

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA MONICA



P.O. Box 1265 Santa Monica, CA 90406-1265
Phone: 310.564.6946 www.lwvsantamonica.org

#MakingDemocracyWork

OFFICERS February 22, 2022

President
Natalya Zernitskaya

Re: City Council Agenda Item 13.G.

Vice President, Program
Barbara Inatsugu

Dear Mayor Himmelrich, Mayor Pro Tem McCowan, and City Councilmembers,

Secretary
Sharon Hart

The League of Women Voters of Santa Monica is deeply concerned with Item 13.G. on your February 22, 2022 agenda - the proposed action to remove Ms. Leonora Camner from her role as a commissioner on Santa Monica's Housing Commission just four months before the end of her term as a Commissioner.

Treasurer
Karen Carrey

DIRECTORS

Cathie Gentile

Jason Islas

Angela D. Scott

Ann Williams

We understand that the City Council has the right to remove a sitting commissioner at any time with the approval of a super-majority of councilmembers, as allowed by City Charter Article 1002. However, we believe that (1) Article 1002 is too broadly stated and (2) reasons that give cause for this kind of dismissal should be more specifically defined. Current language leaves the Council open to charges of making decisions based on retaliation for speech or action you disagree with.

While we do hold certain overlapping views on the topics of housing and land use with the opinions expressed by Ms. Camner, our concerns with Agenda Item 13.G. are not about her specific positions on housing or land use.

We believe in the individual liberties guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, including the right to free speech, and we believe that having diverse viewpoints represented at all levels of government is essential to a healthy and well-functioning democracy.

In light of Ms. Camner's work to hold the City accountable and ensure that we are in compliance with applicable state housing laws, this attempt to remove her from the Housing Commission less than two weeks after HCD declined to certify Santa Monica's Housing Element for 2021-2029 could be perceived as retaliation for exercising both her right to freedom of expression and her deliberative responsibility as a City Council appointed member of the Commission

Additionally, the removal of a commissioner in the absence of legally defined and fairly applied cause sends a harmful message to your constituents and may put the City at risk of potential litigation should this action be interpreted as an infringement of Ms. Camner's First Amendment rights.

It could also be interpreted as a rejection of the City's own Civility policy that was adopted in 2011 and intended to safeguard participatory democracy in Santa Monica by promoting civil discourse and participation during public meetings by enhancing the people's right to speak and allowing all present to express their opinions without the fear of retaliation or verbal attacks. The policy supports embracing respectful

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disagreement and dissent as democratic rights –inherent components of an inclusive public process and tools for forging sound decisions.

At a time when the City seeks to diversify its boards and commissions to meet its equity goals, will individuals who hold differing viewpoints interpret this action as a declaration that they need not apply to serve our City because expressions of their opinions would disqualify them from being able to serve on a board or commission? Will young women in this City interpret this action to mean that their voices do not matter or that they should not speak out on issues that are important to them for fear of retribution?

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Each councilmember sitting at the dais has spoken about your commitment to accountability, transparency, fairness, diversity of ideas, racial and ethnic diversity, inclusivity and equity as fundamental to the work you do on behalf of the people of this City. This work is governance. That is what you were elected to do, and we appreciate your willingness to step forward and take on this role.

In conclusion, we reiterate that our opposition to the proposed action in agenda Item 13.G. is not based on our support or opposition of any specific individuals or any particular policy decisions. We support good governance principles and this action does not appear to have a basis in any principles of good governance. We therefore request that you not remove Housing Commissioner Camner four months before the end of her term.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns in this matter.

Sincerely,
Barbara Inatsugu
Vice President, Program

Submitted on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Santa Monica