CONCERNED MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM OF THE
SAN DIEGO WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP
Names available upon assurance
of protection
[redacted]
Via sdwpstrongertogether@riseup.net

CONSORTIUM POLICY BOARD OF THE
SAN DIEGO WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP
Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, County of San Diego; Chair
Council President Sean Elo-Rivera, City of San Diego; Vice Chair
Council President Pro Tem Monica Montgomery Steppe, City of San Diego; Member
Nancy Sasaki, CEO, United Way of San Diego County; Member
Via email to their individual offices

November 15, 2022

Re: Concerns about the conduct of Peter Callstrom

Honorable members of the San Diego Workforce Partnership Policy Board,

On behalf of the 12 members of the San Diego Workforce Partnership's leadership team named above—including Avail upon assurance of protection—we feel compelled to share concerns with you about the behaviors of the organization's CEO, Peter Callstrom.

For at least 8 years, Mr. Callstrom's conduct has been unbecoming of a public official, and, we believe, has fostered a toxic work environment and ventured into race-based and sex-based discrimination against employees. We further believe Mr. Callstrom has abused public funds, has hid information from government controls (including from you), and has violated the public's right to attend and participate in the meetings of governing bodies of public agencies. We worry this conduct has exposed the public trust to unnecessary risk.

Mr. Callstrom's conduct also includes mismanagement that led to the sexual assault of one employee by a supervisor who Mr. Callstrom knew or should have known posed a great risk to the employee.

We have tried repeatedly to address our concerns internally. These attempts have been ignored.

Because of Mr. Callstrom's excessive use of nondisclosure and confidentiality agreements, we are not able to fully explore our concerns without your support as fiduciaries of the organization. ***We are asking you to protect us, the people we lead, and your constituents from Mr. Callstrom's misconduct by whatever means are available to you.***

Race-based discrimination

Mr. Callstrom has a long and pervasive history of racist employment practices. Mr. Callstrom regularly singles-out employees who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color to dismiss or harass until they depart. Mr. Callstrom strategically sets BIPOC employees up for failure, convincing these employees that they do not have necessary skills for their roles and/or that they are incapable of doing a job, until either (1) they are discouraged to the extent that resignation is the only option available to them or (2) he has constructed sufficient grounds for termination.

A lawyer retained by a confidential former employee has interviewed current and former staff regarding Mr. Callstrom's racially discriminatory practices. Some of those interviewees wish to speak with you, but fear Mr. Callstrom's retaliation, knowing he has power both to cause them harm in their current workplace and to damage their reputations in the fields of public administration and workforce development broadly.

Sex-based discrimination

Mr. Callstrom also has a long and pervasive history of sexist employment practices.

Many of us are aware of exit interviews pertaining to this which, assuming records were properly retained, are on file and should be available for you to review. One former employee is willing to speak to this and has retained a copy of her own exit interview documenting specific instances of sexist discrimination at work.

One current employee is willing to share about sexual assault committed by their supervisor even after Mr. Callstrom knew or should have known about inappropriate behavior exhibited by the supervisor in question. This employee told Mr. Callstrom's HR leaders more than once about instances where their supervisor (1) arrived to work while under the influence of drugs and (2) sexually harassed this employee. The employee's concerns were ignored by these executives. This employee was later assaulted by the supervisor in question.

When the accusation of assault came to light, Mr. Callstrom's HR leaders told the employee that their only option for not returning to work during an investigation of these complaints was to use their own accrued PTO—even while the supervisor under investigation was provided paid administrative leave that did not reduce their accrued PTO. After this investigation resulted in the termination of the supervisor, this employee asked Mr. Callstrom's HR leaders to at least ensure the Workforce Partnership's boards were aware of the incident, and was assured such notification had already taken place. Still, we cannot find any evidence that this information was shared with you. The HR leaders mentioned have since left the organization under questionable circumstances, as described below.

This employee refused to pursue a settlement or severance agreement in order to preserve their ability to talk to you.

Frequent turnover of finance and HR leadership

Since 2015, the Workforce Partnership has had at least 7 different leaders and executives over its finance operations. In the same time period, it has had at least 9 different leaders and executives over human resources. While this creates operational challenges, our primary concern is the circumstances that could lead to such frequent departures of leaders in such sensitive positions.

