

October 28, 2022

Dear MMSD Human Resources Department,

We, the undersigned employees of the MMSD Communications Department, are filing a formal complaint against the Executive Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Tim LeMonds, due to years of consistent emotional abuse and bullying, as [defined in the Employee Handbook](#).

We respectfully request a full review of the materials below, which up until now we have been too afraid to address to HR and MMSD administration due to a fear of additional retaliation by Mr. LeMonds. In full honesty, we are still afraid, but have reached a breaking point due to the toll our mental, emotional, and physical health have taken trying to address the issues ourselves. The consistent bullying and retaliation have created a disrespectful, toxic work environment that inhibits the efficacy of the district's communications department, one that we're unable to fix ourselves no matter how hard we work. Given the facts in this document and the exit interviews of past employees documented by HR, we trust the department will uphold the standards put forth by the Employee Handbook and look forward to working with you.

Thank you very much for your mutual respect, consideration, and confidentiality on this matter.

Sincerely,

Ellie Herman, Communications Specialist

Brad Mackey, Communications Web Programmer

Mike Wetzel, Communications Media Producer/Director

Sections

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3. Resolution and conclusion

Section 1: Timeline of examples of bullying and harassment from Tim. Includes links to evidence.

- **January 2019** Tim starts working at MMSD in Safety and Security. Eventually he takes over a communications leadership role during the transition between superintendents.
- **March 2021** Former employee Taryn Johnson, who worked for the district for over 9 years, resigns and notes Tim's behavior is a factor in her exit interview
- **Spring 2021** Tim criticized the physical appearance of Liz Merfeld because she wore a sweatshirt with a hood while joining a Zoom meeting on her day off, out of office. However, he shared this

criticism by gossiping with other coworkers, and told Liz “I heard everyone else was criticizing your outfit, they think you look really unprofessional.”

- **November 2021** Tim delays plan to have a communications specialist at each high school. Asks Ellie H. to oversee two high school attendance areas instead of one, doubling her workload. Ellie H. was told this was temporary, until new employees could be hired in the New Year.
- **November 2021** Former employee Tony Rodriguez, who worked for the district for over 9 years, resigns and notes a large factor was due to Tim.
- **December 2021** Ellie H. hears Tim speak disparagingly about another coworker, Liz M. saying she is “lazy” and “bad at doing her job.”
- **December 2021** Former employee Ryan Budziszewski, who worked for the district for almost 5 years, resigns and notes Tim’s behavior is a factor in his exit interview
- **January 2022** Tim tells Ellie on Zoom that she would receive a pay increase to match standard market rate
- **Feb. 3, 2022** Ellie H. was informed by Tim she would receive a salary increase and take on a senior communications title.
- **Feb. 4, 2022** Tim pressured Brad about taking a non-union position without seeing any information about what this new job would entail. Following this meeting Tim called Brad's supervisor (Amy Knight) to inform her that he was talking bad about her in the meeting. This was not true and can be corroborated by Mike Wetzel who was also in this meeting with Tim and Brad. [*\(An audio recording exists of this meeting\)*](#)
- **March 2, 2022** Ellie H. receives her first verbally abusive phone call from Tim, in which he yells at her on the phone for 45 minutes, in response to her statement that crisis communications could have been handled better if school staff and Ellie had more autonomy in sending out messages without excessive oversight from Tim. On the call, Tim screams at Ellie: *“You have no idea how to handle your job...I may need to rethink your role, because you are too emotional.”* Please note, Ellie stayed calm while Tim screamed at her. Tim continued to yell *“I am the executive director of communications, that means what I say, goes, and you have to do it.”* He continues to tell Ellie she has no experience and needs immediate training on crisis communications, despite being fully qualified and experienced. Tim says absolutely no crisis communications, no matter how simple or non-critical, can go out without his approval. At the end of the call, Ellie hears the voice of communications coworker Jodi Fiedler on the call. Ellie learned at that moment she had been on speaker the entire time, with Jodi F. present. Jodi claims Tim announced it at the beginning. Jodi never intervened or spoke against Tim’s abusive bullying.
 - Witnesses: After the call, Ellie called her (now former) boss Amy Knight and told her about the situation. She also confided in Memorial High School AP Suzanne Blackamore.
 - This exemplifies shouting at a person in private or in public, belittling a person in public or in private, using vulgar language or inappropriate language towards a person, unwarranted criticism, and excessive monitoring of a person’s work.
- **March 2, 2022** On a conference call with Memorial SBLT and Ellie, Tim shared that he bullied the City of Madison Police Department’s Public Information Officer (PIO), Stephanie Fryer. He told SBLT staff and Ellie *“I became unglued, and really railed into her, I mean full on yelling. She’s an idiot. She clearly doesn’t know what she’s doing.”* Then proceeded to laugh.

