

Gautho, Julia

From: Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson <shebreh4santacruz@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 20, 2025 6:21 PM
To: City Council
Subject: Item 9B Code of Conduct Complaint

Dear Capitola City Council,

I write to you with deep concern regarding the Code of Conduct complaint against Councilmember Melinda Orbach. From my perspective as a fellow elected official, it is clear that this complaint represents a misuse of the Code—weaponizing a tool intended to uphold civility, not silence those who speak openly about harassment and intimidation.

Councilmember Orbach is a competent, thoughtful, and dedicated public servant who has consistently shown her commitment to her community. Her comments at the April 2025 Council meeting, while direct, were neither abusive nor defamatory. They reflected her lived experience as a mother, a health professional, and a civic leader who has been subjected to intimidation that crossed the line from political disagreement into personal threat. To punish her for drawing boundaries is to undermine the very principles of safety and respect that the Code of Conduct is meant to protect.

As someone who also serves in public office, I know firsthand how relentless and personal harassment can be—online, in meetings, and even within the halls where we govern. It is painful enough to endure bullying from members of the public; to have colleagues enable it by legitimizing baseless claims, is unacceptable.

We choose to serve because we care about our communities, but that service should never come at the cost of our dignity, our safety, or our ability to govern effectively.

Rather than fostering civility, this complaint erodes trust in public institutions and sends a chilling message to anyone—especially women—that speaking truthfully about intimidation will result in public punishment. Our communities cannot afford to lose competent leaders to manufactured controversy and harassment.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to dismiss this complaint. Doing so is not only an affirmation of Councilmember Orbach's integrity, but a commitment to ensuring that our local democracy remains grounded in fairness, respect, and the freedom to serve without fear of retribution.

Respectfully,
Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson

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"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made"
~Ruth Bader Ginsburg