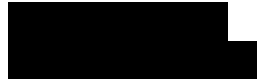


Ravyn Cullor



July 14, 2021

Natalie Corral
City Clerk
City of Hanford
315 N Douty Street
Hanford, CA 93230

Dear Council,

I am submitting this letter to formally document comments made to me by Councilman Art Brieno during an interview and my reaction to them.

On July 21, 2021, I met with Mr. Brieno to interview him about the investigation into his interactions with Darlene Mata. Once I completed asking my questions and turned the recorder off, Mr. Brieno began asking me questions about my personal life (i.e. what brought me to Hanford, what my significant other does, my career prior to the Hanford Sentinel). During this conversation, Mr. Brieno said the following: "I have to say, you are a very attractive young woman. Your boyfriend is lucky. You must have a sister who is ... (implying that my sister is also attractive)." The next day, I called Mr. Brieno to confirm that he did, in fact, make those comments, and he did not deny doing so. We also spoke about his motivation, which I understand was complimentary and not negative.

However, an elected official commented on the appearance of a female reporter during a professional meeting, and that is never appropriate. I understand others may have a different perspective on the issue, but I was personally upset by the comment. Women, especially young women, are constantly having their value in professional spaces measured, partly or wholly, by their appearance. I know women across every industry, including journalism, retail, food service, medical care, law enforcement, government, science, education and the military, who face frequent comments on their appearance in their workplace, making them feel devalued and objectified. Mr. Brieno said he would make a similar comment to a man, that he seemed healthy or that he must work out. It seems clear to me, though, that a comment on a woman's inherent appearance and one on a man's health regimen are very different.

I also understand there is a generational difference. While men and some women often feel discomfort about comments on a woman's appearance in a professional space is of the younger generations, I know that women have had this experience for decades. Both through cultural references, like the 1980 movie "9 to 5," and through personal accounts of women who are my senior, I know that many women have always disliked comments on their appearance in the

workplace, but have been forced to keep those complaints quiet for the comfort of men in the space and to avoid retaliation.

Beyond the comment on my own appearance, the inclusion of a reference to my sister made me particularly uncomfortable. In all fairness, Mr. Brieno could not have known, but I do have a sister and she very recently turned 18. You can understand why I felt particularly uncomfortable about an implication regarding the physical attractiveness of my very young sister.

When I spoke with Mr. Brieno about his comments, I was doing so because my editors and I felt that his interaction with a reporter in a professional space related to the overall topic of his interactions and relationships with women in professional spaces. After discussion with my editor, we chose not to write an article and to write this letter instead, as to allow me to process the interaction and be rightfully upset, because I no longer had to maintain my own objectivity in the situation.

I understand that Mr. Brieno's comments did not come from a malicious place. However, women have the right to openly, clearly and publicly hold people in positions of power accountable for the actions which cause harm. Holding yourself accountable is about recognizing you have caused harm to others, even if that was not your intent, and taking action on that. During my conversation with Mr. Brieno, he never apologized for his comments, spent a significant portion of the conversation justifying himself and told me he didn't want the comments to become detrimental to him. He seemed not to take into account that his comments were a detriment to me, having caused me to feel objectified, devalued and uncomfortable.

As Mr. Brieno failed to hold himself accountable when it became clear to him that his comments were harmful, I submit this letter into the record. I know for a fact your council is required to take sensitivity training. If those trainings do not include a section on what kinds of comments are and are not appropriate in professional settings, they need to. If they do, an elected official is willingly ignoring that direction, and if that member is willing to make an inappropriate comment to a reporter, what's to say that staff, contractors, constituents, residents and other women who must come in contact with that elected official in a professional context aren't facing the same thing.

I understand that the City itself has limited ability to direct council on how they need to behave, but I believe the Council must be made aware of this interaction. I hope you do not push these concerns aside as over sensitivity or pettiness, but as a legitimate complaint regarding an inappropriate and uncomfortable issue that millions of women face every single day.

Thank you,

Ravyn Cullor