

# IRIS HIU-TUNG WONG

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Monday, September 11, 2017

The Honorable Candace Andersen, Chair  
Contra Costa County Internal Operations Committee  
651 Pine Street, Room 101  
Martinez, CA 94553

Supervisor Andersen:

I write to support the report that the IOC staff provided for today's meeting, which accurately discerns the core problems the Contra Costa Commission for Women currently faces.

During my tenure as the Chair of the Commission from April 2016 to August 2017, I was tasked to be a liaison between the Commission and the Friends of the Commission (hereinafter "Friends"). First, it concerned me that the Friends continuously tasked the Commission to fundraise money by organizing community events, which is a task neither listed in the Commission's bylaws nor the purpose of the Commission itself as an advisory body of the Board of Supervisor. Second, I was concerned that after an event, all discussions of its fundraising outcome and for what purpose the money will be used would be silenced at Commission meetings. Many members reached out to me individually to question this dynamic between the two groups and its purpose. Questions to which I unfortunately did not have the answer.

As the staff report noted, the Commission attracted many "highly influential, educated, and dedicated members," yet its membership remained low. As Chair, I heard feedback that, for some, it was not only because they had too many responsibilities in their own lives, but because they did not feel their opinions mattered. Indeed, I have participated in Commission meetings where some members were told, explicitly or otherwise, that they have not been a member long enough to question the status quo or suggest new ideas. Further, members resigned because they were disenfranchised about the Commission's work. Some wanted to learn about the legislative process and work with the Board of Supervisors as stated in the bylaws, not fundraise money.

Let me be clear: I do not think the Board of Supervisors should dissolve the Commission. As the federal government attacks the most vulnerable in our communities, women are disproportionately affected as workers, students, parents, partners, domestic violence survivors, and community members. The County benefits from an advisory body that solely focuses on the issues impacting half its population. Very few, if any, organizations or government agencies in the County has the bandwidth to apply this specific gender lens on each policy. I believe the Commission has the potential to fulfill its original purpose with some restructuring.

Sincerely,

Iris Wong

Cc: Supervisor Diane Burgis, Vice Chair