we would like an urgent opportunity to discuss whether there are ways that we could work with you, drawing on your organisation’s professional skills and powerful influence and possibly using the film as a spring-board, to mount a campaign to help raise awareness of limb difference and help dispel the stigma that disabled children face. There may be other ways of working in partnership – for example to support a long-term programme of mental health support for children with physical disabilities (including upper limb differences) – that would be constructive ways of addressing the issue.

Yours sincerely,



**Clare Salters**  
Chair, Reach Board of Directors and Trustees