

November 10, 2021

The Honorable Nathan Fletcher and Members of the Board  
San Diego County Board of Supervisors  
Letter sent VIA EMAIL

Dear Chair Fletcher and Members of the Board:

We the undersigned write to express our support for the proposed changes to the Board of Supervisor's Rules of Procedure, and our opposition to the racist and hateful comments given by members of the public during recent Board of Supervisors meetings. On Tuesday November 2, 2021 during discussion of the COVID-19 update, a speaker used horribly racist language directed at County staff and others. Many of us watched in dismay as this individual, and various others throughout the meeting hurled insults and hate speech veiled as public comment at our public servants.

Whereas we once debated issues of importance with respect and decorum regardless of diverging opinions, there has been a seismic shift where people use government forums and public spaces to spew hatred and division. As representatives of organizations that have attended and advocated at board of supervisors meetings throughout the years, it is disheartening and alarming to see that these spaces that were traditionally used to discuss the needs and desires of our communities, have been turned into a venue for vitriol and anger.

Our organizations have engaged with the Board of Supervisors with caution given these recent events. In any civil society, we must respect one another if we hope to reach any kind of meaningful dialogue. Our community members, working families, and businesses do not feel safe as it stands to partake in this vital part of civic engagement, which is ultimately a disservice to the work that the County's leadership is elected to perform.

We all understand and support the constitutionally protected right to freedom of speech. It is a vital part of any government that espouses the virtues of freedom and democracy. However, it is not an open invitation for individuals to perpetuate racism or hate speech. We must do better. We must return civility and respect to the process of governing.

Our communities are the ones that end up losing if our system continues to embolden individuals and outside organizations from saturating our public process with hate speech and racism. Our citizens must feel welcomed to exercise their freedom of speech without fear of intimidation. We support Chair Fletcher and Vice-Chair Vargas' leadership in bringing forth this board letter that will protect freedom of speech and promote equitable public engagement.

Respectfully,

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