

Gautho, Julia

From: Debbie Smallwood <debbiesmallwood2020@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 21, 2025 6:19 PM
To: City Council
Subject: Fwd: Melinda Orbach

Dear Capitola City Council:

I write today out of profound concern that this Council has chosen to elevate a complaint rooted in retaliation and intimidation to the level of a public agenda item. To put Councilmember Melinda Orbach on trial for speaking openly about her own experience of harassment is not just absurd—it is a dangerous signal to every woman in this community that her voice can be punished for daring to tell the truth.

Councilmember Orbach has already acknowledged that naming an individual was a mistake she will not repeat. But the heart of her comments on April 17 was clear: a woman, a mother, and an elected leader was asserting her right to safety and to draw boundaries when faced with threatening behavior.

In a political environment where women are too often silenced, minimized, or second-guessing their own lived experiences, Councilmember Orbach did what strong women do—she spoke up. That should never be treated as a transgression.

Rather than inflaming conflict, Councilmember Orbach has sought resolution, offering mediation through the Conflict Resolution Center multiple times. Her willingness to meet in good faith has been met not with respect, but with ongoing attacks on her character and attempts to discredit her leadership. And now, instead of standing with her, this Council risks legitimizing harassment by entertaining a baseless code of conduct complaint.

Let us be clear: Melinda did not slander, demean, or lash out—she asserted her boundaries. For that, she has endured threats, online intimidation, and relentless personal attacks. Every woman in public service, and every mother in Capitola raising daughters to use their voices, is watching closely. To punish her would be to reinforce the oldest, most harmful message women hear: stay quiet, stay small, don't upset power.

I urge this Council to reject this complaint decisively on September 25, 2025. Capitola deserves leaders who stand with women when they speak their truth, who value integrity over intimidation, and who protect the right to safety and respect in public life.

To discipline Councilmember Orbach for insisting on civility is to reward harassment—and that is something no city committed to justice and equity should tolerate.

Respectfully,