Concerns ignored or kept secret

We have shared our concerns with executives, HR leaders, finance leaders, and consultants. In every case, (1) the feedback has been disregarded or kept secret, and/or (2) the leaders and consultants receiving the information have ended their relationships with the organization under abrupt or suspicious circumstances. We know of at least one report from Bernardo Ferdman, PhD; one report from High Performanceology; one from the DiJulius Group; and one that was being prepared by Tim Ducker (former Chief Services Officer) before his abrupt departure two weeks ago. It is our understanding that none of these were shared with you, or with the Joint Personnel Committee, even though they contain important information relevant to Mr. Callstrom's performance.

We believe these are not the only concerns kept secret from you and your staff.

For example, one employee is willing to speak about lies that Mr. Callstrom told (information Mr. Callstrom demonstrably knew to be untrue when he provided it) to a representative of the City of San Diego when questioned about excessive turnover in finance leadership.

This employee is also willing to speak about how they have been instructed by Mr. Callstrom, on more than one occasion, to assist Mr. Callstrom in the evasion of protocols intended to protect the public's right to participate in meetings of governing bodies of public agencies.

This same individual has witnessed many instances of Mr. Callstrom disparaging former finance and HR executives in front of the Workforce Development Board's Executive Committee—made up of influential leaders in every sector of San Diego's economy—with either false or incomplete information shortly after those executives began to ask Mr. Callstrom questions about his conduct, even when those questions were asked of him in private. This individual is now fearful that they themselves will also be disparaged; still, they are putting their future career at risk to share this information with you because they believe it is important and trust you will act on it.

Restrictive nondisclosure agreements and settlements

Some of us are aware of restrictive nondisclosure agreements attached to abnormal severance payments to former leadership team members and executives who voiced concerns to Mr. Callstrom about his conduct and/or the conduct he permits from other leaders and executives, including after claims of race-based and sex-based discrimination have been made. We are aware of these agreements and payments in part because some of us have been asked to help find public funds which can be used to pay for these severance packages.

We believe this practice is intended to prevent you and the public from learning about claims of Mr. Callstrom's misconduct. In order for the full breadth of Mr. Callstrom's misconduct to come to light, we ask you to (1) investigate the use of restrictive nondisclosure agreements with, severance payments to, and settlement agreements with former Workforce Partnership employees, and to (2) release former executives and leaders from nondisclosure agreements, then ask them to share with you their experiences with Mr. Callstrom.

No confidence

Mr. Callstrom's misconduct undermines the Workforce Partnership's efforts to serve your constituents, keeping the people who work here from providing the service those constituents deserve. As a result, *we have no confidence in Mr. Callstrom's ability to continue leading the Workforce Partnership or any public agency.*

Recently, a committee of staff at all levels of the organization created a vision for the service we seek to provide your constituents: "earn trust, inspire growth." We remain committed to this work—*in spite of the challenges posed by working for Mr. Callstrom*—because we are inspired by the people we work with and the people we lead. We are moved by the 133 San Diegans on our payroll who came together and committed to earning the trust of your constituents and to helping those same constituents envision a brighter future for themselves. Our employees live that vision every day with all their heart and soul. We are proud of our team members, our colleagues, and the good work done by the San Diego Workforce Partnership.

We feel a great deal of responsibility to lead in a way that honors the commitment of our teams and that honors the Workforce Partnership's values of collaboration, excellence, stewardship, inclusion and equity. The people who work here and the communities they serve deserve a CEO who feels the same responsibility.

Why we need you

<u>If you do not take swift action to protect us, the people we lead, and the communities you represent from Mr. Callstrom</u>, we believe Mr. Callstrom's conduct may continue in a manner that exposes the public trust to unnecessary legal risk and may cost taxpayers untold sums of money—at a time when your constituents need every dollar of support they can get. Even more importantly, <u>we are concerned that Mr. Callstrom's racist and sexist employment practices, Mr. Callstrom's failed oversight that led to the sexual assault of one employee, and Mr. Callstrom's disparagement of those who bring concerns to light will hurt even more of your constituents.</u>

We have spent late nights and early mornings organizing this information for you outside of our business-hour responsibilities. Speaking up poses a great risk to our financial futures. We are gravely afraid of retaliation and disparagement from Mr. Callstrom.

Still, we are doing this because we believe that you can protect us, our staff, and our community from Mr. Callstrom, and that you indeed would want to do so.

If you have questions about these concerns, we may be contacted at sdwpstrongertogether@riseup.net.

With great respect and admiration,

12 members of the San Diego Workforce Partnership's leadership team