



**PUBLIC REQUEST TO ADDRESS
THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

HILDA L. SOLIS
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Correspondence Received

Agenda #	Relate To	Position	Name	Comments
			The following individuals submitted comments on agenda item:	
14.	44	Favor	Cassandra F Bolden	
			Nashana Alexander	
		Oppose	Aleks Navasardyan	
			isabel villarreal	
			Nicole Osyka	
		Other	Sophia R Toussi	
		Item Total	6	
44.		Favor	Cassandra F Bolden	
			isabel villarreal	
			Nashana Alexander	
			Nicole Osyka	
		Oppose	Aleks Navasardyan	
			Bryan Ranger	
		Item Total	6	
Grand Total			12	

Letter of Resignation

August 13, 2024

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

To whom it may concern:

This letter was written to notify you that I will be putting in my final two weeks as a Public Health AmeriCorps Member. There were many issues with this position that I had noticed while serving. After being hired as a contract worker after 3 months of having first applied in February, receiving a job offer in March, and starting my first day in late April, I noticed immediately that I was labeled as a community health worker. **A permanent CHW does not have the same responsibilities as a Public Health AmeriCorps Member. If you would like to call a Public Health AmeriCorps Member a CHW, then compensate them the same as a permanent CHW.**

I am fortunate enough to live with my parents now but receiving around \$1,500 a month and only being able to work 25 hours a week is not ideal for 99.99% of the people that live in Los Angeles County. I constantly acknowledge that I am by no means an average person, I have a bachelor's degree from CSUN and a master's degree in public health epidemiology from an Ivy-League school. I grew up in Calabasas, but in case people do not know if you want to rent an apartment, **your gross monthly income (before taxes and other deductions) should be at least three times the monthly rent. This rule helps ensure that you have enough income to cover rent, contribute to your savings, and to cover other living costs. Rents are going up in Los Angeles every year. At the moment, the average rent for an apartment is \$2,691. People these days must pick up 2, 3, or even 4 plus other jobs just to get by to live in Los Angeles.** I have connected and developed strong relationships with my other coworkers where they had shared with me that they have to pick up additional jobs on the side on top of working for the county. **This is truly shameful knowing that the LACDPH has a budget of \$2 billion! How is this money being allocated? I would love to know!** I think that there is also definitely a generational divide between the more senior individuals in the county versus the youth in understanding that we basically need money to survive, establish independence, not be unhoused, and to meet our basic needs. I know most people hate living in reality, are sensitive, or are uncomfortable by the truth, but the county needs to wake up and understand that this is the social reality that we currently find ourselves in. **Just to be crystal clear, poor compensation and no benefits are some of the many reasons as to why you are having difficulty finding, hiring, and retaining people to serve as a Public Health AmeriCorps Member.**

Another issue I have is that I have chosen to sacrifice my time, health, energy, and safety for a hostile and mentally damaging work environment. I did not dedicate two years of my life to complete a difficult master's degree program in New York City to be treated like this. Conducting outreaches in neighborhoods is not an issue for me, but zooming out and understanding all the things that could possibly go wrong should be more closely discussed with higher management. To break things down, an AmeriCorps Member doing residential outreaches may become injured by an animal such as a dog, suffer or even die from heat stroke, or be harmed by a stranger for example. There was a point where I was fearful for my safety as a man approached me and asked me if I had a boyfriend while he was in his vehicle in Glendale. I cannot fathom all the things that could have gone wrong in that situation if I had happened to come across a much more aggressive individual. One possibility that comes to mind is me being sex trafficked and you would never hear from me again. Another issue I have is that as a 25-year-old woman soon to be 26 in January and kicked off her parent's health insurance plan is that the county **does not provide health insurance to part-time contract**

Letter of Resignation

employees, which provides further reason for me to leave this service position in case if I were to become injured or sick, which is a possibility given the nature of this job position.

