

Dear Director Ortega,

I am writing regarding the ongoing negotiations between CalHR and CAPS related to the salary discrepancies between State Scientists and our Engineer and Geologist counterparts. I joined DTSC in 2020 after five years in environmental consulting where I worked alongside engineers and geologists with whom I was compensated equally. Regardless of our degree, our contributions to projects were acknowledged to be equal and, therefore, requiring equal compensation. I took a substantial pay cut to come work for the State because I believe in the mission of the Department of Toxic Substances Control and want to be a part of the State's efforts to clean up our most contaminated communities and address longstanding environmental justice issues in California. This pay cut was made even more severe by the mandatory leave policy put in place in July 2020.

On my first day as a DTSC employee, I was seriously disappointed to learn that, though I would again be working alongside engineers and geologists, I would be paid more than 30% less than those colleagues. This fact became increasingly galling as I realized that our responsibilities and activities were indistinguishable. One of the first projects I managed was the investigation of a former dry cleaner, which had previously been managed by a geologist colleague. Though the oversight we provide is identical and on the same project, I do this work for significantly less pay. Again, in the fall of 2020, I took over two major projects overseeing the redevelopment of former Naval Station Treasure Island. I have already been serving as the project manager for the Navy's cleanup efforts on the Island, which is considered a high priority site by DTSC and CalEPA. Having already developed familiarity with the redevelopment activities as part of my role as the Navy-side project manager, it was natural that I should take over from my colleague, a hazardous substances engineer. Again, I currently provide the same degree and quality of oversight as the engineer who preceded me for significantly less compensation.

I recently encouraged a former colleague from consulting to join DTSC. He is an engineer and I knew that he would not face the salary inequalities faced by State Scientists. I could not, in good faith, encourage any scientist I know to apply to DTSC or any state agency, knowing the infuriating reality of pay inequality. Doubly offensive is CalHR's attitude that the State's finances do not allow for correction of this inequity. First, the State is now facing a historic budget surplus, such that the State must remit refunds to millions of Californians. Second, the State is expanding programs and adding new ones in unprecedented numbers. Third, and most importantly, this is not an issue of money, despite CalHR's assertions. This is an issue of following the State's own laws and policies on equal pay for equal work, which has already been resolved via a lawsuit for our supervisors. Unfortunately, the State failed to extend those adjustments to the rank and file, which continues to damage employee morale and retention. As the negotiations between CAPS and CalHR progress, I will be watching closely to observe how the State values our contributions. It is fundamentally important to me to work for an employer that demonstrates its respect for its employees, and that I can respect in turn.

For the past year, this administration has spoken nearly daily about the importance of science, praising its role during our current public health emergency. Further, in his March 2021 State of the State address, Governor Newsom said that "California's most acute preexisting condition remains income inequality. So as we respond to this pandemic, we stay fixated on closing unacceptable disparities. That's one of the fundamental reasons I ran for governor." Correcting the long-standing salary inequity for State Scientists, who are tasked with protecting the public health and environment of

California, is a tangible step that the administration can take to prove that California's commitment to science and addressing income inequality is more than just lip service.

Sincerely,

Peyton Ward  
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