- Witnesses: Memorial Principal Matt Hendrickson and AP Suzanne Blackamore
- **March 3, 2022** Tim criticized Liz Merfeld for not helping out with Memorial's fake bomb threat situation, despite the fact that she was out of the office, on vacation. When she pointed this out, his response was something to the effect of, "well still." Again, she was not being paid to work those days or reachable by phone or email.
- **March 28, 2022** Tim tells Ellie H. she will get her pay increase "soon." On that [phone call](#), Ellie requests back pay for the attendance area/workload being doubled from the position she was contracted to work, without compensation. Tim says he will ask HR, but says "they are so slow," that it may take awhile.
- **April 25, 2022** During a Zoom meeting with Ellie and Amy, Tim describes local NBC 15 journalist Elizabeth Wadas as: *"Quickly becoming the sleaziest journalist in Madison...What a pig of a journalist."*
- **April 25, 2022** On the same Zoom call, Tim then speaks of a West HS football coach as: *"Coach Sweet is one of the grossest people I've met in my entire life...Everything that comes out of his mouth is bullshit."*
- **May 2022** During a conversation about safety and crisis communication with Tim, Liz Merfeld was sharing how some of the things she has been learning in grad school (she is graduating in May 2023 with a Master's Degree in Emergency Management), and Tim replied, *"You can have some letters after your name, but nothing compares to real-world experience."* Liz took offense to this comment, and to the time, energy, money, and dedication she has poured into her graduate studies over the past two years. She corrected him and informed him that she is not in school to have letters after her name but to learn.
- **May 13, 2022** Ellie H. [emails](#) HR asking for an update on the payroll increase. On the same day, HR responds saying they have no record of Tim requesting a raise or backpay.
- **May 26, 2022** HR confirms Tim will have to reach out to HR to formally request fair pay for Ellie H, since he hadn't yet, despite previously claiming he did. On the same day, Ellie discusses this with her direct supervisor, Amy K., who offers to speak to Tim on this matter, and ensure Ellie gets fair pay.
- **June 1, 2022** Tim [texts](#) Amy K. to tell her he is *"both surprised and frankly disturbed,"* that Ellie H. would follow up with HR without coming to him first. Ellie had already discussed this pay increase with Tim 3 times. It was Tim's suggestion Ellie receive a raise in the first place. This falls under belittling a person in public or in private and unwarranted or invalid criticism.
- **June 2, 2022** Amy calls Ellie to update her further on Tim's stance about Ellie's raise. Amy shares that Tim said: he wanted to wait until the base wage pay MTI called for is settled over the summer. He can't talk to HR because if anyone in HR is in MTI, they might get mad that other Doyle employees are getting additional money. He tells Amy to tell Ellie to "be cool." Amy agrees with Ellie on the call that it's unacceptable for Tim to restrict pay for Ellie this long. There is a recording of this call if needed. There has been no discussion of a pay raise or back pay since, and Ellie is scared to inquire for fear of further backlash.
- **June 2022** During Liz Merfeld's most recent (and only) performance review, Tim indicated there is room for improvement in supervising Ellie Herman. Yet that was not part of her job description, as the many department reorganizations that Tim proposed were never enacted, so

Liz was never Ellie's supervisor. Expectations for Liz's performance review were never set, formally or informally. How could Liz be deficient in a responsibility not assigned to her?