This position did not provide much training to me that I deemed to be useful. In my opinion, there is no training needed to know how to hand out outreach materials to community members, hang COVID-19 door hangers on door handles, or to distribute boxes of free menstrual products at a baby expo. My point is, anybody can do this job, you do not need to have any educational background whatsoever to be successful at this job, and having a 2-week training period was, in my opinion, a waste of time. To further illustrate my point, **the Canvas page has not been updated since the inception of the AmeriCorps program and there are many issues with it. I will leave it up to the permanent staff to further investigate this.**

Another issue I have noticed as I was working again for LACDPH is how the organization claims to value equity while a majority of the staff does not know how to speak Spanish, refuses to, does not want to learn, and does not hire enough personnel that actually reflects the community that we serve. To me, this is extremely hypocritical of the LACDPH. Having grown up in the SPA 2 area, the reality is that most of the community that we serve speaks Spanish. I was fortunate enough to attend a private school in Calabasas where I grew up learning Spanish, but I also want to suggest to higher management to **only hire bilingual individuals that can properly communicate with the population that we serve in their native tongue, that being the Spanish language. Furthermore, I can imagine with the \$2 billion budget set aside for the LACDPH that it is possible to afford to pay permanent employees to learn a basic-level of Spanish as well.** In a previous conversation that I had with my supervisor Cristian, since we have both obtained our BSPH degrees from CSUN, we had learned that **people in the community are more willing to engage with us if we are able to properly reflect the population and speak their native tongue. To me, at this point, this is a basic fact that should be known to everyone before they choose to study public health and work in the public health field.**

LACDPH's mission is to protect health, prevent disease, and promote health and well-being for everyone in Los Angeles County. Let's start at the basic level by taking care of our contract and permanent employees first! I noticed that the people that I have worked with looked drained, unhappy, and are extremely undervalued! In that case, the mission statement of this organization is very hypocritical. To claim that this organization also values transparency, respect, equity, and fairness is laughable after what I witnessed and went through just as a contract employee alone these past few months!

Being ganged up on at the end of the day on a Friday Microsoft Teams call led by Tiffany Romo and being called "unprofessional" was quite an experience that I will never forget. It appears as though that she was the one that was highly emotional, sensitive, and inexperienced despite claiming to have spent 11 years working with the county. I understand that she claims that she has never had an issue like this happen before in the AmeriCorps program, but for her to then immediately deny that statement and attempt to walk back that claim was unacceptable and indicates that she needs significant professional psychological help. I can only hope now that she is getting the help that she needs now since she is off and will not come back until August 19th as per her out of office email.

After the Microsoft Teams call last Friday, it was evident to me that there also must be a change of leadership in terms of who is the program director of the AmeriCorps program at LACDPH. If you want your organization, any organization really, to thrive and generally run better, hire an individual that takes things seriously, does not laugh when discussing a serious matter in a conversation or makes faces, can handle issues accordingly, and does not break under pressure. Based off the conversation I had with Stephanie, Cristian, and Tiffany it was evident that I was not at all valued as a Public Health AmeriCorps Member despite all of the time and energy I have chosen to sacrifice in order to

Letter of Resignation

serve my community. **Instead, I was gaslit, backstabbed, and called “unprofessional,” and met with silence by Stephanie and my own supervisor who I thought were both on the call to defend me. This behavior was disappointing to witness but not surprising at all. In all honesty, that conversation felt like I was in high school or middle school all over again despite all of us being adults. Furthermore, their silence alone spoke louder than words ever will.** Before accepting this position with the county, I already knew that it was poorly run by some individuals that are not at all passionate about the work that they do and that they are just there to collect a check. It is sad again to see that all my suspicions are true. I say again, because I served briefly as an intern during the COVID-19 pandemic with LACDPH to finish my BSPH degree at CSUN. **The LACDPH already is not viewed favorably by most of the public given their poor response and lack of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of firm and proper leadership is something I noticed that runs rampant at the LACDPH.**

Ultimately from this experience, I have learned that your years of work experience and where you had gone to school does not matter in the end, what does matter is how you treat people and knowing that your actions always speak louder than your words.

Public health is about prevention. I have taken down my LinkedIn post that advertises volunteering for the LACDPH to prevent people from being exploited. It will continue to be difficult for you to find and hire new, passionate, and talented people in the future to work for LACDPH as I will keep using my voice to share my poor experience. **The Public Health AmeriCorps program at LACDPH was developed to help the next generation of public health professionals to build more public health experience and to influence Public Health AmeriCorps Members to stay working in the public health field. I have decided that I will be exiting the public health field based off this experience alone.**

Despite this generally negative experience, it has been an immense privilege to serve the community members residing in SPA 2. It will be an experience that I will always cherish and hold close to my heart as a now former public health professional. I wish the SPA 2 team success moving forward despite the unfortunate circumstances of my departure. Let me know how I may be of assistance to make my departure as smooth as possible for everyone.

Best,

Sophia Toussi, MPH