



July 6, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Janani Ramachandran directly at [Janani@JananiforCA.com](mailto:Janani@JananiforCA.com) to schedule an interview.

### **Formal Complaint Details How California Democratic Party Endorsement Process Ignored Conflict of Interest Rules, Allegations of Forgery and Suppressed Votes in the AD18 Endorsement Race**

**Alameda County, CA** - A formal complaint filed by Janani Ramachandran's campaign today with the California Democratic Party challenges the numerous irregularities in the party's rushed endorsement vote over the holiday weekend, including clear violations of the party's own conflict of interest rules and allowing delegates who have been accused of forgery to cast ballots without first investigating those serious allegations.

"When the Republican Party works to suppress votes – we rightly cry foul. When the Democratic Party adopts a voting process that by definition denies full access – we should raise our voices as one to speak out for a fair and just voting process," said progressive Democrat Janani Ramachandran, who is challenging the corporate Democrat Mia Bonta in the special election to fill the vacancy in California's 18th Assembly District.

Early Friday evening on July 2nd, the California Democratic Party called a last-minute endorsement vote to be held on a national holiday barely 72 hours later, a clear violation of the party's own rules. Because the vote was rushed without due process and fairness to both sides, delegates did not have time to consider vital issues, including:

Why members of the Bonta campaign – including Mia Bonta and her mother – who have **publicly been accused of forging a signature in the most**

recent party endorsement process were allowed to vote before the allegations were investigated.

How Rob Bonta violated the party's own rules against conflict of interest while campaigning for his family member without disclosing his financial interests, as he is required to do.

If Rob Bonta's last-minute packing of the endorsing body with family members and staff violates the party's own rules or other regulations on self-dealing and conflict of interest.

The Attorney General's conduct appears to be a clear violation of CDP bylaws, particularly the rules regarding disclosing conflicts of interest and self-dealing. See CDP Bylaws Art. VII, § 2(a)(2); Art. II § 12(c).

Up until the endorsement vote, Rob Bonta pressured delegates to vote for Mia Bonta without disclosing his direct financial material interest in the matter. The CDP bylaws state that when communicating with other committee members – including through written digital communication – anyone with a material financial interest in advocating for or against a candidate must disclose their conflict interest, including spouses and staff.

In the run-up to the vote, Rob Bonta appointed multiple members of his own family and one of Mia Bonta's campaign staffers as delegates – also raising significant issues of conflict of interest.

The formal motion to appeal the flawed vote details numerous other irregularities and apparent violations of law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act and other irregularities that saw delegates denied the right to vote.

"The party violated its own rules by rushing a vote without notice over a holiday weekend. But much more importantly, this rush to elevate Mia Bonta prevented a fair and thorough discussion of the serious allegations of forgery and what appear to be clear violations of conflict of interest rules. Democrats should be the party of fairness – not voter suppression and refusal to address charges of corruption and self-dealing. We are asking them to stop, investigate and get it right," said Ramachandran, who was formerly an Oakland Public Ethics Commissioner.

Bylaws referenced above, via the California Democratic Party State Central Committee Bylaws. Full text available [here](#).

## **Article II. Section 12. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE**

**A member of This Committee must disclose to other Members of This Committee while addressing a Convention, Executive Board Meeting, or through written disclosure when communicating through mail, e-mail, or other digital communication, primarily directed towards members of This Committee, that said member, the spouse of the member, or the domestic partner of the member has a material financial interest in advocating for or against a candidate for State or Federal Office or one or more state initiatives if said oral or written communication relates to the material financial interest.**

**For purposes of this section, a “financial interest in advocating for or against a candidate or one or more state initiatives exists when the member or the spouse/domestic partner of the member:**

**(1) is a candidate for the public office under consideration; or,**

**(2) is a paid employee or independent contractor of a political committee or owner, paid employee or independent contractor of a consulting firm which is taking a position for or against one or more candidates or state initiatives under consideration; or**

**(3) is an employee who serves or works in paid employment at the pleasure of a person standing for election to the office under consideration; provided, however, that nothing in this rule shall require any person serving on a nonsalaried basis as an appointee to a public panel, board or commission to make such disclosure; or**

**(4) otherwise receives monetary compensation for the purposes of taking a position for or against one or more candidates or state initiatives under consideration.**

**A financial interest is “material” when it has a value of \$1,000 or more in a calendar year.**

**Disclosure shall be accomplished by stating verbally, when speaking, or in the communication itself when doing so through mail, e-mail, or other digital communication, primarily directed towards members of**

**This Committee, the material financial interest the member of This Committee has in the candidates or state initiatives under consideration.**

The formal complaint can be read in full below:

Dear California Democratic Party Chair Rusty Hicks and Secretary Melehat Rafiei,

I, Janani Ramachandran, candidate for CA State Assembly in District 18, write today to formally challenge the decision of the Special Endorsing Caucus that voted on July 5, 2021, which included numerous irregularities, including a failure to address clear violations of the party's rules against conflicts of interest, failure to investigate serious allegations of fraud among voting members, failure to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act, failure to address clear cases of self-dealing, failure to provide adequate notice, and other violations of party rules. In total, the process was so fundamentally flawed as to amount to classic voter suppression – a tactic that our party should never employ.

Under the California Democratic Party's own bylaws, this caucus was (1) impaired by numerous conflicts of interest due to Rob Bonta's advocacy on Mia Bonta's behalf without stating his material financial interest in her victory, and the stacking of the caucus with Bonta family members and campaign employees, (2) conducted improperly when the vote was held with less than three days' notice over a holiday weekend, (3) failed to provide equal opportunities for all delegates, including those who are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and (4) tainted by serious allegations of fraud against two voting members that deserve investigation.

