



NEVADA FACULTY ALLIANCE
840 S. Rancho Dr., Suite 5-571 Las
Vegas, Nevada 89106

March 17, 2020

Board of Regents
Nevada System of Higher Education
4300 S. Maryland Pkwy
Las Vegas, NV 89119

RE: Letter of Concern regarding TMCC Campus Climate and President Karin Hilgersom

The Nevada Faculty Alliance (NFA) is the independent statewide association of faculty at NSHE institutions, affiliated with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The NFA/AAUP chapter at Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) is the exclusive representative for the collective bargaining unit for faculty at TMCC. NFA/AAUP promotes academic freedom and shared governance at our academic institutions.

The State Board of the Nevada Faculty Alliance is highly concerned about the campus climate and administrative leadership at TMCC. The behavior and managerial philosophy of TMCC president Karin Hilgersom is not conducive to moving the institution forward with faculty in a productive manner. At her evaluation by the Board of Regents in June 2018, because of concerns about campus morale, shared governance, communication, and conflict resolution, the services of a coach or mentor for President Hilgersom were recommended to help her in her college leadership. Unfortunately, these problems at TMCC remain. President Hilgersom appears to have satisfactory external relationships with entities in the community, but the TMCC internal community, the faculty and staff, is deeply troubled by her management style towards employees.

Our recent survey of faculty at TMCC, with a response rate of 67% of the academic faculty, found low morale and a negative campus climate. Among academic faculty, 43% are uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with the overall campus climate. (For comparison, the campus climate metric is considerably worse than found in the recent professional campus climate study at UNR, where only 22% of academic faculty say they are uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with the overall campus climate.) Forty-five percent of academic faculty have seriously considered leaving TMCC in the past three years, the top six reasons being increased

workloads, an unwelcoming campus environment, low salary, tension with their supervisor or manager, limited advancement opportunities, and lack of a sense of belonging. At TMCC, a 57% majority of academic faculty believe the campus climate has either moderately deteriorated (28%) or greatly deteriorated (29%) in the past four years—under the leadership of President Hilgersom.

On the basis of numerous confidential reports and complaints from faculty members, it is the belief of the NFA State Board that the president purposefully uses bullying, threats, divisiveness and retribution as tactics to create a climate of fear and an “us versus them” atmosphere among the TMCC faculty and staff. The NFA State Board is disturbed by verbal abuse and threats made against TMCC NFA officers and members by the president. This targeting behavior is a violation of the TMCC collective bargaining agreement and is prohibited under federal labor law. President Hilgersom’s behavior and philosophy have created fear, apathy, and low morale among a significant number of employees at TMCC.

President Hilgersom is widely perceived as viewing her point of view as the defining voice at TMCC on all matters large and small. Contrary or disparate points of view, which are attributes of a healthy organization, are discounted and then dismissed. Faculty who raise questions about the direction and priorities of the college are seen as enemies and targeted with retributive behavior by the president and her administrative team. The effectiveness and independence of the TMCC Faculty Senate, an important deliberative body of faculty shared governance within any institution of higher education, has been diminished under her leadership.

The TMCC Human Resource office has been relegated to a political arm of the president to obfuscate, mount phony complaints against targeted faculty, and shelter aberrant presidential behavior. The NSHE system attorney assigned to TMCC seems to have become the personal attorney of the president to facilitate the same kind of harassment or cover up. The contractual grievance process, when used appropriately, identifies and alleviates problems institutionally. Under the current model the system attorney finds Code or contractual weak spots then hides behind manufactured deadlines and legalese to prevent a fair and impartial hearing or a mutual resolution of grievances.

The Nevada Faculty Alliance State Board is also concerned with the treatment of administrative faculty under President Hilgersom. The professional staff, lacking tenure, have few protections against threats and harassment by administrators who are serving at the will of the president. This behavior (including slamming office doors, foul language, sending staff home for political reasons, calling meetings with no agenda to berate staff) fosters fear and uncertainty, a behavior we believe that appears to be driven by the president’s authoritarian needs. Staff are fired and disappear at TMCC under questionable circumstances. Too often one day they are at work, the next their offices are dark with boxes of their personal items stacked in the hallway. We recognize that serious violations of NSHE policy may require immediate removal of a staff member from campus, but that would be expected to be an exceedingly rare event. These tactics instill fear in the workplace.

Since the creation of the Nevada Faculty Alliance in 1983 the organization has never formally censured an administrator in the Nevada System of Higher Education. However, due to the toxic, fear-ridden, and deteriorating culture at TMCC we are now seriously considering such

a move. As an affiliate of AAUP, we subscribe to all of the organization's principles, values, and documents. The TMCC culture created by President Hilgersom and her administration ignores the fundamental AAUP principles of shared governance, academic freedom, due process, and faculty rights. The administration of President Hilgersom fails faculty and students by failing to appreciate the human value of those helping Nevada students realize their potential. The state board of the Nevada Faculty Alliance demands that the Nevada System of Higher Education take immediate proactive steps to restore shared governance, academic freedom, due process, faculty rights, and basic human rights at TMCC. If these matters are not resolved satisfactorily, then the State Board will consider a public censure of the TMCC administration and a recommendation of a formal investigation to our AAUP national organization. We call on you, the Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education, to right the ship and put Truckee Meadows Community College back on a positive course.

Respectfully submitted,

State Board of the Nevada Faculty Alliance

Adrian Havas, NFA State President
Kent Ervin, NFA State Vice President
Daniel Cook, NFA State Treasurer
Ted Chodock, NFA State Secretary
Jennifer Nelson, NFA-CSN Chapter President
Roberta Kaufman, NFA-NSC Chapter President
Scott Huber, NFA-TMCC Chapter President
Sandra Owens, NFA-UNLV Chapter President
John Nolan, NFA-UNR Chapter President
James Strange, NFA-WNC Chapter President

Copy:

Chancellor Thom Reilly