

Letter to the Santa Clara Valley Water Board of Directors

March 9, 2026

- District 1 John L. Varela
- District 2 Shiloh Ballard
- District 3 Richard Santos
- District 4 Jim Beall
- District 5 Nai Hsueh
- District 6 Tony Estremera
- District 7 Rebecca Eisenberg

From: Mrs A

Dear Members of the Board,

During my time as the Office Administrator for the California–Hawaii NAACP State Conference under the leadership of Rick Callender, I witnessed an environment that left a lasting impact on me both personally and professionally. I believe it is important for the Board to understand the conditions I worked under, because they shaped not only how I performed my duties, but also how I experienced my role as an African-American woman within an organization that is supposed to protect and uplift us. What I encountered was not support, mentorship, or respect—it was intimidation, dismissal, and a constant sense of being undermined.

One incident that remains especially vivid occurred during our annual Lobby Day event. Lobby Day is hosted by the CA-HI State Conference and brings together California legislators and staffers for open discussions on a wide range of topics. This year, the event was held virtually via Zoom. I was the sole administrator responsible for admitting more than 220 participants and placing them into their assigned breakout rooms.

As the event began, I was inundated with participants trying to enter their designated meetings, and I was managing this high volume entirely on my own. In the midst of this already overwhelming situation, Mr. Callender chose to publicly reprimand me. He raised his voice, questioned why the process was taking so long, and criticized my performance in front of others. His comments were not only unnecessary but deeply humiliating. I remember feeling flushed with embarrassment as colleagues and attendees witnessed his outburst. Instead of offering support or acknowledging the unrealistic workload I had been assigned, he singled me out in a way that made me feel incompetent and exposed.

The staffing issue (or lack thereof) was not addressed until Stacy Anderson volunteered to assist with managing the meeting rooms. Only then did the situation become manageable. However, the damage had already been done—Mr. Callender's conduct left me feeling shaken, demeaned, and professionally undermined during one of our most visible annual events.

During Executive Committee meetings, I often witnessed Mr. Callender speak to women in ways that were dismissive, belittling, and unnecessarily harsh. The tone he used, the interruptions, and the way he minimized or ignored women's contributions created an atmosphere where many of us felt devalued before we even opened our mouths. These were not isolated moments—they were patterns that shaped the entire dynamic of the room.

As an African-American woman working within an organization dedicated to civil rights and equity, it was deeply unsettling to watch women be demeaned in spaces where their leadership and voices should have been respected. The behavior didn't just undermine individuals; it undermined the integrity of the work we were all there to do.

After leaving the CA-HI State Conference, it was STILL challenging to see Mr. Callendar in person. I would turn the other way, not out of weakness, but out of self-preservation. His presence shrinks my confidence and steals part of my peace. It's frustrating to feel that someone who once mistreated you still has the ability to alter your path, even indirectly. An adult with accomplishments, responsibilities, and a voice, yet this one person can still make me feel like I need to disappear.

It's unsettling how someone from your adult life—not childhood, not adolescence, but adulthood—can hold that kind of power. Over time, this environment took a toll. It affected my confidence, my sense of belonging, and my ability to fully engage in the work of a century-old Black nonprofit that I genuinely believed in. I wanted to contribute, to serve, and to be part of something meaningful, but the presence and influence of my bully made that impossible. It is painful to acknowledge that someone entrusted with leadership could create conditions that push people away rather than bring them in. Yet it is even more painful to remain silent about it. My experience deserves to be named, and the Board deserves to know the truth of what I endured.

As an African-American, it is devastating to realize that the very organization meant to fight for justice and dignity allowed an environment where intimidation and mistreatment could flourish. My disappointment is not just personal—it is rooted in the belief that our institutions should model the values they preach, and that no one should be allowed to thrive at the expense of others' well-being.

Watching Rick continue to be elevated, celebrated, and rewarded in professional and community spaces despite the way he treated women in the workplace — myself included — is profoundly disheartening. To see someone whose behavior caused real harm move through respected institutions with little accountability, and worse, receive a payout, is a painful reminder of how often those in power protect their own. The Board should be ashamed.

What makes this even harder is knowing that his actions weren't isolated or invisible. People spoke up. Concerns were raised. Yet the response from leadership was to minimize, deflect, or quietly move on rather than confront the harm head-on. That kind of institutional silence doesn't just fail the people who were hurt — it reinforces a culture where misconduct is tolerated as long as the perpetrator is well-connected.

Accountability isn't just about consequences for one individual; it's about the values an organization chooses to uphold. When harmful behavior is met with rewards instead of repercussions, it sends a clear message about whose experiences matter and whose are expendable. It's exhausting, it's infuriating, and it's a betrayal of the very principles these institutions claim to stand for.

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