- **July 2022** Communications PIO Liz Merfeld resigns from the communications department for another role in MMSD.
- **July and August 2022** Tim begins interviewing additional communications employees to fill vacancies. Key members of the communications staff, including interviewees direct manager or subordinate were never consulted, or invited to discuss the candidates. In July, Tim posted Amy Knight's exact job role on an internet employment board without telling her. As of August 29, Tim said he doesn't know what role he would have the 2 interviewees take, despite offering them roles.
- **Aug. 4, 2022** During a department retreat, Tim and Jodi tell the entire comms staff that while in Chicago for a conference, they went to a Chicago Cubs game with staff from "Let's Talk," a paid vendor MMSD uses. The company purchased box seats for the game, and it appears that Tim and Jodi accepted these free tickets, in direct violation of [District Policy](#). There is a recording, transcript, and social media evidence of this [here](#).
- **Aug. 4, 2022** During the same retreat, Tim shared he purchased videography equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. However, he refused to allow the inclusion, or even suggestions from department staff on what should be purchased, despite having 30+ year videographer employee Mike on the team, who is an expert in the field. This has resulted in the communications budget being almost entirely used up for the 2022-23 school year.
- **Aug. 8, 2022** Superintendent Dr. Jenkins begins a series of interviews with national news sources discussing the teacher shortage. During the first interview, live on CNN via video call, Tim refused to allow Communications Manager Amy Knight or video producer Mike Wetzel to be a part of the video set up, despite it being their role to support video/light/audio production for district events. A district leader noted the poor video quality. Nevertheless, Amy nor Mike were allowed to attend future nationwide interviews despite asking to assist. This is an example of leaving an employee out of a meeting that would otherwise be included.
- **Aug. 10 2022** Tim screams at Amy for letting two staff members, Ellie Herman and Mike Wetzel, take one day off in the month of August. Tim tells her this is not allowed, that staff should not take time off in August. Tim allowed Jodi to take a 3-work day vacation off the same week. Ellie had to take the day off for a funeral. Mike was taking the day off to help his son move to take a job as music teacher in the East Troy School District. Amy shared this information with Ellie.
- **Aug. 16, 2022** Amy K. calls Ellie H. to tell her Tim has requested she demote herself for a lower-paying job in a completely different role in Marketing, and accept less pay than advertised for the position, so he could instead hire 2 white men.
 - Tim had asked Amy what she thinks of Ellie as an employee, and Amy shared a very positive review. Tim responded "*Huh, I think she's annoying.*" This falls under provocative or dehumanizing name calling; Belittling a person in public or in private; and using vulgar language or inappropriate language towards a person.
- **Aug. 16, 2022** On the same call between Amy K. and Ellie H., Amy shares that Tim told her she is "bad" at her job, and that if MMSD doesn't fill its ~150 teaching vacancies, that it is solely *her* fault, because her marketing skills are so ineffective.

