



March 23, 2021

The Honorable Rudy Salas, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

Dear Assemblymember Salas:

On behalf of the California Legislative Women's Caucus, we are writing to respectfully express our support for the Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC) swiftly approving a comprehensive and timely audit of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) based on the growing evidence of widespread harassment of women in their ranks and misconduct and/or neglect on the part of management to address this problem.

According to a recent Los Angeles Times investigative report, almost half of the female apprentices (four out of nine) hired between 2003 and 2019 and a third of women (six out of 18) working in trades positions between 2005 and 2019 have filed formal equal employment opportunity complaints with the district.¹ Those numbers indicate this is not a case of where there is smoke, there is fire. Most of these allegations have been substantiated and the fire is raging. This is about how MWD attends to these complaints and what system, structure and processes are in place to make sure that they are acknowledged appropriately, dealt with fairly and transparently, and resolved without retaliation. A culture of looking the other way is absolutely not, and should never have been, acceptable.

MWD self-promotes that “water planning requires adapting to everchanging circumstances as well as an understanding of history.” This holds true of employee relations as well and yet, from all outward appearances and reporting, MWD has fallen far short of evolving, far short of promoting and insisting on a 21st century workplace for their dedicated employees. In such a critical industry, with so many essential workers who we purport to support and hold dear, this can not be allowed to continue. MWD must mitigate a culture lenient towards sexual harassment and discrimination and institute fair adjudication of reported complaints.

The MWD employees speaking out about the harassment they have endured and the MWD Board members calling for an independent investigation have done so

¹ Elmahrek, A. (2021, February 12). ‘They thought I was so low’: Women say they were harassed, bullied, ignored at powerful water agency. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-02-12/mwd-accused-sexual-harassment-abuse-against-women>

at great personal risk and with great mettle. They have roundly faced retaliation for these actions. We must have the courage to offer them the small measure of having the entity that originally created MWD step forward and call for an examination of its systemic challenges, offering a path forward toward meaningful reforms.

The Women's Caucus is fiercely committed to harassment-free, discrimination-free and retaliation-free workplaces for ALL women and ALL employees. Legislative leadership and the Women's Caucus has done the hard work over several years to clean our own house with the creation of the Legislature's Workplace Conduct Unit. We know it can be challenging but we also know it can be done. We expect others, in government and in all industries, to do the same.

For these reasons, the California Legislative Women's Caucus fully supports the expeditious approval of a JLAC recommendation for a full and thorough state audit into the related practices and protocols of the Metropolitan Water District.

Sincerely,



Cristina Garcia, Chair
Assemblywoman, 58th District



Nancy Skinner, Vice Chair
State Senator, 9th District