

Commissioners  
Fair Political Practices Commission  
428 J Street, Suite 620  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to you as a researcher, political candidate, and local elected official to urge your support for SB 1170. This bill is of paramount importance as it addresses a critical issue that affects the mental well-being of political candidates and, consequently, the integrity of our democratic process.

My own story provides anecdotal support for a growing body of literature and the results of several recent publications. In 2020, I ran for election to my local water district board of directors. I had two opponents both of whom used intimidation tactics online and in person, including physically imposing their presence on me and screaming and abusive language at me multiple times. One opponent had a widely known criminal record of past violent behavior. I was scared. This is not what I signed up for as a candidate. It made me reconsider the run for office. I resorted to carrying a knife when I left the house, increased my home security, and ensured my children knew what my opponents looked like and what to do if they ever encountered them at an event or while walking home from school. I modified my campaign schedule and activities to make sure I never went anywhere alone. I lived in fear and it weighed on my mental health for which I sought treatment.

Last year, I collaborated with California Women's List as they conducted the first ever study examining the hostility candidates face running for office and its impacts on the candidate's mental health. As I reviewed the literature and new survey results from California Women's List research, one point became clear: there is a direct causal relationship between campaign hostility and mental health issues experienced by candidates. The findings from numerous studies—including those conducted by California Women's List, the Bridging Divides Initiative at Princeton University, the University of San Diego's Violence, Inequality, and Power Lab, and the Brennan Center—highlight the staggering prevalence of hostility directed at candidates, particularly those from underrepresented groups. From California Women's List's most recent study, data reveal that a significant majority of candidates experience new or worsened mental health symptoms as a direct result of the hostility they face during their campaigns.

From online abuse to in-person harassment and even physical violence, the level of hostility encountered by candidates is alarming. My own experiences as a former political candidate confirm the profound toll that such hostility can take on one's mental well-being. My background as a neuroscientist, researcher and candidate all support why I believe this bill is critical to reduce fear and hostility, help keep candidates' mental health intact, and protect the integrity of our democracy.

SB 1170 offers a crucial solution to address this pressing issue. By allowing non-incumbent candidates to utilize campaign funds for mental healthcare expenses not covered by insurance, this bill acknowledges the unique challenges faced by candidates and provides them with the support they need to navigate the rigors of political campaigns. Furthermore, it ensures that all candidates, regardless of their background or financial means, have access to essential mental health services.

I urge the FPPC to support SB 1170 as this addresses a campaign need underscored by multiple research studies. SB 1170 furthers the critical goals of the Political Reform Act to increase representation in government.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Boyd Hodgson, PhD  
San Marcos, California  
President, Vallecitos Water District Board of Directors