- **Aug. 18, 2022** Tim calls Amy to suggest another department rearrangement. He suggests Amy not have a full time employee, but instead a part-time LTE, after repeated claims that she is a *“poor manager who doesn’t have control of her staff.”* Tim tells her the reasons many employees have quit over the years is because of her. Exit interviews and statements from former employees disprove this.
- **Aug. 19, 2022** A significant design decision was made about the district website and Brad was not consulted or asked for his feedback on the upcoming change. When informed of the upcoming change in a morning meeting, Brad lashed out calling the change “stupid,” (*admittedly unwarranted behavior*). Brad later apologized to everyone in the meeting individually and blamed his frustrations on being excluded from the discussion in the first place. This is an ongoing example of “excluding a person that would normally be expected to attend from meetings,” section of bullying.
- **Aug. 24, 2022** Tim tells Amy K. *“I fucking hate Beth Beyer,”* speaking of the Wisconsin State Journal K-12 education journalist.
- **Aug. 31, 2022** Communications employee Liz Merfeld’s last day in the department, after resigning, in part due to Tim’s behavior and treatment. Please note, she is still an MMSD employee, working in library services at Badger Rock Middle School
- **Sept. 1, 2022** Ellie Herman is now expected to cover all communications for all 52 schools in the district. Tim claims he will offer jobs to interviewees, which would still be a 2+ week delay plus weeks of onboarding before she has assistance. When Ellie shared her worries that there are not enough staff to cover all schools, Tim sternly replied in a group Zoom that he does not *“see what the problem is, you just need to work harder.”*
- **Sept. 2, 2022** Tim withholds information from Amy on which schools Dr. Jenkins and other officials will be visiting for the first day of school. He doesn’t respond to her texts, calls, or emails when she asks for locations, despite being expected to be there. It is thought this was a maneuver to intentionally exclude her, making her lack of presence look bad to district leaders. Amy shared this situation as it happened to Brad, Mike, and Ellie via text. This is another example of excluding a person that would normally be expected to attend meetings.
- **Sept. 9, 2022** Amy learns in passing from another employee Tim has officially hired 2 new male employees, but he does not share this with any staff besides Jodi. Amy learns one of the male hires will have the same role as Ellie Herman, but will be receiving a higher salary. Ellie has been continually fighting for fair pay that Tim told her she would receive since Fall 2021. Ellie was bullied by Tim the last time she asked for fair pay in June 2022.
- **Sept. 12, 2022** Ellie and Tim are both sent an email from a journalist requesting a statement for a story. After Tim doesn’t respond for hours, Ellie “replies all” to share that she isn’t able to provide comment as she doesn’t work at Doyle, but that Tim may be able to. Ellie has worked professionally in media relations for years, and told previously by Tim that it is part of her role to work with media. However after Ellie’s benign response, [Tim sends her this email, telling her all media requests for the entire district must go through him](#). However this results in reporters never or very delayed getting a response. This exemplifies excessive monitoring of a person’s work.

- **Sept. 19, 2022** Amy was scheduled to attend a Zoom meeting for communications department management, but the meeting was canceled by Tim and deleted from the Google Calendar. Minutes later, Amy walked out into the main communications office, where she saw Tim and Jodi were conducting the meeting in person, with the rest of the department management, but she was not invited. Amy confided about this to Ellie H. during a Zoom meeting on Sept. 21. This is an ongoing example of “excluding a person that would normally be expected to attend from meetings,” section of bullying.
- **Oct. 3, 2022** During an all-staff meeting, Tim shares in front of everyone that Amy will no longer be managing, or have any influence over, MMSD social media or its website, despite it being the two largest aspects of her role. It is unclear to everyone what, if any, work is left for Amy. Ellie learns that Amy did not know she was essentially being demoted before being told in front of everyone, as Tim did not meet with her prior.
- **Oct. 6, 2022** At the retreat, Tim tells Ellie she will be expanding her role to cover even more media relations, by pitching stories to journalists weekly and coordinating and attending all interactions between media and MMSD staff. This is another example of Ellie having even more job responsibilities, but not being paid accordingly.
- **Oct. 6, 2022** During the same retreat, Tim announces yet another redesign of the department. Without discussing it with lead videographer and video producer Mike Wetzel first, Tim tells everyone a new employee, Marti G., *“is the ONLY one in the department who can make videos. Nobody else is allowed to.”* This exemplifies excluding a person that would normally be expected to attend from meetings, and makes Mike internally question if he still has a job in the district.
- **Oct. 13, 2022** The communications team, specifically Tim, Brad, Mike, and Amy, was scheduled to record and livestream a presentation at Wright Middle School. The day before (10-12) they all got together and did a practice set up with the equipment they would be using for video, audio and live streaming. They all agreed that the crew call for this production would be at noon on the 13th. On the day of the event, Tim decided to reorganize the entire audio system for the day, without alerting the rest of the team, unpacking all the equipment they had just set up the day before. Due to this last minute change, Brad, Mike, and Amy did not make it to Wright until 12:35 p.m. They were able to set up what equipment they had, but audio and video equipment that Tim had taken without asking was still with him, so the rest of the team was unable to begin setting up. Tim did not arrive until after 1, and was missing all the audio equipment he had already taken from the rest of the team. They took what equipment Tim had and set up the video they could and began testing the livestream setup while they waited for Tim, who was already an hour late, to leave and come back again with the audio equipment.

