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To: Gilbert Lopez <Gilbert.Lopez@centralaz.edu>, Jerry Walker <Jerry.Walker@centralaz.edu>, David Odiorne <David.Odiorne@centralaz.edu>, Evelyn Casuga <Evelyn.Casuga@centralaz.edu>, Sheila Muehling <Sheila.Muehling@centralaz.edu>

Subject: Request for Board Review of Leadership Climate and Institutional Impact

Dear Members of the Governing Board,

It is with tremendous reservation that I write this message, but I also recognize that from an institutional standpoint, I can no longer remain silent. The future of Central Arizona College and our ability to serve students effectively are at stake.

This week, I attended the Arizona Community College Administrators Conference in Tucson. Dr. Elliott was the only president or chancellor from across the state who was not present. While there may have been legitimate reasons for her absence, it was felt by our administrative team and served as a stark reminder to me of the lack of support that has been evident for several years. Throughout the conference, colleagues shared examples of institutional innovation and collaboration, each reinforced by strong, visible leadership. These discussions underscored how even the best ideas and initiatives cannot succeed without a leader who provides presence, support, and guidance. Reflecting on this, I feel compelled to share my experience and growing concern for the current leadership climate at CAC.

When Dr. Elliott began her presidency, she was highly supportive of the administrative team. Over time, however, her interactions with Vice Presidents, myself included, became inconsistent and, at times, unprofessional. Initially, I was the primary recipient of raised voices and public criticism, often followed by apologies and explanations that she was being "harder on me" because she once served as a Vice President of Student Services and wanted to prepare me for a presidency of my own. While this mentoring relationship was meaningful early on, it eventually shifted in tone and frequency, and similar behavior extended to other Vice Presidents.

To minimize negative interactions, the Vice Presidents at the time, agreed to limit the level of detail we provided, avoid responding to late-night communication, and focus on essential topics only. While not ideal, this approach allowed us to continue functioning as a leadership team.

Up to that point, Dr. Elliott had often expressed that she did not want a leadership team that was silent or unwilling to offer differing perspectives. She encouraged open dialogue and stated that she valued Vice Presidents who would respectfully push back when they disagreed.

However, in November 2023, the relationship changed significantly. Without my knowledge or involvement, Dr. Elliott and Human Resources met with a dean who reported directly to me and informed her that her employment with CAC was ending, based on complaints made directly to the President. While I was not informed of the nature of these complaints, I acknowledge that, given the performance concerns that existed, I may have ultimately reached the same conclusion. However, I believed the appropriate course of action should have included a formal review process, one that involved investigation, documentation, and an opportunity for coaching and improvement before making such a final decision.

After I expressed these concerns, while also acknowledging that the decision ultimately fell within the President's authority, all of my one-on-one and mentoring meetings with Dr. Elliott were abruptly cancelled and have not been reinstated.

When I requested a meeting to understand the decision and seek feedback, Dr. Elliott informed me that she had lost confidence in me, citing allegations that I was circulating a vote of no confidence against her to position myself for her role. I denied these allegations emphatically and asked whether I had ever demonstrated dishonesty or insubordination. She replied that more than one person had told her this and that there was no way to rebuild her trust.

I formally requested an investigation through HR, not to identify or punish individuals, but to determine whether any firsthand evidence existed to substantiate these claims. Months later, I was informed that no investigation occurred.

From that point forward, I was excluded from discussions and received minimal direct communication. I grew increasingly concerned about my employment status and began to develop an exit plan. My executive coach, assigned to VPs and the President because of the Great Colleges to Work For feedback, advised me however to focus on my work, my team, and student outcomes- areas where I could continue to make a difference despite the situation.

In June 2024, I was asked to complete a self-evaluation for my performance review. I submitted it as requested, but instead of meeting to discuss my performance, I received an email containing a finalized evaluation covering 2019–2024 and was asked to sign and return it. It included eight areas rated as “Does Not Meet Requirements,” supported by unsubstantiated claims, and 22 areas marked as “Meets Requirements” with no comments. The evaluation process requires a development plan for any “Does Not Meet” ratings, but none was provided.

With HR’s guidance, I requested a meeting to discuss the evaluation. Nearly eight months after our last scheduled individual meeting, we met. Dr. Elliott accepted the development plan I created which included measurable goals, a timeline, and a request for regular check-ins to ensure progress. During this meeting, she also acknowledged that the earlier allegations against me were untrue and likely originated from another Cabinet member. However, she confirmed that no investigation had ever been conducted.

When I asked if she believed I had not contributed anything positive since 2018, referencing the complete absence of positive comments in the evaluation, she did not respond and the meeting ended shortly after. Later that day, she came to my office to inform me she would not submit the evaluation to HR, apologized for its contents, and stated she would complete a new evaluation in one year. She encouraged me to continue with the development plan I created and stated she wanted to “move forward” and “put the past behind us”. Despite this, no follow-up meetings occurred, communication remained limited, and no evaluation has been completed since.

Over the past year, I have continued fulfilling my responsibilities to the best of my ability. However, it has become increasingly clear that the college’s lack of consistent leadership direction, limited campus presence, and aversion to detail or oversight are hindering institutional progress. I have observed firsthand the impact these behaviors have had on the President’s Cabinet and other highly valued employees across the College. Many staff members have become reluctant to hold others accountable or to make difficult, yet necessary decisions, as such actions are often stalled or overturned. In several cases, unsubstantiated information has been accepted as fact and, at times, even reinforced, creating an environment of uncertainty and apprehension that undermines effective leadership and long-term planning.

I have served CAC for nearly twenty years and remain deeply committed to our students, our staff, and the communities we serve. The past few years, however, have made it increasingly difficult to fulfill that mission effectively. What began as a personal concern has grown into a broader pattern of leadership dysfunction that now affects many valued employees.

I understand the personal and professional risk of bringing this forward, particularly given the previous allegation that I sought to have the President removed for my own personal gain, an accusation that was entirely unfounded and deeply distressing. That experience has made me understandably fearful of further retaliation or mischaracterization. Yet despite that risk, I believe it is my ethical obligation to act in the best interest of the College.

I respectfully request that the Governing Board initiate an impartial investigation into Dr. Elliott’s conduct and leadership practices, including confidential interviews with members of the President’s Cabinet. I am

confident that such a review will reveal a consistent pattern of behavior and provide the Board with a clearer understanding of the current leadership climate at Central Arizona College.

Despite the challenges, our teams have continued to make significant progress and advance student success. I am proud of their resilience and unwavering dedication. I can only imagine how much more we could accomplish under leadership that is present, supports its team through fairness and accountability, seeks facts before judgment, and models respect in every interaction. These qualities would strengthen the leadership team, creating unity, trust, and a shared focus on the College's mission.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your ongoing commitment to CAC and those we serve.

Respectfully,

Dr. Jenni Heath

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Dr. Jenni Heath

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE! www.centralaz.edu

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FOLLOW US ON

I acknowledge that Central Arizona College and Pinal County sit on ancestral land of the O'odham, stretching from Phoenix into Mexico. The Salt River, Gila River, Ak Chin, Tohono O'odham, Hia-Ced peoples now reside on and occupy the jewed or land.