

PRO TEC 17

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To: KCRHA Boards

CC: Helen Howell, Peter Lynn, Meg Barclay, Anne Burkland, Owen Kajfasz, Katara Jordan, Anne Martens

Subject: Concerns about King County Regional Homelessness Authority Leadership Team and Treatment of Staff

Dear KCRHA Board Members,

We are writing to express our profound concerns regarding the current state of affairs at the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA). As dedicated staff members, we firmly believe it is essential to draw your attention at this time of leadership transition to the issues impeding our ability to advance the KCRHA's mission: to significantly decrease homelessness throughout King County, using equity and social justice principles.

We believe the KCRHA can best achieve our mission when our leadership supports us. When we are supported, we reduce staff turnover, which means we can continue to provide services without interruptions and retain institutional knowledge. Such support also cultivates a positive work environment that offers physical, psychological, and emotional safety, and encourages employees to bring their diverse identities and lived experiences to their work. Moreover, when the KCRHA supports us, it builds a reputation as a great employer, which helps us attract talented people to advance our mission.

For these reasons - rooted in advancing KCRHA's mission - KCRHA staff unionized last summer and set about drafting our first union contract.

Unfortunately, our calls for support and offers to negotiate at the bargaining table have largely gone unmet. Despite presenting our complete draft contract early in 2023, the KCRHA canceled five out of eight scheduled meetings this spring.¹ It is important to note that these cancellations occurred even after the KCRHA received an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) filing on March 8, 2023, due to leadership's delay in responding to our contract proposals. Although we are heartened by KCRHA's response to our proposals at the June 15th bargaining session, this negotiation lacked any response or timeline for addressing our economic proposals. If not addressed soon, this could develop into an additional failure to negotiate. This lack of interaction with our union not only undermines the rights and well-being of the staff but also erodes trust within the organization.

Meanwhile, KCRHA staff are experiencing the harmful effects of a toxic workplace environment. Since its establishment two years ago, at least seventeen colleagues have left the organization, most departing within their first year of employment due to insufficient support. This includes two contract managers, both of whom are women of color. It also includes a Systems Advocate Co-Director, who leadership targeted and retaliated against for raising *still unresolved* safety concerns for our Systems Advocate workforce. This alarming turnover rate raises concerns, especially considering the organization recently surpassed 100 staff members.

¹ Canceled meetings include those scheduled on: 3/3, 3/29, 4/19, 5/11, and 5/23

As a result of this failure in leadership, the burden of covering duties for the [growing list of vacant positions](#), filling management gaps, and enduring plummeting staff morale has fallen heavily on the remaining KCRHA staff and hindered progress within the KCRHA. Projects and initiatives are delayed across the organization, including [Partnership for Zero](#) and [contracting](#) (which have been directly impacted by employee turnover). These delays leave our Unhoused Neighbors and partners who serve them without the necessary support and services they urgently require. It is disheartening to witness the immense potential of the KCRHA that brought staff to the organization being squandered due to ineffective leadership.

As a KCRHA Board Member, we implore you to seize the opportunity in this leadership transition to right this ship and support KCRHA staff. **We ask you to hold our leadership accountable to:**

1. Follow the law and negotiate our first contract - including economic proposals - at the bargaining table.
2. Include the union in the process of selecting the next CEO.
3. Create a performance framework for evaluating executive leadership, including the opportunity for KCRHA staff to provide feedback and hold leadership accountable.
4. Ensure that KCRHA utilizes the Equity Decision-Making Framework as described on the [approach page of the KCRHA website](#).

The KCRHA plays a vital role in combating homelessness, and its leadership must uphold the organization's mission and [guiding principles](#).² We strongly believe that with the appropriate accountability for our leaders and a signed union contract, the KCRHA can regain momentum and fulfill its mission effectively.

We would be more than willing to discuss these concerns in greater detail and provide any additional information that may be necessary. Please let us know if there is an opportunity for a meeting or conversation to address these pressing matters further.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We look forward to your prompt response and actions in rectifying the current challenges faced by the KCRHA.

Sincerely,

PROTEC17 on Behalf of Represented Staff of the KCRHA

² Section 3. Guiding Principles