Upon his return with the audio equipment, Tim accidentally killed the power to the entire live stream and camera setup, requiring an additional 20 minute of setup time. After getting the live streaming working again Tim was checking cables and disconnected a cable enough to causing the live stream equipment to need a second reboot in order to be operational for the meeting (an additional 20 minutes). At this point Brad said "Fuck" under his breath and was screamed at by Tim for swearing in a school. No students, school staff, or others were nearby to hear it. Despite the whole team being behind schedule and rushed due to Tim's last minute decisions to

change gear, lack of communication, tardiness, forgetting to bring the equipment and, then two consecutive mistakes, it seems the entire team was set up for failure. No matter how much preparation and work Brad, Mike, Amy, (and later Ellie) put into the event, their skills and efforts were unable to find success due to Tim's disregard for his coworkers. This resulted in decreased productivity and a hostile environment where collaboration nor success were possible.

When Ellie attended the event (around 2 p.m.) Tim did not acknowledge her presence, despite talking and looking directly at him to solve an issue with the monitors. Ellie tried to write off the incident, figuring he was stressed by the situation. At the end of the event, Ellie helped the school janitor fold and put away all the chairs, while Brad, Mike, and Amy worked efficiently to take down all of the equipment and package it. This process takes a considerable amount of time and several trips to the car to load. Tim did not assist Ellie or Brad, Mike, and Amy, instead stood still in the middle of the gym, just watching everyone else work. When Ellie politely asked Tim to take a step to the side so she could put away a chair, Tim did not move. She asked a second time, and a third time, and each time he ignored her, until she had to literally stand in front of him and tap on his shoulder to get him to move. In conjunction with ignoring Ellie when she arrived, this felt like he was intentionally ignoring her. He left the school shortly after, never helping the rest of the team break down or carry the heavy equipment back, or saying goodbye. This resulted in Overtime for two employees who could have been finished sooner if help was provided.

- **Oct. 18, 2022** [Tim sends an email](#) to Ellie, Ian Folger (comms employee), Jared K. (former comms manager) and Kaylee Jackson, the Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction, laying out the rules for communications employees when interacting with a staff member and journalist. Tim had wrongly assumed Ellie was not fulfilling her duties in this area due to a prior email he had received. Instead of emailing or calling Ellie for clarification, Tim sent this email to Ellie's coworker, manager, and district leader to chastise her, even though she had not done anything wrong. Ellie immediately replies all, clarifying her due diligence in the matter. Later that day, Tim calls Ellie and says he had "*made an example*" out of her but realizes she did not make a mistake. He did not apologize to Ellie for blaming her and unjustly accusing her in front of her superiors. Instead he brushes it off by saying it was important information for Ian, a new employee, to learn.
- **Oct. 20, 2022** Ellie learns via Tim that new Communications Manager Jared K. has quit after 31 days on the job, citing Tim as the reason for his departure. Jared submitted a letter about this experience to Superintendent Jenkins.
- **Oct. 24, 2022** At 3 p.m., Brad was informed of a complete home page website redesign that needed to launch by end of day that day (Brad, a Union employee, clocks out at 4:15). It was agreed that the new design would launch at 7:30 a.m. the next day to account for any errors that could pop up so someone would be around to fix any problems. At no point prior to the change was Brad consulted on the new design or, made aware of any meetings about the upcoming new design despite being the Web Developer for the district. This is another example excluding a person that would normally be expected to attend meetings.
- **Ongoing:** An ongoing form of bullying she and Ellie Herman experienced occurred multiple times: Tim would contact Amy Knight claiming he cannot get a hold of Ellie or Liz via email,

phone, and text, that he kept trying but they were ignoring him. Yet on these days, when Liz and Ellie have been made aware of the fact that Tim supposedly tried to reach them, neither have any record of him calling, texting, or emailing. Based on this, the two have no conclusion to reach other than that he was lying and being manipulative.

Section 2: Overview of Official Complaint

Below are thematic summaries of the bullying and harassment department staff have experienced from Tim LeMonds, and the demonstrated ineptitude in his role. Section 2.1 summarizes the bullying and harassment local journalists have experienced from Tim LeMonds, and his antagonization of the press. Please note: It has been made clear to us that Communications employee Jodi Fiedler is compliant, and potentially encouraging, Tim's behavior toward us (ex: timeline items dated March 2 and Sept. 9). As such, we did not feel comfortable sharing this complaint with her, and fear that if she is aware of this complaint, she will share it with Tim, resulting in more abuse against us.

