

March 15, 2023

Ben Toma
Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives
1700 W Washington St
Phoenix, AZ 85007
Sent via email to btoma@azleg.gov

Dear Speaker Toma:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we ask that you take action to address the bullying, angry, and intimidating behavior of individual legislators in the House Standing Committees and the failure, in many instances, of committee chairs to appropriately address this behavior. Specifically, we would like to highlight the behavior of Representative Alexander Kolodin in the House Municipal Oversight and Elections Committee on March 9, 2023 during testimony on SB1201 and SB1142, although he has certainly displayed similar behavior on other days and in other committees.

Representative Kolodin went beyond disagreeing with people or merely being rude and disrespectful, which unfortunately is commonplace, and instead raised his voice and shouted down one of the speakers. Subsequent to this behavior, several individuals indicated that they were not comfortable speaking to the committee and after the committee hearing, two individuals who represent groups that are predominantly people of color indicated that they were considering not asking their members and volunteers to come to the Legislature to speak at the committee hearings.

We respect and appreciate that there will be differences of opinion and differences on how to proceed with policies and which policies, but we must object to this conduct that has the impact of silencing people and preventing people from participating in our democratic processes by creating a hostile environment by bullying those testifying. Sadly, rather than Representative Kolodin being reined in regarding his aggressive behavior, a member of the public was excluded and removed from the committee hearing for expressing concerns about how conspiracy theories are being promoted via the committee.

We ask that you act immediately to instruct committee chairs to conduct meetings in a manner that is welcoming and inclusive of people with varied backgrounds, opinions, and positions on the legislation at hand, and that the chairs be instructed to tell the members of the committees that they refrain from shouting at and shouting down those testifying and to instead wait their turn to express their position. Committee members have repeated opportunities to express their concerns; they need not shout over speakers. The chairs should also be instructed to use their gavel and to shut down a committee hearing if members continue to display this level of hostility to members of the public.

Sincerely,

Sierra Club - Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter
Living United for Change in Arizona
Fuerte Arts Movement
One Arizona
AZ AANHPI for Equity Coalition / AZ AANHPI Advocates
Equality Arizona
Mi Familia Vota
Rural Arizona Action
Activate 48
Arizona Democracy Resource Center/ADRC Action
Opportunity Arizona
ChispaAZ
Common Cause Arizona
Somos Votantes
Arizona Students' Association
All Voting Is Local Action Arizona
Poder Latinx
CORAZÓN
Human Rights Campaign
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Arizona
ACLU of Arizona
Arizona Faith Network
Progress Arizona
Our Voice Our Vote Arizona