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**IABD Announces Leadership Transition of President/Chief Executive Officer**
**Denise Saunders Thompson**

Washington, DC – The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) announced today that President/Chief Executive Officer Denise Saunders Thompson will transition out of her role in Spring 2022. She has led The International Association of Blacks in Dance since January 2010, when she was appointed Board Chair and Executive Director.

Saunders Thompson led the Association through the process of obtaining its non-profit 501(c)3 designation in 2011. In 2017, the Board of Directors appointed Saunders Thompson as its first President and CEO, after having received a half million-dollar grant award from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to establish and develop operational infrastructure and conduct an organizational health study of the Black Dance sector’s dance companies. Since then, the Association has grown to include a team of eight staff and a $1.5 million annual operating budget.

Throughout her tenure, meeting the needs of the Black Dance sector has been the driving force for Saunders Thompson. In addition to expanding the Association’s founding event, the Annual International Conference and Festival of Blacks in Dance and growing the IABD’s membership base to over 6,800, Saunders Thompson has overseen the introduction of pivotal year-round programs and resources, including: the Comprehensive Organizational Health Initiative | Managing Organizational Vitality and Endurance (COHI | MOVE), EVOLVE Regional Dance Summit; the reinstatement of the Emergency Fund in response to COVID-19, Fiscal Sponsorship program, ongoing access to Emergency Preparedness planning, the Nonprofit Arts Administration internship program, and much more. Recently, IABD began digitizing recordings of significant, at-risk dance works, master classes, panels, and more as a result of a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).

“February 2010, I accepted the Torch and set the course for what we are experiencing today – a larger, fiscally stronger association that has deepened its connection to community. It has been a challenge of the best kind and I consider it an honor to become a part of this institution’s history and legacy. Now 11 years later, The International Association of Blacks in Dance is the premier membership association for the Black Dance sector and global Dance Community. It was not an easy decision for me to make. The strategic partnerships and collaborations, the relationship building and alliances, the opportunities and learnings, have been absolutely rewarding. I am thankful for all that has been afforded to me during my tenure with IABD and have thoroughly enjoyed working in service to “all of the people, all of the time”, says Saunders Thompson.

“As I prepare to leave IABD, I remain encouraged for the next stage of the association’s evolution with new leadership. I am proud to share that I have accepted a new position as
Assistant Dean for Administration at Howard University’s Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts. I turn my focus to our next generation of artists to help them find their way to your organizations. We need our young leaders in our institutions now more than ever.

IABD couldn’t be better positioned for the future. We are in a stable financial position, and guided by its Board of Directors and with the support of its staff, the progression to new leadership will be smooth. I remain encouraged by their dedication and fortitude in service of the mission: preserving and promoting dance of African ancestry and/or origin.”

“Denise Saunders Thompson consistently encourages the Black dance community to stay the course and continue to do the work of celebrating the contributions of our dance ancestors and the work of the Black and Brown artist in particular the founders of IABD”, commented IABD Board Chair and Founder/CEO/Artistic Director of Hill Dance Academy Theatre, Dr. Ayisha Morgan Lee. “Denise will be missed but she has always demonstrated through her work the value of our rich cultural legacy of dance. The IABD Board of Directors and Leadership Team stand ready to lead the association and ensure that it maintains its stability and continues to build on its commitment and advocacy to Black dance through this transition and anticipation of new leadership.”

The IABD Board of Directors has appointed McNeil Creative Enterprises, Alison McNeil, Founder/Chief Creative Officer, as the search firm. An executive search is slated to launch later this month. The Board and Executive Search Committee will work towards identifying future leadership of the association.

About IABD
For 30 years, The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) has preserved and promoted dance by people of African ancestry or origin and has assisted and increased opportunities for artists in advocacy, audience development, education, funding, networking, performance, philosophical dialogue, and touring. IABD serves a diverse, national, and international membership of agents and managers, dance companies and studios, educators and educational institutions, individual artists, researchers, and supporters of the Dance field.

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