Section 2.1: Summary of Staff Bullying

[Click here for experiences from former MMSD Employees](#)

Beyond the personal and professional toll Tim's actions have had on department staff and community partners, his behavior also harms the overall goal and effectiveness of the Communication Department, as exemplified by the high rate of employee turnover and consistent department understaffing. This undoubtedly brings financial harm on the district as well, as the Society for Human Resource Management notes onboarding alone costs the organization 16-20% of one employee's salary.

This has resulted in multiple department "redesigns," wherein every few months, Tim proposes a new hierarchy of department staff. The many iterations leave staff confused as to who their managers are or what their role is, and allows room for projects to slip through the cracks. Most recently, Tim announced a department redesign at a department retreat in August 2022—by the end of the month, he told staff on Zoom he was going to extend offers to two new male employees, but "isn't sure where they would go," and to expect additional changes. In the past 12 months, Tim has proposed upward of 6 department redesigns. Including one such plan that surplused Mike Wetzel's position before this plan was abandoned for another plan and Mike's position was reinstated into communications.

While increased workloads and smaller staffs occurred globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been excessive and unnecessary in the communications department. Communications specialist Ellie Herman regularly clocked 60 hour work weeks last school year when covering 2x the number of schools she was hired for, just months earlier. At times she has covered school-specific communications for all 52 schools, despite being paid for her original attendance area of 1 high school feeder pattern.

Section 2.2: Summary of Community Partners and Local Media Bullying

[Click Here for Detailed Evidence of Bullying](#)

The role of a media relations or public affairs director is working directly alongside reporters and media outlets, to inform the public of an organization's mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner. Tim routinely bullies local journalists, and while they themselves are not MMSD employees a) local reporters are a key community partner to MMSD and b) the consistent degradation and vulgar terms used to describe the individuals creates an unstable, hostile work environment. A pattern of provocative or dehumanizing name calling, belittling, exclusion from work-related events, shouting, vulgar and inappropriate language, and invalid criticism toward journalists have all been recorded.

Three separate Madison news organizations told Ellie H. that Tim is not meeting the basic skills and traits that are absolutely crucial to the role of a communications and media relations director. All three news outlets agreed it's due to his:

- Complete ignoring of press requests via email and phone, despite repeated follow ups
- Abrasive, vengeful phone calls and messages to reporters when they work with another MMSD communications staff member, who's allowed to work with the news media
- Severe bullying via email and phone calls to journalists when Tim thinks a story shows "too much negative," about MMSD, when in fact, the journalists are doing their jobs to tell both sides of the story, and hold public institutions accountable
- One shared that Tim regularly called her late on Friday and weekend nights (outside of working hours) to "*scream and yell*," about how terrible of a journalist she was, and that she was an incompetent reporter.

Section 3: Resolution and Conclusion

In writing this complaint, it is difficult to fully convey the effect years of screaming, demoralizing criticism, name-calling, belittling, lying, and intimidation has had on us as employees. For current employees, every day there is a gnawing knot in the pit of our stomachs, a constant anxiety that one phone call or unsuspecting Zoom meeting could end with being yelled at or having our jobs threatened. For past employees, the vast majority, if not all of them, have reported their negative encounters with Tim in their exit interviews. We would like to think these concerns were, and are, taken seriously as they denote Tim's pattern of abuse, and the effects it has on department retention.

We have wished and hoped Tim LeMond's treatment was temporary, something we could adjust to with time. But years later, it is clear Tim's attitude and actions toward his coworkers cannot be resolved—it is a deep, inherent belief that others are not worthy of basic respect. We do not feel Tim LeMond is fit to work in our department. It is our job as communications employees to promote our school district's key values: excellence, belonging, racial equity and social justice, voice, focus, and creativity. It seems our department leader, and the self-proclaimed "Mouthpiece of MMSD," should be expected to model these same values.

Thank you again,

Ellie Herman, Communications Specialist
Brad Mackey, Communications Web Programmer
Mike Wetzel, Communications Media Producer/Director