#### ***I. Rob Bonta's Conflicts of Interests***

Rob Bonta's involvement in the endorsement process violates Article II §12 of the CDP bylaws. When urging delegates to vote for his spouse, through calls and electronic communication, Rob Bonta did not disclose that Mia Bonta's election "relates to [his] material financial interest." Art. II § 12. Rob Bonta, a Democratic State Central Committee member, stands to benefit "materially" because, as Mia's spouse, he would gain more than \$1,000 from her salary if she were to be elected. *See* Art. VII, § 2(a)(2); Art. II § 12(c).

Other family members, employees, or former employees of Mia Bonta or Rob Bonta's campaigns are voting members of the Endorsing Caucus, and there are similar questions about their conflicts of interest to the extent they have attempted to influence votes. Furthermore, even if these family members, employees, and former employees did not advocate for Mia Bonta as directly as Rob Bonta, or do not stand to benefit as much as he does from her victory, their roles still raise obvious concerns about the legitimacy of the endorsement process.

#### ***II. Improper Process and Inadequate Notice***

According to the California Democratic Party (CDP) bylaws, there should have been more time between the formal announcement and the endorsement vote. "Notice of any vote on endorsements. . . shall be sent at least 30 days prior to the meeting." CDP Bylaws, Art. VII, § 4(c). That thirty-day threshold may be reduced by the Chair of the Executive Board, with the advice and consent of the other statewide officers of the Board, only for good cause. *Id.*

The plain language of Art. VII clearly governs in this instance, and none of the provisions on the special elections change the timing requirements outlined in Art. VII. Art. VIII § 3(e)(4)(b) does provide that in special elections, the timeline shall be “compressed” to comport with the other provisions of § 3(e), however no part of § 3(e) contains any indication that a vote could be scheduled on a federal holiday, barely 72 hours after its announcement.

Furthermore, the complete bylaws strive admirably to provide notice of meetings and votes to delegates, candidates, and the public. For example, standing committees must provide seven days’ notice “that proceedings may be conducted other than in person.” Art. V § 8. Even when there is a surprise vacancy for the office of Assembly District Representative, a pressing situation when other procedural rules are relaxed, ten days’ notice is required before a vote on a replacement. Art. VI § 1(j)(3). There is no reason why the decision to endorse a candidate in a special election should be rushed or otherwise treated with less care than the decision to fill a District Representative vacancy.

Our campaign was told via email from the party as late as 12:53 pm on Friday, July 2nd that no election had been scheduled. We sought clarification because some of our supporters on the endorsing committee reported that the Bonta campaign seemed to be aware of an impending vote, and had been reaching out to them. If one campaign was provided notice in advance while one campaign was being misled, that is a violation of rules and law that also must be immediately addressed.

The party staff indicated to us that the failure to follow the party’s own notice rules was motivated by a desire to meet the Secretary of State’s deadline for inclusion in the ballot handbook which is July 8th. That state deadline simply did not require a vote on a national holiday with barely 72 hours notice. Since the stated reason given for the violation of the rules is false, we also ask party leaders to fairly investigate the actual motivations of this extraordinary breach of party rules, law and our party’s principles, which include equal voter access, not voter suppression.

The overarching mission of the CDP is clearly stated in your own bylaws: “achieving an orderly, convenient, and fair process.” Art. VIII §3(c)(1). That mission was failed on July 5.

### ***III. ADA Violations***

The party’s seeming dismissal of the Americans with Disabilities Act is shameful. The way this vote was conducted required delegates to print, sign, scan, and email their ballots within a matter of days. Not all delegates have the financial means or physical ability to follow that process, including using an expensive scanner. The normal accommodation of allowing delegates to mail or drop off ballots at party offices was not provided – because party offices were closed on a national holiday and no reasonable accommodations were offered. This is a textbook violation of the ADA.

### ***IV. Allegations of Fraud***

Finally, and most importantly, there have been numerous reports about irregularities in the endorsement process both before and after the primary election that the Party should consider when examining this process. Margarita Lacabe, the Executive Director of Derechos Human Rights, wrote about the Bonta campaign's efforts to cast a fraudulent vote in the previous endorsement contest. Margarita Lacabe, *Mia Bonta's campaign casts fraudulent vote in failed attempt to obtain the California Democratic Party's endorsement* (May 21, 2021), <http://sanleandrotalk.voxpublica.org/2021/05/21/california-attorney-generals-wife-implicated-on-voter-fraud/>. She also alleges that the Bonta campaign forged a signature on a fee waiver application for a delegate. *Id.*

These claims require investigation – particularly considering the fact that the individuals alleged to have committed fraud were allowed to vote in the July 5<sup>th</sup> endorsement election. They also speak to a larger problem with this rushed, opaque process. Corruption and voter fraud cannot be taken lightly at a time when we, as Democrats, are fighting to protect Black voters, poor voters, elderly voters, and voters of color from disenfranchisement.

I ask you to take these concerns seriously and to rescind your endorsement of Mia Bonta, investigate the serious allegations of fraud, investigate the failure to follow party rules regarding conflicts of interests, investigate the violations of the ADA and equal access, and after these investigations have been conducted and reported – hold a fair re-vote.

Sincerely,

Janani Ramachandran, Candidate for State Assembly, Assembly District 18



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